

A photograph of four children wearing face masks, overlaid with a teal gradient. The children are walking outdoors. A girl in a yellow dress and black mask is in the foreground, looking to the right. Behind her are three boys: one in a white mask and light blue shirt, one in a white mask and yellow shirt, and one in a white mask and blue shirt. The text 'Back to School Guide' is overlaid in white.

Back to School Guide

**Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
2020**

About the Back to School Guide

The back-to-school shopping, bustling hallways after a long summer away from friends, first day icebreaker games – it's all going to look A LOT different this year, due to COVID-19. For parents, teachers, administrators and students, the thought of returning to school can be overwhelming. Use this guide and other Employee Assistance Program (EAP) resources to maneuver the stress of returning to school during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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EAP services that can offer support at this time

There is no right or wrong way to feel, process or cope during this time. The table below highlights some common reactions and needs, and how EAP can help.

Need	EAP Service	Resources
Feeling “off” – stressed, overwhelmed, anxious, adjusting to change or struggling with habits	Counseling Online modules	Therapy (online, telephonic, in-person, in-the-moment) myStrength* or eap.ndbh.com
Find a tutor, childcare or at-home support	Work/Life	Referrals to at least three experts that fit your needs
Improve relationships or combat loneliness	Counseling Online modules or resources	Therapy (online, telephonic, in-person, in-the-moment) myStrength* or eap.ndbh.com
Manage employees who may be struggling	Management consultation program	Dedicated phone line & expert
Handle tough conversations	Webinars	Live and pre-recorded webinars
Get inspired and feel positive	‘A Better You’ subscription email	Inspiring bi-monthly tips
Create healthier habits or set new goals	Coaching Online resources & recipes	Unlimited consult with a coach
Guide legal/government required education needs	Legal consultation/support	30-minute legal consultation
Adjust your finances to support pandemic impact	Financial consultation	30-minute financial consultation
Find COVID-19 resources	COVID-19 resource library	Tip sheets, webinars & more

How to reach the EAP and other key resources for this time:



Support Line
Call anytime
800-624-5544



Mobile app
Search for New
Directions EAP



Web
Visit eap.ndbh.com
for resources

Key online resources for this time – visit eap.ndbh.com with your company code:

COVID-19 library | Health Resource Library | Health assessments

Toolkits (mental health, substance, suicide prevention) | New Directions community crisis page

*For groups contracted with the service

Supporting your family during COVID-19 school decisions and transitions

Depending on the infection rates in your community, schools may not physically reopen at all. Whether it's staggered school hours, safely distanced desks or strictly online learning, there's a lot of uncertainty about how this school year will play out. For students, parents and teachers, all these inevitable changes can add up to some big-time stress.

Do you recognize any of these feelings in yourself or family members?

- Feeling overwhelmed or helpless
- Anxiety, fear or sadness
- Feeling lonely or isolated
- Withdrawing from others/fear of going into public spaces
- Rapid heart rate, stomach upset, low energy
- Frustration, irritability or anger
- Difficulty concentrating or sleeping

If you or a loved one is having any of these feelings, it's not healthy (mentally or physically) to suppress these thoughts. Acknowledging your feelings is the first step towards overcoming your struggles. These feelings are normal and expected during a crisis. Take necessary steps to cope with your feelings and take control where possible.

If bad news is overwhelming you, take a break. Don't read articles that upset you. Turn off the TV. Unplug from social media, if that helps. It's okay to focus on things other than COVID-19 news.

If you're feeling bored or restless, make time for activities you enjoy. Make an effort to do an activity you wouldn't normally have time for.

- Learn a new recipe
- Put together a puzzle
- Take a virtual art class
- Play with your pet
- Start a new hobby

Finally, do these activities on a daily basis:

- Take care of your body by eating healthy meals and snacks
- Make sure you're getting enough sleep
- Exercise every day
- Throughout the day, stand up and stretch to get the body moving
- Talk with friends and family

Talking to your child about returning to school during COVID-19

What do you say to your child when you're still processing news for yourself? Amidst the stress of school district decisions, processing new policies and navigating the unknown, parents must also explain necessary details to their children.

Get your facts straight. As more and more districts announce their plans for the coming school year, it is a lot to process and comprehend even as adults. Before explaining things to your child, be sure you have a clear understanding of your school district's plan, policies and safety measures.

Talk to your child at their age level. Begin the conversation by asking a few questions. Find out what they've already heard and what they may be worried about. Explain the back to school plan, whether it be online learning, staggered hours, hybrid schedule or in-person classes.

Help your child take control. Nothing is more stressful to a child (or an adult) than feeling helpless. While it's important to reassure your child of their safety, it is also important to teach your child how to help themselves. Simple lessons like proper hand washing, being a good germ catcher (cough or sneeze into the crook of your arm instead of your hand), maintaining proper distance between others, wearing a face mask, and practicing healthy habits like eating good foods and getting plenty of rest, give children a sense that they have some control.

Try not to stray from the family routine. Of course, this may be a challenge as school districts announce changes for the 2020 school year. Still make an effort to do all you can to maintain your family's regular routine. Even if your child is online learning this year, keep the days structured, and maintain the same mealtimes and bedtimes. And, of course, staying busy and active keeps little minds off worrisome things.

Above all, keep calm and carry on. As the adult, your job is to be a calming and reassuring presence in your child's life. When you talk to them about COVID-19, be honest, but don't let your inner worries show during the conversation. In a calm voice, let your child know they can always come to you if they feel afraid of what they hear or see. Let them know they can count on you for honest answers.

Supporting isolated teens during COVID-19

Parenting a teenager can be challenging enough, but now you must navigate parenting during a global pandemic. Teenagers are separated from friends, family, teachers and more – feelings of isolation are likely increased. Being isolated can cause increased stress, anxiety and depression.

What is depression?

Depression is a feeling of sadness, despair or hopelessness that does not go away. In someone with depression, this feeling can last for weeks or months and interfere with the person's ability to participate in everyday activities. Depression affects mood, outlook, thoughts and behavior. It also can cause tiredness, irritability, loss of appetite, headaches and insomnia.

The warning signs include:

- Feeling deep sadness or hopelessness
- Lack of energy
- Loss of pleasure or interest in activities that once excited the teen
- Anxiety and panic
- Turmoil, worry and irritability. The teen may brood or lash out in anger because of the distress they feel
- Difficulty organizing, concentrating or remembering
- Negative views of life and the world
- Feeling worthless and guilty. The teen may feel like a “bad” son or daughter, stupid or ugly.
- Drastic changes in appetite or weight
- Difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep or sleeping too much
- Sluggishness. A depressed teen often talks, reacts and walks slower than other teens
- Avoiding and withdrawing from friends and family
- Restlessness. The restlessness brought on by depression may lead to behaviors such as fidgeting or acting up
- Self-mutilation and suicidal thoughts

Depression is one of the most common mental health conditions. The good news- it's also one of the most treatable mental health conditions. Seek professional help if you suspect your teen suffers from depression and choose a therapist who specializes in treating teenagers. Make sure your child feels comfortable with their provider.

Teachers: Managing anxiety surrounding COVID-19

Teachers play a critical role in the lives of children, especially during crisis times. Often, teachers put their personal needs aside to ensure the safety and wellbeing of students in their care. Educators can ignore their own needs in the process of helping children cope. It may be difficult, but teachers must strive to also take care of themselves, so they are able to continue giving their best support in the classroom.

Failure to take care of one's self can result in stress and burnout, especially during crisis situations like COVID-19. Burnout interferes with teacher's ability to provide crisis support and intervention assistance to others, including students. Teachers may also experience secondary trauma resulting from helping other individuals through a traumatic experience. This is why it is so important for teachers to take care of themselves during the ongoing threat of COVID-19.

Preventing teacher burnout

Physical self

Maintain healthy eating habits, drink plenty of water, get enough sleep and find time for exercise. Physical and mental health are connected, so be sure to take care of both.

Emotional self

Recognize your reactions are normal. Allow yourself to have good and bad days. It's okay to turn off the news, get off social media and take a mental break. Grab a book or sit down and do an unplugged activity to wind down after a long day.

Social self

Maintain daily routines. Connect with friends, family and other support systems as needed. Process and debrief the events of each day with other colleagues and caregivers. Acknowledge that you may need additional help from others around you.

No matter how you're feeling about the return to school, EAP is here for you and your household members. The journey ahead may be a long one, and not one you have to do alone. Take advantage of your free benefit offered by your employer and call or connect anytime. Don't worry about memorizing the services – just reach out. **We're here 24/7/365.**