

Early Learning Curriculum & Best Practice Considerations

Vision

This guidance is to support all Preschool and Pre-K classrooms as we re-enter school on August 31, 2020. As young children enter EC classrooms, they will exhibit knowledge and skills across multiple learning domains in a variety of ways. To accommodate this, ECE teachers are accustomed to setting the stage at the beginning of each school year and should always begin by implementing with fidelity, a high-quality curriculum and strong social and emotional learning.

Given the current context of our world, we anticipate children coming in with more social challenges and emotional needs. To improve educational and social and emotional outcomes for young children, EC educators must focus on demonstrated SEL, use HQ curriculum to intentionally plan, build thoughtful routines, and construct knowledge by engaging children in a variety of relevant learning experiences, all while being reflective, responsive, and adaptable to the needs of the children and the fluctuating environment ([Trauma Informed Teaching](#)).

As distance learning is an especially challenging model for our youngest learners, this document will focus on addressing social and emotional needs, building foundational structures which will support transitions, and improving distance learning ([ECE Remote Learning](#)).

Specific Considerations

- Play is essential in all early childhood classrooms ([NAEYC Meaningful Play](#)).
- High-Quality ECE curriculum should drive both in-person and distance learning.
- All learning opportunities should be rooted in child development and based on the RIELDS.
- Assessment data should be used to determine how students apply their knowledge and to continuously improve instructional support for students.
- Building relationships is even more important during distance learning.
- Regular communication and collaboration with families is a key component to success.
- A variety of engaging instructional practices should be leveraged for online learning and off-screen activities.

Best Practices

Social and Emotional Learning

While there is a great deal of information unknown, there is a certain amount of control within your organization or classrooms to make informed, thoughtful and forward-thinking decisions.

Early Childhood classrooms are, for many, the first introduction into education and schools for young children. ECE classroom teachers are dedicated to creating welcoming and engaging environments that acknowledge and support each child's efforts to construct an understanding of the world. Play is the primary mechanism through which young children develop higher-level thinking skills, enhanced language development, problem-solving capabilities, and empathy toward each other.

As schools plan to come back together, they must consider ways to prioritize the mental and physical wellbeing of students, staff, and families, regardless of location. And, if we believe play is a crucial part of learning, we owe it to our students to find a way to incorporate play into distance learning.

Routines

When children are in the classroom, teachers must prioritize creating safe and supportive environments. Establishing predictable routines within ECE classrooms fosters a sense of calm within children as they navigate a new environment. Calm children are better able to focus, regulate their emotions, and begin building relationships. An orderly environment, focusing on safety and nurturing each child's wellbeing will include time for academics, unstructured time for playing and collaboration, small group and independent work, movement, and explorations.

As distance learning is a likely scenario, it will be important that classroom routines provide a sense of emotional safety and security and maximize learning time, so when a change in location occurs, teachers can build on the existing foundation. ECE teachers should model rituals that teach, provide opportunities, practice skills, and help students incorporate positive practices into their daily routines that can be translated into an at home environment.

An important consideration for building routines is the delivery platform and applications that children will be using if/when engaging in distance learning. While technology might not typically be a component of setting the stage in ECE classrooms, this will be an important step in creating an effective and equitable learning environment. Children who understand the platform and basic operating procedures of learning apps (e.g., logging in, mute, finding work) will be more successful during distance learning.

For additional information about developing successful classroom routines visit [EC Learning Environments](#) or listen to [CD Routine Podcast](#).

Relationships

Students come from diverse backgrounds, but the one thing they all have in common is the need for a safe learning environment. Building relationships is an integral part of creating a safe early learning classroom. While EC teachers must always take time to cultivate strong relationships, build partnerships, and plan for SEL, COVID-19 has brought with it a greater need for this approach.

Teachers must effectively plan for supportive and equitable learning environments that promote social, emotional, and academic learning for all students, as a child's social skills, emotional state, and sense of value have an impact on their learning. It is important for classrooms to have a HQ curriculum embedded with building positive relationships into everyday play and learning.

When building relationships is at the center of an early childhood classroom, the quality of student-teacher interactions and academics improves. Teachers lead group discussions, model, and practice building relationship skills such as how to kindly get a friend's attention, how to take turns, how to express feelings, and how to solve



conflicts. These opportunities to learn and practice within each day help children connect with others, relieve stress, and support making positive choices ([Teacher Child Relationships](#)).

In an effort to support transitions throughout the year, teachers should seek ways to build relationships that will foster a positive online community. Consider how structures used in the classrooms will translate into distance learning. Think about the pace of lessons, take a few moments to slow down and set the right tone for the class, build in regular check-ins to assess student's engagement and understanding (thumbs up, thumbs down), and think about closing with a reflection activity. Check-ins do not need to be long to be effective but will help establish expectations for how you and your class want to be together as a learning community in class and during distance learning.

For additional information about building and sustaining relationships visit [Reconnecting with Conscious Discipline](#).

Resilience

Resilience develops through supportive relationships, adaptive skills, and positive experiences that are built over time. The teacher's role is to create an atmosphere that supports relationships and uses strong systems of communication in order to guide and support children through problems and strong feelings, and to embed positive strategies into daily practice.

While in school, helping children to develop the ability to recognize and identify their emotions, and manage them appropriately, will strengthen their ability to do so during distance learning and will help prepare them for the challenges of transitioning. Children who function well in the face of adversity do so with the help of positive social interactions, caring relationships, and exposure to supportive interventions, this can be done both in person and through DL. The more we are able to celebrate successes, encourage conversations, and model healthy strategies for managing feelings the more resilient children will become ([Resilience and Conscious Discipline](#)).

Distance Learning

It is likely that at some point during the school year children will move from one educational setting to another. As students move through in-person and distance learning their ability to predict routines, rely on relationships and continue to develop resilience will play a major factor in their success. When moving to DL, ECE teams should consider a schedule that is more fluid since independent use of technology has obvious limitations for young children. During distance learning, teachers should create fun activities that address both social emotional and academic needs, which should be reflected in classroom and DL schedules.

Teachers should think carefully about how they can create an online space and schedule that closely represents the physical classroom. Encourage students to share something from home, move classroom accessories like bulletin boards and job charts online, celebrate student work, and when possible, circulate and observe student learning. As students become more familiar with the DL routine and expectations, teachers should work to incorporate opportunities for children to spend time online with each other through virtual recess, hangouts, and age-appropriate connections, while also arranging time for individual teacher check-ins.

Remember that teachers set the tone for the classroom, regardless of location, and should be continually aware of their presence. Slowing down, pausing between sentences, smiling, maintaining eye contact, talking in a calm manner, making your face visible, and being mindful of anxiety levels will significantly help students to co-regulate.

Regular communication with families will be essential as younger children will need support to complete many distance learning activities. Teachers must be aware that DL may take longer than face-to-face teaching and carefully



plan so as not to overwhelm students and parents. Students and families must be made aware of the regular schedule and any changes that might be made, the expectations for participation, and how and when they will receive feedback.

Providing families with easily accessible suggestions to develop language skills, reading together, counting, fine and gross motor skills, and support practice and additional skill development during regular family activities teachers can refer them to [Rhode Island's Family Fun Activities](#).

In and out of the classroom, ECE teachers must be agile and adaptable, building relationships, modeling skills and expectations, supporting the physical safety and emotional wellbeing of all children, while continually gathering input from students, planned and unplanned learning experiences, and families, and using that information to adjust the environment, their instruction, and educational and SEL supports accordingly.

Resources

Below are additional resources to support teachers and children during the first weeks of school and in preparation for distance learning.

- SEL
 - [RI SEL Recommendations](#)
 - [SEL Re-Entry Roadmap](#)
- Distance Learning
 - [Creating a Digital Classroom](#)
 - [Digital Media Supports](#)
 - [Virtual Learning Strategies](#)

