

# Reopening Child Care & Early Education Programs during the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Focused Best Practice Recommendations

Children 0-6 years old have unique social-emotional needs and are at highest risk for potential developmental impact due to the heightened stress of the pandemic. Parents and caregivers, including childcare providers can directly reduce this negative impact through your nurturing, consistent, sensitive presence.

### Expect big behaviors

As children communicate their big feelings of Separation Anxiety, Traumatic Stress, fears related to change in routine and environment, and struggle with developmental regression.



### Prepare parents to prepare their children

This is not a typical transition, and parent's worries are valid. Utilize your existing relationships to listen to their concerns, describe what to expect about the new routines and procedures, and ask them what best soothes their children so all the adults providing care are on the same page.



### Be gentle with yourself

Remember: you are working through a pandemic and are likely to experience personal and professional stress as well as secondary trauma responses.



### You mean more than you know

Being sensitive and calm even in the face of big behaviors has the potential to help children regulate and integrate their experiences so they can grow up to be healthy adults and become more resilient when they're older.



### Children are not made to social distance

Social distance guidelines are in direct opposition to children's attachment, social/emotional and developmental needs. The great tension between safety guidelines and children's needs is likely to cause children and adults much stress and anxiety.



### Relationships are the agent of change

Receiving a supportive, reflective space to discuss your thoughts and feelings about your work allows you to bring your best self into relationship with the children you care for. When you feel heard and held, they may experience you as someone that will listen to their fears, acknowledge their feelings, and be the secure base that they need to nurture healthy development.



### Utilize your resources

You are not alone! We are here for you - we can provide relationally-focused IECMH training, consultation, and support.



Mary Ellen Institute

