

BHERO's
Just in **TIME**

Trauma-Informed Strategies

FOR BEFORE, DURING & AFTER WINTER BREAK

TOOLKIT

BHERO
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

GENERAL HOLIDAY-TIME TIPS

- 1 The holidays can be a joyful time for educators, students, and their families as they look forward to interacting with those they love most, but this time of year may also bring forth feelings of loss, grief, and struggle as families remember who or what they have lost. Remembering to be gentle with oneself—and with others—is one small way to acknowledge that this time of year brings forth different feelings for everyone.
- 2 This season can be a great opportunity to engage in multicultural activities that allow students and school staff from diverse backgrounds to share cultures, including holiday traditions and beliefs. This time of year is a great opportunity to honor values and traditions across cultures, bolster a sense of belonging, and create learning opportunities for all.

 - [This article from Edutopia](#) suggests emphasizing common themes across cultural traditions, such as thankfulness, caring for others, peace, and forgiveness.
 - [This article from Edutopia](#) provides a frame for a thoughtful discussion-based lesson surrounding celebrations. Check it out!

DURING HOLIDAY BREAK

for school staff

Taking time away from the classroom provides an opportunity for self-care. Here's an adapted Holiday Self-Care Plan, based on seven areas of wellness, that school staff can consider modifying to incorporate into their break time:

- 1 Physical –**
Educators can focus on the way they treat their bodies. Winter break provides an opportunity to move the body physically, get some extra sleep, and prepare healthy meals.
- 2 Emotional –**
The emotions of the school year have likely influenced educators greatly. By journaling or connecting with friends, family, or even mental health professionals, emotions can be explored and unpacked as needed.
- 3 Intellectual –**
Taking time to read something interesting or learn a new skill, and sharing it with others, is a great strategy to engage intellect.
- 4 Social –**
Connecting with friends and family, whether in person or virtually, is a helpful self-care strategy.
- 5 Spiritual –**
Reconnect with activities that create a sense of belonging, purpose, and fulfillment. These activities ground minds and can create a sense of calm.
- 6 Occupational –**
Consider catching up on professional learning requirements, if needed, or reflecting upon the things that have gone well so far this school year.
- 7 Practical –**
Break is an opportunity to catch up on activities that may have fallen to the wayside during the school year so far, like day-to-day tidying tasks, errands, or cleaning out a closet.

DURING HOLIDAY BREAK for families

- 1** Consider keeping a routine throughout the break that mirrors a typical weekly schedule. For younger students, especially, this sense of routine can make transitions between school and winter break easier. Maintaining a consistent bedtime (exceptions are allowed, of course!), wake-up hour, and mealtime schedule can be useful in fostering a sense of calm throughout the holiday season.
- 2** Wrap-up the year by taking time to consider what the goals of your family are—both as individual members and as a whole—for the upcoming year. Maybe the goal is to spend more uninterrupted time together as a family each week by playing a game together or finding time outside when the weather is nice. In addition, talking through any stresses or anxiety surrounding the upcoming year can also create connectedness. Children who are heading into high school or college may be worried about choosing a school or a career path; others may be worried about fitting in, getting good grades, or making a certain sports or activities team or trying out for a play. Laying worries out in the open allow for creation of a sense of calm.

DURING HOLIDAY BREAK for families

3

Practicing gratitude as a family is one way to think beyond the materialistic aspects of the holidays and consider what truly lifts people up and makes them happy. Naming something—or someone—families are grateful for each day can promote a sense of belonging and warmth during the season.

4

These guides, designed for students and families, provide an overview of signs that others are in need of mental health aid, and contain practical strategies for enhancing mental health.

For parents and carers
Wellbeing support for students during the school holidays

This guide provides tips and resources for parents, carers and families to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in their care during the school holidays. This includes services to reach out to if more support is needed.

Actions that support positive mental health

Encourage your young person to:

- Exercise and eat healthily to boost their mood
- Prioritise sleep to support mental and emotional wellbeing
- Explore relaxation techniques and coping strategies
- Stay in touch and catch up with friends and loved ones
- Make time to do things they enjoy
- Practice positive self-talk, and remind them they are not alone
- Seek professional help if needed¹

The Department have developed wellbeing activities and conversation starters for parents and carers of primary school-aged children and secondary school-aged children.

Feeling it: mindfulness resources and activities for senior secondary students. Smiling Mind gives tips on self-care, understanding and managing emotions, being mindful, being kind to yourself, navigating uncertainty and preparing for change.

Signs a child or young person may need mental health support

In some cases, these options will not be enough to support positive mental health.

Keep an eye out and seek professional help for changes that last two or more weeks such as:

- Loss of interest or involvement in activities normally enjoyed
- Feeling 'low', unusually stressed or worried
- Ordinary things get harder
- Being easily irritated or angry
- Taking more dangerous risks, like using alcohol or drugs
- Withdrawn or feeling overwhelmed
- Difficulties with concentration and motivation
- Having a lot of negative thoughts
- Changing in sleeping and eating^{1,2}

¹ headspace – a parents guide to school issues and stress <https://headspace.org.au/friends-and-family/parents-guide/>

² headspace 'mental health and you' poster https://headspace.org.au/health/secondary/Mental_Health_Posters_mgsaf.pdf

³ headspace – how to talk to your children about mental health <https://headspace.org.au/talkto/>

For students
Wellbeing support during the school holidays

This guide provides tips to continue looking after your mental health and wellbeing during the school holidays and services to reach out to if you need support.

Signs that you or a friend may need mental health support

Keep an eye out and seek professional help for changes that last two or more weeks such as:

- Loss of interest or involvement in activities normally enjoyed
- Feeling 'low', unusually stressed or worried
- Ordinary things get harder
- Being easily irritated or angry
- Taking more dangerous risks, like using alcohol or drugs
- Withdrawn or feeling overwhelmed
- Difficulties with concentration and motivation
- Having a lot of negative thoughts
- Changing in sleeping and eating^{1,2}

Actions that support positive mental health over the school holidays

Encourage your young person to:

- Exercise boosts mood and mental health – make it fun!
- Nourish your brain by eating healthily – it will also improve your mood
- Prioritise sleep to support mental and emotional wellbeing
- Explore relaxation techniques and coping strategies
- Stay in touch and catch up with friends and loved ones
- Make time to do things you enjoy
- Practice positive self-talk – and remember you are not alone
- Seek professional help if needed¹

Feeling it: mindfulness resources and activities for students. Smiling Mind gives you tips on looking after yourself, understanding and managing emotions, being mindful, being kind to yourself, negotiating uncertainty and preparing for change. You may find that these actions are not enough to look after your mental health. Here are some signs you may need some support.

¹ headspace – a parents guide to school issues and stress <https://headspace.org.au/friends-and-family/parents-guide/>

² headspace 'mental health and you' poster https://headspace.org.au/health/secondary/Mental_Health_Posters_mgsaf.pdf

³ headspace – how to talk to your children about mental health <https://headspace.org.au/talkto/>

CLICK TO ACCESS!

BEFORE HOLIDAY BREAK

for school staff supporting students

1

For students who have experienced trauma, maintaining predictability in routines helps to support psychological safety. Keeping school-wide and classroom routines as consistent as possible throughout the holiday transition is best-practice. However, when schedules must change, informing students of the change, and letting them know why, can help learners build the life skill of adaptability and responding to change in a productive way. Surprises are fun for some children, but they can eliminate predictability for others, which may lead to maladaptive behaviors.

2

To help students with the transition to winter break, consider reminding them that they will have time away from the classroom to take a break from learning all day, every day – but they will return in January. A question to foreshadow the return to learn might sound like, “What will you look forward to the most when we come back from winter break?”

3

Should students choose to extend their academic learning over the break, consider highlighting the skills taught leading up to holiday break that can be generalized outside of school. Provide students with a heads up for practice opportunities – “And you can practice or use this skill over winter break by doing/saying/reading/etc ...”

BEFORE HOLIDAY BREAK

for school staff supporting students

4

To emphasize non-academic essential skill development, consider creating a list of healthy activities that students can choose to engage in during their time away. This list may include activities like exercise, connecting safely with family or friends, reading a book that students are interested in, practicing skills online using sites like Khan Academy or IXL, or working on a craft. It may also be beneficial to provide students with time to access the school library or other resource centers to find materials to take home with them.

5

Maintaining classroom engagement may be a challenge in the days leading up to winter break. Consider incorporating thematic instruction centered around the holidays to incentivize students to engage in meaningful content while still looking forward to the season. [This article from Edutopia](#) provides some fun examples for thematic units.

6

Practicing gratitude is a great strategy to manage stress and anxiety, as well as to potentially give back time or talent in a meaningful way. Consider taking time at the start or end of class each day for students to log 3 things they are thankful for. This could be used as a bell ringer or conclusion activity that helps promote gratitude as a daily, healthy practice.

AFTER HOLIDAY BREAK

for school staff supporting students

A

As was mentioned in B-HERO's Trauma-Informed Back-to-School Tips, not all students have happy experiences when staying at home for extended amounts of time. Questions like “What did you do over winter break?” or “What gifts did you receive over the holidays?” can perpetuate disconnection, trigger flashbacks, or create unintended hierarchies based on what students did or received over break.

- Here are some alternative questions, focused on the new year, that can foster connection:
 - What are you most looking forward to in this new year?
 - What are you excited to keep learning about, or start learning about?

B

After an extended break from school, students may need to be reminded of classroom norms, procedures, and practices. Here are a few strategies to make this review fun, engaging, and productive:

1

Consider making review of general class norms, like respecting the speaker, fun and interactive by using a digital platform like Kahoot! or by asking students to act out Classroom Dos and Don'ts in small groups.

AFTER HOLIDAY BREAK

for school staff supporting students

B After an extended break from school, students may need to be reminded of classroom norms, procedures, and practices. Here are a few strategies to make this review fun, engaging, and productive:

2 Help students experience focused attention by utilizing strategies that can build connection and camaraderie listed in [this Edutopia article](#):

- “Sharing Worries or Celebrations: Students write down or draw a worry, problem, or even a celebration they want to share. Folding up the paper, they hand it off to a partner. Partners then respond to one another with an image or words. Before implementing this practice, discuss agreements and trust within the classroom, and doing the activity should always be a choice.
- Coregulating with Partners: Have a student choose a partner. Without talking, one student should find a rhythm in their breathing, body percussion, or drumming on the desk, and see if their partner can match the pattern. Then they change it up as the other person takes the lead.
- Mirror me: In this coregulatory practice, one partner creates a pattern of body movements – such as a jumping jack followed by squatting and arm movements – that the other person will mirror back. It’s fun for students to speed up and slow down these movements to see how closely their partner can follow. Students in each pair take turns leading.”

AFTER HOLIDAY BREAK

for school staff supporting students

B

After an extended break from school, students may need to be reminded of classroom norms, procedures, and practices. Here are a few strategies to make this review fun, engaging, and productive:

3

Ask open-ended questions that provide multiple opportunities to respond:

- What does cooperation look like in our classroom?
- How do we disagree?
- What are the best ways to move between tasks or stations?
- We want to do our best, but we focus on working as a team rather than winning in the end. What does that look like? How can we be good teammates, even if we don't win?
- How do we support our classmates when we express ourselves creatively? How do we support each other when we share our cultures, beliefs, and learned experiences?