



News & Resources

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Young Children Starting or Returning to School Post-pandemic: What do we know and how do we plan?

[Sally Reed Crawford](#)

Starting or returning to school post-pandemic might evoke big emotions for young children and their families. Early Childhood Center staff have been thinking about this and investigating proven strategies that ease anxiety for all involved and is confident that the cure for separation anxiety is the same as it has always been – Effective Preparation. It is essential that programs and educators plan ahead to mitigate fear and anxiety so that children and families build the independence needed for smooth transitions.

Prior to the start of school, programs and educators can support families and children to have a smooth transition by using the following effective preparation strategies -

- Have small group classroom orientations before school starts so families can visit the classroom and tour the building (e.g., 30 minutes per group).
- Families' understanding about how and ability to prepare them for school varies. Offer families guidance on preparing their child at home, e.g., invite them to take pictures of the classroom and teacher during a visit, provide them with a visual classroom schedule, and provide a diverse children's book list about the first days of school.
- Ask families for background information and words used at home (e.g., home language, list of family members, home routines such as mealtime, play and rest) to help practitioners understand children's home environments and use the words children know to help them feel understood.

Suggest families create a "Goodbye" ritual (how they will say goodbye such as a hug, high five, a reminder about where the family will be, etc.) to do before leaving the child in the capable hands of the provider to avoid unexpected disappearances.

During the first weeks of school, educators can help children manage their initial apprehensions, build independence, and contribute to families' well-being by using the following effective transition strategies -

- Prioritize relationships the first few weeks of school (e.g., spend lots of time getting to know children, use frequent specific positive feedback that acknowledges their efforts). Academics is not the priority the first few weeks.
- Expect and plan for big emotions. Remember, children don't know you yet and are getting used to new spaces, people, and rules.
- Provide predictability (e.g., use visuals to teach routines, schedules, rules, expectations, and transitions the first few weeks of school). Investing time in establishing predictable routines will save valuable teaching time in the long run.

Explicitly teach social-emotional skills (e.g. how to enter play, how to be a friend, how to ask for help, how to take turns, etc.) and self-regulation skills (e.g., how to calm down, how to ask for help, how to resolve conflict, etc.) by 1) creating visuals, 2) providing modeling and role-play practice ("when I get frustrated, I take 5 deep breaths like this. Let's do it together"), and 3) using books and visuals to talk about feelings.

Resources:

https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Leadership_ReOpening_Guide.pdf

<https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/helping-preschoolers-cope-with-separation-anxiety>

What about my toys?

[Nancy Simmons](#)

This may be a question arising in early interventionists' minds across the state as the Indiana First Steps program moves forward with the initiative to implement the Family Guided Routines Based Intervention (FGRBI) model for service provision. As an early intervention occupational therapist, I too, have been thinking about how service providers and families of children in early intervention have historically engaged during home visits, especially around the use of toys that are brought into the family home via the provider's toy bag, and wondering how different home visits might look through the FGRBI lens. In giving my best efforts to facilitate lifelong changes for children with developmental delays and disabilities, my clinical reasoning has often surrounded the mindful crafting of the "just right" therapeutic activity after careful activity analysis and intentional acquisition of the specific toy, object, and/ or activity to equip my toy bag in order to facilitate progress toward IFSP outcomes. With FGRBI as our framework, First Steps practitioners are moving away from the use of toys brought into the family home being the agent of change, and instead implementing the evidence-based practice of coaching caregivers to engage their children in learning through participation in meaningful, purposeful everyday activities and routines. [Here is an article](#) that discusses the shift from using providers' toy bags to using caregiver coaching strategies as the agent of lifelong change across early intervention service delivery.

How diverse is your library?

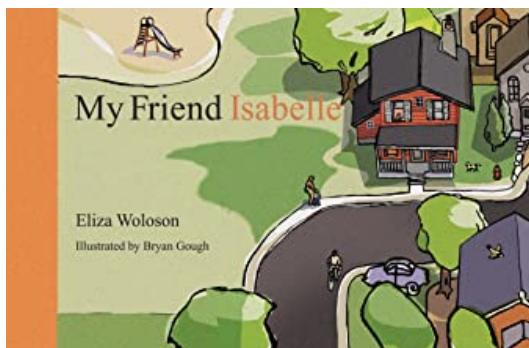
Here are a few of the ECC staff's picks to round out your early childhood library.



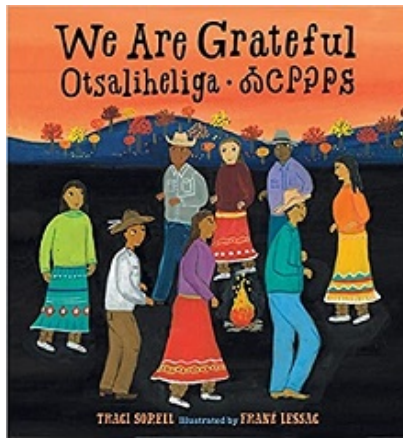
[School's First Day of School](#), By Adam Rex, Illustrations by Christian Robinson



[Our Skin: A First Conversation About Race](#), By Megan Madison, Jessica Ralli, and Isabel Roxas



[My Friend Isabelle](#), By Eliza Woloson, Illustrated by Bryan Gough



[We Are Grateful/Otsaliheliga](#), By Traci Sorell, Illustrations by Frané Lessac



[We Are Family](#), By Patricia Hegarty, Illustrated by Ryan Wheatcroft

Family Guided Routines Based Intervention Training

[Antonieta Barces](#)

The Early Childhood Center at the Indiana University is working closely with the First Steps State office to plan for the implementation of the Family Guided Routines Based Intervention(FGRBI) in Indiana. As part of the exploration phase, we are excited to be offering a 60 minute presentation in the upcoming months, to each of the First Steps agencies and their providers to create readiness for this important initiative.

The presentations will cover the core components and frameworks of the FGRBI and

will be followed by an interactive discussion to capture your feedback on the implementation of this practice. We are looking forward to gathering providers' ideas and suggestions as the First Steps program moves toward implementing this evidence-based practice statewide.

The presentations can be scheduled in an in-person or virtually based on agencies and staff needs. For more information and to schedule a presentation, please contact Antonieta Barces at abarces@iu.edu.

Around the Watercooler at ECC

[Katie Herron](#) - Nancy's article about toy bags got me thinking about equity. When my son was in First Steps, every time a therapist brought in a new toy, I would go out and buy it after the session, because I had this idea that the toy would make all the difference. That somehow that special, shiny object would be the thing that would help my son finally walk or talk or grasp. Part of me knew that it wasn't the toy, but another part of me thought, "But just in case...." What about families who can't afford to go out and buy new toys? Are they left feeling inadequate when the toys leave at the end of the session? Do they figure their child will make progress next week when the toy bag returns instead of feeling empowered to continue working on skills with items in their own home?