



**ADMINISTRATORS GUIDE
TO REOPENING YOUR
CHILDCARE CENTER**



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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unexpected challenges to childcare centers across the country. Now, centers are faced with navigating the reopening process. There are a number of considerations to take into account when looking to reopen.

This guide will help you create a reopening plan that allows you to confidently resume operations and lead your team through these challenging times.

To help navigate this unprecedented situation, Kangarootime has started the KT Childcare Connect initiative to bring together center owners and industry leaders. Our Facebook group, **KT Childcare Connect**, has become a safe place to share thoughts, feelings, ideas, and helpful resources.

To create this guide, we worked with early childhood industry expert, Christina Fecio, with contributions from Cheri Nowicki, National Manager for Skies the Limit, Carol Garboden, ECE Specialist, and Kim Stewart, Director of Seneca Babcock Early Childhood Programs.

HOW AND WHEN DO I DECIDE TO OPEN?

HOW AND WHEN DO I DECIDE TO OPEN?

Child Care Aware created [this helpful flowchart](#) to help guide your decision making process. Don't let the title fool you—the infographic has great resources for child care providers and resource and referral agencies alike.

REVIEW OPENING REQUIREMENTS

Determining when to reopen begins with careful review of your state-specific and local health department guidance for child care centers. You may be required to apply for regulatory waivers, to operate under a temporary license, to restrict your services to children of essential personnel, or to adhere to specific phase-in guidelines. Considering that government agencies are, understandably, often “building the plane while it’s in the air” when it comes to crisis management, you should expect frequent updates to requirements and timelines.

REVIEW OPERATING GUIDELINES

Once you've determined when you are permitted to reopen, please review the [CDC guidelines for operating your center](#). This guidance outlines the necessary steps to keep child care spaces safe and properly monitor staff and children for potential exposure or symptoms of COVID-19. Putting in place these enhanced health and safety procedures will help mitigate the spread of the virus at your center. Familiarity with the CDC guidelines will help you determine when you will be adequately prepared to reopen. You'll need time to order necessary supplies, establish enhanced procedures, apply for any necessary waivers or licenses, prepare your physical space, and educate staff and families about program changes.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

BUILD A BUDGET



To prepare your center financially, **build a budget** and explore funding opportunities. In your budget, account for lower enrollment and increased expenses for necessary supplies such as hand sanitizer, PPE, cleaning supplies, etc. Your center might also incur additional costs for recruiting and adding staff, advertising, modifications to the building, or revised subsidy requirements.

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL CCR&R AGENCY



For additional resources, be sure to contact your local Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency. Many municipalities have put temporary measures in place to help essential workers pay for child care and are using CCR&R agencies to manage these processes.

ASSESS THE PANDEMIC'S FINANCIAL IMPACT



To assess the impact the pandemic will have on the financial viability of your business over the next several months, try Kangarootime's **scenario modeling tool**. This tool gives you visibility into different levers you can pull and how they will help offset losses to enable you to successfully navigate the economic down period. Use the information from this tool to help guide decision making throughout the current pandemic.

OPERATIONS

BUSINESS AS (UN)USUAL

The phrase “business as (un)usual” certainly seems appropriate right now. Complying with new regulatory guidelines and new CDC recommendations requires a strategic review of every aspect of operations. You should expect to make some changes, but fortunately, best practices for infection control, including handwashing and sanitizing procedures, are already standard operating procedures in most child care programs. Similarly, you’re already accustomed to monitoring group sizes, maintaining ratio, and paying careful attention to staffing patterns.

REASSESS CURRENT OPERATIONS

You’re not starting from scratch as you plan to reopen; rather, you’re assessing your typical operations to determine which specific practices require immediate attention. As always, there’s a benefit to proceeding with a “safety first” mentality. Take a careful look at the CDC guidelines and compare with your regional regulatory guidance to determine if there are any substantial differences in the recommendations for essential health and safety routines, including:

- Social distancing requirements, particularly for pick up and drop off procedures
- Face covering (mask) recommendations, for parents, children, and staff
- Exclusion criteria, including daily screening recommendations
- Handwashing requirements
- Cleaning and sanitizing processes
- Group sizes, including any meal times and/or rest time recommendations
- Outdoor play routines, including cleaning outdoor equipment
- Indoor play routines, including cleaning shared materials

OPERATIONS

Cheri Nowicki, National Manager for Skies the Limit, shared the strategies her team has used to help them **effectively implement the CDC guidelines** for child care centers:



Cleaning: I schedule a staff member daily for cleaning only. They wipe all high-touch surfaces (door knobs, light switches, gate handles, etc.), then focus on cleaning and sanitizing toys in each room.



Pick up + drop-off: We established a “parent zone” at our entry way, with X's taped on the floor six feet apart as a visual cue to remain six feet apart during arrival and departure routines. This area is the only space that parents enter; we meet them there and escort children to and from.



Masks: No mask means no entry, except for our actively enrolled children. Parent? Mask. Staff? Mask. Maintenance person? Mask. Everybody gets a mask.



Staff support: I do a personal weekly check in with my staff to see how each person is feeling, to ask what we can do to provide support, and see what (overall) is needed to keep morale up and keep us all sane.

In the event that CDC guidelines are more stringent than your regulations, please consider adapting your processes to comply with the CDC. Added precautions can help inspire confidence in your leadership; families and staff alike need reassurance that you are well prepared for this transition.

You may also want to consider a gradual phase-in for reopening, staggering families' start dates over the course of 1-2 weeks. The extra time may seem unnecessary, but it provides your team with an opportunity to establish new habits and “work out the kinks” in new processes before classrooms return to full capacity.

OPERATIONS

REIMAGINE YOUR CENTER FOR REOPENING

From Carol Garboden via carolgarbodenmurray.com

INCREASE OUTDOOR PLAY

When adjusting the normal schedule, allow children to play outside as much as possible and be mindful of alternating play times to reduce group sizes. Designate a staff member to clean high traffic areas (such as swings and monkey bars) between groups. Fresh air improves everyone's health so think about how traditional indoor activities can be moved to the outdoor classroom.

ADAPT INDOOR PLAY ROUTINES

Limit sensory play to materials that are easily cleaned and are not shared. For example, children can finger paint on individual trays that are cleaned after each use, or children can play in individual tubs of water for experiences such as washing baby dolls and then the bin of water can be replenished for each new child.

CHANGE MEALTIME ROUTINES

Eliminate family-style meal service; do not involve children in food prep or serving routines. Remember, it is still important to sit with children and facilitate social conversation and eye contact during meal times. Spread out seating arrangements during meals so that children are not touching one another; consider leaving an empty space between children who are seated at the table. When possible, use paper cups, paper towels, and paper napkins that can be thrown away after one use or ask families to supply all utensils if needed.

LAUNDRY AND BATH AND PERSONAL ITEMS

Remove an abundance of soft items from the environment that are not easy to launder regularly. Personal comfort items (such as blankets and loveys) can be laundered daily. Remind parents to keep up with laundry and give evening baths or showers for children. Remind teachers to change clothes at the end of each day and shower before interacting with their own families. High-traffic items like cloth lunch boxes can be replaced with brown bag lunches that are thrown away each day. Cubbies and storage lockers should be spread apart and alternated if possible.

TRAINING FOR YOUR STAFF

In order for your team to appropriately implement enhanced health and safety procedures, it is important for them to understand both what to do and why it's important. As with any required training program, as your staff's level of buy-in increases, so too does the likelihood that they will consistently apply what they have learned. You can increase buy-in with clear communication about the essential nature of the training content; this includes having difficult conversations that acknowledge staff members' concerns about potential exposure.

PROVIDE QUALITY TRAINING PROGRAMS

It's equally important to provide timely, high-quality, research-based training programs. Aim to have every staff member engage in pandemic-related health and safety training prior to caring for children. In terms of infection control, staff should know proper hand washing techniques and hygiene, the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), signs and symptoms of coronavirus infection, and the guidelines you have established for safe operations. Separate from that infection control content, your staff will also need guidance about parent communication, self-care, and maintaining warm, positive relationships with children.

SUPPLEMENT ONLINE COURSEWORK

Considering the circumstances, many providers will opt for online training courses. Please consider supplementing online coursework with a personal debrief; often, a quick conversation about the training content provides an opportunity to ask clarifying questions. Connecting with a supervisor, mentor, or other trusted professional can also provide the reassurance a staff member needs to appropriately implement what s/he has learned.

RESEARCH LOCAL TRAINING OPTIONS

Please consult with your local CCR&R for local training options, including state-specific courses that may be required by regulation. In addition, consider The Institute of Childhood Preparedness, which offers on-demand training in both English and Spanish at www.childhoodpreparedness.org. Andrew Roszak, Executive Director, provided the Institute's considerations for program operations in [an informative webinar](#).

PARENT COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATE SENSITIVELY



As you conduct your self-assessment to ascertain your comfort and preparedness to open while remaining compliant, you'll also want to communicate with families to ascertain their need for child care as well as their understanding of the new procedures they should expect. It is important to be sensitive to parents' questions and concerns in order for all parties to feel comfortable with this transition. It's equally important to be sure that your communication demonstrates the thoughtfulness and intention that you have put into the reopening plan; parents want to know that you are well-informed and well-prepared.

INFORM PARENTS ABOUT NEW PROCEDURES



Important information to have in your correspondence includes, but is not limited to, new cleaning procedures, safety precautions, ways to limit unnecessary contact, and ways parents can help keep their families safe.

Christina Fecio shared communication and messaging guidance for administrators when she spoke on [Kangarootime's webinar series](#).

To learn more about best practices when communicating with parents, please read our [Navigating the Reopen with Your Parents](#) guide.

STAFF MANAGEMENT: RETURNING TO WORK

DETERMINE HOW MANY STAFF MEMBERS YOU'LL NEED

1

As always, you'll use the enrollment information you've learned from parents to determine how many staff members you will need to reopen. Considering that parents' needs will change as your region gradually reopens for business, you'll likely need to gradually phase in your team's return to work.

BEGIN HIRING OR REHIRING

2

If you had staff members who were furloughed/laid off, begin the hiring or rehiring process as soon as possible, being mindful of the fact that this crisis has changed some families. Staff members may have concerns about child care, health care, or family leave that were not an issue just a few months ago. It is also likely that some team members will not want to return to work because they are currently earning higher wages on unemployment. **The Small Business Association (SBA) recently issued PPP guidance for laid-off employees who refused to be rehired.**

Prepare in advance for the language you want to use in each of these difficult conversations, being mindful of legal considerations, professionalism, and the reputation of your business. Later, you'll appreciate your ability to manage these situations with dignity and grace.

COMMUNICATE ABOUT RE-OPENING

3

To open the conversation about reopening, consider adapting **this letter** to send a personalized message to staff members. This letter is intended to not only share an update about the protocols and safety measures associated with reopening, but also to remind your team that you care deeply about your school community. Your intentional efforts to create a positive and supportive environment can help team members manage the many changes this crisis brings.

STAFF MANAGEMENT: RETURNING TO WORK

Kim Stewart, Director of Seneca Babcock Early Childhood Programs, reminds us that this pandemic is a collective trauma and shares trauma-sensitive support strategies:

INVEST A TWO-MINUTE DAILY CHECK IN WITH EVERY STAFF MEMBER

Keep in mind that “good” is not a feeling; naming our varied (and sometimes conflicting) feelings can help us process them. These personal check ins are an ideal opportunity to offer ideas on self-care.

CREATE A VIRTUAL SPACE FOR STAFF TO CONNECT.

A private Facebook group or comparable alternative can be a space for staff members to ask questions and support one another. This type of connection is particularly important because our typical routines (such as gathering for lunch or on breaks) are on pause.

ASK STAFF HOW THEY WANT TO COMMUNICATE, AND THEN DO IT

This may mean communicating the same message in multiple ways (email, text, social media, etc.) and requires that you follow up on promises. Your follow through is an investment in a positive relationship.

DO SOMETHING THAT IS FUN AND REMINDS STAFF OF THE JOYFUL NATURE OF OUR PROFESSION

Consider door decorating contests or poster creations at work and virtual “gatherings” after hours, such as sip and paint nights via Zoom.





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