



## Supporting Student Mental Health During A Pandemic (COVID-19)

During a pandemic, like all of us, students may experience a range of emotions. You may observe that students appear anxious, preoccupied, or tired, and/or you may notice a range of physical complaints.

Reactions will vary according to:

- students' development stage
- level of awareness about the pandemic
- exposure to accurate information about the pandemic
- physical or emotional proximity to the outbreak
- health status of student and/or loved ones
- mental health status of student and/or loved ones
- prior experience with traumatic circumstances

### Common student reactions

Anxiety

Worry about self or loved ones

Difficulty focusing on school

Preoccupation with illness

Need for reassurance

Fatigue

Stomach aches, headaches, etc.

During a pandemic, anxious reactions are common. As caring adults in a student's life, we can help young people by being a steady calming influence, providing developmentally-appropriate and factual information about the local situation, and helping students to feel some level of control. For example, students can help to prevent the spread of the illness through frequent and thorough hand-washing, good coughing and sneezing etiquette, and practicing self-care (e.g., healthy eating and sleep).

And, in times of crisis, there are opportunities. Model for students the importance of compassion, caring, and collective responsibility for the wellness of those around us. As educators, we can also hold up the power of the human spirit and highlight the courage of those impacted by the illness, and the many helpers who are selflessly and competently tending to them.

### As a caring helper in students' lives, you can:

1. maintain a calm classroom environment
2. support students as they work through feelings of pandemic worry, in the course of daily school life
3. anticipate and notice that a student might be struggling and may require additional support
4. offer classroom accommodations to students experiencing social emotional concerns
5. assist students who are struggling, and their families, to access more intensive support

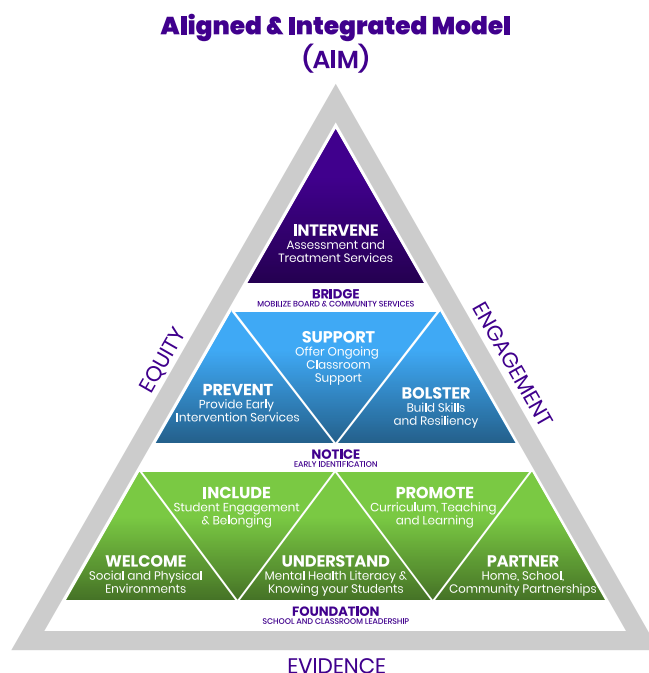


**Note** – All of us are affected to some degree by the pandemic, and depending on our personal circumstances there may be more or less cause for concern. In any case, remember to pause, and take the time you need and deserve to rest and relax, to be with family and friends, and to do the things that help you to stay well.

## 1. SUPPORT FOR ALL –

### Maintain a calm classroom environment

- Set a calm pace for learning, relaxing deadlines as needed.
- Maintain normal, predictable routines as much as possible.
- Remind students about good hygiene and looking out for one another.
- Use learning activities that allow you to float and check-in with students.
- Create quiet spaces for student reflection and dialogue within the classroom.
- Encourage students to take breaks from news and social media.



## 2. SUPPORT FOR ALL –

### Support students as they work through feelings of pandemic worry

- Keep explanations of the pandemic and related updates age-appropriate and factual.
- Listen well, and notice how your students are viewing the situation.
- Calm worries and reinforce hygiene procedures as something students can do to help.
- Validate feelings of anxiety and let students know that you have heard their concerns.
- Encourage students to draw on their faith, culture, natural supports, and coping skills.
- Maintain close communication with parents/guardians, reassuring them about school practices.
- Model compassion, positive coping and self-care skills.
- Help students to notice opportunities, quiet heroes and signs of hope.



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### **3. SUPPORT FOR SOME – Anticipate and notice when a student might be struggling**

- Consider whether there are students in the class who may be feeling more vulnerable
  - For example, students with: a personal connection to someone with the illness, a personal connection to those in or travelling through a widely affected region, a pre-existing medical condition (self or a family member), a pre-existing mental health problem, etc.
- Monitor these students more closely, checking in with them each day.
- Be mindful that students without an obvious link or vulnerability may also experience difficulty.
- Watch for changes in behavior or emotions that might signal that a student is struggling.
- If you have concerns, connect with parents/guardians to discuss your observations.
- Discuss your concerns with the student in a compassionate and age-appropriate manner.

### **4. SUPPORT FOR SOME – Offer classroom accommodations**

- Welcome students who may be struggling, in a calm, caring, and intentional way each day.
- Let these students know about available school supports and how to access them.
- Create opportunities for quiet check-ins and dialogue.
- Maintain academic expectations, but soften these if a student seems overwhelmed.
- Help students to complete tasks by chunking assignments, pairing them with a partner, etc.
- Offer more time for test and assignment completion, as needed.
- Allow students to cue you if they need to connect, or take a break from a task.

### **5. SUPPORT FOR FEW – Assist students and their families to access support**

- Know about available supports and pathways at the school, board, and community level.
- Continue to provide classroom accommodations to students struggling with pandemic worry.
- Remind students to use anxiety management strategies like deep breathing, relaxation techniques, stretching/exercise, social media breaks, challenging negative thoughts, etc.
- Use classroom strategies recommended by the parent/guardian and support providers.

