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Coach's Corner

Back to School

Re-entry
and
Transitions



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This month many children, educators, and parents will begin navigating a third school year in a global pandemic. Back to school can feel like a stressful time but there are ways to make this transition smoother and even enjoyable for everyone!

New Students

Many children who have been home with working parents throughout the pandemic will be starting in early childhood education programs. This may lead to a need for more focus on adjusting to a new environment. If you have new students starting in your program, consider ways to help the child and their family make a smooth transition into your program.

Child Questionnaire

Before a child starts in your program, have their family fill out a questionnaire with information about the child. This should go beyond the logistical information such as medical history and where they live. The questionnaire should focus on more in-depth information. Some examples may include:

- **What are your child's likes and dislikes?**
- **What comforts them when they are feeling sad or afraid?**
- **What activities do you enjoy as a family?**

It is helpful to also include an open-ended question such as "Is there anything else you or your child would like me to know?" If the child is old enough, encourage families to allow them to help answer some of the questions. These questionnaires can be especially helpful if the child is shy or slow to warm up.

Caregiver Interview

Arrange a time for teachers to meet with families of new students. This helps the teacher get to know the family and also helps the family feel more comfortable with the teacher. Consider meeting over Zoom if scheduling is an issue.

Activity Ideas

The beginning of the school year is a great time to do some activities where the children get to learn more about each other. This idea is especially helpful if there are new children.

- **Family pictures**
 - Adding family pictures around the classroom is a great idea for all age groups. It is comforting for children to see the special people in their lives throughout the day.
- **Creative name display**
 - Invite each child to create the letters of their name and hang them around the classroom. Let the child know they can create their name out of anything they can find! They could use collage materials, play dough, blocks, sticks, leaves, etc. If it is not something that could be easily hung up, take a picture! This activity helps to personalize the classroom.

- **Show and tell**

- This is a tried and true way for children to learn more about each other. Invite children to bring in something special from home to show to the class. If there are health and safety concerns, request that children bring in pictures of their special items.

- **Kindness paper chain**

- Have the children start a paper chain and add a loop to it each time they see a classmate do something kind for someone. The children (and teachers!) will be excited to see the chain grow. Bonus points for using fine motor skills!

Setting families up for success

Provide families with information on how to create a positive drop-off experience. Many times family members are also feeling emotional about drop-off, especially if it is the child's first early childhood education experience. If the child is upset during drop-off consider sending the family a note or picture of the child playing once the child settles in so they can feel more at ease.



School-Age Children

Many early childhood education programs opened their doors to school age children who were doing full-time or part-time virtual learning. This new learning environment required a lot of patience and adjustment from both educators and children. If your program has after-school children who are returning to in-person learning, there are ways to support their transition.

Open communication with families

Last year there was a lot of communication between families, elementary teachers, and early childhood educators due to virtual learning. Keep that communication going with the families. That partnership is what got children and families through the difficult year. It is important for us to take what we have learned and use it to promote success in the future.

Afternoon “check-in” with each child

Make it a point to talk with each child individually. Ask about their day and to name one thing that made them feel good. This sets the stage for a trusting relationship.

Activity ideas

- **Project approach**
 - Talk with the children about topics they are interested in and plan opportunities to explore those topics. Let the children have the lead in planning activities or projects related to their ideas.
- **Vision boards**
 - never underestimate the power of positive energy! Encourage children to create a board that showcases all of the things they would like to do throughout the year. They can use art materials, collage materials, magazines, etc. Hang the boards around the room and encourage the children to revisit them throughout the year.
- **Service project**
 - Consider the organizations in your community. Are there any specific projects for the children to help with? This is a great way to teach them the importance of community. An example could be writing letters to folks living in nursing homes.

One of the most important things that we can do for children, especially this year, is provide them with a safe and nurturing space to grow and learn. Many young children are still feeling the effects from a year of disruption from routines. These feelings could lead to longer adjustment periods when returning to early childhood education programs. Educators need to be intentional about the social and emotional climate of our classrooms.



One way to support children dealing with strong emotions, is to create a calming space away from the busy areas of the classroom where a child could do an activity alone or with an educator. Another idea is to have an emotion poster at the entrance to the classroom. Invite each child to identify with an educator how they are feeling that morning. Encourage children to use language to describe their feelings throughout the day. For younger children, use language to help explain how they may be feeling.



The best thing we can do for our children this year is to love them unconditionally and show them compassion and understanding during difficult moments. Last year proved that if we work together we can get through anything. Let's all commit to starting the school year with that same energy and spirit!

Professional Development (PD)

- Building Future Success in School Age Children- DIEEC Live Virtual PD
- Connecting with Children Through Their Love Language-DIEEC
- Brain Connections to Stressful Situations- DIEEC Live Virtual PD

to register for any of these workshops visit: www.dieecpd.org

Resources

- [Zero to Three- Children Navigate Transitions in the Aftermath of Pandemic Restrictions](#)
- [NAEYC-11 Ways to Help Children Say Goodbye](#)
- [NAEYC- 11x: Welcome Children and Families to Your Classroom](#)
- [Focus on FEELINGS: Back-to-School/Program Tips with FLIP IT](#)