



## MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FROM ATLANTIC BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

BACK TO SCHOOL | AUGUST 2023

### Get Ready to Re-Set!

#### School supplies, schedules, carpools, sneakers ... is mental health on your checklist?

Hopefully you got some time off and away. Off work, away from school schedules and a few less demands. Summer life can be more laid back, a time for BBQs and picnics and family time. It can also be a time of late nights, more calories and maybe a few extra treats for everyone.

With summer winding down, it is a good time to GET READY FOR THE RE-SET! The stores are filling up with back-to-school supplies and work is gearing up for new fall projects. Where do you need to re-set your life for yourself and your kids so you will be ready for the new season?

#### Check in on Yourself!

Remember WAY BACK in January when you set your New Year's intentions? Eat better, exercise, spend quality time with loved ones? How is that going for you right now? The change of season can be a good time to check in with yourself before all the back-to-school and back-to-work pressure begins to set in and to prioritize both your physical and mental health.

##### **If you are on track with your intentions:**

- Give yourself a high five and have a little celebration!
- Recommit to your dreams.
- Look over your goals and make plans to update, recommit and Re-Set!

##### **If you have gotten lost along the way:**

- Check to see if those goals still matter to you. If they do, then it is time to recommit. If not, maybe it is time to dig in and look for what really matters to you now.
- Try not to beat yourself up. It never helps. Look for ways to get re-motivated. Talk to a friend, call a coach, read something inspirational.
- Remember that each day is a chance to Re-Set your life!



## Take some time with your family to reflect and prepare for the year ahead.

### Validate Concerns

- It's important to recognize that there are still some challenges related to living through a (still ongoing) pandemic that can contribute to heightened anxiety for kids returning to school.
- Do not push away their concerns by saying, "You have nothing to worry about." It is important to find out what is anxiety-provoking for your child so that you have a dialogue and start to troubleshoot and problem solve before school starts.
- Reiterate to your child or teen that they are not alone in their feelings and that many kids put up a 'brave façade,' but are feeling the same insecurity and sense of anxiety they are.

### Remind your child that feelings can change

- There is typically a six-month adjustment period for major life changes and normalize that returning to school is an example of this.
- Feelings are like waves as they come and go. Helping the child to remember a time that they overcame difficult emotions may help. Remind them to check in at the six-month mark to track progress and increase mindfulness about their improved moods."

### Reassure them that they're prepared

- Particularly for kids who have anxiety around their health or the health of their loved ones, you can take some time to go over the steps your family takes to keep safe — from handwashing to the vaccines they're scheduled to receive.
- By giving their physical health a priority, young people can improve their overall well-being and feel more in charge and empowered.
- For teens, for example, it can be a good time to talk about the Meningitis B and HPV vaccines and how receiving them can protect their health in both the short and long term.

### Instill confidence

- Instilling confidence in your child could be a great way to help them with their readjustment as they start to feel more like their best selves before the school year begins.
- Remind your child what they are good at and get them back involved in that during the summer months. If your child is a great tennis player, get them back out on the court. If they excel in painting, have them take a painting class. They need to re-establish their place in the world and rediscover a sense of belonging and who they were before the pandemic to get back to being themselves.
- While some kids might be reluctant at first in fear of "not being good at anything anymore," allow your children to take baby steps back into their hobbies in low-pressure situations at first until they regain their footing.

### Help your child name their triggers

- Help them identify what they're struggling with and give them easy tools to help them mark their progress. For anxious children, help them learn more about what triggers their anxiety.
- They can then respond to the situation and choose a coping tool to manage intense feelings. Tools could be deep breathing, mood trackers, or practicing mindfulness meditation to help students remain present and non-judgmental in situations that may have caused significant distress in the past.

### Consider if/when your child should seek outside help, like therapy

If a child is not getting back into the groove after about a month of school and is experiencing mood swings, anxiety, using drugs or alcohol, experiencing changes in appetite, sleep patterns, lack of socialization, apathy, and/or not fulfilling assignments or obligations, this would be the time to seek the help of a therapist.

When the child's symptoms are creating an inability to work or go to school, if there is increased conflict and difficulty in relationships, increased risk of health issues, if that child has been hospitalized for mental health concerns or is contemplating suicide, it is time to reach out for professional support."

[SheKnows](#)

[How to Help Your Child Get Mentally Prepared for Back to School –](#)

**If you or someone you know is in a crisis, get help immediately.**

You can call 911 or call or text the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) at **988**

# Mindfulness

Mindfulness is as important as completing that summer reading list when it comes to mentally preparing your children for school!

Setting time aside for intention-setting will help to prepare your family for another school year.

- Intention-setting is different from goal-setting. Goals are clear targets that we strive to hit.
- Intentions are guiding principles that can help us, as individuals, connect our present actions to our personal values. *They focus on who we are and who we could be in this moment.*

Intention-setting is creating an aspirational “north star” that helps kids to envision themselves the way they hope to be prior to getting caught up in the demands and chaos that the school year can bring.

Integrating mindfulness practices as a family or encouraging older children to do so on their own throughout the school year emphasizes the importance of checking in on their mental health and where they are with their intentions. Is there a celebration in order for intentions well lived? Do they need to revisit the intention to ensure its purpose is to support their well-being, or is it possible they are experiencing challenges and need some help to realize the intention? Incorporating mindfulness is a skill that is learned and practiced, just like algebra or learning to play the piano. How can you help them incorporate this skill into their everyday lives?

[Click Here](#) for the 12-part relaxation and mindfulness meditation series

Sharon Kelly, LCSW, from Atlantic Behavioral Health.

Each session will be 5 to 10 minutes long and will guide you through a short relaxation exercise.

The below QR Codes can also take you directly to each session



### Session 1: Mindful Breathing

Learn to focus on your breath to reduce stress and distraction.



### Session 7: STOP Technique

A skill to use on the go.



### Session 2: Mindfulness of Body

Learn to do a body scan and notice sensations in your body.



### Session 8: 3-2-1 for Reducing Anxiety

A skill to use on the go.



### Session 3: Mindfulness of Feelings

Learn to observe and manage emotional ups and downs.



### Session 9: Mindful Walking

Learn to take mindfulness with you.



### Session 4: Mindfulness of Thoughts

Learn to observe thoughts and avoid getting lost in them.



### Session 10: 4-4-6-2 Breathing Practice

Learn to use your breath as a stress reliever.



### Session 5: Mindful Movement

Learn to bring mindfulness with you wherever you go.



### Session 11: Three-Part Practice

Combine what you have learned so far.



### Session 6: Mindful Eating

Learn to enjoy and increase gratitude while eating.



### Session 12: Mindful Self-Compassion Practice

When things are difficult, we all need a little self-compassion.

**Atlantic Behavioral Health**  
**ACCESS Center: 888-247-1400**

**Atlantic Behavioral Health Crisis Intervention Services 24/7 Hotlines:**  
Chilton Medical Center: 973 – 831 – 5078  
Hackettstown Medical Center 908 – 454 – 5141  
Morristown Medical Center: 973 – 540 – 0100  
Overlook Medical Center: 908 – 522 – 3586  
Newton Medical Center: 973 – 383 – 0973

### MENTAL HEALTH SELF CHECK-IN

It's so important to check in with yourself and your mental health. With this self check-in, you will be able to reflect on how you are feeling and the emotions you may be experiencing. Ask yourself these questions and reflect.

- Self Reflection*
- How Am I Feeling Today?
  - What Have I Done Today That Brings Me Joy?
  - Have I Eaten Well Today?
  - Have I Moved My Body Today?
  - Have I Connected With Someone I Love?



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