

# 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 ...”

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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.

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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.

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**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.”

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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?