Going back to school may come with some extra nerves this year, especially since the last two school years haven’t been normal. You’ll likely be back to full-time, in-person school again, and it may feel a little weird or scary. To have a successful school year, it’s important that you feel safe in your school and classroom.

WHY SAFETY MATTERS

If you are worried or afraid it can be hard to think about anything else. When you feel safe, you are able to explore and try new things, which makes learning possible. You spend most of your time at school and deserve to feel safe in that space.

HOW TO MAKE SURE YOU FEEL SAFE AT SCHOOL

BE PREPARED.
Sometimes the best way to feel safe is to prepare yourself for how to handle situations that scare you if they were to happen, rather than worrying about them. Talk to your parents or teachers so you can be clear about what the rules about masks are, what your school will do if there is a COVID-19 outbreak, and what to do in case of emergency situations. It can also be helpful to figure out who your friends in class are if you need to turn to someone.

IDENTIFY ADULTS YOU TRUST.
Feeling safe doesn’t just mean that you won’t get hurt; it means having people you trust that can support you. Think about an adult at school who knows you and can be your ally if you feel threatened—it could be a teacher, coach, guidance counselor, or even a cafeteria worker. This may be especially important for students of color or LGBTQ+ youth who may be searching for someone who can understand their experiences when other peers can’t.

TELL SOMEONE ABOUT YOUR WORRIES.
It’s hard to keep all of your emotions and worries inside and can often lead to more difficulty processing the situations that stress you out. Talking to someone can help you understand that you’re not alone and find ways to feel better. Sometimes just saying words out loud to a friend about what is worrying you can be all the relief you need. Other times it may be necessary to talk to a parent, teacher, or other trusted adult about what’s bothering you. If talking seems too hard, you can write a letter or an email.

KEEP A GROUNDING ITEM.
Grounding is a way of keeping your mind in the here and now and is a great way to help you feel safe and in control when your anxieties are spiraling. There are many ways to ground yourself, like breathing exercises or going for a walk. A grounding item is a physical object and can be a great way to help you feel grounded without leaving the classroom or distracting others. Some examples are a smooth rock you keep in your pocket, a fidget toy, a photo of a loved one or pet, or anything to hold onto that soothes you. Tell your teacher about your grounding object so they don’t think it’s a toy or distraction and take it away.

If you still feel overwhelmed, unsafe, and as though your fear affects how you function every day, you may be experiencing the first signs of a mental health condition, like depression or anxiety.

Take the Youth Screen at MHAScreening.org to see if you may be at risk. Once you get the results, MHA will provide you with more information and help you to figure out the next steps.