

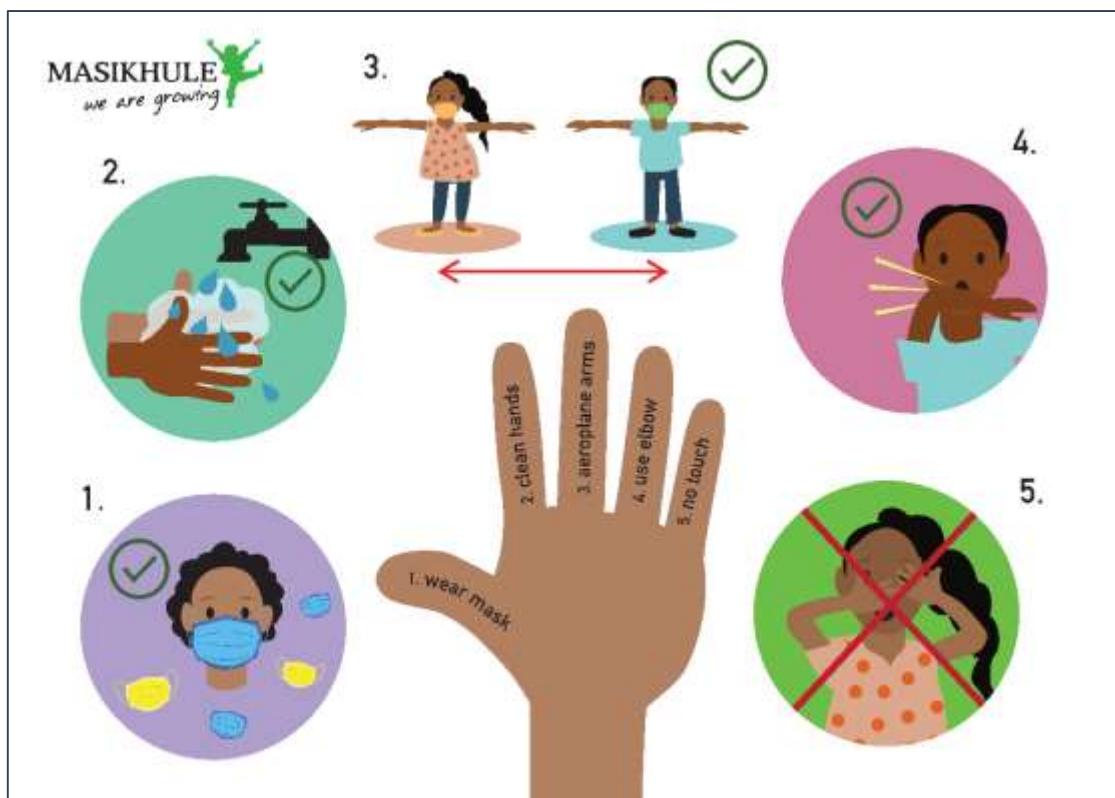
Talking to Children about Coronavirus

Why do we need to talk to children about coronavirus?

Returning to the ECD Centre will no doubt make educators and parents anxious about how children are going to cope. For many children the return to their friends and educators will be exciting, but not all of them will feel that way. This is a worrying time for children and so much has changed and is different and they do not always understand why.

By talking, you can give them reassurance, answer their questions and help them to cope better.

Make a special time to sit down and talk together. Give them time to ask questions and remind them about what is required of them in a caring and loving way. Ask them how they are feeling. Explain that Coronavirus is like the flu and that some symptoms are a fever, cough, sore throat and that most people get better soon and only a small number of people get very ill. Explain how it can spread and what we can all do to stop the spread of germs (talk about the 5 rules below). Talk about what might be different at their ECD Centre.





Remember:

- ❖ Listen carefully and answer children's questions
- ❖ Stick to the facts
- ❖ Don't give unnecessary information
- ❖ Focus on solutions (together)
- ❖ Be calm and give lots of reassurance

What should parents, caregivers, educators look out for?

Parents might notice some of the following in their children once they know they will be going back to their ECD centres:

- Reluctance or refusal to go to school
- Increased clinginess
- Poor sleep on nights before school
- Temper tantrums or crying on school mornings
- Feeling sick- especially stomach aches, headaches.

Educators might notice some of these things when the children come back:

- Children not wanting to leave their parents
- Poor concentration and memory. Easily distracted
- Hyperactivity or withdrawn behaviour
- Increased clinginess with teachers
- Behaviours more suited to a younger child
- Reluctance to participate in activities
- Anxiety, loss of appetite.

[Note: it may be necessary to seek professional help if you notice that there is an increase in the frequency or intensity of these behaviours.]

Remember:

These behaviours are not signs of being 'naughty' or attention seeking. Our children have been told repeatedly that COVID19 is dangerous. We have modelled it (by staying home, not touching others, etc.) and they have been aware of our own anxieties.

Observe the behaviours you see in the children around you and question your responses to them. Assume that you are facing a frightened child rather than a disobedient one.

Some strategies to try

For parents/caregivers:

You should gradually expose your children to all things school-related. Here are some suggestions:

- Start your normal morning routine a week before school starts
- Start using language such as "when you go to school" rather than "if you go to school"
- Develop a special (quick) goodbye ritual – maybe a hug and high 5, or kiss and elbow bump and practice this with your children before dropping them at school
- Use visual aids such as calendars/drawn squares to count down to school starting
- Ask the principal what safety procedures will be implemented at your ECD Centre and discuss them a few times before school starts (e.g. you'll still be doing lots of hand washing, your teacher will still be using the hand sanitizer, etc.). Talk about any new arrangements for dropping your children at the school.

You can also start to prepare the children emotionally:

- Before school starts, ask them what they're looking forward to; what they think might be different; what they're expecting and correct any misconceptions.
- Problem solve together with your child. If something is a particular worry, work with children to help come up with a few solutions. Include children in this problem solving.
- Stay calm.
- Try to spend more time with them and tell them they are loved. Cuddle them often.
- Normalise feelings of uncertainty and worry by letting them know it is okay. Name and acknowledge children's feelings (e.g., "I know that this might feel scary"), and then validate them (e.g., "It's okay to feel worried because lots of changes are happening"; "I'm here for you"). This will help them to feel heard and accepted. Encourage expression of feelings through creative means, e.g., drawings, stories, music, dance.

It is important to remember that most children will not suffer long-term emotional harm because of COVID-19 lockdown. Parents can help children by being supportive, by remaining as calm as possible, and by reducing other stressors in their lives.

Remember also that the ECD Centre might be struggling to get itself back together and might not be able to respond in a way that you would like. Take the return to school slowly. It will be a process where you, your child and their ECD Centre have to figure out what is happening together.

For ECD Centres:

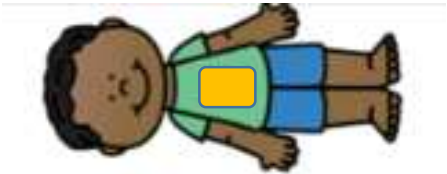
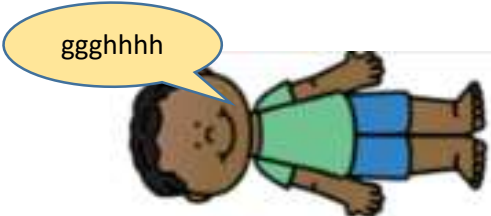
Allow children to get used to the ECD environment slowly:





- Do activities to help them reconnect with their friends
- Spend time going over new safety procedures
- Move slowly back into class routines
- Do play-based activities that acknowledge the time away (what new things did I do while I was at home; what I missed most about school, etc)
- Make a being back together chain (e.g. children make paper chains linking all the reasons they're glad to be together again)

Calming techniques (for caregivers and educators to do with children)



These exercises will encourage the brain to calm, and help to protect against stress and anxiety. These should be part of the daily routine. You can call this something like *Ready to Relax*.


CALMING BREATHING

	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Lifting breath</u></p> <p>Have them lie on their backs with a beanbag or soft toy on their tummy. Ask them to breathe in deeply and move the beanbag UP, then let out their breath slowly and feel the beanbag move DOWN. Repeat.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Sea breath</u></p> <p>Ask them to breathe in deeply through their noses. Now, keeping their mouths closed, exhale while making a 'growly' noise like the sea in the back of the throat. Repeat.</p>

	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Shoulder breath</u></p> <p>Take a deep breath in through the nose and pull the shoulders up to the ears as they inhale. Breathe out through the mouth and roll the shoulders down as they exhale. Repeat slowly in a continuous movement of shoulder rolls, timed with the breath.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Tall tree breath</u></p> <p>As they inhale through their noses, raise the arms as high as they can and bring the palms together high over the top of the head – as tall as a tree.</p> <p>As they exhale through the mouth, bring the palms together in front of the chest. Repeat.</p>
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>First</p>  <p>Smell the Flower</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Then</p>  <p>Blow out the Candles</p> </div> </div>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Flower and candle breath</u></p> <p>They should each pretend they have a nice smelling flower in one hand and a cake with candles on in the other. Then breathe in slowly through the nose as they smell the flower, and breathe out through the mouth as they blow out the candle. Repeat.</p>

RELEASING EXERCISES – helps to relax muscles

	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Pick the lemon</u></p> <p>Kids pretend to reach up to a tree and pick a lemon with each hand. Then squeeze the lemons hard to get all the juice out – squeeze, squeeze, squeeze. Throw the lemons on the floor and relax the hands. Repeat. After the last squeeze and throw, shake out hands to relax.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Lazy cat</u></p> <p>Kids pretend to be a lazy cat that just woke up from a lovely long nap. On hands and knees - have a big yawn, a meow and arch the back. Then stretch out your arms, legs and back – slowly like a cat – and relax. Now cuddle back down and repeat.</p>

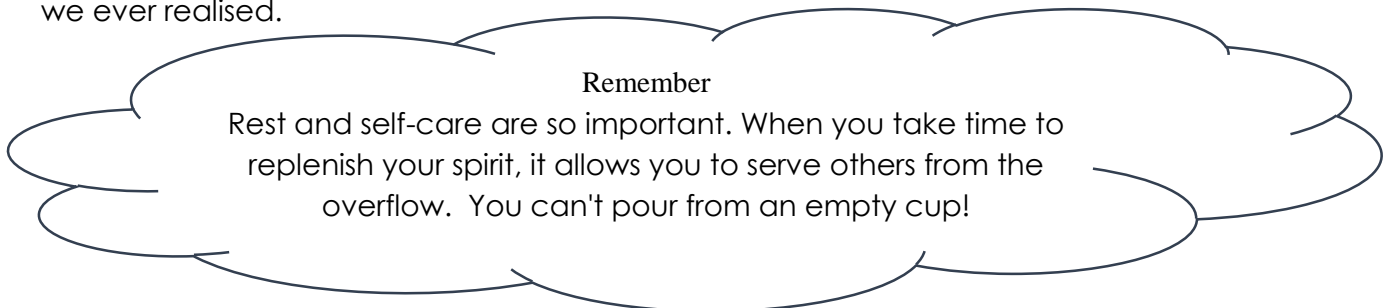
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>The tortoise</u></p> <p>Kids pretend to be a tortoise going for a slow, relaxed tortoise walk. You say: "Oh no, it's started to rain!" and kids curl up tight under their shell for about ten seconds. You say, "The sun has come out again, so come out of your shell and return to your relaxing walk". Repeat a few times, making sure to finish with a walk so that their bodies are relaxed.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Float and freeze</u></p> <p>Kids pretend to be a feather floating through the air for about ten seconds. Clap your hands softly and suddenly they freeze and transform into a statue. Don't move! Then click your fingers and they slowly relax and transform back into the floating feather again. Repeat, making sure to finish as a floaty feather in a relaxed state.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Music, games and reading are all good activities to do together, as you know!</p>	

For Everyone:

- Try to get 8 hours of sleep and to re-establish comforting routines
- Try to eat well and drink lots of water
- Keep practicing precautions (especially washing hands with soap and water frequently)
- Limit social media and remember there is lots of false news, so take care to check information
- Keep your body active! Do some fun exercises with the children – for example: lunges, squats, marching on the spot, dancing to music.
- Make time to do some fun things – to laugh and relax. Children take their lead from adults, so do something together and make it fun (tidying up a room, packing away the washing, sweeping, etc)
- Practice gratitude for yourself and with the children.
Before bedtime ask: 'What went well today?' 'What am I grateful for today?' 'What made me happy today?'

For Educators – most importantly:

Seek support from colleagues. Schedule regular meetings to discuss not only work-related issues but also concerns, anxieties, feelings – positive ones too! If we've learnt anything from this pandemic, it's that we truly are all in this together, and we need togetherness more than we ever realised.



WHO TO CALL FOR HELP (additional to your existing list):

If you are feeling slightly ill and need non-urgent medical care, call the national helpline	0800 029 999 (National Institute for Communicable Diseases)
For information on COVID-19,	Whatsapp: Say "Hi" to 0600 123 456
Report a suspected COVID19 case (24-Hour):	0800 029 999 or send a WhatsApp: 0600 12 3456 National Crisis Line – 0861 322 322
National Gender based violence helpline (GBV):	0800 428 428 *120*7867#
National Helpline for mental disorders, anxiety, depression and suicide (SADAG)	0800 456 789 / 0800 567 567
National Helpline for mental disorders, anxiety, depression and suicide (CIPLA)	0800 456 789 / WhatsApp: 076 88 22 77 5
FAMSA – Family and Marriage Association of South Africa National Support & education during stressful times	(011) 975-7106/7 national@famsa.org.za