

Topic 4

Signs of child abuse and neglect



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.



Signs of child abuse and neglect

Topic 4 focuses on recognising possible signs of child abuse and neglect and understanding how these signs may show up in children's bodies, behaviour, emotions, development, and relationships.

Educators and carers in education and care settings see children regularly and over time. This means you may be the first to notice small changes that, on their own, may not seem worrying, but together or over time may indicate that a child is experiencing harm.

This topic reinforces that:

- One sign on its own does not always mean abuse or neglect.
- Context matters, including age, development, culture, and life experience.
- Patterns and changes over time can increase concern, especially when considered alongside single observations.
- Noticing concerns and discussing them with a service leader is part of professional responsibility.

The three activities in this topic are designed to support reflective noticing rather than creating certainty that abuse has occurred – that is a matter for child protective, health and police services. The activities focus on building shared understanding, language, and confidence through discussion and practice examples.




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, questions, or reflective prompts to guide discussion.

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

Activity 1: What changed?	
Objective	<p>This activity supports participants to practise noticing patterns and changes over time.</p> <p>It helps participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise clusters of physical, behavioural, emotional, and relational signs. • Understand why patterns and changes over time can increase concern. • Practise reflective discussion using everyday education and care examples.
Time	40 – 60 minutes
Format	
Materials needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Child snapshot’ scenario cards • Butcher’s paper • Marker pens • Headings pre-written on paper (optional but helpful) • Whiteboard • Whiteboard pens



Activity plan

Facilitator preamble

“When we work with children every day, we often notice small things before we notice big ones. This activity is about slowing down. Instead of asking, ‘What does this mean?,’ we’ll ask, ‘What patterns are forming over time?’ Our role isn’t to diagnose. It’s to notice, document, and respond appropriately.”

Remind participants:

- You do not need to share personal experiences.
- It’s okay to step out or take a break at any time.

Step 1: Pair review (10 minutes)

- Break participants into pairs.
- Give each pair a “child snapshot” scenario card.
- Ask pairs to read the snapshot together and underline or circle anything that shows change over time.
- Then ask pairs to discuss:
 - *What changes do you notice?*
 - *Which signs appear in more than one area of the child’s life? (physical, emotional, behaviour, relationships)*
- If needed, optional facilitator prompts to support discussion
 - *“What changes stand out when you look across weeks?”*
 - *“What might be explained by context, and what still feels concerning?”*
 - *“What would you do next in your role?”*

**Facilitator tip**

Move around the room and listen to what participants are discussing. If needed, use the additional facilitator prompts to support discussion.

Step 2: Pattern mapping (15 minutes)

- Ask pairs to organise the signs into categories.
- Instruct participants by saying: *“Now map the signs onto your butcher's paper under these headings: physical, behavioural, emotional, developmental, relationships/environment.”*
- Encourage participants to place each observation where it best fits.
- Advise participants if a sign fits in more than one category, it should be noted.



Why does this step matter? This helps participants to see clustering.

Step 3: Whole-group reflection (10–20 minutes)

- Bring everyone back together.
- Ask participants to discuss:
 - *Which signs felt more concerning when you saw them together?*
 - *Which signs might be explained by context or development?*
 - *What helped you avoid jumping to conclusions?*
 - *What would you do next in your role?*
 - Write key words on a whiteboard.



Online adaptation (MS Teams or Zoom)

This activity can be delivered online using breakout rooms and a shared document or slide deck. The purpose remains the same: to help participants practise noticing patterns and changes over time, rather than focusing on single signs or jumping to conclusions.

Platform preparation (before the session)

Consider using:

- Breakout rooms.
- Shared slide deck with child snapshots.
- Shared document (e.g., shared PDF or document link).
- Whiteboard (e.g., zoom whiteboard).

Have the links ready before the session begins.

Step 1: Create psychological safety

- Begin with the facilitator preamble.
- Provide a brief wellbeing reminder and remind participants sharing is optional.
- Participants can step away from the computer if needed.
- Encourage cameras on or off, based on comfort.
- Remind participants support pathways are available if discussions raise concerns (e.g., EAP, supervision etc.)

Step 2: Introduce the activity

- Display slide and say: *"In this activity, we are focusing on patterns over time. Our role is not to diagnose or investigate. It is to notice, document, and respond appropriately within our professional responsibilities."*
- Pause briefly before moving to the snapshot.

Step 3: Snapshot review

- Share one 'Child snapshot' card with each pair by:
 - Displaying the slide before opening breakout rooms, or
 - Posting the snapshot in the chat, or
 - Sharing a link to a shared document.
- Allow 1-2 minutes for silent reading before discussion begins.

Step 4: Breakout room discussion

- Place participants into breakout rooms in pairs.
- Before opening the room, say: *"In your pairs, read the snapshot carefully. Focus on changes across time. Stay grounded in what is observed, rather than what it means."*
- Post discussion prompts into the chat.
 - *What changes do you notice over time?*
 - *Which signs appear across more than one area (physical, behavioural, emotional, relational)?*
 - *What might be explained by context or development?*
 - *What still feels concerning?*
- Provide clear breakout instructions:
 - Nominate a timekeeper.
 - Nominate one person to record key points.
 - Focus on patterns, not diagnosis.
 - Be ready to share one key patter.
 - Ask participants to set a timer for 10 minutes.
- Send a one-minute warning before closing rooms.

Step 5: Mapping patterns

- Bring participants back to the main room.
- Explain: *“Now we will organise the signs you noticed to see where patterns cluster.”*
- Use one of the following options:
 - Option 1: Shared document or whiteboard (preferred)
 - Display headings:
 - Physical
 - Behavioural
 - Emotional
 - Developmental
 - Relationships
 - Invite pairs to add 2–3 observations under the relevant headings.
 - Option 2: Verbal summary
 - Ask each pair to provide a verbal summary of their discussion.
- Regardless of format ask participants to identify one pattern that crossed more than one category.

Step 6: Whole-group reflection

- Guide discussion with prompts such as:
 - *“Which signs felt more concerning when seen together?”*
 - *“Which signs might be explained by context or development?”*
 - *“What helped you avoid jumping to conclusions?”*
 - *“How does looking for patterns change the way we notice concerns in practice?”*
- Capture key themes on a shared slide or whiteboard.
- Keep responses brief and focused.

Step 7: Closing reflection

- Reinforce that:
 - One sign alone rarely tells the whole story.
 - Patterns over time can increase concern, especially when considered alongside single observations.
 - Documentation supports clear decision making.
 - Noticing and sharing concerns is part of professional responsibility.
- Invite participants to respond in the chat:
 - *“What is one thing you will pay closer attention to in your practice after today?”*



Scenario cards: What changed?

These scenario cards can be printed and cut out, provided in a sheet or copied into a slide deck for use during activities. Each card presents a brief snapshot of a child's experience or behaviour, designed to prompt reflection and discussion.

Facilitators may choose to use the cards as written, select a small number that best suit the group and time available, or adapt them to reflect their service, community, or context. All examples should remain de-identified and grounded in everyday practice.

Child Snapshot Set 1: preschool/kindergarten program

Child: "A" (4 years)

Week 1

- Settles quickly at drop-off
- Enjoys group play and outdoor games
- Eats most of their lunch
- Seeks comfort briefly when upset, then re-engages

Week 2

- Arrives quieter than usual
- Stays close to educators during free play
- Eats less at lunch, says they are "not hungry"
- Flinches slightly when another child bumps into them

Week 3

- Has two unexplained bruises on upper arms (covered by sleeves)
- Becomes upset when asked to change for water play
- Withdraws from group activities, prefers to sit alone
- Difficulty settling at rest time

Week 4

- Increased toileting accidents after being toilet trained
- Apologises frequently, even when not at fault
- Avoids physical games
- Appears tired most days

Child Snapshot Set 2: toddler room (long day care)

Child: "B" (2 years)

Week 1

- Curious and active
- Enjoys mealtimes and finger foods
- Comfortable with familiar educators

Week 2

- Clingier at drop-off
- Cries longer than usual when parent leaves
- Eats very quickly and asks for more food

Week 3

- Often arrives in clothes that appear unwashed
- Strong body odour noticed mid-morning
- Becomes distressed during nappy changes

Week 4

- Frequent minor injuries with vague explanations from caregivers
- Appears tired and irritable
- Limited eye contact during interactions

Child Snapshot Set 3: outside school hours care setting**Child:** "C" (8 years)**Week 1**

- Engages with peers
- Completes homework willingly
- Uses humour and talks easily with staff

Week 2

- Begins avoiding group games
- Gets upset quickly when rules are enforced
- Complains of headaches

Week 3

- Displays sexualised language beyond developmental norms
- Becomes aggressive during transitions
- Avoids being alone with certain peers

Week 4

- Risk-taking behaviour during outdoor play
- Difficulty concentrating
- Says "I don't care" when hurt or upset

Child Snapshot Set 4: family day care (Mixed Age)**Child:** "D" (3 years)**Week 1**

- Calm and cooperative
- Enjoys stories and quiet play

Week 2

- Stops participating in group activities
- Rocking behaviour observed during rest time

Week 3

- Increased thumb-sucking
- Appears fearful when voices are raised

Week 4

- Regression in speech
- Avoids eye contact
- Becomes distressed if routines change

Child Snapshot Set 5: preschool / kindergarten program**Child:** "E" (5 years)**Week 1**

- Confident speaker
- Takes leadership in play
- Enjoys physical activities

Week 2

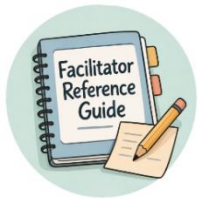
- Becomes withdrawn during group discussions
- Tearful at small corrections

Week 3

- Expresses negative self-talk ("I'm bad", "I mess everything up")
- Refuses to participate in sport

Week 4

- Fearful of going home
- Startles easily at loud noises
- Difficulty sleeping during rest time



Facilitator reference guide: What changes?




The information below is provided to support facilitator preparation and confidence when leading the Snapshot discussion activity. It is intended for facilitator use only and should not be distributed to participants in advance.

This guide is designed to strengthen facilitator confidence, reduce uncertainty when responding to participant questions, and support consistent, safe messaging aligned with child safe practice principles. It does not represent a single or definitive set of answers. Participants may bring varied interpretations, levels of experience, and emotional responses to the scenarios. These perspectives are valuable. Facilitators should welcome discussion and gently challenge assumptions where needed.

Snapshot Set & Context	Patterns to Notice	Key Discussion Points	Practice Prompts
Snapshot Set 1 – preschool/kindergarten (Child A, 4 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradual withdrawal from play and peers • Increased fear or discomfort around physical contact • Regressions (toileting accidents) • Heightened compliance and apologising behaviour • Physical signs alongside emotional and behavioural changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes occur across multiple domains, not just physical • Signs become more concerning when they persist over weeks • No single sign proves harm, but the pattern warrants attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would you document, and over what time frame? • Who would you consult with at your service? • What would you keep noticing closely?

<p>Snapshot Set 2 - toddler room (Child B, 2 years)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased clinginess and distress at separation • Changes in hygiene and clothing • Food-related behaviours (eating quickly, asking for more) • Distress during nappy changes • Tiredness and irritability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toddlers communicate distress through behaviour and body responses • Care needs and neglect indicators may overlap • Context matters, but patterns still require attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do educators notice changes when children can't explain them? • What observations are especially important to document for toddlers?
<p>Snapshot Set 3 - outside school hours care (Child C, 8 years)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional withdrawal and increased aggression • Headaches and other somatic complaints • Sexualised language beyond developmental norms • Risk-taking behaviour • Difficulty concentrating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older children may show distress through risk-taking or disengagement • Sexualised behaviour is a signal to notice, not an assumption • Multiple signs across behaviour, emotions, and learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is within the outside school hours care program's responsibility to notice and document? • How might consultation look different in outside school hours care settings?
<p>Snapshot Set 4 - family day care (Child D, 3 years)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal and regression (thumb-sucking, speech delay) • Self-soothing behaviours • Fear responses to raised voices • Increased distress with change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small settings still require careful observation • Regressions can be a response to stress or trauma • Family day care educators may be working more independently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What supports do family day care educators need to raise concerns? • How can patterns be shared with coordination units or supervisors?

<p>Snapshot Set 5 - preschool / kindergarten (Child E, 5 years)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional changes and low self-esteem • Avoidance of physical activity • Fear responses and startle reactions • Statements about not wanting to go home • Sleep difficulties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional signs can be as significant as physical ones • Children may express distress through words, not just behaviour • Fear of going home is a signal that needs careful response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would you document verbatim? • Who would you talk to next, and when?
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Activity 2: Through the child’s eyes	
Objective	<p>This activity supports participants to reflect on how signs of harm might feel from a child’s perspective, building empathy, and emotional understanding.</p> <p>It helps participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how children may communicate distress without words. • Reflect on how age and development shape behaviour. • Practise interpreting behaviour as communication.
Time	30 - 50 minutes
Format	<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>
Materials needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scenario cards • Reflection questions • Whiteboard • Whiteboard pen



Activity plan

Facilitator preamble

“Children don’t usually tell us directly that something is wrong. Instead, they show us through behaviour, emotions, and changes. This activity helps us practise looking at signs from the child’s point of view.”

Remind participants:

- You do not need to share personal experiences.
- Reflection can be private.
- It’s okay to step out or take a break at any time.

Step 1: Scenario reading (10 minutes)

- Ask participants to form small groups (3-4).
- Provide each group with one scenario card.
- Ask participants to read the scenario card.
- After 2-3 minutes, ask participants to discuss:
 - What they notice about the child’s experience across the day, including emotional shifts, behaviour changes, and interactions.
- Keep the focus on what are observations, not what it means.

Step 2: Perspective reflection (15 minutes)

- Provide each group with the list of the reflection questions.
- Ask participants to discuss the questions in relation to their assigned scenario.
- Remind participants to focus on the child’s experience rather than possible causes.
- Encourage participants to:

- Speak from curiosity rather than certainty.
- Consider how the child's age, development, and context might shape what they are noticing.
- Notice how the child's feelings, behaviour, and coping strategies may change across the day.
- Remind the group that:
 - There are no right or wrong answers.
 - The purpose is not to identify abuse but understanding what a child might be communicating.
 - It is okay to sit with uncertainty.

**Facilitator tip**

Move between groups to listen and gently prompt deeper reflection if needed, using questions such as: *“What might the child be feeling in the moment?”* or *“How might this look different for a younger or older child?”*

Step 3: Practice discussion (10-15 minutes)

- Ask participants to return to the whole group.
- Invite each group to briefly share one insight about the child's experience.
- Guide the discussion by asking:
 - *How could these feelings show up differently at different ages?*
 - *How might culture or previous experiences affect what we see?*
 - *What helps educators respond with curiosity rather than judgement?*
 - *What practical responses could support this child?*
- Encourage concise responses so multiple participants can contribute.
- Capture key themes on a whiteboard.

Step 4: Closing reflection

- Close by asking participants to reflect on this question: *“What is one way you can slow down and respond with curiosity in your practice?”*



Online adaptation (MS Teams or Zoom)

This activity can be delivered online using breakout rooms and shared reflection prompts. The purpose remains the same: to help participants reflect on how signs of harm might feel from a child's perspective, building empathy and emotional understanding rather than analysis or certainty.

Platform preparation (before the session)

Consider using:

- Breakout rooms.
- Slide s with scenarios ready to screen share.
- Reflection questions copied and ready to paste into the chat.
- Shared document or whiteboard.

Have the links ready before the session begins.

Step 1: Create psychological safety

- Begin with the facilitator preamble.
- Provide a wellbeing reminder.
- Remind participants that sharing is optional.
- Participants can step away from the computer if needed.
- Encourage cameras on or off, based on comfort.
- Reinforce the activity is about understanding children's experiences, not identifying abuse or reaching conclusions.
- Remind participants support pathways are available (e.g., Employee Assistance Program (EAP), supervision etc.)

Step 2: Scenario reading

- Share one scenario with each pair or small group.
 - Display it on a slide before opening breakout rooms, or
 - Post it in the chat, or
 - Share via a document link.
- Allow 1-2 minutes for silent reading before discussion begins.

Step 3: Breakout room discussion

- Place participants into breakout rooms in pairs or small groups of 3-4.
- Before opening rooms, give clear instructions:
 - *“In your groups, focus on the child’s experience. Avoid analysing causes. Stay with what the child may be feeling or communicating.”*
- Post reflection questions in the chat:
 - *What might this child be feeling at different points in the day or week?*
 - *How do the child’s emotions or behaviours shift over time?*
 - *What might the child be trying to communicate?*
 - *What might support look like in this situation?*
- Encourage participants to speak from curiosity rather than certainty.
- Encourage the use of language such as “I wonder if....”
- Ask them to consider how age, development, culture, and context shape behaviour.
- Ask them to notice patterns across the day rather than single moments.
- Send a 1-minute warning before closing breakout rooms.

Step 4: Whole-group practice discussion

- Bring participants back to the main room.
- Invite each group to share one reflection or insight.
- Participants may share verbally or type into the chat.
- Guide discussion using prompts such as:

- *How might these feelings show up differently at different ages?*
- *How might culture or previous experiences influence what educators notice?*
- *What helps educators respond with curiosity rather than judgement?*
- *What practical response could support this child?*
- Encourage brief responses so multiple voices can contribute.
- Capture key themes on a shared slide or whiteboard if possible.

Step 5: Closing reflection

- Close with a chat-based reflection: *“What is one way this child’s perspective might change how you respond in your role?”*
- Pause to allow responses.
- Acknowledge themes.
- Thank participants for their reflective engagement.



Scenario cards: Through the child's eyes

These scenario cards and reflection questions are used to support applied, child-centred discussion. Each small group receives one scenario card along with the accompanying reflection questions.

Facilitators are encouraged to develop their own scenario cards to reflect their service, community, or local context. Scenarios may be drawn from everyday practice, common situations, or themes that are relevant to the group.

All examples remain de-identified and avoid naming individuals, services, or specific incidents.

Scenario 1: preschool/kindergarten program

Child A: 4 years

Today, the child arrives quietly and stays close to the educator during free play. At group time, they sit at the edge and avoid eye contact. When another child accidentally bumps them, they pull away quickly and say sorry, even though nothing went wrong.

At lunch, they eat very little and say they are not hungry. During rest time, they struggle to settle and ask to keep the light on. In the afternoon, they watch other children play but do not join in.

Scenario 2: toddler room (long day care)

Child B: 2 years

At drop-off, the child clings tightly to their caregiver and cries longer than usual. Throughout the morning, they follow educators closely and become distressed when attention shifts to other children.

At nappy change time, the child stiffens and cries. They eat very quickly at lunch and reach for other children's food. By mid-afternoon, they are tired, irritable, and difficult to settle.

Scenario 3: mixed age (family day care)**Child C: 3 years**

The child starts the day calm but becomes withdrawn as the morning progresses. During play, they rock back and forth quietly. When another child raises their voice, they cover their ears and move away.

At rest time, the child sucks their thumb and avoids eye contact. They do not engage in conversation and appear distressed when the routine changes unexpectedly.

Scenario 4: outside school hours care afternoon**Child D: 8 years**

After school, the child sits alone and avoids group games. When asked about their day, they shrug and say "fine." During homework time, they struggle to concentrate and tear up their page.

Later, they become aggressive during a game and walk off when corrected. They complain of a headache and say they want to go home.

Scenario 5: preschool/kindergarten program**Child E: 5 years**

The child starts the day confident but becomes tearful after a small correction. During outdoor play, they avoid climbing equipment they usually enjoy.

They make negative comments about themselves and appear jumpy at loud noises. At rest time, they say they don't want to sleep and ask if they can stay with an educator.

Reflection Questions: Through the Child's Eyes

Reflection 1: Feelings

- What might this child be feeling during the day?
- How might those feelings change at different times?

Reflection 2: Coping

- How might this child be trying to cope or protect themselves?
- What behaviours might be helping them feel safer?

Reflection 3: Communication

- What might this child be communicating without words?
- What might they not have the language to explain?

Reflection 4: Age and development





- How might this look different for a younger or older child?
- What behaviours make sense for this child's age or stage?

Reflection 5: Adult response

- What kind of adult response might help this child feel safer?
- What responses might unintentionally increase distress?

Reflection 6: Practice connection

- What would you notice first in your role?
- What would help you respond with curiosity rather than judgement?

Activity 3: From gut feeling to shared understanding	
Objective	<p>This activity supports participants to reflect on how noticing happens in real practice, before signs are clear or labelled.</p> <p>It helps participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise early, often vague “gut feelings.” • Understand how context, assumptions, and experience shape noticing. • Practise putting observations into words. • Build confidence through shared reflection rather than certainty.
Time	45 - 60 minutes
Format	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Individual Work</i></p>  </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Pair Work</i></p>  </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Whole Group Activity</i></p>  </div> </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;"> <p><i>Individual Reflection</i></p>  </div>
Materials needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual reflection sheet • Pens • Optional: quiet background music during individual reflection



Activity plan

Facilitator preamble

“Recognising signs of harm doesn’t usually start with a checklist. It often starts with a small feeling that something is ‘off,’ without knowing exactly what or why. This activity is about slowing that moment down, thinking about it carefully, and learning from each other’s ways of noticing.”

Remind participants

- This is not about proving harm or sharing real cases.
- You do not need to reach conclusions.
- You can keep reflections general, fictional, or hypothetical.
- Uncertainty is often part of the process.

Step 1: Individual work (15-20 minutes)

- Provide each participant with the Individual reflection sheet.
- Ask participants to work independently to complete the reflection sheet.
- Say: *“Think about a time you noticed something that didn’t feel quite right. It may be small. It may be recent or in the past.”*
- Remind participants:
 - They do not need to share what they write unless they choose to.
 - Reflections can be general, fictional, or based on everyday practice.
 - The focus is on noticing and reflection, not outcomes or conclusions.
- Encourage participants to use the full time to think and write.
- Allow silence. Don’t rush this step.



Facilitator tips

This individual reflection time is an important part of the activity and helps prepare participants for meaningful pair discussion.

Step 2: Pair sharing (15-20 minutes)

- Ask participants to form pairs – depending on the group, they may need support to do this to ensure safety.
- Before they begin, clarify the purpose: *“In this step, we are not sharing detailed stories. We are focusing on the process of noticing.”*
- Ask each person in the pair to take 5 minutes to speak while the other listens.
- Provide these instructions:
 - Share only what you feel comfortable sharing.
 - Focus on what helped you notice, not what happened next.
 - Avoid problem-solving or giving advice.
- Provide these guiding questions:
 - *What first caught your attention?*
 - *What helped you realise something might not be right?*
 - *What made noticing slower or more difficult?*
 - *How did age, behaviour, culture, routine, or context shape what you saw?*
 - *What helped you keep the child in mind over time?*
- Encourage participants to:
 - Listen without problem-solving.
 - Notice similarities and differences.
 - Avoid giving advice.
- After both people have shared, invite pairs to discuss what they noticed about the process of noticing.

Step 3: Whole group discussion (10-15 minutes)

- Bring the group back together.
- Explain: *"We are now stepping back from individual examples to look for shared patterns."*
- Ask the group:
 - *What do noticing moments have in common?*
 - *What gets in the way of noticing early signs in busy settings?*
 - *What helps educators trust their observations without jumping to conclusions?*
 - *How does talking with others change how we understand what we see?*
- As facilitator:
 - Reflect patterns across the group.
 - Name shared challenges (time, assumptions, fear of being wrong).
 - Normalise uncertainty.

Step 4: Practice anchor – "One thing I'll hold onto" (5-10 minutes)

- Ask participants to complete this sentence individually: *"One thing that helps me notice and respond thoughtfully is..."*
- Allow 1 minute for quiet writing.
- Invite volunteers to share or collect responses verbally.



Facilitator tips

- Keep the tone slow and grounded.
- Do not rush the individual reflection time.
- If someone shares a serious concern, acknowledge and redirect: *"Thank you for sharing. Let's keep our focus on noticing and role here. We can talk about next steps after the session if needed."*



Online adaptation (MS Teams or Zoom)

This activity can be delivered online using a shared reflection worksheet and breakout rooms. The purpose remains the same: to help participants reflect on how noticing concerns happens in real practice, often before signs are clear or named, and to build confidence through shared reflection rather than certainty.

Platform preparation (before the session)

- Prepare breakout rooms set to pairs.
- Upload or link the 'Individual reflection sheet' (PDF or shared document).
- Prepare a slide with key instructions for each stage.
- Enable chat and confirm participants can access it.
- Optional: prepare a poll or Mentimeter question for the closing reflection.
- Optional: prepare soft background music for individual reflection time.

Have the links ready before the session begins.

Step 1: Create psychological safety

- Begin with the facilitator preamble.
- Provide a brief wellbeing reminder.
- Remind participants that sharing is optional and reflection can remain private.
- Encourage cameras on or off based on comfort.
- Let participants know they may step away briefly if needed.
- Remind participants that support pathways are available, such as supervision or EAP.

Step 2: Individual reflection

- Share the 'Individual reflection sheet' via screen share or link in chat.

- Invite participants to work independently.
- Ask them to reflect on a noticing moment. This may be general, fictional, or drawn from everyday practice.
- Clarify that they do not need to share what they write.
- Encourage them to use the full time to slow down and think rather than rushing.
- Keep microphones muted during this time.
- Optional: play quiet background music.
- Explain that this quiet time supports deeper discussion in breakout rooms.

Step 3: Pair sharing

- Place participants into breakout rooms in pairs.
- Before opening rooms, give clear instructions:
 - *“In this step, focus on the process of noticing. Share only what you are comfortable sharing. Avoid problem-solving.”*
- Post prompts in the chat so they are visible inside breakout rooms:
 - *What first caught your attention?*
 - *What helped you realise something might not be right?*
 - *What made noticing slower or more difficult?*
 - *How did context such as age, behaviour, culture, or routine shape what you saw?*
 - *What helped you keep the child in mind over time?*
- Ask each participant to speak for about five to seven minutes while the other listens.
- Ask listeners to listen without interrupting or offering advice.
- Set a visible timer for the full breakout session.
- Send a one-minute warning before closing rooms.
- Optional: drop briefly into breakout rooms to observe tone and gently redirect if discussion becomes diagnostic or advice focused.

Step 4: Whole group meaning making

- Bring participants back to the main room.
- Invite volunteers to share general reflections rather than detailed stories.
- Offer two sharing options:
 - Participants may speak briefly.
 - Participants may type a key word or phrase into the chat.
- Optional technique: ask everyone to type their response in the chat but wait to press enter until you count to three.
- Guide discussion toward shared themes:
 - *What do noticing moments have in common?*
 - *What gets in the way of noticing early signs in busy settings?*
 - *What helps educators trust their observations without jumping to conclusions?*
 - *How does talking with others shift understanding?*
- Capture key themes on a shared slide or whiteboard if possible.
- Reflect patterns rather than individual examples.

Step 5: Practice anchor

- Invite participants to complete this sentence: *“One thing that helps me notice and respond thoughtfully is...”*
- Participants may write privately.
- Participants may post a word or short phrase in the chat.
- Optional: use a quick poll asking: *“What supports noticing most in your role?”*
- Acknowledge themes and connect them back to collective responsibility.

Step 6: Closing reflection

- Close by reinforcing that noticing concerns is a shared responsibility.
- Remind participants that reflection, discussion, and supervision strengthen child-safe practice.



Worksheet: Individual reflection

This reflection is for your own thinking. You do not need to share what you write unless you choose to. You can keep your reflections general, fictional, or based on everyday practice.

Take a few minutes to work quietly and honestly. There are no right or wrong answers.

Noticing a moment

Think about a time in your work when something about a child gave you pause. It might have been a small moment, a feeling, or a pattern you noticed over time.

You can reflect on:

- A real situation (without names or details).
- A general or hypothetical example from practice.

1. What was the first small thing you noticed? (e.g., a change in behaviour, mood, interaction, or routine)

2. What made it stand out to you at the time?

Noticing over time

3. Did you notice one sign, or several signs over time? (You might think about physical, behavioural, emotional, developmental, or relationship changes.)

4. Were there any patterns that became clearer with time?

Context and Interpretation

5. What context mattered? (e.g., the child's age, development, culture, routine, family situation, or recent changes)

6. What questions came up for you as you noticed these changes?

What Helped or Hindered Noticing

7. What helped you keep noticing or paying attention? (For example: time with the child, documentation, team conversations, supervision, gut instinct)

8. What made noticing harder?

(e.g., busyness, assumptions, uncertainty, lack of time, fear of being wrong)

Reflection for Practice

9. Looking back, what do you think noticing early helped with?

One thing that helps me notice and respond thoughtfully is: