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Winter Break: Check-In with Others

Winter break is almost here! Many of us look forward to the holidays with a sense of excitement, relief, and even joy! Some may have family plans and celebrations to look forward to, others may simply be welcoming the downtime and quiet.

Yet, there are some – possibly peers, family, friends, or community members – who may be looking upon the upcoming break with feelings of sadness, anxiety, or even dread. The holidays may be an isolating and lonely time for some, and a stark reminder of loss or lack in their lives, whether that is through experiencing trauma or grief, coping with illness or addiction, or feeling financial or familial strain.

Can you carve out a small space this winter break to check in on others?

Social connections are very important to our well-being, and our brains are wired for interconnectedness with others. In the busyness of your holiday break, can you commit to checking in on others? Consider small gestures that may have a powerful impact on the well-being of another, such as:

- Walk across the street and actually meet that neighbour you see in passing every day who may be alone. You might be surprised at what this could mean to them, and what you could learn.
- Make a plan to check in with loved ones or someone you believe may benefit from connection. See how they are managing the holidays, and how they are feeling. Remember that no matter how they are feeling – great, or not so great – it's okay. Respect people for how they are feeling.

- Ask open-ended questions that invite a person to respond with more than, "I'm fine," or, "Not much." Perhaps ask questions such as, "What will you be doing this weekend?" If it feels appropriate, you could ask, "What are you doing to take care of yourself?"
- Be a good and careful listener. Many people feel like they are alone with how they are feeling, and that no one else could be interested. Really listen to the answer when you ask someone how they are feeling. If someone appears to need support – maybe they tell you that they are depressed, or they think they are drinking too much – there are resources available to support them. Offer to show them how to find support in their own community, including crisis lines when required.
- If someone you know is going through a hard time, be the one that *shows up* for them: send short text messages, or a card; drop off food, make a phone call, or visit; sit together to watch a movie. Even if your friend isn't in the mood to talk, and prefers to be left alone, that is okay. Let them know you are there.
- If you have knowledge of their situation, recognise the fact that their year was not stellar – perhaps a lost job or a broken marriage is putting a damper on the season. Do not shy away from sensitive topics. If someone is grieving the loss of a loved one, they may welcome hearing their loved one's name, and may be open to sharing memories and stories.
- Holiday cheer may make some people feel worse, but it might also make them feel *normal*. Offer to visit and help decorate their place, watch mushy Hallmark movies together, or invite them over to decorate cookies or build a gingerbread house. Perhaps volunteer together to support your community. If your friend prefers to celebrate in a way that is less shiny and bright this year, support whatever they decide — whether or not it involves you.

As Principals and Vice-Principals, we are problem solvers and want to make someone feel better! But this is a time where you do not have to 'fix' anything. Your gift is to listen, *without* trying to troubleshoot or offer suggestions unless they are invited.

Finally, remember to check in with yourself and think about how you are feeling. Know that many people find the holidays to be challenging: if you do too, you are not alone. Find ways to facilitate connections with others during the holidays that will boost both your well-being and theirs. Isn't that the best gift we can give?

Check out these articles on caring for our own mental health over the holidays and coping with strong emotions:

[Canadian Mental Health Association: Five Ways to Protect Your Mental Health From Holiday Stress](#)

[The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health \(CAMH\): Coping with Holiday Stress:](#)

[Canadian Virtual Hospice: Grief in Times of Celebration: The Empty Spot](#)

[McGill University: A Trauma's Survival Guide to the Holidays:](#)

[BC Crisis Centre](#)

May you find time over the winter break to rest, recharge, and find moments of peace and joy.

Sources:

<https://wellbeingtrust.org/bewell/reach-out-and-talk-to-someone-during-the-holidays/>

<https://www.buzzfeed.com/juliadellitt/ways-to-show-up-for-a-friend-holidays>

<https://wellbeingtrust.org/bewell/reach-out-and-talk-to-someone-during-the-holidays/>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Morandini', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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If you would like to contribute or have ideas about what you would like to see in the ReFresh series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.