

How You Can Help Your Students Cope With Holiday Stress



Posted Dec. 19, 2018 in [Better Conversation](#)

For many, this time off brings a lot of stress and anxiety. Not all of your students look forward to the upcoming holiday season. For many, this time off brings a lot of stress and anxiety. Students may exhibit more frequent or new behaviors this time of year. The behaviors can look differently for the students in your class. You might have some students who act out verbally or physically. There may be students who start to become absent more leading up to a break, or just do not engage with peers or complete classwork as they have done in the past. Many students struggle during unstructured times such as passing periods in the hallways, recess and in the lunchroom.

You can expect these behaviors in the coming days or weeks before a break. There are ways that you might be able to prepare your students and help them to be more successful prior to the holiday break. Some children may not have a lot of interaction with others during extended breaks from school because their parents are working, so they are left on their own most of the

day; others may be grieving the loss of a family member.

A few years back, I had a student of mine who had tragically lost their parent in a car accident. The father was out Christmas shopping for the family and late that night their family got a call saying he was in an accident and didn't make it. For this family, the holidays are especially tough.

The following year we saw that the student was starting to act out at some staff and students so we put together a few strategies to help this student out during the toughest time of the year for them. We don't always know what others are going through, so it is important to show extra patience and grace for your students. Here are some ways to help reduce anxiety for children during the holidays:

Set Time Aside for Conversation

Try to spend some extra time each day with these students leading up to break just to chat and continue to let them know that you care and want them to finish the semester strong. Give them the option to see the counselor or school social worker. They may not formally see your student, but these professionals can set aside a block of time that you might not always be able to give them.

Start an Informal Behavior Contract

Try some fun [incentives](#) to keep your students engaged and attending school. If the student has a good day or class period, then the student gets a reward that is agreed upon by both parties. It is a positive way for both you and the student to start the holiday break.

In the contract, you could allow the student to have a ["chill out" pass](#). This pass allows the students to take a break (during approved times) in a specified area of the school. This could be right outside your door, the gym to do some laps, or to help the custodian out for a few minutes. Most of the

time, the student comes back in a better state of mind and ready to focus again.

Keep Your Routines

The holiday season can be busy for teachers. There are gifts that students need to make for their parents, holiday parties, concerts, and also keeping pace with your curriculum! Try to not overbook yourself or your students. It's okay to make the holidays fun, but try not to overextend your students. If they see that you are stressed, they will become stressed too. Students that struggle during the holidays need that structure and often crave it because they may not have it at home. They feel safe at school with you and your routines. Keep them going right up until the break.

Allow Time for Exercise

Exercise is proven to make us feel better. I don't always exercise, but when I do, I feel great afterward! The same is true for your students. They need an outlet for their energy that they are building up prior to the holiday break. Even if you do not have a lot of time to spare because you are teaching at the secondary level, you might be able to squeeze in some 1-3 minute [brain breaks](#). Quick activities such as jumping jacks, stretching, or simply sharing with a partner across the room can help students to refocus and get their heart rate up a little bit.

If you start implementing a plan now with a few weeks before the holiday break, you might be able to be more proactive and see more desired behaviors and help to manage the stress of students during this holiday season.

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