

## Early learning and childcare: Supporting learning at home and family learning during Covid-19

The following advice has been prepared to assist practitioners in supporting families whose children have an entitlement to funded early learning and childcare (ELC) but who are not able to attend their setting due to Covid-19. It can be used when access to settings is restricted to specific groups of children, for example the children of key workers and vulnerable children. It may also be used to inform support for children who are shielding or self-isolating but feeling well.

The advice provides an understanding of effective support for family learning and learning at home. Practitioners and leaders will be able to apply this understanding to their own specific context.

While the principles of supporting learning at home are consistent across education, their implementation needs to take account of the diversity of the ELC sector and young children's stages of development. The advice here has been informed by what has been learned so far during the pandemic and seeks to provide reassurance and support to those working in the sector.

### Curriculum for Excellence and Realising the Ambition

While the COVID-19 pandemic has changed many things, our curriculum framework continues to apply for children aged 3 years and over. The core principles of Scotland's curriculum and the [four fundamental capacities at its centre](#) remain critical in putting children at the heart of education.

[Realising the Ambition](#) seeks to support quality by encouraging discussion, self-reflection and evaluation of relevant practice. It provides advice on how practitioners can achieve the highest quality of ELC and early primary provision that will enable young children to develop holistically and play their own part in Scotland being the best place for children to grow up. These aims are equally relevant to the work practitioners are currently undertaking to support children's learning at home.

Advice to consider the learning environment in terms of **interactions**, **experiences** and **spaces** is no less important when thinking about learning at home. While settings are closed to most, young children will be interacting with family members who know them best and learning in spaces in and around their homes.

Throughout the pandemic ELC settings have adapted how they support learning to ensure a strong focus on children's health and wellbeing, and engagement. This continues to apply.

Practitioners who know their children well will seek to develop support that is inclusive, adaptable, responsive and well-matched to the needs of children as individuals. It will take account of children's surrounding culture. Careful consideration should be given for example, to the potential impact of socio-economic disadvantage on families during the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

## What do we mean by family learning and learning at home?

[Family learning](#) encourages family members to learn together as and within a family, with a focus on intergenerational learning. Family learning activities can also be designed to enable parents to learn how to further support their children's learning.

[Learning at home](#) is the learning which happens in the home, outdoors or in the community. It can take place through everyday life and can overlap with aspects of organised activity.

Parents are the first and most important educators of their children. However parents may lack confidence in how best to support their children's learning at home. They may also be juggling competing priorities such as trying to work from home while caring for their children. ELC practitioners have a key role to play in supporting families to help young children continue learning at home and in building the confidence of parents who support them.

Key principles for supporting young children's learning at home include the following:

- A supportive home learning environment provides high quality learning experiences for young children.
- Learning at home within the family will not replicate the range of interactions, experiences and spaces that young children access in their ELC setting. A shared understanding of expectations, with a focus on what can be delivered effectively at home is likely to be a more productive approach than over-stretched ambitions.
- Practitioners who know children well should play a key role in developing and delivering support for children learning at home with their family.
- Support assists children to progress, extend and apply their learning.
- Two-way communication with families supports and helps capture children's achievements in the setting and at home, sensitively taking account of the overall demands on families.
- Support aims to ensure engagement for all young children, taking account of their stage of development.
- Provision is made for children and the families of children, who require additional support for learning and any who may be particularly vulnerable or disadvantaged.
- A shared understanding between home and the setting/s of the approaches provided to support learning at home, of the appropriate means of communication and of the respective roles and responsibilities of all involved, including where children have blended placements.
- Continued endeavours are made to tackle digital exclusion, including the use of approaches which do not require devices to support learning where appropriate.
- Partnership working with community providers and third sector organisations to support provision.

## Supporting families and learning at home

Relationships and two-way communication between families and settings are vital. Settings should consider how best to [communicate with families](#) and how best families might communicate with them. A one-size-fits-all solution is unlikely and through collegiate dialogue and engagement, many settings are continuing to find and use creative and innovative solutions.

Many families find informal regular telephone 'check-ins' helpful in supporting their health and wellbeing. Emails or blogs containing video messages to key-children and families, with links to external resources can help support ongoing relationships and overcome literacy barriers. They may also be helpful to families who are speakers of English as an additional language. Families without digital connectivity or unlimited data may benefit, for example, from regular text messages containing prompts and encouragement. Learning packs delivered to the home may best suit others. Families will also appreciate clear information about how and to whom they can ask questions or raise concerns.

Not all parents may be aware that young children learn best through play and meaningful real-life experiences. There can be a misconception that more formal activity is required. Practitioners can support the quality of children's play experiences at home by sharing the [importance of play](#) and how this can be supported. For example, by following the child's lead, playing with the child and engaging in conversation. Parents should be reassured that time children spend playing independently is valuable, as are the opportunities for families to learn together.

While contact with families will most often be made using technology, suggestions should generally encourage children to move away from screens to play and take part in the everyday activities that are part of family life. Outdoor play is particularly important to healthy development.<sup>2</sup> Settings should consider how they can support families to make the most of daily opportunities for outdoor exercise, within current restrictions, to support children's physical development, health and wellbeing and their understanding of the world around them.

Practitioners should consider how support for learning at home can provide opportunities for young children to revisit, consolidate, extend and enhance their learning.

ELC leaders have an important role in ensuring that all families have access to high quality support. Realising the Ambition promotes the benefit of professional dialogue and collaboration between practitioners and across agencies. This continues to be important as practitioners support children's learning in new ways and as they seek to balance priorities, mindful too of their own [health and wellbeing](#).

## Internet safety

Many settings have well established communication with families through social media platforms and blogs. It is likely that families will also want to share their experiences with their keyworkers. Practitioners should continue to follow appropriate guidance on internet safety and the use of social media<sup>3</sup>. Parents should also be made aware of [safe practice](#) guidance.

## Children with Additional Support Needs

It is recognised that families with children who have additional support needs may feel under additional pressure during the Covid-19 pandemic. In providing [support](#) require to carefully and sensitively consider children who have additional support needs, including any learners who may be vulnerable or socio-economically disadvantaged. Tailored approaches which take account of the family situation and include provision of resources to use at home may be required. Liaison with appropriate agencies and the involvement of parents and carers should continue wherever possible. The Child's Plan should be kept up to date and used to inform support.

## Support for practitioners

Education Scotland has curated into a [single list](#) all the support that is available on remote learning from national organisations.

ELC practitioners may find the following links particularly helpful:

### [e-Sgoil Covid-19 Support – Being Me with Dug](#)

Dug's Discovery Den has been developed by e-Sgoil in partnership with Education Scotland to inspire further learning and exploration beyond the screen.

### [Scotland Learns](#)

A range of ideas and suggestions of activities to help parents, carers and practitioners.

[ELC Wakelet](#) - Support for cross-curricular learning at home

### [COVID-19 Education Recovery](#)

A single point of access to guidance and support for COVID-19 recovery.

### [Digilearn.scot](#)

Providing a range of strategies, tools and guidance to support learning at home.

[A summary of Early Learning and Childcare resources](#) links to professional learning for example on family learning, parental engagement and additional support needs.

## Conclusion

What constituted high quality learning through play prior to the pandemic has not changed. The professionalism of our workforce remains. We are all still committed to children's rights and positive relationships. We want our children to be eager participants in their learning. Learning should be meaningful to children, joyful, and social. It should also be well-matched to children's needs and interests. What has changed is the way in which we are seeking to support high quality experiences for our children. It is vital that we continue to adjust and tailor our approaches to help ensure the very best for all our young children.

The aim across Scottish education is for all children to return to settings as soon as it is safe to do so. As we work towards this, it is important to recognise the challenges of supporting learning at home and how we address these.

It is important that we continue to build on the strong culture of collaboration that exists across Scotland. Strengthening this to ensure there are opportunities for practitioners, settings, local authorities, Regional Improvement Collaboratives and national bodies to work together to support learning at home is key.

<sup>1</sup> p15, <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/realising-the-ambition/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/1557/my-world-outdoors-sharing-good-practice-in-how-early-years-services-can.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [GTCS guidance engaging online.pdf](#) and [SSSC Social media guidance for social service workers](#)