

INTRODUCING IT: Thriving Child Care: Social-Emotional Health and COVID-19 Guidelines



WATCH IT (1:01:23 / 1 hour 1 minute 23 seconds)

[Thriving Childcare: Social-Emotional Health and COVID-19 Guidelines](#) (Zero to Thrive, University of Michigan, June 2020)

This webinar brings together four child care and child development experts as they discuss how to meet both safety and developmental needs with Corona-19 now in the child care picture. There is a tension between helping children stay protected from the virus, and helping them feel protected socially and emotionally. Watch and listen to these professionals talk about how you can manage both as child care re-opens.



KNOW IT

Here are the **important ideas** this resource offers:

- Safety and security are both critical to the children in your care. We need to think about how both can be carried out and how they impact very young children.
- Everyone – adults and children - are feeling uncertain, which brings on stress. Supporting good mental health practices will help us to adhere to rules while supporting others. This is a time for flexibility as we think about what is needed.

- Children rely on their caregivers to be emotionally supportive; they need to access us. Experiences may have challenged their sense of safety while away from child care, and they may feel they were abandoned by care providers. Be prepared for a difference in the child's perspective about you and about being in child care upon their return.
- Care providers can use the skills they have on dealing with separation anxiety and transitions, but they may need to start with practices at a more basic level compared to where the child was before the pandemic.
- It may take weeks for children to transition. Look for changes in typical behavior as cues that the child is feeling stress. He may: shut down, show aggression, show heightened separation anxiety, be emotionally flat, have difficulty napping/sleeping, complain of stomachaches/headaches, or be inconsolable. Pay attention to both the duration and the intensity of the behaviors.
- Be prepared to alter schedules and call in additional support such as mental health consultation or Part C services for the child, and supports for staff.
- The child's job during these years is to play, make friends and learn. Each individual child will go about these tasks differently, depending upon their unique temperament and experiences. If you are seeing challenging behaviors, think about these factors as you consider the child.
- Behaviors give voice to feelings. When seeing challenging behavior in a child or adult, take a pause and wonder why – ask yourself what is needed. The same needs you identify in a child may be the same needs for the child's parent. Reassure both that you are there to help them feel safe and secure.
- Parents may show negative feelings due to anxiety, missing their child, uncertainty over safety, feeling a lack of control. Communication and collaboration to address concerns can help.
- Teachers need support in order to stay emotionally available. Connect, plan, ask for assistance, and seek out reflective consultation and professional groups.
- We can be physically distanced and offer emotional support to children – eye contact, maintaining calm, the use of a favorite toy or object can offer children a feeling of security.

- Continue to practice self-care - we need to be calm to share our calm

Here are some terms in the resource that may not be familiar to you:

Temperament describes the individual differences in emotion, motor activation and attentional reaction to stimuli. Characteristics of temperament include activity level, distractibility, adaptability, sensitivity, and quality of mood. There are three major types of temperament: easy, slow-to-warm-up, and difficult. Temperament plays a big role in shaping children's outcomes, it influences the way they interact with their environment, and it impacts how adults and other children respond to them.

Transitional object refers to a physical item, such as a blanket or stuffed animal used by young children to reduce anxiety or provide comfort. It serves as an extension of a young child's primary caregiver, usually the mother.

Regulate is the measure of control a person has over thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Affect is a person's expression or display of emotion or feelings through facial expressions, hand gestures, voice tone, and other emotional signs such as laughter or tears.

Self-care is any activity we deliberately do to take care of our physical, mental or emotional health.



Let's see what you learned from this resource!

1. **True or false:** Children may feel the extended time away from care providers as abandonment.
2. **True or false:** Parents may have the same negative feelings as their children.
3. **True or false:** Caregivers need support during this time of transition.

4. **True or false:** It isn't possible to maintain safe physical distance while offering emotional support to children.



THINK ABOUT IT

Take a few minutes to consider these questions. If you want to, write your thoughts down.

1. Think about how you offer emotional support to the children in your care. What did you do before the pandemic that will need to change? How does that make you feel? How do you think it will make the child feel? What ideas do you have to help manage this change?
2. The speakers talked about playing and making friends as the young child's job. How might the new guidelines impact children in doing these jobs? What ideas do you have to help children accomplish them while keeping them physically distanced?
3. Why do you think the speakers spent time talking about taking care of yourself? Why is or isn't this important?



TRY IT!

Here are some ideas to try:

1. Take some time to think about the major pieces of the day that may make parents anxious, like drop off, pick up, and snack time. Write down what: you will do, what the children will do, and when applicable, what the parents will do. Now think about how you will share this information with parents. Provide them this information and invite them to ask questions and collaborate so that everyone feels safe and reassured.

2. Talking about things is a good way to reduce stress and anxiety, even for children. There are lots of different concerns related to COVID-19 when it comes to health, safety, and child care and education settings. Take a look at **Handout #1**. This tip sheet provides age-appropriate responses for everyone, from very young children on up!

3. Play is synonymous with childhood, but between and among the children in your care looks different with the COVID virus. Care providers need to find ways to encourage children to play independently. In group settings, new ideas are needed to find activities that may be done together, but physically separate. **Handout #2** offers you a long list of activities and games that keep children playing and learning safely!

RECALL IT! Answers: 1. T 2. T 3. T 4. F