

Making the Move Together: Transitions During Uncertain Times

Returning to Head Start center-based classrooms after a public health crisis or emergency may raise questions for you and your family. Think about these tips as you prepare to make the transition from home to your Head Start program for reopening.

Three weeks before the program begins:

- Continue to practice everyday actions to reduce the spread of germs, such as washing your hands and using a tissue when you need to cough or sneeze (or coughing or sneezing into your elbow).
- You can read books or share stories with your child to help them manage their feelings and emotions, such as their fear of going back to school, worries about staying healthy, or confusion about what they hear or see on the news.
- Practice wearing a mask with your child. Talk to them about how they help keep germs to ourselves.
- Make a plan for who in your family can pick up and drop off your child. Connect with your Head Start program to find out how procedures look the same or different.
- Stay in contact with your Head Start teacher and family services worker to remain up to date with program happenings and information that may impact your child's return experience.
- Ask your child what they are looking forward to doing at the Head Start program. Ask if they are excited about playing outdoors, story time, block building, or other activities.
- Talk to your child about things that might look different in the classroom (e.g., if teachers and children wear masks or clear face shields).
- Check with your child's doctor about specific safety precautions if there is a special healthcare need, such as asthma or sensory issues.

Two weeks before the program begins, contact program staff to ask questions about changes, including:

- Will there be screening requirements for entry into the building, such as taking everyone's temperature? Will the program take your child's temperature each day or will you need to do this before arrival?
- How will meals be served? Who will provide the food?
- How will program staff look different? Will there be more or different staff? Will staff be wearing masks? Will staff have on protective equipment that will be described for your child before they attend? Will you need to supply a cloth face covering for your child or will coverings be provided?
- Will the classroom setup and materials look different? Will your child have their own supplies? Will cleaning routines be different?



- Will the hours change? Will there be fewer children present at a time? Will your child attend for fewer days? Will your child have a combination of face-to-face class time and virtual interactions?
- Will drop-off and pick-up be different? Will your child have to wear a mask on the way to and from the Head Start program? Will family members be allowed in the building? Will transportation change?
- Will your child be able to bring comfort items from home, like a blanket and stuffed animal for nap time?
- Who do you call if you have a question?
- What do you do if your child or someone in your family is sick?

One week before the program begins:

- Talk with your child about their feelings about returning to a classroom with other children. Are they excited, fearful, happy, or anxious?
- Continue to practice wearing a mask with your child.
- Talk with your child about clothes and supplies for the first day of school.
- Talk with your child about changes in routines you learned about from program staff, such as lunchtime, outdoor time, dropoff and pickup, and others.
- Continue reading with your child. Include books about big feelings and change.
- Help your child remember the names of their teachers and classmates.
- Review the family schedule and routine. Who will take your child to the center? Who will pick up your child? Review pick-up and drop-off procedures.
- Begin working toward an early bedtime. You may have changed your schedule while you were all at home together.

The night before the program begins:

- Practice wearing a mask with your child one more time before their bedtime routine.
- Aim for an early bedtime.
- Talk with your child about what to expect during the morning routine.
- Remind your child that things at the Head Start program may look different. Teachers may be wearing masks to protect everyone from germs. You might say something like, "They are so happy you are back and want you to be safe."
- Ask your child to draw a picture at Head Start to share with you at the end of the day.
- Think of ways you can offer comfort to your child while you are apart. For example, you might want to send a family photo with them in their backpack.



The first day and week of the program:

- Talk with your child each day about the routines for bedtime, waking up, and getting ready for school in the morning.
- Wake up each morning in time for your routine so you do not feel rushed getting to the Head Start program.
- Explain what will happen when your child arrives. For example, a staff person may meet your child at the car for health checks and walk them to the classroom.
- Give your child hugs to start the new day.
- Talk with your child about what happened each day. Ask how they felt and what they liked.
- Check in with your child's teacher about how your child is doing during the day. Do they seem happy, sad, or anxious? Are they comfortable engaging with the other children? Are there things you can do at home to support any feelings your child may be experiencing?

Transitioning to Head Start classrooms after a public health crisis or emergency can be challenging. Some parents and families may feel concerned or anxious.

Your well-being is important, too! Remember:

- You are strong.
- You are enough.
- You are only human.
- Connect with others.
- Pause, breathe, respond.
- Take breaks.
- Seek help.
- Do what brings you joy.

For more information, explore the Mental Health Resources to Support Response and Recovery collection of resources available on the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC).



For more information about this resource, please contact us: PFCE@ecetta.info | 1-866-763-6481

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