



 Cartwheel

Supporting Students Through Back to School

A Practical Guide for School Teams



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The beginning of a new school year brings excitement, opportunity, and change. For many students, it's also a time of adjustment as they settle into new routines, classrooms, friendships, and expectations.

Most students find their footing with time. Others begin showing signs that they may need additional support. The first weeks of school offer an important opportunity to notice those early signs, partner with families, and connect students with help before challenges begin affecting attendance, learning, relationships, or well-being.

Not every student needs formal mental health support. But for some, timely intervention can make a meaningful difference—not only in how they start the school year, but in how they experience the months ahead.



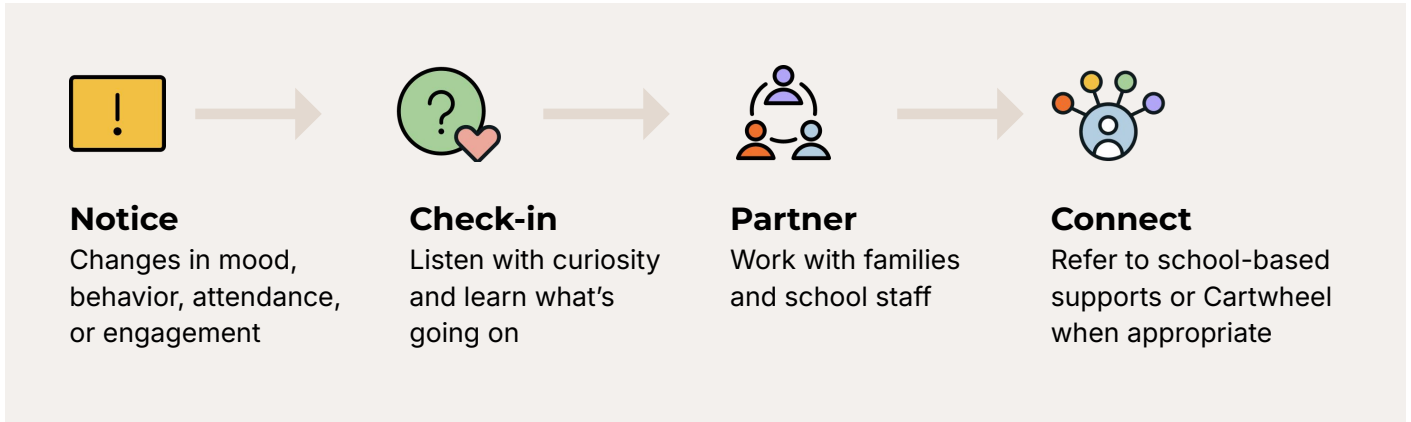
Which students might benefit from a check-in?

The first few weeks of school offer an important opportunity to notice who may benefit from a little extra connection, support, or a conversation. Here are a few examples of students who may benefit from a check-in this fall:

- **Students who seem to be having difficulty adjusting to the new school year**
e.g., struggling with new routines, transitions, or classroom expectations
- **Students with increasing anxiety or school avoidance**
e.g., frequent visits to the nurse, difficulty separating from caregivers, reluctance to attend school, or increased absences
- **Students showing changes in mood, behavior, or engagement**
e.g., withdrawal, irritability, emotional outbursts, or a noticeable change from previous years
- **Students navigating significant transitions at school or home**
e.g., starting a new school, entering middle or high school, recent family changes, or returning after a prolonged absence
- **Students experiencing social or friendship challenges**
e.g., difficulty fitting in, friendship conflict, isolation, or concerns about bullying
- **Students whose families have shared concerns**
e.g., worries about anxiety, emotional well-being, behavior, coping, or changes noticed over the summer
- **Students with a history of mental health concerns or prior support**
e.g., returning to school after receiving counseling, therapy, or other mental health services and who may benefit from continued monitoring
- **Students who seem “not quite themselves”**
e.g., educators notice something feels different, even if they can't yet identify a specific concern



A simple framework for early support



Notice

Pay attention to students whose mood, behavior, attendance, or engagement changes during the first few weeks of school. Small changes can be an opportunity for early support—not just a reason for concern.



Check-in

Start a conversation. A brief check-in with a student or family can make a meaningful difference. Lead with curiosity rather than assumptions.



Partner

Work with families to better understand what's happening and determine the best next steps together. Early partnership helps families feel supported, strengthens resilience, and can prevent challenges from becoming bigger over time.



Connect

When concerns persist or begin affecting attendance, learning, relationships, or emotional well-being, help families connect with available school and community resources, including Cartwheel when appropriate.

Questions to Ask During a Check-In with a Student

You don't need to have all the answers. Even a short conversation can help you better understand what a student is experiencing.

Consider asking:

- *How has the start of the school year been going for you?*
- *What's been going well?*
- *What's been harder than you expected?*
- *Is there anything you've been worried about lately?*
- *Who do you feel connected to at school?*
- *Is there anything that would help school feel easier right now?*



Why early support matters

The start of a new school year brings change for every student. While many adjust with time, others show signs of anxiety, emotional distress, or other mental health concerns.

Recognizing these signs early helps schools provide support before challenges grow. Early support can:

- Strengthen school engagement
- Build confidence and coping skills
- Reduce the likelihood that challenges become disruptive
- Help families feel supported before concerns escalate

Signs that deserve a closer look

- Difficulties with attendance
- Increased nurse visits
- Withdrawal from peers
- Changes in mood or behavior
- Frequent emotional overwhelm
- Challenges with classroom engagement



How Cartwheel partners with schools

When a student needs additional support, Cartwheel partners with schools to provide timely, evidence-based mental health care for students and families—helping schools respond early while keeping students engaged in learning.

Depending on a student's needs, services may include:

- Individual therapy
- Parent or caregiver guidance
- Family therapy
- Psychiatry, when appropriate

Whether a student is experiencing anxiety, school avoidance, emotional or behavioral challenges, friendship or social stress, or difficulty adjusting to the school year, we're here to partner with you.

Ready to connect a student or caregiver?



For Referring Staff

Student support staff can refer a student directly for care. We're here as your partners to make sure that every student gets the support they need to thrive.

[Refer Here](#)



For Families

Parents and caregivers seeking support for their child can reach out directly. Every submission is reviewed and approved before anyone is connected to care.

[Share the Form](#)