

Transition Tips for Reopening Infant/Toddler Programs

Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program staff know how important relationships and continuity are to infant and toddler development. As programs prepare to open their doors and welcome back babies and their families, they can use these strategies to ensure a smooth transition.



As a result of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, programs will need to follow the most up-to-date health and safety guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and local health departments. Staff should review CDC and local government websites frequently for any updates.

Primary caregiving and continuity of care are important.

Give children as much consistency as possible. If feasible, children should go back to their prior teacher or family child care provider upon returning to the program. Ensure home visitors retain the same families on their caseload, as much as possible. Program managers should also consider ways to ensure stable groupings of children and staff to avoid cross-contamination.

- Continuity of Care
 - [Tip Sheet](#)
 - [Podcast](#)
- [Responsive Caregiving as an Effective Practice to Support Children's Social and Emotional Development](#)

Young children have a different concept of time than adults.

One or two months is a long time for a baby. Think of this return as a child's first transition into your program. It might be familiar to you, but it feels brand new to them. Infants and toddlers may need more time to adjust to routines. They might cry more, upset easily, or withdraw. It may seem like they've forgotten some developmental milestones they achieved before the program closed, such as potty training or using words to express themselves. To help children feel safe, comforted, and secure, stay calm and reassure them. Remember to use words to label children's feelings and actions.

- [Effective Practice Guides: Social and Emotional Development](#)
- [News You Can Use: Transitions](#)
- [Daily Separations and Reunions](#)
- [Supporting Transitions: Using Child Development as a Guide](#)

Parents are transitioning, too.

Talk to parents about their concerns. Ask them about their routines while they were home with their child. If drop-off and pick-up procedures have changed, you may need to do this via phone, email, or text message. Work with parents to develop strategies to help their children. For example, you can

encourage them to bring in family photos that can be laminated, regularly sanitized, and stay in the program. If moms are breastfeeding, make sure you have a quiet, clean space to allow them to nurse. Pay close attention to children who have Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs), or whom you suspect might have delays, and assess their development. Partner with parents and your local Part C providers to assess progress children have made toward their IFSP goals during the program closure.

- [Supporting Transitions: Early Educators Partnering with Families](#)
- [Supporting Infants and Toddlers and Their Families Through Transitions](#)
- [Child Observation: The Heart of Individualizing Responsive Care for Infants and Toddlers](#)
- [Transitions in Early Head Start: Tips on Supporting Families of Infants and Toddlers](#)

Support children who are dual language learners (DLLs) and their families.

As you help infants and toddlers ease back into programs and adjust to routines, use language that is familiar and comforting. Talk with children in their home languages as much as possible. If you are not fluent in a family's home language, this is a good time to partner with parents and learn important words or phrases you can use throughout the day. Download the Ready DLL app on your smartphone to learn helpful words and phrases in Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, and Haitian Creole.

- [Ready DLL Mobile App](#)

Meet your own needs.

After a period of social distancing, you might have lingering concerns about physical closeness. Managers, teachers, and family child care providers will want to stay in contact to ensure everyone understands and follows the most up-to-date CDC and local health and safety guidelines. It's important to remember that infants need physical touch—holding, comforting, picking up, diapering, feeding—to feel supported and safe. Consider taking measures in addition to standard health and safety practices. For example, you might wear long-sleeved shirts or smocks that you can change throughout the day. Wash yours and children's hands frequently and talk with parents about health and safety practices at home.

For home visitors, be sure to adhere to your program's health and safety procedures while on home visits. Talk with families ahead of time and be responsive to requests they may have, such as removing shoes, wearing a face mask, or meeting outside. Partner with families to prepare children for these changes and calm any fears they may have about the face mask. Explain what it is and how the mask is keeping their home visitor, themselves, and their family safe from germs. Home visitors should also talk with parents ahead of home visits to consider ways to support language, communication, and social and emotional development. Most importantly, remember to take care of your emotional and physical health and encourage all staff to do the same.

- [COVID-19 and the Head Start Community](#)
- [Managing Infectious Disease](#)
- [Health Tips for Home Visitors to Prevent the Spread of Illnesses](#)
- [Caring for Children in Group Settings During COVID-19](#)
- [Taking Care of Ourselves: Stress and Relaxation](#)