
Tips for Teachers: Helping Children and Adolescents Transition Back to School

Considerations

Teachers play an important role in helping children and adolescents transition back to school by creating a safe and supportive classroom community. When deciding how to help children and adolescents transition, consider the various persons involved (e.g., student, teacher, paraprofessional); whether learning will take place at school, at home, or in both locations; and the array of tasks and activities performed (e.g., learning, playing). Below are some tips for teachers when helping children and adolescents transition back to school.

Create a Partnership Pledge

- Explain to students that a pledge is a promise that everyone in the classroom community will make to keep each other safe.
- Ask students their opinions about what teachers and students could do to keep each other safe.
- Provide examples if students have difficulty generating ideas.
- Summarize the ideas and lead students to consensus about what elements should be included in the pledge.
- Create a poster with students to display in the physical classroom and on the virtual classroom homepage.
- Share the partnership pledge with students' families.

Consider Safe Ways to Promote In-Person Learning and Organized Activities

- Consider the likelihood (probability) of increased disease transmission and the impact (consequences) of decisions related to in-person learning and organized activities.
- Discuss the American Academy of Pediatrics guidance related to the [benefits of in-person learning](#) with teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals.
- Review [considerations for in-person services](#) and [decision guides related to reopening services for children](#) with the occupational therapy practitioner and educational team.
- Assess the risk of conducting in-person learning and organized activities (e.g., projects, clubs, sports) with a [three-dimensional risk assessment](#), which includes contact intensity, number of contacts, and modification potential.
 - Contact intensity: rated (low, medium, high) according to student and staff contact type (i.e., close to distant) and duration (i.e., brief to prolonged)
 - Number of contacts: rated (low, medium, high) according to the number of people in an area at the same time
 - Modification potential: ability to mitigate risks with safety precautions (see [Hierarchy of Controls](#)) such removing the hazard (e.g., social distancing), isolating students and staff from the hazard (e.g., Plexiglass, reconfiguring space), changing the task (e.g., modifying the activity, [cleaning](#), handwashing), and using personal protective equipment (PPE) (e.g., face coverings)

Example: Risk Assessment to Guide Decision Making Related to In-Person Extracurricular Activities (e.g., clubs, sports)

Service Area	Contact Intensity	Number of Contacts	Modification Potential
Wrestling Club	High, due to close proximity of athletes and 3-hour timeframe	Low, due to small number of athletes and staff in large gym	Low, due to inability to socially distance, isolate the hazard, and use PPE
Debate Club	Low, due to ability to socially distance during a 1-hour timeframe	Medium, due to moderate number of participants in classroom setting	High, due to ability to social distance, reconfigure space, increase cleaning/handwashing, and use face coverings
Greenhouse Club	Low, due to ability to socially distance during a 1.5-hour timeframe	Low, due to small number of participants in large outdoor setting	High, due to ability to social distance, reconfigure space, increase cleaning/handwashing, and use face coverings

In the example above, school staff decided that only the Debate and Greenhouse clubs would meet in person, as long as current federal and state guidelines allowed, secondary to risk and mitigation potential.

Create a Supportive Community for Learning

- Provide opportunities for pairs of students to share thoughts and ideas for a few minutes at a time about what they are learning (i.e., [think-pair-share](#)).
- Encourage students to share stories about how lessons connect to their lives outside of school.
- Incorporate [“jigsaw” learning activities](#) that involve 3 to 4 students in breakout groups working together to teach each other concepts (e.g., each student reads a different portion of a chapter and then explains the content to their group members).
- Create time for socialization during virtual learning (e.g., allow students to [“show and tell”](#) their pets and favorite belongings, talk about their interests).
- Provide students with opportunities to reflect on and share their perspectives about learning through journal activities and class discussions.

Support Students

- Listen to students’ concerns about transitioning between different learning environments (e.g., school, home, online).
- Be honest about unknowns related to how the school year will progress, and provide updates to school plans as soon as feasible.
- Help [children](#) and [teen and young adult](#) students [cope with uncertainties](#).
- Model effective coping and self-care strategies.
- Introduce students to [realistic thinking skills](#) and pay attention to unhelpful self-talk.
- Teach students the necessary [steps to solve problems](#).

Resources

- Anxiety Canada—[7 Tips for Educators Returning to School](#)
- International Society for Technology in Education—[3 Ways to Make Remote Learning More Engaging](#)