

# Suggestions for Supporting and Teaching Health and Safety Guidelines

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## Suggestions for Supporting and Teaching Health and Safety Guidelines in Pre-K Classrooms

### *Safe Use of Materials and Toys*

- Keep each student's belongings separated from others' and in individually labeled containers, cubbies, or areas.
- Ensure adequate supplies to minimize sharing of high touch materials to the extent possible (e.g., assigning each student their own art supplies, fine motor materials, manipulative learning materials)
- Limit use of supplies, materials, and toys by one group of students at a time and clean and disinfect between uses.
- Provide individual play mats or use colored tape to mark off individual areas on tables and in play centers.
- Avoid sharing electronic devices, toys, books, and other games or learning aids.
- Use social narratives and visually display routines for playing with toys and using materials within a designated area.
- Teach and use visuals to support students during the clean-up routine so that used toys and materials are placed in bins.

### *Social Distancing*

#### **Room Arrangement and Supports for Distancing**

- Space seating and tables at least 6 feet apart when feasible.
  - Provide acrylic sheets or other barrier between students seated at a table.
  - Assign seats and mark each student's seat with name, symbol, or photo. Do this in multiple areas of the room.
- Provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs on walls, to ensure that staff and students remain at least 6 feet apart in lines and at other times (e.g. guides for creating "one way routes" in hallways).
- Limit, or eliminate, use of common spaces. When possible, divide large group spaces in order to allow more students to safely use the space. For example, use child-sized furniture, (i.e. rolling shelves and kitchenettes) to divide a room and serve as physical reminders to students to remain in their assigned areas.
- Find creative ways to use yarn, masking tape, or other materials for students to create their own space.
- Develop a system for students to change activity areas. Teach and support them in remaining in an activity area for a designated time. Provide a variety of materials in order to increase their engagement and interest.

#### **Strategies for teaching and supporting young students with social distancing**

- Implement strategies to model and reinforce social and physical distancing and movement.
- Use carpet squares, mats, or other visuals for spacing.
- Model social distancing when interacting with students, families, and staff.
- Role-play what social distancing looks like by demonstrating the recommended distance.

- Give frequent verbal and visual reminders to students.
- Create and develop a scripted story around social distancing, as well as handwashing, proper etiquette for sneezes, coughs, etc.
- Send home a tip sheet for parents and family members to also learn about social distancing.

*Resource:* [Ideas for Room Arrangement](#)

*Resource:* [Teaching Young Children about Social Distancing \(TATS\)](#)

## *Hygiene and Safety*

### **Teaching Hygiene, Health, and Safety**

- Signs and Messages
  - Post visuals and photos to remind students and staff about hand-washing and masks.
  - Post visual showing step-by-step routines
  - Include messages and reminders about hygiene and safety guidelines when communicating with families. Send stories and visuals home so that families can reinforce lessons.

### **Strategies for teaching and supporting young students with hygiene and safety**

- Teach, model, and reinforce healthy habits and social skills.
- Explain to students why it's not healthy to share drinks or food, particularly when sick.
- Practice frequent handwashing by teaching a popular child-friendly song or counting to 20 (handwashing should last 20 seconds).
- Teach students to use tissue to wipe their nose and to cough inside their elbow.
- Model and practice handwashing before and after eating, after coughing or sneezing, after playing outside, and after using the restroom.
- Create and develop scripted stories about handwashing, wearing masks, and hygiene etiquette (i.e. sneezing, coughing, refraining from touching face)
- Develop and post visuals for step-by-step processes for hygiene and safety
- Explain and describe the guidelines for storing toys in bins, using individual materials, and waiting in assigned areas. Use visuals for teaching and as reminders.

*Resource:* [Washing Hands Story \(Pyramid\)](#)

*Resource:* [Visuals - Safety Reminders for Covid-19](#)

## *Wearing Masks*

### **Strategies for teaching and encouraging students to wear masks**

- Model the use of masks along with social narratives and photos of staff and students wearing masks.
- Collaborate with families to teach step-by-step processes of mask use.
- Designate parts of the day when masks are not required (i.e. outside play). Refer to district guidelines when determining the schedule for mask use.
- Have a designate way to keep up with students' masks. One idea is to attach each student's mask to a lanyard that is worn around the neck. This makes it less likely that the mask will be dropped or put down and forgotten.

*Resource* : [Teaching Young Children about Wearing Masks \(TATS\)](#)

## *Outdoor Play*

### **Outdoor lessons and play**

- Extend the indoor environment to outdoors, and take the class outside, weather permitting.
  - Outdoor playgrounds/natural play areas only need routine maintenance, and hand hygiene should be emphasized before and after use of these spaces.
  - Outdoor play equipment with high-touch surfaces, such as railings, handles, etc, should be cleaned and disinfected regularly if used continuously.
- Continue to emphasize the grouping of students. Limit the size of groups participating in playground time. Structure outdoor time so that small groups can play in different area of the playground.
- Plan activities and supply materials so that those who are not using the playground equipment are able to maintain interest and stay engaged.
- Consider scheduling outdoor play in staggered shifts with part of the whole group outside while part is inside. The number of groups and amounts of time would depend in part on the number of adults available to supervise and interact with the students.
  - If two or more groups are outside at the same time, they should have at least 6 feet of open space between them.
  - Use cones, flags, tape, or other signs to create boundaries between groups.
  - If you can, have equipment such as balls and jump ropes for each group.
  - Always wash hands right after outdoor play time.

Be familiar with the specific guidance in place for your program related to amount of time outdoors, guidelines about the application of sunscreen. Collaborate with school staff and administrator about the scheduled use of the playground by other classrooms.

If possible, consider having the entire group or shifts of groups have snacks and/or lunch outside. Refer to your school's guidelines regarding permission, location, and health and safety requirements for eating outside. Emphasize hygiene precautions (i.e. handwashing before and

after eating). Be prepared with plans for instructing students about where to sit, how to follow safety guidelines, and how to clean up after eating.

Many lessons can be taught outside, depending on school and district guidelines.

- One example is story time. Follow-up literacy activities (i.e. a nature walk on the school grounds to look for items or colors mentioned in a book) are good outside learning activities.
- If possible, art activities can be taken outside (i.e. hanging paper from a fence and painting with big brushes, drawing with sidewalk chalk).
- Blowing bubbles is an engaging activity for most young students. Because the interest level is often high during bubble activities, it is a good time to model and focus on language and communication skills.

Based on scheduling and available staff, planning activities based on some children having a lesson outdoors and others staying indoors for their lesson can be a good strategy for social distancing and for increasing amount of adult interactions with the groups.

### *Attending to students' social-emotional health.*

Integrate social and emotional learning as a priority through student engagement and positive social interactions. Even though students are distanced from each other and whole-group activities might be infrequent, it is important to provide visual, auditory and sensory supports to promote engagement.

#### **Strategies for supporting children in maintaining distance during play**

- Offer more opportunities for individual play and solo activities, such as fine motor activities (i.e., drawing, coloring, cutting, puzzles, and other manipulatives).
- Plan activities that do not require close physical contact between multiple students.
- Stagger indoor and outdoor play and adjust schedules to reduce the number of students in the same area.
- Use visual schedules, first/then strategies, photos, and social scripts to help students get accustomed to remaining in an assigned area with a specific group of peers.

#### **Strategies for building classroom and friendship connections while distanced**

- Plan ways that give students opportunities to participate in whole-group activities while remaining distanced:
  - Working on a classroom mural or painting (i.e. a few at a time at the art area – distanced – with one group project developed)
  - Music and movement with distance but with the same song and movements. Classroom staff should monitor groups and individuals to support children in understanding the song and movements. If the planned song includes specific motions (i.e. Wheels on the Bus) place visual drawings of the motions, model motions before the activity, use a video that models the motions and play the same video on a tablet or computer placed so students in the small groups can watch.

- Make a classroom book with photos and names of the students. A good example of this strategy is a book that shares students' favorites (i.e. a block or Lego structure, piece of art work, a favorite book). Take the photo to other small groups while using comments such as "Tommy wants you to see what he built". These photos can also be emailed to families. Remember to respect student confidentiality when sending photos of projects. Do not include students' names.
- If you have dividers such as acrylic-sheet dividers facilitate play so that students can develop a common play scheme on both sides of the acrylic sheet.
- Provide photos and models to support children in greeting each other while maintaining distance.

*Resource* : [Considerations for Reopening after Extended Closure](#)

### **Suggestions for supporting students' individual social, emotional and behavioral needs**

- Teachers, families, and staff will need to use strategies to prepare students for seeing their teachers, classroom staff, and therapists in masks and attend to students' emotional responses to this new policy.
- One option is for staff to share a picture of themselves with and without the mask in advance of students' return to school.
- Use masks with child friendly designs or characters.

Some students might experience difficulty adjusting to the new routines. Some reasons for the need for supports during school reopening might include:

- Distancing and wearing masks are routines that are different from their prior experiences at school.
- After several months away from school during remote learning, some students might require extra time and supports to re-adjust to person-to-person school.
- COVID-19 and accompanying economic worries and changes in family routines might have caused families, including young children, to experience stress and uncertainty. The additional change of returning to school might cause further stress for some families and students.

Students might react in a variety of ways when they experience uncertainty and stress. Some students might react in the following ways:

- crying,
- withdrawing,
- feeling tired,
- seeking attention, and
- seeking to be held.

Other students who are experiencing stress might exhibit noncompliant behaviors such as the following:

- resisting masks,
- refusing to distance from peers,
- aggressive actions such as hitting, spitting, and
- leaving an assigned area.

It is important to monitor students' emotional reactions and to establish relationships and connections with them as school begins again. Some ideas for providing an environment that will assist students in feeling welcomed, safe, and secure are below:

- Focus on safety and building/rebuilding resiliency.
- Personalize and show sensitivity.
- Coordinate with staff to provide consistent behavior responses and wording.
- Establish adults' roles as safe and caring helpers.
- Provide choices
- Teach and support consistent routines while modeling and providing practice for new routines.

*Resource* : [Building Relationships \(University of Connecticut\)](#)

*Resource* : [When we All Come Together Again - printable story](#)

### **Strategies to individualize and support emotional well-being**

Supporting students in development of relationships and self-regulation should be paired with consistent classroom instruction related to the following:

- Teach students how to identify and handle emotions
- Teach lessons in recognizing feelings (i.e. fear, anger, worry) and provide practice in ways to deal with and self-regulate feelings
- Facilitate guided practice in routines and learning the parts of the schedule. This helps students know what to expect and know the steps of classroom routines, thus building a sense of security.
- Emphasize that the classroom and school are safe places. To reinforce this concept, provide a safe place for calming down in the classroom.
- Comfort items may be especially needed during this time of transition as they may help to reduce stress for students.
  - To avoid these items coming into contact with other students, efforts should be made for these items to be placed in a cubby or bin and be used at naptime or as needed.
  - If possible, a comfort item should remain in the classroom to avoid cross contamination from another site. Use photos of the item to help comfort the student in another setting. Comfort items are often blankets or stuffed animals that students bring from home. Fabric items should be washed daily.
- Support students with strategies to increase their ability to focus and pay attention in order to stay engaged in on-task behavior.
- Teach skills and provide reinforcement related to students' efforts in learning to set goals and plan how to problem-solve and regulate emotional reactions.

*Resource* : [Video of Circle Time for Calming \(filmed before rules for distancing\)](#)

*Resource* : [Going Back to School - printable story](#)