Health and Safety Considerations in Pre-K and 3-K Classroom Environments

Introduction

This resource outlines strategies and suggestions to support implementing best health and safety practices in early childhood settings. Given recent unprecedented times, this resource includes specific considerations for when, due to special circumstances, these health and safety practices need to be heightened/increased in order to help reduce the likelihood of exposure, such as during a pandemic, disease outbreak, lice, and other instances. The considerations provided in this document are based on the best information currently available and aligned with the Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE) Early Childhood Framework for Quality (EFQ). Please note, this resource is intended to supplement and not replace recommendations provided by city, state, and federal regulations.

The guidance in this resource is informed by measures of quality, published resources, and high-quality practices used by the DECE, including the EFQ and the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS). These markers of quality care can be a helpful reference point when making decisions regarding the health and safety of children and staff.

Programs can decide, based on the severity of the situation, to which extent the more stringent guidance, indicated as in this resource, should be critically and intentionally applied. To gauge the severity of the situation in programs, consideration should be given to the number of individuals affected as well as the likelihood that other individuals may have been exposed and at risk of being infected (e.g., one case vs three cases per room, significant number of cases within a few consecutive days, multiple cases across several classrooms).

In addition, to support implementation and planning, the DECE encourages programs to refer to other existing resources, such as the Units of Study and Explorations.

Trauma Informed Care Considerations

When children and staff members need to be absent from school for some time, normal routines they previously followed may no longer be familiar to them. It is important to be responsive to each child's needs, using a trauma-informed lens, by helping them readjust to routines and consistent schedules for them to experience a safe, nurturing, and supportive environment. Depending on the situation, this may include guiding them through new and/or different health and safety practices, such as more frequent handwashing, wearing face coverings, and/or keeping a physical distance.
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Personal Care Routines

This section includes strategies and suggestions for the following areas:

- Arrival/Greeting Considerations
- Mealtime Consideration
  - Handwashing
  - Food handling
  - Table sanitization
- How this might look
- Toileting/Diapering Considerations
- Nap Considerations
- Personal Care Routines Transition Tips

Arrival/Greeting Considerations

- Ensure that everyone entering the classroom washes/sanitizes hands upon arrival. Display pictures/posters close to or on the classroom door to remind children to clean hands upon entry. For additional guidance on how to support children in understanding handwashing expectations see Appendix B of this resource;
- If individual storage spaces are not available, non-porous bags can be used to keep children’s personal belongings (e.g., coats, backpacks) from touching one another in storage in order to avoid the spread of germs;
- If needing to physically distance:
  - Stagger arrival procedures (10 minutes apart) in order to better supervise/assist with the storage of belongings and hand cleaning;
  - Use masking tape (making smiley faces or colorful arrows) on the floor so children know where to stand while waiting in line (e.g., to store their belongings, use the toilet, wash their hands, or leave the classroom).

Mealtime Considerations

- Supervise children at all times to ensure that the following sanitary conditions are maintained in order to avoid the spread of germs:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Handwashing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Wash hands before eating (or sanitize hands once sitting at tables);</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Wash hands after meals (to get rid of food residue);</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Wash hands if they become contaminated during the meal (e.g., picking up plastic utensils from the floor, wiping their nose, touching toys or the wall as they walk to their table).</td>
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</table>
It is important to practice and check for understanding of proper handwashing procedures to ensure hands are clean. This is the best way to prevent sickness and the spread of germs. For additional guidance on how to support children in understanding handwashing expectations see Appendix B [here](#).

Staff must wash/sanitize hands before wearing gloves as outlined by the [Center for Disease Control (CDC)](#).

Sinks should be disinfected before handwashing for meals as shown [here](#).

Hand sanitizer is allowed as an alternative if a handwashing station is not readily available before eating. Hands should always be washed after the meal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food handling</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Food should be placed on clean and sanitized surfaces and should only be handled with clean hands/gloves and clean utensils;</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Staff should wash hands and change gloves if they become contaminated (e.g., by touching their hair/glasses, wiping their nose, touching furniture, children’s belongings, door knobs, a phone);</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Staff should wash/replace utensils if they become contaminated (e.g., falling on the floor or placed in the sink with other dirty items).</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Wiped with separate clean disposable towels (sponges or cloth towels should not be used);</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Sprayed with a bleach and water solution or an EPA approved sanitizer (following manufacturer's instructions) to kill germs;</td>
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<td>4. Wiped 2 minutes later with a clean disposable towel or let air dry.</td>
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- Engage children in conversation, finger play (e.g., Open Shut Them, The Itsy Bitsy Spider) or singing (as outlined in “Singing Activities Considerations” below) while they wait for their turn to wash hands See Exploration One: [Appendix F](#) for other transition ideas;
- Allow children to start eating once they have been served (instead of needing to wait for everyone to have their food before they can start) and provide activities for them to do once finished until everyone is done with the routine;
- Promote a positive and relaxed social atmosphere by, for example, pointing/talking about proper steps in a handwashing poster; having them pick a song and singing with them as they wash their hands (or count together); gently guiding them to clean up a spill;
- Engage children in conversation (sitting from a distance) and encourage them to talk with each other while they eat. In addition to talking about healthy eating habits, they can talk about topics they are interested in, their favorite family activities, and/or caring for the environment as they recycle during cleanup.

- If needing to physical distance:
  - Serve food in individual portions if family-style meal practices need to be suspended;
○ Ensure that there is enough distance between children once they are sitting at the table in their classroom, consider using clear table dividers if 3 feet of distance cannot be maintained;

○ Consider offering lunch in small rotating groups (instead of one large group) if space does not allow for necessary distance while sitting at the tables or lining up to wash hands;

○ Programs may utilize other spaces, including but not limited to other classrooms, gyms, and outdoor spaces for lunch use and may consider having some or all children eat picnic-style.

**How this might look:**

1) In a classroom with a sink and enough space for all children to eat at the same time:

   While the class is listening to a read aloud in the meeting area (large enough for the whole group), a staff member disinfects the sink/faucet, and cleans and sanitizes the tables. Then, the staff member washes hands and sets the tables, placing pre-packaged bagged lunches at each spot (away from each other). Following, the staff member calls small groups of children (3-4) to wash hands and supervises them to ensure they follow proper procedure.

   Children wash their hands one at a time, and go to their table spots (children whose table spots are in sight of the meeting area are called first). Once seated, children can start eating. If their hands get contaminated before opening their lunch bag (e.g., by touching furniture, toys, their shoes, the trash can), then the staff member would give them hand sanitizer before they open their lunch bag.

   The staff member who was reading the story washes her hands and then both staff members assist children as needed, and, sitting on a chair distanced away from them, engages them in conversation about their day.

   Children clean up their own tray and go to the sink to wash hands or to the bathroom to use the toilet if needed. One staff member supervises cleanup, toileting and handwashing while the other staff member leads fingerplays in the meeting area.

2) In a classroom with a sink and not enough space for all children to eat at the same time:

   While the class is listening to a read aloud in the meeting area (large enough for the whole group), a staff member disinfects the sink/faucet, and cleans and sanitizes the tables. Then, the staff member washes hands and sets the tables, placing a pre-packaged brown-bagged lunch at each spot (away from each other). Following, the staff member calls small groups of children to wash hands and supervises them to ensure they wash properly.

   Children wash their hands one at a time, and go to their table spots. Once seated, children can start eating. If their hands get contaminated before opening their lunch bag (e.g., by touching furniture, toys, their shoes, the trash can), then the staff member would give them hand sanitizer before they open their lunch bag. Then, the staff member assists children as needed, and, sitting on a chair a reasonable distance away from them, engages them in conversation about their day.

   As children finish eating, they inform the staff member who lets them get up one at a time. Children clean up their own tray and go to the sink to wash hands or to the bathroom to use the toilet if needed. Then, they join activities in the meeting area or prepare for nap time. The staff member cleans and sanitizes the tables for the rest of the class to have lunch. The same procedure is followed.

   The staff member in the meeting area offers children other activities once the read aloud is done. This could be fingerplays, a music and movement activity, and/or choices of bins with toys that children can use on the rug/floor while keeping distance, such as puzzles, small blocks, legos, books, or drawing materials.
3) In a classroom without a sink and enough space for all children to eat at the same time:

While the class is listening to a read aloud in the meeting area (large enough for the whole group), a staff member disinfects the sink/faucet, and cleans and sanitizes the tables. Then, the staff member washes hands and sets the tables, placing a pre-packaged brown-bagged lunch at each spot (away from each other). Following, the staff member calls small groups of children (3-4), takes them to a hallway bathroom to wash their hands, and supervises them to ensure they follow proper procedure. While children wait, the staff member engages them in conversations, singing, and/or doing fingerplays.

Children wash their hands one at a time, return to their classroom, and go to their table spots (children whose table spots are in sight of the meeting area are called first). Once seated, children can start eating. If their hands get contaminated before opening their lunch bag (e.g., by touching furniture, toys, their shoes, the trash can), then the staff member would give them hand sanitizer before they open their lunch bag.

The staff member who remains in the class, sanitizes their hands, assists children as needed, and, sitting on a chair a reasonable distance away from children, engages them in conversation about their day.

As children finish eating, they inform a staff member who excuses them, one at a time. Children clean up their own tray and go to the sink to wash hands or to the bathroom to use the toilet if needed. One staff member supervises cleanup, toileting and handwashing while the other staff member leads fingerplays in the meeting area.

In all these case scenarios, sinks are disinfected before children wash hands and tables are cleaned and sanitized after the meal.

4) Picnic style meals:

While the class is listening to a read aloud in the meeting area (large enough for the whole group), a staff member disinfects the sink/faucet, and then calls small groups of children to wash hands and supervises them to ensure they wash properly.

Children wash their hands one at a time, and get their individual mat/blanket to place on the floor for the picnic-style meal. These mats/blankets should be labeled so that children know which side touches the floor and which side if for them to sit/eat on or staff provides support to children to ensure this sanitary practice. Once seated, staff hands out individual paper bag lunches and children can start eating. If their hands get contaminated before opening their lunch bag (e.g., by touching furniture, the floor, their shoes, the trash can), then the staff member would give them hand sanitizer before they open their lunch bag. Then, the staff member assists children as needed, and, sitting their own individual mat/blanket a reasonable distance away from them, engages them in conversation about their day.

As children finish eating, they inform the staff member who lets them get up one at a time. Children clean up their own tray and go to the sink to wash hands or to the bathroom to use the toilet if needed. The mats/blankets are collected and folded in a way that the floor surface does not touch the sitting/eating surface, or they are washed daily. Then, they join activities in the meeting area or prepare for nap time.

Toileting/Diapering Considerations

- Supervise children at all times;
- Ensure that the following sanitary practices are properly and consistently followed:
  - Hand washing after toileting and upon reentry to the classroom if the bathroom is in the hallway. [https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html](https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html)
○ Wearing disposable gloves and aprons/smocks when supporting diapering/toileting;
○ Changing gloves after each use and in between contact with different children;
○ Disinfecting sinks before and after toileting;
○ Sanitizing toilet bowls/floors daily and more frequently as needed (when there is urine on the seat/around the area).

● Take children to the bathroom as needed (avoid having "bathroom trips" so they do not have to wait in line for their turn). See Exploration One: Appendix A for additional support with children who are toilet learning;
● Have all necessary supplies readily available to use as needed (e.g., toilet paper, liquid soap, diapers);
● Children should have multiple changes of clothes on hand at the program. Schools should make efforts to have spare changes of clothes for children who either do not have extra clothes or have used their extra clothes, as practicable;
● Schools should properly store any child’s soiled clothing for family or guardian retrieval at the end of the day.

○ Assist children as needed; to reduce the risk of exposure while supporting children in the bathroom during a disease outbreak, wear additional PPE, such as double face coverings or shields and smocks/long-sleeve shirts.

Nap Considerations

● A separate cot or mat must be provided and labelled for the exclusive use of each child, and must be cleaned and sanitized regularly or when visibly soiled, the mat or cot should be assigned to one child for the entire year;
● Label children’s linens and the non-porous container (e.g., plastic bag or covered plastic container) they are stored in;
● Each child should have two clean sheets or blankets (one to cover the sleeping surface, one for warmth and comfort, and an extra set per child to use as needed);
● Bedding must not be shared and one child’s bedding should not come in contact with another child’s bedding (e.g., placing mats in large plastic bags or, placing a plastic sheet between mats before stacking);
● Sheets and blankets must be kept in the school in non-porous containers (e.g., covered container or plastic bag) labelled with the child’s name in the child’s cubby when not in use;
● Sheets and blankets should be washed at least weekly or when necessary (e.g., if soiled with bodily fluids, food, or other residue);
● To avoid any cross contamination, teaching staff should not store children’s shoes in a community “shoe bin” during nap/rest time;
● Allow non-sleepers to look at books or play a quiet game and offer activities for those who wake up first.

Personal Care Routines Transition Tips

● Arrival/Greeting:
  ○ One staff member greets children and families and provides support as needed
  ○ The other staff member supervises handwashing and toileting;
  ○ Children can have access to limited centers (e.g., table top toys and books).

● Meals:
  ○ One staff member reads to children while the other cleans/sanitizes the tables and prepares for lunch;
  ○ Children sing or do finger plays while they wait, standing on floor markers (3 feet apart), to wash hands;
○ Staff and children discuss healthy habits while looking at the handwashing posters or counting at the sink;
○ Once done with hand cleaning, children go to their spot at the table and are allowed to start eating.
○ Use music to stagger how children move from one activity to another; for example, “When the music stops, Maria, James, and Fre go to wash hands and Elijah, Ava, and Marco please sit at the table.”

● **Toileting:**
  ○ Engage children in social conversations, review classroom activities from the previous day, or talk about the current unit of study;
  ○ Let children know what you are doing, “I am going to take off your pull-up now;”
  ○ Review sanitary practices (e.g., handwashing steps), while children wait to use the bathroom.

● **Toothbrushing (Head Start ONLY):**
  ○ Ensure children properly clean hands before toothbrushing;
  ○ Children can sit or stand physically distanced at tables or in the room while brushing while staff supervise;
  ○ Ensure that the sink is properly sanitized after children complete the toothbrushing routine.

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**Group Activities**

This section includes strategies and suggestions for the following areas:

- **Circle/Meeting Time Considerations**
- **Singing Activities Considerations**
- **Circle/Meeting Time Transition Tips**
- **How this might look**

### Circle/Meeting Time Considerations

- Limit meeting time to no more than 10 minutes for 3K (including transitions in and out) and up to 15 minutes for older children;
- Be intentional with the types of activities planned for circle/meeting time, such as engaging children in discussions to build community, introduce classroom expectations, read a story, share about fun activities with family, introduce a new theme and/or center materials. Consider doing attendance when children are in centers, classroom jobs and/or the feelings chart when children arrive and/or individually during transitions, and the weather chart in the Nature/Science Center.
- Transition to the next activity when children start losing interest;
- Provide alternative activities, such as puzzles or books for children who become disengaged in group activities;
- Consider having smaller meeting times in separate parts of the classroom occurring simultaneously and allow for adequate spacing, a minimum of three feet, between children. For example, there can be two meetings (one small group first and then another group) and/or two groups at the same time meeting in different areas (e.g., half of the class sit in the meeting area and the other half sit at nearby tables/at opposite ends of the classroom);
- Use big books during read alouds so everyone can see it from a distance;
Introduce one or two center activities at a time on the rug to limit the length of the meeting;
Engage children in conversation about their center choices/plan once at the center and not during large group time.

If needing to physically distance:
  ○ Classrooms should be set up to support whole group meetings as long as physical distancing of three feet is maintained to the greatest extent possible;
  ○ Consider placing a poly spot or large X with tape indicating the spaces where children can and cannot sit where the entire class needs to gather together.

Please see Unit 1: Welcome to Pre-K, Appendix B and Explorations One: Our Community, VIII: Weekly Planning template for additional resources on large group activities.

**Singing Activities Considerations**

  ○ Utilize the entire classroom space to maintain distance during large group singing activities;
  ○ Keep voices low to avoid the spread of germs caused by droplets/aerosols from projecting voices;
  ○ When children want to explore loud sounds, encourage them to do so by clapping, stomping, humming, or using percussion instruments.

**Circle/Meeting Time Transition Tips**

  ○ Play a song to indicate it is time to start Circle/Meeting Time;
  ○ Initiate a music and movement activity while waiting for everyone to be ready for the meeting to start;
  ○ Have center signs at each area (instead of using a large center chart);
  ○ Dismiss children to centers in small groups of 2 to avoid crowding while they place their names in the center of their choice;
  ○ Do finger plays with children waiting until everyone has been dismissed to centers.

Refer to Explorations One: Our Community, VIII: Weekly Planning Template for time expectations for Large Group.

**How this might look:**

A staff member reads a story, pausing a few times to discuss it with children, for approximately 5 minutes. Then, the class may have a music and movement activity for 5 minutes. Next, the staff member introduces one or two center activities, such as, "We have a new plant in the Nature/Science Center and a book about it next to it, I will come around and talk about it with children who may be interested."

Then, the staff member reminds children to sanitize/wash hands before they start playing at each center, to keep their face coverings on, and to do their best not to play too close to their friend.
Next, children get their center cards and are dismissed in groups of 3 to choose centers. The other staff member ensures that children sanitize their hands before they start playing at each center and that only the number of children allowed to play are in there. If children choose a center that is full, the staff member uses the center sign to help the child count how many are allowed and may review the system in place to be placed on a waiting list in order to ensure those interested get a turn.

Please see Unit 1: Welcome to Pre-K, Appendix A: Tools of Autonomy for additional suggestions.

### Purposeful Play/Center Time

This section includes strategies and suggestions for the following areas:

- **Classroom 1 Example: Large Space**
- **Classroom 2 Example: Limited Space**
- **Classroom Environment Considerations**
  - Clearly Defined Centers
    - Reading Center
    - Cozy Area
    - Block Center
    - Dramatic Play Center
    - Table Toys (Fine Motor/Math)
    - Art/Writing Center
  - Room Arrangement
  - Activities and Materials
    - Considerations for providing soft furnishings in the classroom
    - Cleaning and sanitizing soft surfaces
    - Cleaning rugs
  - Additional Considerations
- **Health and Safety Considerations**
  - Cleaning rugs
- **Interactions Considerations**
- **Center Time Transition Tips**
- **How this might look**

The way the classroom is arranged and organized affects how well staff can support and enhance children’s learning and supervise them to protect their well-being. These are classroom layout examples that can be used to assist with the implementation of quality classroom environment elements in alignment with heightened health and safety guidelines, as well as specific considerations for setting up centers, arranging materials, and more. These considerations support best practices and requirements, such as frequent handwashing and, if needed, physically distancing.
Classroom 1 Example: Sufficient Space
This suggested classroom layout has sufficient space and furnishings for storage of materials and play. This allows the space in the classroom to be maximized when/if children need to physically distance while meeting their needs for routine care, play, and learning.

- The classroom has enough chairs and tables for each child to use during meals, whole group activities, and play time, with limited seating around each table if children should not sit closely together.
  - For example, during meals, 4 children would sit at a table that would typically accommodate 8 and 2 children at a table that would typically accommodate 4. When eating, children should maintain three feet of physical distance and should be seated in such a way that they are facing away from one another. For example, children may sit on one side of the table, three feet apart. Also, during Circle Time, children would sit at opposite ends of the tables throughout the room rather than sitting closely together in a confined space in order to maintain the required distance.

- The shelving units in the room house the required materials in the various centers. Having just enough toys to ensure that children have access to the variety of materials required at each center will ensure that children have gratifying experiences and develop different skills while having more space to freely access materials and move while they play. Centers that require more space, such as the Block and Dramatic Play Centers, are the largest in the classroom to accommodate building large structures and more active play. This will also provide children with additional space to physically distance.

- Large soft furnishings, such as an adult size vinyl bean bag, a soft plastic chair on rubber mats, are options for the cozy area that would surround children with softness when they relax in the space. If carpets and rugs are used, they should be cleaned regularly, according to the manufacturer’s instructions and frequency of use. If these items are heavily soiled or difficult to clean they should be removed. Please see below for more information on cleaning guidelines for rugs.

  *The red dots on the floor (e.g., stickers or masking tape) can help children keep a distance when they wait in line.

This classroom layout has a generous amount of space that allows for:

- A Library which doubles as a Cozy Area;
- Instruments in the Music Center on a shelf or in a bin (a cabinet is not needed) in a corner of the classroom;
- A Table Toys Center with fine motor and math materials combined;
- An Art Center where painting can be done on the tables;
- Removal or downsizing of the teacher's desk, at the teacher's discretion, to allow for more space for centers.
- Dramatic Play and Block Centers are still the largest in the classroom to allow for more active play;
- All active/noisy centers are on the same side of the room and away from Library/Cozy (quiet center);
- A smaller sand/water table or play with sand or water in a bin on a table. Offering access to both sand and/or water play on a regular basis is encouraged (both materials are not required at the same time). Handwashing is required before and after water play;
- Sand/Water, Nature/Science (which can be combined in the same center) and Art are the centers where messy play typically takes place so they are close to the bathroom sink for easier access during handwashing and cleanup.

Please note that the names of the Centers/play areas in the classroom illustrations are suggestions. For example, “Table Toys” could also be called the Math Center, Fine Motor Area, or Manipulative Center. Similarly, the “Dramatic Play Center” could be called “Housekeeping Center.”

For spaces with less square footage consider the suggested adjustments made in Example for Classroom 2 below.
Classroom Environment Considerations

Clearly Defined Centers Considerations

Having clearly defined centers in the classrooms ensures that children have a variety of places to play. ECERS strongly encourages setting up at least 5 clearly defined centers where children can play with little to no interruption from traffic going through the space, or other children playing in neighboring areas. The number of centers in the classroom may vary based on the setting, classroom size, and room arrangement. In classrooms with limited square footage, the size of each center and/or the amount of children allowed could be limited in order to maximize the space and offer a variety of play opportunities.

A clearly defined interest center includes:

- A space designated for one particular kind of play;
- Sufficient space to allow the type of play encouraged by the materials;
- Materials related to that type of play;
- Materials organized and stored for children’s easy access;
- Furniture needed to use materials in the space.

The chart below provides examples of centers that can be implemented in a classroom to provide a variety of activities and learning experiences for children. As noted above, the number and size of centers may vary based on what the space allows and considerations made to maintain social distancing throughout the day.
For additional center ideas, please see [Unit 1: Welcome to Pre-K](#) and [Explorations One: Our Community](#).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Center</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Reading Center**      | ● Books organized on shelves and/or in bins;  
● Comfortable seating in a quiet space in the classroom;  
● Away from active/nosier centers (e.g., Dramatic Play, Block, Music Centers);  
● Away from high traffic areas to avoid interruptions. |
| **Cozy Area**           | ● Soft furnishings of non-porous materials that make them easy to clean and sanitize, such as vinyl child-sized sofas, vinyl bean bag chairs, and rubber mats or a small mat (easy to launder) for softness under children’s feet;  
● A substantial amount of softness so that children can escape the hardness of the classroom environment while having a designated space to relax and lounge;  
● Seat covers on upholstered sofas/chairs so that they can be removed and laundered as needed.  
*Please note, stuffed animals are not required by ECERS in the Cozy Area. Classroom stuffed animals are also discouraged since it is difficult to maintain cleanliness of porous materials.* |
| **Block Center**        | ● A special block area large enough for at least 3 children to each build a sizable structure and move freely while they play (allowing 2 children at a time if 3 children cannot maintain physical distance during play);  
● Sufficient space, blocks, and accessories for children to play without competition;  
● Sets of blocks and accessories (enough to allow at least 3 children to play without competition) can be made available on a rotating basis (e.g., a bin for Monday and a different one for Tuesday) so the same blocks do not need to be cleaned/sanitized on a daily basis;  
● A flat surface that is suitable for building.  
*Since wooden blocks have a porous surface, they require special cleaning procedures as outlined [here](#).* |
| **Dramatic Play Center**| ● Large enough for the number of children allowed to play without crowding while keeping a distance;  
● Furniture for meaningful housekeeping play, such as play kitchen cabinets, a table with two chairs, and a wardrobe, placed to create clear boundaries so play does not spill out of the space;  
● Props for meaningful housekeeping play, such as hard body dolls, vinyl/plastic dress up items (e.g. purse, wallet, jewelry, shoes), play food, and cooking utensils (placing duplicates of popular toys on both sides of the space will help avoid children crossing into each other’s play);  
● A few additional small props (e.g., a doctors’ kit, and/or a construction set of tools and a plastic hat). |
Nature/Science Center
● Well-organized materials for children’s easy access;
● Furniture/space to use them in the center;
● Sand and/or water play (can be a table in or near the Nature/Science Center if space allows or small bins) with enough material and toys to dig, scoop, mold, fill, and pour.

Table Toys (Fine Motor/Math)
● Well-organized and clearly labeled materials for children’s easy access;
● Convenient/comfortable furniture/space to use them (tables/chairs that can be used for meals).

Art/Writing Center
● Well-organized and clearly labeled materials for children’s easy access;
● Furniture needed to use them (tables/chairs that can be used for meals);
● Close to a sink if there is one in the room;
● A separate container to place art materials after use for cleaning and sanitizing.

Room Arrangement Considerations
● Designate a center for no more than 2 children in order to offer them a “space for privacy” to play protected from intrusion while also maintaining physical distance;
● Ensure that quiet centers, such as the Library and the Cozy Area, are not next to active/noisy activities, such as the Block, Dramatic Play and Music Centers. Buffer centers, such as Table Toys, Art, and Nature/Science can be placed between them to avoid interference;
● Limit furnishings at each center to what is needed for the specific kind of play (versus many additional pieces) to allow children to keep their distance and move freely while they play;
● Place furniture, such as shelves and cabinets, between centers to create a physical barrier. This clearly defines the center so the children playing in each center can remain within the space and keep a distance while playing. This will also avoid “runways” and encourage children to walk in the classroom;
● Place centers away from high traffic areas, such as the bathroom, sink, and cubbies, to avoid crowding and interruptions to play;
● Use shelves/casters that are easy to move to make more room for gross motor play if needing to stay indoors due to inclement weather;
● If possible, do not store materials inside the room in order to maximize space available for children to play;
● Use center signs instead of a single chart to avoid crowding/congregation during center selection.

Activities and Materials Considerations
Below are examples of ECERS-required materials at the “excellent” level of quality that are typically accessible to children and are recommended for use during times when health and safety protocols need to be increased. The types of materials recommended can be easily and frequently sanitized in order to reduce the spread of germs (e.g., vinyl and plastic soft toys). Programs are advised to only put out materials that are required at each center, store the rest, and rotate them daily/weekly to allow time for sanitization. Similarly, limiting furnishings in centers to just what is needed to house materials and for play, allows for more choices of activities during Center Time and more space within each center for the number of children at one time to move freely while they play.

The chart below outlines the specific materials required for various items in the ECERS scale and it is not an exhaustive list. These materials may be organized in a variety of centers/areas throughout the room (e.g., measuring cups can be in a Math Center and/or in the sand table, and “Table Toys” may include various fine motor and/or math materials).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 15 Encouraging children's use of books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35 books for 20 children on topics, including a wide variety of topics, such as diversity, nature/science, math/number books, and the current theme.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 17 Fine Motor Materials</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 choices, at least 1 type from each of the following categories and including varied levels of challenge:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interlocking building materials (e.g., Duplo, Bristle, Legos, Lincoln Logs);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Art materials (e.g., scissor, markers, crayons, pencils);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Manipulatives (e.g., links, beads, pegs and pegboards);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Puzzles (e.g., floor, framed, knobbed, with images representing diversity).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 18 Art</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 material from each of the 5 categories, accompanied by paper and/or another surface suitable for carrying out artwork:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Drawing (e.g., crayons, markers, pencils, chalk);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Paints (e.g., tempera, water color, finger paint);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Three Dimensional (e.g., wood, pipe cleaners, cardboard boxes/rolls);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collage (e.g., yarn, textured paper, cloth);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tools (e.g., scissors, hole punch, dot paints, stamps and stamp pads, stencils).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 19 Music and Movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 instruments, at least 1 per participating child if used in group time:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Different types of instruments (e.g., bells, shakers, maracas, rhythm sticks, triangles). Credit is not given if all materials are of the same type.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Recorded music (e.g., a CD player with CDs) counts as 1 type of music material if used.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 20 Blocks</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enough blocks* and accessories for 3 children to build sizeable independent structures at the same time (interlocking blocks not given credit here):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unit Blocks (e.g., wood, hard foam, plastic);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hollow blocks.</td>
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</table>

Block Accessories from 3 categories |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Accessories (e.g., small diverse people, vehicles, animals, road signs).</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*To make a sizable structure using the same type of blocks, each child would need a set of at least 30 small unit blocks or 10 large hollow blocks.*

*Since wooden blocks have a porous surface, they require special cleaning procedures as outlined here.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 21 Dramatic Play</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Furnishings and props enough for number of children allowed in the Center:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Child-sized household furnishings (e.g., stove, sink, refrigerator, small table and chairs) that can be used to clearly indicate the center boundaries;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Household props (e.g., plates, utensils, pots, dolls, mirror, telephone);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dress up clothing items that are non-porous and easy to clean (e.g., wallet, purse, shoes, jewelry);</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
● Additional housekeeping props or a second theme (only one additional theme is required). Options for small props (to allow for more space to play) include, but are not limited to: restaurant (e.g., menus, play money), construction (tools and plastic hat), farmer/gardener (rakes, shovels, seed packets), or Post Office (mail box, envelopes, postcards);

● Diversity, 4 examples (e.g., dolls representing different races and ages, cultural food and utensils, toy wheelchair or walker).

*Duplicates of popular items will prevent children from crossing over their spaces while they play.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 22 Nature/Science</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 materials, some from each of the 5 categories:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Living Things (e.g., plants, pets, outside garden);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Collection of Natural Objects (e.g., shells, rocks, seeds, leaves);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Factual Books/Pictures/Games;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Tools (e.g., magnets with objects, magnifying glass with objects to explore, color paddles, microscope, prism);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Sand and/or water (both not required) with toys (e.g., measuring cups, small pails, digging tools). Offering water play in individual smaller tubs/bins is encouraged in order to avoid the spread of germs. In addition, this makes it easier to set up and clean up (e.g., staff discard the water in a small bin after a child uses it and refills it for another child). Handwashing is required after sand play and before and after water play.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 23 Math Materials and Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 different appropriate materials, at least 3 from each of the three categories:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Counting/Comparing Quantities (e.g., unifix cubes, dominoes, dice, pegboards with numbers, objects to count in numbered trays);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Measuring/Comparing Sizes (e.g., tape measure, thermometer, measuring cups, spoons, rulers, height charts);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Familiarity with Shapes (e.g., shape sorters, shape puzzles, geoboards, attribute blocks, shape stencils).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 25 Understanding Written Numbers</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some print numbers in display materials and at least 3 different play materials that show the meaning of numbers:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Print numbers on display (e.g., posters with numbers and corresponding pictures, center labels with numbers);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Play materials with numbers (e.g., telephones, stencils, play money, numbers on furnishings);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Play materials showing the meaning of numbers (e.g., number puzzles with corresponding pictures, matching picture/number cards, pegs with numbered peg boards).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 26 Promoting Acceptance of Diversity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 examples of diversity, at least 1 in each of the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Books;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Displayed pictures;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Accessible play materials with at least 2 types of dramatic play props representing the different races or cultures of children and families in the program as well as the local community (e.g., dolls of different skin tones; play foods such as tacos, sushi, pizza, a burger, a croissant; a wheelchair, a walker, a guide dog).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional Considerations
● Establish a protocol that allows children to rotate centers;
● Offer dramatic play materials that are not fabric/cloth so they can be easily cleaned (e.g., hard body dolls, vinyl purses/wallets, wood/plastic play food and/or utensils from different cultures, adaptive devices);
● If children have a transitional toy (not of a soft material) from home, ensure it is kept with their personal belongings and not shared with other children.
● Use displays, books, dramatic play materials, and/or musical instruments (rather than clothing) that represent the different categories of diversity (race, culture, gender, age, and abilities), including cultures of children in the classroom and the local community;
● Organize materials in labeled bins; this will help identify which toys need to be cleaned/sanitized after play;
● Clean/sanitize materials as needed. For proper procedures to sanitize materials, please see here.
  ○ Utilize individualized bins for popular toys (e.g., manipulatives, art supplies) and keep stored to avoid needing to clean them every day, instead, materials can simply be rotated (e.g., one bin for each center for each day of the week).

Considerations for providing soft furnishings in the classroom
Softness in children’s environment gives them an opportunity to escape the normal hardness of the typical early childhood classroom. This means having a space with soft furnishings where they can relax, lounge, daydream, or read. To prevent the spread of viruses, it is best if soft items used are of non-porous materials, such as rubber mats and vinyl bean bags, so that they are easier to clean, sanitize, and/or disinfect.

Cleaning and sanitizing soft surfaces
Use non-porous vinyl/plastic (instead of fabric/cloth) furnishings that can be easily cleaned (e.g., a seat cover can be placed on upholstered soft furnishings that are not vinyl so that it can be easily removed and laundered).

Health and Safety Considerations
● Ensure children wash/sanitize hands as needed. For additional support on how to support children in understanding handwashing expectations see Appendix B here;
● Have well-supervised “sanitizing stations” in the classroom, such as by the entry door, by the Nature/Science, and the Art Centers;
● Have hand sanitizer handy (e.g., in smocks or pockets) to give children a squirt as they move from one center to the next (if hands are not visibly soiled), ensuring that it is not within their reach during play
● Remove mouthed toys and place them in a labeled bin (at each center or by the sink) so they are sanitized before making them accessible to children. For proper procedures to sanitize materials, please see here;
● Ensure that staff have an unobstructed view of all parts of the classroom at all times;
● Ensure that centers are not placed behind or within the swing path of doors;
● Keep spaces regularly used by children clean and well-maintained (e.g. waste baskets emptied frequently, floors swept, spills/messy play cleaned up promptly);
● Ensure that adults who enter the classroom during Center Time (e.g., cluster teachers, staff who may provide coverage during prep time) and throughout the day should properly wash their hands upon entry and change soiled clothing or face covering as needed;
● Store cleaning supplies away from children’s reach during play, on high shelves or in locked cabinets;

Considerations for cleaning rugs:
Carpets and rugs should be cleaned regularly, according to the manufacturer’s instructions and frequency of use. If these items are heavily soiled or difficult to clean they should be removed. Depending on your program type, for more information on cleaning rugs, please see the **maintenance and cleaning section** in the district school health and safety guidance or the **NYCEEC health and safety guidance**.

**Interactions Considerations**

Staff may:

- Engage children in individual/small group social conversations to give them an opportunity to ask questions/discuss what they may be feeling given the situation;
- Circulate around the room and spend time at each center to engage children in conversations about the materials/activities, help them expand their vocabulary (using specific/new words and explaining the meaning), and encourage their logical reasoning;
- Use posters and/or other positive strategies to guide/encourage children with all necessary health/safety practices (harsh interactions and/or punitive discipline strategies should never be used if children forget or do not follow proper procedure);
- Maintain a soft/gentle/low tone and encourage the use of “quiet voices” to avoid the spread of germs caused by droplets/aerosols from projecting voices.
- Wear tags with pictures of themselves smiling, and/or fun transparent masks that could show their smile or have a smile on it;
- Use more non-verbal cues, such as sign language, flicking the lights, starting a song, and/or clapping, to redirect children (similar to children with IEPs);
- Use gestures for positive feedback, such as throwing an air-kiss, giving an air-hug/high five, and/or an elbow bump;

**Center Time Transition Tips**

**Center Time** begins when all children are able to use the space and materials and ends when the first child is required to clean up.

- **Choosing centers:**
  - Dismiss children by twos to self-select their center choice;
  - Have center signs at each center instead of one in a centralized location;
  - Have materials prepared ahead of time for each activity;
  - Engage children in conversations about their plans once already at the center so everyone can get an equal/similar amount of time to play;
- **During Center Time:**
  - Allow children to move freely from center to center instead of doing center rotations;
  - Remind children of the rules and assist them in picking a center once they are ready to move on;
  - Alert children when there are five more minutes left to play (e.g., flicking the lights or using a bell);
● Pace transitions so that children do not feel rushed to finish one activity to start the next, such as cleaning after Center Time to wash hands for lunch.

● During cleanup time:
  ● Give children specific areas to clean up to avoid crowding and to maintain distance, for example, “Ronell, please put away the big blocks and Sally put away all the people figurines. Rose, can you please put all the constructions tools in the box?” (using songs, pictures, and/or pointing at the toys);
  ● Provide storage with picture/word symbols within play areas for efficient clean up.

See Unit 1: Welcome to Pre-K and Explorations One: Our Community Tips for Transition in Appendix F for additional suggestions.

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**How this might look:**

Once all children are in centers, staff circulate around the room and spend time talking with them about the activities/materials they are using, new materials recently introduced, the names of the objects in a book children selected, and/or asking questions that will encourage them to explain their logical reasoning.

For example, while sitting away from children:

- At the Block Center, staff may ask them about the structures they are building, how to get the bridge to stay up, or why they thought the yellow cars went down the ramp faster. If children prefer to build a structure together, in order to ensure they keep a distance, staff may recommend they work on different parts of the same structure and have blocks meet in the middle.
- At the Fine Motor/Math Center, staff may guide children to look at the different colors and shapes in the puzzle pieces to decide which one fits in the space or count the dots and the apples to decide which two go together.
- At the Dramatic Play Center, staff may suggest that while one of them gets dinner ready the other may need to change the baby and then sing a lullaby or read to help the baby fall asleep.

When children want to switch centers, staff will ensure that they wash/sanitize their hands if needed and find another center to play. Staff and/or children will remove dirty or mouthed toys from play areas and place them in a “to-be-cleaned” bin to ensure they are sanitized.

Five minutes before cleanup time, staff may make an announcement and/or go around and let children know. Staff may recommend that children clean up different parts of the center so they are not close together. As children finish cleaning, they line up, keeping a distance, to wash hands and/or go to the hallway bathroom to toilet and wash hands.
This section includes strategies and suggestions for the following areas:

- **Equipment and Space Health and Safety Considerations**
- **Gross Motor Play Transition Tips**
- **How this might look**

### Equipment and Space Health and Safety Considerations

- Use heavy duty masking tape or poly spots to indicate different areas or stations during gross motor play;
- Indicate the number of children allowed at each station/piece of equipment (with masking tape or chalk) to help with distancing and avoid crowding;
- Take action to minimize hazards in the space (e.g., closing gates, removing sharp objects/trash from the area where children play, ensuring all children can be seen during play). If the space used is a parking lot or a barricaded street, ensuring that there is no active vehicular traffic while children play;
- Use a long rope with holders or strings to help with distancing as children walk to the space (which should be sanitized regularly) this way children can be kept together, but avoid holding hands;
- Engage children in fingerplays or large group games (while keeping distance) as a staff member inspects the space for safety;
- Ensure that gross motor equipment is regularly cleaned.
  - During times when health and safety measures need to be increased, this should be done on a daily basis, especially thoroughly cleaning all touched areas, such as grab bars and railings. Please note that it is not necessary to sanitize/disinfect outdoor gross motor equipment before each use; the equipment should be regularly inspected and cleaned when needed.
- Set up a "Hand hygiene" station with wipes/sanitizer for children and staff to use if needed during play;

### Gross Motor Play Transition Tips

**Gross Motor Play** begins when all children are able to use the space and equipment and ends when the first child is required to clean up.

- Make gross motor equipment (e.g., tricycles, balls) available when children enter the gross motor space so they can immediately play;
- Allow children to have free play;
- Allow staff-led activities to be one of several choices;
- Use poly spots, indoors and/or outdoors, to help children with distancing.

See [Unit 1: Welcome to Pre-K](#) and [Explorations One: Our Community](#) for Learning Center/Outdoors/Playground/Gross Motor ideas.
### Outdoor Play (non-gross motor)

This section includes strategies and suggestions for the following areas:

- **Outdoor Play Considerations**
  - Large group meeting/games
  - Activities/materials
  - Health and Safety
  - Interaction/Supervision

- **How this might look**

Early childhood best practices include daily play opportunities both indoors and outdoors, weather permitting. Staff who wish to provide children with what they need for present well-being and future success need to be well informed about the choices they are making.

Programs can be approved to offer outdoor lessons/learning, based on the individual program circumstances, during times when heightened health and safety practices are recommended for children and staff (see more about outdoor learning [here](#)). Below are ideas about how to best offer non-gross motor outdoor opportunities based on individual program variances, such as space and staff availability and other factors. For example, programs can consider integrating one or more of the outdoor play options listed below, such as having outdoor play stations (with non-gross motor materials) in addition to indoor Center Time and/or in addition to outdoor gross motor play; and this can be offered at the beginning and/or at the end of the day.
Outdoor Play Considerations

- **Large group meeting/games**
  - Limit meeting time to no more than 10 minutes for 3K children (including transitions in and out) and up to 15 minutes for older children;
  - Transition to the next activity when children start losing interest;
  - Provide alternative activities, such as puzzles or books for children who become disengaged;
  - Offer a read aloud, a Freeze dance activity, or a sing along with or without instruments;
  - Play scavenger hunt;
  - Play with bubbles and chalk.

- **Activities/materials**
  - In addition to indoor access to materials, examples for outdoor play can include:
    - **Dramatic Play**
      - Housekeeping furniture (e.g., kitchen cabinets, table and chairs, a baby stroller/crib, a shopping cart) and props (e.g., dolls, play food, play utensils).
    - **Blocks and Accessories**
      - Unit and hollow blocks and accessories, such as people figurines, animals, and vehicles.
    - **Nature/Science**
      - Plants, shells, rocks, seeds, leaves, magnifying glass with objects to explore, color paddles;
      - Small water bins with toys (e.g., measuring cups, small pails, digging tools). Water is discarded after a child uses it and refilled for another child to use. Handwashing is required before and after water play.
    - **Fine Motor**
      - Puzzles, matching games, Legos (on a table with two chairs or on the floor).
    - **Art**
      - Drawing/writing materials, paint on a table with two chairs.
    - **Books**
      - A basket with an assortment of books on various topics.

- **If access to materials is only provided outdoors, then the minimum materials list provided above should be accessible outdoors during play.**

- **Health and Safety**
  - Ensure that first aid supplies are readily available during outdoor play;
  - Set up a "Hand hygiene" station with wipes/sanitizer for children and staff to use as needed if there is no sink available;
  - Follow proper cleaning and sanitizing procedures of materials/furniture. For guidance on proper cleaning and sanitizing/disinfecting procedures and frequency, see [here](#);  
  - Remove mouthed toys and place them in a labeled bin (at each center or by the sink) so they are sanitized before making them accessible to children;
  - Minimize hazards in the space as much as possible, such as closing gates and removing sharp objects from the floor. If the outdoor space is a parking lot, ensuring that there will be no active vehicular traffic during the time that children play outdoors.
  - Offer children a mask break while outdoors and maintaining six feet of physical distance. Consider using markers on the ground to support children in knowing where to stand and engage children in finger plays, singing songs, story time, or playing games such as "I Spy," to keep them engaged during the mask break,
• **Interaction/Supervision**

  Staff should:
  - Ensure that all children can be seen during outdoor play;
  - Provide adequate supervision while a staff member escorts children to the bathroom;
  - Monitors traffic/barricades, the public, dogs away from the space selected for children's play;
  - Circulate around the space and engage children in social conversations as well as discussions about materials/activities while they play;
  - Indicate the number of children allowed at each play area (with masking tape or chalk) to help with distancing and avoid crowding;
  - Use a song or a musical instrument to call children’s attention when it is time to transition to another activity;
  - If possible, set up activities in an area with plenty of shade.

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**How this might look:**

1) **The class walks to the outdoor play space when the breakfast routine is finished.** Once there:

   - **One staff member** sets up a nylon blanket or a parachute on the floor (children sit down keeping a distance) and starts Circle Time while another staff member checks the space for safety and sets up play areas.

   - **Circle Time (10 minutes):** A few children share how they are feeling or news from home and then the staff member reads a book, pausing a few times to discuss the story. Then, the staff member reviews the morning schedule, introduces one or two center activities and children choose where they want to play. Puzzles and/or books can be offered as an alternative activity for children who are not engaged during Circle Time.

   - **Safety:** A staff member ensures the gates are closed and/or barricades are in place, checks the floor for sharp objects and trash, sets up “Hand hygiene” stations, and, using tape or chalk, indicates the maximum number of children allowed in each play area at a time.

   - **Play areas:** A staff member sets up play areas, which, based on the space and furnishings available, can consist of materials in easy to carry bins and/or storage bags from the class and/or materials stored at the space. Staff ensure that materials/equipment are cleaned/sanitized as needed. Examples of play areas include:
     - A table with paper, crayons, markers, glitter and color glue;
     - A basket with an assortment of books;
     - A bin with unit blocks and another one with block accessories separated by type (people, vehicles, animals);
     - A bin with puzzles, legos, and math matching games;
     - A picnic set with play food, cooking utensils, dolls, and a purse.

   - **Children are dismissed to play areas of their choice and staff circulate around the space engaging children in conversations and closely monitoring the health and safety of children during play (e.g., ensuring children keep a distance while they play, repositioning barricades that may be pushed out of place, redirecting smokers/strangers that may be close to children at play, replenishing supplies in “Hand hygiene” stations, closely supervising the use of hand sanitizer).**

   - **Staff announce “5 more minutes to cleanup time” and then they go around reminding children that they each can clean up a section of each play area so they can maintain a distance.”**
2) Children who already had an opportunity to engage in gross motor play can clean their hands and join a play area like the ones listed above.

3) Children have choices of play areas outdoors until cleanup time is announced. After that, they engage in gross motor play with access to equipment.

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**Teaching Routines and Transitions**

This section includes strategies and suggestions for the following areas:

- Planning for the Transition
- Teaching the Transition
- *How this might look*
- Transitions Tips and Considerations
- Concepts that can be Integrated
- Additional Ideas

With all of the specific safeguards programs and classrooms may need to follow to ensure children’s health and safety when heightened protocol needs to be followed, it is important that children be taught routines and transitions to support these practices. As much as possible, programs should plan their schedules to limit the number of transitions in the day. While each program may have specific ways of teaching transitions, below are suggested steps for teaching any transition to a child or group of children.

**Planning for the Transition**

- Identify exactly what will happen:
  
  Consider:
  
  - Space/location: Classroom/space specifics and children to determine what you would like to have happen. For example, if planning how children will wash their hands, consider the space and logistics in your classroom or facility (e.g. whether the faucet needs to be pushed down, location of trash can, whether the sink is in the bathroom or another location) and the flow of the transition (e.g., children may use the toilet, then put on their coats, and then go to the next spot in line).
  - Staffing: What each staff member will do during the transition, for example, while one staff member stands by the bathroom door, the other staff member sends children to the sink for handwashing.
  - Activities: What children can do, toys they can play with, while peers complete the transition/routine so they are not waiting in line with nothing to do.

- Determine when and how you will teach children:
  
  Consider:
  
  - Which routine/transition they need to learn first in order to execute the next one. For example, they first need to learn procedures for lining up before they learn how to walk safely to the playground;
● Time of day and when it would be best for children to receive the information. For example, immediately before or after nap may not be as successful. Also, it may be best to introduce and practice one routine at a time, and plan for the next one once children can follow the steps;

○ Size of group that may be best for instruction. When thinking about a multi-step routine that may be in a small space (like teaching handwashing in the bathroom), a small group may be best, while teaching the transition to line up may make more sense in a large group;

○ Flow of the day so children are not rushed. Allow for enough time in the daily schedule based on children’s needs, for example, at the beginning of the year, it may take a longer time from the time they finish cleaning up after center time than it may take later in the year;

○ Teaching and reinforcing the steps to complete routine/transition. For example, using visuals (e.g., pictures of children in the classroom) following the steps and repeating instructions can be a helpful reminder for children;

○ Gather all necessary items for the next activity before signaling a transition.

● Use of language and/or visuals to meet children’s needs:
  Consider:
  ○ Having explicit steps written out to know what to say;
  ○ Saying and demonstrating the steps before practicing the routine/transition with children, for example, “Turn on the faucet;”
  ○ Brainstorming with children “what to do with our bodies while we wait;”
  ○ Prepare children by giving them a warning for how long an activity will last;
  ○ Using activities to keep children engaged while they wait, such as fingerplays, singing a song, playing a game, and/or using breathing techniques to help regulate;
  ○ Using materials that may be helpful to understand and visualize the steps, such as a poster with their pictures demonstrating steps to follow, poly spots/markers on the floor for them to know where to form the line during transitions;
  ○ Using positive behavior strategies to support children’s varying needs as they learn the routine/transition, such as first calling those children who may need more support/time, and calling out the way some children are following the steps, “I see enough space between our friends at the end of the line, thank you! When we have enough space between friends, we do not touch their bodies while we wait;”
  ○ Pointing to classroom rules and guiding them in a soft tone when children need clear reminders.

**Teaching the transition**

Staff members should maintain positive affect and use an encouraging and warm tone while teaching routines/transitions so children are excited and engaged and feel supported in their learning. Positive behaviors should be reinforced with specific praise, such as, “You walked so calmly to your line spot!” “You’re really listening and looking as I am showing you these important steps.”

Throughout the steps below, the example of teaching children how to wash their hands is used. This may look different depending on the exact set up of the sink area (e.g. in the classroom or in a bathroom, faucet type, paper towel set up)
**Say it:** Explain what you are about to teach, when it will be used, and why. For example:

- Explain, “During the day, we will need to wash our hands in order to keep our bodies healthy and safe so we don’t get germs all over. We are going to practice how to wash our hands. When we wash our hands, we have to follow the steps that I see on this chart (pointing to the handwashing chart).”
- Reference the times when children may use the routine or transition on the visual schedule that should be near the place where they would be meeting and learning.

**Show it:** Demonstrate how it will be done, narrating actions along the way and using the visual cues. For example:

- When teaching most routines, both adults in the classroom can teach the steps, one can narrate and reference the visual anchor, such as posters and pictures, while the other models the steps.
- A staff member may narrate actions as she does it or may narrate the actions of another staff member as she takes the steps.
- Explain steps as they progress, “I am going to show you how I do this. First, I turn on the water. Turn on the water. Then I get one pump of soap in my hands. Take a pump of soap. Next I will pull my hands away from the water and rub them together as I sing the ABCs. Rub hands and sing the ABCs. Then I will rinse the soap lather off of my hands. Rinse lather off. And grab a paper towel to dry my hands. Dry off hands with a paper towel. Once my hands are dry, I will use the paper towel to turn off the water and throw away the paper towel. Model these steps. If someone is in line behind me, I will leave the water on so they don’t have to touch the faucet.
- After a staff member demonstrates it a few times, a child may demonstrate as well.
- It may then help to ask a child to follow the same steps and narrate that child’s actions as they happen. For example, say, “Jaden is turning on the faucet so that he can get his hands a little wet. I see that he’s grabbing one pump of soap so that he can start lathering his hands and making sure they are clean. Now he is rinsing off the suds and grabbing a paper towel to dry his hands. He’s all done with that, so he is heading to the bathroom door to listen to a story on the rug. Thank you Jaden for showing the class how to clean your hands so he and everyone else stays healthy, let’s all give Jaden a thumbs up!”
- You may wish to repeat with one or a few more children so they can practice and see the procedure multiple times.
- Repeat this process in small groups as needed to give children additional practice time. Young children learn by watching and doing!

**Check it:** For the first few times using or teaching a routine, it may help to reinforce the expectations and refer to the visual anchor of the steps. It may also be helpful to reteach or reinforce some of the expectations if you notice that steps are being skipped, there is a sudden change to the normal flow of the day (e.g., children not feeling well and sent to nurses’ office, go for a health screening or a fire drill when they would normally transition to centers), or after some days off school (such as after a long weekend or a holiday break).

For specific information on this method, please see *Say-it, Show-it, Check-it: Teaching Classroom Procedures*. For additional hands-on activities to help children learn about handwashing, please see here. For more information on planning transitions to prevent challenging behavior, please see here.
How this might look:

- Engage children in a conversation about why handwashing and keeping our hands clean is important. This can also be a time used to teach them empathy; caring for their school community/friends and home community/family. Staff can say, “Washing and cleaning hands helps to keep us healthy and keep our friends and family healthy too.” The class can then brainstorm ideas and make connections to how this can be done at home:
  - What are some things we can do to keep our friends and family healthy?
  - When do you think it is important to wash/clean hands? Why do you think so?
  - What should we use to clean/wash hands?
- At the end of the day or as part of a recap
  - What did you do today to help keep your friends healthy? (e.g. used hand sanitizer, washed hands, did not put toys in my mouth);
  - Showing them “happy eyes” affirm their answers and add information to affirm/expand what they said.

Teaching and reviewing the steps to handwashing/hand cleaning

Using a simplified hand washing display, describe each picture and point to print/picture as you describe steps for handwashing as other staff model the procedure.

- Encourage children to model your actions as you use self talk to repeat and verbalize the steps;
- Consider singing the steps.

Now, let’s practice with soap and water...

- Encourage children to use the picture display to practice;
- Encourage them to describe the steps as they are handwashing;
- Help child by using self/parallel talk to describe what child is doing.

Let’s practice with hand sanitizer...

- Create a picture display similar to the handwashing display for using hand sanitizer;
- Encourage them to describe the steps as they are hand cleaning;
- Help children by using self/parallel talk to describe what they are doing.

Consider taking pictures as each child washes their hands and display in the classroom recording their responses

- “When do I wash hands?”
- “How can I keep my friends healthy?” (e.g., I washed my hands after meals; I washed my hands after I sneezed).
Post additional handwashing and hand sanitizer displays around the classroom to remind children of when to use (e.g., next to the tissue boxes, as they enter the classroom).

Also consider reviewing the handwashing/hand cleaning steps as part of your daily morning circle time including using displays to remind children when to wash hands until it is embedded as part of their routines.

As children become more familiar with handwashing/hand cleaning routines, incorporate different concepts during small group or individualized interactions.

Transitions Tips and Considerations

Difficulty with transitions can occur for a number of reasons, such as when children are tired, hungry, confused, or not ready to end an activity. To support children with successfully navigating their day and moving from one activity to the next consider the strategies below:

- **Planning ahead**
  - Have materials and activities on hand to transform wait time into fun learning time;
  - Maintain consistency with the daily schedule and routines, as much as possible.

- **Preparing**
  - Prepare children by giving them a warning for how long an activity will last;
  - Gather all necessary items for the next activity before signaling a transition.

- **Using visual cues**
  - A visual schedule makes it clear what a child can expect and what is coming up next;
  - Picture cues can serve as reminders for children about what they need to do during a transition. For instance, a poster with pictures near the front door might contain photos of a coat, hat, and boots that could be referenced to prompt a child to get ready to go outside. Or a chart with the proper handwashing procedure can help children remember the order of steps when cleaning their hands;
  - Using a visual timer or countdown system allows children to visually see how much time they have remaining for an activity or transition;
  - Tape or markers on the floor help children to know where to stand when in line and supports maintaining physical distance.

- **Using music, songs, or predictable noises to signal transitions**
  - A routine cleanup song can be used when it is time to pick up toys;
  - Set a timer to indicate that playtime is ending and soon it will be time to clean up for lunch.

- **Turning transition times into games**
  - Create a song and dance or engage in pretend play about what a child is going to do next. For example, children can be encouraged to “fly” to the sink like superheroes to brush their teeth.

Ways to integrate discussions/concepts related to “staying healthy” during transitions and play:
Math
● Use math talk and/or math materials, introduce/discuss:
  ○ Sequencing, such as, “What comes first, second, third?”
  ○ Counting, such as “How many fingers are on each hand?”
  ○ Differentiating between left and right
  ○ Measurement, such as using markers on the floor to help children understand distance (# of tiles) as they wait/wash their hands.

Dramatic Play
● Discuss with children:
  ○ The handwashing poster in the Center and when they wash hands at home;
  ○ Activities they do to stay healthy in addition to washing hands, such as eating healthy foods and exercising;
  ○ Career workers that help us stay healthy, such as doctors and nurses, and help them understand how the tools in the medical kit are used.

Nature/Science
● Read books to children on how to stay healthy;
● Talk about the parts of the body and how to stay healthy;
● Model care for the environment, such as watering plants or feeding the class pet;
● Create a “I am healthy” theme box (e.g., books about health, pictures that show times to wash/clean hands, sequence puzzles showing the steps to washing hands, sorting healthy foods).

Additional ideas to remind children to wash/clean hands during the day:
● Include pictures of hand washing/cleaning as part of the daily picture schedule;
● When greeting children individually at arrival, say, “Thank you for cleaning hands and caring for friends;”
● Chant, “Hands in the air and keep them way up there until our hands are clean for __________,” upon re-entering after gross motor play;

● Create a fun signal for children to use during play time for when they need a staff member to help them wash hands or use hand sanitizer, such as, “Put your hands in the air and wiggle your fingers.

Face Coverings and Additional Considerations

This section includes information on:
● Face Covering Considerations
● Teaching children about face coverings
● Additional Considerations

Face Covering Considerations
To avoid the risk of contamination, adults may be required and/or may choose to wear face coverings, face shields, and/or gloves for additional protection.

Children may be required to wear a face covering except during:

- Nap time to ensure children are breathing properly;
- Meal time;
- An approved medical exemption documented by a doctor or other health care provider.

If this is required, it is important that this expectation not lead to conflict between or among children and teaching staff. Children who refuse to wear a face covering, are crying, or are dysregulated may be experiencing mental distress. In these cases, teaching staff and families should use positive, nurturing strategies to prevent conflicts over face coverings, and encourage the child to consistently use a face covering over time. Early childhood children should not be isolated, suspended or expelled for failure to wear masks.

For additional information please see Early Childhood Routines Memo (NYCEECs) and Early Childhood Routines Memo (District Schools and Pre-K Centers).

Gloves and proper sanitation may be required when touching a used or contaminated face covering/mask. In addition, when putting on and taking off a face covering, hands should be properly cleaned every time face coverings are put on and taken off.

**Teaching children about face coverings**

When talking with children about the need to keep face coverings on, consider:

- Explaining about the spread of germs;
- Modeling proper use of face coverings, using a doll to demonstrate to make it more fun and inviting;
- Individual social-emotional and developmental needs;
- Encourage parents to allow children to select their own face covering with a design or color that they like;
- Using photos or illustrations in children's books and videos.
- Use simple sentences to answer their questions, focus on the idea that a mask can keep them healthy and happy;
- Comment on how strong, brave, and helpful they look while wearing the mask.

**Additional Considerations**

- Store cleaning supplies away from children's reach, on high shelves or in locked cabinets, at all times;
- Follow cleaning, sanitizing, and/or disinfecting instructions as per manufacturer's label;
- Share photographs and/or posters of proper procedures with families for them to be informed of how health practices are followed/reinforced in the classroom;
- Use an online app to communicate with families on a regular basis, such as on health and safety checks in order to minimize traffic at arrival.
- Children and/or staff who become ill while at school should be brought to the designated area and sent home as soon as possible.

- **In order to avoid contamination during a virus/disease outbreak:**
  - Frequently sanitize "touch points" (e.g., door knobs, backs of chairs, table surfaces, center chart(s);
  - Encourage children not to hold hands;
- Encourage staff to wear a clean smock/apron or an oversized button-down shirt throughout the day and to have spare ones available to change if it becomes dirty/contaminated (e.g., wiping nose on sleeve, with food during meals, saliva during nap).
- Consider the use of an isolation or similar space where children and/or staff can be brought to and sent home as soon as possible if they become unwell while at school.

### ECERS and CLASS Alignment

Guidance in this document is aligned with ECERS and CLASS as shown in this chart:

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