




TIPS FOR CHILD CARE PROGRAMS


Supporting Young Children's Social-Emotional Well-being During Change


The coronavirus outbreak has led to many changes in our lives. While information and recommendations may change during this uncertain time, what we do know is that children continue to learn, develop and thrive in safe, predictable, loving environments. Following these best practice recommendations can support young children and their families returning to child care during this pandemic.


 **Take Care of Yourself.** It is common for all of us to feel stressed. During uncertain times we may experience stress more often. Caregiving is a rewarding and demanding profession. It is important for you to practice self-care and identify effective ways to manage your stress. When you feel overwhelmed ask for and accept help.


 **Meet children's needs with love and nurturance.** Some children may be worried, "acting out" by being clingier, fussy, or withdrawn. A child who learned to use the potty, may regress and have accidents. This can cause frustration for child care staff and families. Young children need you to be patient and understand their needs. Give them love and support to know they are safe. Having a consistent caregiver can promote more opportunity for connection and support.

 **Establish drop-off routines that communicate predictability and safety.** With newer protocols for sanitizing requirements and health screenings, many child care programs will be advised to not let parents stay and support their children as they transition to child care in the morning. It can be helpful to have a visual schedule that clearly communicates new drop-off routines. Some children may need their teacher or provider to stay with them a bit longer to help them transition. It may be helpful to let children have a favorite blanket, a family photo, or stuffed animal at the center that can give them comfort. Communicate with the family drop-off changes prior to their arrival.

 **Be available for hugs, cuddles, and comfort.** Young children can't do social distancing and need hugs, cuddles, and other activities that support safe, predictable, and secure relationships. Talk to children during diaper changes and hold them during bottle feedings. As recommended by the CDC, it is important to comfort children when they need this comfort, particularly when sad, crying, and/or anxious.

 **Consider having smaller ratios and group sizes.** Having these smaller groups supports children's healthy development and public health. It can also be helpful to have a consistent group of children and providers.

 **Read children's books and stories.** Young children, even toddlers, benefit from hearing stories about characters with similar experiences. Social stories can be helpful in supporting children's understanding for what will happen in particular situations and what they can do in those situations. Pictures often go along with these stories that are helpful in understanding new routines.

 **Identify ways for children to express their feelings.** Children need support to understand and become aware of their strong feelings and emotions. Help children by acknowledging and naming their emotions (*e.g., I see you are sad that mommy left. Do you want a hug?*) All emotions are safe and okay to have.

References and Resources

¹Strategies to Support the Well-Being of Essential Child Care Staff and Young Children During COVID-19

²Considerations for Infants and Toddlers in Emergency Child Care for Essential Workers

³Guidance for Child Care Programs that Remain Open



Nebraska Association
for Infant Mental Health