

Caring for Children During Extended Family Confinement

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The following document has been developed by Jesse Coffino and Krystina Tapia in consultation with Cheng Xueqin, Director Anji Childhood Education Research Center, Superintendent of Early Education (retired), Anji County Department of Education, Zhejiang Province, China.

This is an evolving document shared publicly, but under review and revision by a group of educators, psychologists, physicians, and parents.

The document is based on the Anji Play approach to education, developed by Cheng in Anji County, China. The approach centers on five core principles: love, risk, joy, engagement, and reflection. More information can be found [here](#).

In this document:

- [A note to schools](#)
- [A note to families and teachers](#)
- [Taking care of yourself so you can take care of others](#)
- [Healthy meals and meal routines](#)
- [Purposeful plans and maintaining connections](#)
- [Roles, responsibilities, and expectations](#)
- [Observe, and record play, provide materials in response to observations](#)
- [Schedules, noting change, maintaining the environment, and an awareness of time](#)
- [Sample schedule](#)
- [Tools and materials](#)
- [Further reading and resources, notes](#)

Important: Regularly check for updates from local and regional authorities.

A note to schools:

Your program may be required to suspend regular operations for an indeterminate period of time in response to guidance or orders related to the prevention of the transmission of one or more communicable diseases.

During this time, your communities, including students, staff, administrators, and families may be required to be confined to single family units in and around their homes.

Because of your relationship with the children and families that make up your community, you can play a leading role in supporting their physical and mental health during this time.

A note to families and teachers:

During periods of close confinement, the most important factors in maintaining mental and physical health are maintaining a proper diet, access to medication, access to natural environments, fresh air, and sunlight, exercise, consistent routines, and contact with other people. Creating ways to stay engaged with and aware of your environment, maintaining an experience of freedom and efficacy, going outside as much as possible, and staying internally aware of the passage of time can be the difference between hope and despair.

Establishing consistent and responsive (flexible) routines that allow your child the greatest degree of mastery, and awareness of their responsibility to the reasonable needs of the family (group), also forms the crucial building block of healthy learning environments for young children.

When spending extended periods of time with a numerically limited group of people in a bounded, indoor space, patience, listening, and reflection are critical conditions for creating and maintaining a safe and healthy environment.

Being aware of your child's needs, interests and abilities will help you create reasonable expectations, involve everyone in productive tasks that serve the needs of the group, and may make you more aware of what your child is capable of achieving.

During this time follow and engage with your interests and your child's interests and listen fully to what they have to say: research and explore topics of interest, make things, make and listen to music, dance, write songs and stories, take things apart and put things back together, talk

and listen, explore, organize, document and change your environment, try new recipes, bake, organize photos, etc. Do your best to maintain intrinsic motivation, intentionality and planning in your activities. Allow for extensive, uninterrupted, self-directed play and exploration for both your child and yourself.

Many tools may be at your disposal during this time that will allow you to deepen your understanding of your children, support their joyful learning, growth, and development and your growth as a family, and deepen connections both within your family and with your child's larger school community.

During this time avoid oversleeping, reliance on habit forming activities, and the use of rewards or punishments to motivate behavior. Any "rewards" (like television or dessert) should be enjoyed by all at the end of the day to cap off the day's routines. To help maintain a generally positive outlook in the face of uncertainty, avoid fixed thinking, for example "things won't change," "he will never be able to do that," "she will never stop doing that," etc.

Engage with your family and environment by disengaging from rewards-based activities and technologies: limit the use of portable electronic devices to frequently check social media or email communications. Make regular times to check public services, health, and emergency related information, and share what's happening at home with friends and family.

Make your larger goals 1.) increasing your child's ability to be deeply engaged in their own activities without the need of your participation or intervention, and 2.) increasing your child's ability to complete necessary, daily tasks with minimal prompting or oversight. This type of

engagement and inquiry is the deepest form of learning. During this time, do not worry about your child learning specific academic subjects or obtaining specific learning outcomes.

Many adults are solely responsible for children and/or other adults in their care. Many adults will be required to work or otherwise respond to needs external to their family unit during this time.

For this reason, we encourage all parents to consult this document, adapt as necessary and practical, and maintain contact with other adults for listening and support.

Taking care of yourself so you can take care of others:

- Spending time with children over extended periods of time requires patience, energy, calm, and the ability to listen and respond in a clear and effective manner.
- During this time, do your best to stay on the same page with other adults in your family regarding plans, boundaries, and decision-making. Make decisions together, in advance, agree on those decisions and follow-through. When possible, do not discuss these decisions in front of children if there is likely to be disagreement.
- Make yourself aware of appropriate expectations of your child based on their age. See: www.medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002456.htm Minimize frustration by understanding what to reasonably expect from your child.
- Create bounded time and space to pursue your own tasks, projects, or simply take a deep breath. Make sure to communicate with other responsible adults in the household when you need a break or time to yourself.

Healthy meals and meal routines:

- Spend time engaged as a family in discussing and planning meals, choosing recipes, making meals, and cleaning-up afterwards.
- Spend time as a family cleaning, organizing, and making an inventory of food-stuffs in the home. Involve children as much as possible in completing meal and food related tasks with help, and on their own.
- Tasks can include: children serving themselves, bringing plates to and from the table, sweeping, wiping surfaces, retrieving, measuring, prepping, and storing ingredients, cooking, dish-washing and drying, etc.
- Give children sufficient time to complete these tasks. Do not rush children.

Purposeful plans and maintaining connections:

- Schedule regular times to connect with your extended family, friends, and your child's friends. Create shared calendars to schedule video calls, create shared folders to upload photos and videos, create shared documents of activities, ideas, recipes, and other experiences/discoveries.
- Teachers can schedule daily video check-in times with groups of families to learn about that day's play and experiences, look at photos and videos from the day, check-in about health and well-being, share news and updates, and generally maintain the school-family-teacher-child connection.
- Teachers and families can suggest books that all families can read and reflect on together during multi-family video calls.

Resources:

- www.calendar.google.com (calendars)
- www.drive.google.com (file sharing and document creation)
- www.zoom.us (multi-party video meetings)

Roles, responsibilities, and expectations:

- Set basic expectations during the period of confinement like taking care of yourself, your family, and your home, everyone takes part in getting everything done, etc.
- Even if these are already values in your family, it is helpful to reinforce them simply and clearly as you begin a prolonged period of time in close proximity.
- Hold everyone accountable to these expectations, especially yourself, in a loving, patient, and understanding way.
- Make sure that all responsibilities and expectations can be clearly and simply explained.
- Avoid overly complicated, detailed, or changing responsibilities, rules and expectations.

Observe, and record play, provide materials in response to observations:

- Your goal should be to encourage your child's deep, extended and uninterrupted engagement in activities of their own choice. This requires stepping back and observing play, not interrupting play. When possible, use your smartphone to record extended videos of play and take unposed pictures of your child engaged in play. Focus on recording their problem solving and discoveries as they happen.
- Ideally your child will engage in play without prompting in response to the environment and materials available to them. Some children are accustomed to continuous adult engagement in their activities. Use supportive language to encourage children to play on their own and solve problems on their own. For this reason, avoid seeking out pre-planned activities, and activity ideas that have set instructions or otherwise require adult guidance. However, do encourage children to participate in your own hobbies, interests, and activities.
- Children need to move and challenge themselves physically. Consider allowing children to jump off of couches, stairs and other raised surfaces. Provide pillows and other soft objects. Intervene only when absolutely necessary for reasons of safety.
- Conflicts, arguments, and frustrations will arise with and between children. Do your best to listen to these conflicts and give them space to resolve themselves before stepping in. When stepping in, clearly and calmly explain your reasoning.
- Provide materials that are open-ended, minimally structured, and that can be combined together in play. Add materials based on your child's observed needs during play. (See list of possible materials below.)
- Provide materials in a clear and simply organized way so that your child can independently return all play materials to their original location after play.

Schedules, noting change, maintaining the environment, and an awareness of time:

- Make a basic daily schedule together as a family that reflects your pre-existing routines, tasks, chores, and that allows for long, natural transitions between activities. When possible, focus on everyone in the family participating in these routines and tasks, rather than assigning specific tasks to individuals.
- Integrate activities that mark time and allow you to respond, maintain, or observe changes in the environment, for instance raising and caring for plants, small pets, etc.
- Be flexible in providing necessary support to your child's need for play and activity, for instance rearranging furniture to make more space for indoor play, forts from pillows and sheets, etc.
- Create wall space for posting your child's drawings, notes, and artwork, regularly add new work to this space. Spend time looking at this artwork and listening to your child describe its content to you. When possible write down these descriptions.
- Make journals and notebooks for drawing, measuring, tracking these phenomena including weather conditions, food and water consumption, body temperature, consider making large simple wall calendars with days of week that can be filled in with child's drawings of the day's weather, etc.

Sample schedule: (make your own schedule that is responsive to your needs and interests)

6:30-7:30 AM: wake up, blinds open, lights on, toilet, brush teeth, dress, make bed.

7:30-8:00 AM: all put away dishes, prepare breakfast together based on the menu decided the night before.

8:00-8:30 AM: eat breakfast, conversation, all clear table.

8:30-9:00 AM: all do dishes, wipe table, sweep around table, separate garbage from meal, mark calendar/note weather/attend to plants, prepare snack, take and record temperature.

9:00-9:15 AM: transition to play: jumping/running/wrestling/pillows (soft space) or block play or or drawing or play with clay/play-doh, etc. based on observed interest of child/children and discussion from breakfast.

9:00-10:00 AM*: child initiated and led play, adult observation and recording

10:00-10:15 AM: bathroom, snack

10:15-10:45 AM: drawing picture of play or other reflective activity, reading time

10:45-11:15 AM: video meeting with classmates and families

11:30-12:15 PM: lunch

12:15-12:45 PM: lunch clean up, bathroom, self-care, take and record temperature

12:45-1:15 PM: quiet activity like puzzles, etc.

1:15-1:30 PM: transition to nap

1:30-3:00 PM: stories** and nap, adults - print out photos of morning play, upload videos and photos to group, check and update calendars, other planning

3:00-3:30 PM: wake-up, bathroom and snack (discuss dinner preparations)

3:30-3:45 PM: transition to play: jumping/running/wrestling/pillows (soft space) or block play or or drawing or play with clay/play-doh, etc. based on observed interest of child/children and discussion from breakfast.

3:30-5:30 PM*: child initiated and led play, adult observation and recording, and child and adult projects.

5:00-6:00 PM: dinner preparations

5:30-6:15 PM: family prepare dinner together, set table, hand washing, take and record temperature.

6:15-7:00 PM: dinner, conversation

7:00-7:15 PM: all clear table, sweep, wipe table

7:15-8:00 PM: clean up of dishes and kitchen, sweep kitchen, inventory and set up kitchen for next day together and/or watch single episode of age appropriate series together (minimum one adult actively and uninterruptedly watching with child).

8:00-8:30 PM: bathroom, brush teeth, other bedtime preparations

8:30-9:15 PM: reading** and conversations

9:15-10:15 PM: adult conversation and planning

*time can be extended based on child engagement **age appropriate chapter books, in addition to picture books, can create a sense of expectation for tomorrow.

Types of tools and materials that can support your child's interests and your interests:

- Smartphone to record play
- Computer with webcam to take part in video gatherings
- Color printer to print out photos
- Putty for hanging pictures, drawings, calendars, artwork on wall surfaces
- Butcher paper or large post-it notes for calendars, etc.
- Paper of different sizes, types, and qualities
- Pens, crayons, markers, colored pencils chalk (can be organized by color)
- Creative supplies like paint, scissors, glue, tape, popsicle sticks, rulers, stapler, etc.
- Clay or playdough (<https://tinkerlab.com/no-cook-play-dough>)
- Finger paint (<https://tinkerlab.com/paint-recipe-kids-homemade-finger-paint/>)
- Blocks of different types, including unit blocks, duplo blocks, magnatiles, lincoln logs, etc.
- Fabric of varying sizes and qualities
- Rope and string
- Binoculars, magnifying glasses, scales, measuring tapes, etc.
- Cardboard boxes
- Other cardboard (including toilet paper and paper towel rolls) and packaging materials
- Food containers and pots and pans, including plastic containers, cardboard oatmeal tubes, etc.
- Non-food materials for sensory experiences, including small rocks and pebbles, sand, dirt, water, hydrobubbles (<http://hydrobubbles.com/>) etc., and containers to pour, dump, measure, etc.
 - Soil, small plant containers, saved seeds and seeds from your pantry, spray bottle and watering can (www.wikihow.com/Germinate-Seeds)

- Soft objects to jump into and build with (pillows, comforters, blankets)
- Books of all types (www.bookriot.com/2017/11/10/free-childrens-books-online/)
- Maps and globes
- Puzzles, cards and board games

Further reading and resources:

- Child Development Basics: www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/facts.html
- Supporting Families During COVID-19 (Child Mind Institute):
<https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/?fbclid=IwAR1UbB68BTT E8D8BVgBF7gqVzScRDqVoaZ64B9kN7wRAYQOJJBwNL8DHYBY#.XnO-qiyVOH8.facebook>
[ok](#)
- Rights and Responsibilities of True Play: www.trueplayfoundation.org/rights

Notes:

- Remember that it takes children time to process what you are saying and to respond.
Give them time to respond and finish their response.
- Be aware that children respond to your emotional state and how you communicate information and expectations.
- Provide children with clear choices between two options, i.e. “you can clean up on your own, or we can clean up together” (in either instance child must clean up).