



Returning to School

Flattening the Curve of COVID-19 Trauma

As students reenter school after the trauma of the Coronavirus Pandemic, they bring with them anxiety, anger, irritability, and the fear of the unknown. They no longer trust previously known routines and procedures and are unsure about past relationships or social and academic expectations. As their teacher, it is your responsibility to reassure them about the safety and security of the classroom and their place in it. These 10 tips will help you set that foundation.

- 1 Welcome students back with a card or email, once you know the date, and assure them you are working diligently to set up a safe and comfortable place for them to work and learn.
- 2 Establish a class meeting during your first week to establish guidelines, elicit empathy, foster peer-to-peer relationships, and provide each student with a voice. Consider conducting follow-up meetings in the days and weeks that follow.
- 3 Don't ignore the elephant in the room. If possible, talk about COVID-19 and fear. This is an opportunity for you to remind students to consider the sources of their news and to be beware of misinformation. Be sure to send home a summary of the topics discussed to promote parental engagement in the process.
- 4 Provide visuals for all routines/expectations. Even if you think students know what is expected, visuals relieve stress and support safety and comfort for all students.
- 5 Provide self-regulation tools and opportunities for movement throughout your instruction. (Be sure to teach tools as tools, not toys, and model expected use and movement).



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Provide a calm area that allows overwhelmed students a moment to self-regulate. (This area needs to be modeled and taught; expect overuse early on) This is not a time-out or punishment area, and the two should not be the same.

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Set up your room with “calm” in mind. Don’t use conflicting patterns or bright, fluorescent colors for general classroom décor (save these to highlight specific points of instruction). Create and value white space on your walls and pay attention to traffic patterns and furniture placement. Less is more – do not overwhelm.

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Establish a safe atmosphere.

- Assure students that each is safe and valued
- Prioritize discipline (teaching the behavior) over punishment
- Establish consistent and reasonable boundaries
- Establish consistent, clear routines and expectations (supported with visuals)

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Prioritize teacher-student and peer-to-peer relationship-building

- Greet students at the door with a routine (Ex: High-5, Air Hug, Thumbs-up, or Smile)
- Develop a mantra that you and students say each day (Ex: Teacher: “What’s my job?” Students: “To keep us safe.”)
- 2x10 (meet in a one-on-one, 2-minute session for 10 consecutive days with each child to discuss their interests and concerns)
- Use phrases like “I’ve been looking for/thinking of you;” “I’ve been getting ready for you;” “I wanted to share this with you;” or, “I thought you might find this interesting.”

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Remember to balance boundaries with compassion. Students don't care what you know unless they know that you care.