

FOR EDUCATORS

Tips for Supporting Students' Mental Health This Fall

Teens heading back to school this fall are rebounding from a uniquely challenging time and reemerging into a new normal. Getting back into the swing of academic and social life may be daunting, especially as so many teens are still dealing with the mental health impacts of the pandemic.

Here are some suggestions for educators and school staff looking to help teens cope:

Be aware of common challenges

- Anxiety, including social anxiety
- Depression
- Academic loss or stress
- Grief
- Race- and identity-related trauma
- Economic hardship

Look out for big changes in behavior, mood and habits

If a student suddenly seems different, check in with them and their family.

Watch for common signs of a mental health challenge like:

- Losing interest in things they used to enjoy, including academic opportunities
- Not showing up to school or extra-curricular activities
- Not wanting to see friends
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Disruptive behavior or aggression

Open the conversation

Be proactive about talking to students about mental health. Share resources, check in with students on a regular basis, and make sure they know who to turn to if they're struggling.

Validate students' emotions

It's important for students to know that challenging feelings are normal. Give them space to express what they're going through without judgment or repercussions.

Prioritize social emotional wellness

Think creatively about ways that students can meet academic demands without sacrificing their mental health. While academics are key, students may need additional support this year as they reengage with normal life. That might include flexible assignment formats, due dates, or tutoring opportunities.

Create space for grief

Students who have lost loved ones may be having an especially hard time coping and staying engaged. Offer students (and staff) opportunities to connect with others who have experienced a loss; know that the grieving process takes time. Keep in mind that because COVID-19 infections and deaths have disproportionately affected communities of color, students from these communities are more likely than their white classmates to have lost someone close to them.

Take care of your own mental health

Making time and space for your own needs is an important part of meeting students' needs. And when teens see you prioritizing self-care, they learn to do the same.

Empower teachers and staff to help

Make sure staff and educators are trained to recognize signs of mental health issues and establish clear protocols for when and how to connect students to more support. It's also important for school staff to connect with students on a regular basis, not just when something seems to be wrong.

If you think a student is considering suicide, take action

If you're worried a student is in immediate danger of self-harm (and especially if the student mentions suicide), follow your mandated reporter guidelines and call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

MORE RESOURCES

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)

[Child Mind Institute: What Are the Symptoms of Depression in Teenagers?](#)

[Child Mind Institute: How Trauma Affects Kids in School](#)

[The Jed Foundation: Mental Health Resource Center](#)

[The Jed Foundation: Connecting to Help \(A Resource to Share with Students\)](#)

[The Steve Fund: Knowledge Center & Community Conversations Webinar Series](#)



The Morgan Stanley Alliance for Children's Mental Health combines the resources and reach of Morgan Stanley with the knowledge and experience of distinguished nonprofit partner organizations to help deliver positive, tangible impact on the critical challenges of stress, anxiety, and depression in children, adolescents and young people.

