



# Working Together to Support Our Students

Winnipeg School Division is grateful to have our students back with us in person. As Winter Break approaches, it is an opportunity to reflect on the past three years and note how the pandemic has affected us all. Parents, guardians, teachers and support staff have faced multiple losses related to the pandemic and subsequent restrictions. The result has included disconnection, missed opportunities and cancelled celebrations. These losses are significant.

More importantly, children and youth have carried an even greater burden. As well as the experiences previously mentioned, development has been delayed because of missed activities that form the building blocks of growing up. Friendships, activities, sports, dances and congregating in groups are all important components of young life.

The news broadcasts that our youth are struggling. Academic achievement is lower, social-emotional growth is affected and some young people are acting out in violent, sometimes criminal ways. In fact, the Winnipeg Police Service reports that even though total youth crime rates are lower, violent youth crime has increased. This trend is consistent with information coming out across North America.

Adolescence is a time of growth and change. It is normal for youth to withdraw somewhat from their parents or caregivers and chart their own path. It is developmentally healthy to challenge parents' and teachers' beliefs and push back against authority. It's not only normal, it's crucial to development.

Across the division, we are so grateful to be in the classroom with your children once again. It's important that we, as adults in school, are mindful of their experiences-socially, academically and emotionally. Likewise, we are counting on parents and guardians to let us know if you are worried about your child in any of these areas. While some challenging and testing behaviour is a good sign of healthy development, some behaviours indicate help is needed. If you see these signs in your child or teen and are concerned, connect with their teacher or principal. Together we will consider both home and school factors and respond. Together we will support your child in being happy, healthy and thriving.

Signs of concern could include:

- Isolation from family or friends
- Voicing extreme thoughts or ideologies
- Following antisocial or disturbing social media accounts
- Acting in a way that seems very different from their normal behaviour
- Expressions of rage, sadness, or fear that don't go away

While the Winter Break is a time for relaxing and celebrating the season, it may also amplify stress for a child or teenager. We want to work with you, as parents and guardians of our students, however if you feel your child needs immediate help, especially during the break when schools are closed, the following resources are available to you:

- Kids Help Phone: Text 686868 or 1-800-668-6868
- Youth Mobile Crisis: 204-949-4777 or 1-888-383-2776
- MB Suicide Prevention: 1-877-435-7170 or [www.reasonstolive.ca](http://www.reasonstolive.ca)