



National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
Department of Psychology
LABORATORY OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/index.php/en/>

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Welcome to school!

Booklet for students' psychosocial support and adjustment for the new school year during the global pandemic of COVID-19



Dear colleagues,

Returning to the schools during a pandemic after an extended time (emergency prevention measures or extended vacation period) constitutes a unique circumstance for all members of the school community (school personnel, families, students). The return to the schools this new school year as a process indicates a return to everyday life and routine evoking mixed feelings in the way students experience going back to school (e.g., impatience and/or joy at spending time with friends; and/or anxiety about learning and psychosocial challenges in the new classroom, level of education, collaborating with one or more new teachers). Currently, at the beginning of the school year several issues need to be resolved (e.g., following the hygiene rules, administration and organization issues, course material, mask use, alternating school breaks, students who will be absent, vulnerable groups of students, and/or teaching personnel). Moreover, we are concerned about the psychosocial adjustment and recovery of our students and for the ways we can support them, through our role as teachers - "significant others". We are also concerned about our personal health, the health of our loved ones, and how we will respond to the multiple challenges of the roles we take on.

The ultimate purpose of the booklet is to address the psychological needs of students using the experience of the previous period with adaptations for the specifics of the current period of the COVID-19 pandemic. The current booklet is the continuation of the seven booklets for schools and families of the Laboratory of School Psychology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens that were created during every phase of the pandemic from the school suspension, the distance learning process, and the return to the school system after the national lockdown (for previous supporting documents and booklets from our Lab, click here: <http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/index.php/2020-03-27-17-58-58> or for the translated documents in other languages, click here: <http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/index.php/2020-03-27-17-58-59>).

Despite the necessary, unprecedented prevention and protection measures that have been proposed for students and teachers, we remember that each school is a place that promotes not only learning but also the psychosocial development and adjustment of children, while it "cares" for children and supports them in different ways on various occasions. We hope that we will soon return to the rhythms of school that we know and feel safe. Until then, it is important to activate our personal coping mechanisms, those of our students, along with the school's as a system, so as to promote in this experience the strength, knowledge, care, support, and life values.

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Welcome to school!

Booklet for students' psychosocial support and adjustment for the new school year during the global pandemic of COVID-19

Going back to school this school year is a unique circumstance with many changes, new rules, and routines based on everyone's safety. In the context of existing experience and the necessary prevention measures, there is a reasonable concern about the extent of our response to the new conditions and the possible implications for the learning and psychosocial adjustment of our students to the school environment.

In this context, it is important to keep in mind that the school as a system has those elements that facilitate the adjustment and development of its members, acts protectively in challenging circumstances, and provides opportunities for students to evolve, develop skills, and to be psychologically resilient despite the challenging situations they may experience.

In the following sections, you may find: a) basic tips for the psychosocial and learning adjustment of students in the school environment during the pandemic (for more detailed information, you may wish to consult other booklets and supporting documents with suggested activities developed by the Laboratory of School Psychology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, click here: (<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/index.php/2020-03-08-17-58-59>) and b) useful tips for more specialized topics, such as the transition to a new grade and the use of face protection and masks by students in the school environment.



We return to Different Conditions

In our schools,

- ✿ We create our school plan for the first few days regarding prevention and protection measures, in accordance with official guidelines and we co-decide with the rest of the teaching personnel on its content per hour and teaching section.
- ✿ At the same time, we take care of timely information, if possible before the start of the courses (e.g., sending e-mail/welcome posts on a school website/social media, information forms regarding the prevention and protection measures).
- ✿ We ensure that the information we communicate will be understood by all our students according to their developmental age, possible special educational needs, cultural background, level of understanding of the Greek language, etc.
- ✿ We discuss the topic while we avoid information overload and we debunk any rumors.
- ✿ We reinforce and reward students who are being responsible in following the hygiene rules.

In our classroom

- ✿ We emphasize to students getting to know or reconnecting with each other in the classroom by including games, creative activities, group activities, discussions, etc. We take advantage of any outdoor space, if possible, so we can focus on meeting or reconnecting the team.

We communicate that the classroom and its members can be a team in which there is caring – mutual support and thoughtfulness even in challenging periods.
- ✿ We discuss pleasant experiences from the summer vacations and how we spent our time creatively and positively.
- ✿ Along with our students, we seek positive aspects of returning to school. We discuss:
 - ✓ The meaning of flexibility and adjustment to new circumstances and we seek ways to adapt to the school based on the new measures.
 - ✓ The challenges we face and how we have managed to psychologically cope so far with the limitations and rules of the prevention and protection measures.

See “Our STORIES back in the classroom” booklet available from the Laboratory of School Psychology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens at:
http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/return-to-the-school_covid19.pdf
Suggested activity:
-Worksheet 1: “My personal story of perseverance and strength”, pages 14-15.

- ✿ We remember that we managed as a classroom to respond to the challenges we faced during the previous school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and we identify positive elements of our classroom.

See “Our STORIES back in the classroom” booklet available from the Laboratory of School Psychology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens at:
http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/return-to-the-school_covid19.pdf
Suggested activity:
-Worksheet 2: “All together Connected”, pages 16-17.

- ✿ We discuss the ways the students were able to comply with the prevention and protection measures in their everyday life, what was challenging, what/who helped them.
- ✿ We encourage students’ engagement in our collective activities that aim to inform and help students comply with the prevention and protection measures in the school.

See “Our STORIES back in the classroom” booklet available from the Laboratory of School Psychology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens at:
http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/return-to-the-school_covid19.pdf
Suggested activity:
-Worksheet 3: “All together, responsible and creative”, page 18.

- ✿ We gradually help children to set goals at the personal and classroom level by providing them with a sense of perspective and optimism.
- ✿ In general, we encourage conversations at the classroom level that can help children understand the new conditions, express their questions, worries, and emotions.

For useful tips regarding classroom discussions and the psychosocial support of children, you may wish to see the booklet available from the Laboratory of School Psychology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens “Supporting and discussing with our students about COVID-19 Useful tips for teachers and schools” at the following link:
<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/school-based-psychological-support-about-covid19.pdf>



We return by

Taking care of the different educational and psychosocial needs of our students

Educational needs

- Focus on possible differentiated learning and psychosocial needs of the students by providing everyone with equal opportunities and access to the educational process.
- Communication/collaboration with families to inform them regarding the period that the schools were closed (suspension, summer vacation).
- Awareness regarding the educational needs of all students with an emphasis on the students who did not return to the school setting at the end of the last school year or did not participate in long-distance education, or experienced additional psychological stressors.
- Information regarding the implementation of individualized intervention programs for students with special education needs in and outside of the school (parallel support, inclusion classroom, intervention programs in out-of-school settings).
- Continuation of individualized approaches for the learning and psychosocial adjustment of students with special education needs in the school setting.
- Emphasis on the collaboration among educators of other departments/teaching staff providing parallel support/special education teachers (interdisciplinary approach).



Psychosocial needs

- Observation for possible fluctuations in the emotion and behavior of all students returning to class.
- Special care and focused interventions may be needed for vulnerable groups of students who have ongoing psycho educational needs, have been exposed to multiple stressors, and/or have prolonged anxiety symptoms and behaviors.

Remember...

During crises, such as during a pandemic, when our everyday life has changed and we experience uncertainty regarding its course and development, the stress levels may be increased. When children feel insecure in their environment, is it likely to seek control and to reduce stress by activating maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as demonstrating behavioral issues, withdrawal, hyperactivity, oppositional defiant behavior.

In the case of strong emotions or dysfunctional behaviors:

- We give our students time to adapt and help them regain control through constructive processes, such as participating in classroom rules, exchanging views and making decisions about classroom issues, etc.
- We seek as a class/team to achieve small daily goals (learning, team level, relationships ones, etc.) helping to reduce stress through processes that enhance our confidence and ability to thrive.

Suggested activities can be found at the booklet available from the Laboratory of School Psychology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens “Returning to the school and fostering psychological resilience after the stay-at-home period of the COVID-19 pandemic”

http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/return-to-the-school_covid19.pdf

- We identify, reward, and reinforce students’ positive behavior without making comparisons among students.
- We say we are available, and we offer any additional personal time to discuss with our students anything that is bothering them.

Remember....

Strong emotional and behavioral reactions due to the crisis situations constitute a typical response. Soon, after a couple of days of adjustment, most children and youth will be able to respond and gradually adjust to the school environment by developing and cultivating internal coping mechanisms to challenging situations by receiving at the same time the guidance and support of parents and “significant” adults.

We return by

Taking into consideration and some special topics for the beginning of the new school year during the COVID-19 pandemic

Transition to a different educational grade

The transition to school and more specifically to a new educational environment (kindergarten, first grade of elementary school, junior high school, high school) can be an opportunity/expectation for some students to make friends and meet new people, while for others it may cause emotional load and mixed feelings. Currently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there is the added factor of uncertainty for the course of the pandemic as well as the response to the needed prevention and protection measures.

- We place emphasis on students meeting each other. Ideally, we select an outdoor space, so as we can meet/see each other's faces (due to the use of face masks) and we engage in some sort of a getting-to-know each other game.
- (For younger students and grades) The meeting process can continue gradually during the following days in the classroom, such as the students present in the class their favorite photos, objects, etc. while students recognize common and different elements amongst them.
- Introductions can occur during the first days; however, it is important to boost the group cohesion and as time progresses through interactive activities, games and joint projects, participatory activities for all students on issues related to the classroom.
- We seek as many sources of information as possible (family, other educators, other students) regarding the adjustment of students in the school during the different stages of the pandemic (previous school year, distance-learning period, returning to school, learning and psychological needs, thoughts, expectations, worries regarding the new school year).
- We observe possible challenges and strengths of our students (in the learning and psychosocial adjustment), so as we can respond more effectively to their needs and promote their overall mental well-being in the school environment.

Masks in everyday school life



The use of masks by educators and students is a novel experience with extensions to the learning process and social interaction.

- ✚ We show understanding to students who potentially say that they have difficulty wearing a mask, we share our own potential difficulty and we seek all together ways to adjust to this new condition.
- ✚ We encourage the formulation of questions in the class by clarifying that the repetition is not related to the student's abilities but the limitations arising from the use of a mask.
- ✚ We explain that during this time period as we are wearing masks it may not always be clear to us how they feel, and we encourage students to express their emotional or other needs.
- ✚ We take advantage of games and activities for the recognition and expression of feelings considering the use of face masks, such as guess how I feel (while I am wearing a mask, utilizing both verbal and nonverbal ways of expressing emotions).
- ✚ We activate or expand our ways of communication, such as hand and body movements, visualization, changes in tone of voice, etc., to compensate for the objective difficulty of using a mask in verbal communication.
- ✚ We keep in mind that the use of a face mask can hinder the quality of our communication and misinterpret the behavior/attitude of students as lack of attention, difficulty in understanding, etc.
- ✚ In general, we support open communication in the context of this new necessity, looking together with our students for solutions, to adapt flexibly to the new data.

We return by

Taking care of ourselves

- ✿ We remember that we are going through a very unique situation, where we are called in our daily life to take over the management of new complex issues that arise within our multiple roles (as teachers, parents, caregivers of our family members, etc.).
- ✿ We recognize that our own adjustment to the new circumstances requires time.
- ✿ We take care of our physical health (diet, sleep, exercise).
- ✿ We seek the collaboration or support of colleagues by exchanging ideas and experiences from the first days of adjustment in the classroom.
- ✿ We face what we achieved during the previous period of long-distance education and the return to the school during the previous school year, what we utilize this year, what are our needs and the needs of our students.
- ✿ We reward ourselves for the effort, time, and adjustment that we have already demonstrated to the new reality.
- ✿ We remember that recognizing the abilities, flexibility, and optimism are essential elements of psychological resilience.
- ✿ We record, if needed, what we think we can control and what we cannot in our private life and our classroom.
- ✿ We seek professional help when we observe intense physical and psychological burdens in our everyday life.

We return by



Promoting psychological resilience

Useful tips and worksheets for the transition period of gradual student return to the school environment as those pertain to the activation and support of the main areas that contribute to the promotion of student resilience and relate to the following domains (See the following link: http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/return-to-the-school_covid19.pdf):



«Return to the school and fostering psychological resilience after the stay-at-home period of the COVID-19 pandemic»
Useful tips and activity worksheets:
http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/return-to-the-school_covid19.pdf

Relationships

The human connection and our relationship with others provide us with a sense of belonging in a group, we receive and provide support, and that we are not alone in challenging situations.

Self-confidence, identification of strengths

Believing in ourselves and our personal strengths can help individuals recover from adversity faster and more effectively.

Sources of support

Identifying and becoming aware of sources of support (individuals and situations) that exist in our lives in challenging living conditions.

Responsibility, active participation

The sense that we are taking responsibility for activities can help us gain a sense of control over things and can help us maintain our tranquility.

Values, expectations

Becoming aware and gaining a deeper understanding of our values can help us prioritize and set goals along with helping us achieve them.

Goals

Redefining and prioritizing our goals in the context of new circumstances and based on our new emerging needs, can help individuals to continue to derive satisfaction and give meaning to their life.

Optimism

The sense of hope/optimism is associated with the resilience boosting and the expectation that things are going to be okay.

Useful resources for crisis management and psychosocial support in the school community during the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Resources for schools/ teachers (Translated into English)

Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos. P., Georgouleas, G., Athanasiou, D., Fragiadaki, D., & Mihou, S. (2020). *Return to the school and fostering psychological resilience after the stay-at-home period of the COVID-19 pandemic: Useful tips and activity worksheets*. Athens: Laboratory of School Psychology, Department of Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/Epistrofi_sto_Sxoleio_Covid19.pdf

<https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/3065740640179736>

In Greek

http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/Epistrofi_sto_Sxoleio_Covid19.pdf

<https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/3065645803522553>

Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos. P., Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragiadaki, D., & Athanasiou, D. (2020). *Re-Connecting to the School: e-stories in the classroom. Useful tips for the transition to online classrooms/distance learning and the management of conversations that may arise regarding the challenging times we experience & Activities that aim to strengthen social and emotional connections in the online environment in order to promote resilience during school closures happening due to the global pandemic*. Athens: Laboratory of School Psychology, Department of Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/Re-ConnectingtotheSchool-inclass-activities.pdf>

<https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/3048809525206181>

In Greek

<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/pdf/epanasyndeomaste-sto-sxoleio-e-istoriesdrastiriotites-stin-taksi-COVID-19.pdf>

<https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/2933471006740034>

Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos. P., Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragiadaki, D., & Athanasiou, D. (2020). *Supporting and discussing with children and adolescents about COVID-19: Useful tips for teachers and schools*. Athens: Laboratory of School Psychology, Department of Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/school-based-psychological-support-aboutcovid19.pdf>

<https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/2913785252041943>

In Greek

<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/pdf/psychologiki-stirixi-paidiwn-apo-goneis-gia-koronoio-covid19.pdf>

<https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/photos/a.1962983080455503/2869963483090787/?type=3&theater>

Resources for families (Translated into English, German, French)

Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos. P., Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragiadaki, D., & Athanasiou, D. (2020). WE stay at home... WE stay connected. Athens: Laboratory of School Psychology, Department of Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/WE-stay-at-home-WE-stay-connected.pdf>

<https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/2924651767621958>

In Greek

<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/pdf/menoumespitisyndedemenoi--psychologikistirixi-gia-oikogeneies.pdf>

<https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/2900307760056359>

Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos. P., Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragiadaki, D., & Athanasiou, D. (2020). Reconnecting at home: Our stories. Activities that aim to strengthen social and emotional connections in the family in order to promote resilience during school closures happening due to the global pandemic. Athens: Laboratory of School Psychology, Department of Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/reconnecting-at-home-our-stories.pdf>

<https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/3048825068537960>

In Greek

<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/epanasyndeomaste-drastiriotites-gia-oikogenies-oi-dikes-mas-istories.pdf>

<https://www.facebook.com/1962901713796973/posts/2957230044364130/>

In German

Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos. P., Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragiadaki, D., & Athanasiou, D. (2020). WIR bleiben zu Hause ... WIR bleiben überburden. Coronavirus - Covid-19: Ratschläge zur psychologischen Unterstützung von Familien, Kindern und Jugendlichen während des Aufenthalts zu Hause. Athen: Labor für Schul psychologie, Nationale Kapodistrias- Universität Athen.

<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/Wir-bleiben-zu-Hause-Wir-bleiben-verbunden.pdf>

In French

Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos. P., Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragiadaki, D., & Athanasiou, D. (2020). Restons chez nous... proches de nos process. Info utiles pour le soutien psychologique des familles, des enfants et des ados pendant la période de confinement Covid-19 (Coronavirus). 'Athènes: Laboratoire de psychologie scolaire, Université nationale et capodistrienne d'Athènes.

<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/Restons-chez-nousproches-de-nos-proches.pdf>

Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos. P., Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragiadaki, D., & Athanasiou, D. (2020). Supporting and discussing with children and adolescents about COVID -19. Useful tips for parents. Athens: Laboratory of School Psychology, Department of Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.
<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/psychological-support-from-parents-aboutcovid19.pdf>
<https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/2916701468416988>

In Greek

<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/pdf/psychologiki-stirixi-paidiwn-apo-goneis-giakoronoio-covid19.pdf>
<https://www.facebook.com/schoolpsychlab/posts/2877733058980496>

Translated into English by Dr.Lito Eleni Michalopoulou



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Resources for the psychosocial support for COVID-19

<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/index.php/2020-03-27-17-58-59>

<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/index.php/2020-03-27-17-58-58>

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