

THE SCHOOL RE-ENTRY TOOLKIT

A Two-Part System for Supporting Students After Illness, Surgery, or Hospital Care

Created for: Students, Families, Teachers, School Staff, and Healthcare Providers

Purpose: This guide is designed to share general information and practical considerations to help support conversations among families, schools, and healthcare teams when a child is returning to school after illness or surgery. This should not replace guidance from a child's healthcare providers, educators, or other qualified professionals.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit has **two parts** designed for different audiences:

PART 1: Student & Family Guide

Written at a 6th-grade reading level

For students returning to school and their families

Warm, accessible, trauma-informed language

Fill-in-the-blank tools students can use immediately

PART 2: Professional Implementation Guide

Written for school staff and healthcare providers

Detailed checklists, legal frameworks, and protocols

Professional language with actionable steps

Templates and resources for official implementation

Hospitals and schools can distribute both parts together or separately based on the audience's needs.

For Teachers:

- Small adjustments make a big difference
- Believe students when they say they're struggling
- Flexibility is not lowering standards
- Check in privately, not publicly

For Schools:

- Assign one point person to coordinate support
 - Share only what teachers need to know
 - Protect student privacy
 - Follow through on agreed accommodations
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PART 2: PROFESSIONAL IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

SECTION 1: FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Your Role in Successful Reintegration

As a school administrator, you set the tone for how returning students are supported. Your leadership ensures that accommodations are implemented consistently, communication is clear, and the student's privacy is protected.

Students who return after hospitalization, illness, or surgery are not asking for special treatment. They are asking for access to learning while their bodies and minds continue to heal. Your response to their needs demonstrates your school's commitment to equity and inclusion.

- Document health-related incidents
 - Update staff if needs change
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SECTION 4: FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Your Unique Position

School counselors are often the first point of contact for families navigating school reintegration. You understand both the academic and emotional dimensions of what students are experiencing, and you can coordinate support across multiple areas.

Your role is to help students process the emotional impact of their experience, facilitate social reintegration, and ensure they have the mental health support they need.

Before the Student Returns

Meet with family and student (if appropriate):

- Discuss social and emotional concerns
- Ask how the student wants to handle peer questions
- Assess whether individual counseling would be helpful
- Identify any peer support or buddy system opportunities

Assess mental health needs:

- Is the student showing signs of anxiety, depression, or trauma?
- Would they benefit from regular check-ins?
- Should you connect the family with outside mental health resources?

Prepare for social reintegration:

- With family permission, consider how to prepare classmates
 - Develop scripts for handling peer questions
 - Identify supportive peers who can help student feel welcomed
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During Reintegration

Provide ongoing support:

- Schedule regular check-ins with the student
- Offer a safe space for processing feelings
- Monitor for signs of anxiety, depression, or social withdrawal
- Help student develop coping strategies
- Facilitate connection with peers

Watch for warning signs:

- Persistent sadness or withdrawal
- Increased anxiety or panic
- Significant changes in behavior
- Social isolation
- Statements about not wanting to live or feeling like a burden
- Academic disengagement beyond expected adjustment

If concerns arise: Communicate with family, provide appropriate referrals, and follow school safety protocols.

Supporting Peer Relationships

With family permission and student input, you may help facilitate social reintegration.

Options include:

- Brief classroom education about supporting returning students (general, not specific to one student)
- Small group conversations with close friends
- Peer buddy system
- Social skills groups

Sample script for close friends:

"Your friend has been away dealing with some health challenges. They may seem different or tired sometimes. The best thing you can do is be a good friend — include them, be patient, and let them share what they want to share without pushing for details."

Counselor Checklist

Before Return:

- Meet with student/family about social-emotional concerns
- Assess whether individual counseling is needed
- Develop plan for handling peer questions
- Identify peer support opportunities
- Coordinate with teachers on social-emotional needs

Ongoing:

- Check in regularly with student
 - Provide safe space for processing feelings
 - Monitor for mental health concerns
 - Facilitate peer education/awareness (if requested)
 - Connect family with community resources as needed
 - Communicate with team about social-emotional progress
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SECTION 5: LEGAL FRAMEWORKS & FORMAL SUPPORT

Understanding Students' Rights

Students returning from medical events may be entitled to protections and services under federal law. This section provides an overview of the most common legal frameworks that support these students.

Important note: This is educational information only. Families should consult with their school's special education coordinator, counselor, or an education advocate for guidance specific to their situation.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

What it provides:

Accommodations for students with disabilities (including medical conditions) that substantially limit one or more major life activities, including learning.

For School Leaders

Your leadership sets the tone for how returning students are treated. By creating clear systems, training staff, and prioritizing student wellbeing, you build a school culture where all students can thrive. Remember:

- Proactive support prevents crises
- Accommodations are equity, not special treatment
- Student privacy must be protected
- Consistency across staff is essential
- Every student deserves to feel safe at school

ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

Created by: Bridge to Health Equity Foundation

Purpose: This toolkit provides practical, compassionate guidance for supporting students returning to school after hospitalization, illness, or surgery. It respects student privacy, honors family preferences, and provides educators with clear, actionable strategies.

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