



# **Supporting Children's and Families' and Staff's Mental Health Upon Return to School During Covid-19**

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[www.eccpct.com](http://www.eccpct.com)

# The Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP)

ECCP is a statewide, strengths-based program that is designed to offer caregivers of young children, relationship-based consultation services.

The Goal of the ECCP is to support the healthy social and emotional development of young (birth to age five) children by offering support and consultation to those who care for these children.

Funded and Supported by Connecticut's Department of Children and Families  
and the Office of Early Childhood

Managed by Advanced Behavioral Health, Inc.®

\*Currently offering tele-consult services\*



# A Lot Has Happened Since March...

## Children May Wonder:

- ❖ Why there are health screenings?
- ❖ Why am I in a new classroom?
- ❖ Where are my teachers and friends?
- ❖ Will they be coming back tomorrow?
- ❖ Why are there new rules and routines?

## Families May Wonder:

- ❖ Will my child be safe?
- ❖ Will my child be happy?
- ❖ What will happen if my child gets sick?
- ❖ Will my child's same teachers and friends be there?



# The Importance of Building Relationships



One of the most important aspects of teaching is building positive relationships with children.

Children can only feel safe, learn, and thrive when they form a positive relationship with their caregiver/teacher.



# Building Relationships with Children

Things to Consider:

- ❖ Temperament
- ❖ Prior experiences in the classroom
- ❖ Likes and dislikes
- ❖ Ways of coping and being comforted
  - ❖ i.e. What helps the child feel safe?
- ❖ Culture (home, community, ethnicity)



# Building Relationships with Families

Consider various forms of communication:

- ❖ Email/text/photo communication
- ❖ Virtual “meet and greets” – remember to check on center policies regarding sending videos/video messages
- ❖ Consider creating an online questionnaire sent to caregivers with basic questions to get to know (or re-know) their children
  - ❖ You may use Google Docs, Survey Monkey



# Building Relationships with Families

Questions you may ask caregivers prior to children's return during COVID-19:

- ❖ What concerns do you have about your child returning?
- ❖ How can we make you feel more comfortable?
- ❖ Have you noticed any changes in your child during quarantine?
- ❖ Has your child progressed or regressed in any skills during quarantine (i.e. eating/sleeping, speaking, toilet training, etc.)?

When creating a questionnaire for new or returning children, think about information that you wish you had known about past children you've had in your classroom; at the same time, understand families may not be ready or comfortable at that time to answer those questions. Relationship building takes time...



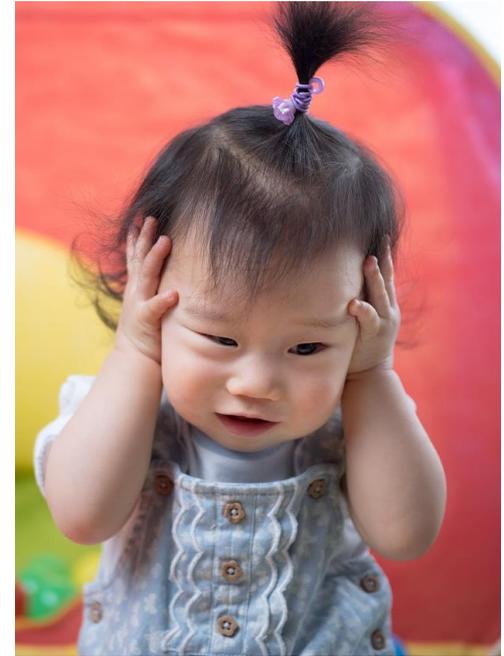
# Acknowledge Children's & Families' Feelings:

Children may feel:

- ❖ Worried, Scared
- ❖ Confused / Unsure

Families may feel:

- ❖ Stressed
- ❖ Worried, Scared
- ❖ Unsure (uncertain about the future)



It's OK to empathize with these feelings, while assuring children and families you will do your best to make school a safe place for them.



# Talk About Changes with Children

- ❖ Children may have questions related to all the changes that they notice in their classrooms. It's okay to answer them or even ask children if they have questions. When children know what's happening and what to expect, they feel safe and secure.
- ❖ Keep answers simple and age-appropriate so they have enough information but not too much where they become confused or scared. (scripted/social stories are great)
- ❖ “Answering Your Young Child’s Questions About Coronavirus”  
<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3265-answering-your-young-child-s-questions-about-coronavirus>



17/03 Downloads

# Going Back to School After COVID-19 (corona virus). A social story.



Subject  
School Counseling, Child Care, School Psychology

Grade Levels  
PreK, Kindergarten

Resource Type  
Other, EBooks, For Parents

File Type  
Presentation (Powerpoint) File (1 MB)

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**Going Back to School After COVID-19 social...**  
FREE

**Book List, Resources, & Websites to Help Teac...**

## Product Description

Looking for a way to help young children transition back to school once the time comes? I have written a social story a social story about going back to school after the COVID-19 shutdown.  
 Appropriate for preschool, Pre-K, and K.  
 Helps children to understand about having to transition from being at home all the time to going back to school.

# Introduce & Address Rules and Routines

- ❖ Keep rules and routines simple, clear, and descriptive. Consider creating visuals of the rules and routines & posting in a few visible areas of the room.
- ❖ Consider reviewing the rules and routines for a few minutes each day. Model the behaviors you want to see in children. For example, consider using puppets/dolls to model good hygiene or safe ways to greet or comfort someone who is upset (Ex – “Hootie” the owl just sneezed (“ah chu!”), what does he need to do now?”)
- ❖ Keep your expectations realistic & practice patience. This will benefit everyone!



# hand washing steps:



1. turn on water



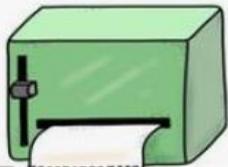
2. wet hands



3. scrub with soap



4. rinse clean



5. dry hands



## How to Wash Your Hands

Color Elmo's handwashing steps below.  
Hang this page by the sink to practice!

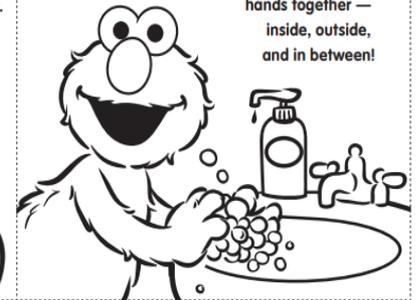
1

Wet your hands under running water.



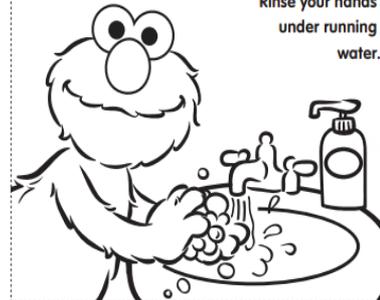
2

Use soap, and scrub your hands together — inside, outside, and in between!



3

Rinse your hands under running water.



4

Dry your hands with a clean towel.



# Greetings | Saludos



**smile**  
sonríe



**put hands on your heart**  
pon las manos  
sobre tu corazón



**give an air hug**  
da un abrazo de aire



**give a superhero salute**  
da una saludo  
de superhéroe



**give a thumbs up**  
da un pulgar hacia arriba



**blow a kiss**  
sopla un beso



**elbow bump**  
choca los codos



**wave hello**  
saluda con la mano

# Help Children Follow Rules and Routines

- ❖ Focus on different ways of getting children's attention. This may include ringing a bell or playing music to signal a transition; saying a child's name in a sing-song voice or whisper voice; and using gestures (i.e. pointing to your face to elicit eye contact).
- ❖ Consider using short, concrete phrases and modeling to re-direct.  
Ex – “Jeremy we give waves right now, not hugs. Watch me (demonstrate waving to a peer). Now, you try.”
- ❖ Use lots of positive reinforcement – “play up” your body language and tone of voice. If you smile, it'll likely show in visible areas.



# Strategies for Helping Children Big Feelings

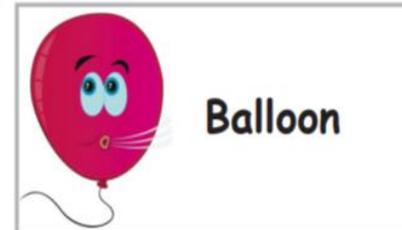
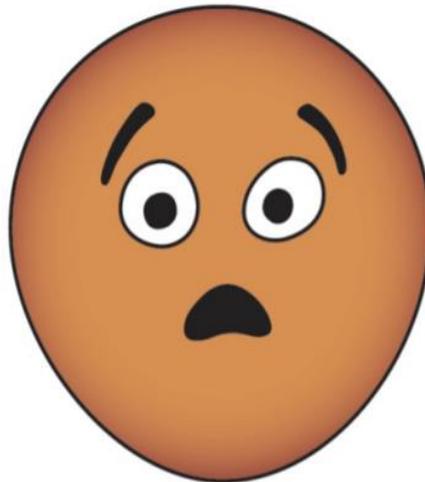
- ❖ Reassure children you will do your best to keep them safe and healthy. Give brief and age appropriate responses to questions.
- ❖ Keep a consistent routine & tell children what is comes next.
- ❖ Keep daily rituals – i.e. morning song, favorite book.
- ❖ Help children label feelings and tell them it's OK to feel that way
  - ❖ “Avoid avoidance” – talking about feelings is a learning opportunity
- ❖ Teach children safe ways deal with big feelings (using words, belly breathing, take a break).
  - ❖ Include “washable” items in “cozy area” (plastic couch/chair, balls, etc.).
  - ❖ Consider creating personalized coping/relaxation kits.
- ❖ Comfort & soothe children – children still need hugs!



## Managing “Scared” During COVID-19

Choose a calming activity.

When I feel scared, I can calm by:





**Creating a Classroom Comfort Box**  
Children can experience many types of stressors from school, home, and neighborhood environments. Teachers can use a comfort box as a tool to help soothe children who are feeling sad, scared, anxious, or angry.

Find the items that work best for the children in your classroom. Here are some examples:

**Soft Items:**

-Make soft dolls or stuffed animals available for children to hold. Puppets can be a helpful tool in helping children to discuss their feelings.

**Photo Albums:**

-Create some mini-photo albums featuring pictures of the children, their families, teachers, and pets.

**Books:**

-Include children's favorite books and books about different types of feelings.

**Squeeze Toys/ Stress Balls:**

-Add in small items that children can hold in their hands that allow them to squeeze, pull, or push.

**Feeling Activities:**

-Put together a variety of pictures of people expressing different emotions, a feelings wheel, and an unbreakable mirror.

**Opportunities for Self-Expression:**

-Include a clipboard with paper and crayons for children to scribble or draw a picture. A dry-erase board or drawing toy can also be used.

**Stress/Wave Bottles:**

-Create a variety of bottles for children to shake and watch by filling clear plastic bottles with food coloring, glitter, vegetable oil, etc. Hot glue the bottle tops for safety.

**Soothing Music:**

Allow children to listen to music with headphones. This can be done during naptime or at anytime during the day as needed.

*When creating a classroom comfort box, talk with the children in your class about what helps them to feel better. Incorporate these suggestions.*

# Strategies for Separation Anxiety

- ❖ Consider providing a virtual preview of the classroom & activities.
- ❖ Encourage a brief “goodbye” ritual between children & families
  - ❖ Ex - “How about you give Mommy a big hug and kiss? When Mommy picks you up later, she will be so happy to see you!”
- ❖ Set gentle & realistic limits around staying at school (avoid promises of leaving early).
  - ❖ Ex – “I hear you saying how much you miss Daddy. Right now we are getting ready to go outside. How about we think of something fun we can do outside together?”
- ❖ Read books that validate children’s experiences (i.e. “The Kissing Hand”, “Wemberly Worried”).
- ❖ Consider allowing children to bring a “comfort item” such as a family photograph.
- ❖ Build rapport in small doses – if your first try is unsuccessful, give space and try again.



# Acknowledge Your Own Feelings

- ❖ It's OK to not be OK. This is a very stressful time for directors and teachers too, not just for parents and children.
- ❖ Young children, especially toddlers, may not understand what is happening the world, but they can sense when their caregivers are upset and may start to match those emotions.
- ❖ Try acknowledging your feelings, rather than pushing them away (“avoid avoidance”)
- ❖ After acknowledging your feelings, try a coping method (deep breathing, looking at a relaxing image, talking to another adult)



# Grounding Techniques

- ❖ Grounding techniques can decrease stress and anxiety by bringing you back you back to the present moment and away from distressing thoughts.
- ❖ The focus is on your five senses - touch, taste, sight, sound and smell.



# Examples of Grounding Techniques

- Press feet on ground and remind yourself you are safe
- Rub a piece of piece of clothing
- 5 sense check (I see, I smell, I hear, feel, I taste)
- Look at a relaxing picture (family, friends, beach)
- Take a sip of cool water



- Stretch- relax muscles
- Take 3 deep breaths
- Look out window at nature
- Remind yourself you are wiser, stronger, kind
- Place you hands on your stomach and heart



# Let's Be Flexible & Patient

- ❖ Normal routines have changed and will continue to change.
- ❖ Each day will be different depending on what the children that day need emotionally, especially if new children are entering into your classroom at different times.
- ❖ Remember all children are different! Some children may need more or different support than others.
- ❖ As an educator, you play a very important role, but you are not superhuman. Be kind to yourself and admit when you are struggling. It's OK to not be OK!



# Online Resources

The Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP):

<https://www.eccpct.com>

Child Health Development Institute of CT (CHDI):

<https://www.chdi.org>

CT Office of Early Childhood (OEC):

<https://www.ctoec.org/>

Conscious Discipline:

<https://www.consciousdiscipline.com/>

National Association for the Education of Young Children:

<https://www.naeyc.org/>

Child Health and Development Institute of CT, Inc:

<https://www.chdi.org/>

Hi Mama: Early Childhood Education Blog:

<https://blog.himama.com>



**If you have questions or need support**

To find a consultant near you, please visit  
our ECCP website and use the “find a  
consultant” feature

[www.eccpct.com](http://www.eccpct.com)

