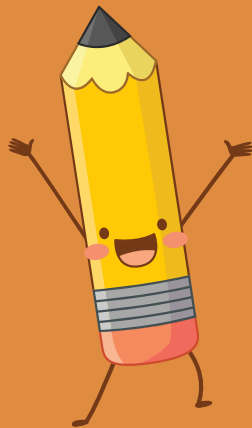


Back to School

It's More Than Just Supplies and Clothes!

July 21, 2026



Welcome to A New School Year!

- “Education is the key to unlocking the world, a passport to freedom.” — Oprah Winfrey
- Presentation Goals:
 - To support educators, day care providers, case workers, parents, and students in having a successful school year.
 - To discuss what goes into having a successful school year from academic, social-emotional, and other standpoints.
 - To share resources and support one another!



Summer Breaks...



- Are filled with vacations, family time, fun activities, and much more for many kids.
- For other kids, it meant quite the opposite, summer was filled with isolation, hunger, abuse.
- **"All children deserve equal access and opportunity to learn."**
— *Walt Disney*
- We know though in many situations, access to education is not always equitable.

Statistics

- Students lose about one to three months of grade-level learning. The **"summer slide"** hits math the hardest—students lose 2.6 months of math skills—while reading comprehension drops by one to two months. Teachers typically spend the first four weeks of the new school year reteaching past material.
- **Cumulative impact:** Children from low-income families are disproportionately affected, often losing 2.5 months of reading skills while their higher-income peers may actually make slight gains due to summer enrichment.

Statistics

- **Snowball effect:** Unchecked summer loss accumulates over time; by 5th grade, significantly affected students can fall 2.5 to 3 years behind their peers.
- **Grade progression:** Learning loss generally becomes more pronounced in higher grade levels, with up to 84% of students showing math skill regression during the transition from 5th to 6th grade.

Statistics

- **Literacy Crisis:** Statewide data shows only 23% of third-grade students in Kansas City's district and charter schools can read at grade level, trailing the 43% statewide average.
- Students who finish the school year academically behind are at the highest risk for the "**summer slide**," a phenomenon where a lack of structured learning causes them to **lose an average of one to three months of academic progress** over the summer break (**US Department of Education**).

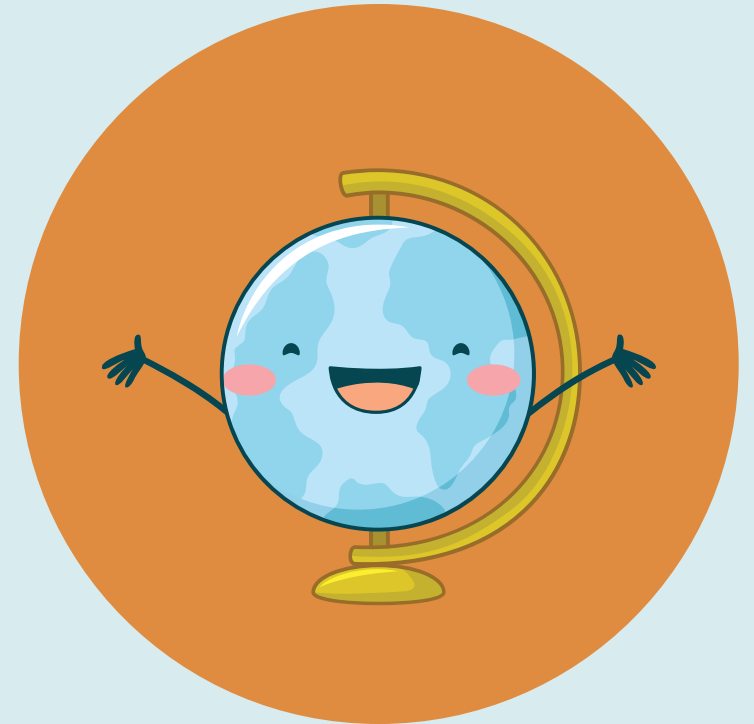
So, what Can we do???



Before A New School Year

- **For students attending a new school or who are just anxious, visit the school campus prior to the year starting if possible.**

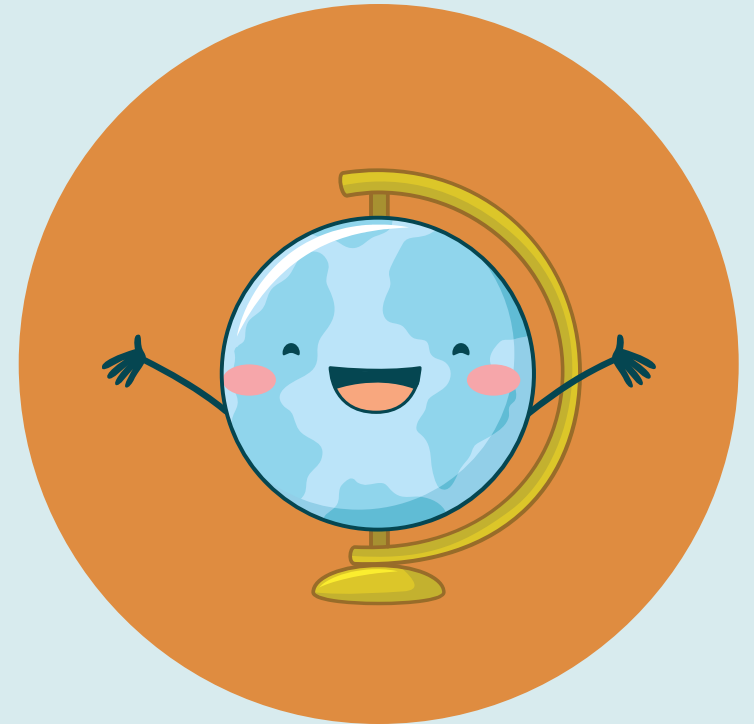
Many schools will offer student, parent and teacher conferences before school starts, so everyone can meet. Additionally, it allows an opportunity for parents and students to see the school.



Before A New School Year

- **Review homework expectations.**

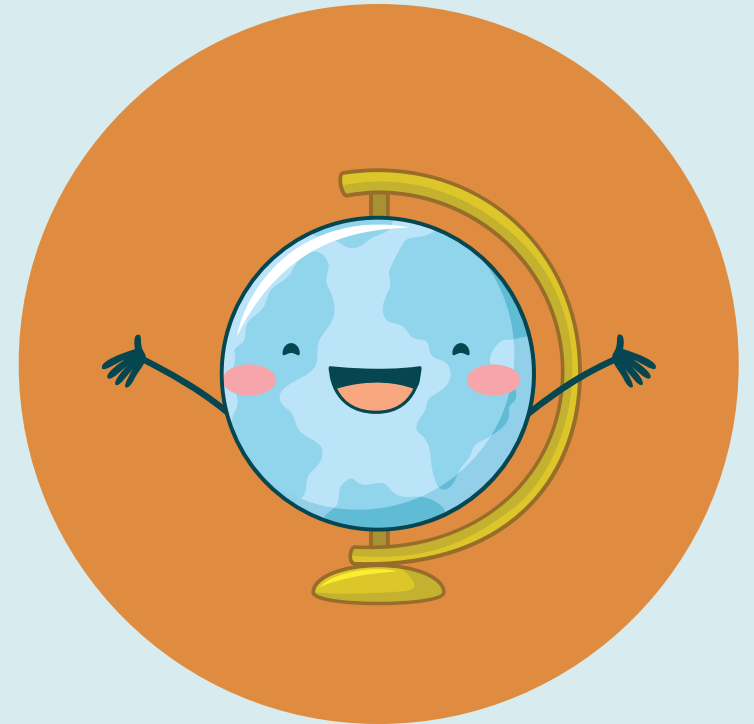
Identify where at home your children will sit to do homework each day, such as at their desk or the kitchen table. When are they expected to start their homework? Right after they get home or after having a snack and a 30-minute break? Review expectations for grades and how the family will address academic challenges. Setting expectations prior to school starting will help both children and parents.



Before A New School Year

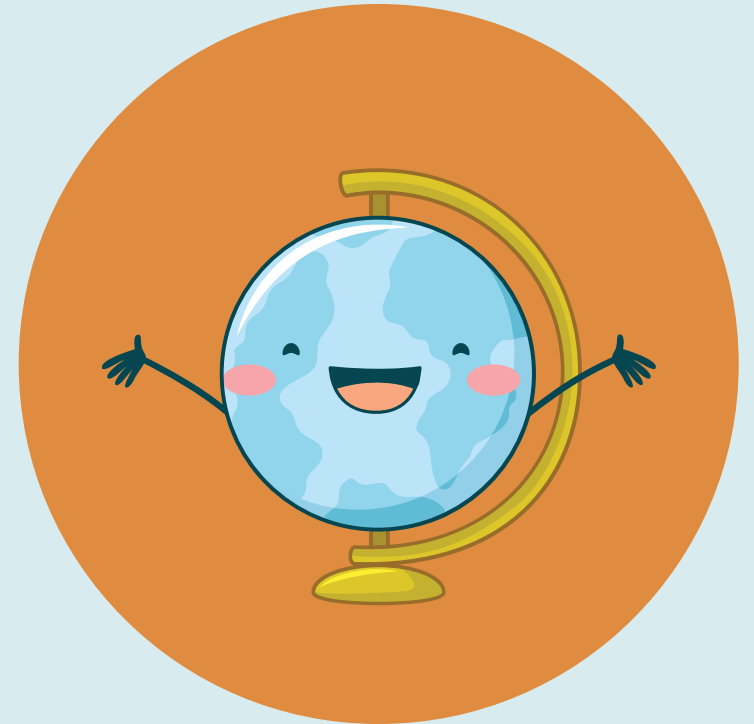
- **Develop a good sleep routine.**

On average, children ages 6–13 require nine to 11 hours of sleep each night. Children ages 13–17 require an estimated eight to 10 hours of sleep per night. Develop consistent sleep routines so your student is able to mentally and emotionally prepare for bedtime. For example, put all electronics away one hour before bedtime, and keep charging stations away from bedrooms to decrease distractions. Additional routine items may be taking a shower, reading a bedtime story, getting a drink or snack and brushing teeth.



Before A New School Year

- **Visual Calendars:** Use a countdown calendar to create predictability and reduce uncertainty.
- **Manage Screen Time:** Limit excessive phone use or social media, particularly at night, to prevent sleep disruptions.
- **Open Conversations:** Create a safe space to talk. Ask how they feel rather than assuming they are stressed, which allows them to voice specific concerns.
- **Normalize Feelings:** Remind students that it is perfectly normal to feel nervous about a new grade or new schoolmates.



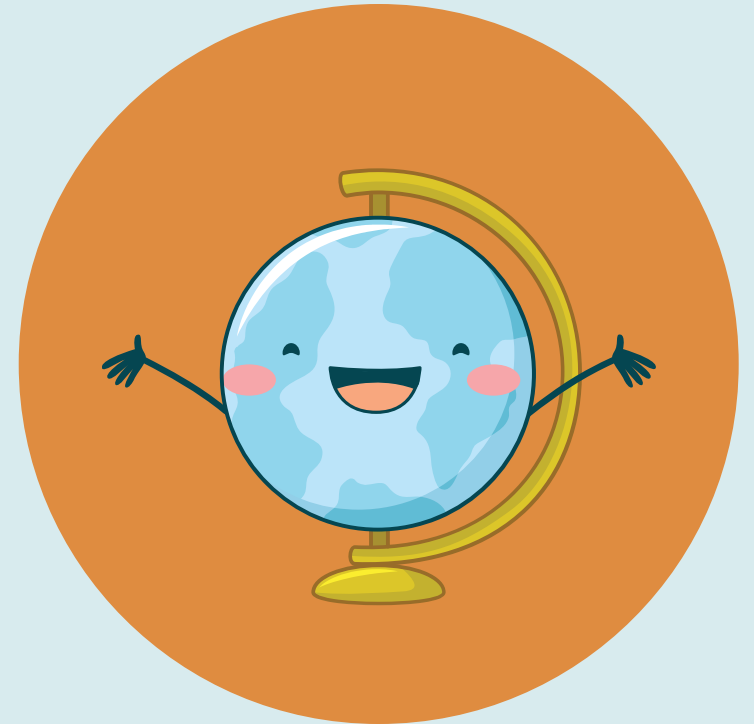
Before A New School Year

- **Goal Setting:** Focus on setting manageable and helpful goals for the upcoming year to build confidence.
- Additional resources:

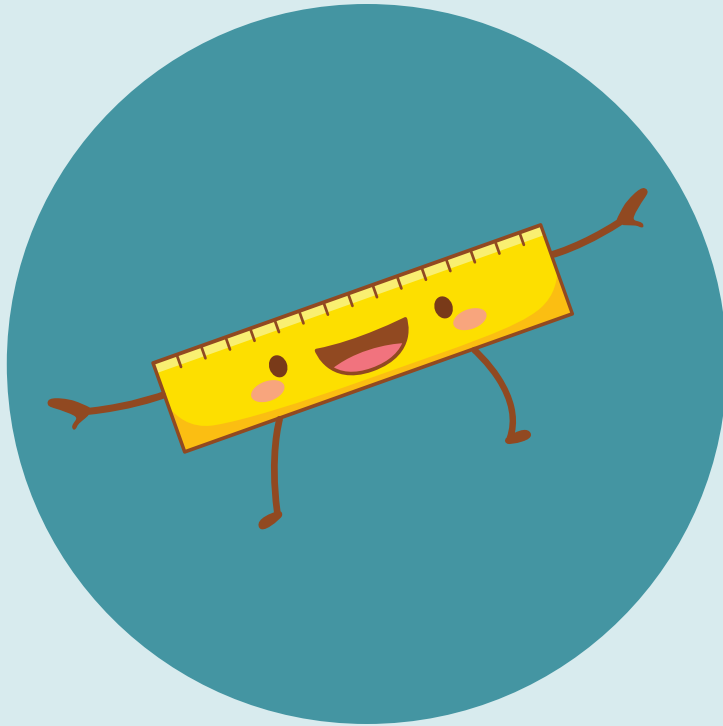
<https://www.klaschools.com/insights/6-tips-to-help-your-child-adjust-to-back-to-school>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-practice/202508/5-tips-to-help-your-child-adjust-to-going-back-to-school>

<https://www.pbs.org/parents/back-to-school>

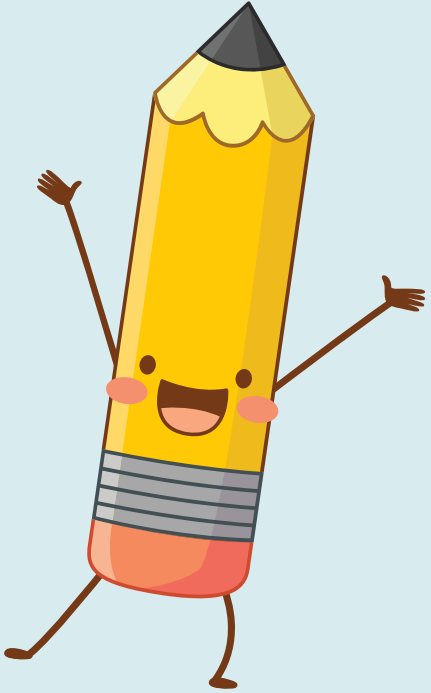


Adjusting to A New School



- <https://www.miracle-recreation.com/blog/helping-children-transition-easily-into-a-new-school-environment/>
- <https://www.childrens.com/health-wellness/8-ways-to-help-your-child-adjust-to-a-new-school>
- https://www.continentalpress.com/blog/help-students-adjusting-to-a-new-school/?srsId=AfmBOoqvNXVdo1fba7sM6B_-rp3WePx8GO8EfsxXyrAQyzBvB83xF3WM

School Supply Resources



- The Ray Way Resource Directory can be found at: www.jacksoncountysoc.com. There is a category entitled “Back to School.” Another category that may be helpful still is “Summer.” There are listings under “Back to School” of multiple free school supply distributions and related resources.
- The SOC can help with small amounts to cover fees, uniform costs, etc. Please reach out sooner than later!

Special Topics

- Student's Mental Health Needs:

<https://www.nami.org/kids-teens-and-young-adults/school-resources/back-to-school-resources/> (resources for educators, parents, and students).

- <https://thearc.org/blog/the-ultimate-back-to-school-guide-for-families-of-children-with-disabilities/>
- A few specific examples...



1

Classroom

Mental Health Contract

HOW TO USE

1. Define mental health for students

As a classroom, begin defining what mental health means to you. This can mean safety, support or self-care, to name a few options. Students may not know what mental health means. To start the conversation, offer [NAMI's Ending the Silence presentation](#) to develop a foundation of mental health and how you will define it in the classroom.

2. Reflect and explore students' mental health needs

Allow students time to reflect on situations they face at school that can impact their mental health. You can do this individually, in small groups or in a large classroom. For example, students can share that they suffer from bullying, stress during exams, relationship disruptions, etc. During this reflection, encourage students to express how these situations make them feel and behave.

3. Identify supports

Bring up ways you can support your students and how students can support each other when mental health situations arise, such as active listening and being respectful. Ask students to write positive messages for each other on a poster to read when they are needing encouragement. Make sure that the poster also lists concrete supports available in the community, such as counseling centers, peer support groups, and general

support like NAMI's HelpLine where students can "Text "HelpLine" to 62640 for support. This gives students a clearer idea of what they can do when they are feeling mental health symptoms and helps them feel empowered to access help.

4. Summarize students' ideas

This is a chance to show your students that you hear them, to validate their ideas and to ensure you are capturing everything from their perspective. By summarizing their ideas, you have the opportunity to guide students and ensure that they have listed everything essential for their mental health.

5. Turn ideas into a contract

Create a poster or a chart to display the finalized contract. The contract should include your classroom's mental health definition, rules, ways you will support each other and places to find support. Make sure to include supports both online and in-school.

6. Sign the contract

To create true accountability, you and each of your students should sign the completed contract. Place the contract in a place in the classroom where it will be most visible.

7. Hold ongoing contract check-ins

Schedule regular mental health check-ins. Ask students to determine if any updates or supports should be added to the contract.

WHEN TO USE

Use the Classroom Contract at any time to break the mental health stigma and encourage students to talk openly and frequently throughout the school year:

- At the beginning of the school year
- During a stressful school season such as prom, midterms, beginning of sports seasons and finals.
- Upon returning from a long break

MENTAL HEALTH CONTRACT EXAMPLE

In our classroom, mental health means

- We agree to support each other with kindness and understanding by:
- For additional support, we know we can:
- We agree to honor this mental health contract by:



Resources for Educators to Create a Safe and Trauma-Informed Classroom

1

- Listen
- Comfort
- Collaborate
- Inspire
- Celebrate

2

- **Cool down** instead of time out: Cool down activities acknowledge that when distressed, children's bodies and minds are focused on fear, and they need time and space to physically recover before they are ready for next steps.^a



NAMI HelpLine Call: 1-800-950-NAMI (6264) | **Text:** "helpline" to 62640
NAMI Teen & Young Adult HelpLine Call: 1-800-950-NAMI (6264) | **Text:** "Friend" to 62640 | **Email:** helpline@nami.org



1



2

Bullying Warning Signs

Bullying is a concern with children of all ages. Know how to spot the warning signs and how to start a conversation with your child about bullying.

Pay attention to your child's behavior for warning signs of bullying. Keep in mind that a child can engage in bullying and be bullied.

Signs of being bullied

- Unexplainable injuries
- Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics or jewelry
- Feeling sick or faking illness
- Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares
- Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school
- Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, self-harm, or suicidal ideation

Signs of bullying others

- Gets into physical or verbal fights
- Has friends who bully others
- Gets sent to the principal's office or to detention frequently
- Has unexplained extra money or new belongings
- Blames others for their problems
- Doesn't accept responsibility for their actions
- Is competitive and worries about their reputation or popularity
- Is increasingly aggressive—hitting, threatening, screaming

Tips for Starting a Conversation

If you suspect your child is bullied, is bullying, or may be a bystander, start by asking questions.

- How has school been lately?
- What do you think of other kids in your class?
- Are there any kids who get picked on?
- What is lunchtime/recess/homeroom like?

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics: Bullying: It's Not OK, <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Bullying-Its-Not-Ok.aspx>

Source: StopBullying.gov, <https://www.stopbullying.gov/bullying/warning-signs>

Helping Your Child Resist Bullying

If your child expresses concern about bullying in their school, you can help them learn behaviors to protect themselves and their classmates.

If your child is being bullied

What to say:

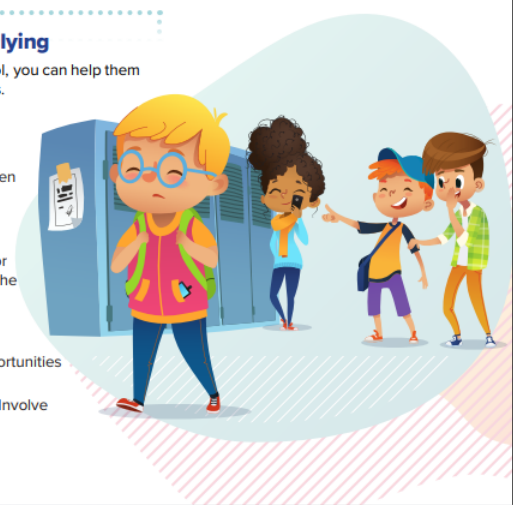
Stay calm. Tell your child it is not their fault, and you will listen and help however you can.

What to teach:

Practice saying, "Stop it," in a calm, firm voice. Use a mirror to practice standing tall and looking unbothered. Ignore the bully by walking away or pretending to text.

What to do:

- Support activities that interest your child. Provide opportunities for your child to socialize with other children.
- Discuss with your child what will make them feel safe. Involve your child in the decision to alert school officials.
- Keep a log of any bullying events that occur.



Additional Local Resources

- <https://futuresfirstkc.org/>
- <https://kclinc.org/>
- <https://familiestogetherinc.org/>
- <https://www.kcpublicschools.org/o/kcps/page/family-services>
- <https://www.kansascitypbs.org/education/early-childhood/>
- <https://www.iam4thirteens.org/>

Additional Local Resources

- <https://www.lyriksinstitute.com/programs-offered.html>
- <https://www.missouriparentsact.org/resources/>
- <https://redcardkc.com/participate>
- <https://showmekcschools.org/>
- Neighborhood community centers and our libraries!

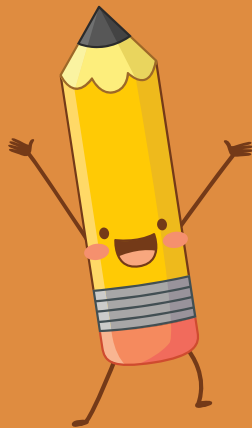
An Upcoming Resource

- Next slide...

SMART Guide

Successful Mastering of Academic Resiliency Tools

2026

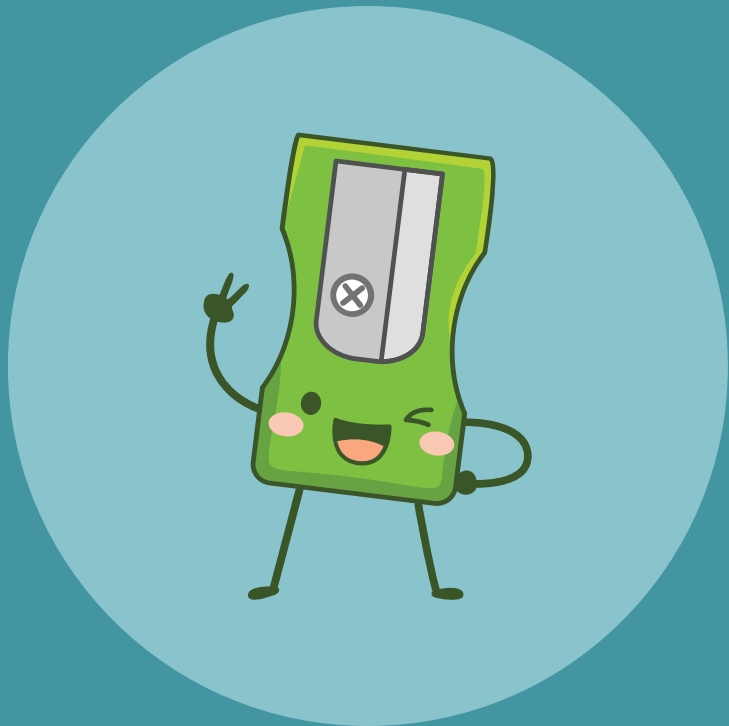


Welcome Educators, Parents, and Students!

- What the SMART Guide Can Do for You:
This guide equips kids with the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral skills needed to navigate school stressors, bounce back from setbacks, and manage mental health. In a classroom, these toolkits—often featuring a mix of worksheets, mindful activities, and behavioral strategies—help children view challenges as learning opportunities rather than insurmountable roadblocks.
- This is based on evidence-based practices and will be posted to the SOC's website in early August.



Questions?



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