



# Tips for Families: Supporting a Mentally Healthy Back-to-School

*"Love begins at home, and it is not how much we do, but how much love we put in the action that we do" (St. Mother Teresa).*

## Connect with School Staff



As you **support** your child or teen with return to school, please know that the **caring adults** in your child's school are also working hard to ensure their **well-being**. Reach out to your child's teacher(s) to share information, discuss concerns, and/or make requests about supports your child may need. Check this resource out: [How to Work Together With Your School](#).

## Re-establish Routines

This time of year offers a good opportunity to make adjustments to routines that will support readiness for learning and overall well-being. Start by looking at **sleep hygiene**. Do family members have consistent wake times and bed times? Consider also routines and expectations around **screen time** since we know that too much can impact sleep, focus, and well-being. In addition, you may want to look at building more **physical activity** and **downtime** into the routine, both of which can reduce stress and help us cope with big emotions. Change is a process, so start with small steps and create a plan together with your child. The following resources may be helpful: [24-Hour Movement Guidelines](#); [Helping Your Child Manage Digital Technology](#); [50 Ways to Take a Break](#).



## Nurture the Relationship



During times of transition or stress, children/youth find safety and security in their relationships with their main caregivers. Spending daily **distraction-free time together**, even just a few minutes at a time, can go a long way to support well-being. Playing or walking together, sharing a hobby, or just hanging out will provide opportunities for your child to open up to you.

## Support Your Own Well-being

Caring for kids/teens can be hard and it can feel difficult to make time for yourself. Self-care is not only essential for your own well-being, but is also necessary in order to support your child's well-being. Check out this [Personal Resiliency Tip Sheet](#) and consider making one small change to support your own mental health. Also consider reaching out to family, friends, your parish, or other members of your community for support. If you're looking for mental health support, [Connex ON](#) can link you to counseling services. [Distress Centre of Toronto](#) offers 24/7 crisis phone support.



*Self Love*

## Support Emotions



Back-to-school can elicit a **range of emotions** for children/youth. Even if your child is excited, there are bound to be other emotions at play as well. Overwhelm, anxiety, uncertainty... to name a few. It helps if children/youth feel comfortable expressing those emotions to their caring adults. **Let them know you're open** to hearing about ALL feelings, not just the happy ones. The following conversation starters may help:

- How are you feeling being back at school? What else are you feeling?
- Is there anything you're worried about?
- What are you looking forward to?
- What helps you cope with tough feelings?
- How can I support you?

This approach will **strengthen your connection** and make it more likely that your child will come to you in the future with their problems and emotions.



## Noticing and Responding to Mental Health Concerns

If you notice changes in your child's emotions or behaviours it can be difficult to know whether what you are observing is related to the normal ups and downs of life or an indication of a mental health concern. The following resources can help you understand how to **identify concerns**, how to support your child, and how to get them the **help** that they may need: (1) [Noticing Mental Health Concerns for Your Child](#); (2) [Quick Reference for Youth Suicide Prevention](#).



## Access to Mental Health Supports

The following supports are available for your family. There is no problem too big or too small. **Don't hesitate to reach out!**

- **School Social Workers and Psychologists** - Speak to your child's teacher and/or school administrator
- [Kids Help Phone](#) - 24/7 counseling, Call 1-800-668-6868 or text 686868
- [Black Youth Helpline](#) - 416-285-9944 - Check website for hours
- [Hope for Wellness for Indigenous Peoples](#) - 24/7 counseling - Call 1-855-242-3310
- [Multilingual Distress Line](#) - Phone support in 8 different languages - check website for more info & hours
- [What's Up Walk-In](#) - Virtual counseling - check website for hours - variety of languages and 2SLGBTQ+ counselors available on request

