



Planning for the next normal at school

Keeping students, staff, teachers, and families safe and healthy

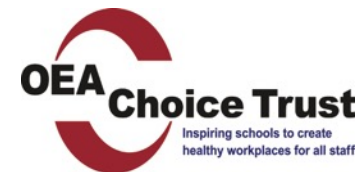
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Chapter 1

The impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of students and educators

As schools strategize their reopening, students, staff, teachers, and families will need ways to process and respond to the impact of this pandemic.

Key takeaways:

- Understand the impact of COVID-19 on students and educators
- Consider existing disparities and traumas
- Develop a foundation of resilience
- Utilize the 5 starter plays for enhancing mental health and well-being



Introduction and purpose

From the challenges of distance learning to homelessness and food insecurities, the COVID-19 pandemic has had widespread repercussions on the health and livelihood of students, staff, teachers, and families. And as stay-at-home restrictions begin to lift, many education leaders are tasked with managing the evolving health concerns and regulations around reopening schools and school districts.

Mental health and well-being should be a top priority for school leaders to address as they rethink their educational environment. With the right preparation, a healthy, sustainable return to school is possible. And we're here to help.

The Planning for the Next Normal at School playbook offers:

- Guidance on the mental health challenges your students might be facing
- Recommendations on how to address the mental health and well-being of school staff and students
- The 5 starter plays for enhancing mental health and well-being during reopening — a framework to help mitigate the spread of the coronavirus and support the mental health of your students and staff

We'll continue to update this content as guidance and circumstances change. For more information, please [contact us](#).

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COVID-19's lingering impact on education

COVID-19 is having an unprecedented effect on students, staff, teachers, and families. While youths are not the [primary victims](#) of this virus, they may be significantly affected by its many mental health consequences. Children and youths are managing more stress at home, less social connection, and new ways of learning in a virtual environment. Additionally, the pandemic has both exacerbated existing health and education inequities and created [new ones](#), including reduced or inconsistent access to:

- Learning
- Healthy meals
- Safe environments and social opportunities
- Services for students in need of additional interventions and support

These growing inequities will have a lifelong impact on many students. As schools develop strategies to reopen, our students, families, and educators will need ways to process and respond to the impact of this pandemic.



Did you know?

Research shows that chronic exposure to stress impacts a person's ability to learn, develop relationships, and manage adversity.



Amplifying stressors on students and educators

Many students, staff, teachers, and family members will enter schools with mental and physical health issues resulting from stay-at-home orders. They'll also carry concerns about how to properly protect themselves against contracting COVID-19 at school.



Education leaders will be managing the ripple effects of COVID-19 on:

- School funding
- Workforce retention
- Academic progress



Students may be dealing with evolving family concerns like:

- Job loss and lack of social connection
- Food and housing insecurity
- Uncertainty about the future
- Navigating distance learning

These challenges will place more pressure on an already stressed school system and potentially lead to negative outcomes for students.

Magnifying adverse childhood experiences

Over 60% of children in the United States face at least one [adverse childhood experience](#) (ACE) by age 18. Research shows that these experiences can disrupt student learning and behavior in the classroom, as well as put students at increased risk for mental and physical health conditions throughout their lifetimes.

While ACEs occur in the lives of youths from all backgrounds, many factors can intensify them, like:

- Racism
- [Structural drivers of inequity](#)
- Social health disparities



Did you know?

Repeatedly experiencing adversity can result in negative educational, physical, and mental health outcomes throughout a person's life and across generations.



Disconnecting from prior support systems

Disrupted support systems, feelings of isolation, and lack of safety all contribute to poor social-emotional health. Although every public health disaster carries the risk of increasing childhood trauma, COVID-19 will magnify traumatic experiences on a huge scale. The world now operates in a state of chronic uncertainty.

- Families are managing health risks and struggling to access necessities such as food, housing, and employment.
- Extended stay-at-home orders find many families both physically distant from everyday support and cohabitating in often challenging physical and emotional environments.
- Students, staff, teachers, and families living in unstable environments are unable to seek previously relied-upon refuge at their schools.



Amplifying disparities within underrepresented communities

As with all adversities, COVID-19's effects are worsened by existing structural inequities, causing a disproportionate, compounding effect for many communities. These effects can negatively impact a person's social-emotional health and increase a sense of loss and anxiety among vulnerable populations and communities of color.



Black, Latino, and Native American communities are experiencing higher infection, mortality rates compared to white Americans. They may also be coping with other social stressors, like racial violence and civil unrest.



Asian American communities are facing stigma, xenophobia, and hate crimes.



Students with disabilities are dealing with a disruption in needed support and services, creating further academic disparities for these individuals.

Building a resilient foundation for reopening

Despite all the challenges presented by the pandemic, we know that schools are a bedrock of support for students, staff, teachers, and communities. Research has long demonstrated a strong link between a [student's social-emotional health and academic achievement](#).

- Youths who demonstrate positive social-emotional behaviors such as self-management, responsible decision-making, and civic engagement tend to [have greater success after graduation](#).
- [Students who feel connected](#) to their school are more likely to find academic success and less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as drug use or violence.
- Schools and districts that focus on building a positive culture and climate see [improved attendance, student achievement, and teacher retention](#).



Prioritizing strategies and practices that support mental health and well-being

There are many strategies that can help support student resilience and cultivate a safe, supportive, and connected learning environment. Your faculty will play a key part in building this positive climate and culture.

The presence of a single caring adult in a young person's life can have a [profound influence](#) on their physical, social, and mental health. As the front-line representatives of your school, teachers and staff will soon be presented with a unique opportunity to help their students take on new challenges. However, it's also important to recognize that your faculty members might need additional support and training to properly address the changing needs of their students.



The 5 starter plays for enhancing mental health and well-being during reopening

Use these 5 starter plays to lay the groundwork for a mentally healthy culture and help your school community rebuild with even greater strength, compassion, and resilience. The plays are useful in both physical and virtual learning environments.



1. Community-building activities

Reestablish connections with regular and consistent community-building activities throughout the day.



2. Trauma-informed training

Prioritize continuous professional learning on implementing trauma-informed practices.



3. Open discussions on environmental stressors

Encourage students, staff, teachers, and families to talk about stressors that might cause emotional distress and exacerbate existing trauma reactions.



4. Social-emotional skill building

Provide instruction in social-emotional skill building, with an emphasis on strategies to identify and manage stress.



5. Mental health support services

Develop a clear and consistent process for identifying and supporting individuals in need of additional mental health intervention and support.

See the resources section at the end of this document for additional strategies to strengthen and expand your approach.



1. Community-building activities

Reestablish connections with regular and consistent community-building activities throughout the day.

- Conduct daily morning meetings.
- [Find time for staff and student check-ins.](#)
- Identify opportunities for peer learning (for example, lessons designed to provide ways for students to learn and work together).
- [See more.](#)

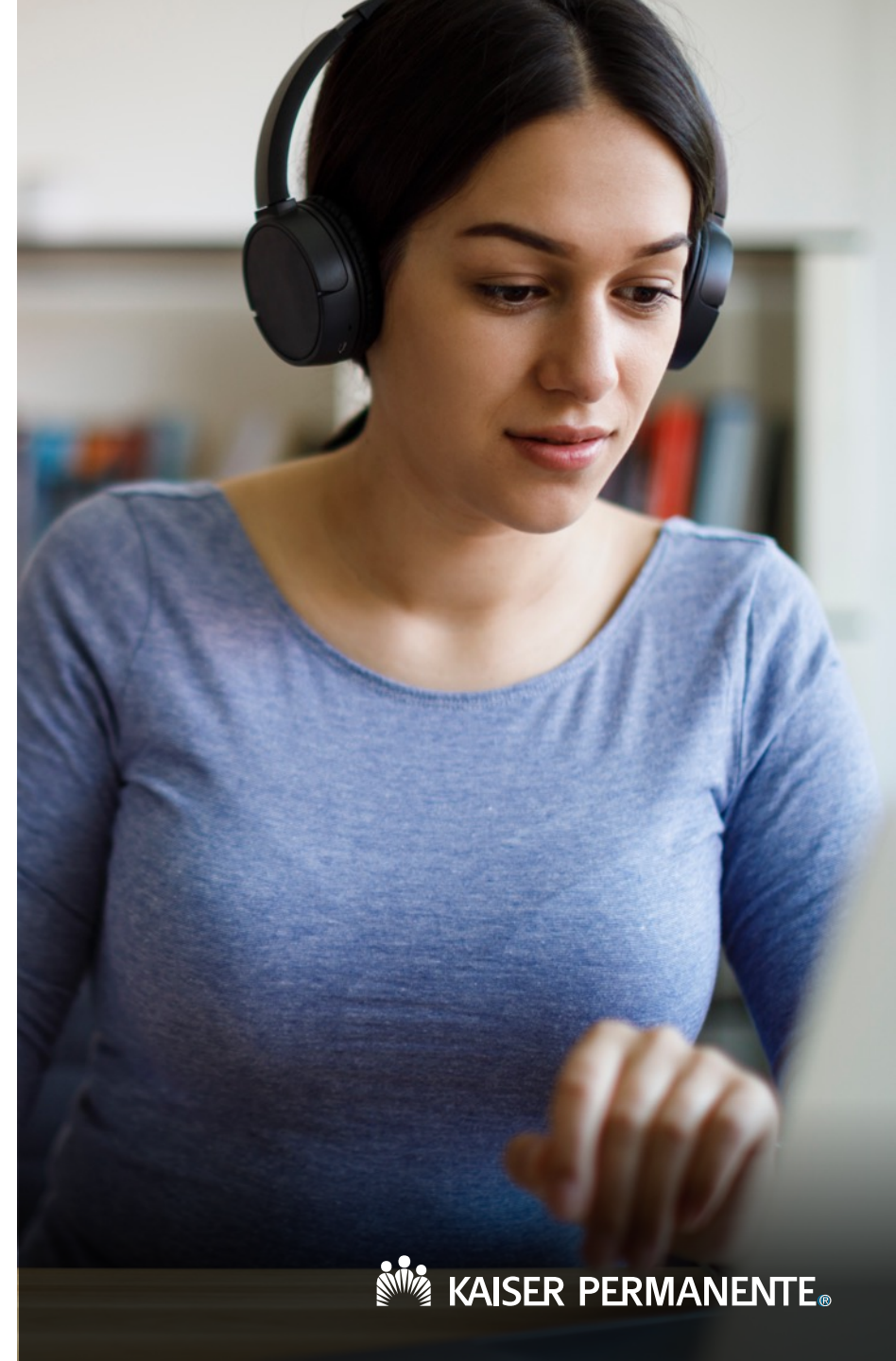




2. Trauma-informed training

Prioritize continuous professional learning on implementing trauma-informed practices.

- [Provide all-staff professional learning opportunities.](#)
- Review and revise school [policies and procedures](#) to be more trauma-informed and adapted to a virtual context.
- Create opportunities for staff and teachers to observe each other and provide feedback.
- [See more.](#)





3. Open discussions on environmental stressors

Encourage students, staff, and teachers to talk about environmental stressors (for example, masks, illness, physical distancing, and hybrid learning) that might cause emotional distress and exacerbate existing trauma reactions.

- Build in time to practice new routines – teaching hand-washing, no-touch practices, virtual high fives, etc.
- Build in time during the day to allow students to express and process emotions.
- [See more.](#)

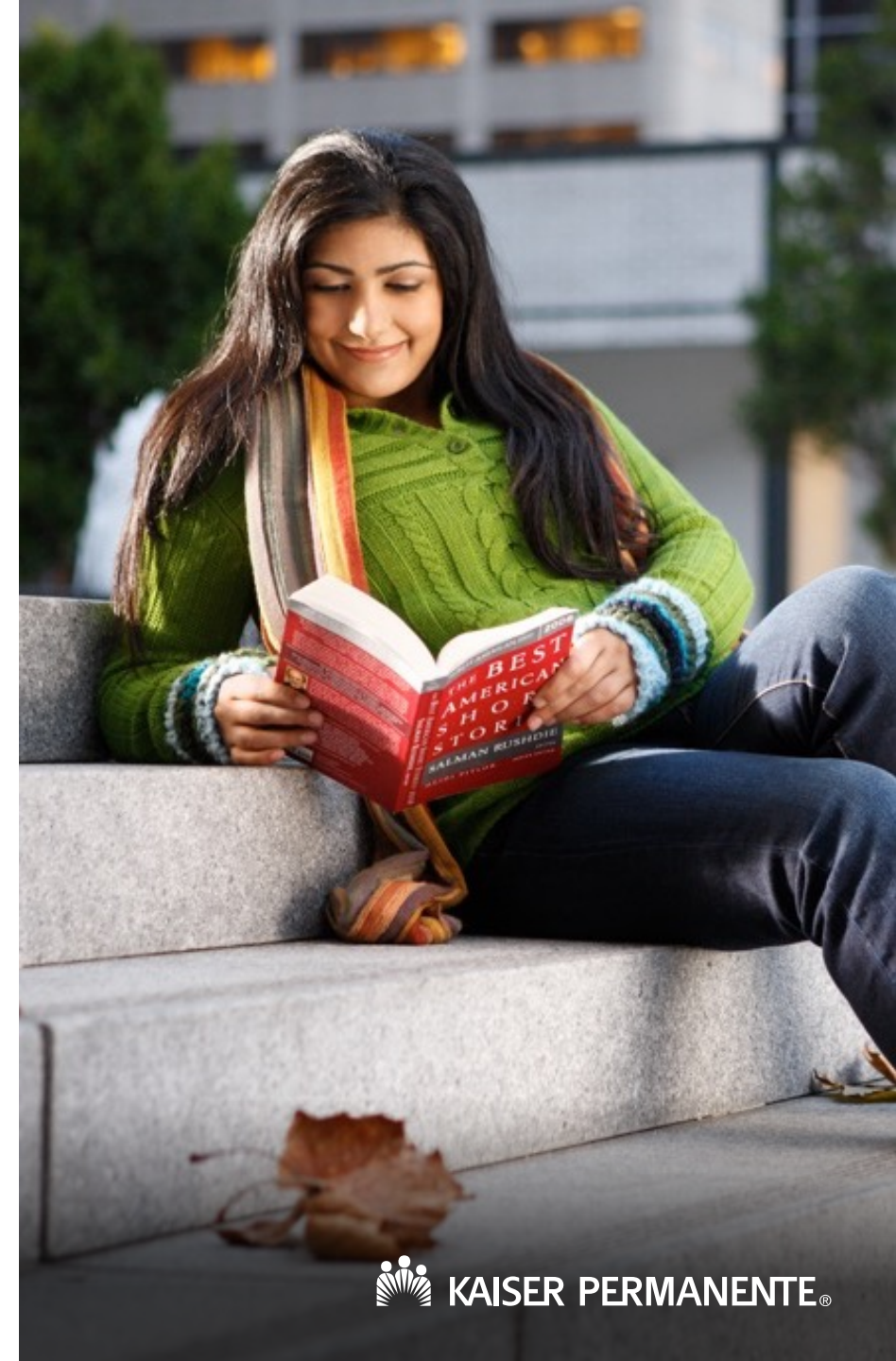




4. Social-emotional skill building

Provide instruction in social-emotional skill building, with an emphasis on strategies to identify and manage stress.

- Build in [time during the day](#) for students to share their experiences.
- Introduce coping strategies that students can apply to those experiences.
- Integrate [practices that promote social-emotional skills](#) (for example, collectively practicing a “mindful minute” as a transition between activities).
- Provide a [calming space or set of strategies](#) for students to de-stress, and encourage daily norms that allow them to use these resources when needed.
- [See more.](#)





5. Mental health support services

Develop a clear and consistent process for identifying and supporting individuals in need of additional mental health intervention and support.

- Create a process to identify students who are struggling with internalizing or externalizing supports.
- Ensure that staff and teachers understand how to refer students for additional resources and support.
- Create easy pathways for students to access mental health resources (for example, regular classroom visits by mental health staff, encouraged check-ins, or “passes” for accessing counseling).
- Create a process for families and school staff to collaborate on student support plans and share available resources with families.
- [See more.](#)



Checklist: 5 starter plays for enhancing mental health and well-being during reopening

Print this page to help track your progress toward completing the 5 starter steps.



1. Community-building activities

- ☐ Conduct daily morning meetings.
- ☐ Find time for staff and student check-ins.
- ☐ Identify opportunities for peer learning (for example, lessons designed to provide ways for students to learn and work together).



2. Trauma-informed training

- ☐ Provide staff and teachers with professional learning opportunities.
- ☐ Review and revise school policies and procedures to be more trauma-informed and adapted to a virtual context.
- ☐ Create opportunities for staff to observe each other and provide feedback.



3. Open discussions on environmental stressors

- ☐ Build in time to practice new routines (for example, teaching hand washing, no-touch practices, and virtual high fives).
- ☐ Build in time during the day to allow students to express and process emotions.



4. Social-emotional skill building

- ☐ Build in time during the day for students to share their experiences.
- ☐ Introduce coping strategies that students can apply to those experiences.
- ☐ Integrate practices that promote social-emotional skills (for example, “mindful minutes” in between activities).
- ☐ Provide a calming space or set of strategies for students to de-stress.



5. Mental health support services

- ☐ Create a process to identify students who are struggling with mental health.
- ☐ Ensure all staff understand how to refer students for additional resources and support.
- ☐ Create easy pathways for accessing mental health resources (for example, regular classroom visits by mental health staff or “passes” to access counseling).
- ☐ Create a process for families and school staff to collaborate on and share student support plans and resources

Instituting a holistic plan for reopening schools

While COVID-19 is affecting everyone, the pandemic is affecting communities in different ways across the country. This impact can ebb and flow throughout the school year and manifest differently depending on the person and setting (for example, classroom versus virtual instruction). Therefore, districts and schools must implement processes that provide timely mental health support to students, staff, and families.

When applied in consideration with local needs, the 5 starter plays will help promote feelings of safety and connectedness for all. Districts are not alone in this endeavor and are encouraged to collaborate with state education agencies and community partners to fully support the work. By working together to implement the 5 starter plays, schools and districts will be well-positioned to rebuild a safe and supportive school experience for students, staff, and families.

Additional district and school administrator resources

The resources below can help schools and districts strengthen and expand their approach to supporting mental health and well-being.

- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)
 - [SEL in Homes and Communities](#)
 - [Schools, Families, and Social and Emotional Learning: Ideas and Tools for Working With Parents and Families](#)
- National Conference of State Legislators
 - [Boosting Social and Emotional Development in and out of School](#)
- ChangeLab Solutions
 - [Blueprint for Changemakers – Achieving Health Equity Through Law & Policy](#)
- National Center for School Mental Health
 - [Advancing Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems: Guidance From the Field](#)
 - [School mental health COVID-19 resources](#)
- National Association of School Psychologists
 - [COVID-19: Family & Educator Resources](#)

This playbook is provided for informational purposes and should not be considered comprehensive or definitive instructions for safely reopening your school or school district. As the environment continues to quickly evolve, we encourage you to stay up to date with the guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), your local department of health, and any relevant national and local regulations.

Kaiser Permanente does not necessarily endorse the services mentioned. Any organizations listed are for easy identification only.