



Return to School 2021: 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.

Latest update: August 20, 2021



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.



MEDICINE WHEEL*

**When incorporating Indigenous knowledge into your teaching, be sure to follow proper protocols and be inclusive all groups. The information shared here is one component of Indigenous culture and should not be taken to reflect the diversity of all Indigenous cultures.*

In creating this resource, PHE Canada spoke with Thomas Doherty M.Ed., OCT. Tom acknowledged the Medicine Wheel, sometimes known as the Sacred Hoop or Sacred Circle, that has been used by generations of Indigenous people for health, healing and teaching. With respect to well-being, the Medicine Wheel provides an individual with a very effective visual and reminder to prioritize well-being throughout their day, be better focused, and build deeper learners.

This particular Medicine Wheel (pictured below) has been gifted by Anishinaabe Elder Leonard Sky and used by him in his teachings of the Seven Grandfather Teachings. The four (4) quadrants represent more than one concept, however, the focus below is on 4 key components of each human individual: the mental (mind), physical (body), emotional and spiritual. Keeping these four (4) components in balance is fundamental for good health, according to many First Nations teachings.

At the start of each day, one should ask oneself four (4) fundamental questions to gauge well-being:



Mental (Mind): Are I able to be truthful and honest about how I am doing now? What is on my plate that I own and do not own that causes my mind to be unfocused on the task at hand?

Physical (Body): What do I need to be my best at school/work? Do I have food and energy to fuel my body and mind?

Emotional: Can I be brave about who I am and the gifts I have to share? Will I be able to communicate with others about my feelings and how I feel about various things?

Spirit: What or who could I bring a more joyful spirit to school/work? Is my heart allowing me to show kindness towards my peers? Do I need some positiveness in my

life today or a friendly face to brighten my day?

Tom suggests that if we struggle with any of these four (4) fundamental questions, then we need to address the area of concern before continuing on with their day, in order to learn, grow, and thrive. The Medicine wheel can be used by educators and as a classroom activity. Self-reflection and being honest with oneself in answering these four (4) fundamental questions are a great way to find balance in one's life and fundamental to good health.

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:

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

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

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know someone who has contracted COVID-19 • Know someone who died as a result of COVID-19 • Have experienced abuse that is new or worsened as a result of COVID-19 • Be experiencing poverty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to move for financial reasons • Have a new fear of leaving home • Have a new fear of interacting with others • Have a new fear of dying • Be experiencing boredom, sadness, distress, or loneliness |
|--|--|

Moreover, 2020 has been a year filled with political and social turmoil that have affected our sense of security, control, self and place. Young people, especially those face disproportionately negative outcomes will require additional considerations.

Without attention, students may experience a variety of negative social, emotional or learning impacts such as:

01. Cognitive: Attention Control, Working Memory & Planning, Inhibitory Control, Cognitive Flexibility, and Critical Thinking
02. Emotional: Emotion Knowledge & Expression, Emotion & Behavior Regulation, and Empathy & Perspective-taking
03. Social: Understanding Social Cues, Conflict Resolution & Social Problem-solving, and Prosocial & Cooperative Behavior
04. Values: Ethical Values, Performance Values, Intellectual Values, and Civic Values
05. Perspectives: Optimism, Gratitude, Openness, and Enthusiasm/Zest
06. Identity: Self-knowledge, Purpose, Self-efficacy & Growth Mindset, and Self-esteem

Retrieved from <http://exploresel.gse.harvard.edu/>, August 25, 2020

It is important to acknowledge each student individually as they move through these experiences. Doing so, may take time but will lead to more positive impact in the long term.

It is equally important to recognize that as teachers, we have experienced trauma during the pandemic and that these will influence how we interpret the behaviour of our students. Both at home and school, be sure to prioritize your own self-care. Take the time and space that you need to process and prepare for the day ahead of time, and to decompress at the end of each day.



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

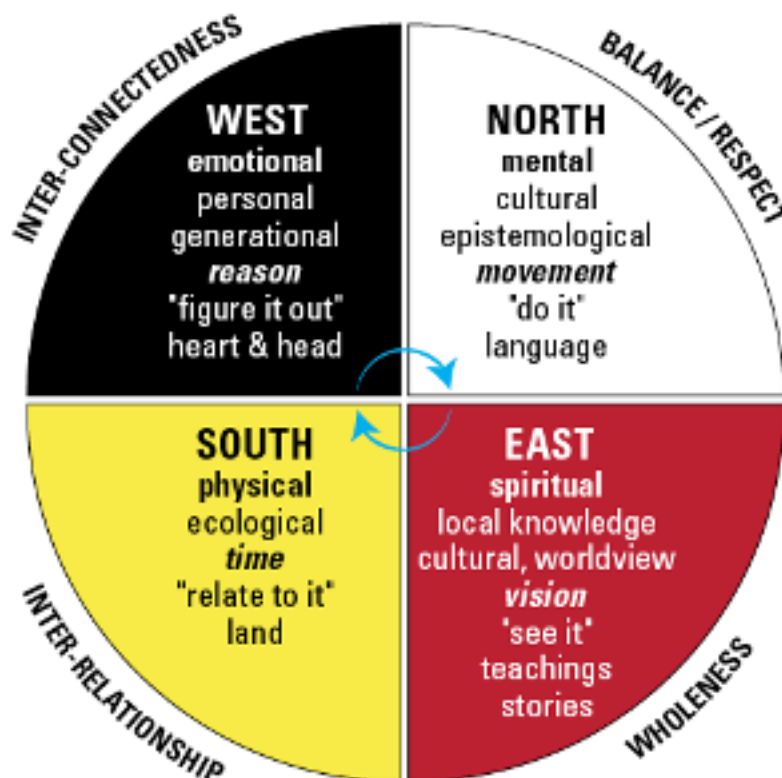
Stress decreases students' ability to self-regulate. They will be looking to you for guidance on how to learn these skills again. Try to remain calm and demonstrate self-regulation techniques when with students. This could mean pausing for some deep breathing or sharing the cues your body is giving to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

ANISHINAABE WORLDVIEW

Thomas Doherty has offered the Anishinaabe view of the four (4) Rs (relationships, reassurance, routines and regulation) much the same way as through inter-connectedness, balance/respect, inter-relationship and wholeness. The following Medicine Wheel diagram reviews the gifts of each of the directions as informed by Cree Elder Michael Thrasher and used by him in his teachings of the Seven Grandfather Teachings.



Through attending to all four directions and with **mutual respect** for one another's **feelings and thoughts**, the **fear of the unknown** can be the drawing point of commonality that drives the relationships that are formed and built upon. **By using empathy and understanding, embracing the unknown and working together we can better achieve a safe and comforting environment** for educators and students.

SEVEN SACRED TEACHINGS

Each of the Seven Sacred Teachings honours the virtues necessary for a full and healthy life. By practicing social distancing, hand sanitizing, wearing and keeping a mask on and respecting the complexities and intersectionality associated of Covid-19 one can ensure that they are following and honouring the Seven Sacred Teachings in keeping the following in mind:

I practice physical distance, handwashing and wearing a mask because...

The Seven Grandfather teachings

Humility – Dbaadendiziwin

Bravery – Aakwa’ode’ewin

Honesty – Gwekwaadzwin

Wisdom – Nbwaakaawin

Truth – Debwewin

Respect – Mnaadendimowin

Love - Zaagidwin



Humility – I am humble and an equal, I don’t know if I have COVID, as we know people can spread the disease even without symptoms.

Bravery – I am strong, I will practice physical distance, handwashing and wearing a mask because I have the courage to face my fears.

Honesty – being truthful and true to yourself, the reality is COVID is real and I don’t want to add to the spread of the virus.

Wisdom – I have the knowledge to keep my community and family safe, therefore I will practice physical distance, handwashing and wearing a mask because I know it works.

Truth – We must understand, speak and feel the truth, it gives us the ability to act without regret, therefore I act true to myself by practicing physical distance, handwashing and wearing a mask.

Respect – I respect the balance and needs of others, I don’t want to get someone else sick with COVID, therefore I practice physical distance, handwashing and wearing a mask.

Love – I love all of creation, I love my family, and my friends, I want nothing but kindness and peace for all things around me, therefore I practice physical distance, handwashing and wearing a mask out of love.

Figure 1 – Thomas Doherty

The above piece is only one example of how the Seven Grandfather Teachings can be utilized to explain how one relates and should react to certain situations that affect or effect their personal well-being.

Of all the North American Indigenous teachings, the Seven Grandfather Teachings are the most commonly shared from coast to coast. Many Aboriginal organizations and communities have adopted the 7 guiding principles, in one form or another, as a moral stepping stone and cultural foundation. Bringing this into your classrooms can be a way to centre well-being each morning. The following is an education resources created and developed by the Seven Generations Education Institute:



HUMILITY – DBAADENDIZIWIN

Humility is represented by the wolf. For the wolf, life is lived for the pack and the ultimate shame is to be outcast. We all share Mother Earth!



BRAVERY – AAKWA'ODE'EWIN

Bravery is represented by the bear. The mother bear has the courage and strength to face her fears and challenges while protecting her young. The bear also shows us how to live a balanced life with rest, survival and play. We all have doubt but how we handle it is the key!



HONESTY – GWEKWAADZIWIN

Honesty is represented by either the raven or the sabel. They both understand who they are and how to walk in their life. "Sabe reminds us to be ourselves and not someone we are not. An honest person is said to walk tall like Kitchi-Sabe... Like Kitchi-Sabe, Raven accepts and knows how to use this gift. Raven does not seek the power, speed or beauty of others. Know your own strengths and weakness and offer help to those who need your help and seek help if in need from those who can help you.



WISDOM – NBWAAKAAWIN

The beaver represents wisdom because it uses this natural gift wisely for its survival. The beaver also alters its environment in an environmentally friendly and sustainable way for the benefit of its Family. One's ability to adapt in a positive way to their surroundings is key to ensuring one's well-being.



TRUTH – DEBWEWIN

Truth is represented by the turtle as it was here during the creation of Earth and carries the teachings of life on its back. The turtle lives life in a slow and meticulous manner because it understands the importance of both the journey and the destination. Always remember to slow down, take a deep breath and assess what is going on in your own surroundings to better understand and proceed.



RESPECT – MNAADENDIMOWIN

Respect is represented by the buffalo. The buffalo gives every part of its being to sustain the human way of living, not because it is of less value, but because it respects the balance and needs of others. Everyone has their own self-value system in order for their own well-being and that always must be respected, even if it is not a shared value of your own!



LOVE – ZAAGIDWIN

The eagle that represents love because it has the strength to carry all the teachings. The eagle has the ability to fly highest and closest to the Creator and also has the sight to see all the ways of being from great distances. The Eagle's teaching of love can be found in the core of all teachings, therefore an eagle feather is considered the highest honor and a sacred gift. We all have to remember to treat others with respect and in the same way you would want to be treated by others.

Therefore, when students return to school, the Seven Grandfather Teachers can be utilized to create and foster a supportive return to school environment, where students **can grow, learn, and play** through navigating their new learning environments and recess with some proven guided principles when interacting with their peers and staff.

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**.

A Healthy School

- honours each person, the interconnection between them, and the land upon which they live;
- values broader ways of knowing;
- focuses on what the school community can do together;
- identifies where there is energy, interest and capacity to strengthen the health and wellbeing of the school community and supports action in that direction.

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 The Canadian Healthy School Alliance for [Healthy Schools Standards](#)):



Examples for the 2021-2022 school year:

- 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 months of in-school learning, but also essential 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"> • Spend time reviewing previous material. • Reinforce learning techniques and strategies. • Less is more at this time - don't overload the students with numerous tasks/assignments. • 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. • 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. • Use formative assessment to establish where individual students are and be responsive to data you collect from observations, conversations, reflective writing, and/or assignments. • Co-construct learning opportunities, experiences, and goals with students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on inclusion. Create an environment where all students feel that they are valued and belong. • 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. • 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. • Work with students to build collaborative problem-solving skills and be open about the reality of having to relearn some social skills. • Allow students to work in groups when possible and safe. • Ensure that non-academic time is prioritized - lunch and recess should not be removed under any circumstance. • Practice self-regulation and self-management strategies. Contributing positively to the social climate includes taking care of the self.

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.

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

- 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



www.phecanada.ca



info@phecanada.ca



PHE Canada, 2451 Riverside Dr., Ottawa, ON K1H 7X7

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.