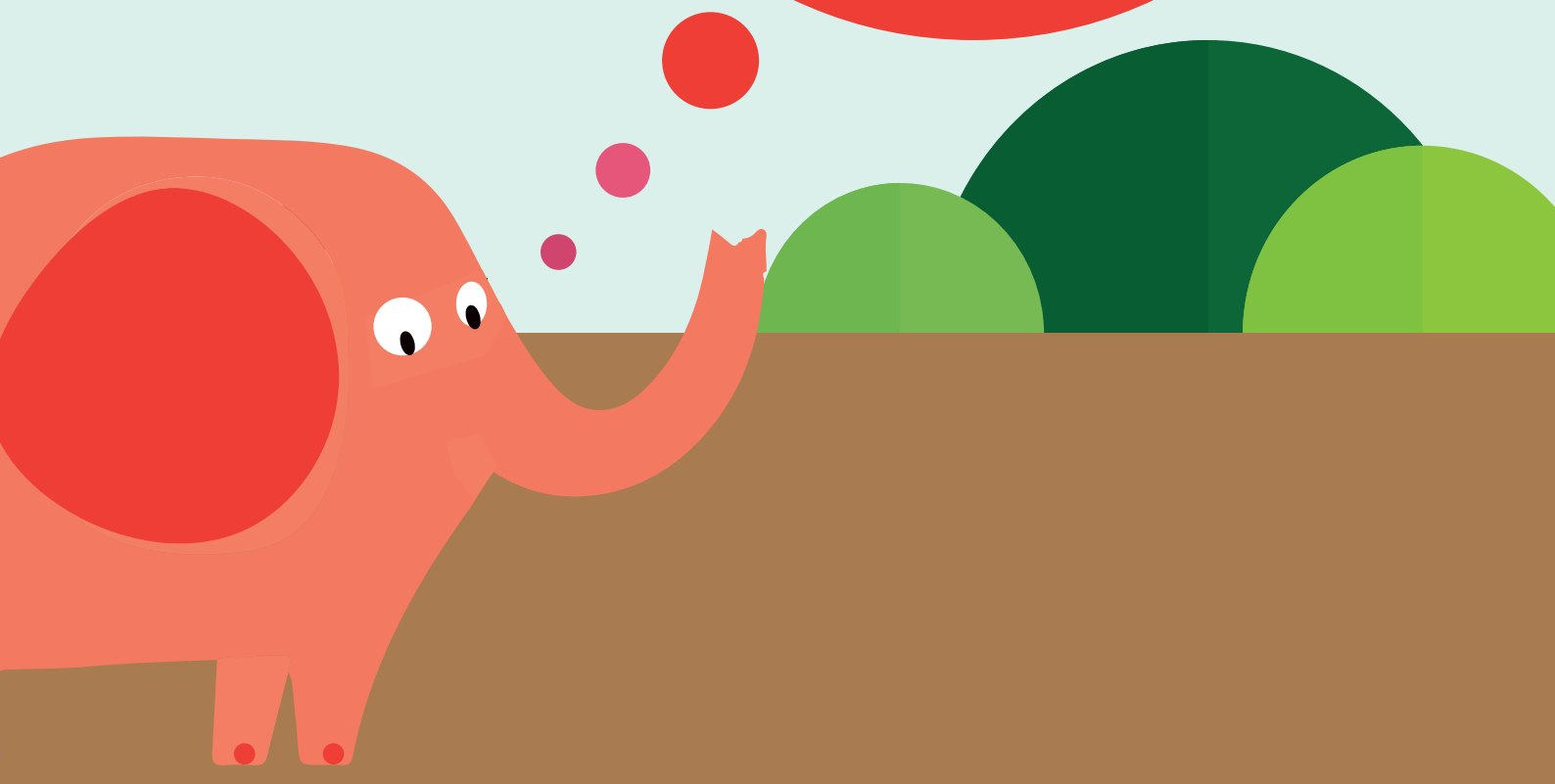


# Practice note

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



## Children's learning and development are supported through regular opportunities to be curious, creative and to develop a sense of wonder about the world.

Children in your setting may at times experience many new, exciting and challenging situations. This normally includes becoming familiar with new routines, people, spaces, ideas and concepts. When children have a strong connection to their care environment and the people in it, exposure to new experiences builds self-esteem and a love of learning. ELC staff are tasked with creating a fun learning environment that is safe and familiar, as well as challenging and stimulating.

Through our scrutiny work and notifications of incidents, we know some children have left the care of their responsible adults to go and explore something interesting or when they have felt overwhelmed. In some instances, this has gone unobserved by the adults responsible for these children and some have been found by members of the public.

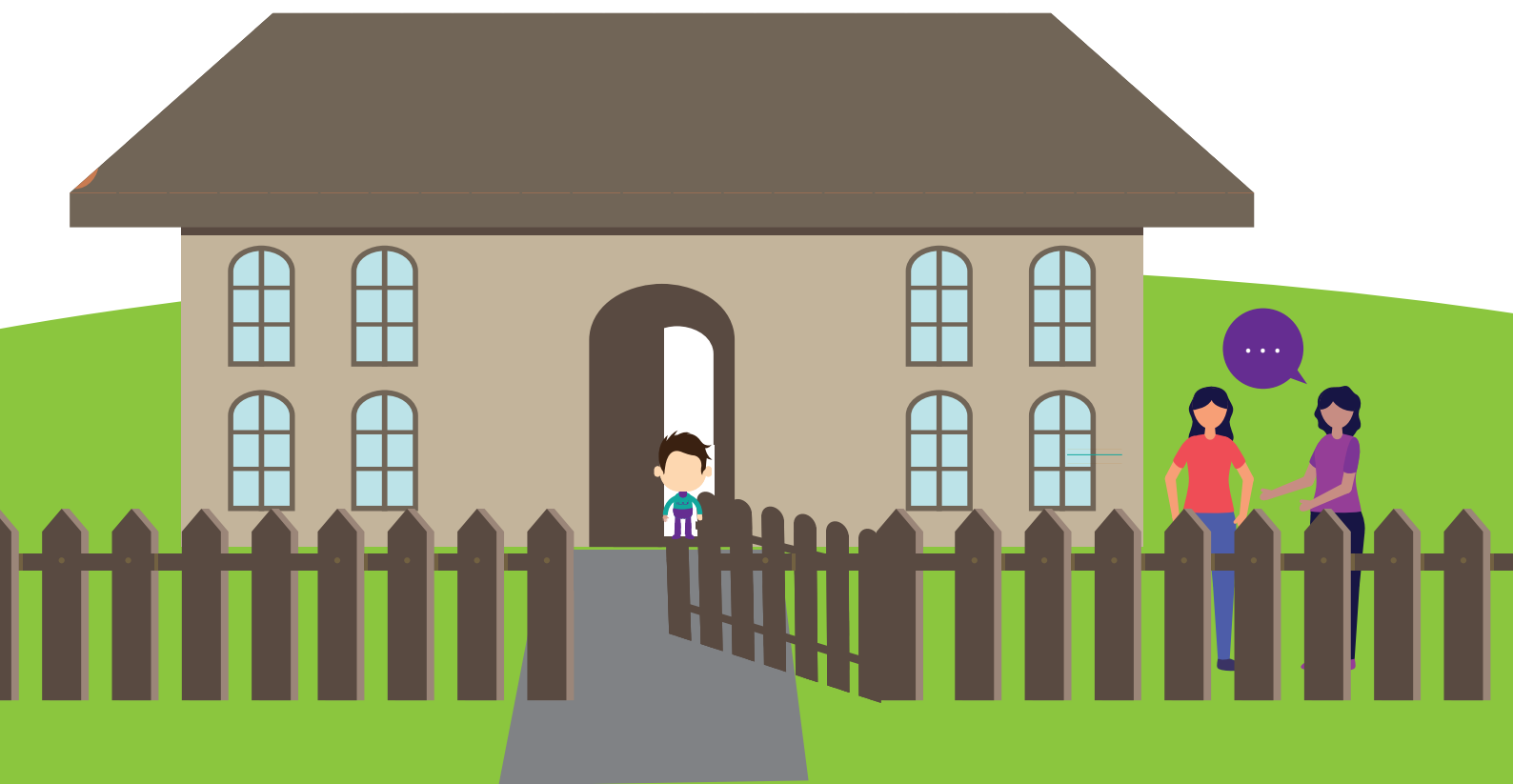
Children who are unsupervised are at risk of coming to harm. A strongly connected relationship and knowledge of the individual child are key. Without them, children's safety and wellbeing are at risk.

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)



## 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 you know me, where I am and who is responsible for me.
- Provide me with a wide range of experiences so I can lead my own play.
- Involve me and talk to me about staying safe.
- Respond when you notice I need your help to explore and investigate the world around me.
- Play is my serious work, keep my experiences interesting and challenging.
- Be curious about the world with me. This will strengthen our emotional connection and help keep me safe.

- Explain things to me in a way that I can understand.
- Notice me and know when to encourage my risky play and when to offer me support.
- Ensure that the environment reflects my individual needs and interests.
- Please take time to wonder what my actions are communicating.

## Reflect on practice

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

### Assessing the environment

- How do you ensure children cannot leave the premises without an authorised adult?
- How do you identify and address safety risks within children's spaces and environment?
- How does your environment support children's natural curiosity, while keeping them safe?
- How do you ensure that children's spaces, choices, and experiences reflect their needs?

### Staff/adult roles and responsibilities

- How do you know what your responsibilities are within your team?
- How do you keep children safe, while at the same time, encourage them to lead and take responsibility for their own learning?
- How do you ensure that children have opportunities to be creative, curious, and imaginative within a safe environment?
- How do you share concerns and speak out when things need to improve?
- What procedures should you follow if a child is identified as missing?

### Staff communication

- How do you know who you are responsible for?
- How do you ensure effective communication with each other?
- How do you let your colleagues know you need their support?
- How do you observe, monitor, and communicate about where children are?
- As a team, how do you critically discuss your care and learning environment to support improvement?

### Family engagement

- To support curiosity and learning, how are families encouraged to share their knowledge and insights about their children with you?
- How do you ensure children feel secure and able to explore, be curious and learn?
- How do you work in partnership with families to plan children's emotional support across their day?

### Knowing and understanding the children in your care

- How do you ensure that children have at least one strong emotional connection with someone responsible for their care, support and learning?
- How do you know when a child needs challenge, additional support or help to pursue their interests?
- How do you include children's needs, interests, and capabilities in your planning processes and risk assessments?
- How do you support children to assess their safety during exploratory play?



## Time to Reflect

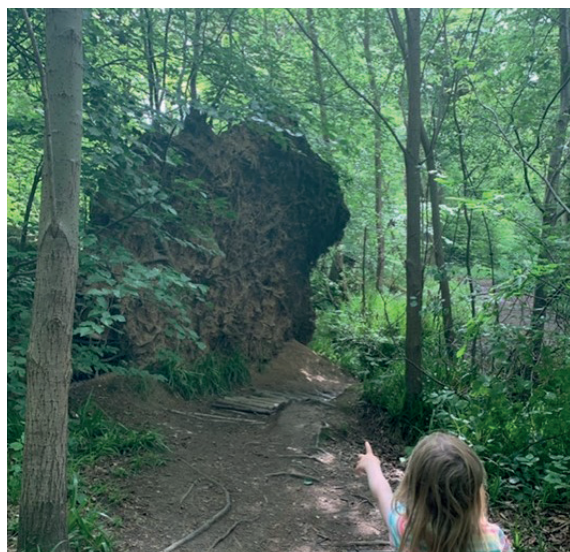
### Scenario 1

A young child had recently started in your setting and was in the outdoor play area. The child was used to collecting their older sibling from school and they were familiar with the school playground.

Unobserved by staff, the child left the nursery outdoor area by means of an opened gate and went to the school nearby to play in the sandpit. After some time, the child was observed by an adult passing who took them to the school. Fortunately, this child did not come to any 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?
- What would your immediate next steps and actions be after an incident like this?
- To prevent this happening to a child in your service, how will you improve your practice?





## Scenario 2

**A child was being creative and building with large resources at the rear of the nursery garden. They successfully balanced two crates on top of each other and climbed on top.**

To build a little higher, the child moved the crates closer to the fence. While balancing on the crates and holding on to the fence, the child was able to see into the nursery car park. There were some interesting sticks in the car park and the child climbed over the fence to gather them for their play. Once outside, the child realised they could not get back into the garden. They shouted but no one heard or noticed they were gone. The child's house was a few streets away from the nursery and they were familiar with the area. The child walked home where they found their dad who was home working. The child did not come to any physical harm but was emotionally distressed by the time they got home.

Discuss the scenario:

- What do you consider the emotions and thoughts were for the child?
- How was it possible for the child to leave the garden unnoticed?
- What would your immediate next steps and action be after an incident like this?
- To prevent this happening to a child in your service, how will you improve your practice?





**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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