



Delaware Association for the Education of Young Children

## **DeAEYC & EEC COVID-19 Task Force**

### **Wellness Committee Recommendations**

The Wellness Committee of the DEAEYC & EEC COVID-19 Task Force is tasked with addressing strategies for dealing with stress brought about by the pandemic, closing of most child care centers, identification of some facilities as emergency centers that care for the children of essential workers. In this document we provide information on strategies for early childhood educators' wellbeing and strategies for talking with children during this time and as centers and family child care (FCC) homes reopen. A resource section is included at the end of this document.

### **Supporting Staff Wellness**

It is important to address staff mental health prior to reopening and ongoing as staff return to work and provide services to children and families. Consider timing: Are there options center-based and family child care educators can engage with prior to a more widespread re-opening? What options are available for educators as programs are re-opening or resuming more routine operations?

Prior to reopening and ongoing, program administrators can provide support and resources for staff regarding mindfulness and self-care<sup>1</sup>. Strategies can include:

- Providing virtual trainings and webinars (recorded or live).
- Conducting prior-to-opening virtual meetings with staff to help minimize their stress and respond to questions they might have—explaining changes in programming and indoor/outdoor environments necessitated by the COVID pandemic to ensure the safety and health of staff, children, and families.
- Establishing virtual communities of practice and/or a buddy system by partnering staff members and providing opportunities for them to talk about their experiences and engage in mutual support.

### **Monitoring the Overall Wellbeing of Staff**

#### Formal

There are several methods that child care center administrators and FCC networks can utilize to gather information about the overall wellbeing of educators who provide direct services to children and families. Incorporating these brief check-ins into daily routines, such as signing in and out of work, allows data to be collected regularly and quickly. Possibilities include:

- A digital poll (e.g., Google poll) allows staff to register their mental/emotional state. Sample prompts might include, "How are you feeling today?" with response options of "Great," "Okay," and "I'm struggling." Responses can be anonymous, affording privacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of these strategies are applicable to supporting the wellbeing of FCC providers as well (e.g., through a FCC formal or informal network of providers).

- A physical poll could be offered with similar questions. There are many possibilities also allowing for privacy, including color-coded response systems. (e.g., stickers, Post-It Notes).

### Informal

Additionally, it is essential to rely upon personal observations and facilitate a sense of community support. Possibilities include:

- Continuing use of the buddy systems for staff to talk about their experiences, e.g., a shared lunch time.
- Implementing positive unifying experiences, e.g., theme days.
- Providing expressions of appreciation, e.g., a pizza lunch.

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## **Talking with Families and Children in Child Care Settings**

Early childhood educators are well-versed in developmentally appropriate ways to talk with children about difficult subjects, as well as appropriate communications with families. Discussions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, its implications for young children and their families, and changes in children’s environments and routines should follow the same guidelines educators use for other difficult topics. In this section we provide an overview of strategies for talking with young children and families about COVID and the types of changes that will take place in child care centers and FCC homes as centers and homes reopen.

### **Prior to Reopening Centers and Homes**

The transition back to child care can be stressful for children and their families. We all need to be tuned in to children’s and family members’ emotional needs. Part of the back-to-child-care transition strategies could be a video introduction to the classroom (or FCC home) and a chance to see the educator without a mask and with the mask on—showing that this is the same person. If possible, online chats one-to-one with the teacher prior to reopening can also ease the transition for returning children and help to begin building relationships with new enrollees and their families. And, as centers and homes prepare to reopen, it would be helpful for center staff and FCC providers to prepare large pictures of their faces to pin onto their blouses/shirts so that children can see who the person is behind the mask.

### **Strategies for Talking with Children<sup>2</sup>**

- First, it’s important to deal with your own anxiety and fears about COVID. When you’re feeling anxious and very worried about the virus, about the pandemic—that’s not a good time to talk with young children, who will certainly pick up on your anxiety and concern. Use whatever methods you typically use to be calm in troublesome situations—be that

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from the CDC “Talking with Children about Coronavirus Disease 2019”; the Child Mind Institute “Talking with Kids About the Coronavirus”; the CDC “Interim Guidance for Child Care Programs”; the SAMHSA “Talking with Children: Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers...”; and the Conscious Discipline website—see information in the Resources section.

meditation, exercise, yoga, talking with colleagues, and so on. The strategies noted in the previous section, *Monitoring Overall Wellbeing in Early Childhood Educators*.

- Remain calm and reassuring as you talk with children. At this time it is apparent that young children are not as at risk as the elderly, individuals with immune disorders, and others—and children’s symptoms tend to be milder than symptoms of older persons. Reassure children that when we follow the guidelines for what we’re supposed to be doing to stay safe and healthy there is a very small chance that they will become infected and get sick.
  - A note of caution from the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): Be careful not to pressure children to talk about an outbreak or join in expressive activities. While most children will easily talk about the outbreak, some may feel frightened. Some may even feel more anxiety and stress if they talk about it, listen to others talk about it, or look at artwork related to the outbreak. Allow children to remove themselves from these activities and monitor them for signs of distress.
- Share with children what you are doing to stay safe—and what they will be doing, as well. Our strategies include washing hands thoroughly—singing Happy Birthday twice while lathering up and washing—when we come in from the outside; before we eat; after blowing our noses, coughing, sneezing, or using the bathroom. We also practice physical distancing—staying 6 feet away from others. (You can use a variety of methods with primarily nonstandard measures to help young children be aware of the 6-foot distance, such as using a 6’ string to help children see what 6’ looks like, the distance from the table toys bookcase to the music area (or other areas that are 6’ apart.)
- Do not use language that might blame others and lead to stigma. Children might have heard adults calling COVID the Chinese virus, or that Blacks and Hispanics are more at risk than other groups, etc. Use correct terminology (COVID) and, when necessary, remind children that viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of a person’s race or ethnicity.
- Discuss COVID in a developmentally appropriate way. Children are most likely hearing about COVID from the TV, online programs, parents’ discussions, etc. Help children feel informed and reassured when they have information about what’s happening. Many people have the virus. Most people—and especially most children—have symptoms that are mild and include a fever, sore throat and coughing, and perhaps some difficulty breathing. These people stay home, rest, and try not to infect others by staying away from others. Some people with COVID have to go to the hospital for care by doctors and nurses.
  - Suggestion: Refer to resources from *Conscious Discipline* as a guide for effective ways to talk with young children about challenging issues, such as creating and using [Social Stories](#) to [explain COVID](#) to young children. (See the *Conscious Discipline Resources* section for additional information and resources.)
- Encourage children to ask questions and talk about what they know about COVID, what they fear. Respond in ways that are factual and reassuring.
- Stick to previously established routines and, as necessary, create new or modified routines and stick to these. Explain to children what the new routine is and why we’re using it, such as:
  - We don’t do circle time with the whole group now because it’s difficult for all of us to be 6’ apart in our classroom (or FCC home);
  - We won’t be eating family style, but the teachers will give each child a plate of food at snack and mealtime(s) so that we’re not all touching the serving utensils.

## **Changes in the Environment and Routines to Be Discussed with Children**

Guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, the Office of the Governor, and other sources will involve some changes to the environment and routines. Children will notice! It's important to address these changes up front with children and family members to minimize their anxiety. These changes could include:

- Mom, dad, grandparents, etc., who typically bring their child into the center or FCC home, will now leave their child at the center/home entry, and a staff person will escort the child to his or her classroom (or the FCC home area where children play).
- All the adults are wearing masks so that they don't spread any germs.
- A staff person is taking the temperature of everyone who comes into the center or home.
- All the plush and soft toys have been removed because these are not easily cleaned, sanitized, or disinfected.
- Snacks and meals are plated, not served family style.
- The cots are farther apart at naptime.
- Children remain in their classroom for the whole day—groups are not combined toward the end of the day as the number of children in the center is lower as children are picked up to go home.
- Not all areas are open, such as sensory or sand play, modeling with play-dough and clay. Some areas are doubled to ensure smaller groups of children at play, such as having two block areas and/or two dramatic play areas (if space allows, of course).
- Toys, tables, bookcases, and other surfaces are cleaned more often than pre-COVID.
- No large-group time in center classrooms—perhaps replaced by several small-group activities.
- Only one group at a time will use the outdoor area (if your program typically allows multiple classrooms to use the outdoor area simultaneously).

## Resources

### Supporting Staff Wellness

Existing Delaware trainings and supports

- DeAEYC <https://deaeyc.org/professional-development/>
  - Self-Care for Early Childhood Professionals
- DIEEC-PD <https://dieecpd.org/>
  - Virtual training: Stress and Resilience: Building Core Capabilities (with Community of Practice)
  - Virtual, live training: Mindfulness: A Resilience Practice
- Mental Health DE <https://mentalhealthde.com/mental-wellness/>

Established professional organizations and federal agencies offering wellness/self-care webinars and resources

- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
  - Talking to and Supporting Children and Ourselves During the Pandemic <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/4843463476337444880>
  - Remember to Take Care of Yourself: Six Ideas for Family Child Care Providers <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/blog/six-ideas-family-child-care-providers>

- Administration for Children & Families, Early Childhood Training & Technical Assistance System
  - Practicing Self-Care and Professionalism [https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/itrg/article\\_self-care\\_for\\_teachers.pdf](https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/itrg/article_self-care_for_teachers.pdf)
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)
  - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) <https://casel.org/>
  - Weekly Webinars <https://casel.org/weekly-webinars/>
- ZERO TO THREE
  - Mindfulness Breaks: A Weekly Series for Self-Care <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3351-mindfulness-breaks-a-weekly-series-for-self-care>
  - Mindfulness Toolkit <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2896-getting-started-with-mindfulness-a-toolkit-for-early-childhood-organizations>
- Mental Health America
  - Webinar: Wellness Routines for Uncertain Times <https://www.mhanational.org/events/wellness-routines-uncertain-times>

## Talking with Children about COVID

- DeAEYC. What Does Developmentally Appropriate Practice Mean? <https://deaeyc.org/professional-development/>
- Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Guidelines for Talking with Children about COVID. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html>
- Child Mind Institute. Talking with Children about COVID. <https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Talking with Children: Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers During Infectious Disease Outbreaks. <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Talking-With-Children-Tips-for-Caregivers-Parents-and-Teachers-During-Infectious-Disease-Outbreaks/PEP20-01-01-006>
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The Power of Storytelling in Early Childhood: Helping Children Process the Coronavirus Crisis. <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/blog/power-storytelling-helping-children-process-crisis>
- Teaching Strategies. Resources for children at home; we anticipate that Teaching Strategies will develop and include resources for children in group settings in response to COVID as centers begin to reopen. <https://teachingstrategies.com/>
- Conscious Discipline. Resources specific to COVID as well as appropriate ways to talk with young children and ‘stay out of the weeds.’ Includes a sign-up to be notified of new resources as they are developed. <https://consciousdiscipline.com/>
- From Conscious Discipline. Answering questions about COVID (Conscious Discipline) **WEBINAR: (14:33 minutes)** <https://consciousdiscipline.com/e-learning/webinar/>

## General Information re: COVID and Child Care

- Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Final Guidance for Schools and Child Care. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>
- CDC. Interim Guidance for Child Care Programs, Camps, Other Institutions. <http://cdn.cnn.com/cnn/2020/images/04/30/reopening.guidelines.pdf>
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). There's No Going Back—Child Care after COVID 19. <https://www.naeyc.org/no-going-back>
- NAEYC. The Ongoing Effect of the Pandemic on Child Care. [https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/topics/naeyc\\_coronavirus\\_ongoingeffectsonchildcare.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/topics/naeyc_coronavirus_ongoingeffectsonchildcare.pdf)
- Office of Head Start / Office of Child Care, DHHS. Includes links to webinars and other resources regarding children in Head Start and child care programs, their families, and staff. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/coronavirus/responding-covid-19>
- ZERO TO THREE. Includes resources on mindfulness, professional development for staff <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3291-coronavirus-resources-for-early-childhood-professionals>
- ZERO TO THREE. A resource on mindfulness. <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2896-getting-started-with-mindfulness-a-toolkit-for-early-childhood-organizations>
- Child Care Aware. Includes information regarding COVID and child care. <https://info.childcareaware.org/coronavirus-updates>
- CDC. Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K-12 Schools and Child Care Programs <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-schools.html>
- CDC. Guidelines for Re-Opening Schools and Day Camps—an online course [https://rise.articulate.com/share/nrm7Eu\\_z3bGckbE8GZtegVksOVj5jlrr](https://rise.articulate.com/share/nrm7Eu_z3bGckbE8GZtegVksOVj5jlrr)
- CDC. Guidelines for Re-Opening Child Care Providers—an online course <https://rise.articulate.com/share/7hScY6-7YAimNsJr8aoyGKwKqolu7GRv>
- CDC. Guidelines for Child Care Providers that Remain Open—an online course <https://rise.articulate.com/share/CxEaASmCg4vI9W2FEqq3qNIRbSk5IUM-j>

## For Parents or Teachers to Reconnect w/ Families or Children

The following resources can be used with families, with teachers, and with administrators to reconnect with families and the children they serve before going back into the classroom.

- Conscious Discipline: **WEBINAR: (6:55 minutes)** Understanding Safety, Connection, & Problem Solving: <https://consciousdiscipline.com/e-learning/webinars/understanding-safety-connection-and-problem-solving/>  
 Article Connected to Webinar <https://consciousdiscipline.com/the-basics-of-the-conscious-discipline-brain-state-model/>
- Conscious Discipline: **Brain Smart Starts Article w/ Examples & Links** <https://consciousdiscipline.com/free-resources/shubert/shuberts-classroom/brain-smart-start/>
- Conscious Discipline: **Conscious Discipline Facebook Page:** Offers free daily Brain Smart Starts w/ certified CD instructors
- Conscious Discipline: Responding to Disruptive Younger Children at Home (Conscious Discipline). **WEBINAR: (13:38 minutes)** <https://consciousdiscipline.com/e-learning/webinars/responding-to-disruptive-younger-children-at-home/>

## General (Teachers and Administrators)

- Real Talk for Real Teachers Podcasts (Conscious Discipline): **PODCASTS: Real Talk for Real Teachers** <https://consciousdiscipline.com/e-learning/podcast/>

## Children with Special Needs

- From Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules, an extension of the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder. Supporting Individuals with Autism through COVID-19. **Article:** <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/supporting-individuals-autism-through-uncertain-times>