

Five Tips for Families Returning to Child Care After COVID-19

As families begin to re-enter the workplace after COVID-19, many children will return to their child care programs. This change may be hard for your child after months of not being at their usual child care. Returning to child care may bring a mix of emotions for everyone. These five tips can help make this transition as smooth as possible for families returning to child care after COVID-19.



- 1. Acknowledge your feelings and concerns for safety.** You may have concerns about your child's safety in the classroom. Talk with your child's teacher and the center director to learn the procedures to keep children safe and healthy. Contact your child care facility's director about how your child's experience may be different when they return. Some important points to discuss are:
 - **Anticipate a change in routine.** Because of new health screening and sanitizing requirements, expect child care providers to practice social distancing. This may include outdoor pick-up or drop-off procedures, use of daily health screenings for children upon arrival, use of face coverings for adults and children older than two years old, and continued intensive cleaning and hygiene measures for adults and children.
 - **Discuss what may have changed and what your child can expect.** There may be changes within the child care facility, such as
 - New staff
 - Smaller classroom sizes
 - Packed meals instead of meals provided by the child care
 - Not all families have returned to the same child care facility
- 2. Get back into bedtime routines.** The week before the return to child care, begin to use school night bed and wake-up times so everyone can get back into the routine. The transition back will be easier for everyone if your child has the sleep they need.
- 3. Talk with your child about his feelings.** Your child has adapted to a new normal. They may feel anxious or confused about going back to child care. Acknowledge all feelings and let them know it's okay to have those feelings. Ask what might help them feel better.

The Pennsylvania Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) Program is a child-specific consultative model which addresses the social-emotional development of young children within their early childhood education program. For more information, visit www.pakeys.org.



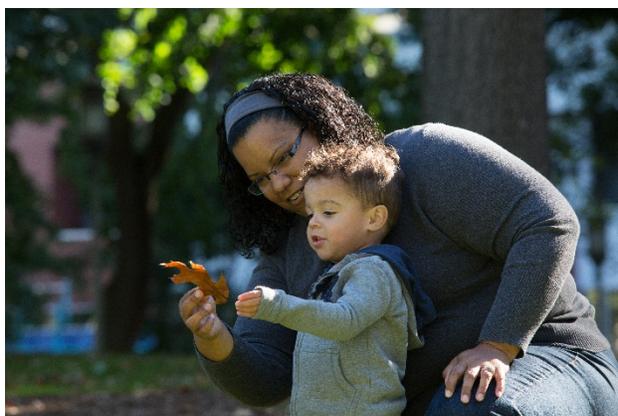
Things that may help with your child's transition back to child care:

- Help your child write a letter telling their teacher(s) what they are looking forward to and what is making them feel apprehensive.
- Draw a picture or make a card to give to their teacher(s) when they return to the classroom.
- Discuss what your child remembers about the classroom: routines, materials, friends, meals, activities, the playground.
- Drive to the child care facility before returning and talk about your morning routine on the first day back.
- Set up a FaceTime call with your child's teacher or other staff, if they are agreeable.
- Look at photos you may have from child care.
- Read the social story, *We Are Back in School*, about returning to group child care.

<https://bit.ly/3cNdnxA>

4. Communicate and collaborate with your child's teacher and child care facility on how to help your child.

When families and child care staff collaborate on ways to support a child, everyone benefits. It will be helpful for teachers to understand if your child has been exposed to food insecurity, illness, trauma, domestic violence or other experiences that may affect your child's behavior. Young children are often unable to use language to fully explain how they are feeling. Your child may act out their worry by becoming withdrawn, fussy, or more aggressive. Teachers can provide the care and support your child needs if they understand what is behind the behaviors and emotions. They can also provide methods they use to soothe your child while in care, and you can share practices at home. This will help keep responses consistent for your child. Your child's teacher or director can also provide information about programs that provide support for children and families.



5. Keep your tone positive and upbeat when saying goodbye. Children pick up on the reactions of the trusted adults in their lives. Try to not look worried or sad when dropping your child off at child care, and don't linger too long when it's time to go. Say a quick, upbeat good-bye and reassure your child they will enjoy the day.

www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/helping-preschoolers-cope-with-separation-anxiety

www.zerotothree.org/resources/3413-what-comes-next-back-to-child-care-following-shelter-in-place

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