



# Mentally Healthy Virtual Return to School Following Winter Break 2021-22

The return to school after a break is a transition that can be difficult for some students as well as for educators. The recent and sudden shift to virtual classrooms has once again altered routines. This causes stress for students, families, and school staff. Students have mixed feelings about the continued uncertainties related to the pandemic and what this may mean in the coming weeks. This range of feelings is a natural response to transition, and to what students and staff have experienced over the past two years. As an educator, you can help to normalize these feelings, continue to build caring learning environments, and help students learn strategies to cope with feelings of stress.

## Remember

Even though learning will happen in a virtual environment, building and maintaining relationships continues to be key. These strategies can help support students as they transition back to learning after the winter break:

- Anticipate significant fatigue and sleepiness, particularly among adolescents. Continue to include a focus and expectations on social and emotional well-being, self-efficacy, and adaptive skills.
- Re-teach expectations and routines and be patient and positive (and non-punitive) when reinforcing and reminding about new virtual routines.
- Use your professional judgement in introducing new academic content, considering time for transitions and re-establishing routines.
- Model [a range of coping strategies](#) you are hoping the students will follow.
- Consider opportunities for students to work cooperatively, feel empowered and assist others, which can prove restorative following significant disruption and collective stress.
- Provide students opportunities to voice concerns, challenges, and needs.

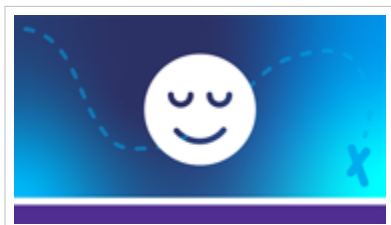




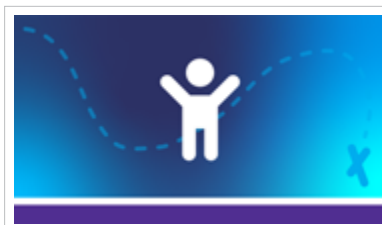
## Resources

Teaching students a variety of stress management and coping strategies will provide them with a choice of tools to use when they are feeling overwhelmed or anxious. Each of us is unique and strategies that work for some might not work for others, and that is okay. By teaching, modeling, and practising various kinds of strategies students can find the ones that work best for them. The following links will take you to six lesson plans (K-12) that contain a minds-on activity to prepare students for learning, a pre-recorded video that models the strategies, and suggestions for consolidating learning. Each lesson explores a different kind of stress management and coping strategy. They are designed to be easy for any educator to use from start to finish, or to take elements from and integrate into everyday routines.

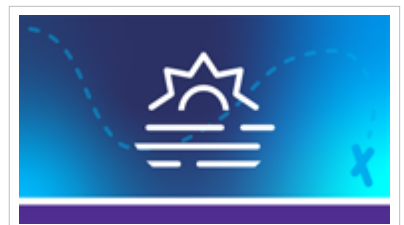
### Lesson Plans to Introduce Stress Management and Coping Strategies



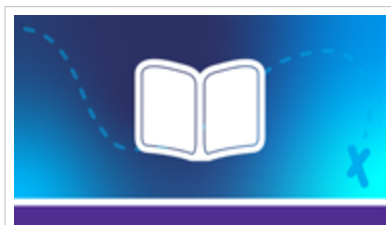
Breathing



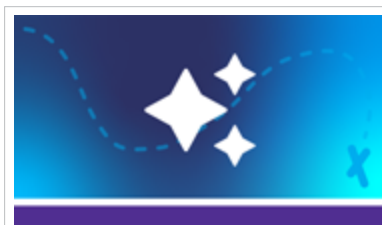
Muscle relaxation



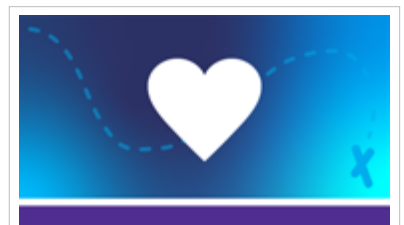
Visualization



Distraction



Thought Changing



Gratitude