



III. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Return-to-school responses should anticipate the **psychological and socio-emotional impacts of the pandemic on teachers and learners**. Some teachers may feel vulnerable to the illness, have sick family members, or have their own young children or vulnerable parents to look after. Students may need additional psychological and socio-emotional support. A whole new set of vulnerabilities could have reared up during school closures, including disruption of vital safety nets such as school meals or exposure to other trauma in “at-risk” households.

School leaders can monitor teachers, and suggest if they should be assessed with regard to their overall well-being, and refer them to mental health services if needed. In school, teachers should also be empowered in self-care and given skills to manage work and COVID-19-related stress so they can respond effectively to the needs of students and other staff. School leaders should consider the additional risk to girls, as well as wider child protection concerns.

Guiding questions for school leaders

Staff psychological and socio-emotional well-being

Have you considered:

- reflecting on how the COVID-19 crisis is affecting your role as a school leader, your own psychological and socio-emotional wellbeing, and the wellbeing of your staff?
- discussing the importance of self-care, stress management, and overall psychological and socio-emotional well-being with your teachers and education support staff?
- developing a plan to support staff well-being when schools reopen, including how to mobilize and maintain a peer support network?
- organizing for yourself and your colleagues, training on recognizing and referring those showing signs of distress to mental health specialists?
- exploring measures that could be taken to provide additional psychological and socio-emotional support for vulnerable and at-risk staff members, including those who have increased workloads due to the crisis?

- discussing with your staff how their roles have been affected by the crisis and how to manage and meet expectations once your school reopens? **(see also Section IV)**

- exploring possibilities for more effective staff time management and reducing workload pressure, for example by streamlining or decreasing paperwork and other administrative responsibilities?

- prioritizing psychological and socio-emotional support for vulnerable and at-risk teachers, including those:

- of advanced age,

- with pre-existing medical conditions, or

- disadvantaged by fewer resources and increased workloads due to taking extra shifts or engaging in blended learning?

Preparing staff to provide psychosocial support to learners

Have you considered:

- discussing and developing with your staff a clear strategy on how to engage in reassuring dialogue about school reopening with learners, parents and caregivers?

- exploring possibilities for providing inclusive and gender-responsive staff training and related resources, including checklists, on how to identify and work with learners experiencing distress, anxiety and other vulnerabilities related to COVID-19 (e.g. girls who may have suffered from sexual abuse, and/or early and unintended pregnancy during school closures)?

- providing checklists for teachers to assess learners' behaviour and reactions in relation to stress and anxiety, and training teachers to provide needed support?

- if teachers can't provide support, are there any other personnel in the school who can?

- whether teachers know how to report suspicions of abuse, violence or neglect of children?

- whether you and your staff have been responsive to the needs of some families for a more flexible return to school?

- exploring possibilities to train teachers in classroom management and conflict resolution skills, including understanding the importance of positive reinforcement to deal more effectively with difficult classroom situations as a result of students suffering from COVID-19-related distress?

- reviewing and revising with your staff, if necessary, relevant child protection policies and mechanisms at your school and in your community, and ensuring staff members are aware of how to report suspicions of abuse, violence, or neglect of children in a professional and confidential manner?

- reviewing and revising with your staff, if necessary, codes of conduct and discipline policies and mechanisms at your school, and ensuring all staff members are aware that there is zero tolerance for corporal punishment and other forms of cruel or degrading punishment?

- exploring the possibilities for your school and/or the wider community to continue to provide or begin providing essential social services to vulnerable learners, including mental health support, social protection and nutrition?

Combat discrimination and stigmatization

Have you considered:

- discussing and developing with your staff school guidelines to identify and prevent bullying, discrimination and stigmatization of learners and teachers related to COVID-19?
- working with your staff, local authorities, community members and other school leaders to support awareness-raising about COVID-19-related discrimination and eliminate exclusion at classroom, school and community levels for teachers and learners?
- working with your staff, local authorities, community members, and other school leaders to promote campaigns to reduce stigma and allay fears about contagion or contamination.

“Before schools reopened, the teachers were worried about resuming work and contracting the virus, as were the parents. We had no WASH facilities, no masks and large classes. Discussions with health staff would have helped us a lot. It would also have been reassuring to have psychologists in schools for psychosocial care.

In the end, we were able to obtain sufficient sanitation and masks from an international NGO, and only one grade returned to school to prepare for exams. The classes were split in two.”

Primary school principal, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso



Tips

Recognize signs of stress. It is important to know how to recognize signs of stress in yourself or in your colleagues. *Teachers in Crisis Contexts Training for Primary School Teachers* offers a list of signs of stress. If you or your staff answers yes to feeling these on a regular basis (once a week or more) then they may be suffering from stress:

1. I feel tense and nervous
2. I have physical aches and pain
3. I am always tired, physically and mentally
4. I cannot tolerate noises
5. My work no longer interests me
6. I act impulsively
7. I can't get distressing events out of my mind
8. I am sad and feel like crying
9. I am less efficient than I used to be
10. I have trouble planning and thinking clearly
11. I have difficulty sleeping
12. Doing even routine things is an effort
13. I am cynical or very critical
14. I have bad dreams or nightmares
15. I am irritable, minor inconveniences or demands annoy me a lot
16. I am spending more time at work than initially

Download the full guide here:

<https://inee.org/resources/teachers-crisis-contexts-training-primary-school-teachers>

Respond to stress. Save the Children has developed a Teacher Professional Development module for teacher well-being that focuses on understanding, identifying and responding to stress as an influencer of teacher and student well-being. The module aims to train teachers to react positively to stress by developing personal strategies and through support of others. For more information, see: [Safe Schools: Teacher Professional Development](#)

Build peer support networks. Peer support networks are important for school leaders' and teachers' well-being. Teachers and other staff can provide mentorship and support to colleagues. Students can provide peer support and look to the community for support as necessary – informal counselling from a PTA member, for example. You can also encourage teachers to share what helps them, which can depend on individuals, cultures and contexts.

Fight discrimination. It is important that teachers and education support staff be briefed on recognizing and addressing discrimination resulting from COVID-19 to help them prevent exclusion and bullying. This can be of school staff and learners who are perceived as being infected, or of wider groups such as people from cultural or ethnic groups that are perceived as more likely to be infected.



Resources & further reading

- [Gender and Education during COVID-19](#), Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2020
- [Tips for parents and caregivers during COVID-19 School Closures: Supporting children's wellbeing and learning](#), Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2020
- [Guidance for parents and caregivers – compilation of resources](#), Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2020
- [Addressing the gender dimensions of school closures](#), UNESCO, 2020
- [How teachers can talk to children about coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#), UNICEF, 2020
- [Psychosocial Support Activities in Child Friendly Spaces, Schools and Communities](#), UNICEF, 2019
- [Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak](#), World Health Organization, 2020