

# Return to School 2020: Focus on Well-Being

Please note: This resource is meant to complement and enhance the recommendations and guidelines provided by Public Health. If you are unsure about any situation, please contact your public health unit for specific guidance.

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## INTRODUCTION

Well-being impacts how we think, what we feel, and the way we act. The COVID-19 pandemic has created stress, fear, and the unknown, which has undoubtedly affected the well-being of both students and teachers. Schools present a unique opportunity for almost all children to develop the emotional, cognitive and physical skills needed to support their well-being and become more resilient people. When we return to school in the fall, it will be imperative to ensure that **well-being is a priority** for all members of your school community to learn, grow, and thrive. Well-being practices can be incorporated into everyday routines at school - in any class and subject area.

01. Incorporate a mindful moment as part of the morning announcements to give students time to centre themselves and prepare for the day. Ask students to reflect on a positive moment from the day before: something they learned, a great conversation with a friend, or playing with classmates.
02. Deepen opportunities for outdoor learning, not just for PHE but for all subjects to increase movement.
03. Give students time to **reflect as part of instructional time**. Encourage them to focus on a song or sound that you play. This will assist with blocking out distractions.
04. Plan smooth transitions that allow students to shift their thinking and gradually focus. Abrupt transitions may be startling to students.
05. Incorporate physical activity in all subject areas. It will not only help students focus better, but will prepare them to learn and retain more information.

06. Explore Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, such as the [Circle of Courage](#), a model of positive youth development.
07. Embed a well-being focus in lesson and activity planning to cultivate a sense of physical and emotional safety.
08. Take time to support [Social Emotional Learning](#) through games and activities.

It is important to note that by including well-being throughout the school day and year, students will be better focused and more **ready to learn**. Well-being should not be thought of as one more thing on the “to-do” list, it is essential to creating a safe and supportive learning environment for all.



## TRAUMA-INFORMED CLASSROOMS

The COVID-19 pandemic is a traumatic time which everyone has experienced differently. It is important when preparing to go back to school, to **teach in a trauma-informed way** to ensure that all students are able to best succeed and grow.

A trauma-informed classroom is one that supports all students. It incorporates ways of knowing and doing that create safe and supportive learning environments. The following is information from [PHE Canada's Teach Resiliency Program](#).

Trauma Informed classrooms are resilience building classrooms which do the following:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CREATE a <b>safe, respectful and supportive</b> learning environment</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HAVE a universal approach to <b>help students to succeed</b> in classrooms and elsewhere in their lives</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FOSTER secure and <b>caring relationships</b></li> </ul>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• STRENGTHEN students' non-cognitive and social-emotional learning skills</li> </ul>                                 |

Everyone is experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is important to remember that some students may also:

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|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know someone who has contracted COVID-19</li> <li>• Know someone who died as a result of COVID-19</li> <li>• Have experienced abuse that is new or worsened as a result of COVID-19</li> <li>• Be experiencing poverty</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to move for financial reasons</li> <li>• Have a new fear of leaving home</li> <li>• Have a new fear of interacting with others</li> <li>• Have a new fear of dying</li> <li>• Be experiencing boredom, sadness, distress, or loneliness</li> </ul> |
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It is important to acknowledge these stressors and experiences and support students as they move through these experiences, will lead to more positive impact in the long term.

To teach in a trauma-informed way, focus on the **following four R's**:

### RELATIONSHIPS

Students may be experiencing relationships differently. For some, it has been months since they interacted with their peers. Also, they can no longer interact in the same way as they could before. Teachers will need to help students rebuild strong relationships in this new context. This also includes your relationship with students in this new context - be caring and supportive.

### REASSURANCE

Providing students with reassurance that everyone is working towards a safe and healthy future will be critically important. Acknowledge their concerns, validate their worries, but don't elaborate on them. Help children to see that adults are doing their best to keep control of the situation and they can help as well.

Focus on a growth mindset and use the power of yet - we can't do this YET, but we will be able to someday.

### ROUTINES

Help students feel a sense of control by involving them in the process of making classroom routines. This may include routines for body breaks, use of supplies, or entering/leaving the classroom. Share the routines developed for cleaning, hand washing, walking in the hallways, etc. that apply to all students in the school and discuss the importance of following these routines as well.

### REGULATION

Stress decreases students' ability to self-regulate. They will be looking to you for guidance on how to learn these skills again. Try to remain calm and demonstrate self-regulation techniques when with students. This could mean pausing for some deep breathing or sharing the cues your body is giving to you (e.g., tight muscles) to signify how you are feeling.

Always try to:

- Create a **safe and comforting environment** for all students
- **Teach with empathy and understanding**, acknowledging the varied experiences that all students have had
- Remember, children are trying to do their best
- Foster a sense of partnership with your students, not a relationship of control or authority
- Focus on children's strengths and successes

## HEALTHY SCHOOLS

Healthy School Communities **create well-rounded, resilient students**, with greater overall academic achievement, decreased discipline problems and improved attendance, improved lifelong health, and reduced disparities - all of which are particularly important in our current global context. Schools are a unique setting which **critically impact student well-being** and help to establish lifelong healthy habits. Having been away from school for so long, a unique opportunity is being presented to restructure schools to be healthier, and **prioritize well-being for all students**.

To achieve success as a healthy school, it is imperative that all members of the school community - students, staff, families, and community partners - **work together to prioritize wholistic well-being**. This multi-level team approach ensures that each and every child has the foundation to learn well and enjoy lifelong success. Regardless of what your school community looks like in the fall (in-person with restrictions, blended learning, or fully remote), a healthy school approach will help foster a culture of growth and support for the cognitive, physical, and emotional well-being of the entire school community.

To work towards being a healthy school, consider the following steps (adapted from [Ophea's Healthy School Certification](#)):

- 01.** **Establish a team** of dedicated individuals who will lead the activity. This team should include teachers, support staff, administration, community members, and - most importantly - students.
- 02.** Set up meetings in a safe space (socially distant or online) and **convene regularly** to monitor progress and make decisions.
- 03.** **Collect data** from your school community to determine assets and needs.
- 04.** **Select a priority health topic** to focus on this year that reflects the needs of your school community.
- 05.** **Create a plan** of how to address your selected health topic(s).
- 06.** **Monitor progress and celebrate success** throughout the school year.

Examples for the 2020-2021 school year:

- Create connections among students in a modified environment. This could be socially distant activities on school grounds, virtual coffee houses, or virtual trivia nights.
- Focus on ensuring that all students are given the opportunity to increase their **physical activity throughout the day**. You can incorporate short daily movement breaks in class or host school wide movement moments online.
- Due to school closures and differing learning environments when students return to school, the equity divide continues to grow greater. Consider how your school community can support students with access to healthy foods, school supplies, and other learning materials while continuing to follow public health guidelines.

The possibilities are endless and should be reflective of your school community's needs.



## RECOVERY LEARNING

When students return to school, they will not only have missed out of 4 months of in-school learning, but also 6 months of social development with their peers. Be cognizant of this and supportive as they work to relearn material and routines. Move slowly through activities and **give students time to reflect** on their growth and progress.

Academically	Socially
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spend time reviewing previous material.</li> <li>• Reinforce learning techniques and strategies.</li> <li>• Less is more at this time - don't overload the students with numerous tasks/ assignments.</li> <li>• Use backward design to ensure effective assessment. First select focussed educational goals, then develop a plan based on where, when, and what is being taught. Using the plan, identify what student success will look like and then determine assessment criteria.</li> <li>• Provide students with a variety of opportunities to demonstrate their learnings: providing opportunities for students to choose from a range of activities with similar knowledge and skills.</li> <li>• Use formative assessment to establish where individual students are and be responsive to data you collect from observations, conversations, reflective writing, and/or assignments.</li> <li>• Co-construct learning opportunities, experiences, and goals with students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on inclusion. Create an environment where all students feel that they are valued and belong.</li> <li>• Incorporate safe social time in your class daily. This may be a morning activity to start the day, some free time within the classroom, or virtual meet ups with other cohorts of students.</li> <li>• Discuss how it is still possible to connect socially while practicing physical distancing. Many students may have heard the term social distancing and need clarification.</li> <li>• Work with students to build collaborative problem-solving skills and be open about the reality of having to relearn some social skills.</li> <li>• Allow students to work in groups when possible and safe.</li> <li>• Ensure that non-academic time is prioritized - lunch and recess should not be removed under any circumstance.</li> <li>• Practice self-regulation and self-management strategies. Contributing positively to the social climate includes taking care of the self.</li> </ul>

## RECESS

Recess is an essential component of a supportive return to school environment where **students can grow, learn, and play**. As we all learn to navigate new learning environments, recess must be included as a part of every school day. **Recess is not a replacement for physical education**, but is a vital part of the day where students can be physically active. When planning recess, keep the following in mind:

- Divide your school yard into zones or areas to assist with the number of students in each area
- Keep equipment within each zone or area to minimize sharing among groups of students
- Involve students in the planning process to develop safe and fun activities to do within public health guidelines

As we return to schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the likely scenarios will be student cohorts. This structure will minimize the spread of the virus, but it will also benefit recess, as cohorts will be smaller and better involve teachers in recess planning and implementation. This should lead to recess that is much more **manageable, inclusive and enjoyable** – which will benefit your class climate when you return to learning and instruction time.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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- PHE Canada Spotlight Series  
<https://phecanada.ca/connecting/events/phe-spotlight-series>
- Canadian Alliance for Healthy Schools - Resource Directory  
<https://phecanada.ca/activate/healthy-school-communities/chsa/resource-directory>
- PHE Canada - Teach Resiliency  
<https://phecanada.ca/programs/teach-resiliency>
- PHE Canada - Teach Resiliency - What does it mean to teach in a trauma-informed way?  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfUosJCsFkg&feature=youtu.be>
- PHE Canada - Teach Resiliency - Every Kid needs a Champion  
<https://phecanada.ca/programs/teach-resiliency/resources/every-kid-needs-champion>
- PHE Blog - Trauma and violence informed teaching – why it is critically important, and how we can do it  
<https://phecanada.ca/connecting/blog/trauma-and-violence-informed-teaching-why-it-critically-important-and-how-we-can-do>
- PHE Canada - Recess  
<https://phecanada.ca/activate/recess>
- The Recess Project  
<http://www.recessprojectcanada.com>
- Ever Active Schools - Comprehensive School Health Webinar  
<https://cshhub.com/course/>
- PHAC - Mental Well-Being  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/mental-health.html>
- COVID-19 Return to School Considerations for Recess  
<https://phecanada.ca/sites/default/files/content/docs/Program/Recess/COVID-19%20Return%20to%20School%20Recess%20EN.pdf>
- Well Ahead: <https://www.wellahead.ca>
- Ophea Healthy School Certification  
<https://www.ophea.net/healthy-schools-certification>



## CONTACT US



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*With respectful acknowledgement that the land where PHE Canada's National Office is located is on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg People.*