



Back to School Guide

In the Era of COVID-19

Summer 2020

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Back to School Tip Sheet Overview

Returning to school is a complex event, even in a typical school year. With the COVID-19 pandemic and other social uncertainty, new challenges have been presented. Many students have experienced major disruptions to their routines. Traumatic events (e.g., separation from extended family members and friends during quarantine, loss of a loved one to COVID-19, disruption to typical activities and daily routines, etc.) related to the pandemic will influence their confidence in returning to school. By supporting the student and addressing their routines, environments, and related tasks, students may have a more positive and productive day, leading to better school outcomes.

Returning to school following the COVID-19 quarantine requires flexibility and extra attention to routines and the environment. When determining how to set up the environment for a successful return to school, consider the various persons involved (e.g., student, teacher, paraprofessional), and the array of tasks and occupations (e.g., learning, playing) performed in the environments.

The [American Occupational Therapy Association \(AOTA\)](#) produced these Back to School Tip Sheets to provide practical tips for parents, guardians, caregivers, administrators, teachers, para-professionals, and students to navigate these challenges. Occupational therapy practitioners provide a continuum of services and support to students in general and in special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Occupational therapy practitioners can help to modify various school environments; establish safe and effective classroom routines; and address the physical, cognitive, psychosocial, and sensory components of student performance. This includes addressing needs for an individual, for groups, or for the school or school system.

For more detailed information or if you have additional questions, please contact an occupational therapy practitioner in your school system.

Note: This document also contains an overarching problem solving model that can be used to address new questions as they arise. The Back to School Tip Sheets were developed using this problem solving model. The information is intended to be used in conjunction with other direction and guidance provided by public health officials; local, state, and federal governments; and school officials, and is not intended to supplant such direction or guidance. For more information, as well as a specific example of working through the problem solving model, please see the Problem Solving Model section below.

About AOTA

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) is the national professional association established in 1917 to represent the interests and concerns of occupational therapy practitioners and students, and to improve the quality of occupational therapy services. The practice of occupational therapy is science-driven, evidence-based, and enables people of all ages to live life to its fullest by promoting health and addressing the functional effects of illness, injury, and disability. Occupational therapy practitioners work with people of all ages to maximize independence and function. This includes considering how person, place, and environment influence occupations. In occupational therapy, occupations are the purposeful activities in a person's day. For children, these include play, school, self-care (dressing, eating, etc.) and other activities. More information is available in the AOTA fact sheet, [Occupational Therapy's Role with School Settings](#).

Detailed Information Regarding Tip Sheet Development

Occupational Therapy Practice Framework

Occupational therapy practitioners, including occupational therapists (OTs) and occupational therapy assistants (OTAs), utilize the [Occupational Therapy Practice Framework \(OTPF-4\)](#) (4th ed.; OTPF-4; American Occupational Therapy Association, in press) to guide intervention and services. Understanding the complexity of daily occupations requires a multi-faceted framework that addresses function from many perspectives. OTPF-4 is the framework that outlines the various approaches that occupational therapy practitioners use to help individuals in “achieving health, well-being, and participation in life through engagement in occupation” (OTPF, p. 4). Occupational therapy practitioners work in many environments, including school systems, to address the specific needs of the person, group, or population in engaging in their daily occupations.

Problem Solving Model

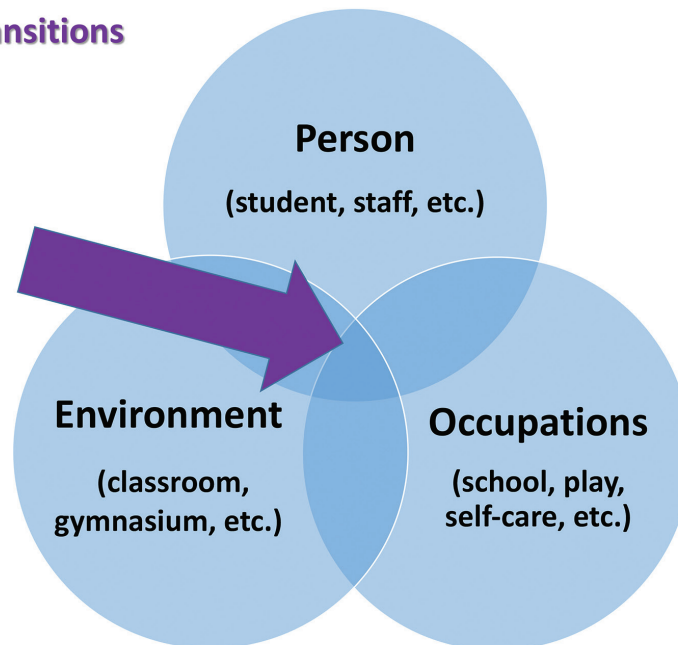
When new events arise, the problem solving model used to develop these tip sheets can be used to find new solutions. The model utilized to develop these tip sheets has been adapted from the Person, Environment, Occupation (PEO) Model (Law, et al., 1996) to guide problem solving related to return to school during a pandemic. This model emphasizes the interaction between the person, the environment, and the occupation (task at hand) to promote optimal performance. This document recognizes the student as the key individual, which is consistent with the client-centered focus of occupational therapy (see Figure 1). This model can be adapted by families, teachers, and administrators to approach problem solving from other perspectives if desired. The model can also be used to address concerns when the teacher or the school community are considered the recipient of services (person).

Figure 1: Return to School Problem-Solving Model

Promote Successful Transitions

(in spite of uncertainty)

- From home to school
- During transportation
- Between assignments
- During altered routines
- Back to home



Example: Working Through the Problem Solving Model

A typical school day and school year consist of many transitions. These can range from moving between topics in class to moving to a new grade. These transitions can be difficult for some students, and can become even

more challenging during stressful times. In most cases, the requirements for managing COVID-19 precautions will increase the complexity of navigating these transitions.

For example, a change in a lunchtime routine, with younger students now required to eat and have recess in the classroom instead of in the cafeteria could be considered in the following way:

Student (Person)

- Cope with frustration and disappointment related to remaining in the same space all day.
- Grieve loss of time for engaging with peers during unstructured time (e.g., recess).
- Regulate emotions and behavior associated with excitement and noise-level changes.
- Manage personal challenges associated with special needs.

Classroom (Environment)

- Position desks to facilitate safe social interaction and management of food items during lunch.
- Provide multiple garbage cans to reduce close interaction among students when disposing of trash.
- Ensure availability of a sink for hand washing vs. relying only on hand sanitizer.

Tasks (Occupation)

- Establish a process for school lunches to be delivered to the classroom.
- Establish a process for cleaning hands prior to lunch while adhering to social distancing/infection control precautions.
- Establish a process for providing assistance needed for opening lunch items while adhering to social distancing/infection control precautions.
 - Using gloves, wipe down touched surfaces.
- Establish a post-lunch clean up and trash management plan.
- Establish a repertoire of recess games that can be played in the classroom while adhering to social-distancing/infection control precautions.

As seen in this example, the seemingly simple transition to eating lunch in the classroom instead of the cafeteria raises important questions about how school teams may create environments that maximize engagement and participation, while adhering to social distancing/infection control procedures. By proactively addressing aspects of the activity specific to the student, the classroom, and the different lunchtime tasks, the students' experience of the school day can be positively affected.

References

- American Occupational Therapy Association. (In press). Occupational therapy practice framework: Domain and process (4th ed.). *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 74(Suppl. 2). Advance online publication. https://www.aota.org/~media/corporate/files/secure/practice/officialdocs/guidelines/otpf4_final_for_web.pdf
- Law, M., Cooper, B., Strong, S., Stewart, D., Rigby, P., & Letts, L. (1996). The Person–Environment–Occupation Model: A transactive approach to occupational performance. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 63, 9–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000841749606300103>

Additional Resources List

AOTA Resources

- AOTA—[School-based and Early Intervention Therapy Services—Decision Guide for COVID-19](#) (PDF)
- AOTA—[Occupational Therapy’s Role in Mental Health Promotion, Prevention, & Intervention With Children & Youth: Inclusion of Children With Disabilities](#) (PDF)
- AOTA—[Occupational Therapy’s Role in Mental Health Promotion, Prevention, & Intervention with Children & Youth: The Cafeteria: Creating a Positive Mealtime Experience](#) (PDF)
- AOTA—[Occupational Therapy’s Role in Mental Health Promotion, Prevention, & Intervention With Children & Youth: Bullying Prevention and Friendship Promotion](#) (PDF)
- AOTA—[Occupational Therapy’s Role in Mental Health Promotion, Prevention, & Intervention With Children & Youth: Childhood Trauma](#) (PDF)
- AOTA—[Occupational Therapy’s Role in Mental Health Promotion, Prevention, & Intervention With Children & Youth: Promoting Strengths in Children and Youth](#) (PDF)
- AOTA—[Occupational Therapy’s Role in Mental Health Promotion, Prevention, & Intervention With Children & Youth: Recess Promotion](#) (PDF)
- AOTA—[Occupational Therapy’s Role in Mental Health Promotion, Prevention, & Intervention With Children & Youth: Social and Emotional Learning \(SEL\)](#) (PDF)
- AOTA—[Occupational Therapy’s Role in Mental Health Promotion, Prevention, & Intervention With Children & Youth: Grief and Loss](#) (PDF)

Cleaning and Disinfecting

- CDC—[Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Decision Tool](#)
- CDC—[Guidance for Re-opening Buildings after Prolonged Shutdown or Reduced Operation](#)
- CDC—[Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, and Homes](#)
- OSHA—[Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)

General COVID Information

- CDC—[Considerations for Schools](#)
- CDC—[Considerations for Youth Sports](#)
- CDC—[Coronavirus Decision Guide](#)
- CDC—[Guidance for Group Homes for Individuals with Disabilities](#)
- Johns Hopkins—[Webinar Series Regarding Return to School](#)

Providing Related Services During Distance Learning

- AOTA—[Occupational Therapy Telehealth Decision Guide](#)
- CDC—[Using Telehealth to Expand Access to Essential Health Services during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- Health and Human Services—[Telehealth Communications during COVID-19](#)

Supporting Resilience and Mental Health

- CDC—[Coping with Stress](#)
- Child Mind Institute—[Supporting Families during COVID-19](#)
- HealthyChildren.org—[How to Help Children Build Resilience in Uncertain Times](#)

Classroom Set-Up

Considerations

Returning to school following the COVID-19 quarantine requires flexibility and extra attention to the environment. When considering how to set up the environment for a successful return to school, consider the various persons involved (e.g., student, teacher, paraprofessional), and the array of tasks and occupations (e.g., learning, playing) performed in the environments. Below are some tips that teachers and other school staff may consider to enhance access, efficiency, and safety.

Evaluate and Organize Materials

- Purge items that are old, out of date, broken, and/or damaged to allow for a clutter-free environment.
- Remove materials that are porous and cannot be easily disinfected.
- Place cubbies or storage containers in alternate locations outside of the classroom to allow more space for social distancing.
- Store additional supplies in containers under desks or chairs to decrease sharing and maintain social distancing.

Modify or Change the Environment

- Rotate use of cafeteria, gymnasium, or auditorium space for individual classrooms to allow social distancing and change of environment.
 - Work with the custodial team to ensure sanitation between use.
 - Consider prioritizing larger spaces for children with special needs who may have challenges social distancing.
- Create visual reminders on vertical (e.g., boards, walls) and horizontal (e.g., floors, table tops) surfaces to promote safe social distancing.
- Utilize Plexiglas dividers to shield table tops, computer stations, or room sections.
- Arrange tables and desks to allow peers to see each other, staff, and audiovisual equipment while maintaining a safe distance to decrease feelings of isolation.
- Ensure ventilation systems are fully operational and increase air circulation as much as possible.
- Open doors and windows as much as possible.

Promote Effective Cleaning and Hygiene Practices

- Scan the environment for frequently used spaces and ensure access to hand sanitizer in those areas.
- Set up sanitization stations at the entry of the classroom and towards the back of the room; assess the height of these stations to ensure ease of access.
- Use hand-free pumps, or instruct all individuals to use their elbows, to dispense soap or hand sanitizer.
- Create signage that includes friendly images to remind students of proper hygiene routines.
- Provide, or request parents to supply, individual hygiene kits in a plastic container or bag.
- Develop a plan for cleaning and disinfecting (see [CDC Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting](#)).
- Establish a safe and locked location, which is easily accessible, to store cleaning supplies and chemicals.
- Incorporate a cleaning routine between use of shared items.

Enhancing Comfort

- Choose comforting materials for the classroom that are non-porous and can be easily wiped with an approved disinfectant.

- Place items in the classroom space to provide a sense of comfort and feelings of home, such as floor lamps, plants, and floor coverings that can be disinfected.
- Change the lighting periodically by opening window coverings or using floor lamps to reduce overstimulation via florescent lights.
- Promote seating opportunities such as beanbag chairs, physio balls, and standing tables to allow for movement.
 - Ensure seating can be disinfected frequently.

Resources

- [AOTA Tip Sheet—Successful Participation at School: Strategies for All Students](#)
- [AOTA School-Based and Early Intervention Occupational Therapy Decision Guide for COVID-19](#)
- [CDC Considerations for Schools](#)
- [CBS KPIX 5 San Francisco Bay video showing newly converted Marin County classrooms adapted for COVID-19](#)

Cleaning Equipment

Reducing the risk of exposure to COVID-19 is an essential consideration for returning to school. Cleaning and disinfecting toys and other equipment is an important practice that will help to mitigate risks. When considering how to best maintain a clean environment, consider the various persons involved (e.g., student, teacher, custodians), the multiple environments encountered (e.g., classroom, gymnasium), and the array of tasks and occupations performed (e.g., learning, playing). Below are some tips that teachers and other school staff may consider.

Items and Equipment that Require Regular Cleaning*

- Handles, door knobs, stair rails, light switches, push buttons, countertops, desks, chairs, and cubbies
 - Nap mats, changing tables, and bathrooms or toileting chairs
 - Playground structures, swings, and riding toys
 - Tablets, styluses, keyboards, and plastic covers that protect equipment
 - Wheelchairs, communication devices, and switches
 - Shared materials such as toys, scissors, writing utensils, and learning manipulatives
- *Toys and other items that cannot be cleaned and disinfected should not be used.*

Cleaning Procedures

- Individuals responsible for cleaning and disinfecting should wear gloves.
- Used plastic toys should be considered dirty.
 - Dirty toys should be placed in a container with soapy water until they are washed and disinfected.
- Toys and other items that children regularly place in their mouths (e.g., spoons and cups) should be cleaned with water and detergent, rinsed, sanitized, rinsed again, and then air dried.
- Machine washable toys and sensory equipment (e.g., Lycra swings) should be used by one child at a time and laundered before they are shared with another child.
- Area rugs, carpet squares, and bean bags that cannot be regularly laundered should be removed from the environment.
- Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water after cleaning and disinfecting toys and equipment.

Cleaning Products

- Only use cleaning and disinfecting products according to the instructions on the label.
- Common household fragrance-free EPA registered disinfectants are effective.
 - See [disinfectants for use against COVID-19](#)
- All cleaning products should be stored in a safe and locked location out of the reach of children.
- Select cleaning product packaging/containers in compliance with Poison Prevention Packaging guidelines.
- Empty cleaning product containers may still pose a safety risk due to the chemicals that remain once the products are used. [Dispose of cleaning product containers and left over cleaning products in accordance with EPA guidelines.](#)

Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfection Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools and Homes](#)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Guidance for Childcare Programs that Remain Open](#)
- Poison Prevention [Packaging Guidelines](#)

Considerations for Creating a Classroom Partnership Pledge

A Classroom Partnership Pledge helps to establish that teachers appreciate students as partners in their education. A Classroom Partnership Pledge may be an effective tool to support students' transition back to school during a pandemic. A well-written partnership pledge should outline the steps that teachers and students will take to create a supportive classroom climate and keep everyone safe.

Steps to Creating a Classroom Partnership Pledge

- Explain to students that a pledge is a promise that everyone in the classroom community will make to keep each other safe.
- Ask students their opinions about what teachers and students could do to keep each other safe.
- Provide examples if students have difficulty generating ideas.
- Summarize the ideas and lead students to consensus about what elements should be included in the pledge.
- Create a poster with students to display in the physical classroom and on the virtual classroom homepage.
- Share the partnership pledge with students' families.

The following are examples that may be included in a Classroom Partnership Pledge:

As a teacher, I pledge to:

- ✓ Maintain social distancing per school guidelines
- ✓ Wash my hands often, such as when I enter and exit a room
- ✓ Follow rules about wearing a mask
- ✓ Report to school personnel if I don't feel well, and stay home if I'm sick
- ✓ Help students stay calm and focused
- ✓ Promote friendships, mental health, and well-being
- ✓ Help students stay organized
- ✓ Allow students to take breaks
- ✓ Treat all students fairly
- ✓ Listen to students' ideas, feelings, and questions and respond with clear, supportive answers
- ✓ Check in on students during distance learning days
- ✓ Be flexible about assignment due dates when students need more time to do their best work
- ✓ Share student progress and/or concerns with families in a timely manner

As a student, I pledge to:

- ✓ Ask questions about safety if I don't understand
- ✓ Maintain social distancing per school guidelines
- ✓ Wash my hands often, such as when I enter or exit a room
- ✓ Follow rules about wearing a mask
- ✓ Report to school personnel if I don't feel well, and stay home if I'm sick
- ✓ Manage my own belongings
- ✓ Take pride in my work
- ✓ Ask for help when I need it
- ✓ Treat others how I want to be treated
- ✓ Listen to others' opinions and respond respectfully
- ✓ Work as a team with classmates
- ✓ Keep my hands to myself
- ✓ Participate in class discussions
- ✓ Arrive on time to virtual class sessions
- ✓ Turn assignments in on time

Discrimination and Stigma

Worry and fear about the transmission of COVID-19 can lead to discrimination and stigma for children, adolescents, and their families. Health status discrimination may occur when someone associates a certain population or nationality with COVID-19. Stigma can occur when someone has been quarantined or isolated because of COVID-19 and then resumes their usual activities. When attempting to identify and mitigate discrimination and stigma, consider the influences of various persons involved (e.g., student, teacher, family, friends), the multiple environments and contexts encountered (e.g., home, work, and school) and how tasks and activities (i.e., occupations) are performed. Below are some tips that teachers and other school staff may want to consider when addressing discrimination and stigma.

Impact of Discrimination and Stigma

- [Impacts health and well-being both directly and indirectly](#)
- [Results in reduced reporting of symptoms and seeking medical attention](#)
- [Leads to poor adherence to preventative guidelines to reduce transmission due to fear of stigmatization](#)

Children At-Risk for Discrimination and Stigma

- Children whose parents are health care workers
- Children whose parents are frontline workers (e.g., delivery drivers and grocery store clerks)
- Children who have difficulty following social distancing guidelines or wearing masks and other facial coverings
- Children who have a family member who was treated for COVID-19
- Children from certain racial and ethnic groups, such as Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Black or African Americans
- Children who cough or sneeze for reasons other than COVID-19
- Children who live in group homes or other congregate settings
- Children who are homeless

Forms of Discrimination and Stigma

- Avoidance or rejection by peers
- Rumor spreading
- Physical acts of aggression
- Verbal aggression
- Cyberbullying

Ways to Address Discrimination and Stigma

- Teach children, family, and staff about the transmission of COVID-19.
- Work collaboratively with school personnel (administrators, related service providers, paraprofessionals, and other educators) to implement a school-wide tiered approach to formally address discrimination and stigma, and provide individual and group intervention services when needed for positive peer interactions and friendship development.
 - Observe peer interactions and intervene at the first sign of discrimination and stigma.
 - Teach children at risk for discrimination and stigma to self-advocate and report concerns.
 - Encourage children who are bystanders to stand up for peers and report concerns.
 - Explain the consequences of discrimination and stigma, in developmentally appropriate terms.

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- Communicate with families about discrimination and stigma.

Resources

- [AOTA's Guide to Acknowledging the Impact of Discrimination, Stigma, and Implicit Bias on Service provision \(PDF\)](#)
- [AOTA's Return to School Guide Mental Health and Well-being Tip Sheet \(PDF\)](#)
- [AOTA's Resource on Bullying Prevention and Friendship Promotion \(PDF\)](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Reducing Stigma](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights—Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Schools while Protecting Students' Civil Rights](#)

Distance Learning

The impact of COVID-19 and the implementation of phased re-opening plans may require that some schooling take place at home through distance learning. Well-designed online courses and a proper home set up (environment) improve a student's (person) engagement in educational tasks (occupation). Below are considerations for school administrators, teachers, and school staff.

Habits and Routines

- Create and provide an [orientation for students](#) that addressed the tools and skills needed to be successful in an online learning environment.
- Set expectations for virtual class participation that promote a predictable routine (e.g., enter virtual classroom, turn camera on, mute microphone, participate in welcoming introduction).
 - Collaborate with all educators and paraprofessionals involved in distance learning and create consistent expectations across courses.
 - Communicate schedules and expectations to students and families through various methods (e.g., face-to-face instruction, email, flyers).
- Establish a consistent day of the week, across all courses, for assignment due dates.
- Routinely use tools to [encourage participation](#), such as polling response systems.

Student Engagement

- Use virtual classroom tools (e.g., discussion boards, group rooms, video chat) to facilitate connections between students and staff.
- Use instant messaging tools to check in on distance learning students throughout the school day.
- Provide opportunities (i.e., virtual office hours) for students to connect with you outside of instructional time.
- Check in with students and families about [how students are coping with the challenges associated with distance learning at home](#).
- Facilitate after school clubs and virtual lunchtime meet ups that may be successful despite social distancing.
- Provide groups that are facilitated by school counselors that allow students to discuss the disruptions.

Online Learning

- Identify students who need access to the Internet or an e-learning device to access virtual classrooms.
- Explore resources such as [Quality Matters Emergency Remote Instruction Checklists and Webinars](#).
- Incorporate [resources](#) that help design a student-focused [online quality course or classroom environment](#).
- Use standards and rubrics to design effective online classroom environments.
- [Address accessibility challenges](#) (e.g., universal design for learning, video captions and audio descriptions, color choice and contrast).
- Ensure access to Internet connectivity and [appropriate Wi-Fi bandwidth](#).
- Use [educational television access channels](#) if available in your community.
- Test virtual learning tools before using them during instruction.

Learning Spaces

- Encourage students to remove unnecessary clutter and distractions from the learning workspace.
- Provide a list of materials that should be readily available within the student's home work space (e.g., glue, pencils, paper).

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- Encourage students to organize the learning workspace so all learning tools (e.g., laptop, worksheets, books) are readily available.
 - Encourage families to set up learning workspaces that allow for [proper ergonomic positioning](#) to prevent fatigue.

Homework and Projects

- Ensure assignments can be reasonably completed by students in the home and online environments.
- Provide simple written, bulleted directions for all assignments.
- Provide video clarifications for complex assignments.

Accommodations

- Identify students who need support to utilize technology for learning or other accommodations.
- Divide longer assignments and learning activities into manageable components.
- Provide reminders, as well as flexible due dates for assignments.
- Allow additional time for online tests.
- Use visual supports and animations to explain difficult concepts.

Resources

- Council for Exceptional Children—[Best Practice for Educating Online](#)
- Michigan Association of Administrators and Superintendents—[National Distance Learning Resources](#)
- National Education Association—[Guide to Online High School Classes](#)

Masks and Facial Coverings

Considerations

Wearing masks and facial coverings help prevent the transmission of COVID-19. Most school districts will have established policies based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. When considering how to help children and adolescents wear masks and other face coverings, consider the health and preferences of the student, the multiple environments encountered (e.g., bus, pick up and drop off location), and the array of tasks and occupations that need to be performed while wearing a mask (e.g., eating and drinking, completing class assignments, talking with friends, participating in recess). Some tips for teachers and school personnel to help increase students' wearing of masks are listed below.

Choose Masks and Other Facial Coverings

- Choose a mask or other facial covering that covers both the nose and the mouth.
- Explore different types of masks and facial coverings, such as bandanas, gaiters, and scarves to find the most comfortable option.
- Consider soft fabric liners to reduce any unpleasant sensations of scratchy material on the lips and cheeks.
- Consider masks that show mouths through a [plastic window](#) to improve communication.
- Consider [neck strips](#) with buttons to loop the mask on, instead of looping over the ears.
- [Attach buttons to eye glasses with rubber bands](#) to allow masks to be connected to glasses, instead of looping over the ears.
- [Consider masks that connect to baseball caps](#) (where allowed) or [headbands](#).
- Consider masks that Velcro or tie at the back of the head.
- Explore masks and facial coverings made out of different fabric weights based on weather conditions.

Teach Students How to Wear Masks and Other Facial Coverings

- Support students with a consistent message about wearing masks and other facial coverings.
 - Be sure to find out whether any students have [accommodations or health needs that require them to go without a mask or other facial covering](#).
 - Ensure school personnel working with students who are unable to wear face coverings have appropriate PPE and training.
- Teach students to wear the mask or other facial covering so it covers both the nose and mouth at all times.
 - Demonstrate and [show pictures of correct and incorrect mask positioning](#).
- Work with occupational therapy practitioners to implement a wearing schedule and use other strategies (e.g., sensory desensitizing techniques for children with documented assessment results that suggest sensory defensiveness) to support students with anxiety or other concerns related to wearing face coverings.
- Practice all steps for managing masks independently, including putting them on, taking them off, packing for transport, and washing.
 - Remind students not to touch the outside of the mask that covers their mouth and nose. Instead, encourage students to put on and take off the mask by using the ear loop/ties.
 - Remind students to put on a clean mask after eating lunch.
- Explain the need to cover the nose and mouth throughout the day.
 - Incorporate stories, video models, and practice with toys (e.g., having a washable stuffed animal wear a mask).
- Post signs in the classroom and throughout the school that encourage and remind students to wear masks or other facial coverings.

Teach Students to Care for Masks

- Encourage students to take off masks at designated times by using the loops or the ties and avoiding the portion of the mask that covers the face to prevent the spread of germs.
- Encourage students to wear a fresh mask or facial covering to school each day.
- Encourage students to place soiled masks in sealable plastic bags for transport back home.
- Encourage families to [regularly launder masks](#).

Resources

- [Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19](#)
- [World Health Organization video: How to Wear a Fabric Mask](#)
- [Photos to remind students how to wear masks from Home Run Remington](#)
- [Autism Services, Education, Resources, and Training Collaborative \(ASERT\)'s Wearing a Mask Social Story \(available in English, Chinese, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, and Burmese\)](#)

Mental/Behavior Health and Well-Being

Considerations

Returning to the classroom following the COVID-19 quarantine requires attention that differs vastly from past considerations for teachers, school staff, and parents. Altered or eliminated required activities and tasks can lead to changes in mental and behavioral health. When determining how to provide the best support, consider contextual factors related to the environment (e.g., systems, policies, attitudes, barriers, and supports). Moreover, extended isolation, fear, and anxiety about possible exposure to COVID-19 influences student success and has significant mental health implications on adults and students alike. It is also vital to acknowledge the impact of new, inconsistent, or ineffective routines. This can affect the behavior, social participation, and well-being of everyone (e.g., students, educators, family members). In addition, witnessing recent events surrounding racial injustices further amplifies the impact of changes related to COVID-19. Below are some tips for school personnel and families to consider when supporting the mental and behavioral health and well-being of the school community.

District and School-Wide Initiatives

- Address behavioral management policies and procedures to limit distress, traumatization, or re-traumatization (e.g., support staff reinforcing rules for social distancing, concerned parents redirecting students, staff using appropriate strategies for children displaying aggression or challenges with emotional regulation).
- Incorporate training on approaches to meet the needs of students in various grade levels such as [trauma-informed care](#), self-regulation, mindfulness, and [social emotional learning](#).
- Identify safe spaces and times for students to take breaks and discuss the emotional impact of recent events.
- Allow opportunities for educators, administrators, and staff to address their personal concerns about returning to the school setting and for daily debriefing for peer support.
- Provide parent training opportunities and support programs on behavioral health, mental health, and well-being.
- Implement [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports \(PBIS\)](#).
- Ensure social distancing and environmental modifications support [inclusion of children with disabilities](#).
- Utilize occupational therapy (OT) practitioners to assist in preventing behavioral challenges impeding learning and interaction to:
 - Promote a supportive environment meeting the sensory needs of the students (i.e., addressing classroom set-up, designing sensory-friendly spaces and classrooms, providing virtual sensory-based activities during virtual or hybrid instruction).
 - Address behavioral challenges by training staff on self-regulation, mindfulness, [social emotional learning](#), and [sensory-based approaches](#) for students with documented assessment results of difficulties related to processing or integrating sensory information to facilitate calming, focusing, and attending.
 - Utilize social stories to explain unfamiliar concepts (e.g., social distancing) and to address the emotional needs of younger students, and those with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
 - Make contact with students on a one-to-one basis and in small groups to promote resilience and self-advocacy.
 - Provide education to families, educators, and students on the [impact of acute-stress and traumatic experiences on brain development, learning, and behavior](#).

Identify Students At Risk

- Acknowledge students' unique exposure to acute stress and adverse and traumatic events:
 - [Grief and loss](#) secondary to family member(s) being diagnosed, quarantined, or dying due to COVID-19
 - Distress due to having parents on the front line (e.g., health care workers, grocery store clerks)
 - Fear regarding [discrimination and stigma](#) secondary to being:
 - A Black student impacted by protests against racial injustices and the increased likelihood of contracting COVID-19

- An Asian American and Pacific Islander student due to stigma of being linked to the origin of COVID-19
- A history of bullying or being bullied, or being a bystander to bullying
 - Students at [risk](#) for being bullied include those with physical and/or developmental disabilities, behavioral challenges, and emotional/mental health diagnoses; coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds; identifying as a member or being suspected of being a member of the LGBTQIA+ community; being socially immature; and/or requiring additional social and emotional support
- Starting at a new school (i.e., relocated, moving between grades, transitioning from junior high to high school)
- Become aware of and acknowledge the [risk factors and early signs of mental illness](#) such as internalizing behaviors (e.g., withdrawal, avoidance); externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression); acute stress; or a history of depression, anxiety, or trauma.

Create Supportive Environments

- Promote positive mental health by creating a sense of [safety](#) and security.
 - Affirm positive and prosocial behaviors.
 - Adopt equitable school discipline procedures. Enforce procedures consistently.
 - [Foster kindness](#).
 - Reconsider the role of school security personnel beyond discipline.
 - Follow a consistent schedule and notify students of changes and disruptions when possible.
- Facilitate social connectedness.
 - Encourage all school personnel to develop [safe and caring relationships](#) with students.
 - Promote friendships by helping students identify others with common interests.
 - Communicate with family members regularly.
 - Use peer supports in the classroom and on the playground.
- Provide opportunities for students to experience mastery and agency.
 - Create a culture that celebrates inquiry and curiosity.
 - Encourage students to set goals.
 - Allow students to make choices about activities when possible throughout the day.
 - Teach students how to utilize resources (e.g., dictionaries, class notes, websites, books, peers) to address academic challenges.
 - [Encourage positive self-talk](#).
 - Provide opportunities for students to identify and correct their mistakes.
- [Allow students to experience positive emotions each day](#).
 - Allow all students to experience [recess](#) adhering to social distancing guidelines.
 - Provide opportunities for students to [engage with peers during lunchtime](#), including virtually.
 - Routinely use [strategies that cultivate a sense of calm and reduce stress](#).
 - [Offer opportunities for students to move their bodies throughout the day](#).

Services for Students Displaying Mental Health and/or Behavioral Conditions

- Develop processes for students, families, and educators to report concerns about individual students and threats to school safety.
- Improve access to school-based mental health services and providers (e.g., school social workers, counselors, psychologists, and occupational therapy practitioners) across school teams.
- Recognize the need for developing, or updating, an individual education plan (IEP) or 504 plan.
- Create plans in collaboration with students, parents, and teachers to educate students about their triggers and match them to the most effective and efficient coping strategies.

- Support students' development of self-advocacy skills.
- Collaborate with community agencies to develop [Wellness, Recovery, Action Plans \(WRAP\)](#).

Resources

- American Occupational Therapy Association—[School Mental Health Toolkit](#)
- National Association of School Psychologists—[A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools](#)

Supporting Students With Autism

Considerations

Children and youth with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may struggle to adapt to changes in everyday life brought about by COVID-19. When determining how to help children and adolescents with ASD, consider the various persons involved (e.g., student, teacher, occupational therapy practitioner, counselor), the multiple environments encountered (e.g., classroom, gymnasium, therapy gym), and the array of tasks and occupations performed (e.g., learning, playing). Below are some tips for teachers and school staff to consider when working with students with ASD.

Understanding COVID-19

- Use stories to explain the transmission of COVID-19 and to provide reassurance about personal health and safety.
- Provide visual supports, cue cards, stories, and videos to convey rules related to social distancing.
- Use visual supports and timers during [handwashing](#).
- Use visual timers, schedules, and calendars to explain and mark the passage of time (e.g., how many days before returning to school).
- Model and practice the use of personal protective equipment such as masks and other facial coverings.

Supporting Self-Regulation

- Incorporate sensory strategies to proactively support self-regulation throughout the school day.
- [Collaborate with occupational therapy practitioners](#) to develop in-class activities and resources to support self-regulation.
- Create a [self-management](#) plan (e.g., strategies to cope with emotions and exhibit school-appropriate behaviors) as appropriate.
- Encourage the expression of feelings and to self-advocate for needs.
- Provide opportunities to request and take breaks throughout the day.
- Incorporate physical activity, such as stretching and movement breaks, throughout the school day.
- Use apps to encourage self-monitoring.
- Encourage consistent routines.

Promoting Mental Health

- Provide opportunities to make choices.
- Prepare students to cope with unexpected disruptions in routine.
- Monitor changes in emotions and behaviors, and [access mental health services](#) if needed.
- Encourage engagement in activities that promote happiness.

Engaging in Distance Learning

- Facilitate independent work by providing [structured work boxes](#).
- Use [visual schedules](#) and pictures to offer choices for break activities.
- Identify [activity choices](#) to address academics, life skills, and leisure pursuits.
- Use structured systems to encourage engagement in learning activities, such as [first-then boards](#) and checklists.

Facilitating Social Participation

- Support [social and emotional learning](#).
 - Use apps and video chat tools to facilitate connections between students when socially distanced.
- Encourage classmates to use text and instant messaging tools to ask one another for assistance with assignments.
- Encourage families to schedule virtual meeting times for students when school is not in session.

General Resources

- American Occupational Therapy Association—[Strategies for Students with Autism](#) (PDF)
- American Occupational Therapy Association—[Students with Disabilities in Post-Secondary Settings: How Occupational Therapy Can Help](#) (PDF)
- [UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute Autism Team—Supporting Individuals With Autism through Uncertain Times](#)
- [Bridging Apps](#), a program of Easter Seals Greater Houston, provides resources, education, and information on apps and mobile devices

Social Stories Resources

- Autism Services, Education, Resources, and Training Collaborative (ASERT)—[Social Distancing Social Story](#) (available in English, Chinese, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, and Burmese)
- Autism Services, Education, Resources, and Training Collaborative (ASERT)—[Wearing a Mask Social Story](#) (available in English, Chinese, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, and Burmese)
- Easter Seals Illinois Autism Partnership—[Coronavirus Story for Younger Children](#) (PDF)
- Easter Seals Illinois Autism Partnership—[Coronavirus Story of High School Children and Young Adults](#) (PDF)
- Easter Seals Illinois Autism Partnership—[Social Distancing Story for Younger Children](#) (PDF)
- Easter Seals Illinois Autism Partnership—[Social Distancing Story for High School Children and Young Adults](#) (PDF)

Video Resources

- Munson Health Care—[Videos Explaining Social Distancing to Kids](#) (includes videos for different age groups)

Resources for Developing Routines

- American Occupational Therapy Association—[Mealtime Routines for Children](#) (PDF)
- American Occupational Therapy Association—[Bath Time Routines for Children](#) (PDF)
- American Occupational Therapy Association—[Bedtime Routines for Children](#) (PDF)
- American Occupational Therapy Association—[Morning Routines for Children](#) (PDF)
- Nebraska Autism Spectrum Disorders Network—[Rules and Routines](#)

Tips for Families: Helping Children and Adolescents Transition Back to School

Considerations

Families play an important role in helping children and adolescents understand how COVID-19 is transmitted and the precautions they can take to reduce the spread of the virus. When determining how to help children and adolescents transition, consider the various persons involved (e.g., student, teacher, paraprofessional), the multiple environments encountered (e.g., classroom, gymnasium), and the array of tasks and occupations performed (e.g., learning, playing). Below are some tips for families when helping children and adolescents transition back to school.

Talk About COVID-19

- Provide [truthful and accurate information about COVID-19](#) that is at the child or adolescent's developmental level.
- Invite questions and recognize opportunities to discuss worries and concerns.
- Help children and adolescents feel a sense of control by exploring [habits they can use to prevent the spread of COVID-19](#), like wearing a mask and washing hands regularly.
- Share mood boosting [strategies](#) that you use to help keep yourself safe and calm.
- Explain how [some people need to take extra precautions](#) to reduce their risk of contracting COVID-19.
- Discuss the roles and responsibilities of school personnel in helping to make sure that children and adolescents are safe at school.

Practice Healthy Habits and Routines at Home and in the Community

- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or with an elbow.
- [Follow good hand hygiene routines](#), like washing hands with soap and water before eating, after going to the bathroom, and when you come home after being out.
 - Use hand sanitizer if hand washing isn't possible.
- If gatherings are allowed, avoid crowds and big groups (like parties, playdates, and get togethers) with people who are sick or have recently tested positive for COVID-19.
- Follow [social distancing guidelines](#) when out in the community.

Develop New Habits and Routines for Returning to School

- [Practice wearing masks or other facial coverings](#) for extended periods during different activities (e.g., reading, engaging in social media, talking with family members) and in different environments (e.g., inside buildings, while outside).
- Teach children to treat masks and other facial coverings with the same care they would use for prescription eyeglasses (e.g., do not play with masks or remove at inappropriate times).
- Send spare masks or other facial coverings and extra hygiene supplies (e.g., hand sanitizer, wipes) to school.
- Demonstrate how to [put on and take off masks and other facial coverings](#) and how to store them when they are not in use.
- Ask children and adolescents how they are feeling on a daily basis and monitor for [symptoms related to COVID-19](#).
- Take daily temperatures if required by the school district.
- [Develop a plan](#) should someone in the family become ill with COVID-19.
- Become familiar with the school's policies and procedures for reporting illnesses, and add school numbers and email addresses to phone contacts.

- Monitor school newsletters, emails, and websites for updates regarding schedule changes and school closures.
- Communicate with school personnel regarding the physical assistance needed for students disabilities (e.g., help using the bathroom or eating) and discuss the types of personal protective equipment and hygiene practices that will be used during such times.

Prepare for E-Learning/Distance Learning Days

- Develop a plan for childcare or adolescent supervision on e-learning/distance learning days.
- Establish [regular times for waking up and going to sleep](#).
- Develop an easy-to-follow [daily schedule](#) that includes periods for school work and for breaks.
 - Set a consistent start time and end time.
 - Identify and prioritize key assignments that need to be completed.
- [Set up work space](#) for e-learning/distance learning.
- Use timers to help with focus and staying on-task.
- Provide opportunities for children and adolescents to move their bodies throughout the day.
- Help children and adolescents stay connected with friends through online classroom breakout groups, messaging, and video chats.
- Recognize that boredom may occur, and encourage children and adolescents to engage in a variety of different types of leisure activities (e.g., games, puzzles, cooking, or crafting).

General Resources

- [American Occupational Therapy Association-Resource Guide for Families During COVID-19](#) (PDF)
- [American Occupational Therapy Association—4 Tips for Families During COVID-19](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Checklist for Parents](#)
- [Healthychildren.org 2019 Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network’s Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with COVID-19](#)

Resources for Talking About COVID-19 With Children and Adolescents

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Talking with Children About COVID-19](#)
- [CNN/Sesame Street Coronavirus Town Hall](#)
- [Mayo Clinic’s How to Talk to Your Kids About COVID-19](#)
- [National Public Radio’s Just for Kids: A Comic Exploring the New Coronavirus](#)
- [New York Times Talking to Teens and Tweens about Coronavirus](#)

Resources for Healthy Habits and Routines

- American Occupational Therapy Association’s Establishing Bedtime Routines (in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)) (PDF)
- [American Occupational Therapy Association’s Establishing Morning Routines for Children](#) (PDF)
- [American Occupational Therapy Association’s Tips for Homework Success](#) (PDF)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Cover Your Coughs and Sneezes video](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Guidance for Social Distancing](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Wash Your Hands video](#)
- [Cincinnati Children’s Hospital video About Social Distancing](#)
- [WCVB Channel 5 Boston’s How to Get a Child to Wear a Mask](#)
- [We Wear Masks: A Social Story About Wearing Masks](#)

Tips for Teachers: Helping Children and Adolescents Transition Back to School

Considerations

Teachers play an important role in helping children and adolescents transition back to school by creating a safe and supportive classroom community. When deciding how to help children and adolescents transition, consider the various persons involved (e.g., student, teacher, paraprofessional); whether learning will take place at school, at home, or in both locations; and the array of tasks and activities performed (e.g., learning, playing). Below are some tips for teachers when helping children and adolescents transition back to school.

Create a Partnership Pledge

- Explain to students that a pledge is a promise that everyone in the classroom community will make to keep each other safe.
- Ask students their opinions about what teachers and students could do to keep each other safe.
- Provide examples if students have difficulty generating ideas.
- Summarize the ideas and lead students to consensus about what elements should be included in the pledge.
- Create a poster with students to display in the physical classroom and on the virtual classroom homepage.
- Share the partnership pledge with students' families.

Consider Safe Ways to Promote In-Person Learning and Organized Activities

- Consider the likelihood (probability) of increased disease transmission and the impact (consequences) of decisions related to in-person learning and organized activities.
- Discuss the American Academy of Pediatrics guidance related to the [benefits of in-person learning](#) with teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals.
- Review [considerations for in-person services](#) and [decision guides related to reopening services for children](#) with the occupational therapy practitioner and educational team.
- Assess the risk of conducting in-person learning and organized activities (e.g., projects, clubs, sports) with a [three-dimensional risk assessment](#), which includes contact intensity, number of contacts, and modification potential.
 - Contact intensity: rated (low, medium, high) according to student and staff contact type (i.e., close to distant) and duration (i.e., brief to prolonged)
 - Number of contacts: rated (low, medium, high) according to the number of people in an area at the same time
 - Modification potential: ability to mitigate risks with safety precautions (see [Hierarchy of Controls](#)) such removing the hazard (e.g., social distancing), isolating students and staff from the hazard (e.g., Plexiglass, reconfiguring space), changing the task (e.g., modifying the activity, [cleaning](#), handwashing), and using personal protective equipment (PPE) (e.g., face coverings)

Example: Risk Assessment to Guide Decision Making Related to In-Person Extracurricular Activities (e.g., clubs, sports)

Service Area	Contact Intensity	Number of Contacts	Modification Potential
Wrestling Club	High, due to close proximity of athletes and 3-hour timeframe	Low, due to small number of athletes and staff in large gym	Low, due to inability to socially distance, isolate the hazard, and use PPE

Service Area	Contact Intensity	Number of Contacts	Modification Potential
Debate Club	Low, due to ability to socially distance during a 1-hour timeframe	Medium, due to moderate number of participants in classroom setting	High, due to ability to social distance, reconfigure space, increase cleaning/handwashing, and use face coverings
Greenhouse Club	Low, due to ability to socially distance during a 1.5-hour timeframe	Low, due small number of participants in large outdoor setting	High, due to ability to social distance, reconfigure space, increase cleaning/handwashing, and use face coverings

In the example above, school staff decided that only the Debate and Greenhouse clubs would meet in person, as long as current federal and state guidelines allowed, secondary to risk and mitigation potential.

Create a Supportive Community for Learning

- Provide opportunities for pairs of students to share thoughts and ideas for a few minutes at a time about what they are learning (i.e., [think-pair-share](#)).
- Encourage students to share stories about how lessons connect to their lives outside of school.
- Incorporate [“jigsaw” learning activities](#) that involve 3 to 4 students in breakout groups working together to teach each other concepts (e.g., each student reads a different portion of a chapter and then explains the content to their group members).
- Create time for socialization during virtual learning (e.g., allow students to [“show and tell”](#) their pets and favorite belongings, talk about their interests).
- Provide students with opportunities to reflect on and share their perspectives about learning through journal activities and class discussions.

Support Students

- Listen to students’ concerns about transitioning between different learning environments (e.g., school, home, online).
- Be honest about unknowns related to how the school year will progress, and provide updates to school plans as soon as feasible.
- Help [children](#) and [teen and young adult](#) students [cope with uncertainties](#).
- Model effective coping and self-care strategies.
- Introduce students to [realistic thinking skills](#) and pay attention to unhelpful self-talk.
- Teach students the necessary [steps to solve problems](#).

Resources

- Anxiety Canada—[7 Tips for Educators Returning to School](#)
- International Society for Technology in Education—[3 Ways to Make Remote Learning More Engaging](#)

Transitions

Considerations

Returning to school after extended breaks is often stressful for children and adolescents. More attention may need to be given to transitioning back to school this year due to COVID-19, phased reopenings, and hybrid learning arrangements. Families play an important role in helping children and adolescents transition back to school. It is important to consider the individuals involved (e.g., student, teacher, paraprofessional), the multiple environments encountered (e.g., classroom, gymnasium; virtual environment) and the array of tasks and activities performed (e.g., learning, playing) when thinking about transitions. Below are some tips for families when helping children and adolescents transition back to school.

Student Supports

- [Talk to students about fears, anxieties, and stressors related to starting a new school year.](#)
- Provide opportunities (e.g., virtual or in-person tours) for students to preview the school environment and their new school schedule.
- Plan introductory meetings to share information about students with teachers and related service providers.
- Work with school personnel to monitor and address concerns or changes in mental, physical, or behavioral health.
- [Collaborate with school personnel](#) to document changes in service needs in individualized education plans (IEPs) and 504 plans.
- Explore different [resources and technologies](#) to provide special education services in the virtual environment.
- Explain school rules and classroom expectations using [social stories](#), videos, and other visual supports.
- Provide opportunities to meet classmates prior to the first day of school and throughout the year, either virtually or while following distancing guidelines.
- Check in with students at the end of each school day. Debrief, and address questions, concerns, and feelings related to returning to school.

Environmental Supports

- Ensure the learning environment provides a sense of [safety and security](#).
- Offer [alternative seating options](#) to meet students' specific needs and ease the transition back into the classroom or during virtual learning.
- Review and provide visual aides directing movement between school environments such as posting one-way signs, taping paths on the floor, and providing aides to monitor social distancing while standing in lines.
- Use [visual timers and countdown clocks](#) to help transition students from one activity to the next.
- Encourage participation in [virtual classroom environments](#) that promote student interaction and engagement.
- Create a [work area and a break area](#) when engaged in distance learning at home.

Activity and Task Support

- Develop [schedules](#) to support transitions from home to school each day or to virtual learning environments.
- Incorporate breaks and quiet moments (e.g., simply sitting still after awakening, meditation, mindfulness) into the time before starting activities and throughout the day.
- Consider [visual schedules and checklists](#) to guide the completion of activities for younger learners and those with intellectual disabilities.
- Utilize transitional objects (i.e., those that provide comfort and a sense of security) or representational objects (i.e., those that evoke the upcoming activity, such as a paint brush to indicate art class) during transitions to

school or between classroom activities and school environments.

- Schedule meals, snacks, bathroom breaks, and downtime during virtual learning.
- Provide opportunities for peer interaction during lunchtime and [recess](#) that support social distancing (e.g., mindful walks, [online games](#), virtual meetups).
- Establish routines during distance learning that cue the [start and end of the school day](#).

Resources

- AOTA—[Successful Participation at School: Strategies for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders](#)
- AOTA—[Transitions for Children and Youth: How Occupational Therapy Can Help](#)
- Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules—[Supporting Individuals With Autism Through Uncertain Times](#) (includes translated materials in 10 different languages)
- Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI)—[Support for Families During the COVID-19 Crisis](#)

Transportation

Considerations

Transportation routines need to be modified to meet guidelines associated with minimizing the transmission of COVID-19. Many transportation providers will rely on students to adhere to social distancing and infection control policies and procedures established by school districts in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. When determining how to help children and adolescents safely use transportation, consider the various persons involved (e.g., student, bus driver, paraprofessional), the multiple environments encountered (e.g., bus, pick up and drop off locations), and the array of tasks and occupations performed (e.g., waiting in line, boarding and disembarking the bus). Below are some tips that teachers and other school staff may consider when addressing transportation routines.

Modify or Change the Bus Environment

- Install Plexiglas shield around the bus driver seat.
- Reduce the number of students on the bus by staggering schedules or making multiple trips.
- Assign bus seats.
- Mark seats with tape or visual markers so students know where to sit and where not to sit to maintain social distance.
- Seat students wearing masks or other facial coverings. Seat one student in each seat.
- Seat students who are unable to wear masks or other facial coverings one per seat.
- Alternate students in every other row, and by window and aisle seats.
- Seat siblings or students who reside in the same home together.
- Between trips, use [effective procedures and supplies](#) to clean and disinfect high-touch point areas, such as handrails and seats.
- Drive with bus windows open (as weather permits) and use fans to circulate air.
- Maintain bus attendance logs to assist with possible contact tracing.

Prepare Students for Transportation to and From School

- Encourage students to [wash and sanitize hands](#) before they enter transportation, and after they get to school or back home.
- Provide students with spare masks or other facial coverings in case they get lost or wet from rain or snow.
- Provide parents and guardians with detailed information regarding [infection control policies and procedures during bus transportation](#).
- Provide parents and guardians with detailed information regarding drop-off and pick-up procedures, including traffic flow and whether they may bring their child into the school building.

Prepare Students for Waiting

- Rehearse strategies for waiting for the bus or at car pool lines, while maintaining a [safe social distance](#).
- Use visual markers (e.g., chalk, tape, cones) to help students maintain appropriate spacing.
- Use snapshots, written checklists, and verbal reminders to help students manage backpacks and supplies independently (reminding them why it's important to not ask friends to hold items or offer to carry things for others).

Students With Special Needs

- For each student with special needs, review the individualized education plan (IEP) to determine if transportation

services are listed as related services.

- Provide [travel training](#) to students with developmental and cognitive disabilities so they can learn how to safely follow transportation routines.
- Use assigned seats on buses and vans to help students maintain social distancing.
- For those who rely on touch for balance or bus entry/exit, develop routines to wash hands before and after, and pack gloves that can be kept in a bag and used specifically during transportation.
- Alert bus drivers and bus assistants to special accommodations related to students' ability to follow social distancing and infection control procedures.
- To mitigate the isolation of sitting alone, consider packing an easy-to-wash stuffed animal as a "travel buddy" to sit in the adjacent seat, or provide the student with an electronic device in a cleanable case.

Resources

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—What Transit Operators Need to Know about COVID-19](#)
- [Easter Seals—Tips for Preparing Your Child to Ride the School Bus](#)
- [Education Week—Guidance for Social Distancing on School Buses](#)
- [National Association for Pupil Transportation—COVID-19 Guidance](#)
- [National Association for Pupil Transportation—Transportation for Students With Disabilities](#)
- [Safe Routes to School: Recommendations for Safe Routes School Programming](#)