

Quick Reference Mental Health Guide

The New Jersey Department of Education
The New Jersey Department of
Children and Families

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**New Jersey Department of Education and
New Jersey Department of Children and Families**

Quick Reference Mental Health Guide

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact every aspect of our lives. This public health emergency has presented unprecedented challenges to our schools and communities. In June, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) released [The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan](#) providing necessary information and considerations for a return to in-person instruction to our school district leaders. Since the provision of those guidelines, districts have made difficult decisions regarding the safe reopening of their schools based upon local needs assessments, staffing capacities, current enrollment numbers, and the unique physical structures within each school. New Jersey students and educators returned to school utilizing operational models such as: hybrid learning, remote instruction, or full in-person instruction. While districts have approached the challenge of school reopening in a variety of ways, all school communities are facing the same fundamental reality that their students and staff have endured, and continue to endure, significant stress and trauma as a result of the ongoing pandemic.

As our schools continue to adjust to daily changes in our public health conditions, our educators remain committed to connecting with our students and families. It is critical to support the mental health of students, families, educators, and build resiliency to adjust to this shifting landscape. We have learned from years of research in education, psychology, physiology, and neuroscience that stress and trauma impact the ability to work and learn. With this in mind, the NJDOE and NJ Department of Children and Families (NJDCF) have collaborated to provide an organized array of resources to assist schools in addressing the emotional well-being and mental health needs of all students and staff.

Earlier this year, a Statewide Mental Health Working Group was formed to develop a comprehensive school-based mental health resource guide to assist districts in addressing the mental health needs of all students. While work on the comprehensive guide continues, to address the immediate needs of educators, students and families, the NJDOE, NJDCF, and a subcommittee of the Statewide Mental Health Working Group created this user-friendly quick reference guide with links to state services, national resources and strategies and practices to address the mental health needs of New Jersey's students and educators.

**New Jersey Department of Education and
New Jersey Department of Children and Families**

Quick Reference Mental Health Guide

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and Response to Intervention (RTI) models provide frameworks for districts to develop tiered levels of prevention, support and intervention that can include comprehensive school mental health and therapeutic supports in addition to academic supports. One benefit of these frameworks is the development of an array of interventions that vary by intensity based on students' needs. The Quick Reference Mental Health Guide includes links to a sampling of documents and websites on reopening schools followed by a list of strategies and practices to address mental health needs organized into three tiers to align with MTSS and RTI frameworks often used in New Jersey schools:

- Primary Prevention or Tier 1 strategies to support all students;
- Secondary Supports for small groups; and
- Tertiary, or Tier 3 Intensive, Interventions.

Key Documents and websites for Reopening Schools:

- [NJDOE The Road Back – Restart and Recovery Plan and Updates](#)
- [The American Academy of Pediatrics' \(AAP\) COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Return to In-person Education in Schools](#)
- [NASP and ASCA School Reentry Considerations](#)
- [The National Association of School Psychologists' COVID-19 Resource Center](#)

Key Resources for Planning a School-Based Mental Health System

- [School-based Mental Health Needs Assessment and Planning: The SHAPE System](#)
- [School-based Mental Health Screening Guide: The SHAPE System](#)
- [Creating School Mental Health Referral Pathways: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](#)

Tier 1: Universal Supports

Tier 1 universal supports are those supports provided to *all* students in the school or classroom.

New Jersey Department of Education and
New Jersey Department of Children and Families

Quick Reference Mental Health Guide

Tier 1 Supports:

- [Tier 1 – Mental Health Support for All: The SHAPE System](#)
- [Mental Health Practices: Multi-Tiered Supports – Transcend Education](#)

School Climate Considerations:

- Use school climate surveys to identify needs and plan for improvement
 - [NJDOE School Climate Improvement Resources](#)
 - [NJ School Climate Survey](#)
- Solicit ongoing student feedback around return-to-school activities
 - [NJ School Climate Resource Strategy Guide](#)
 - [Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#)
- Engage parents and staff in school climate work
 - [Mental Health Practices: Safe School Environment – Transcend Education](#)
 - [Connect with the County Interagency Coordinating Council](#)

Teacher and School Staff Well-Being:

- Provide teachers and school staff with links to self-care, self-help, and psychoeducational resources
 - [Self-Care Strategies for Educators during the Coronavirus Crisis](#)
 - [5 Strategies for Teacher Self-Care \(ASCD\)](#)
- Identify potential referral paths and community-based supports for teachers and school staff
 - [NJEA's Member Helpline](#)
 - [NJ MentalHealthCares Hotline – 866-202-HELP \(4357\)](#)
 - [NJ Department of Human Services Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services \(DMHAS\) Ombudsman](#)

New Jersey Department of Education and
New Jersey Department of Children and Families

Quick Reference Mental Health Guide

- Use trauma-sensitive approaches to provide feedback and support
 - [Supporting Teachers Through Stress Management \(NASP\)](#)
 - [Survey Questions to Assess Staff Needs – The Management Center](#)

Fostering Positive Behaviors and Relationships:

- Adopt a 3-tiered Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Model (PBIS)
 - [New Jersey Positive Behavior Support in Schools – NJPBSIS](#)
- Utilize restorative practices when incidents occur
 - [Restorative Practices: A Guide for Educators – Schott Foundation](#)
- Utilize trauma-sensitive approaches to provide feedback and support
 - [Strategies for Trauma-Informed Distance Learning – WestED](#)
 - [COVID Class Check-In Survey – Making Caring Common – Harvard GSE](#)
- Ensure all students have at least one trusted adult that they are connected with in the building
 - [Relationship Mapping – Ensuring Connections at School – Making Caring Common – Harvard GSE](#)
 - [Building Developmental Relationships During the COVID-19 Crisis – The Search Institute](#)
- Provide staff with training and professional development on cultural responsiveness
 - [Cultural Responsiveness Field Guide-National Center on PBIS](#)

Positive Discipline Practices

- Ensure that 3–5 clear expectations are taught, practiced, and reinforced
 - [NJPBSIS Universal Planning Resources](#)
- Introduce or reintroduce the expectations framework throughout the school building
 - [National Center on PBIS – Tier 1 Resources](#)

New Jersey Department of Education and
New Jersey Department of Children and Families

Quick Reference Mental Health Guide

- Use “Try First Strategies” in the classroom then use office conduct referral and discipline data to identify students in need of Tier 2 and 3 intervention
 - [NJPBSIS Classroom Management Resources](#)
 - [OSEP IDEAs That Work: Supporting and Responding to Behavior](#)
- Reinforce COVID-19 safety expectations with positive reinforcement and incentives rather than punishment
 - [A Template for Using MTSS to Address School Attendance – UC Davis](#)

Mental Health Literacy

- Work with students and staff to assess mental health literacy and identify ways to promote it within the school and community
 - [Supporting Student Mental Health: Resources to Prepare Educators](#)
 - [Information about Mental Health First Aid Training in NJ](#)
- Develop mental health literacy activities throughout the year for both in-person or remote settings
 - [Mental Health and High School Curriculum Guide](#)
- Use culturally responsive approaches to mental health literacy
 - [Culturally Responsive Problem-Solving Guide – Wisconsin DPI](#)
- Work to decrease the stigma of mental health in school and the community
 - [Mental Health Literacy for Pre-service and Practicing Teachers – TEACH Mental Health](#)
- Ensure that faculty and staff have completed state-mandated trainings in suicide prevention and bullying
 - [NJDOE Suicide Prevention Resources](#)
 - [Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide](#)
 - [NJDOE Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying Tutorials](#)

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

- Identify areas within the curriculum in which to integrate SEL
 - [SEL “Look-fors” in Blended Learning – CASEL](#)

New Jersey Department of Education and
New Jersey Department of Children and Families

Quick Reference Mental Health Guide

- Use the NJ SEL Competencies and Sub-Competencies to Guide SEL programming
 - [NJDOE SEL Resource Page](#)
 - [SEL Resources during COVID-19 – CASEL](#)
 - [SEL Effort and Inventory Analysis – SEL Needs and Effectiveness – CASEL](#)
 - [Equity and SEL: What Educators Need to Know – CASEL](#)

Meaningful Family and Community Engagement

- Proactively reach out to community organizations, providers, businesses, non-profits to assess levels of potential support and collaboration
 - [Getting Started with Real Family Engagement During COVID-19 – The Flamboyant Foundation](#)
 - [A Blueprint for How After School Programs and Community Partners Can Help – The Afterschool Alliance](#)
- Involve parents and guardians in all aspects of returning to school
 - [NJDOE New Jersey Tiered System of Supports \(NJTSS\) Parent and Family Engagement Assessment Tool](#)
 - [Statewide Parent Advocacy Network \(SPAN\) for Students with Disabilities: Resource Library](#)
 - [National PTA COVID-19 Resources](#)
 - [NJ PTA Family Engagement Resources](#)
- Educate parents and families on mental health
 - [Searchable Learning Tools for Parents – Learning Heroes](#)
 - [NJ Parent Link: The Early Childhood, Parenting and Professional Resource Center](#)
- Establish connections for potential before-during-and after care services
 - [New Jersey’s Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies by County](#)
 - [NJSACC: The Statewide Network for NJ’s Afterschool Communities – Virtual After School Resource Guide](#)
- Provide parents with support for at-home instructional days
 - [Be a Learning Hero](#)
 - [NJ 211 Resource Finder](#)

**New Jersey Department of Education and
New Jersey Department of Children and Families**

Quick Reference Mental Health Guide

New Jersey’s System of Care

New Jersey’s System of Care Contract System Administrator, [PerformCare](#), is the single point of entry to the Children’s System of Care (CSOC). PerformCare’s website provides a host of resources for providers, educators, youth, and families for behavioral health, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and substance use treatment needs. This is the single point of entry for services such as Care Management Organizations, Mobile Response, and Family Support Organizations.

The CSOC helps professionals and families connect to healthy supports in their communities and home counties. These [ResourceNets](#) are administered by the respective Care Management Organization (CMO) in each county throughout New Jersey.

Tier 2 Supports: Intervention for Identified “At-Risk” Students

Tier 2 supports are targeted supports that are provided to small groups of students with similar needs who are identified based on student data.

Tier 2 Supports

[Tier 2 and 3 Supports for Students: The SHAPE System](#)

Brief Interventions

Teach Problem Solving Skills

- [Vanderbilt’s Center for Teaching – Teaching Problem Solving](#)

Use Motivational Interviewing

- [School-Based Motivational Interviewing](#)

Goal Setting and Tracking

- [Goal Setting for Middle School and High School Students](#)
- [Society of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology Evidence Based Interventions](#)

Group Interventions

Consider utilizing existing staff (School Psychologists, Social Workers, and/or school counselors) to provide remote support groups for students who are identified as needing assistance. For example, remote counseling groups could include social skills groups and/or problem-solving groups.

**New Jersey Department of Education and
New Jersey Department of Children and Families**

Quick Reference Mental Health Guide

Since 2000, the [Traumatic Loss Coalition](#) has been providing support to communities affected by traumatic events such as homicide and illness, the most difficult being suicide.

Through funding from the Children’s System of Care (CSOC), University Behavioral Health Care (UBHC) offers several trainings, currently virtually, to youth and family-serving professionals regarding approaches to interventions, skills building, engagement, and various topics including Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Nurtured Heart Approach, and more.

- [UBHC virtual trainings](#)

Mentoring Programs

- [Extensive Mentoring Resources by the United Way including Tools and Guidebooks](#)
- [The National Mentoring Resource Center](#)
- [US Dept of Labor: Mentoring Youth and Young Parents: A Guidebook for Programs Helping Youth and Young Parents Navigate a Pathway to Self-Sufficiency](#)
- [Big Brothers Big Sisters of NJ](#)

Check-in Systems

- [Check & Connect](#)
- [Check-In/Check-Out \(CICO\) Tip Sheet](#)

Meaningful Family and Community Engagement

- Connect families with local community providers, county resources, and other organizations to enhance Tier 2 and 3 supports
- Mobile Response and Stabilization Services, accessed via [PerformCare](#), are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to help children and youth who are experiencing emotional or behavioral challenges. The services are designed to defuse an immediate crisis, keep children and their families safe, and maintain the children in their own homes or current living situation (such as a foster home, treatment home, or group home) in the community.
- Proactively reach out to the Care Management Organization in your County to establish connections to better support families who may be receiving Tier 2 or 3 supports outside of school.
- Explore higher education partnerships (school psychology and/or social work programs) to assist with the further development of mental health curriculum resources and supports.

New Jersey Department of Education and
New Jersey Department of Children and Families

Quick Reference Mental Health Guide

Tier 3 Supports: Intensive Interventions to Address Significant Needs

Tier 3 supports and interventions are individualized and intensive.

Tier 3 Supports

[Tier 2 and 3 Supports for Students: The SHAPE System](#)

Individualized Therapeutic and Behavioral Interventions for Students and Families

- Consider the school district's capacity to provide individualized counseling remotely and/or in-person, monitoring of progress, and therapeutic support to identified students with current staff and programs.
 - [NJPBSIS – Function-Based Problem-Solving for Challenging Behavior](#)
 - [Check & Connect](#)
- Collaborate with local community providers, county resources, and other organizations to enhance Tier 2 and 3 supports.
- Connect students and parents to individual counseling, remote or in-person, family therapy, out-patient programs, or addiction services as needed.
 - [PerformCare](#)
 - CSOC [Mobile Response and Stabilization Services](#) accessed via PerformCare