

COVID-19 IMPACTS ON INFANT 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 Infant 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.

RELATIONAL CLIMATE

Reflects the connections, emotions, and respect conveyed by teachers as well as the infants' responses to these interactions

For infants, especially those who are nonmobile, teachers will still need to be physically present and connected to provide care. Much of an infant's time for connection to adults occurs through routine care such as feeding, diapering, and rocking to sleep, and there may be limited social distancing during these activities. However, the use of masks may affect how teachers communicate with each other and build relationships with the children in their classrooms, and teachers must make intentional efforts to build these important connections.

RELATIONAL BEHAVIORS

Teachers can still display behaviors that support the development and maintenance of relationships with infants. Physical proximity, eye contact, joint attention, and verbal and physical affection should be observable, with teachers making only slight adjustments to these behaviors.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Teachers pat children on the back rather than kissing them on the forehead
- Teachers sit near an infant, rather than holding the infant on their lap

EMOTION EXPRESSION

The use of masks may impact evidence for the behavioral marker of smiling. However, there should be many indications that teachers and children are enjoying their time together in the classroom. Teachers can still share in laughter and demonstrate enthusiasm for children's actions and presence in the classroom. Teachers may consider wearing clear masks for this age group to support children's developing understanding of emotions.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Teachers' smiling is evident in their eyes, eyebrows, temples, and cheekbones
- Teachers use photos to demonstrate positive emotions when their faces are covered
- Teachers and children are having fun and being playful

RESPECT FOR INFANTS' STATE

Infants use their hands and mouths to explore materials. Observers may see teachers sanitizing toys more frequently, limiting the sharing of toys between infants, or washing children's hands more often. Observers should look for teachers to clearly communicate their intentions when they need to remove a toy or wash an infant's hands.

LACK OF ADULT NEGATIVITY

Overall, behavioral markers within this indicator remain unaffected. However, with increased concerns around coughing and sneezing, it is important for teachers to monitor and mitigate their own negative feelings when they come into contact with infants' saliva. Observers will look for teachers to remain positive in their interactions when infants sneeze, cough, or drool.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Teachers making negative comments, such as "That's gross!" or "Don't sneeze on me"
- Teachers showing irritation at having to wipe a child's nose or resanitize a toy

TEACHER SENSITIVITY

Encompasses teachers' awareness of and responsiveness to infants' verbal and nonverbal cues, including availability to provide comfort, skill in resolving distress, and timeliness and contingency of responses

Infants need support from adults in addressing their needs and regulating their emotions. Additionally, infants can sense stress in caregivers, which may increase their own levels of stress, fear, or frustration. Teachers must be aware of signs that infants are having difficulty so that they can adequately respond to infants' needs and emotional and physiological expressions and provide them with a sense of safety.

AWARENESS

Teachers will still need to visually scan children, attend physically to children, and acknowledge children verbally and physically. Infants may need extra support if they are feeling tense or unsettled.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Teachers notice children's body language, such as more agitated body movements when upset or sucking fingers as a way to soothe themselves
- Teachers understand that children may display more fussiness or crying

RESPONSIVENESS

Due to heightened levels of stress, infants may need to be held more often or may be more difficult to soothe. Observers should still look for teachers consistently responding to and making adjustments for children's individual needs, as well as infants seeking out teachers and being comforted by their efforts. If it takes more time for a child to be soothed, observers should consider how the teacher adjusts their responses and the effectiveness of those adjustments.

FACILITATED EXPLORATION

Considers teachers' facilitation of experiences and interactions in routine care and playtime to support infants' engagement and development

COVID-19 restrictions may limit teachers' usual strategies for helping to facilitate children's exploration, such as sitting with children and directly joining in their play or using exaggerated facial expressions. Additionally, children who are experiencing high levels of stress may have less interest in engaging in exploration. In these cases, teachers will need to employ new strategies to support their exploration.

INVOLVEMENT

Teachers' involvement may be a little more physically distant from infants who are mobile or can sit up on their own. Even so, teachers can be involved in infants' play and routines.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Teachers sit across from infants, facing them and shaking a rattle, rather than holding the infants in their lap
- Teachers focus infants' attention on a mobile during diapering, instead of singing a song

INFANT FOCUSED

Due to new sanitation procedures, teachers may have to stop children's exploration when one infant reaches out to touch another infant's face, or when an infant is reaching for a toy. Teachers may also need to be more careful not to overstimulate if a child is in need of a quiet or soothing environment due to heightened stress.

OTHER BEHAVIORS OBSERVERS CAN LOOK FOR:

- Teachers provide a different toy for an infant if the toy they are interested in needs to be sanitized
- Teachers guide an infant to touch a doll instead of another child's face
- If infants turn their heads away to regulate their stimulation, teachers pause facilitating exploration and wait to engage in the activity when infants indicate that they are ready

EARLY LANGUAGE SUPPORT

Captures the amount and effectiveness of teachers' use of language-stimulation and language-facilitation techniques to encourage infants' early language development

The use of masks could impact teachers' ability to engage in conversation with the children and/or observers' ability to assess these conversations. Teachers should still engage in teacher talk, communication support, and communication extension with infants. It may be helpful to wear clear masks or a face shield as infants benefit from seeing facial cues in understanding what is being said and imitating sounds. Observers may see teachers intentionally compensating for the presence of the mask, through behaviors such as using gestures to enhance the meaning of what they're saying and pausing intentionally to let children know when they are done talking.

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