

CAN 'T STOP COLUMBUS

Returning to Childcare Post COVID-19

*Understanding Perspectives of
Parents and YMCA Staff*

This study was conducted in partnership between
**Can't Stop Columbus, Columbus YMCA, and
Lextant: the human experience firm**

lextant®



OUR MISSION

Understand how to alleviate parent and staff concerns by determining what will make them feel safe and comfortable upon return to childcare.

ABOUT LEXTANT

We are the human experience firm.

Lextant was born from a passion to understand how the things we “make” affect how we work, live, and play.

40

Team Members

20 years

In business

500+

clients



OBJECTIVES

01 Understand Staff Fears

This study aimed to understand the barriers and concerns that staff had about returning to work at the childcare center.

03 Ideate Potential Solutions

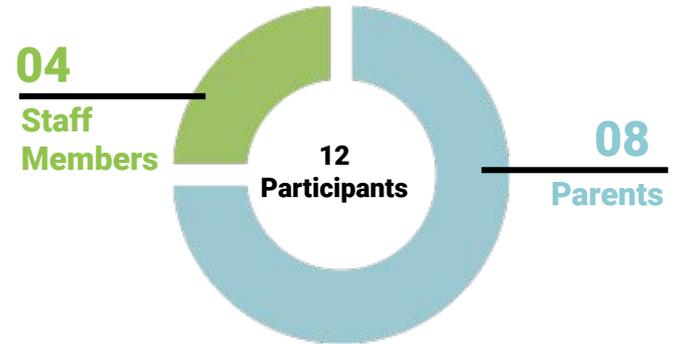
After an understanding of staff and parent concerns was accomplished, actionable solutions were created.

02 Understand Parent Fears

This study aimed to understand the barriers and concerns that Parents had about bringing their children back to childcare.

WHO WE TALKED TO

The Lextant team was fortunate to speak with eight parents and four staff members in one-hour co-creation interview sessions.



METHODS & PROCESS



01 **DG & Canvas Development**

A digital canvas with carefully selected images & words was developed to help participants envision their ideal childcare experience. The team then developed key questions & probes that would help guide the discussion with parents & staff.



02 **Online Co-Creation**

Eight parents and four staff members were interviewed in one hour sessions. During each session, four digital canvasses, each representing ¼ phases of their childcare journey was created. Following this, participants explained different ideas they wanted in their ideal world through the collage they created on the canvas.

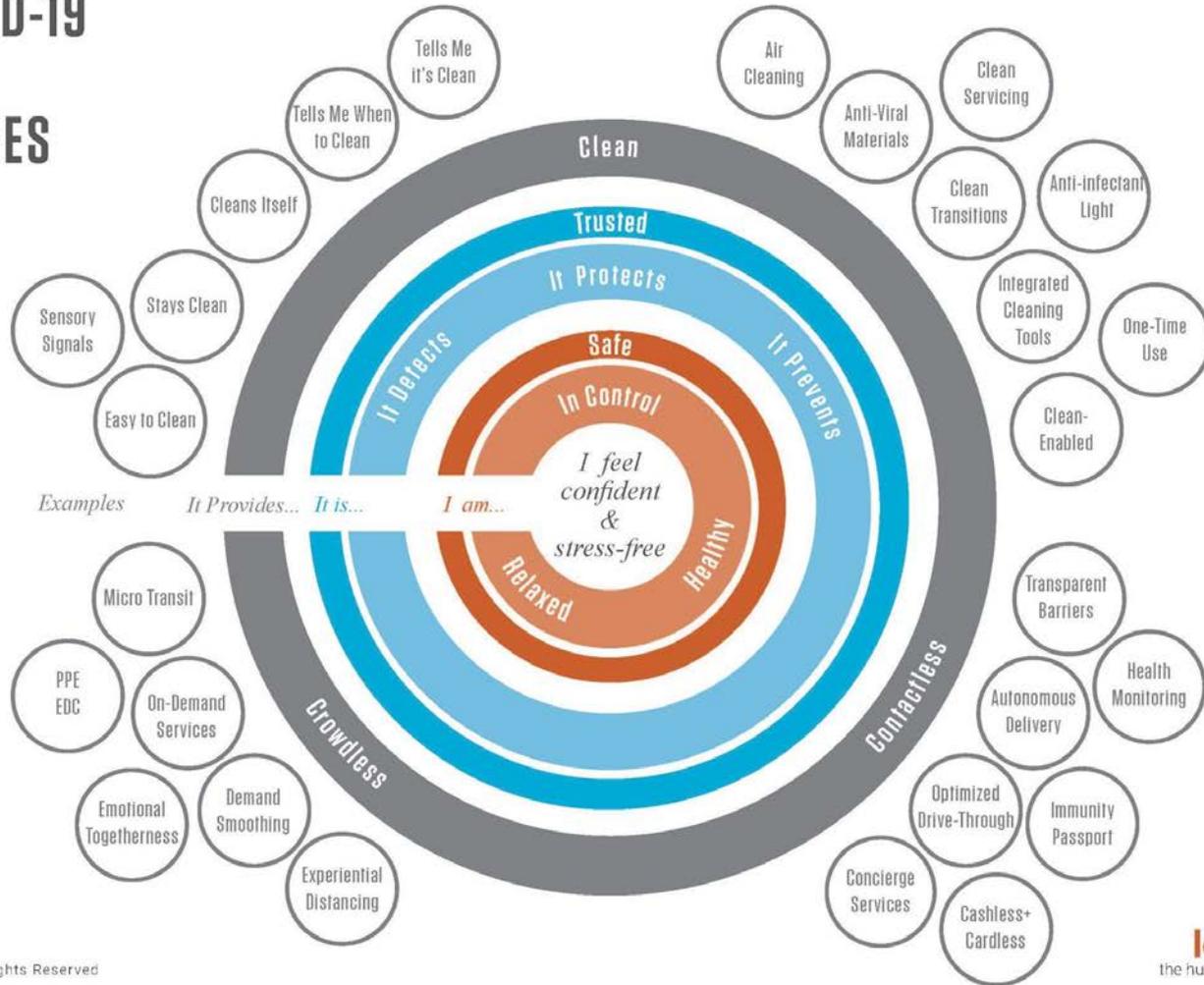


03 **Theme Integration**

Participant responses were then synthesized by the Lextant team in order to understand major patterns in ideal features desired, ideal emotions & their mutual relationships for parents & staff.

POST-COVID-19 GROUP EXPERIENCES

Using established research, Lextant formed a framework outlining the desired post-covid group experience.



The core emotions of this framework, Confident, Relaxed, Healthy, In Control, Stress Free, and Safe, became the foundation for our co-creation sessions. We aimed to understand how these desired emotions would translate into the childcare space.

Current Concerns

In line with previous research that YMCA had conducted, parents expressed that their concerns with returning their children to childcare primarily revolves around the following:

- Health risks to their children and family
- Uncertainty about what precautions will be taken
- The ability for their child to grow and develop effectively
- Wanting to know details about specific staff procedures

Not related to COVID-19, but noteworthy, were concerns regarding the recent protests taking place in downtown Columbus.

lextant:



Our ideal

Return to Childcare Experience

POST COVID-19

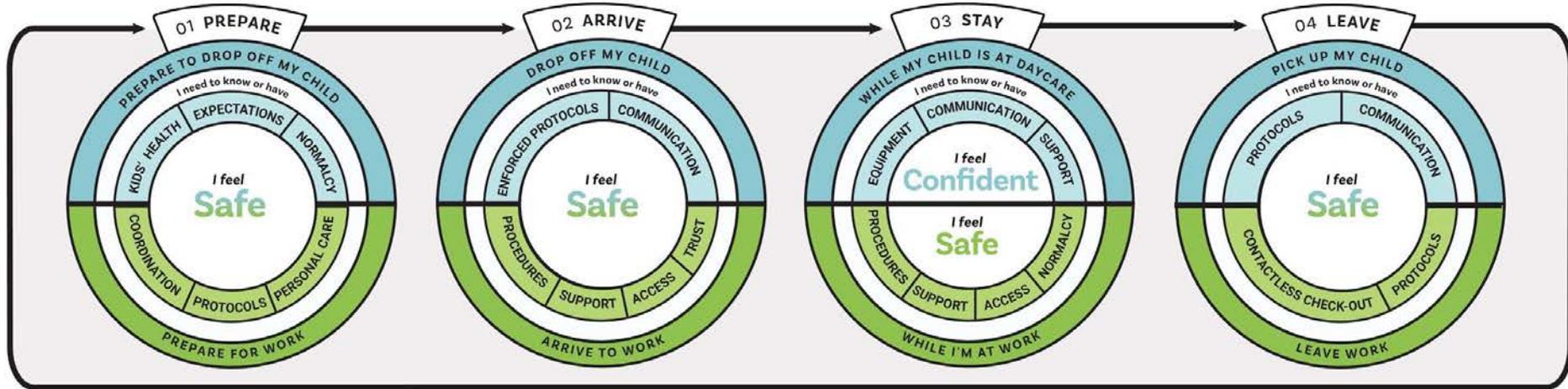
Our ideal

Return to Childcare Experience

POST COVID-19

This model depicts the ideal journey and experience of returning to childcare as defined by parents and staff. Outlined is the desired emotional experience along with the benefits that deliver that experience.

- Parents
- Staff



Our ideal

Return to Childcare Experience

PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

The journey for parents returning their children back to childcare can be broken down into the following four steps:

- 01** at-home preparation
- 02** dropping their children off
- 03** the time children spend at the childcare
- 04** picking their children up



I feel Safe

Preparing for Drop-Off

For me to feel **SAFE** when I am preparing my kids at home...

I need to know my kids are healthy

I need to feel safe and in control knowing that I have checked my child's temperature before leaving for the day. I would also expect all children returning to childcare to have visited their doctor within two weeks of returning and received a clean bill of health.

I need to know what to expect

I should be notified ahead of time so that I know what kind of changes in procedures and protocols have been changed. I expect to know what measures will be taken to ensure that social distancing guidelines and cleaning rules are followed. I want to be assured that the childcare center will be cleaning all contact surfaces regularly, and utilizing touch-free technology when possible. I will feel **RELAXED** knowing that proper PPE and cleaning products like hand sanitizer will be readily available.



Communication is important, and along with communication about changes in policies I want communication that is beneficial to me and my children. The childcare should provide advice on how to prepare my child for the changes that have been put in place. I also expect regular communication about increased health risks, outbreaks, or any other concerns. Ideally, I would have an app to maintain contact with the childcare, communicate with staff, and track my child. I need to know that I can be connected to them even when they are at the childcare.

PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

I feel
Safe

Preparing for Drop-Off

For me to feel SAFE when I am preparing my kids at home...

I need some sense of normalcy

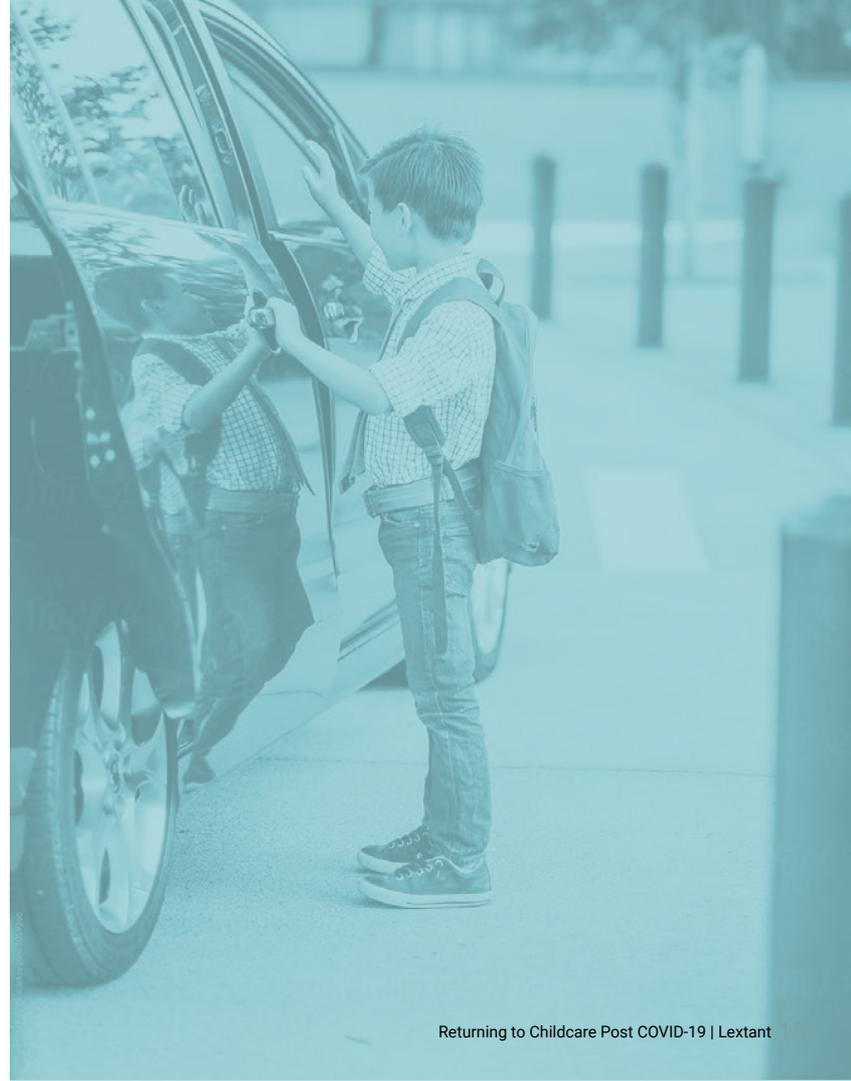
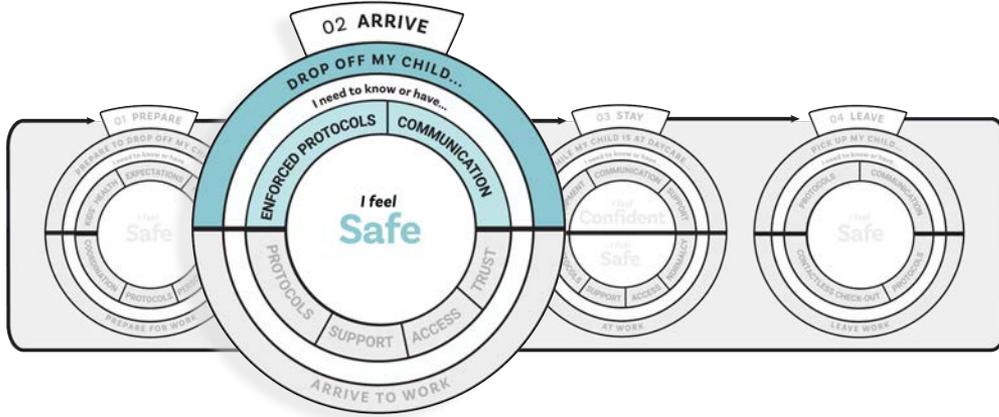
Making the return to childcare as normal as possible is going to ensure that my child is relaxed throughout the whole journey. I want to know that there will be a safe way for my child to engage in physical contact with other kids and staff, and know that I can personally walk them into the school. It is important to me that my child feels like we are in this together.



“ Making him feel loved & preparing him for the people and the process around by checking if he had a good sleep, if he is excited, playing his favorite music in the car as we drive to the center, knowing what he wants to do at school for the day and just pumping him up. ”

Dropping off My Child

When dropping my child off at childcare, I want to feel safe. To feel **SAFE**, I need to know that all protocols are established and enforced, especially during drop-off times. I also need clear communication before and during drop-off from the staff to know what to expect and how to best drop off my child.



I feel Safe

Dropping Off My Child

For me to feel SAFE when dropping my kids off...

I need to see protocols put in place at drop off

A touchless check-in process would help me feel SAFE. I want protocols enacted to ensure that everyone who enters the building takes the following precautions:

- Their temperature is checked.
- They wash their hands at a contactless handwashing facility outside of the building and have easily-accessible hand sanitizer.
- Their personal items are sanitized before entering the center, and they encourage the use of single-use items to avoid sharing.

- PPE such as masks need to be worn by staff and adults, but not by the kids. Not wearing masks and letting the kids experience physical touch and closeness is essential for them to feel connected and their mental health.



Protocols should ensure that children are transferred to the teacher outside of the building so that I can talk to the teacher without possibly contaminating the building.

Clear routines and procedures help give things a sense of normalcy for my children.

Alternatively, protocols could stagger drop-off to limit crowding by ensuring I stay in my vehicle until I am alerted that the staff is ready for me to bring my child into the center. This would make me feel like the situation is **IN-CONTROL**.

PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

I feel
Safe

Dropping Off My Child

For me to feel SAFE when dropping my kids off...

I need to know that protocols are being enforced at drop off

Any protocol changes that are put in place must be enforced by the staff to ensure that they are all being followed. It should be the responsibility of the staff to ensure that new protocols are being followed, not me.

Visually seeing children getting their temperature checked when arriving and being spaced up from one another lets me know that these protocols are being followed.

Signs reminding everyone to follow protocols also help to let me know that everyone is aware of how to conduct themselves and holding each other accountable.



“

I want to know processes are in place, like people staying 6 feet away from each other, parents using hand sanitizers or washing hands before entering the building, and that all of these are properly regulated by the staff.

PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

I feel
Safe

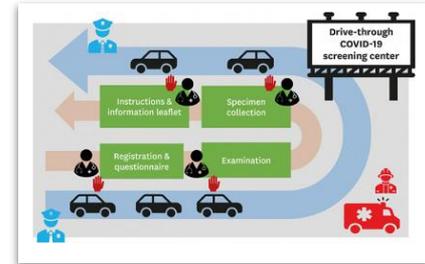
Dropping Off My Child

For me to feel **SAFE** when dropping my kids off...

I need communication with the childcare center and staff

I need to know about any changes to procedure ahead of time and the changes need to be consistent and well thought out. I should be notified about any changes via text, email, phone, app, etc. and I should be able to communicate with the teachers about any changes.

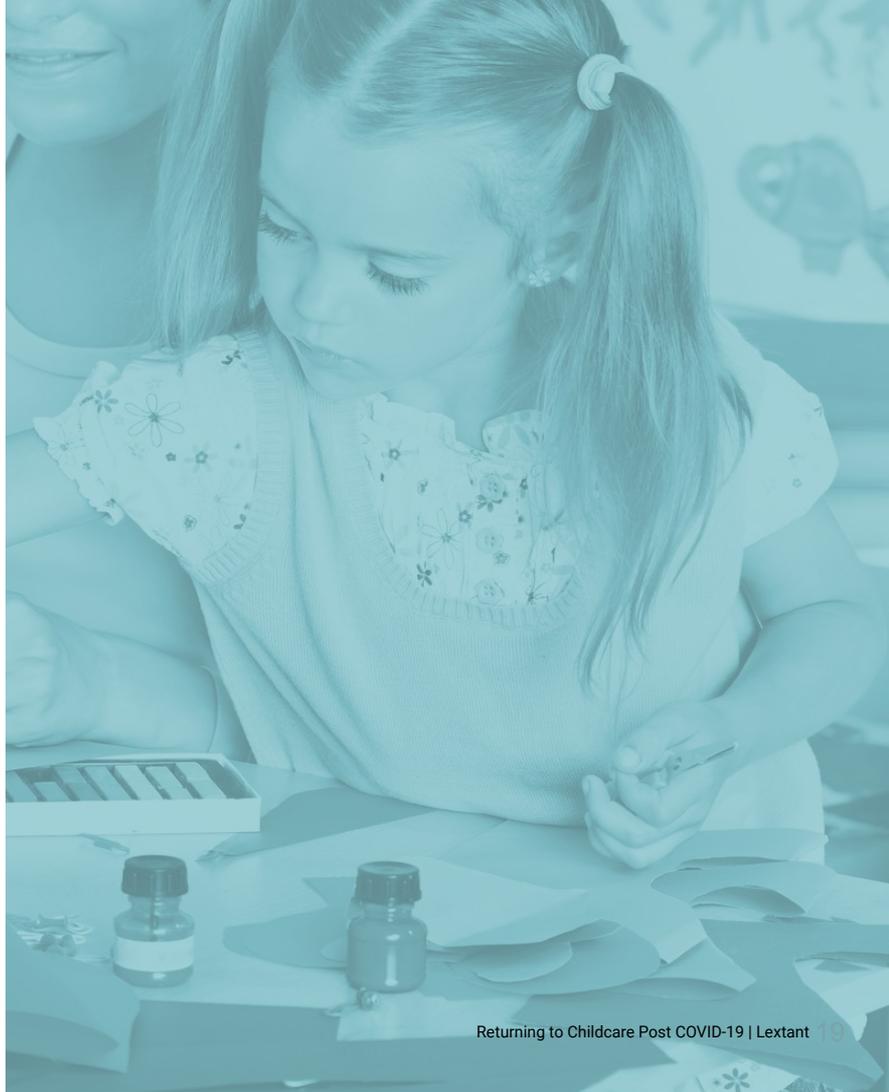
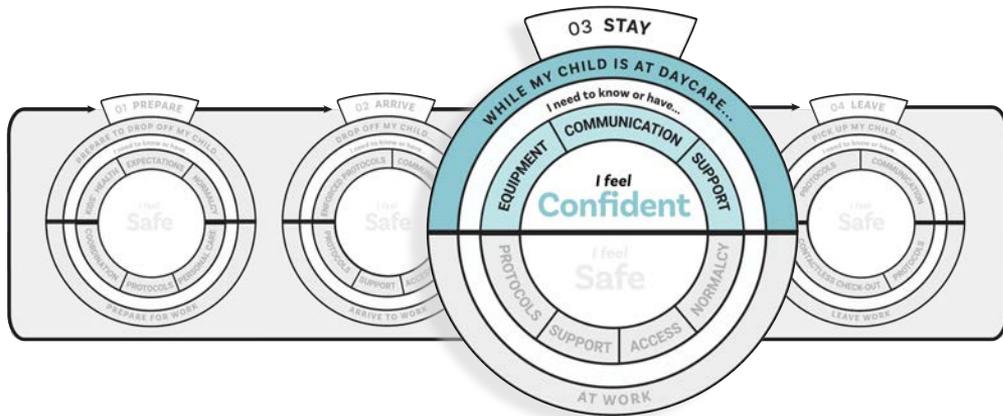
I want it to be clearly communicated that protocols are being followed. Seeing staff actively cleaning and task checklists in public places show me that things are being regularly cleaned and builds my **CONFIDENCE**. In order to feel **IN-CONTROL** I should be able to make suggestions for improvements as part of the open communication between the staff and parents.



PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

While My Child Is at the Center

While my child is at the center, I want to feel **CONFIDENT**. In order to feel confident, I need to know that both staff and my children have access to proper equipment. I also need to have open communication with my staff to know what's going on. With their support, I will feel confident that my child is safe.



I feel Confident

While my Child is at the Center

For me to feel **CONFIDENT** while my kids are at childcare...

I need protocols defined and maintained with equipment

Protocols should be put in place that are protecting my child from the virus when at the center. A system that ensures staff & child touchpoints like toys, supplies or furniture must be wiped down and washing of hands by children and teachers should be regulated periodically. More importantly, I want to know these procedures are strictly practiced by children, staff & parents. Ensuring this will make me feel more **RELAXED**.



“
Sanitizing wipes are their own category thinking of toys, supplies and everything that kids touch. Protocols are needed to help clean and sanitize everything that kids touch: pencils, scissors, door handles are sanitized between classes or morning and afternoon sessions.

I feel Confident

While my Child is at the Center

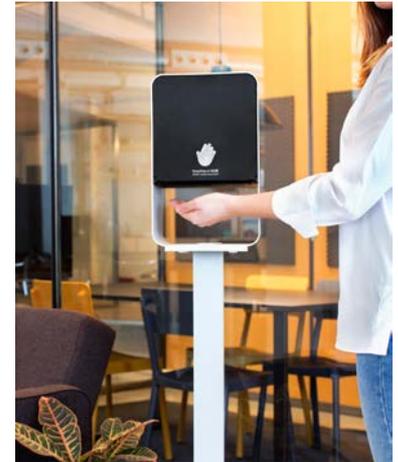
For me to feel **CONFIDENT** while my kids are at childcare...

Equipment should be accessible & complement the protocols in place

Cleaning accessories like sanitizers and hand washing stations should be available and accessible to parents, staff and children throughout the center. Staff members should ensure that when interacting with children or parents, they are wearing protective gear.

Interactions with equipment should minimize touch points as much as possible.

Gloves should be easily disposable and should not be used by staff to interact with multiple children or parents. Moreover, hand washing units, sanitizer dispensers and other frequently contacted equipment should have contactless interactions (e.g., motion sensor activation). Having this will ensure an extra layer of protection, making me feel **RELAXED**.



I feel Confident

While my Child is at the Center

For me to feel **CONFIDENT** while my kids are at childcare...

I need to know what's happening at the center

I feel confident knowing that my child has access to open space for playing which is essential for their physical development. I also expect meals to be served at the center that are nutritious (e.g. vitamins, proteins & fibers) and fresh. Knowing this, will reassure me of my child's health during challenging times as today.

I want timely visual updates about my child's activities (e.g., food, lessons, games played, nap schedule) so I know about their daily development.



“
There could be an app to know what's happening at the center when my child is there. Using it to know information like...“Did she take a nap?, What did she eat today and what activities was she involved in?” Also, other information, like if someone in her class is sick, so I know what symptoms to look for.

I feel Confident

While my Child is at the Center

For me to feel **CONFIDENT** while my kids are at childcare...

I need to know that I have the support of the center

If I have insufficient information, I need to know that I can reach out to someone for assistance at all times. This will make me feel **STRESS-FREE**.

Additionally, knowing about new protocols or announcements can prepare me for what to expect when my child is at the center. I would also know that protocols are in place if I see signage and instructions helping others to follow enforced guidelines. I want the center to share tips and tricks that can help reduce my child's anxiety about the new normal. Only when I am better informed of what the new normal looks like at the center can I be equipped to prepare my child for it.



I feel Confident

While my Child is at the Center

For me to feel **CONFIDENT** while my kids are at childcare...

I need to feel a sense of togetherness

I want my child to learn in a fun, calm and collaborative environment although rules and regulations may be a part of their daily routine. They should still experience a sense of family when interacting with teachers and peers which is important for their physical and mental development.

Masks and other equipment should not deter children or teachers from retaining a sense of normalcy when communicating or intermingling with each other.

The sense of togetherness should extend to parents-teacher relationships as well. There should be instances along the day when teachers and parents can communicate with each other updates about children and also vital information about the new normal at the center that can help parents to be on the same page and feel more involved.



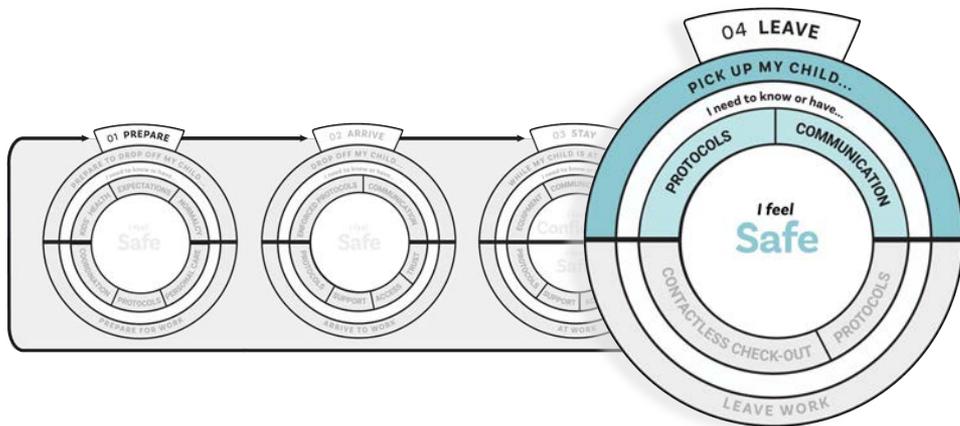
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I would want my child to have a sense of freedom, comfort and a sense of normalcy even in a state of controlled guidelines and rules.

PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

Picking Up My Child

When picking up my child, I want to feel **SAFE**. In advance, I need to know the protocols for pick-up and have open communication with staff.



I feel
Safe

Picking Up My Child

For me to feel **SAFE** when picking my kids up...

I need to know that a contactless process for pick up is in place

Regulating the crowds of kids and parents during pick up is essential so that **SAFE** social distancing can be maintained. I want text or app updates that inform parents about wait times and when my child is ready for pick up so that all the parents aren't trying to pick up their kids at once. In addition, contactless hand washing and sanitizing stations should be accessible for kids and parents at pick up so that handwashing and cleanliness can be maintained.



PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

I feel
Safe

Picking Up My Child

For me to feel **SAFE** when picking my kids up...

I need to know that pick up protocols are being enforced

There need to be safe processes that are regulated and enforced with clear signage and directions so I can feel **CONFIDENT**. This will help regulate pick up queues and sanitizations activities. Children and staff should wash their hands before dropping children off to parents and the staff should be wearing appropriate PPE so that all parties can stay **HEALTHY**.

“

I think all procedures should be as contactless as possible. Parents should be notified about when to pick up kids so that it's not crowded and social distancing is maintained, which will help reduce the spread of the virus.



PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

I feel
Safe

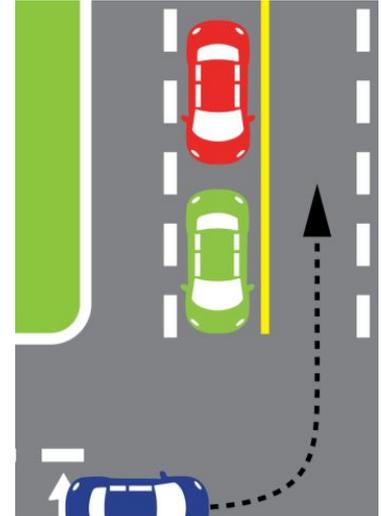
Picking Up My Child

For me to feel **SAFE** when picking my kids up...

I need to communicate with the childcare staff

The protocols in place to optimize the pick up process should be clearly communicated to me. There should be a support line that I can call to gather the information I need during the pick up process and I should be updated about any relevant changes.

Visual representations of how the pick up process is going to work should be provided and a checklist should be maintained to ensure that all stages of the process are completed. In addition, I want to be able to stay connected with my child and be provided with updates about my child's day. This will help me stay **STRESS FREE** because I know the childcare's procedures and what my child is doing throughout the day.



“ I know I will be doing the right thing sending my child back if I know about protocols, like social distancing rules. I want to be able to communicate with staff for updates on their practices and on my child.

Our ideal

Return to Childcare Experience

STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

The journey for staff returning to work can be broken down into the following four steps:

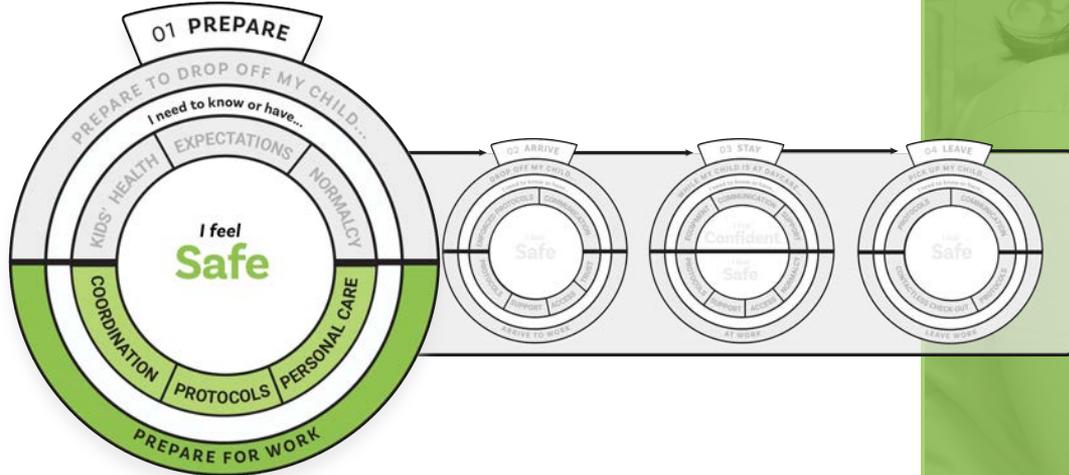
- 01** preparing for work
- 02** arriving to work
- 03** while at work
- 04** leaving work



STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

Preparing for Work

When preparing for work, I want to feel **SAFE**. I need to have coordination with my team, defined protocols, and my own personal care routine at home that involves taking care of myself and of my family.



STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

I feel
SAFE

Preparing for Work

For me to feel SAFE when I am preparing to go to work...

I need our team to be coordinated

When I am unsure, I need our team to have clear leadership that I can ask for support. Our team needs to be on the same page and provide consistent responses and actions for other staff, parents, and children.



“

We won't know what we need in the current state, so when we go in, we will have to ask for things from the leadership.

STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

I feel
SAFE

Preparing for Work

For me to feel **SAFE** when I am preparing to go to work...

I need to know our protocols beforehand

Staff and families need to follow predetermined guidelines and procedures to ensure that things are as germ free as possible in order to make me feel comfortable. Safe social distancing procedures need to be followed and groups should be limited to a maximum of 10 so I can feel **IN-CONTROL**.



STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

I feel
SAFE

Prepare for Work

For me to feel SAFE when I am preparing to go to work...

I need to take care of myself

I need to establish a personal routine to ensure I am prepared for work. I need to take my temperature, wash my hands, and eat a good meal before I go into work. Preexisting health conditions are a concern that I have about returning to work.

I need to take care of my family

Before I am able to go to work it is essential that I have access to care for my own family.



STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

Arriving to Work

When arriving to work, I want to feel **SAFE**. I need to know in advance proper protocols and have access to equipment and safety gear. I need support from other staff in order to be confident and gain the trust of parents.



STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

I feel
SAFE

Arriving to Work

For me to feel **SAFE** when I am arriving to work...

I need procedures and protocols enforced when arriving at work

The number of occupants needs to be limited in order to allow for appropriate social distancing. This will result in fewer touchpoints that need to be regularly cleaned. If apps are going to be used, each child needs their own device to prevent the spread of germs. Contactless methods should be used when possible, like during check in and getting paper towels, in order to limit sharing germs.

Temperature checks make me feel **SAFE** because I know no one is sick and needs to be isolated from the others. In addition, people need to be cleaned as they enter the center and regular cleaning and hand washing is essential.



STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

I feel
SAFE

Arriving to Work

For me to feel **SAFE** when I am arriving to work...

I need support for adhering to procedures

I need a step by step checklist for all of the procedures I need to follow, like making sure everyone has appropriate protective equipment when they enter the building. All of the staff must be on the same page with the protocols in order to maintain the rules and cleanliness of the center.

The staff needs to support one another when emergencies arise, but also on more common tasks like taking temperatures in order to feel **IN-CONTROL**.



“
It is important to have the support of everyone (directors/parents) to maintain rules and to help when other staff members have emergencies.

STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

I feel
SAFE

Arriving to Work

For me to feel **SAFE** when I am arriving to work...

I need access to the essentials

I must have consistent access to the equipment I need like wipes, masks, and hand washing essentials. In addition, the air should be purified to help those with respiratory issues like asthma. This is important since COVID-19 is a respiratory related illness.



STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

I feel
SAFE

Arriving to Work

For me to feel **SAFE** when I am arriving to work...

I need to gain parents' trust

A board or some other device to share important information with the parents should be established. This will enable staff to inform parents about important protocols and changes. This will boost the parents' **CONFIDENCE** in the staff and childcare center.

I need preparations to be taken care of so I can focus on my job

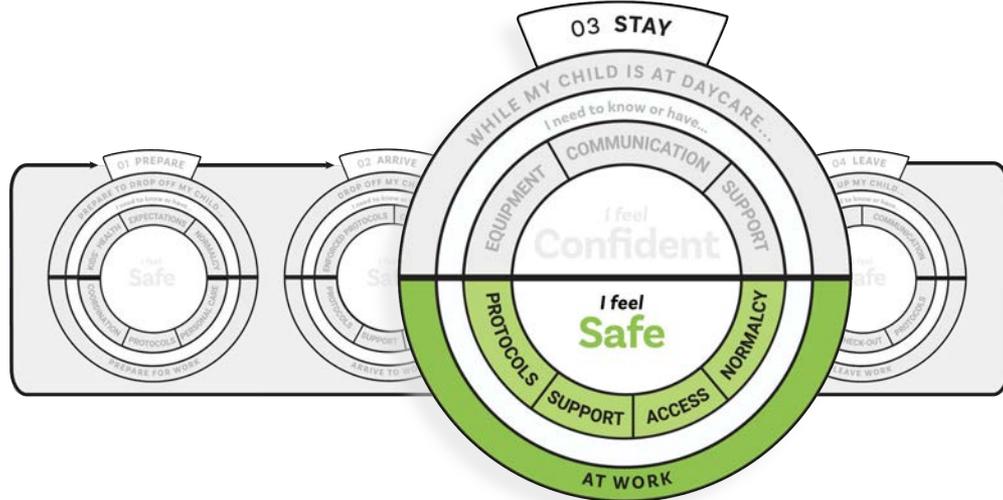
The rooms should be cleaned overnight so that I can feel **IN-CONTROL** of the children and the environment when I am at work.



STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

While I'm at Work

While I'm at work, I want to feel **SAFE**. I need to know that protocols are set in place and followed by everyone. I need to have access to essentials and know that my colleagues do as well. We need to support one another and instill a sense of normalcy in any way we can.



STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

I feel
SAFE

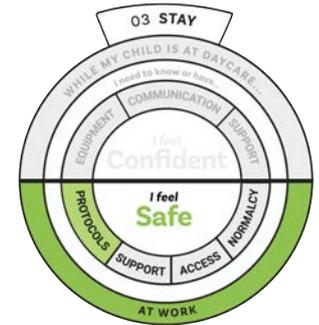
While I'm at Work

For me to feel **SAFE** while I
am at work...

***I need procedures at work
that keep all of us safe***

Protocols are needed for standardizing parent, staff, and child interactions. Ensuring appropriate social distancing, limiting unnecessary contact, and consistent cleaning are essential to maintaining a **HEALTHY** environment. New student to teacher ratios and preemptively arranged seating are two methods that could be used to ensure the safety of the childcare environment.

Visual indicators pertaining to social distancing and hand sanitizing procedures should be readily available. These should be kid friendly and frequent to drive home the message and remind everyone of the new procedures.



STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

I feel
SAFE

While I'm at Work

For me to feel **SAFE** while I
am at work...

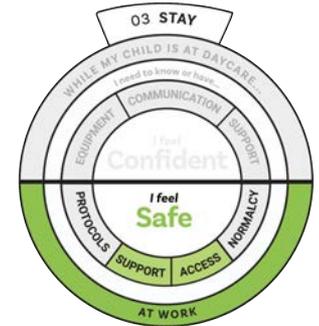
I need access to the essentials

Kits that contain essential items, like pen and paper, for workers and children should be provided so no one has to share. The kits should be individualized to the recipient.

In addition, essential items like air filters, cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer, and masks should be readily available. Enforcing the usage of masks and other PPE is essential to providing a **SAFE** environment for the staff and children.

I need support

Leadership and staff need to be on the same page so that we are able to support one another with essential tasks like cleaning, temperature taking, and managing the kids. Staff need meals and mental support in order to provide the best child care possible.



STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

I feel
SAFE

While I'm at Work

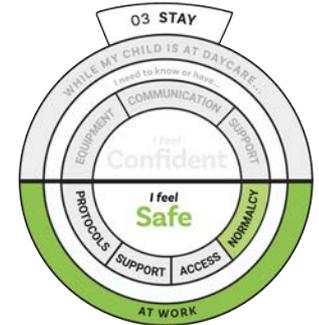
For me to feel **SAFE** while I
am at work...

*I need to maintain
normalcy*

The children need space to play with access to fresh air so they are not confined and are able to keep their distance from others. Children want to hug and climb on each other and teachers so knowing and maintaining appropriate boundaries is important. This will make parents feel **SAFE**. However, we still need to understand children's emotions and provide them with emotional support.

*I need to gain
parents' trust*

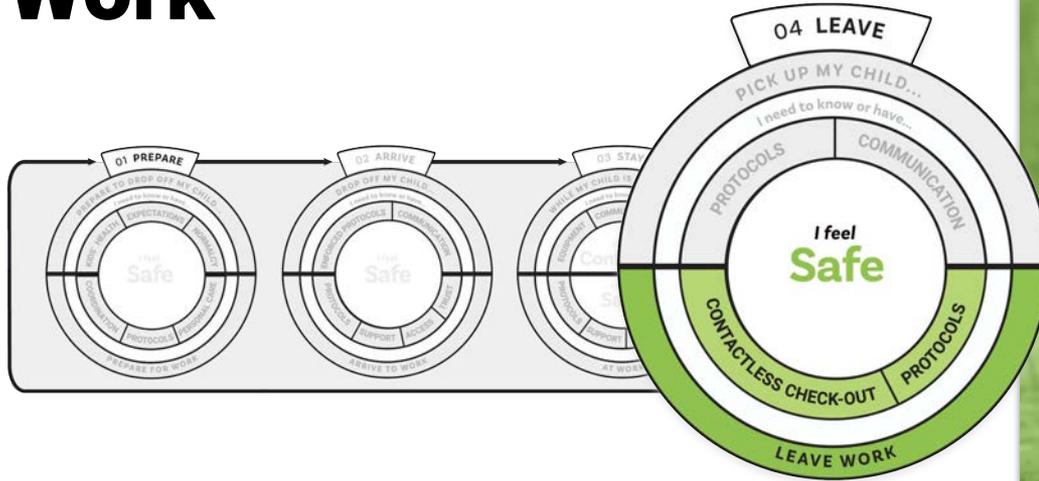
Parents need to receive live updates on their children to feel more **RELAXED**. By informing the parents about their child's wellbeing, the parents will gain **CONFIDENCE** in our ability to care for their children.



STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

Leaving Work

When leaving work, I need to feel **SAFE**. There should be a contactless check-out process and clear protocols in place in order to leave the space as clean and safe for the start of the next day.



STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

I feel
SAFE

Leaving Work

For me to feel **SAFE** when I am leaving work...

I need contactless check out

The check out process for staff must minimize contact touch points by making touchless hand sanitizers and similar supplies accessible to prevent the spread of germs. Social distancing must be an integral part of checkout to maintain personal safe space as one exits the center.



“

Limiting the number of people is important in maintaining social distance when leaving from the facility. This ensures our safety.



STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

I feel
SAFE

Leaving Work

For me to feel **SAFE** when I am leaving work...

I need established protocols when leaving from work

Protocols need to be established for the children and the environment. A safe way to transport and clean masks is needed. Consistent end of day cleaning protocols for wiping down the room are needed so we can be **CONFIDENT** in the cleanliness of the room and the cleaning happens behind the scenes. Each child should have their own supplies to limit sharing germs. Clear protocols should be provided for parents and children for the pick up process to ensure the safety of the children. When leaving each child needs to be able to say goodbye to their friends and then wash their hands.

I need protocols to be maintained

Protocols need to be standardized and followed by everyone to provide **CONFIDENCE** for parents, children, and staff. Each staff member should be in charge of their own space at the beginning and end of each day. For tasks that others have to complete for me I want access to a checklist so i can be assured that the tasks were completed up to par.



“ I need everyone’s support in maintaining the established protocols and during personal emergencies in this pandemic period.

LOOKING FORWARD

How to Create Solutions

Throughout the insights in this report there are a number of direct solutions brought up by participants or uncovered by the Lextant team during analysis. However, these solutions are not exhaustive and should serve as examples of what solutioning might look like.

As a guideline, below is a high level overview of where to start when brainstorming with your team around certain steps in the journey.

	At Home	Arrive	Stay	Leave
Parent	Communication	Visual Cues	Communication	Visual Cues
Staff	Communication	Protocols	Teamwork	Protocols

LOOKING FORWARD

01 Communication

For both parents and staff, communication means knowing what's important in a clear, easy-to-understand way. Solutions that revolve around communication tend to be in parts of the journey where the parents and staff are not personally present and cannot rely on physical cues to instill the desired emotional experience.

02 Visual Cues

Visual cues are a way to use signs, actions, and other visible displays, as a way to assure parents that their children's needs are being met in a safe and clean way. These are especially important for parents, as their overall time spent at the childcare is minimal, and they must rely on what they can observe in those brief spaces of time.

03 Protocols

When staff members are first arriving to work and getting ready to leave work, they expect there to be a process of protocols in place to keep them and the rest of their team safe. These moments in particular represent a change in status and are expected to be highlighted with actionable protocols that mark their coming and going.

LOOKING FORWARD

04 Teamwork

Once staff members have checked in, while protocols are still important, their focus shifts to taking care of the children as a team. Solutions for staff at this point should focus on a common goal that everyone on the team can strive for.

05 Togetherness

(Common through all phases and roles)
Two way communication is continuously maintained in terms of updates at the center and their child (preferably through visuals) so they know protocols are in place and enforced.

Staff members are also continuously updated about protocols, provided easy access to safety equipment & team support during urgent needs. This continuity in information flow helps parents & staff to be better informed, prepared and feel a sense of togetherness.

Thank you for including Lextant in this rewarding cause and research sprint.

We appreciate the contributions of all involved—parents, staff, stakeholders, and the Can't Stop Columbus organization.

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