

Take A Minute for Wellness

From Erin Switzer - Health Promoting School Coordinator SD 58

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BACK TO SCHOOL in June COVID-19 Style

District staff have been “back at school” since May 14th and more children will be back in buildings starting June 1st. ESW children have been in schools for a while now, and staff have been working hard preparing spaces and classroom climates so that children and youth will recognize that school buildings are safe and healthy places to be.

Even though routines will be different, new ones taught and the ideas of social “niceties” shifted the school climate that our kids will be welcomed back to will be one of safety and love. The following visuals and links have some ideas, activities and [social stories](#) that may be helpful in teaching children the new COVID social norms:



1. “Be Calm. Be Safe. Be Kind.” Is our mantra. Students may be coming to school with fears and misconceptions. [Morning check ins](#) will be helpful.
2. “Tell if you’re not well.” Remind students that they need to tell an adult if they are not feeling well at any time.
3. “Cough or sneeze? Elbow please!” Respiratory etiquette is key in preventing the spread of germs. This little [song](#) will have you humming.
4. “Always Wash Your Hands” These [Handwashing activities](#) include specific instructions following the IHA guidelines around handwashing.
5. “Stop. Look. Go.” Some [fun ideas](#) for teaching students that they must move around the school in a mindful and intentional manner, ensuring that social distancing and safe proximity can be managed.
6. “Space is Good” Students can be reminded through [games](#) that they need to be mindful of social distancing, keeping safe space between themselves and others.

*“Relationships over Everything
Connection before Content
Maslow before Bloom”*



Emotions all over the Place?

You are normal 🌀

These past weeks of COVID-19 lifestyle have naturally increased our physical systems that respond to anxiety. Our baseline has risen therefore it takes less stress for our bodies to react with more intense physical symptoms. Our bodies have been dealing with mixed messages from government, media, scenarios from around the world and we are “change fatigued” as the new normal becomes the outdated normal faster than we can accustom ourselves. Some people may find that emotions are scattered, moving between calm – busy – restless and back to calm without any apparent triggers. Others are feeling worry, guilt, anger, or grief. Many are asking “Am I doing enough? Am I doing things right? Can I handle the steep learning curve?” Others are reporting having difficulty

Emotions.....continued

reading and understanding what they have read. All of this may come in waves and may be accompanied by physical sensations, tightness in the chest, difficulty breathing, tingling in the arms or hands, light headedness. All of this is NORMAL!

Anxious feelings come from uncertainty and the COVID-19 conditions that we are experiencing are a perfect definition of uncertainty. These times require that we learn to sit with uncertainty. How do we do this? Anxiety will go down as questions are asked and answered. Anxiety will go down as exposure to the classroom environment increases. Understanding that moderate stress is actually an asset is good. Our goal is not to eliminate stress but to maintain it in the optimal “green zone”. Thoughts, behaviours, moods and physiology are all connected so when we don’t feel like we have control in one area we can determine actions in other areas to balance it. When our **moods** escalate or our **physical** symptoms are triggered we can use **behaviours** such as *breathing, exercising, going for a walk, meditating, or engaging in a pleasurable activity* to lower the level of unease to a manageable level.

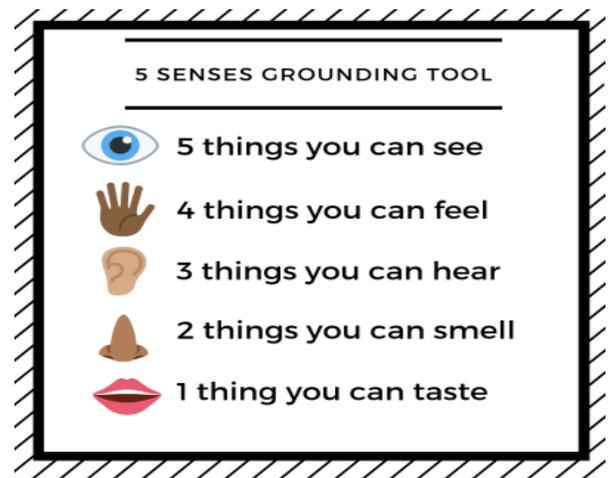
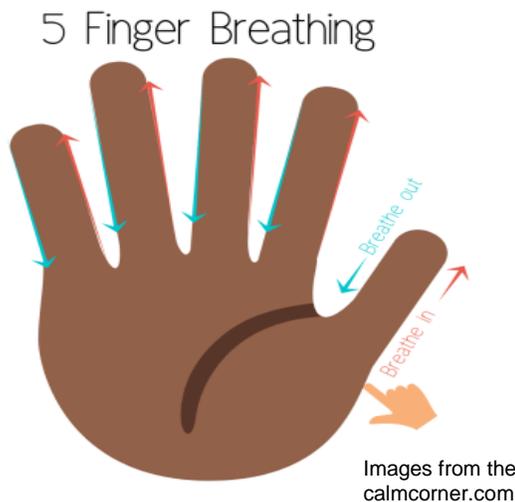
When we find that our **behaviours** are becoming obsessive or avoidant we use our **thoughts** to plan

specific, attainable, and timely goals for routines/habits, pleasurable accomplishments, or even the facing that difficult task that needs to get done. When our **thoughts** start branching off and creating “monkey-brain” we can balance them by identifying the distressing thought and then identifying the facts that support or discredit that thought. (Remember that assumptions and conjectures are NOT facts – avoid information from social media platforms).

As teachers and school staff we are caregivers. Our gift is that we are aware of the feelings of others and we have an innate desire to support and protect those around us. Keep in mind the mirror neurons in your brain that collect our personal stress as well as the stress of those around us. SELF CARE is therefore VITAL. It is the only thing that we have total control over. **Schedule** what you need. (Don’t leave it to the moments left over. We know those leftover moments just don’t exist). **Set boundaries** around you. A few minutes of **breathing, thinking, walking, doodling** - whatever meets your need - scattered throughout your day will keep you in the optimal zone with room left over to handle whatever comes at you.

REACH OUT – TALK IT OUT

SHARE GRATITUDE



**Keep Calm
and Carry
On.....**

Staying in the optimal emotional zone takes practice just like staying in optimal physical condition does. Dr. Andrew Maki from Starling Minds makes this analogy: **Relaxation and Emotional Regulation** in mental health is like **Stretching** is to physical health. Likewise, **Goal Setting** is like doing **Cardio** and **Thought Balancing** is the **weight training**. Train with a SEL buddy or access a “personal trainer” (counsellor) through our district’s EFAP program www.efap.ca/ or call 1-800-387-4765 or download the app.