

# 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.

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## 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.**

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## **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**

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## **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.

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- Consider classroom environment (seating, lighting, noise)
- Plan how to welcome student back naturally

### **First Day Back:**

- Greet student warmly without making a big deal
- Provide brief, private check-in if appropriate
- Ensure student knows they can ask for help or breaks
- Implement agreed accommodations immediately
- Monitor for signs of fatigue or discomfort

### **First Few Weeks:**

- Implement accommodations consistently
- Be flexible with deadlines while maintaining expectations
- Check in regularly but privately
- Communicate with family about progress and concerns
- Adjust accommodations if needed
- Celebrate small successes

### **Ongoing:**

- Treat student as normally as possible while honoring needs
- Maintain communication with coordinator and family
- Watch for signs that additional support is needed
- Foster independence while remaining available
- Remember recovery is not linear

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## **SECTION 3: FOR SCHOOL NURSES**

### **Your Critical Role**

As the school nurse, you are often the bridge between medical care and educational support. Families and students trust you with sensitive health information, and teachers look to you for guidance on supporting students' physical needs.

Your role is to ensure the student's medical needs are safely managed at school while protecting their privacy and helping them feel comfortable accessing care when needed.

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## **Before the Student Returns**

### **Coordinate with the family:**

- Request any necessary medical documentation (physician's note, medication orders, emergency action plan)
- Clarify activity restrictions (if any)
- Understand signs/symptoms that require notification or emergency response
- Discuss medication administration needs
- Ask what the student wants staff to know vs. what should remain private

### **Prepare your office:**

- Stock any needed supplies
- Ensure medication storage is appropriate
- Create a safe, comfortable space for the student if they need to rest

### **Communicate with school staff:**

- Share general health information on a need-to-know basis only
  - Clarify when you should be notified
  - Explain any physical restrictions without disclosing diagnosis
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## **During Reintegration**

### **Serve as the medical liaison:**

- Be available for questions from teachers and family
- Monitor student's health status during the school day
- Check in with student regularly (without hovering)
- Document any health concerns or incidents
- Coordinate with healthcare providers as appropriate

### **Watch for red flags:**

- Unusual fatigue or weakness
- Pain or discomfort
- Dizziness or balance issues
- Changes in mental status
- Signs of infection or complications
- Emotional distress

**If concerns arise:** Contact family immediately and follow emergency protocols if necessary.

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## Protecting Student Privacy

You have access to sensitive medical information that others do not need to know.

### General guidelines:

- Share only what is necessary for safety and appropriate support
- Do not discuss diagnoses, prognoses, or treatment details with teachers
- Keep medical records confidential
- Let the family control what information is shared

### Example of appropriate communication:

*"This student needs to take breaks as needed and should have access to water throughout the day. Please send them to me if they appear unwell."*

### Example of inappropriate communication:

*"This student had chemotherapy and is immunocompromised, so watch for signs of infection."* (Unless family explicitly authorized this level of detail)

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## Nurse Checklist

### Before Return:

- Receive medical documentation from family
- Review activity restrictions and medical needs
- Set up medication administration plan (if needed)
- Create emergency action plan (if applicable)
- Stock necessary supplies
- Identify signs/symptoms requiring immediate attention

### Ongoing:

- Serve as medical liaison between family and school
- Monitor student's health at school
- Be available as a safe space for the student
- Communicate concerns to family promptly

- 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.

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### **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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## 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

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## 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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