

THE SCHOOL AGE UPDATE

The North Carolina School Age Initiative



Keeping Your Head in the Game

Winter is upon us, and with the cold weather comes chaos. From school closings and staff shortages to Covid outbreaks and angry parents, the winter months always contain a few surprises. As school age professionals, we cannot choose the daily changes thrown at us. However, we do have the ability to choose how we react in the face of stress.

With this new year, take time to reflect on how you handle stress. Make an effort to find new and effective ways to cope with sudden changes that might pop-up during the program day. Below are three easy tips that you can practice today.

1 Prepare a Back-Up Plan

An easy way to reduce sudden school age stress is to create a back-up plan for your lesson plans. Work with other group leaders or your program coordinator to come up with alternative activities for when schedules change or coworkers call-out. Make sure to cater alternative activities around factors like the weather and temperature. Back-up activities during the winter months will be more successful if you consider the temperature outside and how students are dressed.

You can also put together a healthy selection of "special" materials in your storage area that can be rotated into play during teacher absences or schedule changes. With school age materials the old adage is true, "absence makes the heart grow fonder". Students normally flock to materials that they have not recently interacted with. Having an ample supply as a back-up will help you prevent chaos before it happens.

Always remember, being able to adjust your lesson plan with quick alternatives can help you stay focused and remain in control of classroom behaviors. A little extra planning can reduce a large amount of stress.

Need Support?

The NC School Age Initiative is here to help you with all of your programming needs. From preparing for your SACERS-U assessment to supporting teachers dealing with challenging behaviors, our state project staff have your back.

The NC School Age Initiative is also a resource for high quality school age trainings and professional development.

Find our school age resources visit our website at www.swcdcinc.org and www.childcarerrnc.org.

You can also contact our State Project Manager with any questions.

Jon Williams

Email: williams.jon@swcdcinc.org

Phone: 828.450.9218



2 Include Your Presence in the Classroom Environment

Another quick way to reduce sudden program stress is to incorporate yourself into your classroom. It is easy to forget that YOU are an important component to your classroom family. When schedules change and chaos ensues, you are the stability for your students and co-workers. In light of this stability, your presence in the classroom deserves to be seen and appreciated along with the students.

Take time to put up pictures of your own family, drawings from your children/loved-ones, and special mementos from previous students. Create a usable teacher area that is comfortable and calm for office or administration work. Don't hesitate to include your favorite age-appropriate song in the classroom dance party or read a story to the class you enjoyed as a child.

Reflect on how you are represented in the classroom and find ways to include small elements of joy that can help you reset from a stressful day of learning.

3 Tackle Sudden Stress Head-On with Honesty

Sudden stress is a trickle-down problem. Students have the ability to pick-up on the stress exhibited by teachers and program staff and translate this stress to a variety of challenging behaviors. The best way to keep stress to a minimum during sudden change is to address the source of stress head-on with honesty.

If you are transitioning into an alternate schedule, gather your students and let them know the new routine for the day. If a group leader calls out sick, take time to introduce the students to the substitute or secondary teacher. Let them know the changes that will be taking place and the plan that you have to make the day fun and successful.

Intentionally sharing change with students reduces the fear of the unknown. It provides students with a chance to recalibrate their day and prepare for new experiences. This process will help reduce challenging behaviors associated with change and improve the overall morale of the classroom.

Being honest and open with parents is also an effective way to tackle sudden stress head-on. Let parents know about staff changes, teacher shortages, and alternate schedule routines. Take advantage of online program update tools and messaging platforms to keep parents updated and informed. Reflecting on how you approach sudden change with parents will help your program strengthen relationships with parents and better care for the students you serve.





SUPPORTING STUDENT ORAL HEALTH

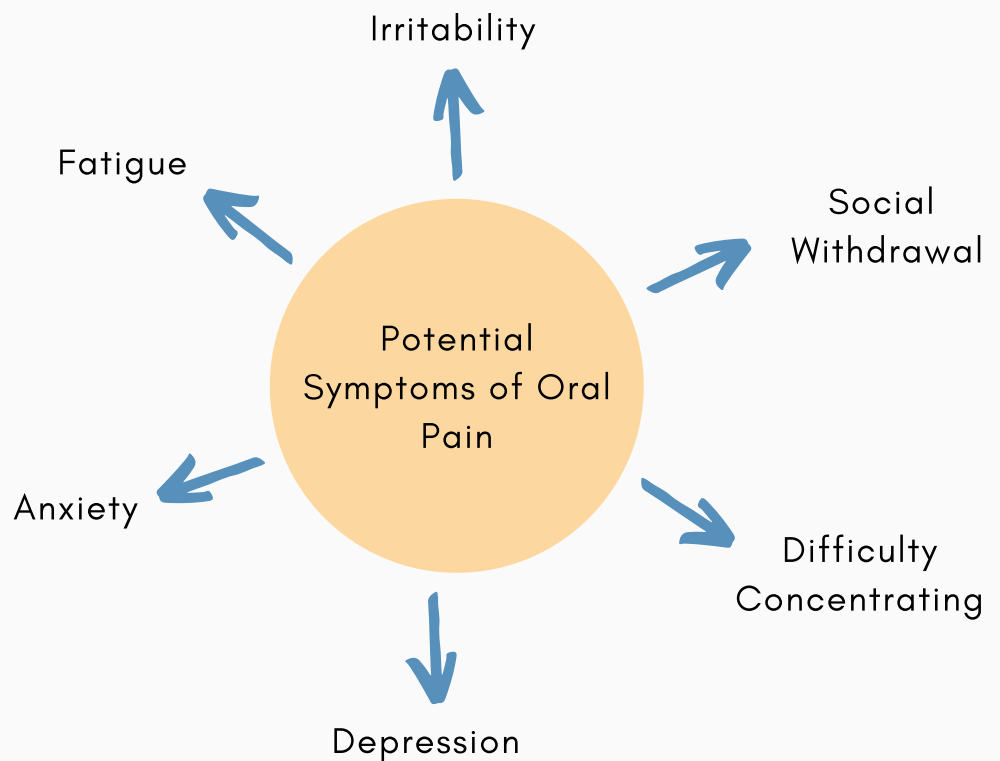
BY EMILY HORNEY, MHA, RDH
EARLY CHILDHOOD ORAL HEALTH COORDINATOR
DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH, ORAL HEALTH SECTION



Oral health is essential to overall health, especially for children, youth, and adolescents. Sadly, tooth decay (cavities) is one of the most common chronic diseases among children. However, children, youth, and adolescents can also experience gum disease, tooth loss, oral cancer, and dental trauma.

Lack of an oral health routine at home, limited or no access to dental care, and a diet high in sugars and starches contribute to poor oral health outcomes that can lead to poor school performance and an increase in days missed from school. In addition to problems with learning, poor oral health can lead to low self-esteem, poor eating habits and nutrient intake, difficulty speaking, isolation, and depression.

School administrators, teachers, nurses, social workers, and counselors play an important role in reducing dental disease in the school age-population through school-based oral health programs, the promotion of the importance of good oral health, and connecting families to a dental home. Taking simple steps to provide oral health education, support a well-balanced school nutrition policy, ensure access to fluoridated water, and advocating for preventive oral health programs can make the difference between poor, good, and great oral health.



To learn more about oral health issues facing North Carolina's children and how your school can support oral health, check out the [Healthy Schools Oral Health Training Modules](#).

THREE WAYS TO SUPPORT WRITING SKILLS

Albert Einstein stated it best:

"The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but IMAGINATION."

Writing skills are fundamental to helping students interpret and communicate the imagination inside of them. Having the ability to relay ideas with written words hones important critical thinking and language skills that simply cannot be enhanced by speaking. Even in the age of computers, writing skills are needed to learn and lead.

Below are three ways you can help students develop their writing skills in your school age classroom:



JOURNAL TIME

Journal writing is a fantastic way to tie in school age lesson plans with writing development. Give each student their own personal journal that they can decorate and make their own. Every day give them a topic to write about and time to expand their thoughts. Journal time can take place anytime of the day. Some good examples include:

- Transition times
- Outdoor play
- Arrival
- Group discussion time

DRAMATIC PLAY

Dramatic play is a perfect activity area to encourage writing skills. Have students write out plays, storyboards, and scripts to support dramatic creativity. Props like menus, signs, and posters are great dramatic play additions that can be constructed by students of every age. If you want to add an extra degree of creativity, have students use the dramatic play space to practice writing new scripts and languages.



CREATE PERSONALIZED BOOKS

Your classroom's reading area is a perfect space for students to practice writing skills. Help students create their own works of fiction and non-fiction by drawing book pages and dictating the words. You can also have students bring pictures from home and write a book around the images. Creating personalized literature is a great way to simultaneously increase your program's approach to diversity and writing development.

NORTH CAROLINA STABILIZATION GRANTS



HAVE QUESTIONS? WE CAN HELP!

In October 2021, Gov. Cooper announced the release of a \$805 million dollar investment into the state's early education and school age programs. The Child Care Stabilization Grants open funding resources to all licensed child care programs in the state.

The Child Care Stabilization Grants provide funding for:

- Family supports
- Personnel costs, including payroll, salaries, similar employee compensation, employee benefits, retirement costs, educational costs, child care costs; and supporting staff expenses in accessing COVID-19 vaccines;
- Rent (including under a lease agreement) or payment on any mortgage obligation, utilities, or insurance; also, may include late fees or charges related to late payments;
- Facility maintenance or improvements, defined as minor renovations, including outdoor learning spaces/playgrounds, and minor improvements to address COVID-19 concerns;
- Personal protective equipment, cleaning and sanitization supplies and services, or training and professional development related to health and safety practices;
- Purchases of or updates to equipment and supplies to respond to COVID-19;
- Goods and services necessary to maintain or resume child care services;
- Mental health supports for children and employees;
- Health and safety trainings for staff, including but not limited to CPR, First Aid, and medication administration.

For more information or to apply visit the NCDCEE website at:

www.ncchildcare.ncdhhs.gov/Home/Stabilization-Grants

DCDEE Customer Support Team

Phone Number: (919) 814.6300

Email: dcdee_support@dhhs.nc.gov

You can also contact us at the NC CCR&R School Age Initiative if your school age program needs support or has any questions.

Jon Williams - Statewide School Age Project Manager

Email: williams.jon@swcdcinc.org

RECENTLY UPDATED!!!

The NCDHHS has just released the newest update to the Strong Schools NC Public Health Toolkit. This resource is geared to help your program navigate Covid-19 and keep the families you serve safe.

Access the Toolkit here: <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/strong-schools-nc-public-health-toolkit>

**STRONG SCHOOLS NC
PUBLIC HEALTH TOOLKIT**