

Guidance for Families of Young Children During School Closures for COVID-19

With our daily routines disrupted and many elements of our work and personal lives currently unknown, it is understandable that there will be heightened stress and anxiety. In times of communal stress it can sometimes be hard to know what to say or how to react. During this time, keeping our daily routines, connecting with others (even from afar), and caring for ourselves will help offer a sense of security and help children know what to expect.

Here are a few suggestions with more information and resources on each below:

- Speak with your children about the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and why schools are closing
- Keep a daily routine that works for you and your family so everyone knows what to expect.
- Offer children lots of opportunities to stay engaged in play and learning
- Caregivers' physical and mental health is important

Speak with your child about the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and why schools are closing

- Children are likely hearing about the virus. Feel free to talk with them about it. Not talking about it may actually make them more nervous. Invite your child to share what they know about the coronavirus and how they are feeling.
- Find out what your child already knows before beginning the conversation. Ask questions geared to your child's age level. For younger children, you could say, "Have you heard grownups talking about a new sickness (germ) that's going around?" This gives you a chance to learn how much kids know – and to find out if they're hearing the wrong information.
- Follow your child's lead. Some children may want to spend time talking or even drawing. But if your children don't seem interested or don't ask a lot of questions, that's OK. They may need time to think about it and come back to you later with their questions.
- Answer your child's questions about the virus in a straightforward and factual manner.
- If your child asks about something and you don't know the answer, it's okay to say, "I'm not sure." Use the question as a chance to find out together, or let the child know you'll check into it and come back to them later.
- Remember that emotions are contagious. Your attitude about the coronavirus will impact how your child feels about it. If you remain calm, your child is more likely to remain calm as well.
- Empower your child with information about staying safe. You might say, "We can be germ-busters! Germ busters keep germs away by washing hands and keeping hands to ourselves and away from faces." Let children know there are a lot of helpers who are working to keep the germs away too, like doctors and nurses.
- Give children space to share their fears. It's natural for children to worry, "Could I be next? Could that happen to me?" Let them know they can always come to you for answers or to talk

about what scares them.

Some language to share with children

- "There is a new germ, like the germs that give us the flu or a cold and it's called Coronavirus, or COVID-19."
- "It can make people cough or have a fever, but if a person gets this germ it usually doesn't stay for long."
- "Grown-ups are very good at keeping kids safe. We can stay safe by washing our hands with soap and water. When we wash our hands, we can sing a song! What song should we sing?"
- "Grown-ups everywhere, like your teachers and other grown ups in school, are working really hard to make sure that everyone stays healthy. One way to do that is making sure we do our learning and playing from home. "

Resources

- [Social Story on Speaking with Young Children about School Closure](#)
 - o Social stories support children's learning of complex topics. Consider using this story to talk to your child about school closure and adapting to new challenges.
 - o *Note: Consider adapting this social story to better reflect your family and community.*
- For more information see "[Talking With Children: Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers During Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#)"
- Adults can find accurate information [here](#)

Try to keep a daily routine that works for you and your family so everyone knows what to expect.

Children thrive on routines. Following a predictable routine is a helpful way for children to feel safe and know what is expected of them (e.g. washing hands before breakfast, reading a book before nap, or taking a bath or shower before bed). Routines help you and your child move confidently through the day and encourage positive behavior. At the same time, be flexible and responsive to your child's needs. You know your child best! Find a balance of routines and flexibility that works for your family.

- Some language to use with children when discussing a daily routine: "We'll still wake up every morning, have breakfast, and read a story. Some things that will be different are that we won't be going to school for a little while and we won't be going to the library after school."

Things to consider when planning your daily routines

- An easy way to get started is to ask yourself, "What are the things we do every day?" Here is an example of what a schedule at home may look like:

Morning	Wake up routine Breakfast Reading time Play
Afternoon	Lunch Quiet time Music and movement Play
Evening	Dinner A walk outside Bedtime routine

- In school, teachers use pictures to help children understand what is coming next. You may want to consider using images like those found [here](#). You can find a handwashing example below.



Source: livingwellwithautism.com

Take time to remind your child a few important things everyday

- They are safe
- Where they will be that day
- Who will be taking care of them that day
- When they can expect to see you again (i.e. "I will see you after snack this afternoon.")

Routines can also be challenging. This Routine Based Support Guide for families gives helpful tips for navigating any daily routine with your young children.

- [For infants and toddlers](#)
- [For children 3-8 years old](#)

Offer children lots of opportunities to stay engaged in play and learning.

For young children, everyday living is full of learning. Any learning that they consider fun is called play! Connecting with and talking to your child throughout the day is one of the best ways to support their development.

- Your child's favorite toys, games, and books offer many opportunities for learning, especially when you play and talk with them. By talking with your child as you play, and engaging in back and forth conversations, you are supporting the development of many important skills (e.g. vocabulary development, communication skills, listening skills, social emotional skills, and critical thinking skills). **Always feel free to talk and play with your child in any language your family speaks, as this supports later learning in any language.**
- Daily activities like cooking, laundry, and opening the mail offer important moments to bond and engage with your child. The Division of Early Childhood recently created and shared a Learning at Home resource for families of young children full of ideas for how to build learning into your days at home.
 - o You can pick up a printed copy at any of the Enrichment Centers and digital copies, including all translated versions [here](#)
- Families of 4-year-olds also should have received a pack of Fun with Feelings cards this year. There are [resources online](#) to help you use those cards at home to support play, learning, and social emotional development
 - o We suggest you start with the video "[How Can I Use Fun with Feelings?](#)"

Caregivers' physical and mental health is important.

Adults should support each other to recognize and address stress. It can be challenging to recognize stress signals for what they are; physical discomfort, unusual emotional fluctuations, and difficulty thinking clearly are some common responses to communal stress. When you take time to care for yourself, you are better able to care for your child. Even a few minutes of "you time" can help you recharge so that you can be your best.

- Listen to music as you're doing chores around the house.
- Set an alarm to remind yourself to pause, take a deep breath, or use a calming meditation app. Even two minutes of relaxation can make a difference in how you feel.
- Make sure you're getting enough sleep. When your little one lays down to rest, try to do the same. If they're having trouble settling down, sing a quiet song that you loved when you were small, one that calms you down, too.

- Take a ten-minute vacation. As you're bathing your child, soak your hands in the warm water.
- Keep a favorite family photo with you. If you're having a challenging day with your little one, you can look at it to remind you of happy times you've spent together.
- Reach out to others. Feeling alone is common for families and caregivers during stressful times. But you don't have to handle them on your own. Connect with trusted family members and friends, share your feelings with them, and enlist their help.