

**We are all in the same storm, but not necessarily in the same boat.** The return to school will have its challenges. While we have yet to experience this type of event, it is important to recognize that we have faced previous challenges in our work, and have used our internal and external resources to cope effectively. Students and their families have lived varied experiences during the pandemic and it will be important to acknowledge and validate their thoughts and feelings upon their return.

## Welcome back our students: CREATE the NEW NORMAL

### Maintain a structured and predictable, yet flexible approach to students who may have difficulty adapting and complying with new routines and structures

- Allow for ongoing discussion and practice about the WHY and HOW of new procedures, routines and expectations
- Involve students to help them internalize and create a sense of control (i.e. distancing, hygiene, sharing of items)
- Ask students what would be helpful to make their school days feel connected and engaging as a way to explore and name what is possible (“Since we cannot hug one another, what would be some ways we could show each other that we care?”)



### Provide space for students to share their experiences and questions

- It’s normal for students to feel a variety of emotions (i.e. fear, anger, confusion and sadness) as well physical reactions (i.e. being distracted, stomach/headaches and fatigue). Share your observations with your administrator.
- When students express concerning thoughts or feelings use educational creative activities such as writing, drawing, guided journaling, and movement to ease distress and provide containment
- It is ok to not have all the answers and to say “I don’t know”. Be open to questions and respond in a calm, empathetic and developmentally appropriate way.  
Child: “Why can’t we do XXX anymore?”  
Educator: “I know it’s hard that things have changed. We have to do things differently to keep ourselves safe and healthy while at school.”

## CARING, COMMUNICATION, AND CONNECTION

### 1 Model an attitude that encourages a sense of safety and security

- Project a confident, empathetic and optimistic outlook
- Promote the message that we must focus on what can be controlled

### 2 Relationships through empathy and compassion

- There may be students that you will be interacting with whom you may not be familiar. Take time to get to know them, and what they most enjoy about learning
- Model empathy and compassion in conversations and interactions

### 3 Listen attentively and validate

- You don’t have to have all of the answers; most children just need to know that you are actively listening by being present
- Validation is a powerful tool. (“It’s true, school doesn’t feel the same way as when we left.”)

### 4 Focus on the silver lining: Leave them feeling empowered

- Regardless of their experience, there was likely something positive that students remember. Let’s do our best to find that moment whether big or small (“What is one thing you are proud that you did while away from school?”)