

# Topic 8

## Child development and child safety



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The National Child Safety Training aims to enhance safety for children and strengthen child-safe culture across the education and care sector by introducing shared language, responsibilities, and understanding. The training was developed in partnership between Australian Centre for Child Protection (ACCP) and the Queensland Government on behalf of Australian governments.

The first level of training, Foundations of Child Safety, includes two eLearning courses:

- **Course 1:** Understanding Child Safety
- **Course 2:** Understanding and Identifying Child Abuse and Neglect

To complement the mandatory eLearning courses, a suite of non-mandatory Community of Practice resources has been developed to extend learning and support the application of knowledge in education and care settings. Whilst the Community of Practice are a voluntary component of the National Child Safety Training, they provide structured opportunities for discussion, reflection, and shared learning over time, helping staff build confidence and consistency in practice.

These resources contain prompts and suggested activities aligned with each course topic. They are designed to be flexible and may be selected, adapted, shortened, or revisited to suit different service types, team sizes, and meeting formats. The intention is to support practical conversations, not to prescribe a fixed program. There is no expectation that all topics and activities will be used and it is at your discretion how you use these resources.

Child safety is everyone's responsibility in places where children learn and grow. Harm can affect a child's wellbeing, learning, and development throughout childhood, and its impacts can continue into adulthood. When child safe practices are not in place, children are more at risk of harm.

By completing the mandatory eLearning training alongside some non-mandatory Community of Practice activities, you can strengthen your understanding of your role in protecting children, responding to concerns, and supporting a child safe environment in your service.



Australian  
Centre for  
Child Protection



Queensland  
Government

## Child development and child safety

Children grow and develop rapidly in their early years. They learn to move, communicate, form relationships, regulate emotions, and make sense of the world around them. Understanding child development helps education and care staff recognise what is typical for a child's stage, identify when something may not be on track, and respond in ways that support safety and wellbeing.

The National Quality Standard highlights the importance of understanding child development to support children to be safe, well, and thrive. When staff understand developmental stages, they can:

- Notice changes that may signal a safety concern.
- Match supervision and guidance to developmental ability.
- Support emotional regulation and secure attachment.
- Teach respectful relationships and body safety in age-appropriate ways.
- Adjust expectations based on developmental stage rather than chronological age.

A child's developmental age may differ from their age in years. Life experiences such as disability, trauma, stress, illness, or unstable environments can influence development. Understanding this helps staff respond with empathy and appropriate support.





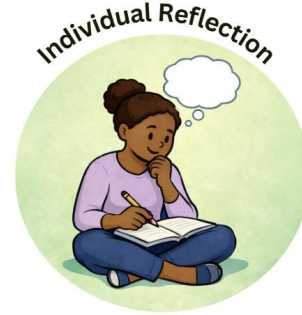
### Reminder

You **do not** need to run all three activities.

Select, adapt, shorten, or spread activities across sessions to suit your group and available time.

Activities can also be adapted for one-on-one supervision, mentoring conversations, or team meetings. You may choose to use a single scenario, question, or reflective prompt to guide discussion.

These activities are designed to be flexible and responsive to your service context.

<b>Activity 1: The stages of development</b>	
<b>Objective</b>	To strengthen participants' understanding of Erikson's stages of development theory on child development and explore how everyday interactions in education and care settings directly support children's development and wellbeing.
<b>Time</b>	30-40 minutes
<b>Format</b>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Small Group Activity</i></p>  </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Whole Group Activity</i></p>  </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Individual Reflection</i></p>  </div> </div>
<b>Materials needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stages of development worksheet</li> <li>• Butcher's paper or whiteboard</li> <li>• Markers</li> <li>• Pens</li> </ul>



## Activity plan

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### Facilitator Preamble

*“A child’s stage of development is important to know to help keep them safe. It can impact how well they can understand danger and follow rules. In education and care services, safety needs to match where the child is at developmentally.”*

### Remind participants

- Keep discussion general and focused on developmental stages, not individual children.
- Avoid sharing identifiable details or specific case examples from your service.
- Focus on strengths and developmental skills and support needs rather than deficits.
- This is about understanding child development to guide safe, responsive, and developmentally informed practice.

### Step 1: Set the context – Why understanding development matters (5 minutes)

Briefly revisit key concepts:

- Children grow and develop quickly in the early years.
- Development includes many areas such as physical/biological, social-emotional, cognitive and sexual.
- Children’s abilities to communicate, understand others, manage emotions, and solve problems change as they grow.
- Understanding child development helps adults recognise what children may be able to do, say, or understand at different ages and stages.
- Ask participants:
  - *“Why is understanding child development important for child safety?”*
  - *“How might misunderstandings about development affect how we respond to behaviour?”*

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- Emphasise: Everyday interactions such as tone of voice, comfort, routines, boundaries, and play, directly impact development.

### Step 2: Development in practice (15-20 minutes)

- Divide participants into small groups of 3-4.
- Explain that Erikson's Stages of Development is one theory on child development. It suggests that children go through several stages of development across their childhood and then into adulthood.
- Assign each group one developmental stage:
  - Stage 1: 0–1 year (Trust vs Mistrust)
  - Stage 2: 1–3 years (Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt)
  - Stage 3: 3–6 years (Initiative vs Guilt)
  - Stage 4: 6–12 years (Industry vs Inferiority)
- Provide each group with the Stages of Development worksheet.
- Ask groups to discuss and record:
  - *What key skills are emerging at this stage?* (e.g., attachment, language, emotion regulation, independence, problem-solving)
  - *How might children at this stage communicate a concern or unsafe experience?*
  - *What misunderstandings about behaviour at this stage might adults have?* (e.g., a behaviour that is developmentally typical may be seen as "naughty")
  - *What does the child need most from adults at this stage to help them feel safe and supported? Consider:*
    - Supervision
    - Emotional co-regulation
    - Clear boundaries
    - Encouragement
    - Predictable routines
    - Teaching about safety and relationships
- Ask volunteers to identify one intentional action education and care staff can take daily to support healthy development at this stage.

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- Encourage practical, everyday examples such as:
  - Naming emotions
  - Slowing transitions
  - Offering choices
  - Supporting problem-solving
  - Providing calm reassurance
  - Modelling respectful boundaries
  - Modelling emotional regulation

### Step 3: Connect to safety (7-10 minutes)

- Before moving to the whole-group share, ask each group:
  - *“How does understanding this stage of development help us keep children safe?”*
  - *“What risks arise when expectations do not match development?”*
- Groups add one sentence to their paper: *“Child safety at this stage means...”*

### Step 4: Whole group debrief (10 minutes)

- Invite each group to briefly share:
  - One key insight about child development.
  - One practical action that supports safety and healthy development at that stage.
- Reinforce:
  - Developmentally informed practice increases empathy and strengthens protective environments.
  - Children who feel understood, supported and respected are more likely to feel secure, communicate openly and seek help when something does not feel right.
  - Staff who apply developmentally informed practice are therefore better positioned to support children’s wellbeing and uphold safe, responsive learning environments.

### Step 5: Closing reflection (2 minutes)

- Invite participants to complete silently: *“One way I can intentionally support development in my daily practice is...”*



#### Facilitator tips

- If participants focus only on behaviour management, prompt: *“How could we build skill rather than just stop behaviour?”*
- Reinforce that child development varies. Age provides a guide, but developmental needs may differ depending on life experiences, disability, trauma, or cultural context.





## Online adaptation (MS Teams or Zoom)

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This activity can be delivered online using breakout rooms, shared slides, chat responses, and collaborative documents. The purpose remains the same: to connect Erikson's theory on the stages of development to everyday educator practice and child safety.

### Platform preparation (before the session)

- Upload or share a digital version of the Stages of Development worksheet.
- Set up breakout rooms (4 rooms, if possible, one per developmental stage).
- Optionally prepare a shared document or whiteboard with one page per stage for groups to record ideas.

### Step 1: Create psychological safety

- Begin with a brief facilitator preamble and wellbeing reminder.
- Reinforce that this is a reflective learning activity, not a test of knowledge.
- Encourage participants to contribute in ways that feel comfortable (speaking, chat, or shared document).

### Step 2: Set the context – Why understanding child development matters

Share a slide with the key concepts and briefly revisit them in plain language:

- Children grow and develop quickly in the early years.
- Development includes many areas such as physical/biological, social-emotional, cognitive and sexual.
- Children's abilities to communicate, understand others, manage emotions, and solve problems change as they grow.
- Understanding child development helps adults recognise what children may be able to do, say, or understand at different ages and stages.
- Invite quick responses in the chat to the questions:
  - *"Why is understanding child development important for child safety?"*

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- *“How might misunderstandings about development affect how we respond to behaviour?”*
- Read a few responses aloud and emphasise that everyday interactions such as tone of voice, routines, boundaries, and play directly impact development.

### Step 3: Development in practice

- Divide participants into breakout rooms of 3–4 people.
- Assign each breakout room one developmental stage:
  - Stage 1: 0–1 year (Trust vs Mistrust)
  - Stage 2: 1–3 years (Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt)
  - Stage 3: 3–6 years (Initiative vs Guilt)
  - Stage 4: 6–12 years (Industry vs Inferiority)
- Provide access to the worksheet via link or screen share.
- Ask each group to appoint one note-taker to record ideas in the shared document or on a virtual whiteboard.
- In breakout rooms, groups discuss and record:
  - *What key skills are emerging at this stage?*
  - *How might children at this stage communicate a concern or unsafe experience?*
  - *What misunderstandings about behaviour at this stage might adults have? (e.g., a behaviour that is developmentally typical may be seen as “naughty”)*
  - *What does the child need most from adults at this stage to feel safe and supported?*
  - One intentional daily action participants can take to support healthy child development.

Encourage practical, realistic examples such as naming emotions, offering choices, slowing transitions, modelling respectful boundaries, and providing calm reassurance.
- Send a one-minute broadcast message before closing breakout rooms to help groups finalise one key action.

### Step 4: Connect to safety

- Before returning to the main room, ask each breakout group to add one final sentence to their shared page: *“Child safety at this stage means...”*
- When participants return, briefly review each group’s sentence on screen.
- Ask the whole group:
  - *“How does understanding this stage help us keep children safe?”*
  - *“What risks arise when expectations do not match development?”*
- Participants may respond verbally or via chat.

### Step 5: Whole group debrief

- Invite one spokesperson from each breakout group to share:
  - One key insight about child development at their stage.
  - One practical action that supports safety and healthy development.
- As facilitator, highlight connections between developmentally informed practice, empathy, realistic expectations, and protective environments.

### Step 6: Closing reflection

- Invite participants to type into the chat or reflect silently: *“One way I can intentionally support child development in my daily practice is...”*
- Allow a brief pause before closing.
- Reinforce that developmentally informed responses strengthen both learning and child safety.



## Worksheet: The stages of development

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### Stages of development and child safety

*Erikson's Stages of Development* is one theory on child development. It suggests that children go through several stages of development across their childhood and then into adulthood.

#### Group developmental stage:

- Stage 1: 0–1 year (Trust vs Mistrust)
- Stage 2: 1–3 years (Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt)
- Stage 3: 3–6 years (Initiative vs Guilt)
- Stage 4: 6–12 years (Industry vs Inferiority)

#### What key skills are emerging at this stage?

Consider areas such as:

- Attachment
- Language development
- Emotional regulation
- Independence
- Social skills
- Problem-solving
- Risk-taking
- Moral understanding

**How might children at this stage communicate a concern or unsafe experience?**

Think about how their developmental abilities may affect how they:

- Express feelings or worries
- Describe events or experiences
- Seek help from adults
- Show distress

**What misunderstandings about behaviour at this stage might adults have? For example, a behaviour that is developmentally typical may be seen as “naughty.”**

**What does the child need most from adults at this stage to help them feel safe and supported?**

Discuss and prioritise what is most important:

- Close supervision
- Emotional co-regulation
- Clear and consistent boundaries
- Encouragement and affirmation
- Predictable routines
- Teaching about safety and relationships
- Opportunities for safe exploration
- Calm reassurance
- Support with peer relationships

**Why are these supports particularly important at this stage?**

### Daily intentional action

Identify one intentional, everyday action education and care staff can take to support healthy development and child safety at this stage.

Practical examples include:

- Naming emotions
- Slowing transitions
- Offering structured choices
- Supporting problem-solving
- Providing calm reassurance
- Modelling respectful boundaries

**Our chosen intentional action:**

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**How will this support both child development and child safety?**

**Link to child safe practice**

How does understanding this developmental stage strengthen:

- Prevention of harm?
- Safe supervision?
- Responding appropriately to behaviour?
- Teaching consent, boundaries and relationships?





## Facilitator reference guide: Stage specific notes

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Below are key developmental characteristics and child safety implications for each stage.

### Stage 1: 0–1 year (Trust vs Mistrust)

#### Emerging Skills

- Attachment formation
- Sensory exploration
- Early emotional signalling
- Beginning cause-and-effect awareness

#### Brain Development

- Rapid neural growth
- Attachment pathways forming
- Stress-response systems highly sensitive
- Brain development shaped by consistent caregiving

#### What children need most

- Consistent, responsive caregiving
- Predictable routines
- Physical and emotional safety
- Calm co-regulation

#### Daily intentional actions

- Respond promptly to distress
- Maintain eye contact and warm tone
- Narrate routines
- Provide gentle, consistent handling

### Child safety link

- Secure attachment reduces long-term vulnerability.
- Inconsistent, unpredictable, or harsh responses may disrupt trust and attachment formation.
- Supervision must be constant and relational.

Facilitator prompt: *“How can secure attachment act as a protective factor for children’s safety and wellbeing?”*

## Stage 2: 1–3 years (Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt)

### Emerging Skills

- Independence
- Language expansion
- Emotional intensity
- Beginning impulse control
- Boundary testing

### Brain Development

- Prefrontal cortex developing but immature
- Limited impulse control
- Emotional brain highly active

### What children need most

- Clear, consistent and safe boundaries
- Support and guidance to develop emotional regulation skills
- Safe exploration
- Predictable structure and routine
- Support to develop body safety skills

### Daily intentional actions

- Offer structured choices
- Name emotions
- Model calm responses
- Reinforce safety rules consistently

### Child Safety Link

- Misinterpreting impulsive behaviour as “defiance” can lead to harsh responses.
- Inconsistent boundaries increase vulnerability.
- Teaching body safety must be concrete and simple.

Facilitator prompt: *“How can developmentally appropriate boundaries reduce risk in education and care environments?”*

### Stage 3: 3–6 years (Initiative vs Guilt)

#### Emerging Skills

- Imaginative play
- Social negotiation
- Expanding language
- Curiosity about bodies
- Early moral reasoning and developing understanding of how their actions affect other people

#### Brain Development

- Growing executive functioning
- Improved but inconsistent self-regulation
- Strong learning through modelling

#### What children need most

- Encouragement to make choices with guidance
- Clear explanations about safe behaviour and boundaries
- Support with peer conflict
- Teaching about consent and personal safety
- Opportunities for safe exploration and problem solving

#### Daily intentional actions

- Use consistent body safety language
- Support problem-solving between peers
- Encourage safe decision making
- Provide opportunities for safe exploration

### Child Safety Link

- Adults modelling respectful boundaries is critical
- Adult modelling of emotional regulation and problem-solving skills is how children learn
- Allowing children to practice making decisions with guidance and support is important

Facilitator prompt: *“How do we balance children’s curiosity and growing independence with our responsibility to keep them safe?”*

### Stage 4: 6–12 years (Industry vs Inferiority)

#### Emerging Skills

- Competence-building
- Confidence and sense of achievement grow (with encouragement and support)
- Development of peer relationships
- Navigating social rules
- Growing independence
- Stronger cognitive reasoning
- Moral understanding

#### Brain Development

- Increasing executive functioning
- Developing impulse control
- Strengthening abstract thinking

#### What children need most

- Encouragement and support
- Stable relationships with trusted adults
- Safe peer environments
- Clear expectations and boundaries
- Support forming relationships and problem solving
- Support with online safety
- Reinforcement of personal safety concepts
- Consistent structure and supervision at home and school



### Daily intentional actions

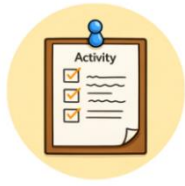
- Facilitate group problem-solving
- Reinforce respectful peer interactions
- Explicitly teach digital safety and personal safety skills

### Child Safety Link

- Children develop greater independence, stronger peer relationships and increased access to the online world. These changes can introduce a range of safety considerations.

Facilitator prompt: *“How do we support children’s growing independence and agency whilst also keeping them safe?”*

<b>Activity 2: What’s typical and what may need support?</b>	
<b>Objective</b>	<p>To strengthen participants’ ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise behaviours that align with typical development.</li> <li>• Identify when additional support, monitoring or safety consideration may be needed.</li> <li>• Practise responding in ways that are developmentally informed and protective.</li> <li>• Reflect on how misunderstanding development can impact child safety.</li> </ul>
<b>Time</b>	35-45 minutes
<b>Format</b>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Small Group Activity</i></p>  </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Whole Group Activity</i></p>  </div> </div>
<b>Materials needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developmental scenario cards</li> <li>• Butcher’s paper or printed worksheet</li> <li>• Markers</li> <li>• Optional: Developmental area headings (Cognitive, Social-emotional, Physical/Biological, Sexual)</li> </ul>



## Activity plan

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### Facilitator Preamble

*“Understanding child development helps us respond calmly, fairly and safely. When we know what is typical for a child’s developmental stage, we are less likely to overreact to behaviour and more likely to respond appropriately and notice when something genuinely needs attention or support.*

*Developmentally informed practice is protective practice. It helps us match supervision, expectations and guidance to the child’s developmental ability, not just their age in years.”*

### Remind participants

- The goal is not diagnosis or labelling.
- Keep examples general and de-identified.
- Focus on support and safety, not blame.
- Children develop at different rates, variability is normal.

### Step 1: Scenario analysis and sorting (15-20 minutes)

- Divide participants into groups of 3-4.
- Provide each group with 4-5 developmental behaviour scenario cards.
- Ask groups to work through each scenario using the following guiding questions:
  - *What developmental area does this behaviour relate to?*
    - Cognitive
    - Social-emotional
    - Physical/Biological
    - Sexual development
  - *Is this behaviour typical for this developmental stage?*
    - Typical and expected

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- Likely within normal range but may need support or guidance
- May be beyond what is developmentally typical for this developmental stage
- *What developmental skills may still be forming?* (e.g., impulse control, emotional regulation, understanding boundaries, perspective-taking)
- *What would a developmentally informed response look like?*
- *What level of supervision is appropriate?*
- *What language should be used to respond to this behaviour?*
- *What emotional support may be needed?*
- What teaching opportunity is present?
- Encourage groups to write short dot points under each scenario.
- Facilitator circulates and prompts deeper thinking with questions such as:
  - *“What does this child understand about consequences at this stage?”*
  - *“Is this skill fully developed yet?”*
  - *“Is there room for teaching or skill development here?”*

### Step 2: Apply the safety lens (10-12 minutes)

- Now shift the discussion from behaviour to safety.
- Ask each group to choose one scenario and discuss:
  - *How could misunderstanding this behaviour impact child safety?*
  - *How does developmental knowledge guide supervision and boundaries?*
- Encourage practical examples (e.g., toileting supervision, playground risk, consent conversations, transition expectations).

### Step 3: Whole-group reflection (8-10 minutes)

- Bring participants back together.
- Invite each group to briefly share:
  - One behaviour that is commonly misunderstood in children.
  - One important reason why we should match behavioural expectations to developmental stage.

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- Facilitator Reinforcement: Developmentally informed practice strengthens child safety because:
  - It prevents overreaction and unnecessary discipline.
  - It helps staff recognise genuine warning signs that a child may need additional support or intervention.
  - It ensures supervision and expectations match developmental ability.
  - It supports guidance and skill-building rather than punishment.



### Facilitator tip

If participants focus heavily on behaviour management, gently redirect: *“What developmental skill is still forming here?” “Is this behaviour likely a result of a skill gap?”* and *“What support can be put in place to build skill rather than just stopping behaviour?”*



## Online adaptation (MS Teams or Zoom)

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This activity can be delivered online using breakout rooms, shared documents, chat responses, and optional polls. The focus remains on strengthening developmentally informed responses and linking behaviour to child safety.

### Platform preparation (before the session)

- Upload scenario cards in digital format (PDF or slide deck).
- Prepare breakout rooms (3-4 participants per room).
- Create a shared document or whiteboard with one page per group for recording notes.
- Optionally prepare quick poll questions for “Typical / May need support or guidance/Beyond what is typical for this developmental stage”.

Ensure links are ready before the session begins.

### Step 1: Create psychological safety

- Begin with a facilitator preamble and brief wellbeing reminder.
- Reinforce that this activity is about understanding development, not judging children or colleagues.
- Remind participants that discussion is voluntary and examples must remain de-identified.
- Encourage cameras on or off based on comfort.
- Remind participants support pathways are available (e.g., EAP, supervision etc.).

### Step 2: Scenario analysis and sorting

- Divide participants into breakout rooms.
- Share 4-5 developmental behaviour scenarios with each group via link or screen share.
- Ask groups to work through each scenario using the guiding questions below.

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- One participant records short dot points in the shared document.
- For each scenario, groups discuss:
  - *What developmental area does this behaviour relate to (cognitive, social-emotional, physical/biological, sexual development)?*
  - *Is this behaviour typical for this developmental stage (typical and expected/ within normal range but may need support or guidance/Beyond what is typical for this developmental stage)?*
  - *What developmental skill may still be forming (e.g., impulse control, emotional regulation, understanding boundaries, perspective-taking)?*
  - *What would a developmentally matched response look like?*
  - *What level of supervision is appropriate?*
  - *What language should be used?*
  - *What emotional support is needed?*
  - *What teaching opportunity is present?*
- Encourage practical thinking.
- Send a broadcast message halfway through breakout time with prompts such as:
  - *“What does this child understand about consequences at this stage?”*
  - *“Is this skill fully developed yet?”*
  - *“How might overestimating this child’s ability create risk?”*

### Step 3: Apply the safety lens

- Ask each breakout group to choose one scenario and shift the discussion from behaviour to safety.
- In breakout rooms, groups discuss and record:
  - *How could misunderstanding this behaviour impact child safety?*
  - *How does developmental knowledge guide supervision and boundaries?*
- Encourage realistic examples such as toileting supervision, playground risk, consent conversations, or transition expectations.

### Step 4: Whole-group reflection

- Bring everyone back to the main room.

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- Screen share the group notes if possible.
- Invite each group to briefly share:
  - One behaviour that is commonly misunderstood.
  - One important reason why we must match expectations to developmental stage.
- Participants may speak aloud or contribute via chat.

### Step 5: Close with the key messages

Developmentally informed practice strengthens child safety because:

- It prevents overreaction and unnecessary discipline.
- It helps staff recognise genuine warning signs that a child may need additional support or intervention.
- It ensures supervision and expectations match developmental ability.
- It supports guidance and skill-building rather than punishment.



## Scenario cards: What's typical and what may need support?

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These scenario cards are designed for printing and group discussion. They are intentionally brief and do not contain full background information. The purpose is not to diagnose or label behaviour, but to practise linking developmental knowledge to child safety and appropriate support.

Facilitators are encouraged to adapt or create additional scenarios to reflect the ages, service type, community context, and cultural diversity of their setting. Participants may identify different developmental areas or levels of concern, and this discussion should be welcomed.

### **Scenario Card 1:**

Sienna (2 years old) frequently says “no” when asked to pack away toys, wash hands, or sit for meals. She pulls away when educators try to guide her physically. Staff are beginning to describe her as “defiant” and “non-compliant.”

### **Scenario Card 2:**

During outdoor play, two 4-year-olds are found looking at each other's bodies in a quiet corner. They giggle and appear curious. One child later asks an educator why boys and girls look different. A staff member expresses concern that this behaviour is “inappropriate.”

**Scenario Card 3:**

Ethan (5 years old) finds it difficult to sit still during a 20-minute group time session. He fidgets, lies on his stomach, and occasionally talks to peers. Educators have reminded him several times to “sit properly.” He appears disengaged by the end of the session.

**Scenario Card 4:**

During a board game, Ava (7 years old) becomes very upset when she loses. She cries, pushes the game away, and refuses to continue. Other children move on quickly. An educator comments that Ava “should be able to handle losing by this age.”

**Scenario Card 5:**

A toddler (18 months old) pushes another child during block play when they reach for the same toy. The toddler does not appear angry and continues playing immediately afterward. The other child cries.

**Scenario Card 6:**

Leo (4 years old) was previously independent with toileting. After returning from a two-week break, he has had several toileting accidents and asks educators to help him more often. Staff wonder whether he is “being lazy.”

**Scenario Card 7:**

At morning drop-off, Zara (3 years old) cries intensely and clings to her caregiver. She takes 15-20 minutes to settle, even though she has attended the service for several months. Educators are unsure whether this is typical or something more concerning.

**Scenario Card 8:**

During a craft activity, Noah (6 years old) struggles to follow three-step instructions. He forgets what to do next and becomes frustrated. Other children complete the task more quickly. An educator questions whether Noah is “not trying hard enough.”

**Scenario Card 9:**

Two 5-year-olds are engaged in superhero play. They are chasing, pretending to “zap” each other, and occasionally falling onto soft mats. One child becomes louder and more energetic, though both appear to be laughing. A staff member intervenes quickly, concerned it may escalate.

**Scenario Card 10:**

Mila (6 years old) spends much of her free play time drawing alone. She participates when invited but rarely initiates interaction. An educator wonders whether this is a sign of social difficulty or simply a personality difference.



## Worksheet: What's typical and what needs support?

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### What's typical and what may need support?

Scenario Title: \_\_\_\_\_

### Understanding the Behaviour

1. **What behaviour or situation is being described?** (Describe objectively only what you observe, avoid interpretation.)

2. **Which area(s) of development does this behaviour relate to?** (Tick all that may apply)

- Cognitive (thinking, language, learning, memory)
- Social-emotional (relationships, feelings, self-regulation)
- Physical / Biological (movement, coordination, growth)
- Sexual development (body awareness, curiosity, boundaries)

Why?

## Is This Typical?

**3. Based on the child's developmental stage, this behaviour is most likely:**

- Typical for this stage
- Typical but may need some support or guidance
- Beyond what is typical for this developmental stage

Explain your reasoning:

## Developmentally Matched Response

**4. What would an appropriate, developmentally matched response look like?**

Consider:

- Language used
- Supervision level
- Emotional support
- Boundaries
- Teaching opportunities

## Safety Lens

### 5. How could misunderstanding this behaviour impact child safety?

For example:

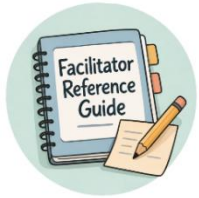
- Overreaction
- Under-supervision
- Labelling
- Missed warning signs
- Shame or embarrassment

### 6. What risks arise when expectations don't match developmental stage?

**7. How does understanding development guide supervision and boundaries in this situation?**

**Key Insight**

**8. One important reminder about development and safety from this scenario:**



## Facilitator reference guide: What’s typical and what may need support?

This reference guide is designed to support facilitator preparation and build confidence when leading this activity. It provides developmental insights and example responses linked to each scenario; however, it is not an exhaustive list of “correct” answers.


Child development is complex and influenced by many factors, including temperament, culture, disability, relationships, and life experiences. Participants may identify additional developmental considerations, alternative responses, or different safety reflections. These perspectives should be welcomed and explored.

Scenario	Developmental Area	Typical / Monitor / Safety Concern	Why? (Development Insight)	Developmentally Matched Response	Safety Considerations
1.	Social-emotional.	Typical.	Stage: Autonomy vs Shame & Doubt. Toddlers test independence and control. “No” is developmental, not defiance.	Offer limited choices. Use calm tone. Avoid power struggles. Support autonomy safely.	Ensure safe boundaries remain consistent. Avoid labelling behaviour negatively.
2.	Sexual development / Cognitive.	Typical.	Curiosity about bodies and differences is common in pre-school aged children. Giggling	Respond calmly and factually. Reinforce privacy rules and consent language.	Monitor.

			and questions reflect exploration.	Redirect children to a different activity.	
3.	Physical / Cognitive.	Typical.	Attention span still developing. 20 minutes may exceed capacity. Movement needs remain high.	Shorten sessions. Add movement breaks. Use interactive engagement. Use aids such as wobble cushions	Mismatch between expectations and development may reduce engagement and confidence.
4.	Social-emotional.	Typical but may need some additional supports.	Industry vs Inferiority stage. Emotional regulation still forming. Competition can feel intense.	Validate feelings. Teach coping skills. Model problem-solving.  Provide opportunities to practice with supports.	Watch for repeated extreme distress or social withdrawal.  Provide additional emotional regulation education and supports.
5.	Physical / Social-emotional.	Typical.	Limited impulse control and language. Pushing is common at this stage.	Immediate gentle intervention. Model "gentle hands." Teach simple language ("my turn"). Teach safe and unsafe touch.	Close supervision during shared play. Support emerging communication and emotional regulation skills.
6.	Social-emotional.	Typical but may need support/monitoring.	Regression can occur after change or stress. Not laziness. Child may need reminders to use the toilet. May need to explore any reluctance	Provide reassurance. Re-establish routine. Avoid shame. Check in with family. Provide regular toilet break	Monitor persistence. Consider stressors or transitions impacting safety and wellbeing.

			to use the toilet (fear etc).	reminders to all children.	
7.	Attachment / Social-emotional.	Typical but child may need additional supports at drop off.	Separation anxiety can resurface after routine changes. Attachment system activated.	Predictable drop-off routine. Comfort strategies. Gradual settling support. Identify consistent staff member to assist with handover. Use aids if needed such as teddies.	If distress is extreme or escalating, explore additional supports with family.
8.	Cognitive.	Needs Monitoring.	Working memory still developing. Multi-step tasks can overwhelm.	Break instructions into smaller steps. Use visuals. Check understanding.	Avoid attributing to effort alone. Monitor for learning support needs.
9.	Physical / Social-emotional.	Typical.	Imaginative superhero play is common. Physical play supports regulation and social negotiation.	Supervise closely. Reinforce consent and safe bodies. Set clear boundaries. Provide reminders to all children about safe play.	Intervene if one child distressed, power imbalance appears, or play escalates unsafely. Redirect to alternative activity.
10.	Social-emotional.	Monitor.	May reflect temperament (introversion) rather than difficulty.	Offer small group options. Respect personality. Build trust gradually. Identify consistent staff member to offer	Monitor if isolation increases, peer rejection occurs, or mood shifts significantly.

			Participation when invited is positive sign.	support and encouragement in smaller group activities.	
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<b>Activity 3: What skill is the brain developing?</b>	
<b>Objective</b>	The focus is on understanding behaviour in the context of the child’s stage of brain development and using this understanding to support more developmentally informed responses that strengthen children’s safety and wellbeing.
<b>Time</b>	15-20 minutes
<b>Format</b>	
<b>Materials needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Printed scenario cards (1-2 per group)</li> <li>• Participant worksheet</li> <li>• Pens or markers</li> </ul>



## Activity plan

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### Facilitator preamble

*“When we understand what skill, the brain is learning at this stage of brain development, we are more likely to respond with empathy and support instead of frustration or punishment. This short activity helps us practise shifting from reacting to understanding, guiding, and supporting healthy brain development”.*

### Remind participants

- Keep examples general and de-identified.
- The goal is to understand behaviour in the context of the child’s stage of brain development.
- Focus on supporting healthy brain development and assisting children to develop new skills.

### Step 1: Present a behaviour (10 minutes)

- Read out 3-4 scenario cards, one at a time. For example:
  - A 2-year-old says “no” repeatedly
  - A 4-year-old asks questions about body differences
  - A 5-year-old struggles to sit still at group time
  - A 7-year-old becomes very upset after losing a game
- After each one, ask the group:
  - *“What skills and tasks are the brain learning at this stage of development?”*
- Encourage quick responses such as:
  - Emotional regulation
  - Impulse control
  - Social problem-solving
  - Independence

### Step 2: Shift the lens (5–7 minutes)

- After discussion, ask:
  - *“How might our response change if we consider this behaviour in light of the child’s stage of brain development rather than viewing it as deliberate misbehaviour?”*
  - *“What would a developmentally appropriate response look like?”*
- Prompt participants to think about:
  - Tone of voice
  - Supervision
  - Boundaries
  - Emotional support

### Step 3: Safety link (5 minutes)

- Ask: *“How does understanding brain development strengthen child safety?”*
- Draw out themes such as:
  - We avoid unrealistic expectations
  - We supervise appropriately
  - We teach skills instead of punishing behaviour
  - We notice when something is genuinely outside typical development and may require support or intervention

### Step 4: Closing reflection (2 minutes)

- Invite participants to complete: *“Next time I see challenging behaviour, I will pause and ask myself...”*



#### Facilitator tip

If participants respond quickly with behaviour management strategies, gently ask: *“What skill is still forming at this stage of development?”* and *“What support does this child need to develop this skill?”*



## Online adaptation (MS Teams or Zoom)

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This activity can be delivered online using screen share, chat responses, polls, and short breakout discussions. The focus is on shifting from viewing behaviour simply as “misbehaviour” to understanding it in the context of the child’s stage of brain development and using this understanding to support more developmentally informed responses that strengthen children’s safety and wellbeing.

### Platform preparation (before the session)

- Prepare 3-4 behaviour examples on slides.
- Set up a quick poll option (e.g., “What skill is developing?”)
- Enable chat and reactions.
- Optional: Prepare 2–3 breakout rooms for small group discussion.

### Step 1: Create psychological safety

- Begin with the facilitator preamble.
- Provide a wellbeing reminder.
- Begin with a short reminder that this activity is about understanding development, not labelling children.
- Reinforce that responses can be brief and participation is voluntary.
- Encourage cameras on or off based on comfort.

### Step 2: Present a behaviour

- Share your screen and display one scenario card at a time. For example:
  - A 2-year-old says “no” repeatedly
  - A 4-year-old asks questions about body differences
  - A 5-year-old struggles to sit still at group time
  - A 7-year-old becomes very upset after losing a game
- After presenting each behaviour, invite participants to respond quickly in the chat to the following question:

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- What skills and tasks are the brain learning at this stage of development?
- Encourage short responses such as emotional regulation, impulse control, independence, curiosity, social problem-solving, or executive functioning.
- To keep energy high, you may use a quick poll after one example asking:
  - *“Is this behaviour mostly about impulse control, emotional regulation, or social understanding?”*
- Briefly reflect on the results before moving to the next scenario.

### Step 3: Shift the lens

- Once all behaviours have been explored, ask participants:
  - *“How might our response change if we consider this behaviour in light of the child’s stage of brain development rather than viewing it as deliberate misbehaviour?”*
  - *“What would a developmentally appropriate response look like?”*
- Invite responses in chat first, then ask for 2-3 volunteers to expand verbally.
- Prompt thinking around tone of voice, supervision, boundaries, emotional co-regulation, and teaching moments.
- If helpful, place participants into short breakout rooms (3-4 minutes) to generate one developmentally matched response per scenario, then return to the main room for sharing.

### Step 4: Safety link

- Facilitate whole-group discussion by asking:
  - *“How does understanding brain development strengthen child safety?”*
- Participants can respond in chat or unmute.
- You may summarise verbally or type key phrases onto a shared whiteboard.
- Draw out themes such as:
  - We avoid unrealistic expectations
  - We supervise appropriately
  - We teach skills instead of punishing behaviour

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- We notice when something is genuinely outside typical development and may require support or intervention

### Step 5: Closing reflection

- Invite participants to complete in the chat or silently: *"Next time I see challenging behaviour, I will pause and ask myself..."*
- Allow a brief pause before closing.
- Reinforce that developmentally informed practice reduces risk and strengthens both empathy and child safety.

