

FACING FEARS

SUPPORTING STUDENTS



BACK TO SCHOOL OUTREACH TOOLKIT



-  /mentalhealthamerica
 -  @mentalhealtham
 -  @mentalhealthamerica
 -  /mentalhealtham
 -  /mentalhealthamerica
- www.mhanational.org

This campaign is supported by contributions from Janssen: Pharmaceutical Companies of Johnson & Johnson, Otsuka America Pharmaceutical, Inc., and Sutter Health.

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for downloading Mental Health America's 2021 Back-to-School Toolkit.

As our country continues to contend with the effects of the pandemic, and as these effects continue to disproportionately affect marginalized communities and communities of color, we remain especially committed to supporting the mental health needs of all of our school-age children.

During this time of collective mental health distress and trauma for many, our youth are particularly vulnerable. Many sensitive developmental stages and milestones have been disrupted, family environments have become less stable, economically and otherwise, and there has been an abrupt disruption in the basic need for social and peer interaction. We know that these obstacles are increasing the incidence of anxiety, depression, and substance use among our youth. We also know that early identification and intervention reduces the chance that these early experiences persist or worsen. Addressing the early signs of mental health conditions can dramatically increase the likelihood of positive outcomes and recovery.

Often the best place to start this early identification and intervention is at school. Only half of youth with a mental health condition receive the support they need, but of those who do receive services, we know from previous research that about 60-70% get those services at school. This is particularly the case for youth with lesser access to outside resources, like those in low-income and marginalized communities.

At Mental Health America, we know that teachers, schools, and mental health professionals throughout the country are concerned about this crisis and eager to answer the call to the best of their ability. In this toolkit, you will find information and resources designed to assist in those efforts. We trust these resources will be of use to those of you on the frontlines -- educators, parents, social workers, school administrators, and others. We encourage you to share these resources and to stay in touch with Mental Health America about your experiences -- let us know how this information assists you in addressing the mental health of students.

And in addition to caring for students, we remind all adults reading this to be attentive to their own mental health needs as well. This current crisis is affecting us all; self-care and care for one another are crucial.

Thank you for your commitment to the mental health of all youth.

Sincerely,



Schroeder Stribling

Schroeder Stribling, President & CEO
Mental Health America

This year's toolkit includes:

Key Messages

Drop-In Article

Social Media Post Samples and Images

Resource List

Handouts for Adults

Handouts for Kids and Teens

Worksheets for Kids and Teens

Posters

QUESTIONS?

If you have further questions about Back to School, please contact Danielle Fritze, Vice President of Public Education and Design at dfritze@mhanational.org.

KEY MESSAGES

- The COVID-19 pandemic continues to exact a huge toll on both the physical health and the mental health of the nation's young people.
- Beginning a new school year usually comes with some anxiety, but this year students may need a lot more support, reassurance, and comforting before they're ready to learn.
- A lot of kids and teens haven't been able to feel safe or stable over the last year because of the trauma caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ways it has disrupted "normal" life.
- As we enter a new, very uncertain academic school year, it's important for parents, caregivers, and school personnel to know the signs that a young person is struggling with their mental health.
- Feeling safe is important. After meeting basic needs for survival like food, water, and sleep, feeling safe and secure is necessary before anyone can focus on relationships, learning, or other opportunities for personal success.
- Being physically back in school for the 2021-2022 school year may help some students feel more secure, but for others the anxiety and fear is palpable and overwhelming. But no one has to suffer in silence.
- Parents, caregivers, and school personnel should check in on their own mental well-being during these stressful times.
- One of the quickest and easiest ways to determine whether you are experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition is to take an anonymous screen at www.mhascreening.org.
- MHA has 10 online screening tools, including one that is youth-focused and one for parents. Once you get the results, MHA will provide you with more information and help you to figure out next steps.

Feel free to supplement these key messages with language from the fact sheets and other materials included in this toolkit.

FACTS AND STATS

- The percentage of youth screeners (ages 11-17) at mhascreening.org who identify as trauma survivors has consistently risen since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Rates of depression among youth screeners at mhascreening.org remain higher than pre-pandemic levels.
- The number of youth screeners who report frequent suicidal ideation is higher than ever, with over half (54%) indicating they had frequent thoughts that they would be better off dead or of hurting themselves as recently as June 2021.
- When asked about the main contributors to their mental health problems in 2021, 36% of youth screeners cited past trauma as a factor.

DROP IN ARTICLE

Use this article in your next e-blast or share with your local schools to include in their next newsletter.

Since we've been in the midst of a pandemic for a year and a half, it is difficult to remember how important feeling safe is to our mental health. But safety is vital, and if needs like safety aren't met, a mental health condition may develop.

A lot of kids and teens haven't been able to feel that sense of safety for a long time. Not only are they dealing with fears that a family member (or they themselves) might be exposed to COVID-19 or the Delta Variant, but some have had to face an abusive home environment, a family financial hardship, or a family loss recently. We know from research that an estimated 1.5 million children worldwide lost a mother, father, or other caregiving relative in the first 14 months of the pandemic.

When a kid or teen experiences this kind of hardship, it can feel as if the world is crashing down on them. That's why it's crucial right now, as students return to school, for parents, teachers, and administrators to do everything they can to foster a safe and secure environment. School can be a refuge from some of these difficult situations at home, and a place that students feel out of harm's way.

Still, even in the safest of environments, we are in a youth mental health crisis, and many students will exhibit symptoms of depression and anxiety as they return to the classroom. It is important to let kids and teens know that support is available. Each school has different types of education and counseling services, so it is best to become familiar with the resources that your school provides.

To take an initial mental health screening, students can access www.MHAScreening.org for a free, confidential, and anonymous mental health test.

There are also serious signs that someone is in crisis and needs more immediate help. These include thoughts or plans of hurting oneself or another person. If you think a child or teen is in immediate danger of taking suicidal action, call the national suicide hotline at 1-800-273-TALK. Their trained crisis counselors can help you find local resources or suggest next steps.

SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

GENERAL

- Mental Health America's 2021 #Back2School toolkit, #FacingFearsSupportingStudents, helps students, parents, and schools recognize how feeling unsafe can impact mental health and what can be done to cope with these feelings. Learn more at mhanational.org/back2school.
- Beginning a new school year usually comes with some anxiety, but this year students may need a lot more support, reassurance, and comfort before they're ready to learn. Check out Mental Health America's free 2021 #Back2School toolkit for tools to cope at mhanational.org/back2school.
- Being physically back in school may help some students feel more secure, but for others, the anxiety and fear are overwhelming. Mental Health America's 2021 #Back2School toolkit provides resources and tools for parents, teachers, and students to cope at mhanational.org/back2school.
- As we enter a new, very uncertain academic school year, it's important for parents, caregivers, and school personnel to know the signs that a young person is struggling. Mental Health America's new #Back2School toolkit provides tools to cope at mhanational.org/back2school.
- COVID-19 continues to impact both the physical health and the mental health of the nation's young people. Mental Health America's #Back2School toolkit includes resources and tools to cope with the new school year at mhanational.org/back2school.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has left many feeling unstable, unsafe, and burned out. For those returning to in-person learning, "normal" might come with its own set of fears. Mental Health America's 2021 #Back2School toolkit provides free tools to cope at mhanational.org/back2school.
- Now more than ever, it is critical to ensure that students feel safe and supported as many return to in-person learning. Mental Health America's 2021 #Back2School toolkit provides tools for students, caregivers, and teachers to address mental health at mhanational.org/back2school.
- Caregivers and teachers are burned out due to the COVID-19 pandemic. You can't give from an empty cup. It's important to check in on your own mental health during stressful times. Mental Health America's 2021 #Back2School toolkit has tools to cope at mhanational.org/back2school.
- Rates of depression among youth screeners at mhascreening.org remain higher than pre-pandemic levels. It's more important than ever to integrate mental health as part of overall wellness in schools. Learn more at mhanational.org/back2school.

SCREENING

- If you're recognizing something "isn't quite right," one of the quickest and easiest ways to determine whether you are experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition is to take an anonymous screen at mhascreening.org. #B2S2021 #Back2School
- It's normal to experience some anxiety when returning to school - especially given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. But if fear or anxiety is impacting your day-to-day life, check in on your mental health by getting screened at mhascreening.org. #B2S2021 #Back2School
- Mental Health America has 10 online screening tools at mhascreening.org, including one that is youth-focused and one for parents. Once you get the results, MHA will provide you with more information and help you to figure out next steps. #B2S2021 #Back2School
- Parents, caregivers, and school personnel should check in on their own mental well-being during stressful times. Start by getting screened at mhascreening.org. A screening is not a diagnosis, but it can guide you to resources to cope. #B2S2021 #Back2School

HASHTAGS

Best practices:

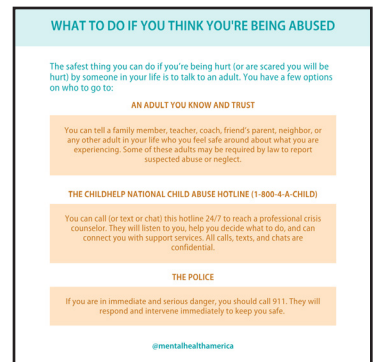
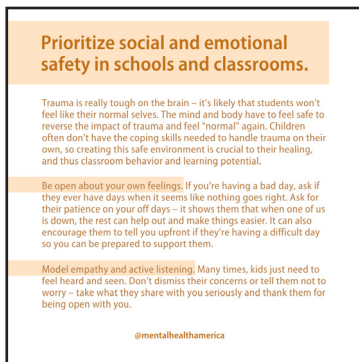
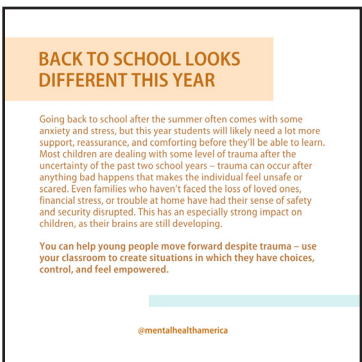
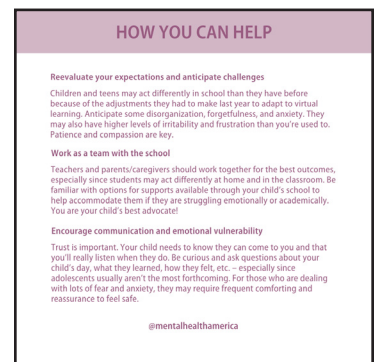
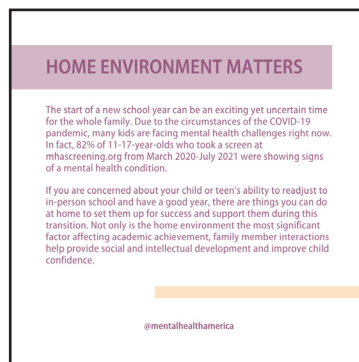
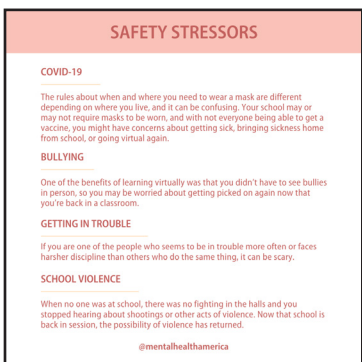
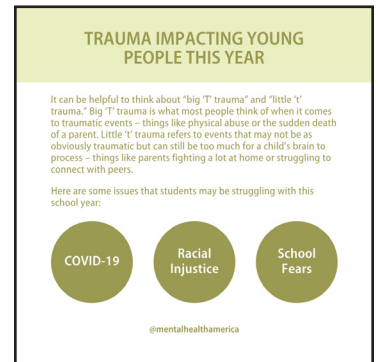
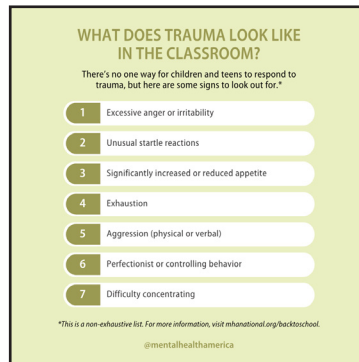
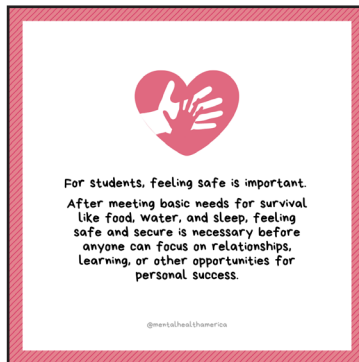
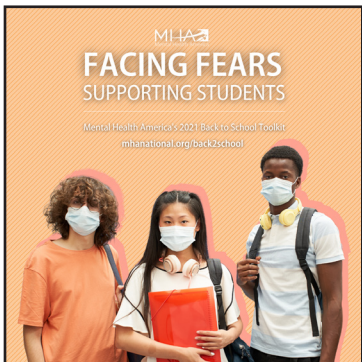
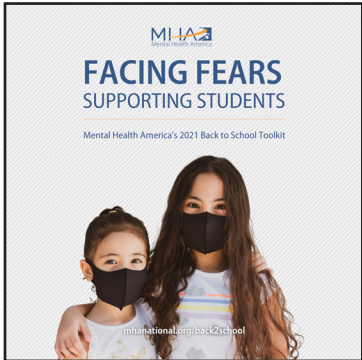
- For Facebook and Twitter, use no more than one or two strategic hashtags per post.
- For Instagram use at least 10 hashtags per post.

Here are our suggested hashtags for this year's Back to School campaign:

- #Back2School
- #B2S2021
- #FacingFearsSupportingStudents

IMAGES

Download and save the images provided for use on your social media platforms or websites. The images below *and more* can be downloaded by visiting mhanational.org/back-school-2021-toolkit-download, and saving from the linked Google Drive.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

24/7 TOOLS

MHA Screening: Online screening is one of the quickest and easiest ways to determine if you're experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition. Our screens are free, confidential, and scientifically-validated.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: The Lifeline provides 24/7, free, and confidential support to people in distress – you don't need to be suicidal to reach out. Call 1-800-273-8255 to be connected with a crisis counselor. Crisis counselors who speak Spanish are available at 1-888-628-9454.

Crisis Text Line: If you prefer texting to talking on the phone, text MHA to 741-741 to be connected with a crisis counselor who will help you get through your big emotions.

Domestic Violence Hotline: The stressors of COVID have the potential to increase violence between partners and in homes. If you're experiencing domestic violence, looking for resources or information, or are question unhealthy aspects of your relationship, call 1-800-799-7233 or go to their site to virtually chat with an advocate.

Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline: If you or a child you know is being hurt or doesn't feel safe at home, you can call or text 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453) or [start an online chat](#) to reach a crisis counselor. They can help you figure out next steps to work through what is happening and stay safe.

The Trevor Project: The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning youth. Trained counselors are available 24/7 to youth in crisis, feeling suicidal, or in need of a safe and judgment-free person to talk to. Call 1-866-488-7386, text START to 678-678, or [start an online chat](#).

MHA RESOURCES

Addressing the Youth Mental Health Crisis: The Urgent Need for More Education, Services, and Supports

Indicators of youth mental health and well-being indicate a growing public health crisis that has only been worsened by COVID-19. Yet, public policy has been slow to respond. This report is designed to guide advocacy at the state level and begin to create a framework for federal policy. The report aims to document the alarming trends in youth mental health and the disparities in access to care; address several innovative state legislative solutions to promote school-based mental health education, supports, and services; and highlight the effect of these policies on advancing equity and the role of youth leadership in securing legislation. Visit [MHA's website](#) to access the report.

Back to School Toolkits

An archive of Back to School toolkits (like this one) from previous years can be found on [MHA's website](#). Our 2020 toolkit, *Coping During COVID*, and our 2019 toolkit addressing topics of stress and loneliness may be of particular interest. Some materials are also available in Spanish.

Screening in Schools

Providing mental health screenings in schools is one of the best ways to catch mental health problems when and where they are likeliest to arise. Fifty percent of individuals who struggle with a mental health condition will show symptoms during their adolescent years. Childhood brain development research indicates that puberty is especially an important time for monitoring the onset of mental illnesses including depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. This period is when individuals are most vulnerable to poor outcomes—but also where intervention has the best chance for building resiliency and change.

Mental health screenings can be implemented in schools through sharing resources with students on school posters or handouts at the nurse's office, by providing screenings and education in health or physical education class, or as part of a ubiquitous mental health screening and education protocol. MHA Screening is designed to support schools across various levels of investment. MHA Screening is a free program available to any school district to share. Learn how to get started at screening.mhanational.org/mental-health-screening-in-schools.

MHA PARTNERS AND ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

The **AAKOMA Project** builds the consciousness of youth of color and their caregivers on the recognition and importance of mental health, empowers youth and their families to seek help and manage mental health, and influences systems and services to receive and address the needs of youth of color and their families. Learn more at <https://aakomaproject.org>.

Brightline is reinventing behavioral health care for children and families, bringing together innovative technology, virtual behavioral health services, and an integrated care team focused on supporting children across developmental stages and their families. Brightline is headquartered in Palo Alto, CA and expanding quickly to support families across the country. Learn more at <https://www.hellobrightline.com>.

Minding Your Mind creates experiences that open minds and show people they are not alone when they are struggling. Their group of young adult speakers, who have successfully and productively coped with their mental health challenges, share their stories of hope, recovery, and resilience. They use the power of storytelling to provide evidence-based education about mental health challenges in schools, communities, and workplaces. Minding Your Mind encourages youth to seek help and ensures that those around them are effectively prepared to provide that help. Learn more at <https://mindingyourmind.org>.

The **National School Boards Association** (NSBA) is a federation of state associations and the U.S. territory of the Virgin Islands that represent locally elected school board officials serving approximately 51 million public school students. Working with and through state association members, NSBA advocates for equity and excellence in public education through school board leadership. Learn more at <https://www.nsba.org>.

The **NotOK App** allows you to pre-select up to five contacts, and when you press a button in the app, it will text those contacts with your location and a message that says, "Hey, I'm not OK. Please call me, text me, or come find me." It's a great way to let your support system know that you need some help, even if you can't put it into words. Learn more at <https://www.notokapp.com>.

This Is My Brave is a mental health storytelling organization which provides a platform for individuals to share their stories through creative expression. In 2019, they launched their high school program featuring stories and performances from high school teens, with a panel discussion led by experts. Learn more at <https://thisismybrave.org/high-school-edition>.

MHA AFFILIATE SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMS

CALIFORNIA – [Mental Wellness Center](#)

Mental Health Matters is a program that teaches basic facts about mental health to middle school and high school students, including symptoms and warning signs, specific mental health disorders, understanding that mental health disorders are treatable, and understanding that mental health disorders can happen to anyone – even children and adolescents. The class reduces stigma and ignorance and allows students to practice wellness skills. Mental health disorders discussed include thought disorders like schizophrenia, mood disorders, including clinical depression and bipolar disorders, anxiety disorders such as panic disorder, phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and eating disorders anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

The Wellness Connection is a high school leadership program of the Mental Wellness Center that educates, empowers, and engages students. Students raise awareness and reduce stigma around mental health by promoting self-care, connection, kindness, education, prevention, and outreach amongst their peers.

Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) is designed for adults who regularly interact with young people - either in a personal or professional capacity. It is designed to teach parents, family members, caregivers, teachers, school staff, peers, neighbors, health and human services workers, and other caring citizens how to help an adolescent (age 12-18) who may be experiencing a mental health or addictions challenge or who is in crisis. The course introduces common mental health challenges for youth, reviews typical adolescent development, and teaches a 5-step action plan for how to help young people in both crisis and non-crisis situations.

Teen Mental Health First Aid (tmHFA) is an evidence-based course that teaches teenagers the skills they need to recognize and help their friends with potential mental health and substance use problems and crises and how to get the help of an appropriate adult. The course is designed to be delivered in high schools or other community sites by a trained teen Mental Health First Aid Instructor in three interactive classroom sessions of 75 minutes each or five sessions of 45 minutes each on non-consecutive days.

FLORIDA – [MHA of Southeast Florida](#)

I'm Thumbody is a one-hour self-esteem program for Grade 2 students. Children learn to respect themselves, respect others, be responsible for their attitudes/actions, and where to go for safe help. These concepts are helpful for bullying prevention as well. The classroom presentation introduces the concept of good mental health and discusses the positive value of differences. The presenter teaches the second graders to change negative thoughts to positive ones to feel good about themselves. In addition, children learn that it's good to talk about their feelings and ways to manage their anger.

Listen to Children is a mentoring program for elementary students. The premise is that children benefit from an ongoing supportive relationship with a caring, non-judgmental friend who is not an 'authority figure.' The listener can help children relax and receive extra positive attention in their busy lives. Parents or caretakers must sign consent for the child to participate. Teachers, school counselors, or parents identify students projected to benefit. This is a prevention program and is not recommended for children with severe behavioral issues.

Thumbody, Too is a 45-minute kindergarten classroom presentation, which is a prequel to the Grade 2 version. A puppet resembling a thumb teaches the children they are very special, and everyone has different fingerprints. Themes include respect and responsibility. Not only do the kids love the puppet, they also enjoy the songs, the coloring activity, and doing their thumbprints. The students learn that it's good to talk about their feelings (happy, sad, scared & mad) and that they are special – even though some things might be difficult for them. They also learn some appropriate things to do when they are angry and what to do if they get separated from their adult in a big store.

INDIANA – [MHA of West Central Indiana](#)

Junior Mental Health America staff teach the **Too Good for Drugs (TGF)** program in Vigo County fourth grade classrooms. In this program, students focus on developing the personal and interpersonal skills necessary to resist peer pressure and make healthy choices. TGF emphasizes goal setting, decision-making, bonding with others, respecting oneself and others, managing emotions, and effective communication. The program also provides information on the negative consequences of drug use and the benefits of a nonviolent, drug-free lifestyle. Too Good for Drugs is a curriculum produced by the Mendez Foundation that has been approved by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) as a best practice program for safe and healthy schools.

The **No Fear Future Club** program provides young people opportunities to learn more about themselves through service to others. Club members gain an understanding of the important role each individual plays in the community as they organize various service-learning projects. This club provides students the opportunity to be young leaders within their schools, teaching their peers about the importance of giving back and standing up against important social issues, such as bullying, suicide prevention, and the importance of staying drug and alcohol free!

KANSAS – [MHA of South Central Kansas](#)

Pathways is the oldest substance abuse prevention support program in Sedgwick County serving children ages 11 – 18 that are at-risk of using drugs and/or alcohol. Pathways utilizes Life Skills Training, a research-based curriculum proven to reduce the risks of alcohol, tobacco, drug abuse, and violence by targeting the major social and psychological factors that promote the initiation of substance use and other risky behaviors. The 8-12 session program focuses on drug education and awareness, prevention, self-esteem, peer pressure and anger management. Pathways encourage students to seek healthy alternatives to using drugs. Groups are available for classroom settings, during lunch, or after school.

The **PATHS for Kids** program utilizes Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) which is an evidence-based curriculum for promoting emotional and social competencies and reducing aggression and acting out behaviors in elementary school students, ages 5-11. PATHS curriculum covers five areas of social and emotional development including self-control, emotional understanding, self-esteem, peer relations, and interpersonal problem-solving skills. PATHS for Kids groups meet for 10-12 weeks and are available for classroom settings, during lunch or after school.

The **Teen Outreach Girl Empower Program (GEP)** is a structured gender specific support group for girls ages 9-18. GEP targets girls at-risk for juvenile delinquency, school suspension/expulsion, alcohol/substance abuse, and/or school performance failure. GEP utilizes Girl Circle, a research-based curriculum which aims to counteract social and interpersonal forces that impede girls' growth and development by promoting an emotionally safe setting and structure within which girls can develop caring relationships and use authentic voices. GEP is comprised of groups which meet for 12-15 sessions, which focuses on topics including bullying, emotional self-care, shoplifting, healthy relationships, body image, and friendship. GEP groups are held at area schools and community centers at prearranged times. Groups are available for classroom settings, during lunch, or afterschool.

The **Boys 2 Men Empowerment Project (B2M)** is a gender specific program targeted to boys between ages of 12-18 at risk for juvenile delinquency, school suspension/expulsion, alcohol/substance abuse, and/or school performance failure. B2M utilizes Boys Council, a research-based curriculum that promotes boys' and young men's safe, strong, and healthy passage through pre-teen and adolescent years. B2M is comprised of groups which meet for 12-15 sessions, which focuses on topics including roles and expectations, bullying, put-downs, respect, power, and emotions. B2M groups are held at area schools and community centers at prearranged times. Groups are available for classroom settings, during lunch, or afterschool.

NEW YORK – [MHA in New York State](#)

Mental Health and Wellness 101 for Students combines lecture and experiential learning activities. Topics include understanding mental health along a continuum from wellness to illness; self-care and other wellness strategies; recovery and treatment seeking behavior; and anti-stigma messaging.

Mental Health and Wellness 101 for Educators includes a one-hour training on mental health and wellness, with additional 30-minute training components that can be tailored to your needs (i.e. suicide prevention, trauma, school-based wellness initiatives).

The **School Mental Health Resource & Training Center** is an online, self-directed module for school personnel. 1 hour. Eligible for one CTLE credit. Participants can leave and return to the course as necessary. Audio and video are part of the course. To obtain the certificate, participants must take a test.

Youth Mental Health First Aid - The course introduces common mental health challenges for youth, reviews typical adolescent development, and teaches a 5-step action plan for how to help young people in both crisis and non-crisis situations.

NEW YORK – [MHA of Western New York](#)

BEST: Basic Emotional Skills Training is an evidence-based classroom program that helps students in Pre-K through Second Grade develop the healthy social and emotional skills they need to succeed in school and life.

NEW YORK – [MHA of Columbia-Green Counties](#)

The **Advantage After School Program** provides educational support, recreational opportunities, skill-building, character education, and a nutritional snack. Three hours of interesting and engaging structured daily activities. Collaborations with service providers offer specialized services for participating youth. Promotes positive attitudes regarding school, delays childbearing, and prevents violence. The programs are available every school day. Students are expected to participate in each 3-hour session.

School-Based Prevention Programs (SBPP) - The Ichabod Crane and Taconic Hills School-Based Prevention Programs are collaborative efforts between the Columbia County DSS, the two school districts and MHACGC. Based at the school, MHACGC staff provides services to families with children who have serious emotional, social and/or behavioral issues that put them at risk of being placed in out-of-home settings or dropping out of or failing in school. The staff offers a variety of supports to enable the family to keep the child at home and the family intact. Family Support Specialists provide services for 10-12 families at a time. These families have children whose behavioral, social or emotional needs impact upon their ability to learn. Although the target population is Kindergarten through 8th grade, the program serves the whole family.

OHIO – [MHA of Licking County](#)

The **Signs of Suicide** program helps middle and high school students learn about mental health, mental wellness, and the signs and symptoms of suicidal thoughts and ideation in a classroom setting over 2-3 days. Students are trained to recognize these symptoms in themselves, their friends, and their family members. The students learn about available resources. They are given mementos with contact information (in case of a crisis), like pencils, pens, and bracelets.

OKLAHOMA – [MHA Oklahoma](#)

The **Student Mental Health Screening** program offers a free and voluntary adolescent screening tool that assesses physical and emotional well-being. It is a proactive step designed to ensure Tulsa and Oklahoma City students' safety and get them help when they need it. The young people who participate in Student Mental Health Screening are 6th-12th graders who have expressed interest in the screening and have parental permission. Teens whose parents give permission for the screening engage in the computer-based screening process, then review the results in a conversation with a licensed clinician. If the screening indicates a need for further evaluation (positive result), the clinician makes contact with parents and, typically, refers the teen to appropriate community resources for further evaluation. Student Mental Health Screening staff continues to follow-up with teens and parents to ensure they receive appropriate resources.

SOUTH CAROLINA – [MHA of Greenville County](#)

I.C. Hope® Don't Duck Mental Health® program is a free public awareness and education program that teaches basic coping skills for mental health and aims to eliminate mental health stigma at a young age. Geared towards elementary school children, the program features I.C. Hope®, the Ambassador for Mental Health and Wellness. This friendly duck wears a bandage on his head to symbolize that mental illness is real and treatable and a life preserver around his neck to symbolize that every life is worth saving. The program features story time, discussion, crafts and the oh so popular "Down with the Duck" song and dance. By the end of the program, students should be able to identify new coping skills for stress, bullying, grief, anger and other mental health-related topics. Each session is about an hour long and features one mental health topic. Number of sessions given per group can be adjusted per request.

TENNESSEE – [MHA of East Tennessee, Inc.](#)

Mental Health 101 is an early intervention program for middle and high school students across Tennessee. Mental Health Association staff visit more than 120 schools annually, serving over 30,000 students in the academic year. Students are eager to learn about mental health because many know their peers are struggling with mental health problems or struggling themselves. Outcome data shows gains in demonstrable knowledge of mental illness signs and symptoms, symptom duration, suicidal behaviors, and how to intervene.

TENNESSEE – [MHA of the MidSouth](#)

The **Erasing the Stigma** program provides educational and interactive presentations for children and youth to learn how to eliminate mental health stigmas and develop coping skills for other mental health and wellness-related problems such as, but not limited to bullying, body image and self-esteem, risky decisions, substance abuse, stress and depression. Annually, Mental Health America of the MidSouth serves more than 20,000 children and youth in Middle and West Tennessee.

TEXAS – [MHA of Greater Houston](#)

The Center for School Behavioral Health is a "living laboratory" for incubating innovative, integrative, cost-effective and replicable best practices, the Center supports the healthy psychological and cognitive development of children in the Greater Houston region through services and programs that promote behavioral health and the prevention, early identification, and treatment of behavioral health disorders (also addresses trauma). The Center works collaboratively with school districts, government institutions, public and nonprofit educational and child-serving organizations, higher learning institutions, behavioral health providers, other community stakeholders (including advocacy groups), students, and parents. The Center advocates for implementing sensible public and school policies to close gaps in services and eliminate constraints that exacerbate students' behavioral health needs.

The Emotional Backpack Project Campaign - Children carry a backpack almost everywhere they go. Inside, one may find school supplies, snacks, clothing, a phone, or other items that help them feel secure and prepare them to handle situations. An emotional backpack is an invisible bag filled with life experiences. A diverse group of children and young people discuss the importance of filling a child's emotional backpack with the information, ideas, words, thoughts, self-care tools, skills, and strategies they need to stay mentally healthy wherever they go. The Emotional Backpack Project will teach youth, parents, and educators about mental health and local resources. Additional training modules, lesson plans, and activities are available to help schools infuse mental health into the campus culture. The training modules also fulfill the requirements of SB 460. Senate Bill (SB) 460, passed by the 83rd Texas Legislature in 2013, requires school districts to train teachers, administrators, and staff in mental health intervention and suicide prevention so they can identify red flags in a child's behavior and respond effectively.

Emotional Backpack Leaders - Schools select one or two Emotional Backpack Leaders to participate in a train-the-trainer program for a full year. Emotional Backpack Leaders then use the training modules at the school. The training teaches participants how to teach the Emotional Backpack Project curriculum to educators, parents, and students (signs and symptoms of mental illnesses, trauma-informed classrooms, suicide prevention). Participants will learn how to present the program with fidelity to the tested core model and apply it to a range of adult and student learning styles.

VIRGINIA – [MHA of Fredericksburg](#)

The **Suicide Prevention Education Program** empowers middle and high school students with the ability to identify the signs and symptoms of suicide and depression and what they can do to get help. The curriculum used is Signs of Suicide (SOS), developed by Screening for Mental Health, Inc. It is listed on SAMSHA'S National Registry of evidence-based programs and practices for high school, while the middle school program is considered a best practice. Students are taught that suicide is not a normal response to stress but is a preventable tragedy that can be a result of untreated depression. The program has been implemented in Spotsylvania County and Fredericksburg City public schools at the 7th and 9th grade level.

The Mental Health America Fredericksburg Virginia (MHAFVA) **Teen Council** actively works towards spreading awareness and reducing stigma surrounding mental health in our schools and community. Our focus is to educate, raise awareness and give teens a voice. It is open to teens currently enrolled in a high school program in Planning District 16 (Spotsylvania, Fredericksburg, Stafford, King George and Caroline).

WISCONSIN – [MHA in Sheboygan County](#)

Social Emotional Learning Brought to You - MHA utilizes an evidence-based curriculum developed and used by Growing Minds as well as an expanded curriculum and programming developed by MHA Mindfulness Instructors providing additional tools for teachers. The curriculum lessons fall into four different categories, each relevant to concepts within the classroom including: focus & attention, self-awareness & self-regulation, knowledge of thoughts & emotions, and social skills & relationships.

Educational Presentations - MHA in Sheboygan County provides educational presentations for students ages K-12. Trainings available both in person (when appropriate) and virtually include: depression & anxiety, depression & suicide, B4Stage4 Mental Health Matters for youth, stress management, and customized programs.

RESOURCES FOR SPANISH SPEAKERS

Encuentra Qué Decir has information about mental health, how to support someone with depression, and how to talk to children. Learn more at <https://encuentraquedecir.org>.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network has a variety of resources available specific to children who have trauma, including those who are dealing with migration and separation issues. Learn more at <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/informacion-en-espanol>.

HOW TRAUMA IMPACTS SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Trauma is an emotional response to a distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms the individual's ability to cope. Trauma is subjective – a traumatic experience for one person may not be traumatic for another, but that does not mean it is any less real for the person who is traumatized.

People of all ages experience trauma, but it has a particularly long-lasting impact on children as their brains are still rapidly developing. Often, children and adolescents don't have the necessary coping skills to manage the impact of stressful events on their own or the language to explain their feelings (or even what happened).

WHAT DOES TRAUMA LOOK LIKE IN THE CLASSROOM?

There's no one way for children and teens to respond to trauma, but here are some signs to look out for:

- Excessive anger or irritability
- Unusual startle reactions
- Significantly increased or reduced appetite
- Exhaustion
- Aggression (physical or verbal)
- Regular tardiness/absence from class
- Perfectionist or controlling behavior
- Difficulty concentrating
- Frequent headaches or stomachaches
- Low self-confidence
- Hoarding (snacks, school supplies)
- Risky behavior (substance use, sex)
- Panic attacks
- Extreme self-reliance or hyper-independence
- Running away
- Defiance
- Alienation from peers (self-isolation or inability to relate/make friends)

It's important to keep in mind that trauma responses can vary by culture, race, gender, geographic location, and other factors – and students have all had different traumatic experiences over the last year. Many students and families may have dealt with vaccine anxiety, but likely not as intensely as Black Americans who thought back to the Tuskegee Study. In terms of trauma response behaviors, girls are more likely to turn inward and get quiet or retreat from social settings, while boys are more likely to get outwardly irritable or disrupt class. All behavior is a form of communication – if a student's actions or demeanor are disruptive or strike you as "off," think about it from a trauma lens and consider what they might be trying to express as needs or wants.

Social-emotional Development: Experiencing trauma, especially at a young age, disrupts young people's ability to relate to others and manage emotions. Without healthy coping skills, this often leads to poor in-class behavior, which can reduce learning time and increase rates of suspension and expulsion.

Academic Performance: Trauma can undermine many skills that are crucial for learning, including development of language and communication skills, the ability to organize and remember new information, and reading comprehension. Students coping with trauma may experience intrusive thoughts or flashbacks that prevent them from paying attention in class, studying, or focusing during timed assignments. School-related trauma (like bullying or unfair punishment) often leads to school avoidance, leaving the most vulnerable students behind academically. Trauma also negatively impacts young people's sense of self, making it difficult for those students to feel motivated, proud, and engaged in their learning.

If you notice these symptoms in a child or teen, you may want to consider or encourage a mental health screening. A screening is a free, anonymous, and confidential way to see if a person is showing signs of a mental health condition. Screening tools for young people and parents are available at [MHAScreening.org](https://www.mhascreeing.org). Once completed, screeners are given information about the next steps to take based on results.

TYPES OF TRAUMA

It can be helpful to think about "big 'T' Trauma" and "little 't' trauma." Big 'T' Trauma is what most people think of when it comes to traumatic events – things like physical abuse or the sudden death of a parent. Little 't' trauma refers to events that may not be as obviously traumatic but can still be too much for a child's brain to process – things like parents fighting a lot at home or struggling to connect with peers.

Here are some issues that students may be struggling with this school year:

COVID-19:

The fear, uncertainty, and general upheaval that the pandemic caused has been (and continues to be) traumatic for many. Many youth are dealing with significant grief – over 1.5 million children have lost a primary or secondary caregiver due to COVID-19.¹ Rates of substance use² and family violence/abuse³ have increased during the pandemic, and even just heightened anger and arguing in the home can be traumatic.

RACIAL INJUSTICE:

In the U.S., Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) students are vulnerable to racial trauma due to living in a system of white supremacy. Race-based discrimination and violence have been prominent in media coverage, which can be triggering and retraumatizing for students with marginalized identities.

SCHOOL FEARS:

The start of a new school year is often particularly challenging for students who have faced bullying or exclusion among their peers. A number of students may be dealing with severe separation anxiety after having spent more time at home recently, or if they saw less of their parent(s) during the pandemic due to essential work and fear that happening again.

[MHASCREENING.ORG](https://www.mhascreeing.org) | [MHANATIONAL.ORG/BACK-SCHOOL](https://www.mhanational.org/back-school)

¹Hillis, S.D., Unwin, H.J.T., et al. (2021). Global minimum estimates of children affected by COVID-19-associated orphanhood and deaths of caregivers: a modelling study. *The Lancet*, 398(10298), 391-402.

²Abramson, A. (2021). Substance use during the pandemic. *Monitor on Psychology*, 52(2). <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/03/substance-use-pandemic>

³Usher, K., Jones, C.B., et al. (2021). COVID-19 and family violence: Is this a perfect storm? *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, 30(4). <https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.12876>

HOW TRAUMA IMPACTS SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Going back to school after the summer often comes with some anxiety and stress, but this year students will likely need a lot more support, reassurance, and comforting before they'll be able to learn. Most children are dealing with some level of trauma after the uncertainty of the past two school years – trauma can occur after anything bad happens that makes the individual feel unsafe or scared. Even families who haven't faced the loss of loved ones, financial stress, or trouble at home have had their sense of safety and security disrupted. This has an especially strong impact on children, as their brains are still developing.

You can help young people move forward despite trauma – use your classroom to create situations in which they have choices, control, and feel empowered.

PRIORITIZE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SAFETY IN SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS

Trauma is really tough on the brain – it's likely that students won't feel like their normal selves. The mind and body have to feel safe to reverse the impact of trauma and feel "normal" again – students can't effectively learn without those basic needs met first. Children often don't have the coping skills needed to handle trauma on their own, so creating this safe environment is crucial to their healing, and thus classroom behavior and learning potential.

Ways you can do this:

- *Be open about your own feelings.* If you're having a bad day, ask if they ever have days when it seems like nothing goes right. Ask for their patience on your off days – it shows them that when one of us is down, the rest can help out and make things easier. It can also encourage them to tell you upfront if they're having a difficult day so you can be prepared to support them.
- *Model empathy and active listening.* Many times, kids just need to feel heard and seen. Don't dismiss their concerns or tell them not to worry – take what they share with you seriously and thank them for being open with you.

BUILD A STRONG CLASSROOM COMMUNITY.

For students coming in with trauma and anxiety, giving them some control is one of the best things you can do to help them feel more at ease. Many children have gone through similar experiences but felt alone in it, especially given the isolation that came with COVID-19. It's important to help them rebuild social connections and support – peer relationships are crucial for social development. Feeling like part of a classroom team makes school a much more positive environment and holds children accountable to someone other than authority figures.

Ways you can do this:

- *Create a classroom contract together.* Set expectations, rules, and consequences as a group. Discuss what good students, good classmates, and good teachers look like – make sure they know their voices are heard and valued.
- *Be proactive in addressing bullying and disrespectful behavior.* Do this kindly and compassionately, but it's important for kids who may be a victim of bullying to know that you'll be on their side. Part of feeling safe in the classroom is feeling safe in that environment as a whole, not just with the teacher.

FOCUS ON POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT OVER PUNISHMENT

Many kids feel unheard or like their opinions and desires don't matter, especially after or during a traumatic experience. This often manifests as attention-seeking behaviors. If they get attention - even negative attention - through acting out, they'll likely continue those behaviors. Positive reinforcement is not only more compassionate – it also increases confidence and motivation, both of which are negatively impacted by trauma.

Ways you can do this:

- *Praise appropriate classroom behavior.* Highlighting student role models can motivate and inspire other students. It switches the narrative from "don't do anything wrong" to "let's see how great you can do."
- *Create opportunities for students to show off their strengths to teachers, peers, and themselves.* If a student finishes an independent assignment and didn't have further instructions and starts drawing at their desk without interrupting anyone, don't call out that it's math time – instead, praise their quiet transition and art skills. If you need to redirect them, frame it positively: "I didn't think anyone would finish so quickly! I'd like us to stay focused on math during this time – could you pull out your workbook?"



WORK WITH THE FAMILY.

You only know so much about your student's home life, especially at the start of a new year. Inviting their family to be a part of the team can help you better understand and support the student with whatever challenges may come up throughout the year. It's helpful to be aware of what your students' families have gone through over the last year and a half (if they're open to sharing) and what resources they have available at home. By making yourself a resource to the parents, they are more likely to be engaged in their child's education, which helps both the student and the teacher.

Ways you can do this:

- *Reach out proactively with positive feedback.* Most families only hear from school when there is negative information to share, like that their child got in trouble or was hurt. Sharing that their child was especially helpful to a student in need or that you were impressed by their book report establishes that you really care about their student.
- *Give families your contact information.* Decide your own boundaries here – maybe you're fine with them having your cell phone number, or maybe you'd rather keep it to email. Tell them when, how, and for what reasons they can or should reach out to you.

INCREASE YOUR TRAUMA COMPETENCY

Integrating trauma-informed classroom strategies is beneficial to all students, and small changes can make a big difference in student well-being and success.

Ways you can do this:

- *Know your student population.* Different communities experience different types of trauma – know the demographics of your class and educate yourself on what issues different students may face. Understand the cultural differences that show up in coping with trauma and mental health challenges.
- *Connect with local organizations doing on-the-ground work.* There are some things that you can't provide directly to your students and families, but other organizations can – like financial resources or low-cost, healthy food. Know how these issues intersect with youth mental health and student performance and help provide your families with solutions.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE FOR TEACHERS

WE Teachers, in collaboration with MHA, has developed a free module to give teachers the materials, resources and activities to support your students in identifying and dealing with trauma. You'll learn about what trauma is and how it exists within students and/or the classroom, explore how to identify trauma within a student and discover the importance and benefits of developing a trauma-informed classroom.

Visit teachershub.we.org/courses/we-teachers-introductory-module-trauma-informed-classroom for more information.

MHASCREEING.ORG | MHANATIONAL.ORG/BACK-SCHOOL

FOLLOW
US



/mentalhealthamerica



@mentalhealtham



@mentalhealthamerica



/mentalhealthamerica



SUPPORTING STUDENTS AT HOME

The start of a new school year can be an exciting yet uncertain time for the whole family. Due to the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, many kids are facing mental health challenges right now. In fact, 82% of 11-17-year-olds who took a screen at mhascreening.org from March 2020-July 2021 were showing signs of a mental health condition.

If you are concerned about your child or teen's ability to readjust to in-person school and have a good year, there are things you can do at home to set them up for success and support them during this transition. Not only is the home environment the most significant factor affecting academic achievement, family member interactions help provide social and intellectual development and improve child confidence.¹

Even if your child or teen seems to be doing well, they were impacted in some way by the events of the last year and a half. All school-age youth experienced some degree of:

- Uncertainty
- Fear
- Loss of normalcy or disruption of routine
- Reduced peer interaction or loneliness
- Lack of structure
- Grief or loss

TAKE CARE OF YOUR OWN MENTAL HEALTH

Children and teens pick up on anxiety and tension in adults around them. Be open about your own feelings and lead by example in how you deal with them by modeling healthy behaviors and coping skills.

REEVALUATE YOUR EXPECTATIONS AND ANTICIPATE CHALLENGES

Children and teens may act differently in school than they have before because of the adjustments they had to make last year to adapt to virtual learning. Anticipate some disorganization, forgetfulness, and anxiety. They may also have higher levels of irritability and frustration than you're used to. Patience and compassion are key.

WORK AS A TEAM WITH THE SCHOOL

Teachers and parents/caregivers should work together for the best outcomes, especially since students may act differently at home and in the classroom. Be familiar with options for supports available through your child's school to help accommodate them if they are struggling emotionally or academically. You are your child's best advocate!

ENCOURAGE COMMUNICATION AND EMOTIONAL VULNERABILITY

Trust is important. Your child needs to know they can come to you and that you'll really listen when they do. Be curious and ask questions about your child's day, what they learned, how they felt, etc. – especially since adolescents usually aren't the most forthcoming. For those who are dealing with lots of fear and anxiety, they may require frequent comforting and reassurance to feel safe.

KNOW WHEN YOUR CHILD'S STRUGGLES MAY BE A SIGN OF SOMETHING BIGGER

Common signs of mental health conditions in youth include problems with concentration and memory, changes in appetite, feeling sad or hopeless, loss of interest in things they used to enjoy, excessive worry, irritability, changes in sleep patterns, and/or angry outbursts. Check out our fact sheet, [Know the Signs: Recognizing Mental Health Concerns in Kids and Teens](#), for more information.

A Parent Screen is available at [MHAScreening.org](https://mhascreening.org) to help you determine if your child or teen may be having emotional, attentional, or behavioral difficulties. These results can be used to start a conversation with your family doctor or a school mental health professional.

[MHASCREENING.ORG](https://mhascreening.org) | [MHANATIONAL.ORG/BACK-SCHOOL](https://mhanational.org/back-school)

¹Khan, F.N., Begum, M., Imad, M. (2019). Relationship between Students' Home Environment and their Academic Achievement at Secondary School Level. *Pakistan Journal of Distance and Online Learning*, 5(2), 223-234. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1266643.pdf>

SAFETY AT SCHOOL: PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL

Going back to school may come with some extra nerves this year, especially since the last two school years haven't been normal. You'll likely be back to full-time, in-person school again, and it may feel a little weird or scary. To have a successful school year, it's important that you feel safe in your school and classroom.

WHY SAFETY MATTERS

If you are worried or afraid it can be hard to think about anything else. When you feel safe, you are able to explore and try new things, which makes learning possible. You spend most of your time at school and deserve to feel safe in that space.

HOW TO MAKE SURE YOU FEEL SAFE AT SCHOOL

BE PREPARED.

Sometimes the best way to feel safe is to prepare yourself for how to handle situations that scare you if they were to happen, rather than worrying about them. Talk to your parents or teachers so you can be clear about what the rules about masks are, what your school will do if there is a COVID-19 outbreak, and what to do in case of emergency situations. It can also be helpful to figure out who your friends in class are if you need to turn to someone.

IDENTIFY ADULTS YOU TRUST.

Feeling safe doesn't just mean that you won't get hurt; it means having people you trust that can support you. Think about an adult at school who knows you and can be your ally if you feel threatened—it could be a teacher, coach, guidance counselor, or even a cafeteria worker. This may be especially important for students of color or LGBTQ+ youth who may be searching for someone who can understand their experiences when other peers can't.

TELL SOMEONE ABOUT YOUR WORRIES.

It's hard to keep all of your emotions and worries inside and can often lead to more difficulty processing the situations that stress you out. Talking to someone can help you understand that you're not alone and find ways to feel better. Sometimes just saying words out loud to a friend about what is worrying you can be all the relief you need. Other times it may be necessary to talk to a parent, teacher, or other trusted adult about what's bothering you. If talking seems too hard, you can write a letter or an email.

KEEP A GROUNDING ITEM.

Grounding is a way of keeping your mind in the here and now and is a great way to help you feel safe and in control when your anxieties are spiraling. There are many ways to ground yourself, like breathing exercises or going for a walk. A grounding item is a physical object and can be a great way to help you feel grounded without leaving the classroom or distracting others. Some examples are a smooth rock you keep in your pocket, a fidget toy, a photo of a loved one or pet, or anything to hold onto that soothes you. Tell your teacher about your grounding object so they don't think it's a toy or distraction and take it away.

If you still feel overwhelmed, unsafe, and as though your fear affects how you function every day, you may be experiencing the first signs of a mental health condition, like depression or anxiety.

Take the Youth Screen at MHAScreening.org to see if you may be at risk. Once you get the results, MHA will provide you with more information and help you to figure out the next steps.

SAFETY STRESSORS

After being home and doing school virtually for so long, here are some common things that you may be concerned about when physically returning to school:

COVID-19: The rules about when and where you need to wear a mask are different depending on where you live, and it can be confusing. Your school may or may not require masks to be worn, and with not everyone being able to get a vaccine, you might have concerns about getting sick, bringing sickness home from school, or going virtual again.

BULLYING: One of the benefits of learning virtually was that you didn't have to see bullies in person, so you may be worried about getting picked on again now that you're back in a classroom.

GETTING INTO TROUBLE: Being back in school probably means being on a stricter schedule than you got used to while doing virtual school, so it might be hard to sit still for hours at a time or to keep your behavior under control. Your teachers may also get stressed as everyone gets used to being back in school and they may seem less patient or meaner than you remember. You may feel like only certain people get disciplined for misbehaving, or some get punished worse than others. If you are one of the people who seems to be in trouble more often or faces harsher discipline than others who do the same thing, it can be scary.

SCHOOL VIOLENCE: When no one was at school, there was no fighting in the halls and you stopped hearing about shootings or other acts of violence. Now that school is back in session, the possibility of violence has returned. Even though it seemed like you heard a lot about acts of violence at school before COVID, they aren't as common as you think despite the amount of media attention they get. Talk to your teachers about procedures if you need to be reminded about what to do to stay safe.

[MHASCREENING.ORG](https://MHAScreening.org) | [MHANATIONAL.ORG/BACK-SCHOOL](https://MHANational.org/back-school)

FOLLOW
US



/mentalhealthamerica



@mentalhealtham



@mentalhealthamerica



/mentalhealthamerica



WHEN HOME LIFE IS HARD: UNDERSTANDING ABUSE

Child abuse is when someone caring for a child intentionally hurts them physically or emotionally. It can be hard to recognize this abuse – it's natural to trust that the people who are supposed to care for you wouldn't hurt you. But your feelings are important, and if you feel scared or unsafe at home, you might be experiencing some form of abuse.

AM I BEING ABUSED?

Experiencing abuse is scary and confusing, especially when it's coming from someone who is supposed to take care of you. Even if you know you are being hurt, you may have thoughts like: *I know they love me. I don't want to get them in trouble. What if it's not on purpose? What if I did something wrong? What if they told me not to tell anyone?* No matter what, abuse is never your fault, and you deserve to feel safe around the people in your life.

It's also important to know that something considered abuse in one culture may not be considered abuse in another. This doesn't mean that the actions don't hurt you – as the one experiencing the situation, you are the only person who can decide if you are hurt. But sometimes, what looks like intentional abuse or neglect may be a cultural misunderstanding or a traditional practice. In cases like this, education and support can help families change their behavior.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I'M BEING ABUSED?

The safest thing you can do if you're being hurt (or are scared you will be hurt) by someone in your life is to talk to an adult. You have a few options on who to go to:

An adult you know and trust. You can tell a family member, teacher, coach, friend's parent, neighbor, or any other adult in your life who you feel safe around about what you are experiencing.

Some of these adults may be mandated reporters – people who are required by law to report suspected abuse or neglect. These adults are really important in keeping kids safe, but you might not be ready for someone to intervene yet. Mandated reporters vary by state but often include teachers, school staff, and other adults who work with children.

The Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-4-A-CHILD). You can call (or text or chat) this hotline 24/7 to reach a professional crisis counselor. They will listen to you, help you decide what to do, and can connect you with support services. All calls, texts, and chats are confidential.

The police. If you are in immediate and serious danger, you should call 911. They will respond and intervene immediately.

WHAT IF I'M NOT READY TO TALK YET?

That's okay. Sometimes kids feel guilty speaking up, like they are betraying their parents or caregivers, or are scared about what will end up happening to them. It takes a lot of courage to talk about abuse, and it's okay if you aren't prepared for that yet. Focus on keeping yourself safe in the meantime: find a safe space in your home or at a friend's house, limit interaction by having headphones on or focusing on a book, and have a plan in case you ever need to get out of the house immediately.

You deserve to feel safe and loved. When you are ready, know that telling someone is the safest and bravest thing you can do, and there are a lot of adults who care about you and will help keep you safe.

TYPES OF ABUSE

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Any intentional physical harm to a child is physical abuse, including hitting, burning, biting, or any action that injures the child.

SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is involved in sexual acts with an adult or older child. These acts do not need to involve physical contact to be considered abuse. No adult should touch or talk about your body (or theirs, or anyone else's) in a way that makes you uncomfortable.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Words can hurt. When a parent or caregiver talks to or treats you in a way that makes you feel bad about yourself, that's emotional abuse. It can be hard to recognize but includes things like name-calling, insulting, threatening violence, and withholding love and support.

NEGLECT

Sometimes, the people who are supposed to take care of you don't meet your needs. This may not be intentional – the adults in your life might care about you very much but be struggling financially or with their own mental health, making it difficult to provide for you. Even if they are doing their best, it is their responsibility to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and supervision to maintain your health and well-being.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV)

Some adults treat their child(ren) well but are abusive to other adults at home. You can be impacted by abuse even if it isn't happening to you. Witnessing abuse, especially involving someone you love, or just being in a home where you know (or suspect) that abuse is happening can weigh on your mental health.

MHASCREENING.ORG | MHANATIONAL.ORG/BACK-SCHOOL

FOLLOW
US



/mentalhealthamerica



@mentalhealtham



@mentalhealthamerica



/mentalhealthamerica

MHIA
Mental Health America

WORKSHEET: FEELING SAFE

Experiencing a traumatic event of any kind can leave you feeling unsafe or unstable. Finding ways to focus on safety and building a sense of control over aspects of life can help you feel more grounded. When we lack safety, we may feel anxious, overwhelmed, or depressed. Use this worksheet to think through how you can increase feelings of security in life.

BUILDING AWARENESS

Are there other situations in life that make you feel out of control?

(Example: having an unexpected conversation or visit, getting into an argument, having to do something you didn't want to do)

What are some of the thoughts that go through your mind that increase negative feelings or experiences?

(Example: I don't know what to do, everything is going to go wrong)

What are some of the physical experiences in your body that increase negative experiences?

(Example: my heart races, I get a stomach ache, I sweat)

BUILDING SAFE COPING

What are some positive words you can say to yourself to feel better?

What are some things that have helped you feel safe in the past? This can be an action you've taken to reduce negative physical reactions or an object that feels safe. (Example: holding a stuffed animal, reading your favorite book, listening to calming music)

Think of a place where you have felt safe in the past. Take a moment to close your eyes, take a few slow deep breaths, and visualize the place. Think through the details. What do you see, hear, smell, feel, or even taste?

Who in your life can you talk to when you feel unsafe or unstable?

MHASCREENING.ORG | MHANATIONAL.ORG/BACK-SCHOOL

FOLLOW
US



/mentalhealthamerica



@mentalhealtham



@mentalhealthamerica



/mentalhealthamerica



TALKING ABOUT HARD TOPICS: GUIDE TO PREPARING TO SHARE

When we have to have a conversation about hard topics, it's important to plan ahead so you aren't caught off guard which can set us back. Use the following sheet to plan through what it would be like to share your experiences with someone you want to disclose information to.

PLANNING THE CONVERSATION

1. Who do you want to share with?

2. What specific information do you want to share?

3. Use the back of this page or additional sheets to write out a script or an outline of a script of what you might share. If you're not sure where to start, use the document at mhanational.org/talking-adolescents-and-teens-time-talk as a guide.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

1. What do you think will happen when you share? What is the best response you could receive?

2. What is the worst thing that could happen? What would they say to you or how would they react that would make you feel much worse?

3. What do you need from this person to feel better? It is important that the below answer is focused on specific, clear, or concrete actions that will help you feel better. (Example: I need you to listen, I need you to call me once a week, I need you to help me talk to mom and dad.) Add this answer to your script in #3 in the first section of this page.

4. What are you going to do if the person you're sharing with does not respond in the best way?
(Example: talk to your friend, write in your journal, take a walk.)

HAVING THE CONVERSATION

To have the conversation it's best to **use the script** you developed from question #3 in "planning the conversation" and make sure you remember to **ask for what you need** (from question #3 from "managing expectations"). Use your responses from "managing expectations" to prepare for potential challenges or issues that could arise during the conversation. Remember that #4 from "managing expectations" is an action you can take regardless of the outcome of the conversation.



STRESS OR FEAR AFFECTING YOU EVERY DAY? OVERWHELMED? UNABLE TO COPE?

YOU MAY BE EXPERIENCING
THE FIRST SIGNS OF A MENTAL
HEALTH CONDITION, LIKE
DEPRESSION OR ANXIETY.

TAKE THE YOUTH SCREEN AT
[MHASCREENING.ORG](https://mhascreening.org) TO SEE
IF YOU MAY BE AT RISK.

ONCE YOU GET THE RESULTS,
MHA WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH
MORE INFORMATION AND HELP
YOU TO FIGURE OUT NEXT
STEPS..

IN CRISIS? Trained crisis counselors are available
24/7 by texting "MHA" to 741-741 or calling
1-800-273-TALK (8255).

LEARN MORE AT [MHANATIONAL.ORG/BACK2SCHOOL](https://mhanational.org/back2school)

MHIA
Mental Health America
B4Stage4

 /mentalhealthamerica
 @mentalhealtham
 @mentalhealthamerica
 /mentalhealtham
 /mentalhealthamerica
www.mhanational.org

LIFE DURING COVID HAS MADE IT HARD TO FEEL SAFE.

If you are afraid all of the time, take the youth screen at MHAScreening.org to check on your mental health. It's free, confidential, and anonymous.

Once you get the results, MHA will provide you with more information and help you to figure out next steps.



IN CRISIS? Trained crisis counselors are available 24/7 by texting "MHA" to 741-741 or calling 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

LEARN MORE AT [MHANATIONAL.ORG/BACK2SCHOOL](https://mhanational.org/back2school)

MHA
Mental Health America
B4Stage4

[f /mentalhealthamerica](https://www.facebook.com/mentalhealthamerica)
[@mentalhealtham](https://twitter.com/mentalhealtham)
[@mentalhealthamerica](https://www.instagram.com/mentalhealthamerica)
[p /mentalhealtham](https://www.pinterest.com/mentalhealtham)
[yt /mentalhealthamerica](https://www.youtube.com/mentalhealthamerica)
www.mhanational.org