



The Mind Hub

By



Topic: Back to School! Prioritising Mental Health in the First Month

The start of a new school year is full of excitement, fresh starts, and renewed energy! However, it can also bring stress, uncertainty, and emotional overload for students, parents, and educators alike. As we settle into the school year, it is important to remember that academic success is closely tied to emotional well-being. Before we dive into tests, academic performance, routines, and expectations, let's take a step back and prioritise mental health!

Whether your child is entering kindergarten, or S7, or you are a teacher managing your classroom dynamics; supporting mental health now sets the tone for a more resilient and productive year ahead!

Tips for Supporting Student Mental Health in September

Establish Predictable Routines

- Routines provide a sense of safety and control. After a summer of loose structure, reintroduce consistent wake-up times, homework hours, meals, and bedtimes.
 - Tip for parents: use visual schedules or calendars to help kids see what's coming each day.
 - Tip for teachers: start each day with a predictable classroom ritual (e.g. morning ritual, check-ins, etc.)

Normalise Feelings & Encourage Expression

- Back-to-School brings a range of emotions: excitement, fear, sadness, even anger.

Children (and adults) need safe spaces to express them.

- Tip for parents: ask open-ended questions like “what was the hardest part of today?” instead of just “how was school?”.^{*1}

- Tip for teachers: use emotion check-ins (like a feelings thermometer or mood meter) during morning routines.

Watch for Signs for stress or anxiety

- Some stress is normal – but chronic stress or anxiety can interfere with learning, socialising, and behaviour.
 - Red flags to watch for:
 - Frequent stomach-aches or headaches
 - Avoiding school or certain classes
 - Trouble sleeping or changes in appetite
 - Mood swings or withdrawal
 - If these signs persist beyond a few weeks, don't ignore them – early support makes a big difference.

Teach & Model Coping Skills

- Children learn how to manage stress by watching the adults around them.

Demonstrating calm, using deep breathing, and naming your own emotions helps them do the same.

- Quick coping strategies:
 - Box breathing (inhale – 4secs, hold – 4secs, exhale – 4secs, hold – 4secs)
 - Grounding exercises (5 things you see, 4 things you feel, what do you see on your right side, find the closest red item in your surroundings, etc.)
 - Brain breaks or movement breaks

Build Relationships first, Academics after

- Strong student-teacher and peer relationships are the foundation of both learning and mental health.
 - Tip for parents: encourage your child to connect with one classmate, club, or teacher. One positive connection can anchor a student emotionally.
 - Tip for teachers: prioritise connection over compliance in the first month. Greet students by name, show interest in their lives, and build classroom community.

Communicate Early and Often

- Don't wait until report cards or behaviour problems to check in. Teachers and parents should be partners in supporting students.
 - Tip for parents: reach out to your child's teacher early to introduce yourself and share anything helpful about your child's learning style or emotional needs.
 - Tip for teachers: reach out early and regularly with both positive updates and concerns—building trust makes tough conversations easier later.

Take Care of Yourself, too

- Mental health is a family and community effort, and that includes **your** well-being as an adult.
 - Reminder: You can't pour from an empty cup. Make time to recharge, seek support, and show yourself grace in this transition season.

❖ FAQs

1. *Q. How long does it take students to adjust back to school?*

A. Every child is different, but most students typically adjust within the first 3-4 weeks of returning to school. During this time, it is normal to see some moodiness, fatigue, or resistance, especially after a long summer break. However, if a child is still showing signs of stress or emotional distress after the first month, it may be time to take a closer look. What to watch out for:

- Sudden changes in behaviour (e.g., withdrawal, anger outbursts)
- Physical symptoms like frequent headaches or stomach aches
- Ongoing difficulty separating from caregivers
- Significant changes in sleep or appetite

What to do: keep an open dialogue with your child and their teacher. Early intervention is key. The earlier we understand what's behind a student's struggle, the sooner we can support them effectively.

2. *Q. What should I do if my child is refusing to go to school?*

A. School refusal can be one of the most stressful situations for families and teachers. It often stems from underlying anxiety, fear of separation, social issues, academic stress, or even past trauma.

What NOT to do: avoid yelling, punishing, or shaming your child for their fear. These reactions can reinforce anxiety and make the problem worse.

What TO do:

- Validate their feelings. Try: "I know going to school feels really hard right now. Let's figure out what's making it feel that way."
- Maintain routines. Keep mornings structured and avoid letting school refusal lead to "fun" alternatives at home (TV, games, etc.)
- Work with the school team. Inform the teachers, educational advisors, school psychologist, as soon as school refusal starts. A team-based plan is usually more successful.

^{*1}Note: The quotes and sample dialogues included in this newsletter are intended as examples only. Feel free to adapt the language to fit your own voice, your child's age, or your classroom environment. What matters most is the intention behind the words, not the exact phrasing.

In some cases, external therapy is needed to threat the root causes of school avoidance.

3. *Q. How can I talk to my child about mental health without scaring them?*

A. Talking about mental health does not need to be heavy or clinical. In fact, normalising emotions and conversations about feelings is one of the best ways to build emotional resilience.

Use age-appropriate language:

For younger children: “everyone has feelings. Sometimes we feel happy, and other times we feel sad or nervous. That’s okay.”

For older kids or teenagers: “Mental health is just like physical heath. If something’s not feeling right, we can talk about it and find support.”

Model emotional openness:

You don’t have to be perfect. Share when you have felt nervous or overwhelmed and explain how you managed it. Kids learn more from what we **do** than what we **say**.

4. *Q. What role do teachers play in supporting student mental health?*

A. Teacher are often the first line of defence when it comes to spotting emotional or behavioural challenges. They spend more time with students than almost anyone else during the week and are uniquely positioned to notice when something is off.

How teachers support mental health:

- Creating a predictable, safe, and inclusive classroom environment
- Building positive relationships with students
- Using trauma-informed or social-emotional learning (SEL) strategies
- Referring students to the school psychologist, and Care Team when concerns arise.

What teachers are not: Therapists. But they are key partners in a collaborative mental health approach, and their observations are often the first step toward getting a student the support they need.

5. *Q. Can mental health really affect academic performance?*

A. Yes. Mental health has a direct impact on a student's ability to learn.

Emotional well-being affects:

- Attention and concentration: anxiety and stress make it difficult to focus or retain new information.
- Motivation: depression can drain a student's energy and interest in schoolwork.
- Memory and processing speed: emotional overload can cause students to "shut down" during lessons or tests.
- Behaviour: unregulated emotions may show up as impulsivity, acting out, or defiance.

Supporting a student's mental health Is not a distraction from academics, it is often a prerequisite for academic success.

6. *Q. What resources are available if I am worried about my child's mental health?*

A. Our school has a multi-tiered support system that includes school psychologist, educational advisors, learning support coordinator, educational advisors. If you are concerned about your child:

- Start by contacting their teachers. They can share observations and initiate a referral
- Reach out to the school psychologist
- Consult your paediatrician.
- Local community mental health services
- Online therapy platform.

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- Crisis text lines or hotlines for more urgent needs.

Early support leads to better outcomes.

Final Thoughts

September is the perfect time to lay the foundation for a mentally healthy school year. By focusing on emotional well-being early, we can help students feel safe, connected, and ready to learn. Whether you are a parent or a teacher, your presence, empathy, and partnership make a world of a difference! On the official school website, under the school psychologist section you can find an *External Resources List* of organisations and services available in the region of Karlsruhe.

Let's make this school year not just about getting back to school, but also about **feeling good about being here.**

If you have any concerns about your child's stress levels or would like further resources, don't hesitate to reach out to the school psychologist.

- The Mind Hub, by Marina Stavrou

