



Tips for Early Childhood Educators During COVID-19

WHEN CHILDREN WORRY

Coming back to pre-school and childcare is an opportunity for teachers to do what they do best—help children feel safe, calm, and secure through predictable and responsive relationships.

While some children may be eager to return, children who have been home full time with their parents may experience separation anxiety upon reopening. They may also be experiencing the trauma of illness in their family, financial hardship, or abuse that may have worsened during the quarantine. In addition to COVID-19, the growing awareness of racial injustice around us may affect young children. They may feel particularly vulnerable and may not be able to express their worries.

WAYS TO HELP CHILDREN DURING THESE TIMES



PRACTICE BREATHING

Encourage children to put their hands on their bellies and slowly take three deep breaths, in through the nose and out through the mouth.



TALK IT OUT

If caregivers and children are wearing a mask, it is hard to see facial expressions. It is more important than ever to talk through feelings. When children verbalize their worry, answer them as simply and honestly as you can.



DRAW IT OUT

Encourage children to draw what they are feeling and to name it. Ask about their feelings: “What color is your feeling?” “What does your feeling look like?” Create a story by labeling their pictures.

WHEN CHILDREN WORRY (CONTINUED)



STRETCH IT OUT

Simple stretches or yoga poses teach children how to reduce stress in a healthy way. Practicing poses and breathing can improve a child's emotional regulation and can give a child a strong sense of accomplishment and empowerment.



REASSURE CHILDREN

If children see news that may be frightening or express worries about the virus, reassure them that adults are working to keep them stay safe. Use play and honest conversation to help young children feel secure, safe, and loved.



IT'S OK TO ASK FOR HELP

If you think that a child needs mental health support, the following are resources for you and for parents:

REGIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION SERVICES

www.mass.gov/early-childhood-mental-health

CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INITIATIVE

www.mass.gov/service-details/find-a-cbhi-provider

RESOURCES ON HOW TO CREATE CALM IN YOUR CLASSROOM

TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOL STRATEGIES DURING COVID19

www.NCTSN.org

BENEFITS OF YOGA FOR YOUNG KIDS

www.azearlychildhood.org/resources/articles/7-benefits-of-yoga-for-young-kids/

SESAME STREET COMMUNITIES

www.sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/resilience/

MA ASSOCIATION FOR INFANT MENTAL HEALTH

www.massaimh.org/member-resources/covid-19-resources/



REFERENCES

1. The National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI), <https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/index.html>
2. <https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/econ-coping-schoolstaff-factsheet.pdf>



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COMING BACK TOGETHER

As children come back to pre-school and childcare, we know that many things may be different. It is important to remind children that many things are still the same. Your role as a creative and responsive teacher is more important than ever. Acknowledge that things are different and set a positive tone for what is new.

WAYS TO EXPLAIN WHAT'S NEW



NEW WAYS TO SAY HELLO AND GOODBYE

Create a new way to greet children in the morning that is physically distant and fun—a hand wave or a body movement. Greet all the children by name and tell them how happy you are to see them. At the end of the day, consider a wave instead of a hug.



NEW WAYS TO EXPRESS EMOTIONS

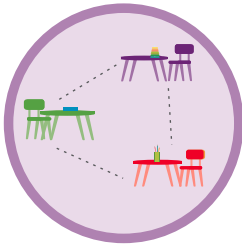
Wearing a mask hides your facial expressions and can seem scary to children. Consider taping a smile to your mask or wearing a pin on your shirt with your photo. Since you cannot rely on facial expressions to comfort children, it is important to explain your emotions.



NEW ROUTINES

After a long break, it is important to remind children of the expectations and routines of your classroom. Consistent structure helps children feel safe and confident about what will happen next. Involve children in establishing new routines to give them a sense of control.

COMING BACK TOGETHER (CONTINUED)



NEW LOOK FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

Your classroom may look different due to physical distancing or new safety requirements. Remind children that their teacher and friends are still there. There may be new toys and new activities, but there will still be fun and laughter.



NEW WAYS OF SHARING

Children may not be able to share toys or activities in your classroom in the same way as they once did. Create new ways to share through drawing, stories and games like “I Spy”. Create community in your classroom with a bulletin board or a collage that shares all the children’s work. Celebrate all types of families.

ACTIVITIES TO USE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

SESAME STREET COMMUNITIES – HEALTH EMERGENCIES

www.sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/health-emergencies/

RE-ESTABLISHING ROUTINES

challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Rebuilding-the-Pyramid.pdf

MA ASSOCIATION FOR INFANT MENTAL HEALTH

www.massaimh.org/member-resources/covid-19-resources/



REFERENCES

1. Parlakian, R. (2020) Why are people wearing masks? Why are people covering their faces? <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3211-why-are-people-wearing-masks-why-are-people-covering-their-faces/>
2. Bartlett, J Griffin, J Thomson, D. (2020) Resources for Supporting Children’s Emotional Well-being during the COVID19 pandemic. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/resources-for-supporting-childrens-emotional-well-being-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>



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BUILDING CHILDREN'S RESILIENCE

Many children who are returning to preschool and childcare have experienced difficult situations. They may have seen illness in their family as well as racial injustices around them. In addition, their parents may be experiencing stress that affects their children. As an educator, you can play an important role in supporting children during challenging times. Children build resilience through safe, nurturing relationships with caring adults and in the growth that occurs through play and exploration. Your calm, steady approach models the behavior that you want to see in children.

USE THE 3 Rs TO RESTORE CALM

REASSURANCE

Children need to feel that they are safe, even in difficult times. Answer their questions honestly. Fears can be less overwhelming when you talk about them.

ROUTINES

Daily routines help to shut down our stress response and promote predictability. Classroom routines help children feel secure. Let children know when a transition is about to happen.

REGULATION

Show children that you can see the world through their eyes. Help children learn how to describe their feelings and encourage them to express their emotions. Calm their stress response through breathing, coloring, or other mindfulness exercises.

RESOURCES ON RESILIENCE

THE NATIONAL CHILD TRAUMATIC STRESS NETWORK

www.nctsn.org/resources/trauma-informed-school-strategies-during-covid-19

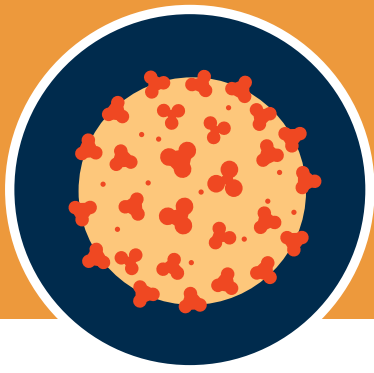
SESAME STREET IN COMMUNITIES/RESILIENCE

www.sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/resilience/



REFERENCES

1. Adapted from Heather Forkey, MD. Supporting resilience in kids in times of stress, June 2020.
2. Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 227-238. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.227>



Tips for Early Childhood Educators During COVID-19

DISCUSSING THE VIRUS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Children may have questions or concerns about COVID-19. As an early childhood educator, you can help children feel safe by providing honest and straightforward explanations about the virus and focusing on what children can do to keep everyone healthy. The virus has had a larger impact on communities of color and children may have had a wide range of experiences over the last few months. Some may have loved ones or community members who have become ill, while others may have remained sheltered from the virus's effects.

STRATEGIES FOR DISCUSSING THE VIRUS



ASK CHILDREN WHAT THEY HAVE HEARD ABOUT THE VIRUS

This will help you address what they are most concerned about. Try not to overload children with too much information that may cause more worry.



ASK CHILDREN HOW THEY FEEL ABOUT WHAT THEY HAVE HEARD

Let them know that it is OK to feel scared or sad. You can also reinforce that many children and adults have those same feelings.



ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO BE HEROES IN REDUCING THE SPREAD OF THE VIRUS

Explain that their actions can make a big difference in keeping people healthy in the classroom and in their neighborhoods. Discuss the new procedures in your classroom and how everyone plays a part in keeping the class healthy through hand washing, wearing a mask, not sharing toys and staying a safe distance from friends.

LEARN MORE ➡

DISCUSSING THE VIRUS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

(CONTINUED)



DESCRIBE THE VIRUS IN SIMPLE LANGUAGE

- The coronavirus is a new type of virus or illness. Some people call it COVID-19. The symptoms usually include a fever, cough, and having a hard time taking deep breaths.
- The coronavirus does not usually make children very sick.
- Most people with coronavirus can stay at home and rest to get better. Only a small number of people become very sick and need to go to the hospital.
- Doctors and nurses are working hard to help people who need more care.

RESOURCES FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

SESAME STREET COMMUNITIES—H IS FOR HANDWASHING

www.sesamestreetincommunities.org/activities/h-is-for-handwashing/

SUPPORTING CHILDREN DURING COVID 19

www.nctsn.org/resources/supporting-children-during-coronavirus-covid19



REFERENCES

1. CDC—Talking to Children about Coronavirus
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html>
2. Gurwitch R., & Brymer, M. (2020). Supporting Children During Coronavirus (COVID-19). Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.



Tips for Early Childhood Educators During COVID-19

HELPING CHILDREN WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

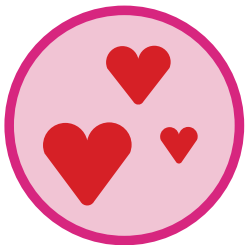
There has been a tremendous amount of grief and loss in recent months. This may include the death of a relative due to COVID19 and also the loss of regular activities and routines. Given the pandemic procedures around isolating the sick and the changes in mourning rituals, many adults and children have not been able to say goodbye in the usual ways to loved ones who have died. This lack of closure can cause distress and grief in children.

WAYS TO HELP CHILDREN COPE WITH THE TRAUMA OF LOSS



VALIDATE THEIR FEELINGS

Children benefit from a caring adult who listens to them and acknowledges that it is OK to feel sad, angry, or lonely. Help children label their feelings with words or drawings. Use clear language.



OFFER LOVE AND SUPPORT

Remind children that they are loved. Reassure them that the adults around them will take care of them.



KEEP UP ROUTINES

Children may find structure, support, and connections at preschool or childcare to be reassuring. Returning to predictable routines helps children manage complex emotions.

HELPING CHILDREN WITH GRIEF AND LOSS (CONTINUED)



MAKE MEMORIES

Help a child find or make an object that connects them to their loved one and reminds them of happy memories. Ask a child to bring in a photo of their loved one and describe it to the class. Tell children that the memory of a loved one will live on in everyone's hearts.



PERMISSION TO FEEL HAPPY

For many children, grief can be interrupted as they begin to feel happy again or when they are doing something fun. These changing emotions are a normal part of the grief process.

RESOURCES TO USE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

SESAME STREET IN COMMUNITIES: GRIEF

www.sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/grief/

NCTSN: HELPING CHILDREN WITH TRAUMATIC SEPARATION OR GRIEF

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/helping_children_with_traumatic_separation_or_traumatic_grief_related_to_covid19.pdf

MA ASSOCIATION FOR INFANT MENTAL HEALTH

<https://massaimh.org/member-resources/grief-and-loss-resources/>



REFERENCE

Cohen, J., Goodman, R., Kliethermes, M. D., & Epstein, C. (2020). Helping Children with Traumatic Separation or Traumatic Grief Related to COVID-19. Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.



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MANAGING YOUR EMOTIONS THROUGH SELF-CARE

These are difficult times with a great deal of uncertainty. Recognize that this is a new situation for everyone and as an educator, you need space to reflect on your own emotions to be able to respond effectively to children. You have the knowledge and experience to help guide children through these challenges. You know how to think creatively, nurture children, and encourage them to grow and learn.

USE YOUR ABCs TO REGULATE YOUR OWN EMOTIONS

AWARENESS

Take time to check in with yourself to understand what is causing your stress. Is a child's behavior pushing your buttons? Are you feeling less confident? How does your body react—shortness of breath or heart racing?

BALANCE

In a difficult moment, take a deep breath or a break. If you know you have a challenging situation ahead, try to prepare yourself in advance. Practice ongoing self-care through exercise, mindfulness, sleep, and activities that you enjoy.

CONNECTION

Remember that you are not alone. Make a list of people who support you and then reach out to them. Take a physically distant walk with a friend. Plan time for reflection and connection with colleagues or friends.

RESOURCES FOR SELF-CARE

TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOL STRATEGIES DURING COVID-19

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/taking_care_of_yourself.pdf

PYRAMID MODEL SELF-CARE

https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Pandemic_Supporting-Yourself_tipsheet.pdf



REFERENCE

Adapted from Heather Forkey, MD. Supporting resilience in kids through caregiver regulation, June 2020.