

Safely Coming Back Together; Supporting children and families to return to your early years setting



All settings are different and each child is unique. They will have accessed a range of experiences at home and in coming into the setting will be equipped with various levels of confidence and resilience. It is therefore difficult to offer specific recommendations that would be universally applicable.

This document hopes to provide some suggestions and considerations that may be useful for you and your children, in your context. They are to be used in conjunction with the GOV.UK Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance and support a suite of documents regarding the reduction of transmission of the virus within settings. These documents are hyperlinked at the end of the document for easy reference.

Early Years settings will need to work closely with parents and staff to agree the best approaches for their circumstances.

Considerations to support your setting during this protective phase of current restrictions

At an operational level:

- Decisions will be made by the leadership team. In order for them to be successful, please involve all staff working with the different age groups to ensure their specialist 'hands-on' knowledge of the routines and environment support you in identifying potential concerns and allaying these anxieties for your children, parents and staff.
- You need to be aware of the potential risk points within your setting for transmission of this virus- within the risk assessment you need to identify the risk, how to overcome and negate this concern for your staff, parents and learners and then provide clear instructional guidance for your families and staff to follow. The space needed for children of EYFS age must meet guidance from the *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* – point 3.57; the following indoor space requirements apply:
 - children under 2 years need 3.5 metres squared per child
 - children 2 to 3 years need 2.5 metres squared per child
 - children 3 to 5 years need 2.3 metres squared per child

This was mirrored in the guidance document '*Actions for education and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1 June*' published May 24th 2020

- There is no set way in which risk assessments must be presented, however they must be bespoke for your setting. Dudley Local Authority have provided templates for both schools and settings to support you in this. Good practice would be to involve the staff of each



classroom/family group base or room to support you in writing these for their individual environments.

- As a leadership team, all children who will be attending will need to be allocated a family group to become their sole base for their time within the setting. The publication of specific Early Years guidance on 24th May 2020 suggests group sizes to a maximum of 8 children, (while adhering to EYFS ratios) is preferable so groups are as small as possible. Providers are expected to ensure that there are no more than 16 children in a group in Early Years settings.
- Best practice would suggest where possible that a specific adult will be assigned as the family group key person.
- When planning family groups you may want to consider; friendship groups of the children, key worker and vulnerable children attendance patterns and the availability of staff. You will need to ensure that staffing allocation remains consistent across family group. Any decisions must be made alongside the settings risk assessments, to continue to ensure minimal risk of transmission within the setting.
- Each family group must be thought of as a safety bubble protecting their group from infection. The children and members of staff must remain within their family group and safety bubble; if they move or join another bubble the protective nature of the bubble will be popped (broken) and cross-infection could occur.
- It is best practice to ensure wherever possible, the family groups are based within a familiar environment; the children's known working environment within the setting.
- When deciding where you will be locating family groups within your setting; consider whether each family group can have access to their own set of toilets, if practically possible, that ideally would not be shared with a second family group.
- Consider where each family group will enter your setting, are they able to have their own entrance or will you operate a designated time slot for arrival and departure.
- When talking to children, you may wish to refrain from using the term bubble- they may be expecting bubbles to blow, or a bubble effect around them for the time that they are in the setting. Consider an alternative term, for example; family, club, team etc.... something which can be identified and named to ensure that the children have some understanding and feel a valued member of the group.
- Within their family group space, it is recognised by the government that it may not always be possible for the children to remain 2 metres apart especially for EYFS. There is no expectation that this will mean a huge change from their current provision; they do not need to be table based or have an allocated space within.
- You will need to identify the process and ensure that all staff members know and understand how to deal with a suspected corona virus illness on site. They must be able to implement this process with immediate effect to minimise potential virus transmission throughout the setting. In the event of a positive case, settings should contact Dudley Public Health and schools, the School Nursing Service.
- Staff will need to be provided with specific guidance regarding their role and the social distancing approaches they may employ when supporting the children.
For example, if a child falls and is injured or if a child becomes upset and needs comforting, are you within your setting advocating physical contact, a hug, holding their hand? Do you need to have this conversation with your staff and then ensure it features within your risk assessments.



- When working indoors within your setting, ensure that windows and doors are open to ensure good ventilation and air flow within the rooms
- The cleaning of the equipment and emptying of bins must be happening through the implementation of your enhanced cleaning schedule. This should again be communicated with all members of staff to ensure these measures are consistently implemented across the setting.

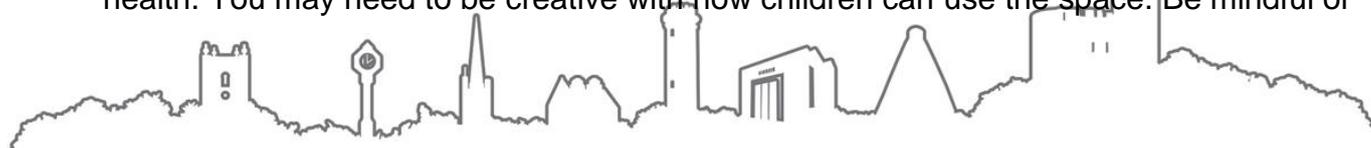
Management of resources

- With the guidance suggesting the removal of equipment, toys and soft furnishings that are hard to clean, there are questions that your staff may wish to ask themselves when deciding on what resources should be provided at this time:
 - ✓ Can I wash these items effectively?
 - ✓ Will the items dry well? Can they dry quickly to be used again?
 - ✓ What about the resources that children often put in their mouths? E.g. cups, plastic/ wooden food and cutlery, teapots in the water or the role play area and straws in the craft supplies etc.
 - ✓ Is the cleaning of the identified items manageable? For example, some people wash plastic construction equipment (duplo/lego or Knex) in a large pillowcase in the washing machine on a cold and gentle wash cycle and dry outside on a towel or blanket.
 - ✓ How much equipment is needed? How much is too much equipment within a family group?
 - ✓ It has been recommended that books are not shared across groups until they have not been handled by anyone for at least three days. So you will need to consider how you organise access to sets of books on a regular basis while minimising the risk of cross-infection.

Remember that the cleaning will need to be done every time the equipment is played with and specifically if it is then accessed by another family group/bubble. This should be reflected in your enhanced cleaning schedule

Structure of the day

- The routines/daily timetable will need to be managed and rigorously enforced from a logistical angle- everyone will need to stick to the times in which you access the outdoors and the arrangements at lunchtime, as these are potential times your family group may come into contact with other groups.
- Handwashing hygiene practice will become a regular and frequent part of the session. The children should wash their hands upon arrival, at regular intervals throughout the day, both prior to and post eating, and before they leave the setting to go home. You will also need to ensure that the children are employing the government guidelines consistently and may need frequent reminders especially in the beginning. These might be supported by the visual aid of picture instructions with a simple commentary that is consistently used by the key person.
- Staff need to consider regular outdoor access for the children as this will support good respiratory hygiene practices and the fresh air has a positive effect on everyone's mental health. You may need to be creative with how children can use the space. Be mindful of



distancing should more than one family group be accessing a larger outdoor area at the same time.

The settling-in period

Before, our current restrictions, children will have had a settling in period within the setting. Due to guidelines this is no longer possible for example, the guidance suggests that parents should not be encouraged to enter your setting, when dropping off their child.

Due to the young age of our learners, some children may require a new settling in opportunity. This is likely to be vastly different to previous settling in practice.

Please remember:

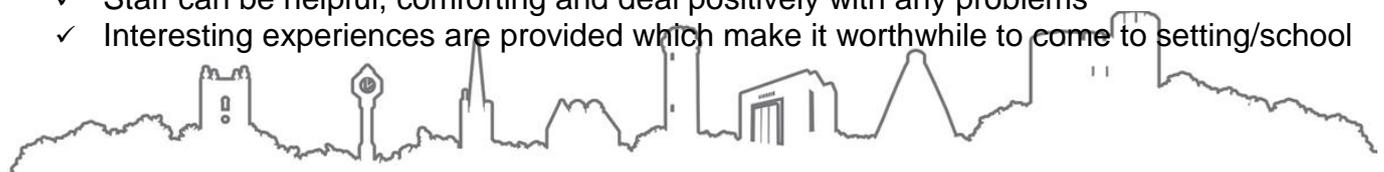
- Individual children will need different amounts of time to settle in or settle back in. It may take two weeks to support a child, it may take less or it may take more. It is different for every child therefore settling in procedures should be purposefully designed to be flexible to suit each unique child.
- If a child is struggling to enter the setting and is clinging to their parent, it helps if you have guidance for staff which has been communicated clearly with your parents regarding the procedure. Remind the parents to respond positively and ensure that the child has a hug before they leave to raise the child's emotional levels positively, this will help them to feel calmer in their anxious state. When the parents leave the child will have a memory of a calm and a soothing parent, rather than one who rushes away. Consider if a space could be made available (in line with social distancing), where the parent can give the child the time they need before they leave, rather than feeling under pressure to rush away. This space will not be necessary for all children but for some children returning to the setting after spending so much time at home may be more difficult .
- As a key person you could support the introduction to the new family group by ensuring anxious children have a close friend to play with during the day. If a child is struggling, you could have to hand a photo of the family/parent for the child to access when they need to. Alternatively use a recording device e.g. "a talking tin/button" and ask the parent to record a message. These small steps can aid the child in finding a sense of calm.
- It would be good practice during this time if the child's allocated key person spent time supporting their children in getting to know / or remembering the school staff, environment and their peers, especially the members of their family group.

Key person role within every family group

The purpose of the key person within their group is to develop positive relationships with all family group members. The key person will quickly learn about each member of their family group (bubble) and be adapting their interactions to support them in settling in, feeling safe, secure, confident and happy within their new experiences at the setting.

The nurturing of the relationships will allow the child to trust that:

- ✓ Setting/School staff will meet her or his needs
- ✓ Staff can be helpful, comforting and deal positively with any problems
- ✓ Interesting experiences are provided which make it worthwhile to come to setting/school



Alongside the curriculum being provided, we need to be aware of supporting the children in our family group with their self- regulation.

Curriculum

'The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets the standards that schools and childcare settings must meet for the learning, development and care of children from birth to 5 years old. Early years settings should use reasonable endeavours to deliver the learning and development requirements as far as possible in the current circumstances, as set out here. Schools should use best endeavours to support pupils attending school as well as those remaining at home, making use of the available remote education support'.

'No school will be penalised if they are unable to offer a broad and balanced curriculum to their pupils during this period'.

Above quotes taken from: [Actions for education and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1 June 2020 updated 12 May 2020](#)

There is no expectation for a full curriculum to be employed from the first day of return.

Every child matters; each child will have experienced something different within this current situation. They may have experienced loss, remained in their home for the entire time, have parents who are key workers plus a variety of other circumstances. This needs to be considered when deciding on the content of the day.

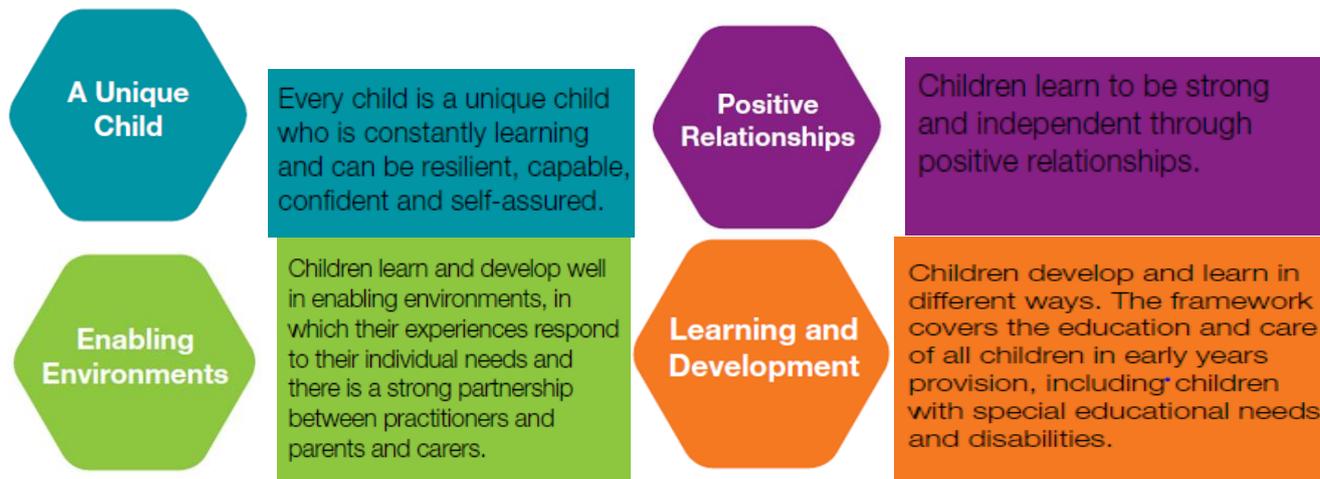
The prime areas will need to be the primary focus of the curriculum being provided as children settle back into their setting. The educational programmes within the EYFS statutory framework state the prime areas are:

- Communication and Language
 - Physical Development
 - Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- [Early years foundation stage statutory framework \(EYFS\)](#)



A reminder

Settings need to be employing the overarching principles of the EYFS as stated in the Statutory Framework (page 6):



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Characteristics of Effective Learning
<p>Playing and exploring – engagement</p> <p>Finding out and exploring Playing with what they know Being willing to 'have a go'</p>
<p>Active learning – motivation</p> <p>Being involved and concentrating Keeping trying Enjoying achieving what they set out to do</p>
<p>Creating and thinking critically – thinking</p> <p>Having their own ideas Making links Choosing ways to do things</p>

These characteristics remain part of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation stage and should be used by practitioners/key persons. They should be reflecting upon each member of their family group and consider the different ways in which their children learn and reflect these characteristics within their practice.

It is known that these characteristics are enhanced or inhibited by the experiences/opportunities presented to children. When they are supported to follow their own curiosity, to problem solve, plan, adapt and to demonstrate commitment alongside the motivation to complete a task; these children will be developing as self-regulated learners within the setting.

¹ The visual images and content are taken from page 2 of Developments Matters in the Early Years Foundation stage (EYFS) 2012/13 <https://foundationyears.org.uk/files/2012/03/Development-Matters-FINAL-PRINT-AMENDED.pdf>



Bristol has developed a fourth characteristic; Emotional Well-being, this document may support you with delivery at this time

Bristol Early Years Characteristics of Effective Learning			
	A Unique Child: observing how a child is learning	Positive Relationships: what adults could do	Enabling Environments: what adults could provide
Emotional Well-Being	Showing emotional literacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressing and recognising a range of emotions Managing a range of emotions Demonstrating that they feel safe and secure and have a sense of trust Demonstrating a growing understanding of the moral culture of their environment Showing resilience in adverse situations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a strong ethos and set of shared values that are embedded in day to day practice. Provide an ethos which values the opinions of others and is characterised by openness. Ensure each child and family has a constant and consistent key person to help them develop a sense of trust and security. Nurture warm, loving relationships between the child and their key person. Provide positive, warm role modelling by adults, both in their relationships with other adults in the setting and with parents and children. Welcome, greet and say goodbye to children and families. Encourage trusting and secure attachments which enable the key person to learn about the home culture, identity and every child's unique interests and needs, e.g. home visits. Ensure that relevant practitioners have detailed information about the home language and experiences of the child. Work together with the child and family to help them understand the process of separation. Model emotional literacy by naming, expressing and commenting on feelings. Nurture relationships between children through planned cooperative experiences such as listening, turn taking and social modelling, e.g. can I play with you? What's your name? Model strategies and behaviours consistently to support positive learning behaviour, e.g. empathy, Conflict Resolution steps. Give opportunities for children to think, reflect and clarify and to receive full attention when they look to an adult for a response. Listen to, value and respect the views and ideas of all children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a secure and welcoming environment that helps children and parents make attachments and friendships. Provide opportunities, time and a range of resources to encourage children and adults to talk about and express their emotions, e.g. puppets or role play to demonstrate and explore scenarios about social interactions, feelings. Develop strong home school partnerships in order to forge trusting and authentic relationships. Use visual cues, signs and symbols to support children in naming and expressing feelings. Provide clear and consistent routines and boundaries to enable children to feel safe and secure. Display photos of children and their families. Share personal experiences; special events, holidays, cultural identities and celebrate similarities and differences. Ensure constancy, consistency and security of the environment to help children to develop trust and security. Create an environment that supports children to make choices, plan and become autonomous learners. Provide uninterrupted time for play and extended activity that supports children to become intrinsically motivated. Provide a stable, safe environment to enable children to cope with change and challenges.
	Being connected <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Showing evidence of attachment Showing evidence of attachment to peers and the wider community Demonstrating a sense of belonging to their environment 		
	Demonstrating positive self-esteem & self-worth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Showing self confidence Showing respect for their culture and beliefs and those of others Taking responsibility Demonstrating an awareness of their own needs Showing they feel valued by expressing own needs and values to others Showing a sense of humour 		

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As the children return you will have focussed upon creating an enabling environment physically but you need to be aware of the emotional environment that we are providing and this will constantly be evolving in order to meet the needs of our learners.

- The content of your session will need to be flexible, ensuring that the children's needs are being met, both physically and emotionally?
- A regular and predictable daily routine will help EYFS aged children. For example a High/Scope-type daily routine offers predictably and structure but still offers choice within each segment of the programme. The routine will need to provide set times, including outdoor play, supporting you in managing potential crossovers with other family groups
- Group physical activity can be programmed into each day, in addition to children being encouraged to move around the area in a variety of ways. Help children to 'feel alive' via their body. Less stillness and more moving, sing together, dance together and laugh together.
- The delivery of any content should ensure that the key person actively interacts in ways that support relationships: calm voice, eye contact, same physical level, gentle smiling, noticing each child, non-verbal communication is paramount

² The visual image and content are taken from page 9 of Bristol Early Years characteristics of effective learning (CoEL) April 2017 <https://www.bristolearlyyears.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Bristol-EY-CoEL-Final-Document.pdf>



- It has been advised to avoid sharing common items within the environment. As an alternative, you may wish to follow an age appropriate Montessori style approach, where each child has their own 'practical life activities' in a tray, or in a box or bag. This could be adapted to fit our own settings and any number of different items could be included in each child's individual packages.
An example for a Reception aged child may contain: tissues, labelled water bottle, labelled cup, a pair of scissors, a glue stick, a pencil and a small notebook. Then add all sorts of things that the child could keep personal to themselves. Some suggestions: 10 items to count and use, a musical instrument, little drawstring bag to keep found treasures.
- You could provide if appropriate each child with their own paper tape which is 2 metres in length, this will support them in understanding the distance, they can use this to explore their new environment both indoors and outdoors.
- Instructions/ rules need to be broken down into manageable steps to support the children's understanding and ensuring that the children do not forget any stage of these hygienic procedures. The staff could create these before the children arrive.
- For example, breaking down routines into a visual picture instruction which is supported initially but will lead to the children independently following of the instructions. (this will support language skills, sequencing skills and children learning English as an additional language).
- Ideas for visual instructions to produce: visual timetable of the new day, washing their hands to meet the WHO guidance, good respiratory hygiene practice (Catch it, Bin it Kill it), coming into the setting, going home time, lunchtime etc... There are many ways in which we can support the children.
- You will sometimes be providing group activities within your bubble. This is a time when you can be having 5 a-day story sessions and lots of singing and rhymes to support our children's early phonological skills.
- Outdoor physical motor skills development; maximise the use of this environment. At this point in time, it does need to be thought of as an extension to your indoor environment.

Considerations for the support of children with SEND

- Be realistic due to the changes in setting that the children will be experiencing. You may need to start off with a shorter amount of time in nursery/ school and then increase, depending on the child's needs e.g. ensure they are having a positive experience.
- Consider having a clear safe space where children can go to inside and outside where they can find their own personal equipment that is suitable for wiping down/ throwing away after use. Also have some favoured toys within this areas.
- If appropriate, provide their own sensory trays labelled with the child's picture and or name with suitable washable sensory materials to be disposed of daily.
- Consider children who are still exploring objects orally beyond the expected age/stage norms. Some children will put everything in their mouths, others specific textures. Have a procedure in place for toys that are placed in children's mouths, perhaps have a designated box ready for washing nearby.
- Some children will need individualised visual timetables that are easily accessible, especially in the bathroom area to reinforce hand washing, maybe a pull-down Velcro system so that pictures are not lost or picked up by other children.



- Now/ Next sheet to break down instructions further dependant on their level of understanding and processing abilities, alongside objects of reference (e.g. a brush to paint, a cup to drink)
- Cue cards worn by the adult, with pictorial/ photographic prompts supported by signing, limited language used, gesture and singing to allow the adult to be more mobile and consistent with their communications.
- Have flexibility within the routine, consider the impact of sitting for long periods of time in restricted areas on a child with a very short attention span. Allow frequent movement and opportunities for physical development/ outside access.
- Being prepared, have a carousel of ideas created with the knowledge of the children that you have, which can be used inside/ outside e.g. sensory toys that can be washed.

Supporting children who are not yet returning to your setting

It is important that our children whose parents have decided to continue their learning within the home environment are also supported. The format this takes is entirely up to you as a setting; it is important to maintain contact with these children through video or virtual opportunities in readiness for when they return to the setting.

There are number of sites and supportive online tools to share with and direct parents to use. These are listed in the document: Actions for education and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1 June published May 24th 2020. It states: “The Department for Education’s [Hungry Little Minds](#) campaign features tips and practical activities that parents and carers can do at home with children to support their early learning. The campaign website has been updated to include a wealth of online educational resources available for parents and carers to support their child’s development at home. Settings can also direct parents and carers to the [BBC’s Tiny Happy People](#) campaign and the [National Literacy Trust’s Family Zone](#) for more ideas and content. The Department for Education has published further guidance on how to [help children aged 2 to 4 to learn at home during the coronavirus outbreak](#).”

Supporting all parents; communication is the key

Parents and children will have feelings of anxiety and there is a need to communicate your commitment to ensuring their children will be offered an environment which is as far as possible, reducing the risk of transmission of corona virus, through your risk assessments in order to open.

There is a model letter to share with your parents and carers regarding the partnership between themselves and the setting in order to maintain the protection of everybody, though minimising the potential for virus transmission. This letter should be edited to reflect your setting’s own circumstances and approaches. The letter should also be made available for all families, for example, ensuring that any English as an additional language family can confidently access the information and guidance.

This is the link to the document containing the letter in Annex A: [link to document](#)



- Share your settings risk assessments with your parents to ensure they are aware of all considerations that have been taken before opening.
- Share your proposed routine for the day, emphasising the need for frequent handwashing throughout the day and the use of the outdoors.
- Ask for feedback from parents; is there any further information they require?
- Provide a video (using your iPad or tablet) which will introduce the parents and children to their key person, where they will be coming into your setting, how to drop off the children, what the environment will look like when they return, how to pick up the children.
- This will support your children from a family where English is as an additional language in understanding new expectations within your setting.
- The content will be under your control but ensure that it is personal to each family group within your setting.
- Every key person could share a short story as a lovely way to start the connection with their family group, share your expectations such as children are no longer bringing items from home etc...

Links for current government guidance - May 2020.

Please ensure that you remain vigilant and frequently access the latest version of these documents, as sometimes there are updates.

- Actions for education and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1 June
[Planning guidance for early years and childcare settings](#)
- Implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings
[Coronavirus \(COVID 19\): implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings](#)
- Actions for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus outbreak
[Link](#)
- Early years foundation stage (EYFS) coronavirus disapplications
[Earl years foundation stage statutory framework \(EYFS\)](#)
- Safe working in education, childcare and children's social care settings, including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE)
[Safe working in education, childcare and children's social care](#)
[COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings](#)
[The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy](#)



Other useful links to support ongoing work

Principles into practice cards – Crown copyright 2007. [Link](#)

Development Matters PDF guidance: [Link](#)



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The Early Years Alliance You tube channel offers numerous supportive videos including:

WATCH NOW! Welcome Back: Supporting practitioners, children and families to return to your provision.

The Early Years Alliance have also produced some guidance which can be purchased by providers who are members:

- Meeting the needs of children from Day 1
- Preparing your premises and the EY environment
- Supporting practitioners, children and families to return to your setting



A Danish website who have been offering supportive blogs based on the Danish experiences from returning during the pandemic.

[Link](#)

Blogs from Sue Allingham available on the family website. Explaining coronavirus to the children [Link](#)

Reopening Child Care: How to Get Everyone on Board, here's how to take change one step at a time. [Link](#)

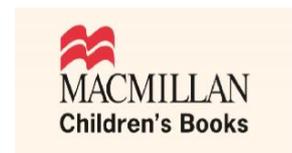
This site has an operational plan for parents which may support you in designing your own. [Link](#)



[Link](#)

This site has a number of links to supportive documentation around the current circumstances and a useful blog piece written by Ruth Swailes regarding the use of "Bubbles" within settings for the EYFS [Link](#)

Artwork and verse © Axel Scheffler and Julia Donaldson 2020, based on characters from The Gruffalo © 1999 (Macmillan Children's Books). Posters to print and display around the setting to support the children in remembering the hygiene and safety guidelines. [Link](#)



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Useful five stage approach to the 'recovery' curriculum [Link](#)

Emotional well-being training, returning to a new normal [Link](#)

Explores the impact of current situation on young children [Link](#)

Barnados/violence reduction unit. Lots of info around trauma-informed practice and COVID19 resources and links [Link](#)



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