

Should Students Get Mental Health Days Off from School?

Megan Haase

Department of English, Anoka Ramsey Community College

ENGL 1121: College Writing and Critical Reading

Professor Chris McCarthy

November 17, 2023

Should Students Get Mental Health Days Off from School?

Have you ever woken up on the wrong side of the bed? Have you ever just had a bad mental health day and needed a day to relax and reset? I know I have. This is why I believe schools should allow students to take mental health days off from school. Some parents and teachers believe that students would take advantage of these mental health days, even if they were not actually having a bad mental health day and use them as a free day to do whatever they want. Though that can be true, taking care of your mental well-being should be your main priority. Mental health is very important for everyone, not just students. School can be hard enough while also dealing with hardships in your personal life. Having a day to relax and reset when a student is overwhelmed and struggling can be crucial. [**This is especially important to me because I could have really used this during school.**](#)

As a current college student and former high school student, I know firsthand how stressful balancing your academic life and personal life is. I know what it feels like to be overwhelmed and feeling burnt out from all the stress. I remember begging my mom to let me stay home sick because I was falling behind in school and feeling so overwhelmed and just needed a day to relax and reset. Because my school did not offer these mental health days, I was forced to pretend to be sick so I could simply have a day to recuperate my mental and emotional state. Many kids likely experience the same feelings I did and would strongly benefit from mental health days.

Mental health days for students are breaks from the normal academic routine. Mental health days focus on addressing and supporting a student's emotional well-being. These days serve as a recognition of students experiencing stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. These challenges can impact a student's overall ability to learn and thrive. Incorporating mental health days into the academic year is a positive thing for many reasons. “A 2020 report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

found that the proportion of mental health-related emergency department visits for children aged 5-17 increased by about 31" (Styx 2023). Firstly, giving students mental health days acknowledges the understanding that mental and emotional well-being are fundamental components of a successful educational experience. As a student, I felt like nobody understood me and what I was going through. Allowing me to have a mental health day would have given me the feeling that I was understood, and they cared about my mental health. Many students may likewise feel as though they are heard and acknowledged by these days and their academic success may increase. Furthermore, a mental health day can provide the opportunity for a student to recharge and reset which reduces the risk of burnout. Most students work until they break and burn out. I feel as if no student should get to that point and should deal with their mental health before they get burnt out. "Mental health is health," says Dr. Bubrick. "Think of it like this: If you were exhausted and feeling sick, pushing yourself to keep going, to go to work or school, would probably be a bad decision." "When a child has been pushing through challenges and is feeling drained, a break is not only a good idea but it's necessary". (Jacobson 2023)

Ultimately, the implementation of mental health days reflects an approach to education that recognizes the importance of student's mental health and how bad mental health can affect their academic success. I believe that schools should focus more on mental health and talk about it with their students. Schools offer guidance counselors and many resources for students who may be dealing with mental health problems, but students oftentimes perceive these counselors as unapproachable and non-caring because of choices regarding the implementation of mental health days made by administration. It is extremely difficult for students to achieve success in academics if they are struggling with their mental health.

Taking a mental health day off from school can offer numerous benefits to students. School is a fast-paced environment and students can often find themselves overwhelmed by the pressure of all the homework, exams, and social interactions. "School is stressful, even with the most caring teachers and the most supportive systems, the most well-resourced children still experience immense stress at school"

(Styx 2023) Although I grew up with an amazing support system and an amazing family. I still struggled with my mental health at home and at school. Additionally, a mental health day can help a student's mental awareness. This enables students to recognize any underlying issues they may have that impact their mental health. By taking the time for self-care, students can develop essential coping skills and mechanisms that can help them navigate challenges that may be going on in their school or personal life. “Ultimately, recognizing the importance of mental health days contributes to a more compassionate and supportive environment at school or at home. Students today are grappling with a variety of issues beyond the classroom and need time to take off for their mental health.” (Proulx 2019) When students are struggling with their mental health, especially at home, it gets taken to school with them. This causes students to fall behind in their academics. If you take the time to go back to the root of why you are feeling this way and prioritize your mental health first, you can achieve mental and academic success.

In response to the growing awareness of the mental health challenges students face, an increasing number of schools are recognizing the importance of mental health days into their calendars. Some schools understand that students are not only learners, but also individuals that have emotional needs. Twelve states currently allow for mental health days. “Since 2020, 10 states have passed laws allowing kids to take a day off from school not because they are physically ill, but simply to mentally rest and recharge” “Allowing students to take mental health days sends the message that taking care of your mental health is as important as your physical health”. (Prothero 2023). As a parent, even if your school does not allow mental health days, you should still allow your student to occasionally have one. “Mental Health Days and Kids, a survey of more than 1,000 American parents conducted by Verywell Mind and Parents, found that 75% of parents feel mental health days can be an effective tool in managing a child’s mental health”. (Tate 2022)

These designated days can provide them with the opportunity to prioritize their well-being and emotional health. “When kids ask to stay home, parents should use it as an opportunity to check in and do a little detective work.” (Jacobson 2023) “It is important to talk to your student about the reason behind

them needing a mental health day and to get a better understanding of if a mental health day is the best solution for them.” (Jacobson 2023) I personally always found it helpful when my parents, instead of saying “no” to me staying home, would talk me through it and we would come up with a plan together. Even if that meant I still had to go to school, they would find something to do after school that would be beneficial to my mental health. “According to the Verywell Mind and Parents survey, 54% of parents are at least somewhat concerned about their child’s mental health and about 35% say their child has shown signs of struggle or emotional distress at least once a week”. (Tate 2022)

It is very important to make this day off count if you are planning on taking one. Dr. Ruggiero says, “This means they are doing things that benefit and protect their mental health. Some mental health day activities include taking a walk or spending time in nature, baking, drawing, and painting. Some other ideas consist of exercising or listening to music or reading a book.” (Jacobson 2023) All of these activities are calming and can help you unwind a little bit. Students should not use this day to sit on their phone and look at social media. It is important to be mindful and do things that help you relax and make efforts towards healing your emotional well-being. “A mental health day should be focused on relaxing and recharging. An attempt to cram too many wellness activities into a single day could just lead to further stress. But allowing a student to spend the day scrolling or staring at a screen may not be helpful either.” (Styx 2023) In my experience, I found lying in bed and looking at my phone or computer all day did not help or allow me to relax. I would use this day to catch up on any miscellaneous tasks I may have wanted to get done earlier and tidy up my room and personal spaces. A tidy space makes for a tidy mind.

In conclusion, mental health days for students are crucial. As someone who struggled with mental health, especially in school, acknowledging that students' well-being extends beyond academics is important. These designated breaks offer a chance for self-reflection, stress management, and emotional rejuvenation. By integrating these mental health days into the school calendar, schools can send a powerful message about the importance of students prioritizing their mental health, sometimes even over their academics. Mental health days do not only benefit individual students but also contribute to a more

supportive environment at school. Overall, I believe that taking an occasional day off for the sake of maintaining mental health can be a benefit to a student's overall well-being.

Authors Note: Since I had already re done this essay prior to the portfolio, there was not much more I feel I needed to fix. There were a few sentences here and there that needed to be worked on but besides that I feel confident about this essay. After having a family member review my essay, along with Professor McCarthy and my peer reviews, I feel strongly about this essay. I took into consideration all the revisions and advice I got, and it was very helpful and made me grow as a writer. This was an important topic to me because I struggled with my mental health during my school years. I loved the idea of schools allowing students to take a mental health day off occasionally and I enjoyed researching about the topic.

References

Jacobson, R. (2023, January 26). *Should kids take mental health days?*. Child Mind Institute. <https://childmind.org/article/should-kids-take-mental-health-days/#:~:text=Mental%20health%20days%20are%20important,them%20get%20back%20on%20track>

Prothero, A. (2023, February 7). *More schools are offering student mental health days. here's what you need to know*. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/more-schools-are-offering-student-mental-health-days-heres-what-you-need-to-know/2023/01>

Proulx, N. (2019, September 12). *Should students get mental health days off from school?*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/12/learning/students-mental-health-days.html>

Styx, L. (2023, May 9). *The growing acceptance of mental health days for students*. Verywell Mind. <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-growing-acceptance-of-mental-health-days-for-students-5199076>

Tate, A. S. (2022, November 23). *Kids today need access to Mental Health Days*. Parents. <https://www.parents.com/health/mental/kids-need-access-to-mental-health-days/>