

# Re-entry into the Classroom: How to Prepare Educators to Welcome Back Students

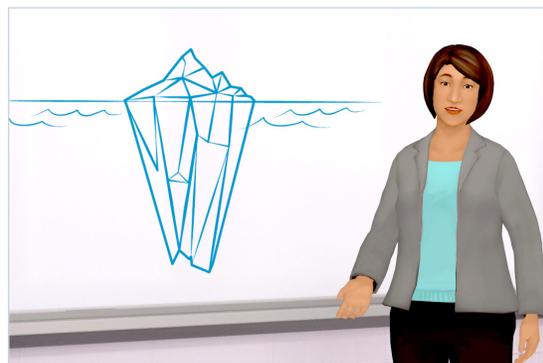
COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders caused unprecedented disruption in every walk of life, but none more so than for families with school-aged children.

The return to school will look different in different places, with some schools moving to a hybrid model and others returning to fully in-person learning. Either way, as students potentially return to school in the fall, the transition will be challenging for many. So how should schools prepare to welcome them back?

One answer comes from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The AAP-issued guidance for school districts returning to the classroom, recommends:

“**Teachers and other school personnel should receive training on how to talk to and support children during a pandemic and principles of psychological distress.**” - AAP

A student’s life is like an iceberg. At school, educators see what is above the water. But there may be a lot happening below the surface. [Adverse childhood experiences](#) (ACEs), such as violence or divorce, mental health issues, job loss, or other problems in the home, can significantly impact a students’ wellbeing and undermine their ability to learn.



*A student's life is like an iceberg.*

The first wave of the pandemic was the virus. Many consider a mental health crisis to be the second wave. Some students will be returning to school having lost a loved one to the virus. Others live with constant worry about their parents/caregivers working on the frontlines who are at risk for contracting COVID-19. Many are struggling with isolation and depression. And any existing and ongoing ACEs are likely heightened while secluded at home.

Now more than ever, students will depend on their educators for support. [Educators need to recognize signs of students in distress, know what to say to a student, and where to refer students for more help.](#) These skills will also help teachers and staff build relationships with students that will foster a safe, nurturing environment, a critical protective factor in the transition back to learning.



# Applying Kognito Simulations to a COVID-19 World

## IDENTIFY STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

Kognito’s simulations were developed using [evidence-based models and techniques, game mechanics, and learning principles](#) that can be universally applied to situations of all scales. By practicing proven techniques with virtual humans, such as motivational interviewing, building empathy, and identifying at-risk students, these simulations have enabled more educators to, on average, increase the number of meaningful conversations they have with students. Collectively with over 700,000 educators having taken a Kognito simulation, those conversations add up to impact student mental health, academic performance, and school safety.

Every district, school, classroom, and student faces unique challenges. But the techniques that educators learn and practice using our simulations can be applied in many situations, including the current COVID-19 crisis.

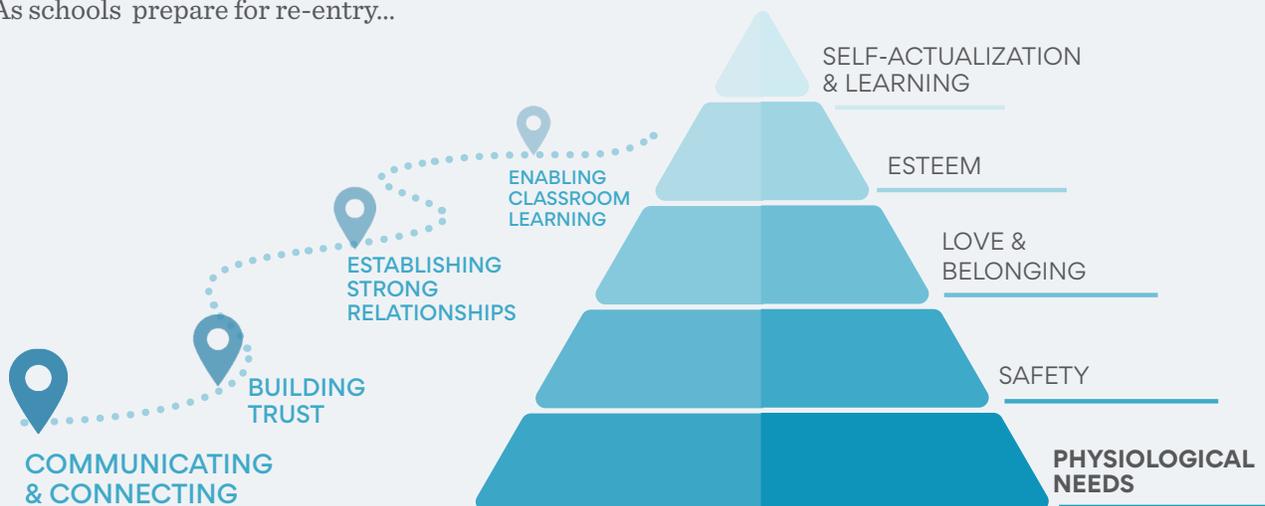
School can be a source of strength for students whose lives have been disrupted, and although educators aren’t mental health experts, they are often the first to notice when something is off. Educators learn how to recognize psychological distress, and understand that psychological distress might suggest an underlying mental health problem or be the result of a situational crisis, unmanaged stress, inadequate sleep, or a combination of factors.

During the conversation practice scenarios, learners will identify worrisome behavioral changes in students in three categories:

- **Academic changes**, like slipping grades and diminishing attendance
- **Behavioral changes**, like emotional outbursts or withdrawn social interactions
- **Appearance changes**, like drastic weight gain/loss, and declining groom or hygiene

## HOW KOGNITO SIMULATIONS BRING STUDENTS BACK TO LEARNING

As schools prepare for re-entry...

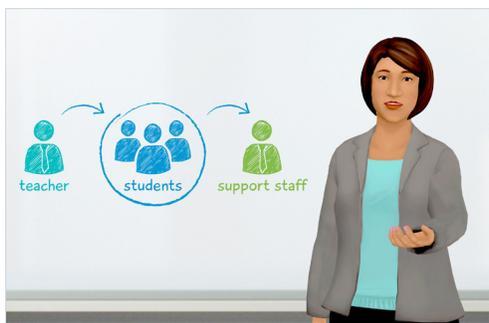


## TALK WITH STUDENTS

Learners apply techniques such as asking open-ended questions and reflective statements to establish a supportive relationship with the student, encourage them to open up, and create an environment for discussion. Learners will also avoid pitfalls that may make a student or parent defensive or refuse to communicate.

Building rapport with students can happen over time through multiple conversations/encounters, not necessarily all at once. By practicing empathy, and learning signals of when to ask questions, when to make observations, and when to back off, learners equip themselves with effective conversation skills that help them build relationships with their students and gain their trust over time.

## CONNECT STUDENTS TO SUPPORT SERVICES



Students are often **more motivated** about seeing the counselor when they're personally referred by someone they **know and trust**.

Learners become familiar with the resources available in their district,

how to make a referral, and are provided with role-play examples of effective tactics to increase a student's motivation to see a counselor. Instead of suggesting that a student see a school counselor or mental health professional, learners first establish trust, understand the student's situation, and demonstrate empathy so the student will be more open to getting help.

Learners also address the importance of their own self-care, and how the compassion and care they show themselves is key in helping them be compassionate and caring with their students.

While the practice scenarios in the Kognito simulations aren't specific to COVID-19, educators will engage in role-play scenarios that will teach the same skills needed to support students this coming fall.

**Try a demo to experience  
a role-play simulation**

## SOMETHING YOU MIGHT ENCOUNTER

### JAMIE

Junior in High School

Withdrawn

Not turning in assignments

Unmotivated about post-graduation plans.



### IDENTIFY JAMIE

Jamie just started his junior year, after missing months of his sophomore year due to COVID-19. He's normally an active student, but back at school he's been withdrawn. He doesn't show interest in class, seems to zone out a lot, and has failed to turn in most of his assignments. When asked about post-graduation plans, he shrugs, uninterested in the topic.

### TALK WITH JAMIE

After talking with Jamie, you learn he has taken on additional responsibilities at home as his family faces financial hardship. His mom, a single parent, lost her job after contracting COVID-19, and as the eldest sibling, he had to take care of his younger siblings during her recovery. That responsibility, on top of the stress of worrying about his mother's health and financial strain, has taken a toll on Jamie's mental health.

### CONNECT JAMIE TO SUPPORT SERVICES

After learning more about Jamie's situation, you collaborate with Jamie to create a plan. You work out flexible deadlines and assignments to better accommodate his schedule, and you refer him to a school counselor to help him discuss college-readiness and support. You also work together to make a follow-up plan for connecting with Jamie's family on ways to support them.



What students may be bringing back into the classroom due to the COVID-19 pandemic:	Practice scenarios educators engage with in Kognito simulations:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illness of a parent</li> <li>• Death of friend or family</li> <li>• Economic hardship due to a parent/ caregiver losing their job</li> <li>• Abuse, violence, or neglect</li> <li>• Stress &amp; anxiety from a disruption to daily routine and missed experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sick family member</li> <li>• Death of a parent</li> <li>• Erratic behavior</li> <li>• Decline in grades/low attendance</li> <li>• Potential self-harm</li> <li>• Suicidal thoughts</li> <li>• Withdrawal in class</li> <li>• Physical disruption of the community</li> </ul>

When their basic needs are not met, students cannot learn. Until their underlying issues, or ACEs, are addressed, focus on learning in the classroom will be a struggle.

By training all of your educators, especially middle school and high school educators where students come into contact with multiple teachers each day, **your schools increase the chances for critical conversations to happen and relationships to grow, building an important safety net for students.** These conversations have the power to change lives, leading to better supported students who can acclimate and succeed in the new environment created by COVID-19.

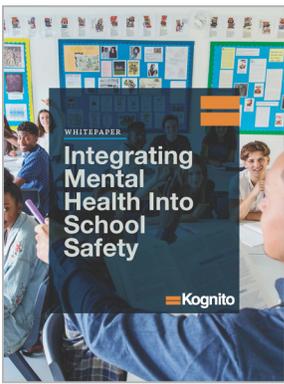
## Additional Resources from Kognito



### Trauma-Informed Practices for K12 Schools

[Learn more about this interactive role-play simulation for educators to build skills, confidence, and empathy that better support students whose behavior might be related to sources of trauma or distress.](#)

[See a product walk-through or try a demo on our website.](#)



### Integrating Mental Health Into School Safety

[This whitepaper provides information on:](#)

- [The latest evidence on how psychological safety contributes to student success](#)
- [How schools play a role in promoting protective factors and positive emotional development for students](#)
- [Ways to integrate mental health into a school safety plan, including universal approaches to addressing mental health](#)
- [Making the case for funding, evidence-based mental health prevention and early identification](#)