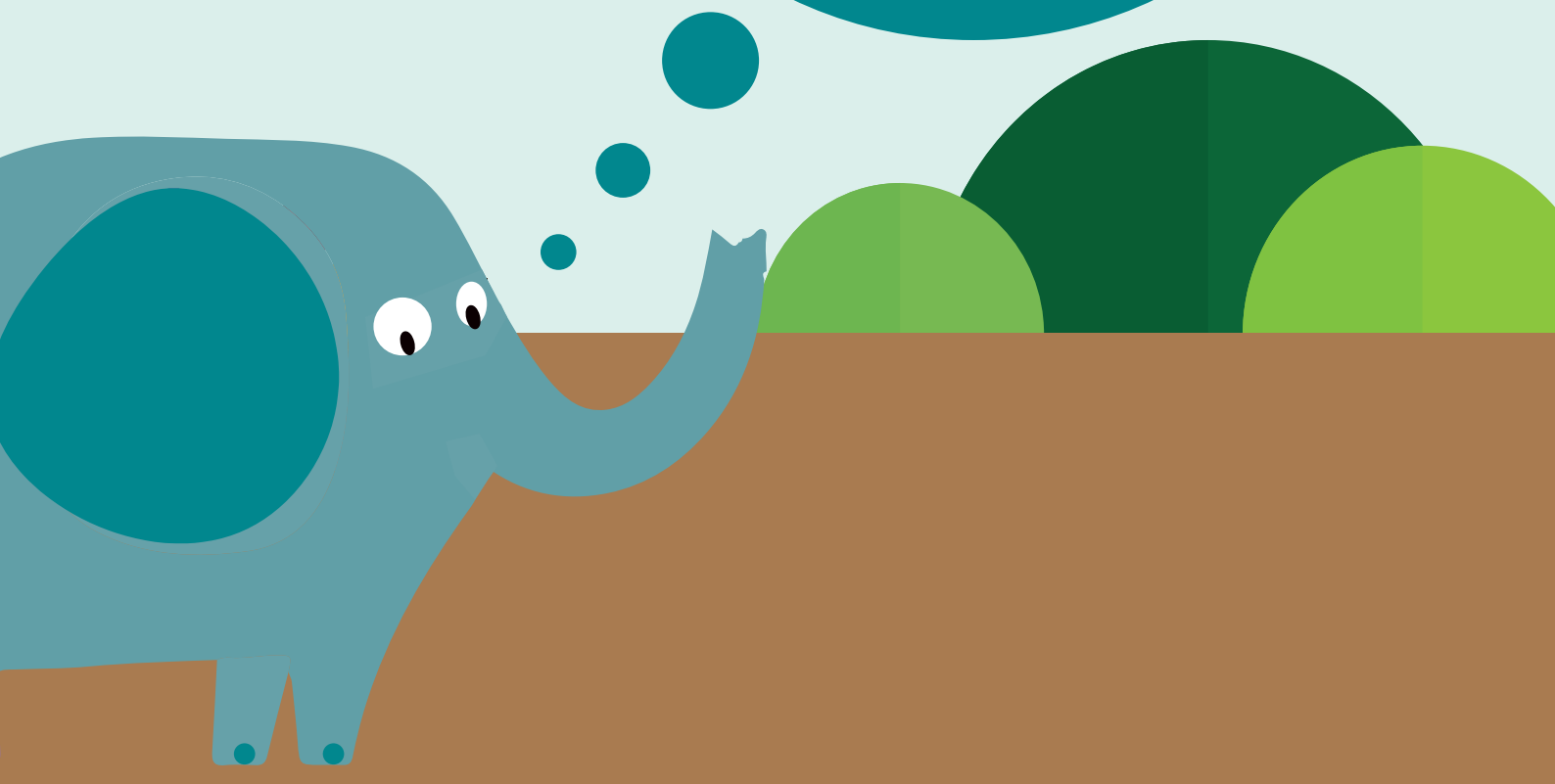


Practice note

Keeping children safe:
supporting transitions
in early learning and
childcare (ELC)



In early learning and childcare (ELC), transition is understood to mean a time of change for children. From their earliest years, children experience daily and major transitions as their environments, routines, expectations and relationships change.

These changes can happen across the day or over time. If children are given the right support, they will learn to adjust to new situations and to form new and trusting relationships with others. This places them in a good position to have the confidence to explore, develop their interests and progress their learning.

For most children, transitions are a source of excitement and opportunity. However, for some transitions can be a time of anxiety.

Through our scrutiny work and notifications of incidents, we know that children have sometimes left the setting or have been left behind during times of transition. This presents a serious risk to their safety and wellbeing. Knowledge of the individual child and listening to their words and actions are key. Without them, children's safety and wellbeing are at risk.

Sometimes children leave a setting as they are not familiar with the environment or routine, are curious about something they see or are looking for someone familiar. As a result, children have crossed roads, made their way home and have been found by members of the public. Children who are unsupervised are at risk of coming to serious harm.

As ELC staff, it is your responsibility under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ([UNCRC 1989](#)) to ensure children's rights to life, survival and development (Article 6), protection from violence, abuse and neglect (Article 19) and to leisure, play and culture (Article 31) are promoted.



"As a social service worker, I must protect and promote the rights and interests of people who use services and carers."

([Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers](#), Scottish Social Service Council)

This practice note will provide a prompt for reflecting on and developing approaches to keeping children safe during transitions, while ensuring they still have opportunities to build connections with others, play and learn.



Listen to children's words, actions, and emotions. What are they telling you?



Respond, Reflect and Remember

We want to share our learning so you can be confident you provide safe, nurturing, and supportive care. The three R's (**Respond**, **Reflect** and **Remember**) can help you to keep children safe.

Respond to children

It is important to take account of children's voices in matters that affect them. Each child will experience the care you provide differently.

- Make sure I am always cared for by people I know and who know me.
- When I feel overwhelmed or fearful, I need someone who makes me feel safe.
- Support me to make friends and to form trusting relationships with others.
- Remember that I feel big emotions and need help to make sense of them.
- Sometimes I feel fearful when I cannot predict what is going to happen next.

- I will seek comfort and safety from those I know and trust. Be patient with me as I build my attachment to you.
- Please take time to get to know my family, as well as me. They can help you to better understand me, what I like and what I might need support with.
- If I am upset or feeling anxious, do not be afraid to change plans so my care is responsive.
- Be curious about what my needs are and what my behaviour is communicating.

Reflect on practice

These questions are designed to help staff in the process of reflection.

Assessing the environment

- How do you assess the environment to identify potential safety risks during times of transition?
- What potential risks have you found, and how could these be addressed to ensure children's safety?

Staff/adult roles and responsibilities

- How do you plan staffing arrangements to ensure that children are safe?
- What are the responsibilities of a child's key person in supporting transitions?
- What discussions take place about the impact of transitions on children's safety?
- How do leaders provide staff with feedback on their practice to support improvement?
- If a child were missing, what procedures would you follow?

Staff communication

- How do you communicate about children's needs during daily transition?
- How do you ensure children are supported, and accounted for, during the different transitions across their day?
- How do you ensure that colleagues understand when you need support?
- How do you supervise children and communicate about where they are?

Family engagement

- To support transitions, how are families encouraged to share their knowledge and insights about their children with you?
- When children and their families arrive at your setting, how do you know they feel welcomed and feel connected with staff and children?
- How do you communicate with families to determine if children need extra emotional support across the day?
- How can comforters from home help a child feel settled, safe, and secure?

Knowing and understanding the children in your care

- How would you be reassured that children are secure and settled?
- How do you interpret what children are trying to communicate?
- How do you ensure nonverbal children can express their needs, feelings and wants?
- How do your observations and knowledge of a child influence the routine of the day?
- How do you promote children's sense of self, independence and responsibilities?

Time to Reflect

Scenario 1

A child who has been attending your service for 18 months arrives one day upset. The parent appeared rushed at drop off and explained they were late for an appointment.

They highlighted that their child had not wanted to come to nursery and that they had a “very difficult” morning. The parent also seemed upset. A member of staff escorted the child to the garden where their friends were playing and then returned indoors. Unobserved by staff, the child then left the nursery garden by means of a small gap in a fence. After some time, the child was found in the nursery car park by an adult visiting the service. The adult brought the child to the nursery office. No one had been aware the child was missing. Although upset, the child had thankfully not come to any physical harm.

Discuss this scenario:

- What do you consider the emotions and thoughts were for the child?
- What actions do you consider were needed to prevent this?
- To prevent this happening to a child in your service, how will you improve your practice?



Scenario 2

Lunch time was approaching in a primary school nursery class. Children were encouraged to come inside from the garden, tidy up and wash their hands before going to the gym hall for lunch.

One member of staff asked the group of 20 children if they were ready before leading the way to the gym hall. The other staff walked alongside the children. One child was still washing their hands when everyone else left the playroom and the child did not hear the others leaving. When the child realised all the children had already left, they made their way out of the playroom through the open door that led into the school. At the gym hall, children were busily collecting their meals before sitting down. It was 10 minutes later before the child's key worker realised they were missing. Staff began searching for the child who was found alone five minutes later in the school library.

Discuss the scenario:

- What do you consider the emotions and thoughts were for the child?
- What actions do you consider were needed to prevent this?
- Identify and discuss transition periods at your service, and reflect on whether any changes are needed to ensure children are accounted for and their needs met?





Remember
... SIMOA

S

Safety

Be alert to all potential risks in your setting.

I

Inspect

Look around and inspect the environment to make sure a child can't leave an area without staff or their parent/carer.

M

Monitor

Regularly check that all children are accounted for, particularly when they are outside, on outings or using transport.

O

Observe

Observe children and think about their feelings and emotional security – use these observations to support children to feel loved and secure

A

Act

Assess and take action to keep children safe.

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