

## Things to Consider when Reopening your Louisiana Child Care Center to Support Teachers, Children and Families

The following strategies provide basic guidelines about how to plan to welcome children back into your center as successfully as possible. Each individual center will need to think about what strategies are best for meeting their particular needs. Please consider reaching out to the [TIKES mental health consultation team](#). They are available to assist in determining the best course of action for centers based on your unique needs (see information below).

- **Set yourself up for success**
  - Clean and organize learning centers so children can have access to materials and equipment that are fun and meaningful for them.
  - [Post a picture schedule](#) at the children's eye level that they can use to follow the events of the day. Refer to the schedule often, particularly before and during transitions, to orient them to what is happening next.
  - Encourage parents to prepare children for their first day. Reminding them of the names of their teachers and friends will help them feel that school is a familiar, fun, and safe place.
- **Plan for arrivals and departures**
  - Determine how to handle arrivals so that children are transitioned safely from parent to center and back. Some questions to consider: Will you allow parents to enter the classroom? If so, what health requirements will be necessary (e.g., handwashing, masks, etc.). If not, how will you insure the exchange of important information between parents and teachers and keep children comfortable?
  - Encourage parents to say goodbye to their children (in other words, don't sneak out) and tell them when they'll be back. This is a good time to refer to the picture schedule ("Mommy will be back to get you after our center time this afternoon.") and helps children anticipate when their parent will pick them up.
  - Ask parents to bring a comfort object that reminds their child of home (e.g., a shirt that smells like a parent, family photos, a stuffed animal, etc.). Allow the children access to the comfort object whenever they are having big feelings, like missing home or parent(s).
- **Maintain recommended health practices**
  - Teachers and children should wash hands and sanitize tables and other surfaces regularly and as directed by public health officials.
  - Avoid whole group activities to reduce the number of children who are in close contact, which also allows for more individualized attention to children who will need it during this transition.
  - Maintain adequate spacing between children during nap. Arrange for children to sleep head to foot to increase the distance between.
  - The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) has published guidance for safe health practices that may be useful.
- **Maintain a balance between structure and flexibility**
  - Have a set schedule that provides a sense of structure and predictability for children. However, it's important to allow them to engage in child-directed play activities and to disengage from non-preferred activities whenever possible. Setting up a protected quiet space provides a place and time for children to regulate and manage their big feelings.
  - Limit group time and whole group activities to allow for more one-on-one and small group times with teachers as they begin to reestablish a trusting relationship with the children.
  - Spend time outdoors so children have opportunities to exercise their big muscles, have more unstructured time, use their big voices, and get fresh air.
- **Acknowledge and validate children's emotions**
  - It is to be expected that children may experience some difficulty as they transition back to group care. They will likely miss their parent, who has been a constant presence over the past few weeks/months and may not have maintained a consistent and predictable routine in the home. Acknowledge when children are having big feelings (e.g., "You're sad because you miss your mom.") and validate those emotions appropriately ("It's ok to miss Mommy.").
  - Provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for children to talk about their emotions, such as one-on-one conversations, stories about emotions, or through pretend play activities with dolls, puppets, or other items.
  - The [Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning](#) is a great (free) resource for teachers and parents to support the social and emotional development of young children.
  - Keep in mind that this experience has been unsettling for children as well as adults. Children will need additional support and understanding as they readjust to center based care. Meeting their needs in a sensitive and consistent manner will help to ease the transition. Child trauma experts at [Child Trends](#) have developed guidance to help.
  - If challenging behavior persists, please reach out for help. Early intervention can help to ease the burden on caregivers and children and create a more enjoyable experience for all.

TIKES Mental Health Consultation is available via telephone or secure video platform to Louisiana caregivers in need during the COVID-19 crisis. Parents, Type I, II, & III child care centers, respite care center caregivers, and others caring for young children can request a consultation. Requests are typically answered within hours and scheduled for the next day. Complete a request form at: <https://medicine.tulane.edu/departments/clinical-sciences/psychiatry/research/tikes>