

KID CONNECTS WEEKLY NEWSLETTER: FOR PARENTS, MAKING THE DECISION TO SEND YOUR CHILD BACK TO CHILDCARE

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FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT:

Contact our warm line at, (303) 245-4418, to talk directly to an Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant.



“Parenting is the easiest thing in the world to have an opinion about, but the hardest thing in the world to do.” Matt Walsh

Parents are weighing many factors that include the risk of exposure to COVID-19, pressure to return to work, stress of caring for young children, judgement from peers, and worries about the future of the childcare industry. Many parents have had to keep their children in childcare due to the nature of their work or economic wellbeing. Still, other parents of children attending a childcare that was temporarily shut down may have been the first to return to care upon reopening. Additionally, some parents may have been planning to put their child into care for the first time this summer and may now be reconsidering this choice, or have to put a child

in care because their work situation has changed in the past months. The decision to have your child in group care is not clear cut and information and guidelines continue to evolve. Many parents may feel judged by other parents, their childcare providers, friends and family, and their community at large for their current decision. Additionally, some may disagree with their coparent on what is best for their child. The stress on parents right now is monumental. Remember, you are the expert of your own family and children. You are making a decision that seems best for your family with the information you have now. There may not be a “right” or “wrong” decision for your family. There will always be pros and cons to every choice. Sometimes parents think if they have mixed emotions then they have made the wrong decision. For example, you may feel confident about your choice to send your child back to care and then sob in your car after dropping them off. This does not mean you have made a bad choice. You love your child and it is normal to experience many emotions. Other parents might initially feel good about their situation, only to start second guessing their lack of conflicting emotions. You may feel relieved and glad to have your child back at care, then worry others will judge your decision as selfish or hasty. In reality, this judgment is untrue, and you have made a thoughtful and informed decision. Additionally, while giving children as much consistency as possible is important, you also have the right to change your mind about your childcare plans, especially as new information emerges. Parenting during a pandemic has many challenges so extend grace to other parents and yourself. You are doing the best you can.



Making the decision to send your child back to a childcare setting is complex. The decision to put your child in care is not easy and has understandably created a lot of anxiety for parents in the middle of an already tenuous time. Again, each family needs to evaluate their situation, assess their needs, decide what is best for them, and remember there is no “right” or “wrong” decision! Here are some questions to consider that may assist families in making the difficult decision on whether to send their child back to care.

1. What is the current guidance/recommendation from my state and local government on health and safety practices in childcare settings? (<https://www.bouldercounty.org/families/pregnancy/child-health-promotion-program/>)
2. Am I able to stay at home with my child?
3. What is my financial situation? Can I afford to work part time? Take the summer off? Not return to work?
4. Can I continue to work from home while caring for my children full time? How might my work be impacted? How might my mental health be impacted?
5. Do I have support from my partner/family to care for my child while I work?
6. Does anyone in my family fit the high-risk category of infection? Do I live with an older adult or someone who is immunocompromised?
7. How does my child manage change and transitions? What will it look like for my child to return to care?
8. How am I doing mentally and emotionally? Is it better for me and my family to have a break during the day? Or, will I feel less stress knowing my child is at home, reducing possible exposure to COVID-19?
9. Am I worried about my child’s learning or socialization? Would I feel more confident in my child’s learning/education if they were in care?



Kids Returning to Care: It can feel like starting all over

When children are returning to childcare after an extended break, it can feel to you and them, like it is the first day of school again. You can expect some stress both within yourself and your children. On top of it all, you and your children are experiencing the effects of this pandemic. It is exhausting and hard raising young children and managing challenging behaviors. During this time, it is important to take care of yourself because when you are regulated your children are more likely to be regulated from seeing you model healthy ways to cope with emotions. Children of all ages experience stress but do not have the capacity that adults do to cope. They are learning from adults how to process their stress and learn healthy ways to express themselves.¹

Here are some ideas for understanding and supporting behavior as children re-enter their schools:

1. ***Identify Stress Behaviors:*** Children respond to stress with a range of behaviors. You could see more overt behaviors such as attention seeking or covert behaviors such as withdrawing. Children may also experience regression and/or changes in their sleep and eating patterns. Some of the behaviors you can expect to see include being rigid, irritable, noncompliant, attention seeking, aggressive, withdrawn, clingy, frequent crying, needing to be cuddled and held more, trouble separating from parents, and somatic complaints (headache, stomachache).



¹ Center on the developing child. “8 Things to Remember about Child Development.” <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/8-things-remember-child-development/>

2. **Seek to Understand the Meaning of the Behavior:** Reflect on your child’s behavior. What need is my child trying to communicate through this behavior? For example, a child may make frustrating bids for attention to communicate his/her need for connection. Being able to identify the underlying need or meaning of the behavior is key to finding a responsive and successful remedy.
3. **Connect with the Emotion:** Naming children’s feelings helps them tame big emotions. Our brains have two hemispheres. The right is responsible for feelings and emotions and the left for logic and linguistics. Young children are right brain dominated. As adults we can help children integrate their two hemispheres by putting their right brain experiences into left brain words. ²
 - a. **Labeling feelings** helps children connect their behavior to their emotions. E.g. “You are sad dad left; you miss him.”
 - b. **Social stories** are visual reminders used to teach children appropriate behavior. Social stories can help children understand and respond to emotions. E.g. “We all had to stay at home because of the virus. Now it is safe enough to come back to school. You may have some big feelings about being here at school. I am here to support you with all those feelings.”
4. **As much as possible, commit to consistency, predictability and structure:** The brain thrives on predictable patterns. Creating rhythm to our day and knowing what to expect next provides a sense of safety.
 - a. **Routines:** Explain the morning and drop off/pick up routines to children. Have predictable rituals for your mornings and throughout their day, explain what their schedule during school will look like.
 - b. **Reminders:** Remember to remind children a transition is coming up and what the expectations are. Ex. “remember in one week you will be going back to school, you will be dropped off by ____ and picked up by ____ and doing ____ during the day.”
 - c. **Choices and Limits:** Now more than ever, children have very little power and may try to exert control in disruptive ways. Simultaneously, children need clear limits as having too much control is overwhelming. Give children a sense of agency within parameters. Try giving a child two positive choices. And tell them what they do have control of.



² Siegel, D. J. & Bryson, T.A. (2012). The whole-brain child. New York: Bantam Books Trade Paperbacks