



Promoting Health & Wellness During the Holiday Season

Climate Connection is a publication
of the NYS Center for School Safety.

NAVIGATING THE POTENTIAL ANGST AND STRAIN OF THE HOLIDAYS

***Not everyone goes into the holiday season full of excitement and cheer.
Be on the lookout for signs that students or staff members may be struggling.***

While generally regarded as a time of joy and excitement, for some, the holiday season can elicit feelings of anxiety, stress, and trauma. Families may be grieving the loss of a loved one. Students who live in homes where there is abuse, domestic violence, and/or mental illness may dread the extended break away from school. Financial insecurity or other hardship can also contribute to a child or caregiver's discomfort as the holidays approach. While we focus on health and well-being throughout the entire school year, during the holiday season it is especially important to pay close attention to the physical and psychological needs of our school community. The sooner we are able to identify that a student, family, or staff member may be in distress, the better positioned we are to mobilize our resources and provide the necessary support.

As you consider how you will address the social-emotional and mental health needs that may surface or intensity in the coming weeks, you may find the following tools helpful:

[Grief Over the Holidays: Educators Can Help Students Cope](#) (National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement)

[A Parent's Self-Care and Self-Reflection](#) (NYS Trauma-Informed Network and Resource Center)

[Supporting Children and Teens During This Holiday Season](#) (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network)

[Pause-Reset-Nourish to Promote Well-Being](#) (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network)

[Thriving During the Holidays: How to Prioritize Your Mental Wellbeing](#) (National Council for Mental Wellbeing)

LOCAL RESOURCES

The New York State Education Department has designed this [Community Resource Map](#) to connect families and professionals with local agencies and community resources in their area that can help with issues from early childhood through the transition to post-school life.



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Well-Being Practices

Gentle Reminders for Times of Stress

WELCOME THE STRESS RESPONSE

Remember that the body's natural stress response is helpful. Your body is "rising to meet a challenge" and is/was doing exactly what it is supposed to do. Not only is cortisol increased during times of stress, but so is oxytocin, the love/bonding hormone which helps us to seek support from others and offer support.

McGonigal, K. (2013)

COMPLETE THE STRESS CYCLE

Helping your body complete its stress cycle is critical, even when you are still being exposed to the stressor. Ways to do this include:



- Move your body/physical activity
- Express yourself creatively (art/imagination)
- Laugh
- Cry
- Be Social
- Take deep breaths
- Share affection
- 20 second hug
- 6 second kiss

Nagasaki, E. & Nagasaki, A. (2020)

CONNECTION & RELATIONSHIP

We are not meant to struggle alone. Relationships with safe, supportive people enhance our well-being and resilience and help us recover from times of stress and trauma. Talk to someone you trust and share how you are feeling and what you need. We benefit from not only seeking support but giving it. Connect with someone who might need you, too. Connect with your "why" in the world, your purpose and values that help you feel grounded.



EMOTION SKILLS & PRACTICES

Science tells us that we benefit from becoming aware of and welcoming our feelings. All of them. Gentle physical touch, like putting your hand on your heart, tuning into your heartbeat, and labeling your feelings may be helpful. Try to do this with acceptance and non-judgement. Feelings are like helpful guides, giving us important information about what we need. Remember they are temporary, always changing.



MINDFULNESS & ATTENTION

There is plenty of research documenting the benefits of mindfulness and attention related to practices to reduce stress. These practices are accessible no matter where you are. Be gentle with yourself and keep it simple.



- Present moment awareness
- 12-minute meditation
- Focused-attention practice
- Draw, color, doodle
- Mindful eating
- Compassion practice

LOVINGKINDNESS PRACTICE

May it/We/They
Be safe and free from harm
Be happy and healthy
Love and be loved
Feel peace and ease

Jha, A. (2003)



TECHNIQUES TO

GROUND YOURSELF



5, 4, 3, 4, 1

Look around you and count **5** things you see. Say them out loud. Now **4** things you can feel. Now **3** things you can hear. Now **2** things that you can smell. Lastly, **1** thing you can taste.



WATER

Splash some cold water on your face or arms. How does it feel? What do you notice? If you are looking for a more intense sensation, try holding an ice cube in your hand.



BREATHE DEEPLY

First, empty your lungs of all air. Now, take a very slow deep breath through your nose. Feel the air fill you up as you breath into your belly. Hold the air in your lungs for 5 seconds, the slowly let it out through your mouth for 5 seconds. Take 5 of these deep, slow breaths.



BODY SCAN

Do a scan of your body focus on each place where your body is touching another surface. Start at your feet, are they on the ground? Touching your shoes? Feel your legs wrapped in a blanket or your back against your chair and work your way up to your head.



STRETCH & MOVE

Do something physical, like stretching, jumping up and down, stomping your feet, running up the stairs. Notice how your muscles engage in these activities.

Center for Resilience + Well-Being in Schools



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IMPROVING YOUR EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

The Emotional Wellness Dimension involves the ability to express feelings, adjust to emotional challenges, cope with life's stressors, and enjoy life. It includes knowing our strengths as well as what we want to get better at, and living and working on our own but letting others help us from time to time.

AREA	THINK ABOUT...	RESOURCES
Feelings/ Emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you allow yourself to be open to and acknowledge your feelings without judgment? • Have you found and developed safe relationships with people or groups where you can express your feelings and thoughts? • Do you see challenges as opportunities for growth? • Do you recognize your limitations and learn from your mistakes? • Are you taking responsibility for your actions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect each day on your emotions, what can they teach you, and how you can express them. • Consider using a journal to record feelings and thoughts. • Develop regular habits that help you process and deal with your feelings effectively so you move forward in fulfilling your emotional needs. • Find a place where you feel the most comfortable and go there when you feel a need for comfort, quiet space, or safety.
Self-Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you joined support groups, or thought about starting one? • Do you write your thoughts in a journal, listen to music, or talk to family or friends when you are in need? • Have you tried yoga, breathing, or meditation to remain calm and centered? • Are you maintaining a daily routine? • Do you leave yourself plenty of time to get to work and other obligations? • Are you eating some meals without distractions, like checking your phone or watching TV? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discover what you like to do best, and do it often. It will help keep your spirits and emotions up. • Find an outlet for physical activity, such as a sports league or a gym/fitness center. • Take some time to yourself regularly. • Identify resources that can help you with a sleep schedule or ideas for meal planning. • Practice positive self-affirmations. Develop a positive statement to repeat to yourself daily. When you change your thoughts, you can change your mood and attitude.
Stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you learning to manage stress in ways that work for your lifestyle? • Do you recognize stress triggers and appreciate that you are not your feelings? Feelings are fleeting and will pass. • Do you welcome and cultivate positive, empowering thoughts and emotions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a step back when in a stressful situation. • Practice deep breathing or other relaxation techniques. • Try out different coping exercises or strategies when not in a stressful situation. When challenges arise, you will be better prepared to deal with them. • Practice finding positives (a silver lining) in something that you feel is negative. Support others in doing this, as well.

[A Step-by-Step Guide to Wellness \(SAMHSA\)](#)