Essentials for Returning to School: Teachers

Build Connection

Create Safe Spaces

Reframe Behaviour

Connect Academics to Interests

Activate Academic Instruction
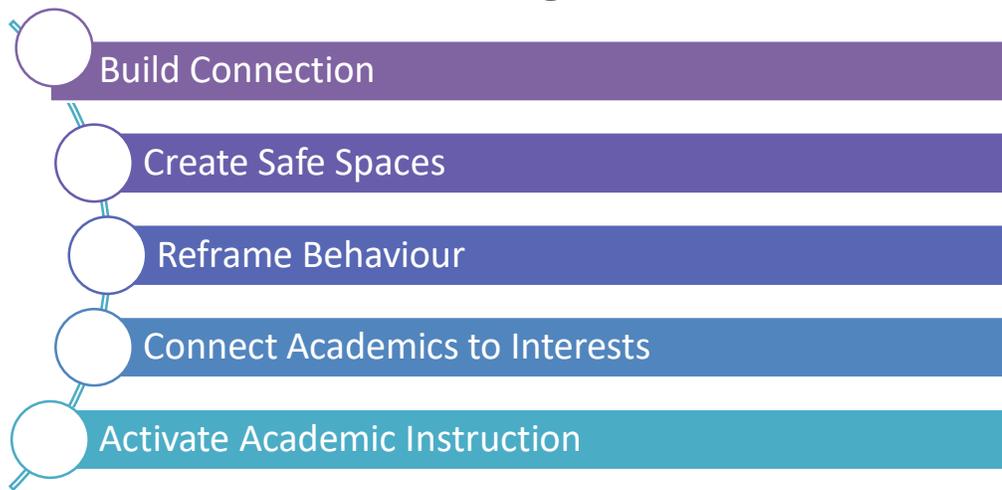
Stressed brains are not ready for learning!

Returning to school after a closure is a major adjustment for children and youth, who may struggle with the academic and social demands of the change. They may also be arriving under stressful family conditions complicated by grief and uncertainty worsened by COVID-19.

Because academic progress depends first on mental and physical well-being, recovery learning will require calm and predictable environments. Here are some essentials to help support a successful return to school experience.

Build Connection

- **Prioritize classroom community building activities and games** (e.g., morning meeting, sharing circles, land-based activities)

- **Get to know students individually** (e.g., interests)

- **Schedule small group unstructured exploratory time** (e.g., puzzles, drawing)

- **Establish classroom traditions with student choices** (e.g., Tuesday Tunesday where students can select favourite songs for movement breaks)

Create Safe Spaces

- **Prioritize predictability and follow through** (e.g., keep routines and avoid sudden changes where possible)

- **Use small group seating and don't leave anyone out** (e.g., desk groups for all students)

- **Schedule time for quiet periods** (e.g., silent reading, offer easy access to headphones)

- **Validate feelings and stress** (e.g., "This is hard isn't it? You might even feel mixed up.")

- **Use calm body language and tone** (e.g., model appropriate responses under stress)

- **Offer genuine praise and feedback individually** (e.g., avoid posting marks publicly)

Reframe Behaviour

- **Expect an increase in stress behaviours** (e.g., task refusal, tantrums)

- **Don't take stress behaviours personally**

- **Allow students to save face** (e.g., avoid publicly humiliating or calling out students)

- **Allow for flexibility without giving up boundaries** (e.g., allow time for students to calm down rather than punish)

- **Use restorative, calming, and grounding strategies proactively as well as reactively** (e.g., scheduled after recess, or following a meltdown)

- **Offer a chance to reset at school rather than sending students home if possible**

- **Where possible, offer land-based experiences for resolving conflict**

Connect Academics to Interests

- **Introduce academics once student trust and relationship has been established**

- **Begin with low risk activities** (e.g., Yahtzee, Sudoku, word search, Language and Literacy Bins)

- **Use video game and online interests in lessons** (e.g., Minecraft Education)

- **Read high interest materials to students and discuss** (e.g., video game strategies)

- **Emphasize project-based learning for informal assessment** (e.g., literacy, numeracy)

- **Where possible, offer land-based experiences for teaching**

Activate Academic Instruction

- **Meet as a staff to encourage self-compassion and belonging** (e.g., staff collaboration and program planning)

- **Recognize the holistic needs of students as primary** (e.g., well-being and safety)

- **Identify individual student participation in previous remote learning** (e.g., plan for students with low completion differently than high remote learning completion)

- **Estimate literacy and numeracy benchmarks based on previous in-class work**

- **Plan for varying student school readiness and possible future closure** (e.g., get familiar with MFNERC's Remote Learning Hub and Essential Learning Packets)

- **Communicate with parents proactively** (e.g., positive weekly update letter sent home)

- **Use informal approaches to teaching and assessment** (e.g., project based learning and Observation-Conversation-Product approaches)

- **Ask for support from resource and counselling staff as well as clinicians**

Find more ideas at: https://u.org/2Nq7TkD