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Press Release – For Immediate Distribution

Association of Psychology Newfoundland and Labrador

Strategies to Decrease Stress Returning to Work from Holidays and Back to School Stress

As the summer winds to an end, both adults and kids may find the adjustment back to work and back to school a challenging time. The Association of Psychology Newfoundland and Labrador wants to remind the public that there are strategies that can help with this transition.

Returning to Work

- If returning from out of town or out of province travel, don't rush back the night before – try to give yourself a day or two at home first to help with the transition
- Block off time to get caught up on missed emails, messages etc. and remember you can't do it all the first day. Try not to overbook yourself, and prioritize how quickly messages etc. need to be returned
- If possible try returning to work mid-week, so that you're only facing a few days to start
- Return to self-care and routines – it's easy to increase food and alcohol over the summer, and regular exercise routines are sometimes lost
- Plan mini-holidays – schedule activities for the first weekend, plan a long weekend away in the fall, enjoy bonfires on the beach
- Enjoy your holiday memories – put a favourite holiday picture on your phone or computer background
- Start planning your next holiday – gives you something to look forward to

Returning to School

Proper **sleep** is very important for children in school. Without good sleep, they will have difficulty focusing on schoolwork, learning, and interacting with their peers. Primary school children typically need 10-11 hours of sleep at night, and elementary school children typically need 9-10 hours. Over the summer, many children stay up late, and then cannot get to sleep early enough for school when it starts. If children have developed a later bedtime over the summer, it is a good idea to begin to restore their usual bedtime about a week before school starts. Making bedtime about 15 minutes earlier every couple of nights over the week should help.

Start establishing back to school **routines and structure**. Help your child/teen to prepare their homework/study area. Let them choose special lunch items or school supplies, while still being mindful not to increase your own **financial stress**. Plan the schedule for extra-curricular activities that keeps children/teens engaged but not overwhelmed.

Primary and elementary school children are often **anxious** in the weeks before school opening. They wonder if their friends will be in their class and if they will be comfortable with their new teacher. Parents can help children with these fears by helping them discuss what might happen if their preferred friends are not in their class, and providing strategies on how they can make new friends, as well as maintain friendships after school and on weekends. Parents can also reassure children that, if needed, help is available from their teacher, guidance counsellor, and/or school administration.

Students entering **junior high/high school** often report many fears, particularly around new routines such as remembering their locker combination, having to cope with different classrooms and teachers, as well as new classmates. Students are sometimes worried about how they will be treated by older students, as they have often heard frightening stories about initiations, drug use and bullying. Parents can help their children by problem solving how they would cope with potential situations, provide reassurance that the likelihood is low, and remind them of how to seek support from school personnel, peers and family members.

Students entering **post-secondary** have many of the same stresses (e.g. friendships, grades) but additional pressures of finances, often living away from home for the first time, significant increases in independence, autonomy, availability of drugs and alcohol. This is also a time period in which many significant mental health conditions (e.g. schizophrenia, psychosis, personality disorders) may fully emerge. Supports are available to assist with both academic and mental health concerns at most post-secondary institutions.

For any child, teen or young adult who is anxious about returning to school, it is helpful to talk about they can expect. Children will feel calmer when they realize that they already know a great deal about their upcoming school year. Whenever possible, providing children with choices (e.g. clothing, snacks, school supplies for first day) may help to reduce anxiety.

If you think your child, teen or young adult is experiencing symptoms of anxiety related to returning to school that are above and beyond what is to be expected, a Psychologist in your area can offer help. Please visit our website at www.apnl.ca to find one nearest you.

About: APNL is a fraternal organization dedicated to the promotion of Psychology in Newfoundland and Labrador and to the service of our members across the province. Our parent organization is the Canadian Psychological Association. Currently there are approximately 150 APNL members province-wide.

Contact: Media interviews with a Psychologist on this (or other topics), can be arranged by contacting APNL at janine@janinehubbard.com or 709 682-0235