

Back to School, Back to Balance

A family guide to helping children feel confident, connected and ready for the school year.



ELEMENTARY TOOLKIT
FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS
JK – GRADE 8



Small steps now can make a big difference all year long.



REST WELL



FEEL GOOD



CONNECT



BE BRAVE



STAY ON TRACK

Table of Contents

Inside you'll find practical tools, meaningful activities, and helpful tips to support your child's emotional wellness and set the stage for a successful school year.

- 1**  **Why School Transitions Matter**
- 2**  **The Back-to-School Readiness Wheel**
- 3**  **Two Weeks Before School**
- 4**  **My Feelings About School**
- 5**  **Building Brave**
- 6**  **Friendship Builder**
- 7**  **Calm Your Mind Toolkit**
- 8**  **Family Connection**
- 9**  **When Extra Support Might Help**
- 10**  **Resources & Support in Niagara**



You are not alone.

We're here to walk beside you and your family every step of the way.



1



Why School Transitions Matter

NEW PLACES. NEW PEOPLE. BIG FEELINGS.

Starting or returning to school is a big step. It's normal for children to feel excited, worried, happy and unsure—all at the same time.

Understanding these feelings and getting ready together can help make the transition smoother for everyone.

COMMON TRANSITION FEELINGS



WORRIED

Feeling nervous about new things or changes.



EXCITED

Looking forward to learning and seeing friends.



UNSURE

Not knowing what to expect can feel tough.



HOPEFUL

Believing in yourself and looking ahead.

MY TRANSITION GOALS

This year, I want to:

Three heart icons followed by horizontal lines for writing goals.

I will remind myself:

Horizontal line for writing a reminder.

I am looking forward to:

Horizontal line for writing something to look forward to.



DID YOU KNOW?

Feeling a little nervous is a sign that you care. It means you're getting ready to try something important. You are braver than you think!



FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

Validate your child's feelings and reassure them that it's okay to feel a mix of emotions. Small conversations every day can build confidence and connection.



YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

Many families experience challenges during transitions. Reach out for support—we're here to help.



NEED SUPPORT?

Find a walk-in clinic near you at <https://pathstonementalhealth.ca/walk-in-clinics>



PARENT TIP

Practice short "what if" talks before school starts. Example: "What if I feel nervous? What can help?"

Plan together, stay calm, and celebrate progress.





The Back-to-School Readiness Wheel

GETTING READY IN ALL AREAS

Being ready for school isn't just about supplies. It's about feeling ready in many different ways. Use this wheel to check in and see how you're doing in each area.



MY STRENGTHS

I am doing well in:

♥ _____

♥ _____

I want to work on:

♥ _____

♥ _____

♥ I can take small steps every day to feel more ready!



FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

Look at the wheel together and celebrate strengths in each area. Choose one area to focus on at a time. Small steps create big change.



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PARENT TIP

Remember, "ready" looks different for every child. Focus on progress, not perfection. You know your child best.



3

Pathstone 
Mental Health

Two Weeks Before School

SMALL STEPS TODAY, BIGGER CONFIDENCE TOMORROW

Getting a head start can help ease worries and make the first day feel more manageable. Try these simple steps together. You've got this!



SIMPLE STEPS TO TRY



- ☐ **Check the Schedule**
Look at important dates, start times, and bus schedules.



- ☐ **Get Organized**
Gather school supplies, pack backpacks, and set up a space for homework.



- ☐ **Adjust Routines**
Shift bedtimes and mornings earlier to help everyone adjust.



- ☐ **Practice Transitions**
Visit the school, try the bus route, or practice drop-off goodbyes.



- ☐ **Talk About Feelings**
Ask open questions and listen. Let your child know it's okay to feel a mix of emotions.

MY TWO-WEEK PLAN

This week, we will:



We're most looking forward to:



FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

Consistency and connection are key. Celebrate small wins and keep encouragement front and centre. You're helping build confidence one day at a time.



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PARENT TIP

Create a visual countdown or checklist together. It can make the build-up to school feel fun and less overwhelming.



YOUR NOTES: _____



Proudly supporting children, youth and families in St. Catharines, Welland and across Niagara. Together, we build stronger, healthier communities.



My Feelings About School

ALL FEELINGS ARE OKAY

It's normal to feel lots of different emotions about school. Naming your feelings can help you understand them and find healthy ways to cope.

COMMON FEELINGS ABOUT SCHOOL



WORRIED

I might feel nervous about new places, people or changes.



EXCITED

I might feel happy about learning new things or seeing friends.



UNSURE

I might feel unsure about what to expect or how things will go.



NERVOUS

I might feel like my stomach has wiggles or that I need reassurance.



HOPEFUL

I might feel positive about trying new things and growing.



EMBARRASSED

I might feel shy or worry about making mistakes.



SAD

I might miss someone or feel disappointed sometimes.



FRUSTRATED

I might feel annoyed when things are difficult or don't go as planned.



DID YOU KNOW?

Feelings come and go. What you feel today might be different tomorrow, and that's okay!



FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

Listen without fixing. When children feel heard, they feel safe. Help them name feelings and remind them that it's okay to feel a mix of emotions.



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PARENT TIP

Validate your child's feelings by saying, "I can see this is hard." Then help them focus on one small step they can take.



YOUR NOTES:



HOW I FEEL ABOUT SCHOOL TODAY

Right now, I feel:



Not Good



Really Good

The feelings I have most about school are:

One thing I'm looking forward to:

One thing I'm worried about:

Something that helps me feel better is:



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Building Brave

COURAGE GROWS CONFIDENCE

Bravery isn't about being fearless.
It's about trying even when something
feels hard or scary.
Every brave choice you make helps
you grow stronger inside.

WAYS TO BUILD BRAVE



Start Small

Take tiny steps outside your
comfort zone. Small brave
choices lead to big growth.



Try New Things

Challenge yourself to try
something you've never
done before.



Speak Up

Share your ideas, ask for help,
or set a boundary. Your voice
matters.



Keep Going

It's okay if it's hard. Keep
practicing—every time you try,
you get braver.



Celebrate Progress

Notice your wins, even the small
ones. You are growing stronger
every day!

BE BRAVE,
BE KIND,
BE YOU.



MY BRAVE PLAN

Something I want to be brave about:

1 My first small step:



2 Things that might feel hard (and that's okay):



3 People who can support me:



4 How I will celebrate when I'm brave:



I can be brave, even when I'm scared.



FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

Encourage bravery by praising effort,
not just outcomes. Remind your child
that mistakes are part of learning and
that you're proud of their courage.



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transitions. Reach out for support—
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PARENT TIP

Model bravery by sharing how you face
challenges. Your example shows your child
that courage is a choice anyone can make.



YOUR NOTES:



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Friendship Builder

STRONG FRIENDSHIPS, STRONGER YOU

Good friends can make life better, more fun, and more meaningful. Building healthy friendships takes practice, kindness, and respect—one connection at a time.



WAYS TO BE A GREAT FRIEND



Be Kind

Small acts of kindness—like a smile or a kind word—go a long way.



Listen Well

Pay attention when your friend talks. It shows you care.



Include Others

Invite others to join in and make sure no one feels left out.



Be Honest

Tell the truth and keep promises. Trust is the foundation of friendship.



Support Each Other

Celebrate your friends' wins and be there during tough times.

MY FRIENDSHIP GOALS

This year, I want to:



Ways I can be a better friend:



I will build new friendships by:



If I have a friendship challenge, I can:



♥ I can be a friend and I can ask for help, too.



FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

Help your child practice friendship skills at home. Talk about kindness, inclusion, and how to handle disagreements with respect.



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NEED SUPPORT?

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PARENT TIP

Encourage your child to reach out to one person at school this week. It could be a new friend or someone they don't talk to often.



YOUR NOTES:



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7

Pathstone
Mental Health

Calm Your Mind

PEACE ON THE INSIDE, STRENGTH FOR THE OUTSIDE

A calm mind helps you think clearly, handle stress, and feel more in control. You can learn simple ways to calm your mind anytime, anywhere.



TOOLS TO CALM YOUR MIND



Deep Breathing

Breathe in slowly through your nose, hold, then breathe out through your mouth. Repeat.



Mindful Moments

Pay attention to what's around you—what you see, hear, smell, feel, and taste.



Positive Thoughts

Notice negative thoughts and replace them with kinder, more helpful ones.



Recharge Activities

Do things you enjoy—listen to music, draw, read, walk, or spend time outside.



Rest and Sleep

Good sleep helps your mind reset. Aim for a consistent bedtime routine.

MY CALM PLAN



When I start to feel stressed or overwhelmed, I can:



Things that help me relax:



People I can talk to when I need to calm down:



I can take a deep breath, slow down, and give myself what I need.



FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

Model calm by managing your own stress and showing healthy coping strategies. Create a calm space at home and encourage regular breaks from screens.



YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

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NEED SUPPORT?

Find a walk-in clinic near you at <https://pathstonementalhealth.ca/walk-in-clinics>



PARENT TIP

Try a 5-minute calm break together. Breathe, stretch, or do a quiet activity. Little moments add up!



YOUR NOTES:



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Family Connections

STRONGER TOGETHER, EVERY DAY

Family is the people who love and support you. Spending quality time together, talking openly, and helping each other out builds trust and brings you closer.



WAYS TO STRENGTHEN FAMILY CONNECTIONS



Talk and Listen

Share your day and really listen to each other without distractions.



Make Time Together

Eat meals together, play games, or enjoy activities as a family.



Show Appreciation

Say "thank you," give compliments, and celebrate each other.



Support Each Other

Be there during hard times and cheer each other on during good ones.



Create Traditions

Special routines and traditions create lasting memories and a sense of belonging.

MY FAMILY CONNECTION PLAN



This year, I want to:



Ways we can spend quality time together:



How I can show appreciation to my family:



When we face challenges, we can:



 I am proud to be part of my family.



FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

Strong family connections protect mental well-being. Try family check-ins, share meals, and be open about feelings. Small moments build strong bonds.



YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

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NEED SUPPORT?

Find a walk-in clinic near you at <https://pathstonementalhealth.ca/walk-in-clinics>



PARENT TIP

Plan one family activity this week. Even 15 minutes together—like a walk, storytime, or cooking—can make a big difference.



YOUR NOTES:



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9

When Extra Support Might Help



It's okay to need extra help sometimes. Getting support early can make a big difference.

Here are some signs to watch for and ways we can help.

SIGNS YOUR CHILD MIGHT NEED EXTRA SUPPORT



Feeling sad, anxious or worried most days



Trouble sleeping or having nightmares



Big changes in mood or behaviour



Withdrawing from friends or activities



Struggling at school or avoiding school



Talking about self-harm or feeling hopeless

Trust your instincts. You know your child best. If something feels "off," reach out.



HOW WE CAN HELP



TALK TO US

We're here to listen without judgment and help you understand what your child needs.



GET SUPPORT

We can connect you with programs and services that are the right fit for your family.



BUILD SKILLS

Your child can learn ways to manage big feelings and build confidence.



WORK TOGETHER

We'll support your whole family every step of the way.



FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

Asking for help is a sign of strength. You don't have to have all the answers. We're here to support you and your child—together.



You are not alone. We've got you.



YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

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NEED SUPPORT?

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YOUR NOTES:



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10 Resources & Support in Niagara

You don't have to figure things out alone.
There are caring people and services in our community ready to support you and your family.
Reach out anytime—you matter.



WHERE TO FIND SUPPORT



ONE STOP TALK Kids Help Line

Get free, confidential help for children, youth and caregivers across Niagara.

☎ 905-684-8336

💬 Text: 905-684-3620

🌐 onestoptalk.ca



KIDS HELP PHONE

24/7 support for kids and youth across Canada.
Get help with whatever you're going through.

☎ 1-800-668-6868

💬 Text: 686868

🌐 kidshelpphone.ca



PATHSTONE MENTAL HEALTH WALK-IN CLINICS

No appointment needed.
Talk to a mental health professional.

- St. Catharines
- Welland
- Port Colborne
- Pelham / Fonthill
- Grimsby
- Beamsville / Lincoln
- Niagara Falls

Find locations and hours at:
pathstonementalhealth.ca/walk-in-clinics



CRISIS SUPPORT

If you or someone you know is in crisis, help is available 24/7.

☎ 911

☎ 988 (Suicide Crisis Helpline)

💬 Crisis Services Canada
1-833-456-4566

OTHER COMMUNITY SUPPORTS



SCHOOL SUPPORT

Talk to your child's teacher, guidance counsellor or principal. They can connect you with school resources.



COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Local programs offer support with mental health, parenting, learning and recreation.
Ask us or check our website for what's available.



PARENT & CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUPS

Connecting with other parents can help you feel understood and less alone.



CULTURAL & INDIGENOUS SUPPORTS

Culturally safe services are available. We can help you find the right support for your family.



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