

INTRODUCING IT: Tips for Supporting Infants & Young Children's Transition as We Re-open

READ IT (12 minutes / English and Spanish)

[Tips for Supporting Infants and Young Children's Transition as We Re-open](#) (Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health, 2020)

[Consejos para apoyar la transición de los infantes y los niños pequeños a medida que reabrimos](#) (Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health, 2020)

This resource talks about the transition for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers who are moving back into your care, and the stress this may cause them. The article breaks down the different areas to consider, and gives you specific ways you can support and respond to behaviors and feelings brought about by stress.

Extend your TRY IT! learning through Zero to Three's article supporting family conversations about the transition back to childcare, along with handouts on stating behavior expectations clearly, positive attention and rules, and a social story featuring Tucker the Turtle!

KNOW IT

Here are the **important ideas** this resource offers:

- Stress impacts everyone's behaviors. Very young children can sense when the important adults in their lives feel stress, too.
- Young children may show changes in behavior, emotions, and social interactions in ways that challenge us or are different from the way they normally act.

- Some typical changes include: Acting younger than their age or struggling with/ losing a previously learned skill; difficulty with attention or sitting still; moodiness; expressing fears; increased clinginess; increased need for attention and/or reassurance; preference towards solitary activities; sleep difficulties; repetitive play with themes involving illness.
- Caregivers and their response to these changes are important. You can make a positive difference by taking action in the following areas: paying attention to your own feelings; nurturing your relationship with the child; using positive instead of negative interactions; supporting children when engaging with friends; establishing routines; setting age-appropriate rules; talking about emotions; giving them secure spaces; supporting meaningful play; and modeling behavior with them and others that is healthy and supportive.
- Making emotional well-being a priority – it is the foundation to school and life success!

Here are some **terms** in the resource that may not be familiar to you:

To be “present” is to be fully focused and without judgement in the moment and paying attention to the other person.

To be “activated” is to react with emotions in response to someone else’s behavior or emotions. Becoming activated can get in the way of paying attention to the other person.

Protective factors are the skills, strengths, or coping strategies that help to reduce a risk’s impact, like stress. A **protective factor** is a positive way to counteract the risk.

Reciprocal play describes children interacting and coordinating play with others, such as in role-play or dress-up games.

To be “regulated” is to have emotions under control and to express them in healthy ways. Very young children need adults to teach them how to be regulated, or to co-regulate.



RECALL IT

Let's see what you learned from this resource! Choose the answer from choices provided. The answers are at the end the guide.

1. You may see this response to stress in the children you care for:

- a) sleep difficulties
- b) social withdrawal
- c) shorter attention span
- d) all these behaviors

2. You can positively manage the stress you feel from a child's behavior by:

- a) Walking away from the child
- b) ignoring the child's behavior
- c) taking a couple deep breaths
- d) yelling at the child

3. To build connection and a child's sense of being seen and heard, you should try to have at least _____ positive interactions for every one negative interaction with the child.

- a) eight
- b) one
- c) five
- d) three

4. Maintaining routines, age-appropriate rules, nurturing interactions and _____ are all ways to help a child feel understood and supported.

- a) labeling emotions
- b) negative reinforcement
- c) ignoring the child's feeling
- d) not checking in with parents



THINK ABOUT IT

Take a few minutes to consider these questions. If you want to, write your thoughts down.

1. What behaviors do you see when the children in your care feel afraid? Worried? Sad? What are the things you do or don't do to help them manage these big feelings?
2. The resource offered many tips on supporting children and their feelings. What practices were you already doing? What new ones will you try? Why?
3. What child behaviors you are most challenged by? Why is this behavior(s) a "hot button" behavior for you? Has anything in this resource helped you to see this behavior differently? How will use this new knowledge the next time you feel activated?



TRY IT!

Here are some ideas to try:

1. The resource suggests caregivers work closely with families. Share [this article](#) from Zero to Three. It offers parents things to think over and talk about with their child. This will help everyone to make the big transition back to care.
2. Reach out to the family and the child with a letter or email to tell the child how excited you are to see him or her again. Remind the child of some of the things he or she loves to do while in your care. Enclose a picture of yourself without your mask to remind the child what you look like. Add a photo of you wearing a mask to help the child know who you are. Ask the family to talk to their child about what you will look like when they come to child care. If possible, schedule a video call with the family.
3. Think about the rules and expectations you have for the children in your care. Are the children able to follow them based on their age? Look at the **Handout #1 - Clearly State Behavior Expectations**. Jot down three rules that are very important to you. Think about how you will explain them to the children in your care. You can let

families know what rules you are working on, too - they may want to practice them at home!

4. As the resource says, a big part of setting rules and expectations is that children need regular practice to master them - and lots of reminders, too! Children do better when they are given guidance on what they have permission to do, instead of being told what they may not do. Take a look at **Handout # 2 - Positive Attention**, for tips on how to help children learn and remember rules. Want some ready-made rules with pictures to print? Take a look at **Handout #3 - Our Preschool's Rules!**

5. Rules give children a sense of predictability, and that makes them feel safe in their world. Regular schedules and routines also provide children with those same feelings. Making a daily picture schedule of the routines you use in your care setting can help children remember the routines. Help them learn the schedule by talking to them about the schedule. Children able to draw pictures can make a drawing for each piece of the schedule. Have them tell you about the drawing, and label the drawing with the name or description of the activity. Hang the pictures up in sequential order where the children can see them.

6. Even with these supports, children will still use big behaviors to show us their big feelings! Use this social story, **Handout #4 - Tucker Turtle Takes Time to Tuck and Think**, to share with children in your care. It's a great way to talk about and practice how to calm down for those times when big feelings make them want to use big behaviors.

RECALL IT! Answers: 1 – D; 2 – C; 3 – C; 4 - A