



Supporting Student Behavior After Breaks

Resources for School Staff & Families



Facts & Data

Irregular routines and inconsistent sleep patterns have been associated with higher risk-taking behaviors and higher levels of reported depression in youth, according to the [National Library of Medicine](#).

Holiday breaks from school can be rejuvenating for some, but according to the [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#), 64% of people with mental illness, including clinical anxiety and depression, report holidays can make their conditions worse.

[Research](#) shows that student mental health risks are greatly diminished when they have support from an adult they can trust. According to the [Regional Educational Laboratory](#), trusting relationships with adults are shown to increase student engagement and academic success.

According to the [Healthy Youth Survey \(HYS\)](#) results from 2021, only 14% of Washington students in grade 8-12 responded that they did not have a trusted adult to turn to when they were feeling sad or hopeless.

Action Items

- Keep a consistent sleep schedule and routine at home during breaks to help students transition smoothly back to school.
- Reinforce positive behaviors at home with consistent praise and compliments.
- Notify school staff if major changes at home may impact your student's learning or mental/emotional wellbeing.
- Model mindfulness that all families celebrate holidays and traditions differently and that some families may not be able to give gifts or go on vacations during a holiday break.
- Share school announcements with your student to review behavior expectations and reminders on upcoming events and deadlines.
- Check in with your student about how they're feeling as they return from break. Look for signs that they may be feeling anxious or worried and provide reassurance.
- Model problem solving conversations and practice ways your student can ask for help with academic or social concerns at school.
- Share strategies with your child for dealing with anxiety, such as taking breaks and getting enough sleep and exercise.

Conversation Starters

- How are you feeling about returning to school after break?
- What are you looking forward to? Is there someone or something you're excited about?
- Is there someone or something you're nervous about? Would you like to talk about it? Would it be helpful to practice how you could address your concerns?
- Is there anything you would like your teacher(s) to know as you transition back to school?
- Do you have a trusted adult at school you can talk to if you or a friend needs support?
- What are some things you can do to help yourself or a classmate when you are struggling?
- How are you able to ask for help from your teachers and school staff?
- I saw the welcome-back email from school reminding families about student behavior expectations, do any of these expectations feel challenging? What are some strategies we can practice to help you be successful when you return?

See a list of [34 Conversation Starters for Your Family](#) you can use to get your family talking during break.

Additional Resources

- [Leveraging Reset Opportunities](#) – The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments provides information to help students and staff thrive after a challenging break or academic term.
- [Back to School and Mental Health](#) – The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides information on supporting students as they return to school.
- [Sleep Tips for Teens](#) and [Ways to Help My Child Sleep](#) – These resources from UW Medicine provide guidance to help families establish healthy sleep habits for young children and teenagers.
- [How Families Can Support Student Health and Emotional Well-being](#) – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides guidance on what families can do to collaboratively support their student's experience at school.
- [Digital Drama Unplugged](#) – This lesson from Common Sense Education helps students learn to avoid or de-escalate online drama that may happen over a break.
- [How to Support Your Child with Stress, Worry, and Anxiety](#) – This handout by UW Medicine provides guidance and resources for parents on ways to support their child's mental health.
- [Social and Emotional Learning Games](#) – Five games you can play to help your child with social-emotional learning at home to practice managing their emotions and work on social skills.
- [Supporting Young Children's Learning and Well-Being at Home](#) – A collection of resources developed during the COVID school closure to support student emotional needs while at home.

