

COVID-19 IMPACTS ON TODDLER CLASS® INDICATORS

The following table outlines at the dimension and indicator level how the changes to classroom settings described above may impact the evidence for each Toddler CLASS® dimension. It also discusses some specific interactions to look for that meet the intent of these dimensions and indicators. Like the behavioral markers in the CLASS manual, the list provided here is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather, to help observers think about some different types of evidence they might be capturing.

This table addresses only indicators that may be difficult to assess or simply not present due to new health and safety procedures. Indicators that are likely to be observable regardless of new procedures are not included.

POSITIVE CLIMATE

Reflects the connection between the teacher and children and the warmth, respect, and enjoyment communicated by verbal and nonverbal interactions

Facial expressions and physical presence are especially important for toddlers as they develop a sense of self in relation to the adults and other children around them. With social distancing and the use of masks in the classroom, teachers must make intentional efforts to build these important connections and establish relationships, especially with children who may have recently experienced trauma or increased levels of stress.

RELATIONSHIPS

Increased social distancing between teachers and children and among children may impact evidence for behavioral markers such as **physical proximity**, **reciprocal interactions**, and **peer connections**. Additionally, the use of masks may limit **matched positive affect**, or observers' ability to assess it.

Nonetheless, this indicator is about how teachers and children **enjoy warm relationships** with each other, and there are many other ways to observe the presence of these relationships in the classroom.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Teachers give their time and attention to children, moving around the room and checking in frequently
- Teachers sit within a few feet of children playing in small groups
- Distanced activities are still shared—for instance, the children and teachers participate in finger plays together at their respective spots on the carpet
- Teachers or children use photos, perhaps of themselves, to share their emotions when their faces are covered
- Teachers engage in conversations with children from across a table
- Children engage in parallel play with each other while distanced

POSITIVE AFFECT

The use of masks by teachers and/or children may impact evidence for the behavioral marker of **smiling, laughing**. Social distancing protocols may impact evidence for the behavioral marker of **verbal or physical affection**.

However, there are many other behaviors that can indicate to an observer that **the classroom feels like a warm, pleasant place to be**.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Teachers' smiling is evident in their eyes, eyebrows, temples, and cheekbones
- Teachers nod and offer other affirmations
- Teachers and children are having fun and being playful
- Teachers and children use thumbs-ups, air fives, elbow bumps, clapping, and other celebratory gestures
- Teachers and children use air hugs, air hearts, finger hearts, and other affectionate gestures
- Teachers use phrases that show an intent to provide affection, such as "I would love to give you a hug"
- Teachers rub children's backs when children are upset, rather than kissing them on the forehead
- Teachers use animated body language to express excitement and enthusiasm
- *Unaffected behavioral markers: enthusiasm*

RESPECT

Increased social distancing between teachers and children and among children may impact evidence for behavioral markers such as **eye contact** and **body orientation**. Additionally, the use of masks may limit teachers' use of a **warm, calm voice**, or observers' ability to assess it.

Nonetheless, the respect indicator is about how teachers **demonstrate respect for children**, and there are many other ways to observe evidence of respect in the classroom.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Teachers orient themselves toward children even if they are a few feet away
- Teachers bend down to get on a child's level even from a distance
- Teachers communicate intentions, such as "I need to come close to your body to help you" or "I need to fix your mask to cover your nose"
- Teachers give children their full attention when speaking to them
- *Unaffected behavioral markers: respectful language and communication*

TEACHER SENSITIVITY

Encompasses the teacher's responsiveness to and awareness of children's individual needs and emotional functioning. The extent to which the teacher is available as a secure base (being there to provide comfort, reassurance, and encouragement) is included in this rating

Depending on their experiences, children may display heightened levels of anxiety, stress, or depression during the pandemic. Despite health and safety protocols that may limit teachers' ability to monitor children's facial expressions, teachers need to be aware of signs that children are having difficulty so that they can adequately support children and help provide them with a sense of safety.

AWARENESS

Social distancing protocols and mask wearing may impact evidence for the behavioral marker of **notices difficulties or children who are upset** by limiting teachers' ability to see children's facial expressions.

However, there are many other ways for teachers to remain **consistently attentive to children**.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Teachers notice children's body language, such as slouching, downcast eyes, or wandering
- Teachers are attuned to the emotional needs underlying aggressive or withdrawn behaviors
- Teachers prepare additional activities or provide calm-down spaces to meet the needs of children who are having difficulty engaging in activities or regulating their behavior
- Teachers notice if a child is having difficulty wearing a mask or separating from a family member
- *Unaffected behavioral markers: is attentive to children throughout the classroom*

RESPONSIVENESS

Social distancing protocols may impact evidence for the behavioral marker of **provides comfort** by limiting teachers' physical closeness with children.

However, there are many other ways that teachers can **respond to children's needs and bids for attention**.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Teachers verbally check in on children regarding their needs and emotional well-being
- Teachers provide time for children to share their feelings
- Teachers support self-soothing strategies such as deep breathing, self-hugs, or the ability to go to a quiet area
- *Unaffected behavioral markers: responds to children's bids for attention, acknowledges and accepts emotions*

REGARD FOR CHILD PERSPECTIVES

Captures the degree to which the teacher's interactions with children and classroom activities emphasize children's interests, motivations, and points of view and encourage children's responsibility and independence

Teachers must make a concerted effort to provide flexibility within the structure imposed by COVID-19 restrictions, which may limit children's access to specific roles, materials, or opportunities for independence in the classroom. Even in this environment, teachers can provide children with choices. Providing choices empowers children who have experienced trauma to feel a sense of control over their environment, which is crucial for healing.

CHILD FOCUS

Strictly following program health and safety requirements, such as minimum length of time for hand washing, may impact evidence for behavioral markers such as **follows children's leads**.

However, there are many other opportunities for teachers to ensure that **activities are child directed and child led**.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Teachers ask children about their ideas for how they will play in centers
- When teachers must require children to do something, they provide choices within the experience—for instance, what song to sing while hand washing, or where or how to stand while having their temperature checked
- When teachers must prohibit an activity children are interested in, such as working at the sensory table, they provide reasonable and related alternatives
- Within an activity, children are able to decide how they use the materials—for instance, what they want to build with the blocks
- *Unaffected behavioral markers: provides choices, elicits children's expression and ideas*

FLEXIBILITY

Social distancing and sanitation procedures may impact evidence for behavioral markers such as **allows movement and talking, "goes with the flow," and adjusts pacing for individual children**.

However, there are many other ways for teachers to be **flexible in their plans and within activities**.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- When teachers must interrupt a child's individual pace (to follow a sanitizing schedule, to keep small groups together), they involve the child in deciding if and how they will return to their work later
- Teachers provide areas in which children can move freely ("You look like you want to dance. You can go to the music corner so your body doesn't get too close to your friends.")
- Teachers allow movement between centers with limited children or once materials are sanitized
- Children may sit, stand, lie, and move within their personal space
- Teachers have children use "airplane arms" to help define personal space and encourage movement

SUPPORT OF INDEPENDENCE

Health and safety requirements may impact evidence for the behavioral markers of **child responsibility** by limiting children's ability to distribute materials or participate in cleanup. Additionally, teachers may limit the **materials accessible** to children due to the need for frequent sanitation, and children may not be able to stand close to one another while teachers support **peer perspective taking**.

However, there are many other ways for teachers to **maximize children's independence** in the classroom.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Children do classroom jobs that don't require personal contact, such as watering plants or putting away their own nap blankets
- Teachers engage children in peer perspective taking by providing words to acknowledge needs and emotions while children stand a few feet away from one another
- Teachers keep materials that are easily sanitized accessible to children
- *Unaffected behavioral markers: support of self-care*

BEHAVIOR GUIDANCE

Encompasses the teacher's ability to promote behavioral self-regulation in children by using proactive approaches, supporting positive behavior, and guiding and minimizing problem behavior

Children may have been out of their classroom routines for weeks or months, and while some children may have had a regular schedule, others have not. This fact, coupled with COVID-19 restrictions, means that all children will be learning new rules and procedures. To ensure that children and adults remain safe, teachers may need to frequently provide clear behavior expectations and monitor behavior to prevent problems where possible. Although exploring and testing boundaries is a common developmental behavior in toddlers, children who have had stressful experiences during the pandemic may display more frequent unexpected or challenging behaviors. Teachers can support these children with proactive and positive behavior guidance strategies.

While evidence for Behavior Guidance may look different in the ways described above, all of the behavioral markers should be present to the extent that is typical.

FACILITATION OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Considers how well the teacher facilitates activities to support children's learning and developmental opportunities. How the teacher connects and integrates learning into activities and tasks should be included in this rating

COVID-19 restrictions may limit teachers' usual strategies for drawing children into lessons and activities, such as sitting with children and directly joining in their play or using exaggerated facial expressions. The use of masks and social distancing may also impact teachers' ability to embed information into children's play and routines and/or the observer's ability to assess these behaviors. Additionally, children who are experiencing high levels of stress may have difficulty concentrating. In these cases, teachers will need to employ new strategies to encourage children's engagement. Engaging children in conversations and getting them thinking about COVID-19 and its effects can be an important part of helping children make sense of what is going on in the world around them.

ACTIVE FACILITATION

Social distancing protocols may impact evidence for the behavioral markers of **teacher guides exploration** and **teacher is involved in children's activities to support learning and development** by putting teachers at a distance from children or limiting their movement around the classroom.

However, there are many other ways that teachers can **provide intentional opportunities and guidance for learning and development**.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Teachers add to what children are already doing by suggesting new ways of using materials or developing their activities
- Teachers actively seek information about what children are working on and how it is going
- Teachers join in activities while sitting a few feet away from children and/or using their own set of similar materials
- *Unaffected behavioral markers: teacher provides opportunities for exploration and learning*

CHILDREN'S ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Restrictions on the types of materials available in the classroom and the extent to which these materials can be shared may impact evidence for behavioral markers such as **manipulation of materials** and **physical involvement**.

However, there are many other ways that teachers can ensure that children are **actively and consistently involved in activities and routines**.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Children have a personal set of hands-on materials available to them
- Teachers help children use everyday objects in new and creative ways
- Teachers integrate movement opportunities into book reading and other activities
- *Unaffected behavioral markers: verbal involvement*

QUALITY OF FEEDBACK

Assesses the degree to which the teacher provides feedback (in response to what children say and/or do) that promotes learning and understanding and expands children's participation

The use of masks and social distancing could impact teachers' ability to engage in back-and-forth exchanges and/or observers' ability to assess these exchanges. Teachers can promote children's learning and understanding by responding to their comments and actions with hints, assistance, questions, information, and encouragement, even when there is not an immediate opportunity to continue the exchange. Teachers should take advantage of moments when they can work closely with small groups or individuals to have deeper exchanges. Teachers may also need to provide more verbal assistance than physical assistance when scaffolding for children. Quality of Feedback interactions can be an important part of motivating and instilling confidence in children who have experienced high levels of stress during the pandemic.

While evidence for Quality of Feedback may look different in the ways described above, all of the behavioral markers should be present to the extent that is typical.

LANGUAGE MODELING

Captures the quality and amount of the teacher's use of language-stimulation and language-facilitation techniques to encourage children's language development

The use of masks and social distancing could impact teachers' ability to engage in conversations with children and/or observers' ability to assess these conversations. Teachers can promote children's language development by using self- and parallel talk and advanced language to provide frequent opportunities for children to hear language throughout the day. Teachers should ask questions as they move around the classroom and engage smaller groups of children or individuals to have more authentic conversations. Language Modeling interactions can be an important part of providing children with the words they need to process and communicate their experience of the pandemic.

REPETITION AND EXTENSION

Social distancing protocols may impact evidence for the behavioral marker of **repeats**, or observers' ability to assess it.

However, there are many other ways for teachers to **focus on children's attempts to communicate and build directly on their contributions**.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Teachers acknowledge comments they cannot hear by asking children to repeat themselves
- Teachers approximate repetitions for difficult to hear comments by asking children, "Did you say...?"
- Teachers describe their understanding of the purpose of a child's communication, even if they did not understand the specific utterance ("You're asking for help with something," "You have something to say")