



Top Tips for Practitioners

SUPPORTING BABIES AND CHILDREN FROM ARMED FORCES FAMILIES

Children from Armed Forces families often show unique strengths such as adaptability, curiosity, and strong relationships. They may also experience more frequent transitions, changes in routine and periods of separation. These tips show how familiar early years practice grounded in relationships, play and emotional security can be thoughtfully applied to support continuity, belonging and wellbeing.

“For most children, transitions are a source of excitement and opportunity. However, for some, transitions can be a time of anxiety.” (Supporting Transitions in Early Learning and Childcare)

1. Build belonging through understanding and connection

What this means for families

We take time to get to know your child and your family. Understanding your routines, experiences and any upcoming changes helps us plan support that feels right for your child.

In practice

Use enrolment and personal planning conversations to understand whether a child is part of an Armed Forces family, and how this may shape their day-to-day experiences.

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When families are relocating, prioritise relationship-building and, where appropriate, communication with previous settings to support continuity.

Reflect children's experiences naturally through play, stories, or conversation — celebrating a wide range of family lives.

Use inclusive language, images and role-play resources that affirm belonging for all children, including those with Forces connections.



Practitioner note:

This supports Realising the Ambitions (RtA's) focus on relationships and knowing children deeply and reflects the GIRFEC principle of seeing the "whole child."

2. Maintain emotional safety during periods of change

What this means for families

We understand that changes such as a parent being away or moving home can feel big for young children. We respond with warmth, patience, and predictable routines.

In practice

Use attachment-informed approaches to help children understand changes in simple, developmentally appropriate ways.

Keep ongoing, open communication with families to share observations and a shared understanding of how children may show emotions or behaviour.

Offer gentle opportunities for children to express feelings, while also allowing them to stay absorbed in play and everyday routines.

Provide consistency through trusted adults, familiar routines, and clear expectations, recognising that children may show different attachment needs at different times.



Practitioner note:

These approaches reflect Scotland's Trauma-Informed Practice framework — creating safety, trust, and choice.

3. Support continuity through transitions

What this means for families

Frequent moves can be tiring for children and adults. We aim to make each transition as smooth as possible by keeping learning and support consistent.

In practice

Share clear, consistent information during transitions so that routines, learning and helpful strategies travel with the child especially when moving across regions or countries.

Keep a brief, child-centred record of significant changes so families do not need to repeat their story.

Provide simple, reassuring information that helps children understand what will stay the same and what will be new.

Support early peer relationships to build a sense of safety, belonging and community from the start.

Top Tip - keep a learning passport alive and active

Make the child's learning passport a "living journal" that travels with them, not after them.

When transitions happen (often at short notice for Armed Forces families), a well-used and regularly refreshed passport gives the new setting an immediate window into what the child loves:

- Keep the child's voice at the heart of the passport.
- Regularly involve children in choosing what goes into their learning passport — photos, drawings, favourite activities, special friends, and things of which they are proud of.

This helps them feel ownership and ensures the passport truly reflects who they are. When they move to a new setting, the receiving practitioners gain instant, meaningful insight into what helps the child feel safe, confident, and ready to learn—making each transition smoother, warmer, and more personal.



Involve children in choosing what goes into their learning passport



Practitioner note:

This aligns with GIRFEC transitions guidance and RtA's emphasis on continuity and secure attachments.

4. Work in partnership with families and wider networks

What this means for families

We value your knowledge of your child. Working together helps us support your child's wellbeing, learning and confidence.

In practice

Approach families with empathy and flexibility, recognising that responsibilities may change when a parent is deployed or preparing to relocate.

Use reflective conversations to help parents understand children's responses to change, without assuming difficulty.

Signpost to support services (local, national, or Armed Forces-specific) in a clear, sensitive way.

Stay aware of local Armed Forces community movements and supports so practitioners can anticipate change and respond early

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Practitioner note:

Partnership working reflects GIRFEC's principle of working together and valuing the child's wider world.

5. Recognise strengths while staying attuned to need

What this means for families

We recognise your child's strengths and celebrate what they bring to our setting. We also stay mindful that every child's emotional needs can change over time.

In practice

Avoid assuming that resilience means no support is needed; needs may appear subtly or at different stages of change.

Use team reflection or professional learning to understand how Armed Forces life may influence emotions, play or relationships.

Keep the environment predictable, calm, and emotionally available during periods of uncertainty.

Maintain warm, respectful communication — practitioners are often a key trusted adult when other parts of a child's world are changing.



Practitioner note:

A strengths-based, relational approach supports UNCRC, inclusion principles and RtA's view of children as capable and competent.

In practice: Bringing it all together

This guidance does not replace what practitioners already do well.

It simply highlights how familiar early years approaches — noticing, listening, nurturing, and providing secure relationships can be viewed through a Forces-informed lens.

With understanding, consistency and strong partnerships, practitioners can help children and families feel safe, valued and supported throughout their unique journey.

Useful resources and links

- [Realising the Ambition: Being Me](#)
- [UNCRC – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
- [GIRFEC – Getting it Right for Every Child](#)
- [Health and Social Care Standards](#)
- [Keeping Children Safe: - Supporting Transitions in Early Learning and Childcare](#)
- [Me, My Family and My Childcare Setting](#)
- [Wee People, Big Feelings](#)

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