



Considerations for Reopening Series for Early Childhood Programs

PART 4: SUPPORTING HIGH QUALITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

RESOURCE TOOLKIT

This toolkit was created as part of the QUALITYstarsNY *Considerations for Reopening* webinar series to support early childhood programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides a collection of resources and materials developed by QUALITYstarsNY and various organizations, in alignment with state and federal guidance and best practice in early childhood, to help programs with reopening and operating during the time of COVID-19.

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PART 4: SUPPORTING HIGH QUALITY ENVIRONMENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Considerations for Reopening Series
Part 4: Supporting High
Quality Environments during
the COVID-19 Pandemic

QUALITYstarsNY Quality Improvement
Specialists



Considerations for Reopening Webinar Series

Visit our series webpage at **qualitystarsny.org/reopening** to access:

- Webinar recordings from the other series sessions
- Downloadable Resource Toolkits for each session

Objectives

- Participants will develop a plan to share the environmental resources from this session with program staff.
- Participants will identify and plan for at least one environmental change needed in their program.

Agenda

- Welcome and introduction
- Ice breaker polls
- Structure for bringing this back to staff
- Developmentally Appropriate Environments
- Adaptions for Environments during COVID-19 Guidance
- Planning for staff sharing
- Wrap Up

Topic	Considerations	Strengths of Current Implementation	Changes that can be made to implement topic to its fullest potential	Items and other supports (training, coaching) needed to support implementation
Room Arrangement/ Furnishings/Cozy Area				
Display				
Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fine Motor • Art • Science/Nature 				

Action Planning

Developmentally Appropriate Environments

- Safe
- Promotes active engagement
- Predictable
- Quiet and active Areas
- Space to be alone
- Independence supported
- Choice in play & materials



for a substantial portion/much of the day

- Creates an atmosphere of friendship







(Photo Credit: ABCD Fredonia – Fredonia, NY)

Using the ERS During COVID-19

- Use to guide best practice
- Think what we should be doing and then what can we do now?
- We want to ensure best practice through monitoring
- Keep current by checking the Environment Rating Scales Institute: ersi.info
- High stakes observations should not be happening at this time

Disinfecting Materials

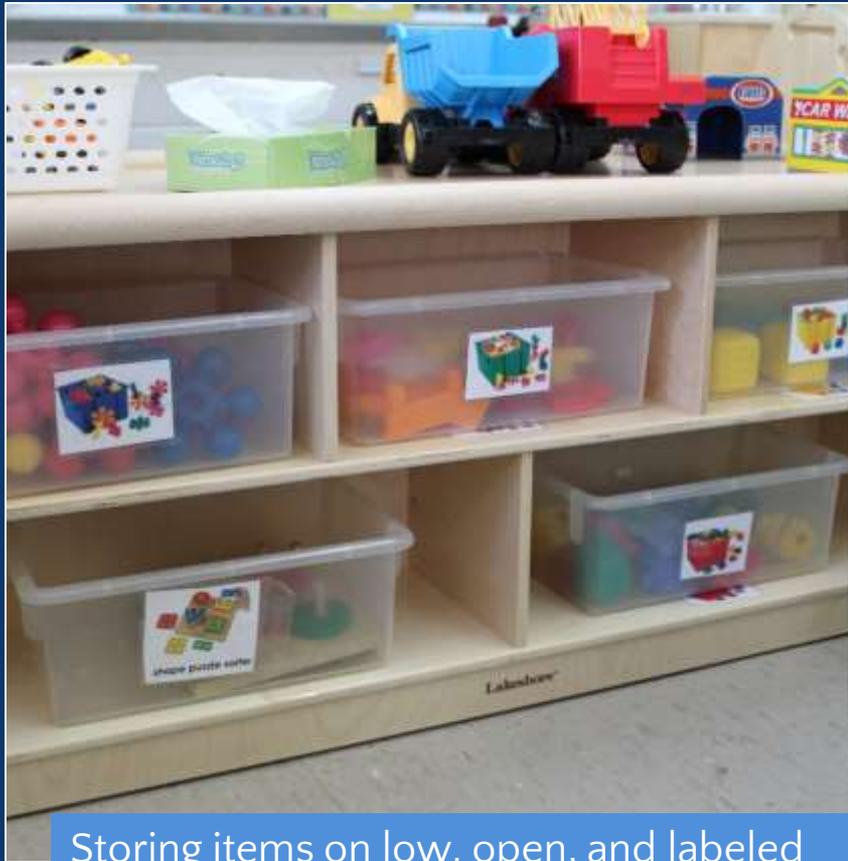
- Rotation of materials
- Soft toys
- Foggers
- Store away for 6 days



Furniture/Furnishings

- Easy to clean
- Rugs and mats
- Storage bins
- Remove furniture to create space
- Soft rockers/gliders

Furniture/Furnishings



Storing items on low, open, and labeled shelves helps children make their own choices and learn the self-help skill of putting toys away. During the COVID-19 pandemic, be sure to use bins that are easy to clean and disinfect.



These furnishings encourage self-help skills and are easy to clean and disinfect.

(Photo credits: Staten Island Mental Health Head Start - Staten Island, NY)

Room Arrangement

- Centers
- Active areas
- Quiet areas
- Children have choice in where they are
- Visual cues for where children can be

Room Arrangement



This program uses Velcro dots on the floor to encourage children to play near each other, but maintain social distancing as well. Visual cues and floor markings are a great way to help children learn how to function in their new classroom environments.

(Photo credit: ABCD Fredonia – Fredonia, NY)

Room Arrangement



Constant interaction can be stressful for children. It is important to provide space for privacy where children can use materials on their own as well as space for them to play near others. These small tables and activities are set up to encourage children to use materials in a private space. *(Photo Credit: Twin Parks Montessori Schools – New York, NY)*

Room Arrangement



Clear dividers can help prevent the spread of germs during activities. This is not a requirement, but may be helpful to encourage children's communication & interaction as they play.
(Photo credit: Kids Express and Achievements – Watervliet, NY)

Cozy Area/Soft Spaces

- Substantial softness
- Protected from active play
- Vinyl options
- Accessible for much of the day (MOD)/
substantial portion of the day (SPOD)

Cozy Area/Soft Spaces



A cozy area provides a substantial amount of softness for children to completely escape the hardness of the classroom. During the COVID-19 pandemic, if you are not able to clean and disinfect pillows and rugs daily, consider using vinyl pillows, vinyl mats, and soft vinyl chairs (like the blue one pictured) or vinyl sofas.
(Photo Credit: Staten Island Mental Health Head Start - Staten Island, NY)

Cozy Area/ Soft Space

A soft couch provides children in this family child care program the opportunity to relax and completely escape the hardness of the environment. Some children may choose to take quiet activities to the cozy or soft space to play by themselves. During the pandemic, be sure you are able to wash and disinfect any soft surfaces regularly. *(Photo credit: Rosa's Playhouse – Freeport, NY)*



Display

- Covered and easy to clean
- Visual cues and reminders
- People (of varying ages, races, abilities, genders, and cultures), places, and things
- At eye level

Display



Display should include people, places, and things that are familiar to the children's current lives. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this means community helpers may be wearing masks. You can also display photos of the children, their families, and the child care staff wearing masks to help the children feel comfortable and relate to the photos.

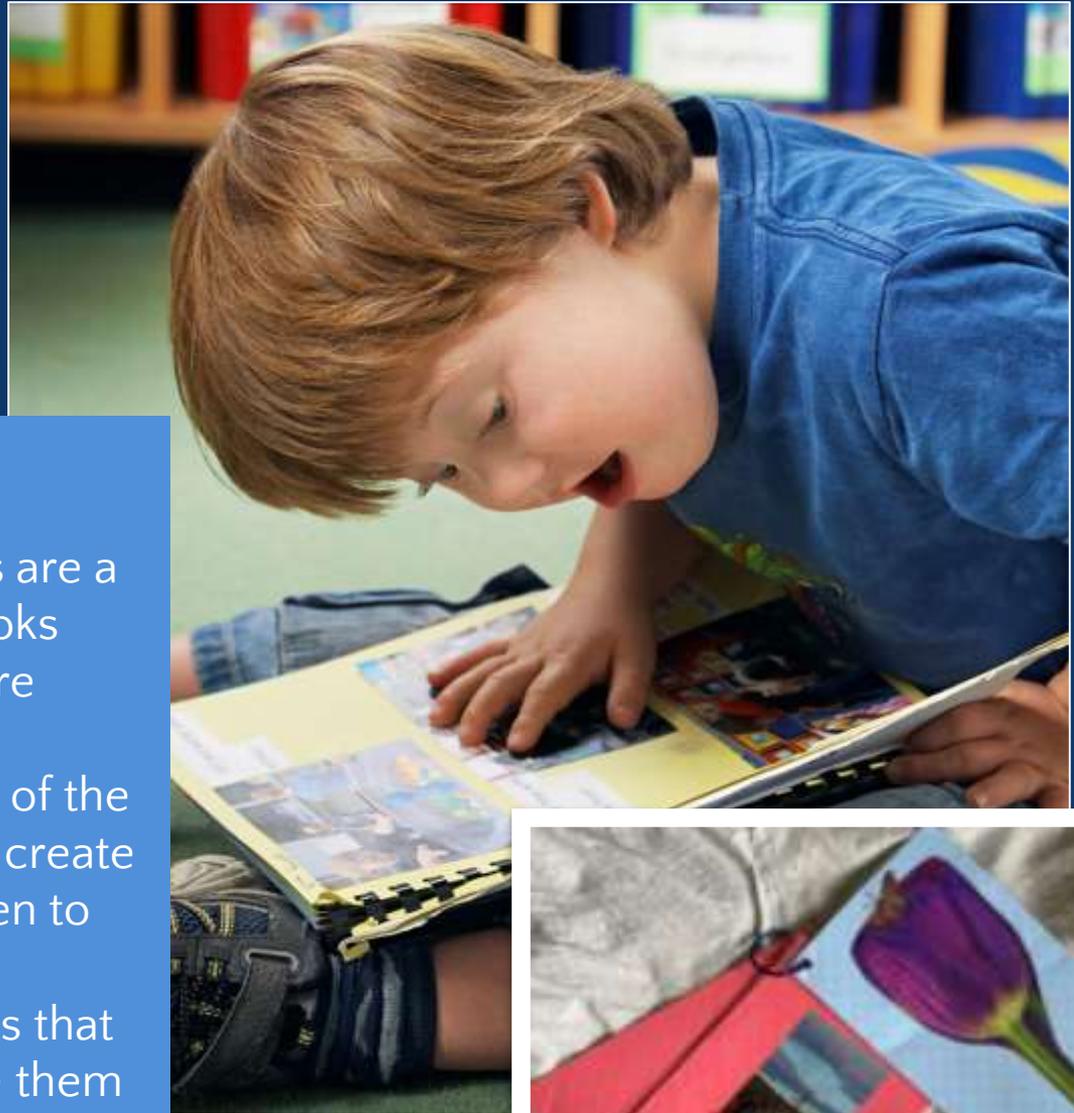
(Photo credit: NCMPI)

Books

- Board books
- Homemade books
- Read throughout the day (exaggerated tones and facial expressions)
- Store paperback books unstacked for 6 days
- Wide selection for each age group
- Pandemic social stories

Books

Homemade laminated books are a creative solution to using books during the pandemic. They are simple to make and easy to wipe/disinfect. Using photos of the children and their families to create stories will encourage children to use books. You can also deconstruct paperback books that are falling apart and laminate them to make brand new books!



Books



Individual book bins can help prevent the spread of germs during the pandemic. Label bins with children's names and photos to help them understand which bin is theirs. If books are rotated, store them unstacked/not touching for at least a week so that any contamination risk is eliminated. (Photo credit: Corning Children's Center – Corning, NY)



Books should be used with children every day, multiples times per day. If books are used in groups, ensure children have space to distance and view the pictures. Remember book times can be individualized as well and are great for establishing a one-on-one connection between teachers and children. (Photo credit: Deb Collins – Schenectady, NY)

Language

- Encourage conversation and elicit language
- Clear masks
- Exaggerated facial expressions and tones
- Speak loudly and annunciate
- Write children's words and ideas
- Display words and pictures together

Language



Teachers' expressions can still be seen even with a mask! Eye contact and exaggerated facial movements help children understand emotions when the mouth and nose are covered.

(Photo credit: Children's Place at the Plaza - Albany, NY)



Clear masks are an option to help children see emotions, mouth movements, and pronunciation when talking.

(Photo credit: Kids Express and Achievements - Watervliet, NY)



Helping Children Understand Emotions When Wearing Masks

Young children look for emotional cues from caregivers to help interpret the environment and rely on their caregiver's facial expressions, tone of voice, and body posture to identify and understand emotions. Here are tips and ideas for helping children identify emotions when your face, your most expressive feature, is covered by a mask. Use these strategies to let children know that behind the mask, a kind and warm expression is still there!

1. Practice emotional expressions with a mask on in front of a mirror. Pay attention to facial cues that can be seen, body movements, and hand gestures.
2. Incorporate ASL when teaching emotions (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91toGHEUwL0>).
3. Direct children to look at your eyebrows, eyes, body movements, and gestures when talking about emotions. For example, "Look, I am happy. You can't see my mouth smile, but my cheeks lift up, my eyes crinkle, and my shoulders and arms look like this."
4. Increase the use of gestures throughout the day and when talking about emotions (e.g., shoulders shrugged for sad, arms out to indicate a happy mood).
5. Talk about your feelings as much as possible (e.g., "I am feeling happy that it is almost time to go outside and play"; "I am feeling sad that it is raining right now"; "I am feeling excited that we have a new toy in centers today;").
6. If using an emotion check-in, encourage all adults in the classroom to participate and check-in when the children do (https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/feelingFaces_chart_template.pdf).
7. When talking about emotions, hold up the corresponding emotion card or visual near your face. Consider wearing a lanyard with a visual of an emotion expressions (e.g., tired, happy, excited, sad, angry, mad, nervous).
8. Be sure to face children and remain nearby when talking to them while wearing a mask. Wearing a mask muffles the speaker's speech, which can make it more difficult to understand what is said.
9. Provide an activity for children to practice wearing a mask and making different faces while looking in a mirror or at each other. Point out how their face looks (e.g., eyes, eyebrows).
10. Allow children to use masks during play with stuffed animals to help familiarize them with seeing masks in their environment.



Resource

https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Wearing-Masks_Tipsheet.pdf



National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations | [ChallengingBehavior.org](https://challengingbehavior.org)

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Displayed Language

This family child care program uses the display to help children understand the health procedures. The words are accompanied by pictures to help children relate to words to their meaning. During the COVID-19 pandemic, displaying language to help children understand new rules or procedures is very helpful. (Photo credit: Tender Hearts Day Care – Minoa, NY)



Displayed Language



Children in this family child care program designed an outdoor zoo (that they later created!) and the provider labeled their drawings with their dictations. During the pandemic, it is important to remember to encourage communication between children and to elicit language throughout the day, in both routines and play activities.

(Photo credit: Tender Hearts Day Care – Minoa, NY)

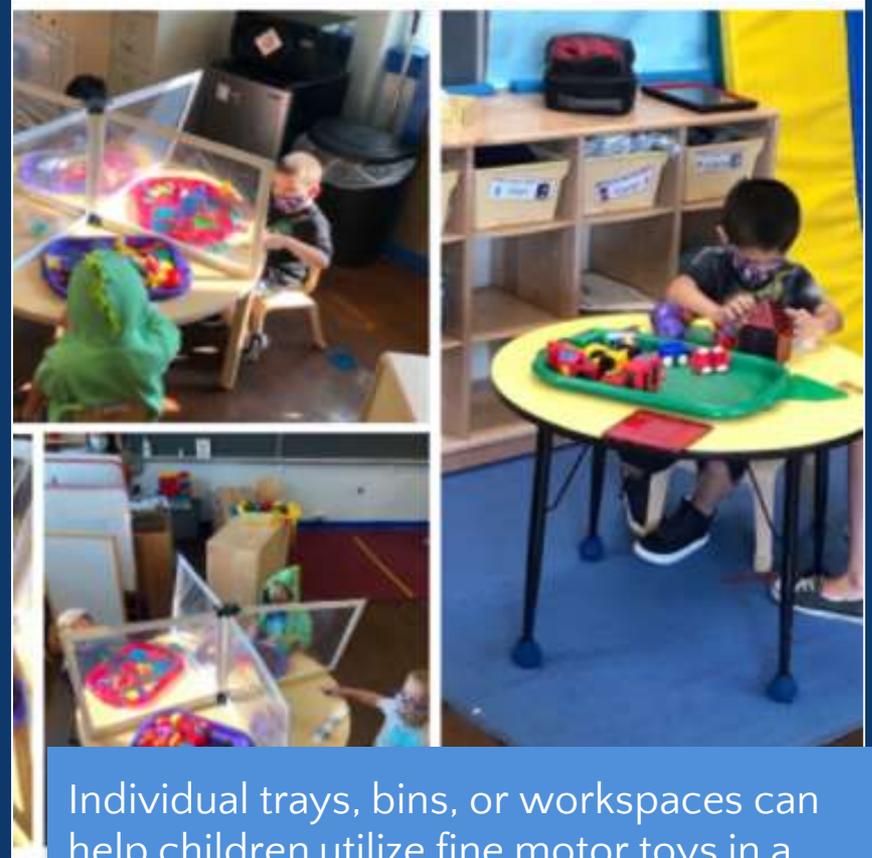
Fine Motor, Manipulatives & Math

- Variety of skills/levels of difficulty
- Split large amounts of materials
- Smaller amounts can be rotated throughout the day
- Individual trays or bins

Fine Motor/Manipulatives



These fine motor materials are easy to clean and disinfect. Fine motor materials of different levels of difficulty (such as stacking and interlocking blocks) should be offered for each age group.



Individual trays, bins, or workspaces can help children utilize fine motor toys in a distanced way. Split large amounts of materials into smaller bins to allow for a disinfection/rotation cycle.

(Photo credit: Kids Express and Achievements – Watervliet, NY)

Fine Motor/Manipulatives



Individual trays, bins, or workspaces can help children utilize fine motor toys in a distanced way. Split large amounts of materials into smaller bins to allow for a disinfection/rotation cycle.

(Photo credit: ABCD Fredonia – Fredonia, NY)

Math/ Numbers



Toys/materials that focus on size, shape, numbers, counting, measuring, and comparing quantities should be accessible to preschool-aged children. Be sure all materials can be cleaned and disinfected. Split large amounts of materials into smaller bins for individual use or to allow for a disinfection/rotation cycle.

(Photo credit: Deb Collins – Schenectady, NY)



Art

- Non-toxic and safe options (no choking hazards)
- Drawing materials, paints, 3D materials, art tools, and collage materials (age-appropriate)
- Individual art kits

Art



Toddlers should be offered age-appropriate art materials daily. Preschoolers should have daily access to a variety of art materials (drawing, painting, 3-D materials, collage materials, and art tools). During the COVID-19 pandemic, individual art bins are helpful to ensure materials that cannot be disinfected are not shared. Label the bins with children's names and photos so they know which one belongs to them. *(Photo credit: Deb Collins – Schenectady, NY)*

Art



Play dough is a 3-D art material that can easily be separated into individual containers. Replenish play dough when it gets visibly soiled, dries out, or biweekly (just a recommendation, not a requirement). Find a play dough recipe online to affordably make large batches at a time. *(Photo credit: ABCD Fredonia – Fredonia, NY)*

Music, Movement, and Active Physical Play

- Easy to clean materials
- Space to move and dance
- Outdoor options
- Static groups on the playground

Music & Movement



Outdoor music activities are a great way to ensure children have space to sing, dance, and move their bodies!

(Photo credit: First Steps Early Childhood Education Center – Woodstock, NY)

Active Physical Play



Infants need clean, open space on the floor to explore. Floor time is important for non-mobile infants who are developing coordination and muscle control. Be sure to regularly wash and disinfect any mats or blankets used by children. *(Photo Credit: Sarah Gould-Houde)*



Keep children in their static groups during both indoor and outdoor play. This means only one group should use the playground at a time. You can spray equipment with disinfectant and let it air dry between groups. *(Photo credit: Staten Island Mental Health Head Start – Staten Island, NY)*

Blocks

- Space for multiple children
- Types of blocks
- Types of block accessories
- Cleaning and disinfecting

Blocks



Block areas should be spacious enough to allow for multiple children to build their own structures at the same time. During the COVID-19 pandemic, taping lines on the floor will help children stay in one area as they build. High quality block areas include multiple types of blocks [unit blocks (foam, wood, soft, etc.), large hollow blocks, and homemade blocks] and accessories (include animals, vehicles, and people).

*Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and disinfecting wood blocks or change out wood blocks for another easier to clean material during the COVID-19 pandemic.

(Photo credits: Kids Express and Achievements – Watervliet, NY; Step with Purpose Group Family Day Care – Brooklyn, NY)



Science/Nature and Sensory Play

- Individual collections of natural objects
- Non-poisonous live plants
- Opportunities to explore the natural world
- Sand/water – 18 months and up
- Close supervision
- Individual sensory bins

Science/Nature



Children can create their own collections of natural objects outdoors. During the pandemic, be sure that any objects that are unable to be cleaned/disinfected are not shared.

Sensory Play



Individual sensory bins provide hands-on experiences for children without sharing germs.

(Photo credits: Bloom Early Learning – Moriches, NY)

Sensory Play

Toddler sensory play should be closely supervised. Separate bins on/in a larger table provide opportunities for conversation and shared experiences while using individual materials.

*(Photo credits: Corning Children's Center – Corning, NY;
ABCD Fredonia – Fredonia, NY)*

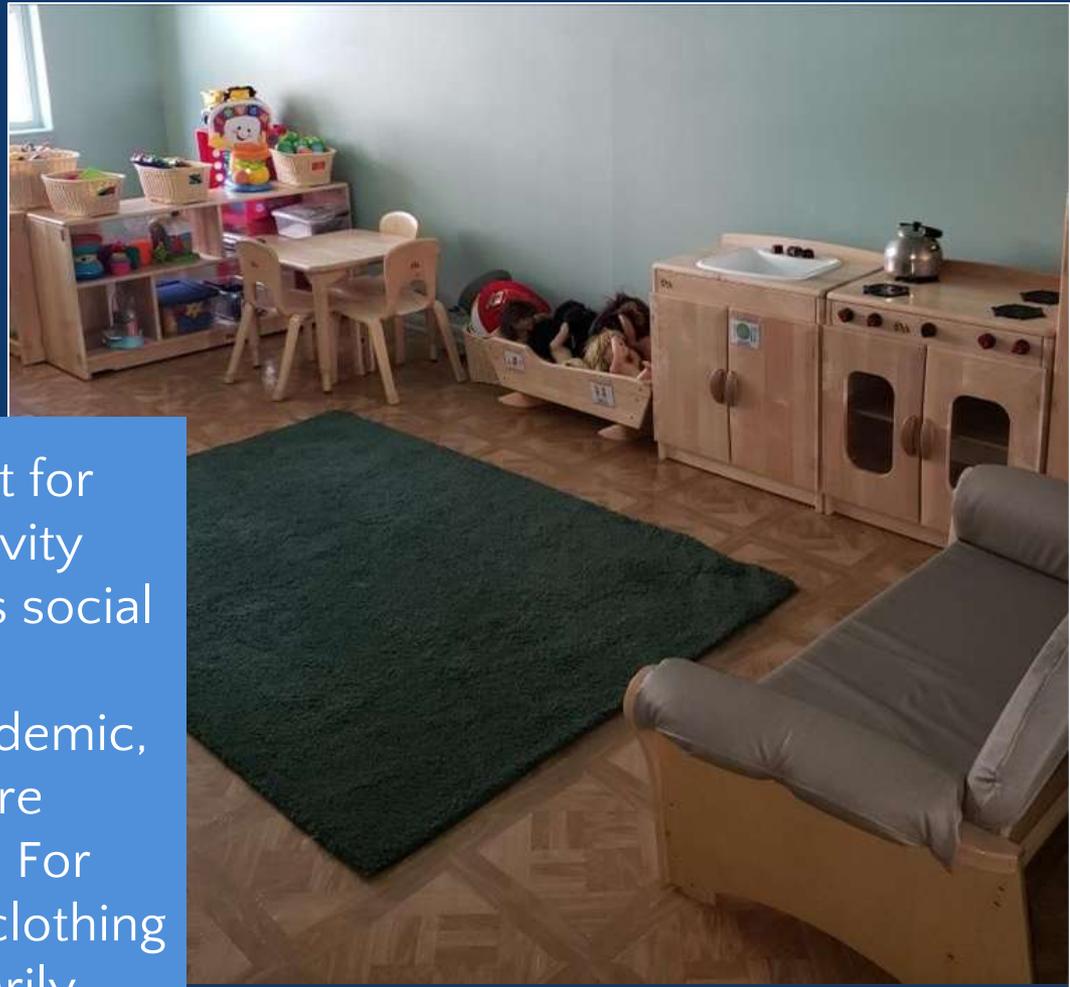


Dramatic Play

- Easy to clean/disinfect dolls and other materials
- Different themes
- Consider removing cloth dress-up clothing if it cannot be laundered daily
- Have a plan to disinfect mouthed play food

Dramatic Play

Dramatic play is important for the development of creativity and imagination as well as social skills and communication. During the COVID-19 pandemic, consider what materials are difficult to clean/disinfect. For example, cloth dress-up clothing might need to be temporarily removed if you are unable to wash and disinfect it daily. *(Photo credit: Step with Purpose Group Family Day Care – Brooklyn, NY)*



Dramatic Play



Velcro dots help children in this dramatic play area distance themselves while playing together. The play food and other props encourage communication and interaction between children. *(Photo credit: ABCD Fredonia – Fredonia, NY)*



This family child care provider changes the dramatic play theme daily! The children vote on what to do with the area each day, and the provider washes the items each night. Then, materials are stored for one week until they are offered again. *(Photo credit: Deb Collins – Schenectady, NY)*

TV/Video/Computers/Tablets

- Preschoolers: No more than 30 minutes total per week. Computer time (including watching a peer use a computer) should be limited to no more than 15 minutes per day. No media screen time during meals/snacks.
- Infants/Toddlers: No screen time for children under 24 months. For children 2 years and older, no more than 30 minutes total per week, with only 15 minutes per day for computer use. No media screen time should be allowed during meals/snacks.
- “The American Academy of Pediatrics released new guidance for the use of technology with young children. This guidance is provided for parents at home with their children, not for early childhood programs. Many children are often exposed to large amounts of technology at home, and it is not in their best interests to add to that in early childhood programs.” - ERSI

American Academy of Pediatrics Media Use Guidelines for Young Children

Age	Description	Media Use Guidelines
Younger than 2	Children younger than 2 learn and grow when they explore the physical world around them. Their minds learn best when they interact and play with parents, siblings, caregivers, and other children and adults.	<p>For children younger than 2,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media use should be very limited and only when an adult is standing by to co-view, talk, and teach. For example, video-chatting with family along with parents.
	<p>Children younger than 2 have a hard time understanding what they see on screen media and how it relates to the world around them.</p> <p>However, children 15 to 18 months of age can learn from high-quality educational media, IF their parents play or view with them and reteach the lessons.</p>	<p>For children 18 to 24 months, if you want to introduce digital media,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose high-quality programming. Use media together with your child. Avoid solo media use.
2 to 5 years of age	<p>At 2 years of age, many children can understand and learn words from live video-chatting. Young children can listen to or join a conversation with their parents.</p> <p>Children 3 to 5 years of age have more mature minds, so a well-designed educational program such as Sesame Street (in moderation) can help children learn social, language, and reading skills.</p>	<p>For children 2 to 5 years of age,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limit screen use to no more than 1 hour per day. Find other activities for your children to do that are healthy for their bodies and minds. Choose media that is interactive, non-violent, educational, and prosocial. Co-view or co-play with your children.

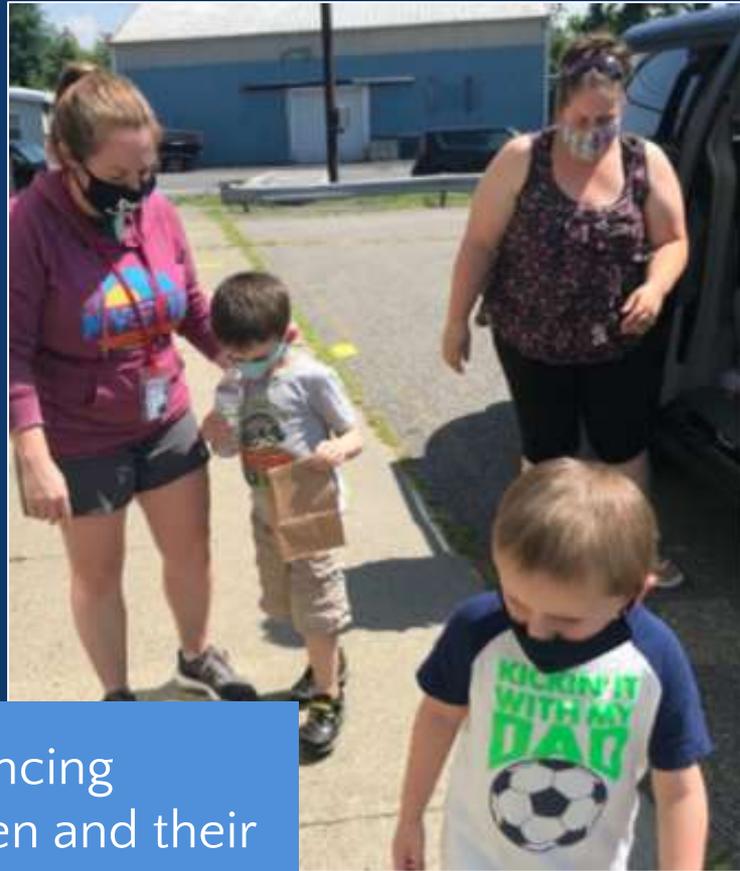
Resource:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Healthy-Digital-Media-Use-Habits-for-Babies-Toddlers-Preschoolers.aspx>

Routines

- Social distancing markers
- Clear procedures displayed
- Spacing during meals
- Spacing during nap/rest
- Resources for separation anxiety
- Cleaning/disinfecting procedures

Greeting & Departing



Arrows and social distancing markers help the children and their families understand the traffic patterns and procedures during busy drop-off and pick-up times.

(Photo credit: - Kids Express and Achievements - Watervliet, NY)

Greeting & Departing

In addition to marking social distancing measurements, displaying pictures and procedures help families and caregivers understand the drop off and pick up processes. They can also help children understand what to expect.

(Photo credits: Twin Parks Montessori Schools – New York, NY; Key to Little Hearts Group Family Day Care – Brentwood, NY)



Meals & Snacks



Clear dividers are an option that provide safe opportunities for interaction during meals. These are not a requirement and children should still be distanced as much as possible during meals and snacks.

(Photo credit: Kids Express and Achievements – Watervliet, NY)

Health Practices



Floor markings help children stay distanced during routines such as handwashing. *(Photo credit: ABCD Fredonia – Fredonia, NY)*



Mesh bags are a creative way to air dry toys and materials after they are disinfected. *(Photo credit: Bloom Early Learning – Moriches, NY)*

Schedule and Group Activities

- Free play MOD or SPOD
- Plan for gradual transitions
- Picture schedule
- Smaller groupings

Schedule

Use a picture schedule that has both words and photos to help children understand what comes next during the day. You should take into account the additional time needed for cleaning and handwashing and be sure you plan longer transitions to get these things done. Review the picture schedule with children throughout the day to help them understand any new changes. Using photos that include the children in the class is a fun way to engage them in the daily schedule! *(Photo credit: NCPMI)*



Group Activities



Smaller groupings are more developmentally appropriate for young children than large groups. Consider planning for small groups rather than whole class activities to help children stay interested and engaged. During the COVID-19 pandemic, small groups or individual activities will allow for better spacing between children as well.



As weather permits, group activities can be done outdoors to allow plenty of space for distancing and access to fresh air!

(Photo credit: Twin Parks Montessori Schools – New York, NY)

Supporting Families

- Nursing rooms
- Newsletters
- Conferences
- Open houses
- Community Resources

Supporting Families



This is a nursing room for breastfeeding parents and their children. Soft furnishings and calming colors provide a relaxing and comfortable atmosphere. A sign on the door indicates when the room is in use. If you have the space in your infant/toddler program, consider creating a nursing room. You can also take the CACFP Breastfeeding Friendly Child Care Self-Assessment and become a Breastfeeding Friendly Child Care program. During the pandemic, be sure to screen any parents entering the program and provide handwashing and sanitizing supplies. Also, disinfect the space between uses.
(Photo credit: Mercy Cares for Kids – Albany, NY)



Action Planning

Next Steps – what will you do?

Breakout Rooms

Think about your next steps and share the following:

- What areas in your program might need adjustments?
- How will you plan to share this information with teachers and work together to make the needed changes?

New York State Resources

Office of Children and Family Services

ocfs.ny.gov/main/news/COVID-19

Department of Health

coronavirus.health.ny.gov/home



Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-main.page>

More in the Considerations for Reopening Webinar Series

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Thank You

- Please fill out the evaluation in your email in the coming days.
- Reach out to your QUALITYstarsNY specialist if you need support with your environment.
- Thank you for attending and a special thank you to the programs and providers who shared photographs and ideas with us!



Part 4: Reopening Action Plan

Topic	Considerations	Strengths of Current Implementation	Changes that can be made to implement topic to its fullest potential	Items and other supports (training, coaching) needed to support implementation
Room Arrangement/ Furnishings/Cozy Area				
Display				
Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fine Motor • Art • Science/Nature • Sensory play • Math • Music/Movement • Blocks • Active Physical Play • Dramatic Play • TV/Video/Computers/ Tablets 				

Part 4: Reopening Action Plan

Topic	Considerations	Strengths of Current Implementation	Changes that can be made to implement topic to its fullest potential	Items and other supports (training, coaching) needed to support implementation
Schedule				
Sharing environmental resources with staff				

Other steps to take:

HOW THE ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALES SHOULD BE USED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

By, Debby Cryer and Dick Clifford

Recommendation:

ERS assessments should be completed, wherever programs are serving children, to help inform us about the pandemic's effect on health and safety, but also on the quality of care and learning for children. This information can guide us on how best to maximize the good and minimize the bad within each program. Without information provided by ERS assessments, we are not able to make intelligent, well-informed decisions under these difficult conditions. We want to keep quality standards high, but recognize that it is not appropriate to use the scores on ERS instruments during the pandemic in high stakes decisions about child care reimbursement rates or on program ratings. ERS assessment scores can and should be used to inform and guide best practices.

Rationale:

During these days of fear and hardship it becomes difficult to make the best decisions to protect health while ensuring that life's necessities can continue as normally as possible. We may ask ourselves whether children should be in child care or not. Both parents and child care professionals are asking such questions. But in all states, some children are attending child care. The staff of these programs must consider how to manage the needs of protecting health while continuing to meet children's developmental needs. The role of the ERS, in examining how well children's wide range of developmental needs are being met, remains relevant and unchanged in the midst of this pandemic.

The ERS were designed to assess a program and provide information from those assessments to determine how to improve the quality of what children experience. At this time, the requirements of health are more demanding than ever but are often in direct conflict with ensuring that children's many other developmental needs are met. ERS observations are necessary to help us see what has happened to the quality of programs as they shift priorities. If programs are open and serving children, we cannot stop completing ERS observations, because then we become blind to what is happening to children in programs. Instead, we should use this time to support programs in meeting global quality indicators to the best of their ability during the pandemic. It is possible to continue some level of monitoring of both health and safety and overall program quality without introducing an undue amount of risk to children and staff of the programs. In fact, failure to monitor is not acceptable when we are charged with protecting children's overall health and safety while providing rich learning environments for them.

Developmentally Appropriate Learning Environments for Infants and Toddlers in all Modalities of Care

Tip Sheet for use in the COVID-19 Pandemic

While providing care for infants and toddlers during a pandemic, it is of the utmost importance to follow all of the state and local regulations and guidelines as they are released. It is also critical that children are spending time in environments that are proven to support optimal developmental outcomes.

This tip sheet provides suggestions for how to adjust your space and practices to create safe and developmentally appropriate learning environments during COVID-19. Please note, these tips are specifically focused on best practices during COVID-19 rather than general best practice to be used when health and safety concerns are not heightened due to the pandemic. These suggestions are for creating environments for infants and toddlers who are attending either a family/group family child care program or center-based early childhood program.

In addition to these tips, we've provided slides with photographic examples of current QUALITYstarsNY participating programs that have implemented the practices. Some photos reflect infant and toddler environments and some show preschool environments. Family child care, center-based, and school-based programs are all represented in the photographs as well.

Space and Furnishings Tips

(During the COVID-19 Pandemic)

Furniture/Furnishings

- If you need to, remove furniture to provide children with more play space. Make sure that you still have enough space to meet the needs for both routine care and play.
- Make sure you can easily clean and disinfect furniture between uses. Consider using assigned spaces for meals.
- Be sure to properly disinfect gliders or rocking chairs that have fabric on them. Consider using receiving blankets on the backs and seats of the chairs if necessary.

Cozy Area/Space for Privacy

- Provide children with a special cozy area in the room. The area should be protected from active play and accessible to children all day. Children need quiet and cozy spaces where they can go to be less stimulated, play alone, or play quietly.
- Typically, a cozy area should provide softness. If you are unable to disinfect rugs, soft furniture & toys as children use and secrete on them, you may want to consider removing them from the care space. If you cannot provide soft toys and materials, you may want to consider using soft vinyl materials. It is still important to have this area in your care space even if it looks different during this time.

Room Arrangement

- If possible, make centers or play areas larger to provide children with more space to play.
- Toys should be stored within reach of children.
- Combine centers if needed, but make sure to group similar items together.
- Make sure traffic patterns do not interfere with activities.
- Provide areas that lend themselves to both quiet play and active play.

Display

- In addition to photos of the children, their families, and community members, include photos of people wearing masks to represent the children's current life experiences.
- Hang photos at the children's eye level and protect them from being torn by covering them with material that can be easily wiped/disinfected. Laminate pictures before they are hung or hang fire-proof plexi-glass display boards.

Language and Literacy Tips (During the COVID-19 Pandemic)

Books

- Children need to be able to access books and should be read to throughout the day.
- If you are worried about children using books, consider using more board books, as they are able to be wiped down.
- Take your books apart and laminate them, or make homemade laminated books that are easy to disinfect.
- Provide children with individual book bins or baskets.
- Laminate social stories about masks or other COVID-19-related topics to create books. Take pictures of the teachers with their masks off making a face, and then do the same face with the mask on, and same for the children if possible. Use these photos to make a laminated book to help children learn to read facial expressions with masks.
- Have a bin for “soiled” books to be cleaned once used. Books that cannot be disinfected should sit flat and unstacked for at least 6 days before going back into rotation. (see resource link)
- Remember, infants and toddlers need access to a wide selection of books, including books about people (of varying races, ages, abilities, cultures, and genders), animals, familiar objects, familiar routines (eating, sleeping, and toileting), nature and science.

Language Enhancing Practices

- Children need to hear the sounds of language in order to learn it. Make sure to engage children in back-and-forth conversations.
- Make sure you are expressing yourself with your whole face especially when wearing a mask.
- Try using a mask that has clear plastic over your mouth to help children see your lips.
- Make sure to point out in pictures and books how people are expressing themselves. For example, “The man in this picture is smiling; he is feeling happy.”
- Display pictures that portray people expressing different types of emotions in different situations. This will help children build an emotional vocabulary and learn to read social pragmatics. Remember any displayed materials should be protected and easy to clean.

Activities Tip Sheet

(During the COVID-19 Pandemic)

Music

- Make sure children have lots of space when they are dancing.
- Use dance props and musical instruments that can be cleaned and disinfected.

Art

- As age appropriate, typically around 12 months of age, children should have supervised access to non-toxic and safe art materials, such as crayons, play dough and brush & finger-paints. It will likely be hard properly disinfect most of these art materials between children using them. Please still provide these experiences to children.
- Create individual art kits so children do not share materials that cannot be disinfected such as crayons and play dough. Make sure children are thoroughly washing their hands before using these materials. Closely supervise and dispose of play dough as it is secreted on, or at least bi-weekly.

Fine Motor/Manipulatives

- Put fewer amounts of toys/manipulatives in bins that can be rotated out for disinfection. Make sure the materials being offered can be disinfected.
- Encourage distancing by offering less materials at a time, but have clean bins on hand to rotate throughout the day.
- Consider providing children with individual manipulative bins.
- Remember to provide infants and toddlers with the toys they need to support their fine motor, hand-eye, and cognitive development. Give children access to at least three fine motor materials that support a variety of skills, including grasping, shaking, turning, pushing, pulling, poking, putting together, using the thumb and forefinger together, and scribbling. Materials should vary in color, size, shape, texture, sound, and action. Examples of such items include: grasping toys, nesting cups, large peg boards, simple puzzles, and push & pull toys. A variety of fine motor materials should be accessible for much of the day.

Activities Tip Sheet

(During the COVID-19 Pandemic)

Active Physical Play

- Infants should have a large space for freedom of movement for a majority of the day. Make sure to have plenty of blankets to keep under babies if they are on a carpeted floor. Put down clean blankets as they are soiled. Wash blankets after each use. As feasible, try to provide at least 6 feet of space between infants.
- Toddlers also need large spaces to walk and practice their gross motor skills throughout the day.
- Provide infants and toddlers with outside gross motor experiences on a daily basis, weather permitting. Encourage them to practice crawling, walking, balancing, climbing and ball play. To help cut down on the spread of germs, give children extra space when engaging in gross motor play near other children. Make sure to clean and sanitize materials used for gross motor play. Have children wash their hands before and after this type of play to cut down on contamination.

Sensory, Science & Nature Experiences

- For children who are 18 months old and can safely have sand and water experiences, provide it individually. Try using plastic shoe boxes, dish pans, and other plastic totes. Make sure children thoroughly wash their hands before and after play. Disinfect after each use.
- Experiences with nature and science are still important. Beyond having non-poisonous living plants to look at, talk about, and take care of, allow children to have individual nature collections that are safe and able to be disinfected.

Activities Tip Sheet

(During the COVID-19 Pandemic)

Dramatic Play

- Make sure your dolls and animals can be disinfected. If you are unable to wash soft toys, provide the same toys in vinyl, plastic, wood or a material you can disinfect. Many companies who sell children's toys have statements out on how to disinfect their materials safely.
- Consider offering smaller amounts of toys for children to play with to keep up with disinfecting.
- Remember, infants and toddlers engage more in realistic dramatic play. Make sure to provide them with toy telephones, dolls and accessories, pots and pans, play food, small building and accessories. Typically dress-up can be lots of fun, but unless you can disinfect clothes after each use, avoid them at this point.
- Keep a close eye on children mouthing play food and make sure to put in the mouthed toy bin upon secretion.

Blocks

- Children learn a lot through block play and should have access to blocks and accessories such as animals, vehicles and people to support it for a majority of the day.
- If you do not have access to a washing machine and dryer, you may need to remove your soft blocks. For infants and toddlers, at least 10 of one type of block is considered a set. In order to help with social distancing and disinfecting you may want to consider how many blocks you have out at a time.
- Provide children with spatial boundaries by using tape, trays, or towels (if you can wash them) to help with social distancing as needed.

Program Structure/Routines Tips

(During the COVID-19 Pandemic)

Greeting & Departing

- Make sure any adult who may drop off or pick up a child is aware of the current policies and procedures.
- When possible consider greeting children at the door of the building. For larger centers, assign different doors to the building for different classrooms.
- Place sign in and out forms strategically to avoid families waiting near each other in tight spaces.
- Try to stagger drop offs and pick ups to be avoid crowding.
- Plan with families to support children who are having separation anxiety.

Schedules

- When infants and toddlers are not involved in a routine part of their day, they should be engaged in free play in their environments, choosing where to play and what to play with.
- Transition children bit by bit. Use small groups to ease transitions between activities, especially when going outside and returning inside.
- Make sure you allow extra time for handwashing and transitions.
- Children should have the choice of taking part in a group activity. For infants, groups should not be larger than 2-3 children, 2-5 for toddlers, and 4-6 for two year-olds.
- Make sure you display visual schedules to use with children.

Health Practices

(meals, naps, diapering/toileting, breastfeeding)

- Children should sleep 6 feet apart. You may need to move cribs to ensure the 6 foot distance. Make sure each child's crib or mat is placed in the same place for each nap.
- Provide nursing mothers with a private space for breastfeeding that can be easily disinfected between uses.
- Changing tables should not have cloth coverings. Make sure to strictly adhere to diaper changing procedures.
- Support children with proper hand washing.
- Be sure you have a protocol for disinfecting toys that have been mouthed. Establish a mouthed toy or dirty toy bin in the care space. Place toys in the bin as they are soiled and then disinfect when there is time before putting them back into rotation.
- Consider wearing smocks or aprons to change between snuggling and bottle feeds with infants.

Developmentally Appropriate Learning Environments for Preschoolers in All Modalities of Care

Tip Sheet for Use in the COVID-19 Pandemic

While providing care for preschool-aged children during a pandemic, it is of the utmost importance to follow all of the state and local regulations and guidelines as they are released. It is also critical that children are spending time in environments that are proven to support optimal developmental outcomes.

This tip sheet provides suggestions for how to adjust your space and practices to create safe and developmentally appropriate learning environments during COVID-19. Please note, these tips are specifically focused on best practices during COVID-19 rather than general best practice to be used when health and safety concerns are not heightened due to the pandemic. These suggestions are for creating environments preschool-aged children who are attending either a family/group family child care program or center-based early childhood program.

In addition to these tips, we've provided slides with photographic examples of current QUALITYstarsNY participating programs that have implemented the practices. Some photos reflect infant and toddler environments and some show preschool environments. Family child care, center-based, and school-based programs are all represented in the photographs as well.

Space and Furnishings Tips

(During the COVID-19 Pandemic)

Furniture/Furnishings

- Make sure all furnishings can be easily cleaned and disinfected on a daily basis and as they become soiled.
- Vinyl mats make great floor play spaces and are easy to clean.
- Consider removing rugs if you are unable to regularly disinfect them.
- Use storage bins for materials that are made of plastic/other hard materials that can be cleaned/disinfected.

Room Arrangement

- If possible, make centers or play areas larger to provide children with more space to play.
- Toys should be stored within reach of children.
- Ensure there are active and quiet play areas.
- Use dividers when social distancing is not possible (if required).

Cozy Area/Soft Spaces & Materials

- Create an area where a child's body can completely escape the hardness of the classroom (at least a cushion, mat, large pillows, a soft couch or chair, etc.).
- The area should be protected from active play and open to children for a substantial portion of the day.
- If you are not able to launder soft toys after a child uses them, consider taking out the soft toys and replace them with items that can be easily cleaned and disinfected. Make sure the new toys provide softness. You may want to provide children with items such as vinyl pillows and toys.

Display

- Place children's work behind a covering that can be cleaned easily if possible. (laminated or fire-safe plexi-glass).
- Display photos of the families and community helpers wearing masks to represent their current environment.
- Use posters with visual cues for any new health and safety procedures.

Language and Literacy Tips

(During the COVID-19 Pandemic)

Books

- Board books are able to be wiped down.
- Laminated and laminated “homemade” books are easy to clean and can be customized to the children in the class and their families. Consider deconstructing older/worn paperback books and laminating them.
- Have a bin for “soiled” books to be cleaned once used. Rotate books frequently so that used books can be disinfected appropriately.
- Some programs have created individual book baskets that are rotated and include a wide selection of books.
- Books should be taken out of rotation for a minimum of 6 days and should be stored flat and unstacked (see link).
- Reading should be encouraged and teachers should read with children throughout the day.
- Practice using strong tones and inflection so children can understand context without seeing facial expressions behind a mask.

Using Language in Display

- Reference displayed words and photos to help children understand new things (masks, distancing, etc.)
- Add labels to identify new materials that are added/rotated in the classroom.
- Children’s names should be displayed in the classroom to help them learn to recognize their names and know which items (such as individualized bins) belong to them.

Language Enhancing Practices

- Write children’s words as they say them (ex. write dictations on their work or help them write letters to friends and family if they are sad, cannot visit, or just want to say something).
- Practice facial expressions while wearing masks to see how your face displays emotions when partially covered.
- Try using a mask that has clear plastic over your mouth to help children see your lips.
- Be sure to speak loudly and announce so that children can hear what you say.

Centers/Activities Tips

(During the COVID-19 Pandemic)

Fine Motor/Manipulatives/Math

- Preschoolers should have access to puzzles, small building materials, art materials, and manipulative toys.
- Split large amounts of materials into smaller bins to allow for a disinfection/rotation cycle.
- Provide children with materials for counting, measuring, comparing quantities, and identifying shapes.
- Have a “soiled” toy bin for any items that are mouthed, coughed on, or sneezed on.

Art

- Individual art kits can be used for items that cannot be sanitized and disinfected (crayons, playdough, etc.). Label individual children’s supplies with their name and picture to help with pre-reading skills.
- A variety of art materials should be accessible to children, including drawing materials, paints, 3-D materials, art tools, and collage materials. Provide as many of these as possible in individual kits or on accessible shelves if the materials can be disinfected.

Music/Movement

- Use large open spaces (such as a gym or outdoor area) when possible for music and movement activities.
- Offer music activities as a free choice activity inside and outside rather than as a large group activity.

Blocks

- Split large amounts of block accessories (people, animals, vehicles) into smaller bins to allow for a disinfection/rotation cycle.
- Follow manufacturer’s instructions for cleaning and disinfecting wood blocks.
- Limit the number of children in the block area to ensure space to play.
- Use tape markings or other methods to encourage distancing.

Classroom Centers/Activities Tips

(During the COVID-19 Pandemic)

Science/Nature & Sensory Experiences

- Preschoolers should have access to living things, natural objects, science tools, nature/science books, games, or toys, and science activities or experiments.
- Create individual science experiences for materials that cannot be disinfected (ex. Leaves, pinecones, rocks)
- Use small bins or dishpans for individual sensory experiences. Children should wash hands before and after sensory play, materials in the bins should be changed, and the bins should be disinfected between children.

Dramatic Play

- If dress up clothing or soft dolls cannot be laundered daily, consider removing it temporarily.
- Change themes (post office, doctor's office, restaurant, etc.) in the dramatic play area to keep children interested and engaged and to provide opportunity for cleaning and disinfection.
- Rotate materials when possible to provide variety and opportunity for cleaning and disinfection.
- Provide opportunities for dramatic play outdoors.

TV/Video/Computers and Tablets

- Screen time should be limited for children when possible. Preschool children should ideally have no more than 30 minutes per week (and no more than 15 minutes per day) of screen time.
- If serving children remotely, provide activities that encourage movement and active participation rather than watching a screen.
- Disinfect computer materials (keyboard, mouse, headphones, and screen) between each use.

Program Structure/Routines Tips

(During the COVID-19 Pandemic)

Greeting/Departing

- Make sure any adult who may drop off or pick up a child is aware of the current policies and procedures.
- Mark 6 foot distances in drop off and pick up areas.
- When possible, consider greeting children and parents at the door of the building. For larger centers, assign different doors to the building for different classrooms.
- Place sign in and out forms strategically to avoid families waiting near each other in tight spaces.
- Try to stagger drop offs and pick ups to avoid crowding.

Health Practices (nap, meals, toileting. etc.)

- Display health practices and steps throughout the room in easy to see places.
- Utilize displayed signs, posters, etc. to help children understand requirements and expectations.
- Place children head to foot and 6 feet apart during nap.
- Provide areas for non-napping children to participate in calm activities. Consider quiet activity baskets for individual children.

Schedule

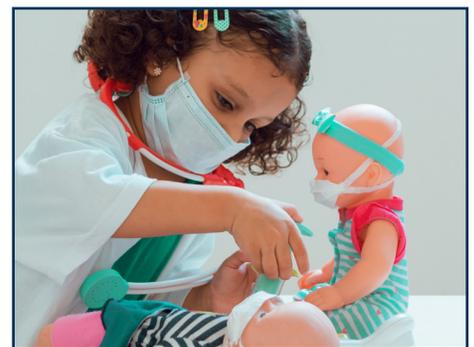
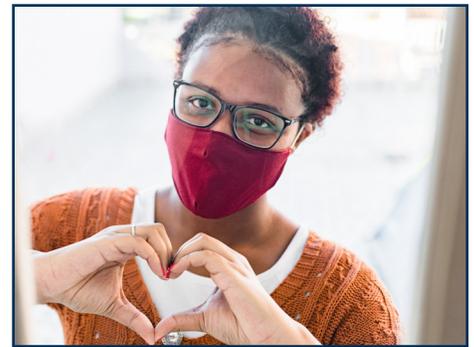
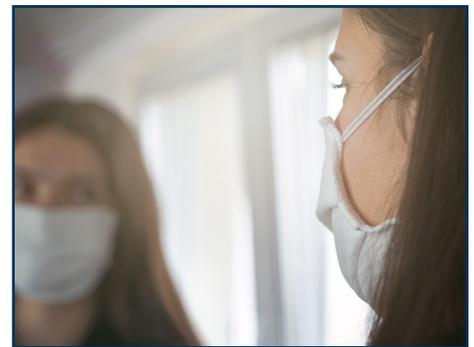
- Use a picture schedule to help children understand the routine of the day.
- Update the picture schedule with current pictures (masks, floor markings, spaced group times, extra handwashing, new greeting/departing methods, etc.).
- Provide longer transition times to ensure cleaning/sanitizing/disinfecting can happen between events.

Group Activities

- Consider fewer if any large group activities where all children gather in one place.
- Use floor markings to help children understand how to create space between one another.
- Use outdoor space for group times when possible.

Young children look for emotional cues from caregivers to help interpret the environment and rely on their caregiver's facial expressions, tone of voice, and body posture to identify and understand emotions. Here are tips and ideas for helping children identify emotions when your face, your most expressive feature, is covered by a mask. Use these strategies to let children know that behind the mask, a kind and warm expression is still there!

1. Practice emotional expressions with a mask on in front of a mirror. Pay attention to facial cues that can be seen, body movements, and hand gestures.
2. Incorporate ASL when teaching emotions (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91foGHKuwL0>).
3. Direct children to look at your eyebrows, eyes, body movements, and gestures when talking about emotions. For example, "Look, I am happy. You can't see my mouth smile, but my cheeks lift up, my eyes crinkle, and my shoulders and arms look like this."
4. Increase the use of gestures throughout the day and when talking about emotions (e.g., shoulders shrugged for sad, arms out to indicate a happy mood).
5. Talk about your feelings as much as possible (e.g., "I am feeling happy that it is almost time to go outside and play."; "I am feeling sad that it is raining right now."; "I am feeling excited that we have a new toy in centers today.").
6. If using an emotion check-in, encourage all adults in the classroom to participate and check-in when the children do (https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/FeelingFaces_chart_template.pdf).
7. When talking about emotions, hold up the corresponding emotion card or visual near your face. Consider wearing a lanyard with a visual of an emotion expressions (e.g., tired, happy, excited, sad, angry, mad, nervous).
8. Be sure to face children and remain nearby when talking to them while wearing a mask. Wearing a mask muffles the speaker's speech, which can make it more difficult to understand what is said.
9. Provide an activity for children to practice wearing a mask and making different faces while looking in a mirror or at each other. Point out how their face looks (e.g., eyes, eyebrows).
10. Allow children to use masks during play with stuffed animals to help familiarize them with seeing masks in their environment.





According to the Center for Disease Control, children under 2 years of age should not wear masks. Any child wearing a mask should never be left unattended.

Wearing Masks

By: LJ Werner, MA ECSE &
Ashley Marotta, MS ECE

ChallengingBehavior.org

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Office of
Special Education Programs
U.S. Department of Education



UNIVERSITY of
SOUTH FLORIDA



Sometimes I wear masks for fun.



I might wear masks for dress-up,
playing with friends, or going to parties.

Sometimes masks cover...



your eyes



your whole face

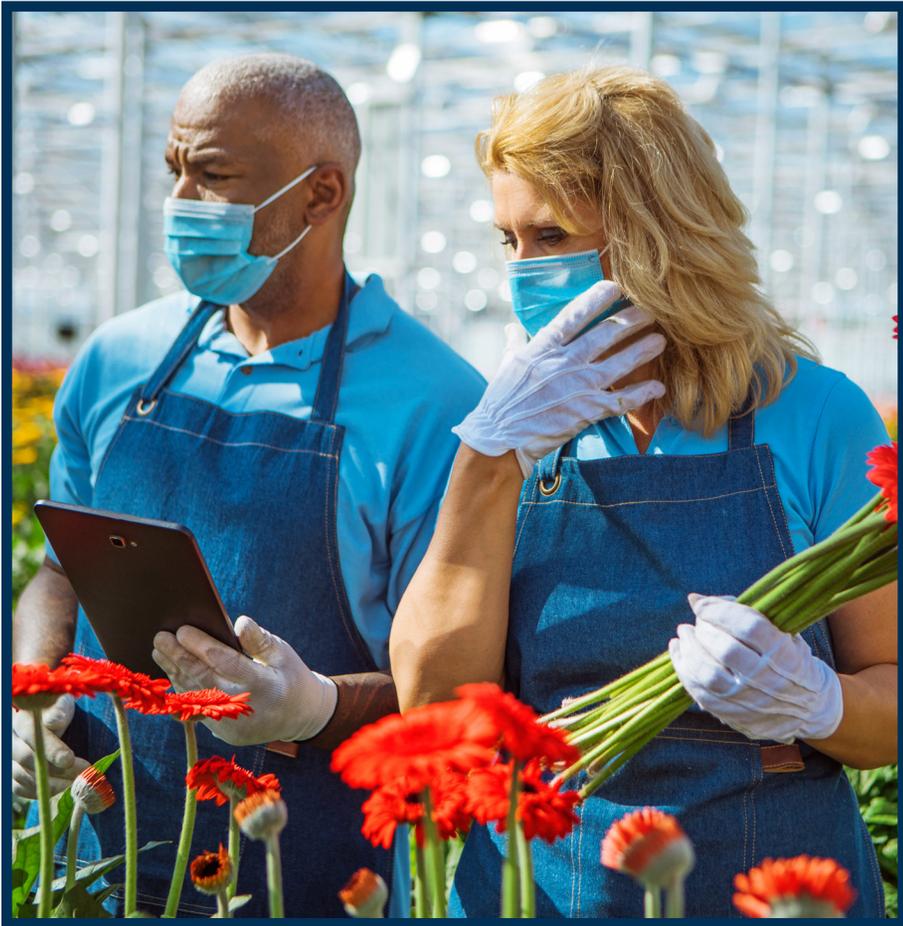


or just your mouth

I have seen my doctor, nurse,
and dentist wear masks.



Lots of people wear masks to stay healthy and strong. They wear them to keep their germs to themselves.



I am spending lots of time at home right now, but there will be a time I have to go somewhere like the store or school.



There will be adults and children wearing masks when I am outside of my home.



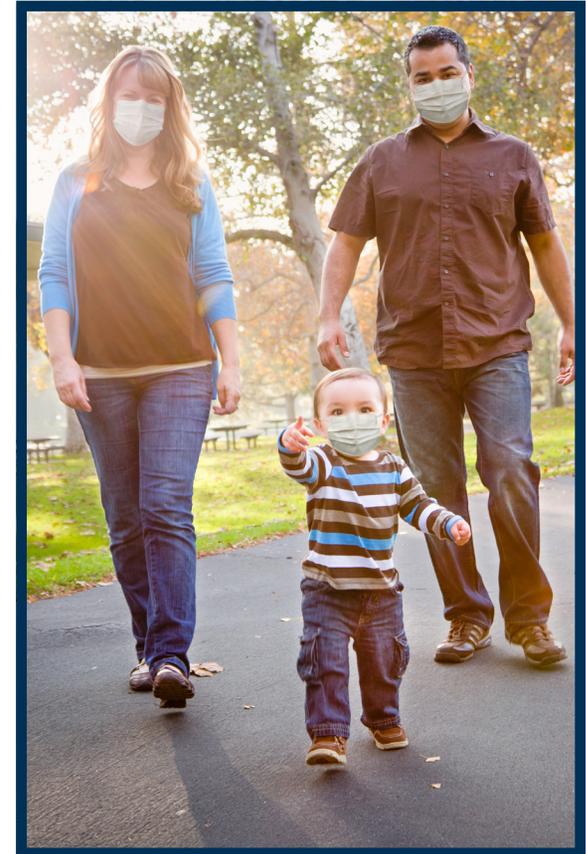
They are wearing the masks to keep their germs to themselves.



My family or someone who cares about me might tell me to wear a mask. They want to help me stay strong and healthy.



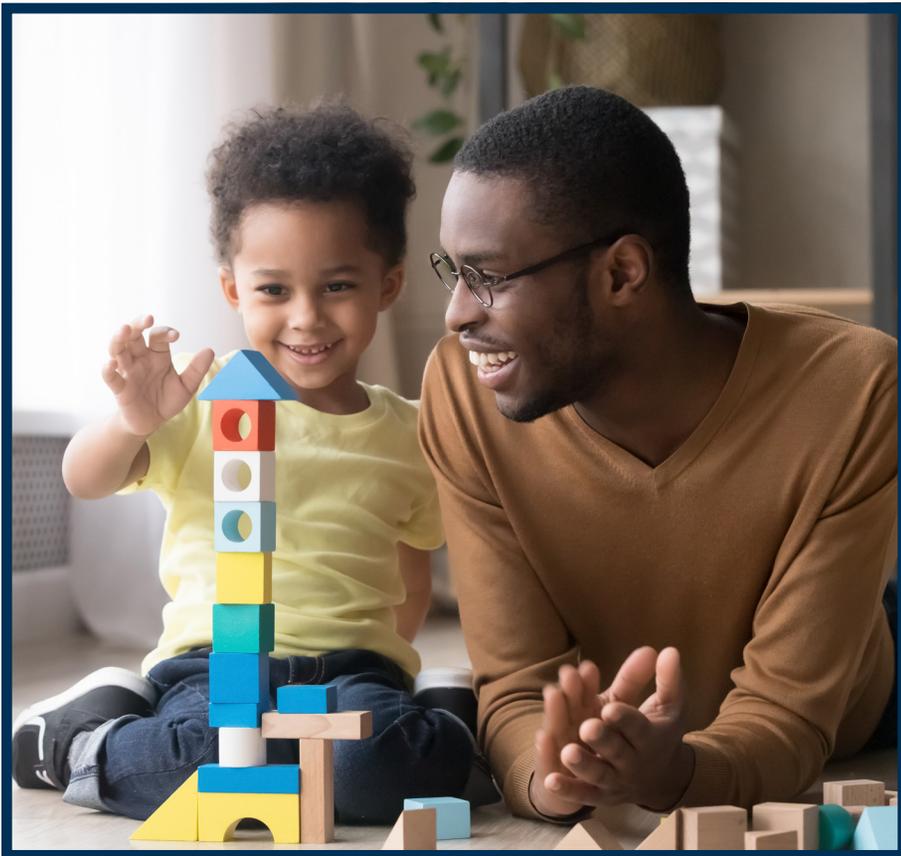
I might wear my mask at the grocery store, or riding the bus, or going for a walk.



There are many different looking masks, which is fun. It is important to wear the mask correctly, so it covers my mouth and nose.



Sometimes I don't need to wear a mask, like when I am at home or playing outside at home.



When I am at school, I might need to wear a mask. I can still talk and play with my friends even if I have my mask on.



It's everybody's job to help keep germs to themselves. Just like washing hands!





Created By:

LJ Werner, MA-ECSE

Early Childhood Specialists
CU Boulder/Speech Language Hearing & Sciences
Child Learning Center (CLC)

Ashley Marotta, MS-ECE

Education Specialist
CU Denver, Retired Faculty

American Academy of Pediatrics Media Use Guidelines for Young Children

Age	Description	Media Use Guidelines
Younger than 2	<p>Children younger than 2 learn and grow when they explore the physical world around them. Their minds learn best when they interact and play with parents, siblings, caregivers, and other children and adults.</p>	<p>For children younger than 2,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media use should be very limited and only when an adult is standing by to co-view, talk, and teach. For example, video-chatting with family along with parents.
	<p>Children younger than 2 have a hard time understanding what they see on screen media and how it relates to the world around them.</p> <p>However, children 15 to 18 months of age can learn from high-quality educational media, IF their parents play or view with them and reteach the lessons.</p>	<p>For children 18 to 24 months, if you want to introduce digital media,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose high-quality programming. Use media together with your child. Avoid solo media use.
2 to 5 years of age	<p>At 2 years of age, many children can understand and learn words from live video-chatting. Young children can listen to or join a conversation with their parents.</p> <p>Children 3 to 5 years of age have more mature minds, so a well-designed educational program such as Sesame Street (in moderation) can help children learn social, language, and reading skills.</p>	<p>For children 2 to 5 years of age,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limit screen use to no more than 1 hour per day. Find other activities for your children to do that are healthy for their bodies and minds. Choose media that is interactive, non-violent, educational, and prosocial. Co-view or co-play with your children.

Reopening Considerations for Reopening Part 4: Supporting High Quality Environments during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Links to Helpful Resources

- CDC/EPA Approved Disinfectants: www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2-covid-19
- Study on library materials and COVID-19: www.slj.com/?detailStory=novel-coronavirus-detectable-after-six-days-on-stacked-materials-REALM-project-library-COVID-19
- Environment Rating Scales (ECERS, ITERS, FCCERS): www.ers.info
- Community Playthings Block Cleaning: www.communityplaythings.com/customer-service/covid19-update
- Screen/Media Use Time Chart – American Academy of Pediatrics: www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Healthy-Digital-Media-Use-Habits-for-Babies-Toddlers-Preschoolers.aspx
- Screen/Media Use Toolkit for Families: www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx#home
- CACFP Breastfeeding Friendly Child Care: www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/cacfp/breastfeedingspon.htm
- NYC DOE 2020-2021 Classroom and Materials Guidance: infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/dece-fy21-classroom-and-materials-guidance.pdf