



Welcoming Children Back: Supporting Students After War

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Welcoming Children Back: Supporting Students After War	1
Introduction	1
Create a Simple Morning Routine	2
Start with a Check-In (Most Important)	2
Add One Simple Activity	2
End with a Shared Classroom Goal	3
Activities to Help Students Refocus	3
“Making Lemonade”	3
“The Big Squeeze”	4
“5-4-3-2-1”	4
Guide Students with Calm and Respectful Language	4
What to Say (Examples)	5
When a Child is Upset	5
What Matters Most	6
Final Reminder	6

Introduction

When children return to school after a time of war and stress, many may feel worried, tired, or unsettled. Some children may have trouble focusing, sitting still, or controlling their emotions. This is normal.

As teachers, your calm presence and simple daily practices can help children feel safe again. This guide offers **simple tools** to support students, help them calm their bodies and emotions, and gently return to learning.

Focus on three simple things: connection, calming the body, and steady routines.

Create a Simple Morning Routine

When students return after a time of stress, begin each day with a **short and consistent morning routine (5–10 minutes)**. This helps students feel safe, calm, and ready to learn.

Start with a Check-In (Most Important)

Begin with a simple check-in so students can share how they are feeling.

Ask **1–2 simple questions**, such as:

- How are you feeling today?
- What has been on your mind?

The teacher answers first in a simple and honest way. Then students may share when they feel ready. The class listens quietly and without judgment.

Keep it short (3–5 minutes).

This helps students feel seen, supported, and more calm.

Add One Simple Activity

After the check-in, choose **one** short activity to help students settle their bodies and focus.

- **Movement:** clapping game, stretching, or gentle movement to wake up the body
 - **Rhythm (example):**
Clap a simple pattern and have students repeat it
Example: clap–clap–pause, clap–clap–pause
Or say together: “Good morning, we are here” (clap with each word)
 - **Breath work (example):**
“Let’s take a slow breath together”
Breathe in through the nose, then slowly breathe out
Repeat 3–4 times
You can say: “Smell a flower... now blow out a candle”
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End with a Shared Classroom Goal

End with a short statement said together. This helps students feel safe and reminds them that they are part of a caring group.

Examples:

Teacher: “My job is to help you and keep you safe.”

Students: “Our job is to help each other and learn together.”

Teacher: “My job is to support you when things feel hard.”

Students: “Our job is to try our best and help each other.”

Teacher: “My job is to help solve problems.”

Students: “Our job is to solve problems together.”

Teacher: “I am here for you.”

Students: “We are here for each other.”

This helps children understand that the classroom is a **safe place**, and that everyone is working together.

Activities to Help Students Refocus

After a time of stress, many children may find it hard to sit, focus, or stay calm. This is normal. Short, simple activities can help students calm their bodies, release tension, and return to learning.

You can use these at any time during the day when students seem restless or upset.

“Making Lemonade”

A simple imagination and movement activity that helps children release tension and relax their bodies.

“Close your eyes. Imagine you are standing under a lemon tree. Take a deep breath.”

“Reach up and pick some lemons.”

“Now squeeze the lemons. Make tight fists and squeeze for five seconds.”

“Throw the lemons down and relax your hands. Shake them out.”

Repeat 2–3 times.

“The Big Squeeze”

A simple body activity that helps children release stress by tightening and relaxing their muscles.

“Choose a muscle in your arm. Put your other hand on it and squeeze it tightly.”

Count to five, then relax.

Ask: “How does your body feel now?”

Repeat with other parts of the body.

“5–4–3–2–1”

A quiet activity that helps children calm down by focusing on what they can see, feel, and hear around them.

Ask students to think quietly:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel

- 3 things you can hear
 - 2 things you can smell
 - 1 thing you can taste
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Guide Students with Calm and Respectful Language

When students return after a time of war, they may feel afraid, unsettled, or overwhelmed. Some may cry, become angry, withdraw, or struggle to focus. This is normal.

In these moments, the teacher's role is to **stay calm, speak simply, and create a sense of safety and dignity**. The way you speak helps students feel secure and supported.

Avoid detailed discussions about the war. Keep language simple and focused on safety and the present moment.

What to Say (Examples)

Use **short, calm, and respectful language**:

- "You are safe here."
- "I am here with you."
- "Take your time."
- "We will go step by step."
- "We are together."

Speak slowly and gently. Your tone matters more than your words.

When a Child is Upset

1. Stay close and calm

Stand or sit near the child. Keep your voice low and steady.

2. Acknowledge without pressure

Do not ask many questions. Say:

- “I can see this is hard.”
- “It’s okay, I am here.”

3. Give simple guidance

- “Let’s sit together.”
- “Let’s take a breath.”

4. Bring the child back when ready

- “When you are ready, we will return together.”
- “Let’s go back together.”

What Matters Most

- Stay calm and patient
- Protect the child’s dignity
- Do not shame or rush the child
- Help them return to the group gently

Children feel safe when the adult is calm, steady, and respectful.

Final Reminder

Your calm presence is the most important support you can give.