



BC Aboriginal
Child Care Society

A Gentle Start: Gradual Entry During Pandemic Times

April 9, 2022



Gradual Entry

A gentle way to introduce children and families to child care. It involves a very slow and incremental process of relationship development. It requires educators and families to observe the child, read their cues and proceed as the child gains confidence. Some children adjust quickly and complete gradual entry in 5 days, some it takes longer. Make sure to prepare parents. The goal is gentle and supportive decisions.



Births in British Columbia

During the pandemic we have welcomed over 85,000 new babies to our province.

2020 - 42,247

2021 - 42,573



How has the pandemic effected children and families?

- Increased family involvement
- Improved sibling bonds
- Increased focus on mental health
- Improved hand washing hygiene
- Increased sense of community – we are all in this together



How has the pandemic affected children and families?



- New mothers and families isolated from extended family and community
- More time spent on screens
- Parents facing increased stress
- Increase in developmental delays in children
- Limited experience in group situations
- Increase in family violence



What are you experiencing?

- Increased difficulties with separation
- Unfocused
- Over stimulated
- Communication difficulties
- Difficulty building trust
- Sleep challenges



Starting Gently

The Setup



Relationship Development



- Make time to meet with the family
- Schedule time where someone can be dedicated to spending time with them
- Arrange to go over the orientation package
- It can be helpful for the family to come and visit without their child
- Introduce the family to the staff person who will be their primary caregiver
- Ask questions about how comfortable they are in separating from their child, what are the demands on their time regarding gradual entry
- Remember that a trusting relationship with the family signals to the child that you and your program are safe





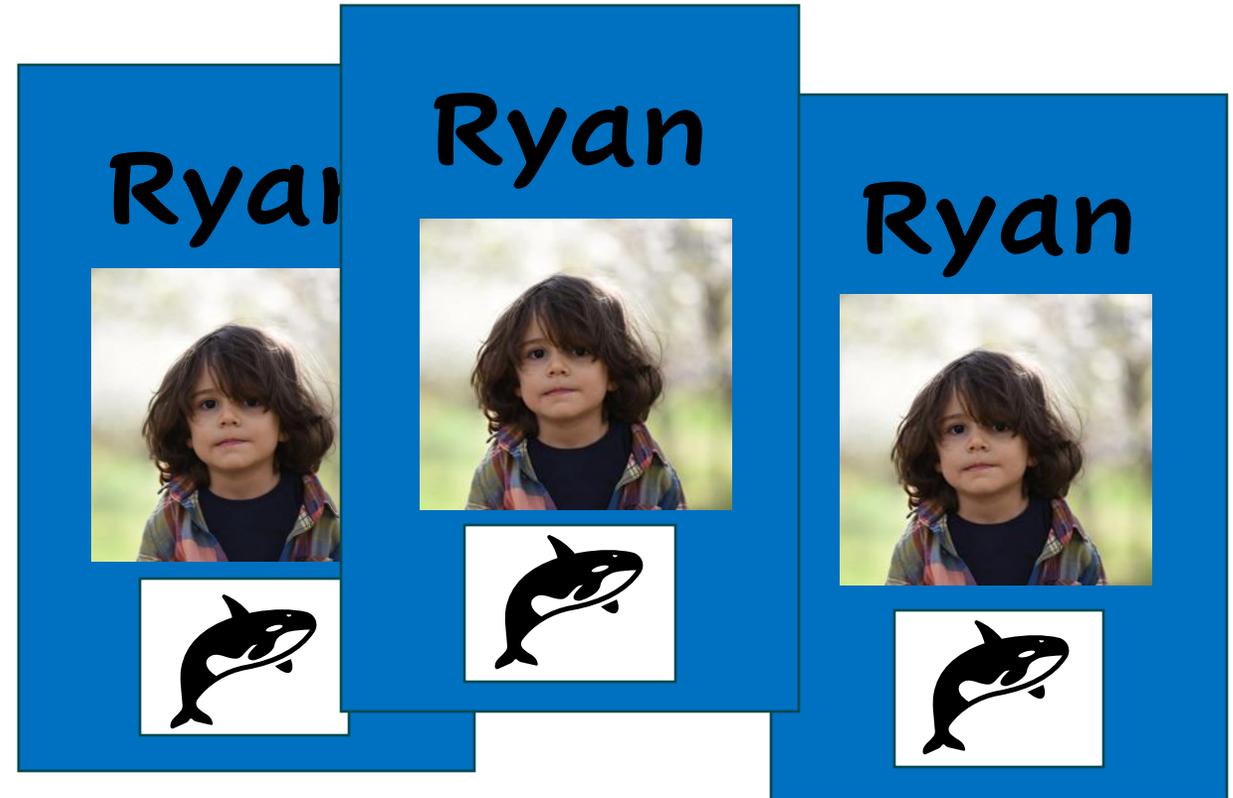
Primary Caregivers

- Are consistent caregivers who are attached to a child, particularly as they go through the gradual entry process
- They are responsible for giving updates to the parents of the children they are connected to
- During gradual entry their shifts should be set to match the child's routine
- They should take care of all major routines (transitions, mealtimes, nap, bathroom) with the child as they become comfortable with the program



Developing Identifiers

- Create name tags that support identity development
- Name tags help develop a sense of belonging
- Preparing the program for the arrival of a new child helps everyone adjust and welcomes the new family
- Pairing colours, photos, symbols and the child's name creates a triple signal to support all the children to make connections
- Family photo displays or activities
- Birthday walls



Starting Gently

The Process



Starting Gently – Introduction to the Space & Primary Caregiver

Day One or days, the goal is to have a happy and stress-free visit

- Parents should play alongside or with children
- Children should meet primary caregiver
- Parents should not leave
- Visit should be short
- Leave while the child is still interested and happy



Starting Gently – A Short ‘See You Soon’



Day Two or once the child seems more sure of the environment

- This should be a short goodbye – 30 – 60 mins max
- Family must say goodbye – don't slip out when the child is distracted
- Goal is to have parents return while child is still happy
- If child is distressed call family and ask them to return in a shorter timeframe



Starting Gently – Mealtime Together

Day Three or when the child is managing free play

- Family returns to share snack or a meal with the child
- This is the introduction to mealtime routines
- Family supports bathroom visit, handwashing, unpacking lunch kit or waiting to be served food
- Family models eating and assists child
- Family and child leave after meal



Starting Gently – Introduction to Sleep



Day Four or when child is comfortable getting through lunch independently

- Family arrives during or shortly after lunch
- Family introduces child to naproom
- Explore bed
- Observe other children going to sleep
- Family can try to assist child in napping but should not force
- If child falls to sleep family stays until child wakes
- Family and child go home after visiting naproom or when child wakes



Starting Gently – Naptime

Day Five or when family and child are ready to try naptime

- Primary caregiver takes child to naproom
- Primary caregiver tries to assist child to nap
- If child is struggling primary caregiver signals other educator to call family
- If child falls to sleep family is contacted to come to daycare so that they are present when child wakes



Starting Gently – Early Pick-up

Day Six or once child is napping successfully

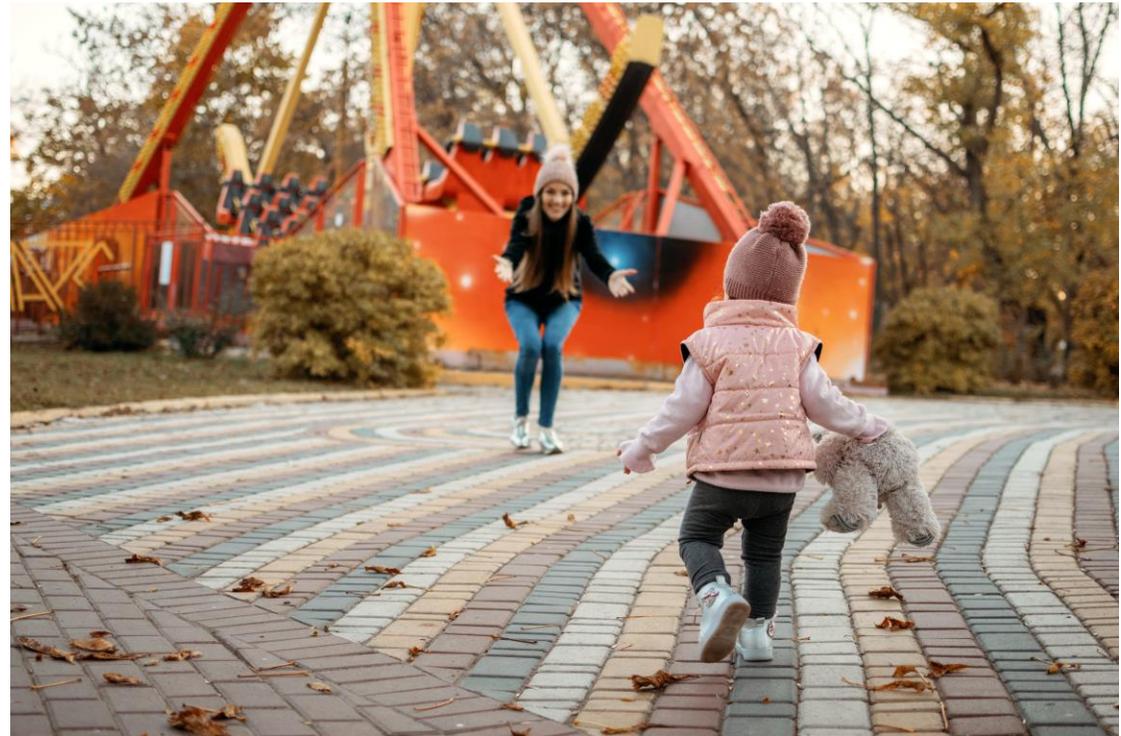
- Child is dropped off, stays through the day, naps and wakes for snack and free play time
- Family is called when child wakes and plans pick up time with primary caregiver
- Pick up is mid-afternoon well before end of the day



Starting Gently – The Full Day

Day Seven and Onward...

- This is a negotiated process
- Parents and primary caregivers need to be discussing the best interests of the child and what they can manage
- New children may take time to settle in and a full day may not work for them yet
- End of the day is stressful for little ones as they see other children's families arriving which is a trigger for missing their own



Starting Gently

Strategies to Support Success



Tips – Constant Communication

- Connect every morning – greet, build relationship
- The primary caregiver should be the main connection, but all educators should greet family
- Get a sense of how much communication is needed/wanted by the family
- Call as soon as child has calmed
- Take photos of the child having a good time and send if possible
- Have a way of tracking important information to communicate
- Share stories at pick-up



Tips – Consistency

- Follow a regular routine
- Help families with consistency – leave when you say goodbye
- Educators, follow through on commitments
- Teaching team needs to commit to consistent approach
- Maintain primary caregiver as long as needed



Tips – Attachment/Comfort Items



*Attachment items can provide a bridge
between home and the program*

- Support children to keep track of special items
- Help others to understand the significance of items
- Offer item at times of need



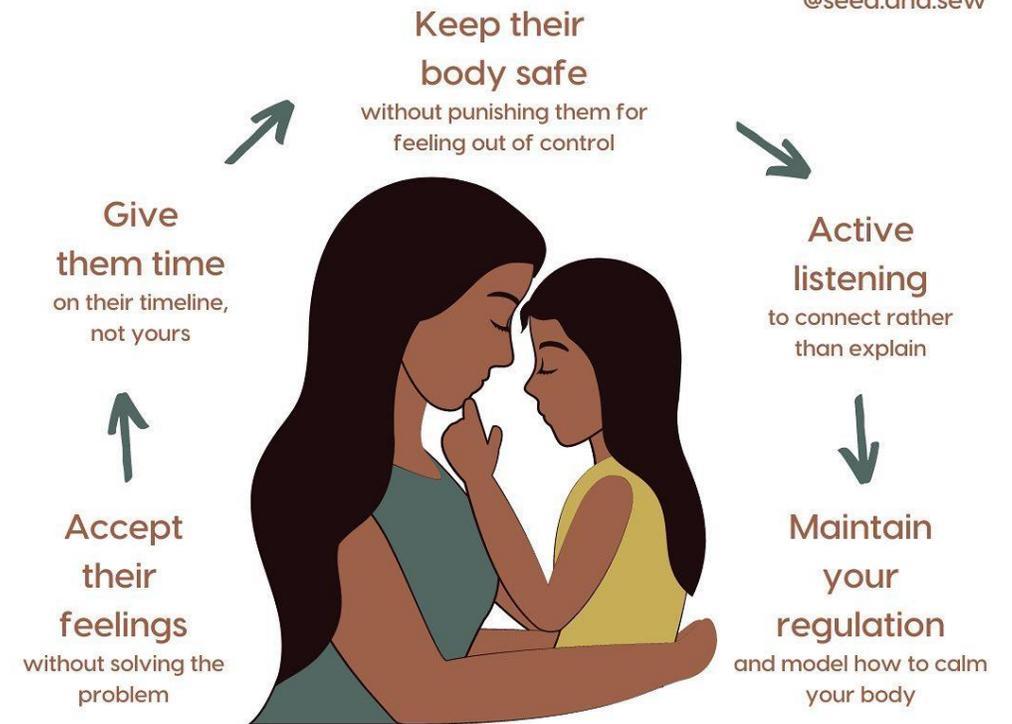
Tips – Supporting Co-Regulation

- Remain calm
- Stay close
- Empathize
- Give verbal and physical support
- Wait
- This is not self-soothing or self-regulating

Holding Space For Big Emotions

In order to teach our kiddos to process emotions, we first have to **ALLOW** the emotion by holding space for it.

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Tips – Reducing Stimulation

- Head outside
- Use natural materials and neutral colours
- Edit, edit, edit!
- Plan for small groups



Tips – Translation Sheets & Sign Language

- Hearing your home language is comforting
- Ask families to share phonetic spelling to assist educators
- Practice pronunciation with families
- Sign Language is quicker to pick up
- It can augment communication
- Even 10 – 20 signs can be a big help

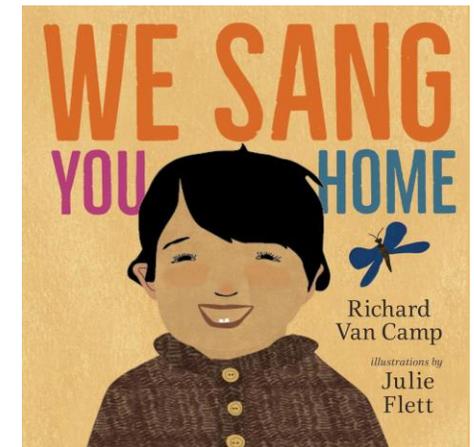
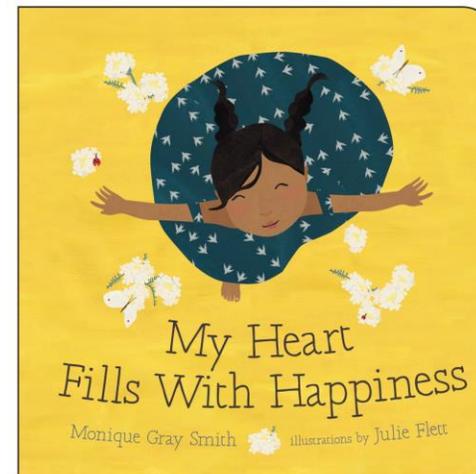
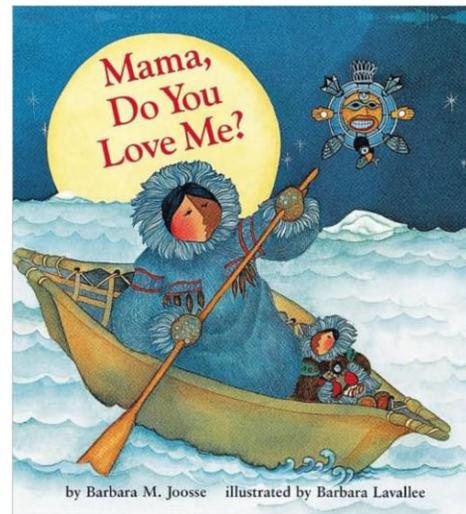
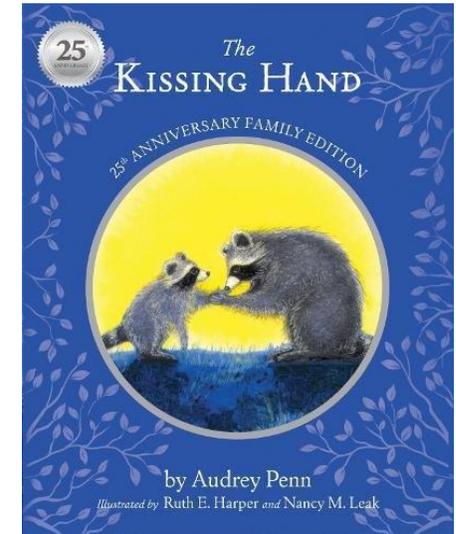
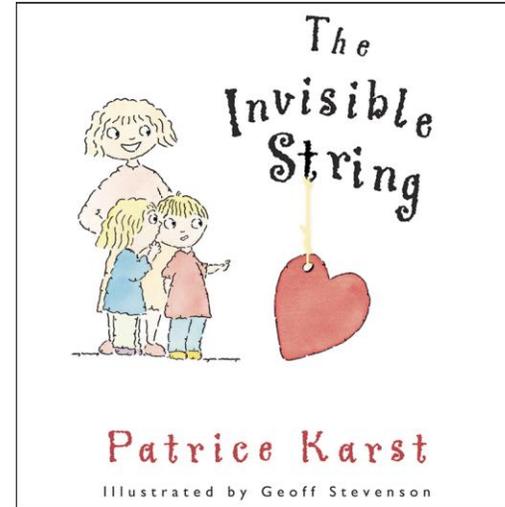
Home
Language/
Mother Tongue

Mummy will
come back
soon.



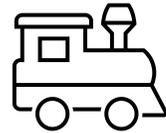
Tips – Supportive Books

- Stock your bookshelf with books that focus on family and child connection
- Make books about children's families
- Draw family's attention to books



Tips – Visual Schedules and Social Stories

- Visuals provide an additional way to communicate
- They support sequencing
- Provide concrete way to review time
- Can be translated easily



Arrival	Free Play	Outside	Lunch	Nap	Hometime
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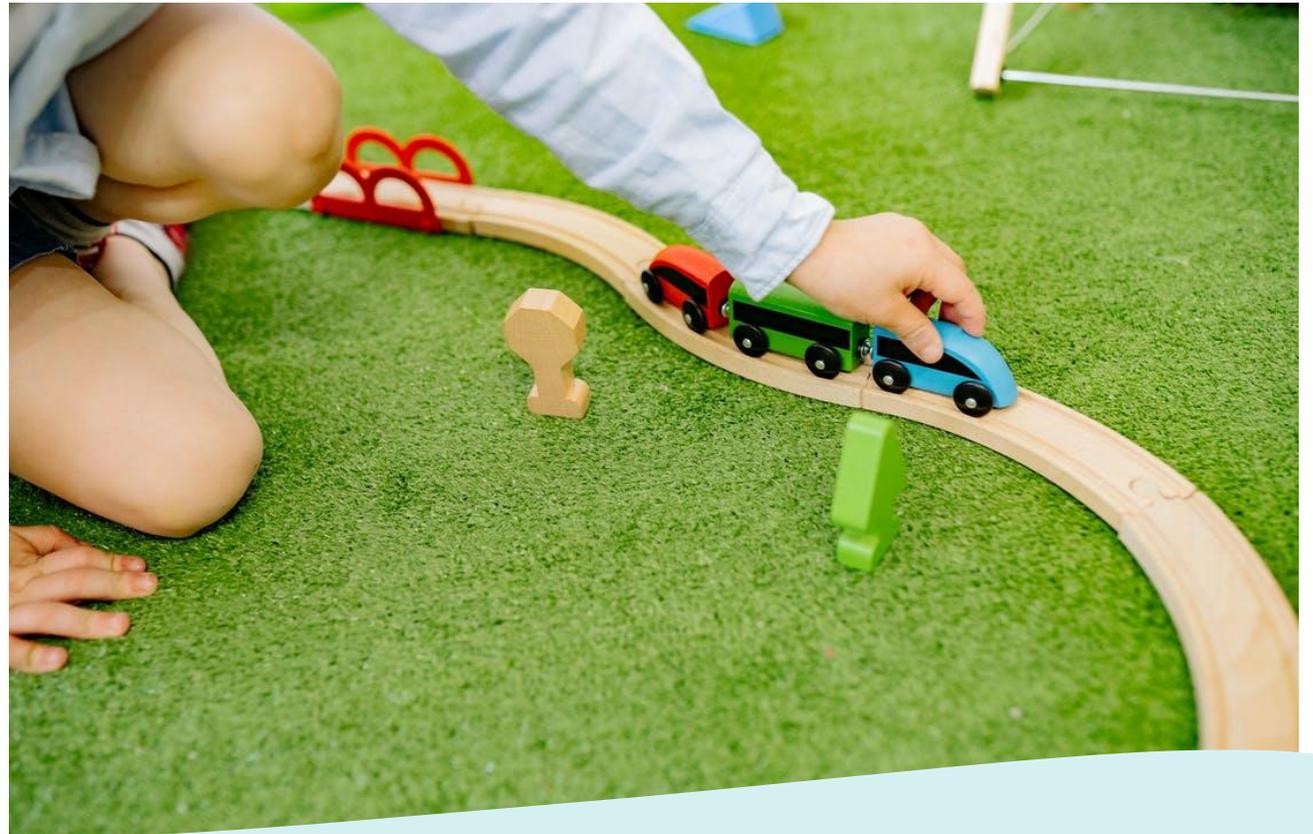
Tips – Sign Language and Music

- Another way to support communication
- Minimal words can provide a lot of support
- Bridges language differences
- Does not interrupt speech development
- Songs can be translated
- Familiar songs are soothing
- Music can be played again and again



Tips – Activities of Interest

- Learn about children's interests
- Make sure to include something every day
- Find ways to change environment but include special interests
- Extend interests and combine with other areas of play



The Good News

- Research shows that children are resilient.
- With support, consistency, engaging environments and empathy they can catch up.
- Children's brains in this age range are still forming.



Thank You

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