

Ready, Set, Return!

Getting Back in the Swing After Break

Welcome back from break! If you struggle to get back in the swing or feel out of sorts following break, you are not alone. This may be hard to believe as breaks tend to be thought of as fun, relaxing, and rejuvenating times. However, this is not always the case, and you may also experience stress during a break and/or in the transition back to school. Events/occurrences/situations that cause stress are called *stressors*. Stress is your body's response (physical and cognitive) to a stressor. Manageable stress motivates us toward goals and allows us to gain skills in overcoming adversity and building resilience. So, what can you do to get back into the swing following break and reduce stress you experience?

- **Something to look forward to:** Focus on something you look forward to coming back from break. It might be a favorite class or school activity or time with friends. Having something to look forward to can assist you in the transition and first days back at school.
- **Reestablish daily routines:** One of the hardest parts of returning from a break is reestablishing daily routines. We tend to get out of those routines over break, which helps us enjoy the time, and coming back means reestablishing daily routines and habits. The sooner we do this, the quicker we will get back into the swing of things. Some daily routines to consider include:
 - ✓ **Sleep:** According to the National Sleep Foundation, teens need 8 to 10 hours of sleep and getting the required amount helps with physical health, emotional wellbeing, and academic performance (sleepfoundation.org). Allow yourself time to wind down in the evening in preparation for sleep. Avoid technology use the hour before bed and have your sleep space free of devices. Light from devices reduces the body's ability to produce melatonin, the hormone that allows you to sleep.
 - ✓ **Eating habits:** Eating healthy foods increases energy and ability to focus as compared to less health foods. Having healthy snacks available may also help avoid poor food choices.
 - ✓ **Activity:** Daily activity/exercise and spending time outdoors helps boost our mood, increase our energy level, and improve our ability to focus. Aim for some activity most days of the week.
 - ✓ **Work and breaks:** Schedule homework and study time as well as breaks. Breaks allow a reset and improve your ability to focus. For example, work 45-50 min and then take a 10-15 min break.
 - ✓ **Avoid procrastination:** While it's a trap we all fall into, planning helps avoid procrastination. Avoiding procrastination will result in more successfully managing both schoolwork and other activities.
- **Reflect on what worked well before break, and set realistic goals:** Often, you have solutions we can draw on to help you get back into the swing after break. Along with exploring these tools is setting realistic goals and having realistic expectations. You should expect that it will take some time to get back into the swing after break and that you will face challenges. Yet, if you stick to the things that work well, assess when you face adversity, and readjust where needed, you will be more likely to stay on course.
- **Celebrate successes:** We can be hard on ourselves when we fall short of what we or others expect of us. Working through adversity also involves celebrating successes along the way! Allow yourself the ability to celebrate successes – sticking to your bedtime or doing something nice for a neighbor – and draw motivation from them.
- **Breathe... and other tools:** When you feel stress rising, remember to breathe – deep! While it may seem obvious or cliché, it may also be challenging when experiencing stress. Deep breathing – full inhalations and exhalations – is a great tool to calm your body. Deep breathing increases oxygen to the brain and fosters calmness via the nervous system (stress.org). A key is to practice deep breathing while in a calm state to allow for drawing on this technique when experiencing stress. Many of life's enjoyable day to day activities also help manage and relieve stress. These tools are called coping skills and are what we utilize to walk through and relieve stress.
- **Seek further support if needed:** Sometimes with your best attempts to get back in the swing and stay on track, you find you need further assistance and that is ok! Supporting students is a key role of a school counselor. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you need support. I am happy to help!

Wishing you a great return from break,

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