



Schools This Year...Supporting Student and Staff Mental Health in Crisis

Tips for Educators and Mental Health Professionals

Schools in the United States and around the world continue to face a serious quandary: How to balance education and learning amid the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cumulative trauma of global unrest around inequity at all levels.

In many communities, schools have transitioned from distance learning to in-person to hybrid classrooms and back again due to COVID-19 restrictions. Many students and families are struggling to meet schools' changing expectations while managing other stresses on time, energy, and resources. Parents, in effect, have become virtual co-teachers, checking in on their children, as they have tried to juggle their own virtual work as well. ***We have been asking a lot (perhaps too much) of parents and children.***

Whether you are teaching in school buildings, virtually, or in a hybrid program, positivity and relationship building is a foundation for mental health and well-being. Supporting staff and student mental health will foster success, both emotionally and academically, and help students, families, and schools transition through these challenges.

The **New England MHTTC** serves the six states that are a part of the Region 1: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), our core mission is to use evidence-based means to disseminate evidence-based practices across the region. Our **Childhood-Trauma Learning Collaborative (C-TLC)** was designed to strengthen mental health supports that address the needs of children who have experienced/are at risk of experiencing significant trauma.

The C-TLC's ***Schools This Year*** tip sheet was developed to guide conversations to include a trauma-informed, equitable, and compassionate lens to providing mental health supports for every member of the school community. Throughout this school year and beyond, you can use these tips to bring school communities together to heal from the trauma and grief that COVID-19 continues to inflict. Operating schools—in all forms—with optimism, joy, and connection will support the mental health of staff, students, and families, and provide a positive and healthy foundation for moving into a more hopeful future.



**A resource from the
Childhood-Trauma
Learning Collaborative**



Tip One: Foster a sense of security.

Begin with an underlying foundation of cultural responsiveness, justice, and equity. Invite conversations with families to understand more about their heritage, their experiences, and their concerns. Review school policies, curricula, and protocol to reaffirm a just and equitable basis for learning. Advocate for redistribution of resources and find partnerships with community organizations to support equity.



Tip Two: Build community.

Build strong, healthy relationships. In addition to creating a sense of safety, healthy relationships between staff and students and families are the key ingredient to cultivating community. Focus on student and family strengths in communication. Authentically get to know all members of the community.



Tip Three: Work with community partners to support student and staff mental health.

Provide professional development on the neurobiology of trauma and compassionate responses to mental health challenges and toxic stress, which often displays as behavior difficulty for youth.



Tip Four: Acknowledge and address grief.

Teach staff how to recognize grief. Share the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) list of symptoms, which includes 1) social withdrawal, 2) increased anxiety, irritability, aggression or high-risk behaviors, and 3) somatic complaints including stomachaches, headaches, and more.



Tip Five: Re-establish routine and connection.

Create predictability through school and classroom routines. Providing structure and predictability through schedules and team building activities that regularly occur at specific times during the day helps children and adults feel secure.



Tip Six: Use mindfulness to teach self-regulation at home and at school.

Incorporate mindful habits into daily routines at school. Learn more about how to do that with our [Five Mindful Habits](#) video.



Tip Seven: Vision for a better future together, with a healthy dose of reality. Vision, considering ideal and also practical realities, exploring possibilities, and refining your vision over several working sessions.

Excerpts here are from our *Toolkit for Schools*. Click [here](#) to access that publication in its entirety.

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At the time of this release Tom Coderre served as Acting Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use at SAMHSA. The opinions expressed herein are the views of the speakers, and do not reflect the official position of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), or SAMHSA. No official support or endorsement of DHHS, SAMHSA, for the opinions described in this presentation is intended or should be inferred.

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