



COVID-19 Back to School Preparation Guide



August 2020

August 24, 2020

Introduction

We at CFEL understand that these have been unprecedented times and would like to thank you for your commitment to the health, safety and well-being of the children, staff and overall community. **We are all in this together!** It is through asking questions for clarity, supporting each other, and staying mentally and physically healthy ourselves, that we can be best prepared to offer a safe and seamless transition back to school this September.

As schools begin to re-open, administrators and their administrative boards are incorporating new measures to protect the physical health and safety of students, staff and families. With thorough planning and innovative approaches, learning will be conducted with a key focus on wellbeing.

The impact of physical distancing restrictions or part-time attendance to school, uncertainty about timeframes and scheduling will require Educators to adapt and learn. Despite these changes, a “new normal” provides opportunities to improve past practices and build back effective processes and policies stronger than before.

Centres for Early Learning exists for an incredibly important purpose - **Inspiring smiles by building experiences and shaping community.** It is now, more than ever that we hope to reinforce this philosophy to its fullest potential.

Sincerely,

Pattie London, RECE
Director of Education

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CHILDREN

This guide will outline steps we are taking to support your child's transition back to school safely. We hope that you will find actionable ideas, as we Collaborate in making preparations that your child will need and how we can support them. As your Trusted Partners, we have outlined activities, made recommendations and found resources that will support your child's wellbeing and learning.

Reinforce Physical Distancing and introduce Group Distancing:

We have managed to maintain a safe, physically distanced environment for the children in our care since our successful re-opening on July 13, 2020. Our educators have focused on reinforcing these concepts with the children through methods such as effective role modelling, words of encouragement as well as educating children on spatial awareness techniques. As always, we endeavor to maintain excellence. In this regard, our teams have been consistent with coaching children with preparedness who are more recently returning to care as well.

Additionally, you will find our focus to be consistent with that of guidelines set out by Toronto Public Health and the Ministry of Education. Specifically, we have highlighted the importance of maintaining group or cohort distancing. Through this approach, children and staff of an assigned classroom do not chance socializing with another group and are able to continue with their learning uninterrupted and without the potential of cross contamination.

It is with great pleasure that we are able to continue escorting children to and from schools within our community. In keeping with the requirements of cohort distancing, we will be escorting children at staggered times, making use of alternate routes as well as maintaining physical distance at all times. An example for reference would be as follows:

- A kindergarten classroom consisting of both Junior and Senior Kindergarteners would be split in to two physically distanced (6 feet apart) groups and escorted separately.

To support the children further, we will conduct mock practices or walks two weeks prior to the expected re-opening of schools. The aim of these walks would be to practice street safety, reinforce key concepts of physical distancing and aid in supporting familiarity for the children. Additionally, educators will be equipped with visual aids and travelling emergency backpacks, which will include:

- PPE (extra masks, gloves, gowns)
- Hand Sanitizers
- First Aid Kits
- Wipes, Tissue and Paper Towels
- Receiving Blankets



Reinforce the Concept of the 4 W's:

While we continue to introduce key ideas to the children that are in keeping with optimal hygiene techniques, we intend to create methods that support the children with a sense of ease and comfort. With this in mind, we introduce the 4 W's Concept.

The 4 W's concept is simple yet impactful, and can help remind children what pertinent measures can be taken to maintain self-safety at all times.

- **W**ear Your Mask
- **W**ash Your Hands
- **W**atch Your Distance
- **W**ork Together



















Your Child's Wellbeing – Back to School Pulse Checks:

- In order to support the children's wellbeing, we will be completing informal pulse checks with your child by simply asking them how they feel about returning to school. We will be using a method called the Zones of Regulation which is a social-emotional learning curriculum, created to teach children self-regulation and emotional control
- The Zones of Regulation uses **four colors to help children self-identify how they're feeling** and categorize it based on color
- When children fully understand what they're feeling, they can make sense of, and regulate their emotions much better

The Colours and Four Zones:

- In the **Red Zone** – feeling angry, feeling out of control- this could look like a tantrum, aggressive behaviours, or outburst of emotion
- In the **Yellow Zone**- feeling anxious, frustrated – this could look like emotions building into the Red zone, silly tendencies, difficulty focusing
- In the **Green Zone**- feeling calm, happy, and content- this could look like they are ready to engage in their daily activities. This is the zone where optimal learning takes place
- In the **Blue Zone**- feeling sad, uninterested, disengaged- this could look like crying often, wanting to be alone or withdrawn

The Zones of Regulation

Blue Rest Area	Green Go	Yellow Slow Down	Red Stop
 Sad	 Happy	 Nervous	 Angry
 Upset	 Excited	 Surprised	 Yelling
 Hurt	 Calm	 Confused	 Aggressive
 Tired	 Proud	 Silly	 Mad

The key concept we will be integrating is **Bring Children into the Conversation**. Educators will listen and talk to the children about the current situation using age-appropriate language. Educators will be helping children to understand, verbalize and organize their own feelings around the pandemic.

Encouraging Children to Advocate for Themselves:

As we endeavor to maintain an environment for the children that is warm and nurturing, we also keep the safety of your children at the forefront of our practices. In so doing we aim to preserve the safety of your children, our team and the overall facility.

To reinforce the above we will encourage children to be their own advocates! We will continue to empower your children with a sense of confidence in expression, and how their feelings can be communicated to their teachers effectively when not feeling well. To further support realization of symptoms, our team will be presenting your child with questions such as:

- “What does it feel like?”
- “Where do you feel the pain?”
- “What can we do to make you feel comfortable?”

Through this open-ended questioning technique, we intend to support children in comprehending the screening process as well as to self identify the onset of symptoms, should they occur. Furthermore, your children will benefit from an opportunity to express emotions or moods.

Back to School- How can you prepare?

PARENTS

Centres for Early Learning is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for the children, families and employees we serve. In order to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission within our child care centres, it is everyone's responsibility to diligently monitor for symptoms. Parents and caregivers are

required to assess their children daily for the presence of symptoms of the common cold, influenza, COVID-19, or other infectious respiratory diseases prior to drop off. If you and/or your child are feeling sick, stay home.

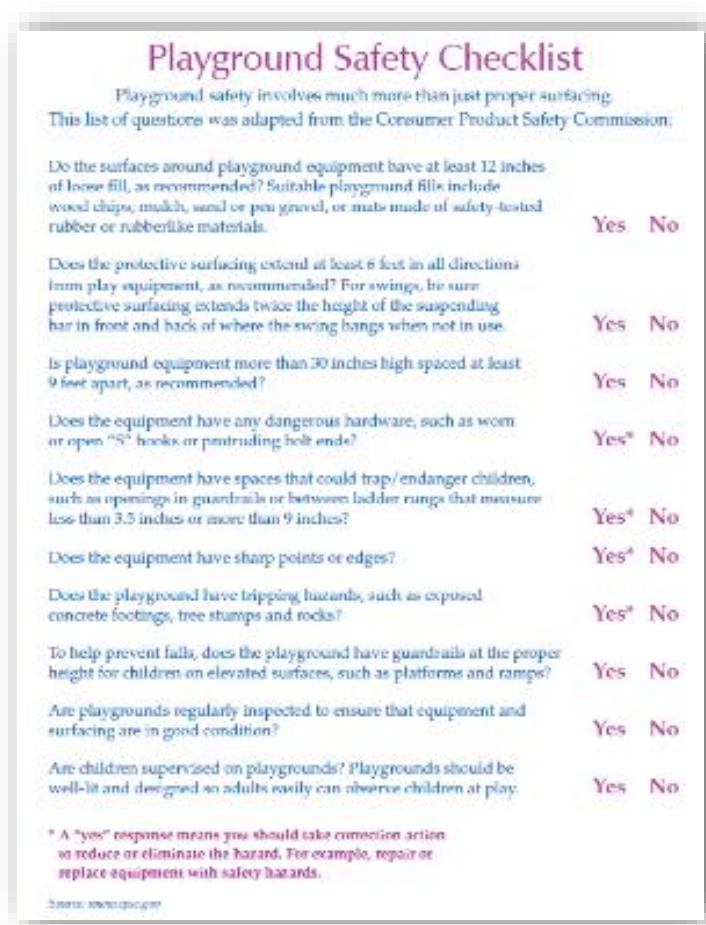
Similarly, your child's school will have health and safety protocols in place to ensure that your child re-enters the school setting safely. If you have not received the schools health and safety protocols, below are some strategies to help you prepare for illness and back to school preparation:

Prepare Your Safety Questions:

Find out who your best point of contact at the school is to address your questions to. Some questions you may have are:

- “How will screening take place at school?,”
- “Who can I contact to check in on how my child is doing?”
- “Is the best method of communication through email or by telephone?”

You may already feel familiar with the screening process at the centre so learning what the school has put in place can help to provide more ease during this transition for you and your family. Additionally, having answers can help you feel more in control of what to expect



Playground Safety Checklist

Playground safety involves much more than just proper surfacing. This list of questions was adapted from the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Do the surfaces around playground equipment have at least 12 inches of loose fill, as recommended? Suitable playground fills include wood chips, mulch, sand or pea gravel, or mats made of safety-tested rubber or rubberlike materials.	Yes	No
Does the protective surfacing extend at least 6 feet in all directions from play equipment, as recommended? For swings, be sure protective surfacing extends twice the height of the suspending bar in front and back of where the swing hangs when not in use.	Yes	No
Is playground equipment more than 30 inches high spaced at least 9 feet apart, as recommended?	Yes	No
Does the equipment have any dangerous hardware, such as worn or open "S" hooks or protruding bolt ends?	Yes*	No
Does the equipment have spaces that could trap/ endanger children, such as openings in guardrails or between ladder rungs that measure less than 3.5 inches or more than 9 inches?	Yes*	No
Does the equipment have sharp points or edges?	Yes*	No
Does the playground have tripping hazards, such as exposed concrete footings, tree stumps and rocks?	Yes*	No
To help prevent falls, does the playground have guardrails at the proper height for children on elevated surfaces, such as platforms and ramps?	Yes	No
Are playgrounds regularly inspected to ensure that equipment and surfacing are in good condition?	Yes	No
Are children supervised on playgrounds? Playgrounds should be well-lit and designed so adults easily can observe children at play.	Yes	No

* A "yes" response means you should take correction action to reduce or eliminate the hazard. For example, repair or replace equipment with safety hazards.

Source: www.cpsc.gov

Prepare Back Up Care:

Child Care and Schools have similar health and safety protocols in place to ensure safe and healthy environments. We can only achieve this goal with the support of our students, families and broader community. To further enhance the sense of preparedness, we recommend taking some anticipatory steps, should disruptions pertaining to COVID-19 and Influenza occur beyond the childcare's or school's control.

In the event where you may have to stay home to support your child, co-ordination and flexibility is required to eliminate the feeling of being stuck. Co-ordinate with other family members, friends, or emergency contacts to be back up child care providers ahead of time in the event that you cannot take time off work or school

- Communicate with your employer or school administrator when your child has started child care and/or school so they are aware of these complications- this can help open the lines of communication and provide flexibility in your parental role
- If you are aware of any baseline health issues that your child experiences, example, seasonal allergies, being proactive with obtaining a note from a medical practitioner can assist in explaining that a pre-existing health condition is the reason for CoVid like symptoms that appear

We Are Here to Support You!

We understand these are unprecedented times and information is coming at you quickly and is constantly changing. It can be overwhelming sorting through all of this information, which may spark many questions for you. We are here to support you and provide you with some insight and information that we have received working with our external partners. We will be hosting a second Parent Orientation on Zoom – the date will be sent to you shortly. Stay tuned!



Discussion Topics:

First Session – Introduction to COVID-19 protocols and processes in our centre, Screening Tutorial and Tour of classrooms

Second Session - Back to School Preparation - current processes and review of School Escort guidelines



The current pandemic situation created large adjustments in daily routine and life overall. With the changes to social gatherings, parents/guardians and children are bound to experience anxiety or mood changes with regards to returning to school in the midst of the pandemic.

Health and Wellness Considerations:

- Coping strategies to deal with fear and anxiety as a result of the situation and any added uncertainty
- Strategies for adapting to new ways to address fear on an ongoing basis
- Tools for adjusting mindset to meet the current needs; focusing on areas of control and building resilience
- Coming to terms with the implications of the current situation, extending to grief/loss where new outcomes are concerned
- Pivoting in uncertainty while maintaining perspective and sense of community



We understand that the current changes (quarantine, physical distancing, etc.) could pose a challenge for children who are transitioning back to childcare and school. We recognize the importance of a strong support system with a keen focus on empathy and compassion. Through the implementation of varying techniques, we have been able to aid children in navigating through emotions such as distress and anxiety.

Some methods we have implemented to enhance the whole child experience are:

As your Trusted Partner, we hope that you too can aid in reinforcing these methods at home and would highly appreciate your input to further this initiative. Some tips to help with this could include:

- Family discussions around COVID-19 that provide children with accurate, up-to-date and age appropriate information about the virus.
- You may consider introducing a mood journal to your child. You may also benefit from keeping emoji stickers on hand and can ask them to place it in their journal to help them express the way they feel.
- Conduct your own Progressive Muscle Relaxation sessions as a family.

As always, our teams at the centre are able to offer great resources for homemade books, articles, resources for children and parents to help assist with individual needs during this transition- please feel free to reach out to the Education staff to see how we can best meet the needs of your family.

Distance Learning- How Should You Prepare?

CHILDREN



It is likely that not all students will be present when school resumes and not all students will attend school all the time or at the same time.

There is an option for distance learning. This means that parents, who choose this option, must prepare to blend class time and home time when children are learning virtually. Here are some tips and strategies to prepare for this transition:

Create a structured routine – similar to preparing for school, your child will thrive on a consistent and structured day, sequencing events that are expected throughout their day. Make sure they are going to bed on time and prepare a morning routine to be organized and ready to start their day. A visual chart can help guide children through steps during their daily routine. This can help them to predict what is next.

- Have a healthy and balanced breakfast- breakfast is important for children because it improves their mood, focus, memory and learning. A balanced breakfast should offer a variety of wholesome foods like protein and carbohydrates. Prepare breakfast ahead of time and freeze food to save you time during the morning rush.
- Take breaks similar to recess and lunch breaks- this can be a time for a walk or bike ride outside to incorporate some social time they would typically experience during recess at school. Physical movement or regular exercise has also proven to produce more energy and reduce the likelihood of feeling tired or unfocused during the day. Movement can also enhance emotional well-being. Most people report that they feel calm and have a sense of well-being after they exercise.
- You Tube tutorials can act as the “third” teacher- if a child wishes to research more about a certain topic or are having difficulty understanding a lesson, they have access to a multitude of videos or tutorials that can help further their curiosity or understanding about specific lessons. This can set up the foundation in self-guided learning environments for future learning methods.



Distance Learning - How Should You Prepare?

PARENTS

Distance learning lessons could include activities that can be done alone, personalized and/or supported with print and/or on-line resources and information. It takes time and patience to prepare for distance learning lessons so ensure you have the supplies at hand to develop a successful virtual learning environment. Here are some tips that you can follow to successfully prepare for distance learning at home:

- **Sticking to a Schedule** - Creating a routine at home is incredibly important for learning because it allows for expectations to be set by the parent while communicating to the child what to focus on and what is coming next. Having a schedule also allows for more awareness of transitions, as transitioning between tasks can be difficult for some children. For example, telling your child 5 more minutes of math and then a break, lets the child know there is a desirable outcome that awaits them.
- **Practice Patience** - When adjusting to new learning, patience will be required. As children returning to school adjust to their new normal, they will take some time to buy in to their new learning environment, similarly to adults who have experienced working from home as their new normal. Temptation will be high to disengage from learning and to be distracted from online teachings. This is why it is suggested to set up the child's learning environment, which would look like a space prepared with all their materials and most importantly no distractions!
- **Communicate School Support** – As the children adjust to their new normal, teachers will be adjusting to theirs as well, which means children will need a wide range of support to fit their learning style. We understand that your child may be a visual learner or may learn better from more hands on learning approaches. Online learning could challenge those learning styles and we will support you through adapting to this new learning process. Please do feel free to reach out for help. Keeping open avenues of communication with schools can also further support you with managing this new style of schooling. Be sure to seek out resources from school when you can. It will ensure your child is supported through their new learning routine, while also showing your child that you are an advocate for their learning. We must also be aware that the demand on teachers will also be increased while teaching children to be patient in their learning is a skill we can role model for them as we wait to attain any support from school.

This guide will only be successful in preparing for school if everyone does their part. Parents are encouraged to ask questions and participate in their child's learning at the centre and in school.

We ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER!

