

Reopening Protocols for ECCs

Ensuring Safe Operations for
Early Childhood Centres

Welcome Back

"We thank God for the experiences we have gone through, the challenges we have learned from, and the circumstances that have made us."

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum

We have come through a difficult time, made possible by the strength and unity of the community.

Our highest priority has always been, and remains, the safety and security of our community.

Today is about preparing to respond effectively, together as a community.

Objectives

By the end of this protocol
you will be:

1 Aware of preparations needed for reopening

2 Informed on roles and responsibilities

3 Ready to respond in case of an emergency

4 Prepared for effective communication

Guiding Principles

1



People First

- Children and staff safety first
- Lives first, always
- Never go back for possessions – leave them behind

2



Outdoors Safely

- Outdoor activities permitted under defined conditions and direct staff supervision

3



Safe Zones

- Avoid windows, glass, and open areas
- Move to safe zones when needed
- Identify assembly point

4



Official Alerts

- Follow official alerts immediately
- No unofficial info or social media

Possessions and buildings can be replaced,
but lives cannot be compensated.

Environment Readiness

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Indoor Operations and Safe Zones

Space Requirements

- Solid walls, concrete roof, no exposure to external areas
- Ventilation available without exposure to a dangerous source
- Emergency exits and assembly points identified and clearly marked

Safe Zone Rules

- Designated away from windows and glass
- If no safe zone exists, the room must not be used
- Reachable within 1 minute from any location
- Multiple safe zones per building to cover all areas
- Easy access without crossing outdoor or exposed areas

Planning and Mapping

- Safe zones clearly marked on evacuation maps and emergency plans
- Every staff member must know safe zones in their room
- Distributed across the building for quick access

Training and Readiness

- All staff trained on protocols and familiar with evacuation routes
- Roles assigned in advance, not on the day
- Emergency go-bag ready prepared and accessible (first aid, register, contact details)



- KHDA approval required before reopening
- No ECC may operate without signing the KHDA reopening declaration

Supervision and Wellbeing

Your calm matters more than you think. Children look to you – a steady voice and relaxed body language can prevent panic before it starts.

Children

Supervised and supported at all times

- Fixed routines maintained to provide stability
- Monitor for anxiety, regression or behaviour changes
- Log and report concerns — do not dismiss

Staff

Your calm is the most powerful tool

- No fear-inducing language or imagery
- Respond to distress with sensitivity
- Staff wellbeing equally prioritised

Environment

Safe, calm and never alone

- Positive, calm atmosphere always
- Minimum two staff per room during an alert
- No one manages an emergency alone
- Support is available – you don't have to cope alone

Remember: During exceptional periods, children may show signs of regression or anxiety. These must be logged and reported and not ignored.

Understanding Your Stress Response

What your body does

The threat response — fight or flight

- Heart races**
Blood pumps faster to prepare your muscles for action
- Breathing becomes shallow**
Quick, short breaths — your body wants more oxygen fast
- Tunnel vision**
Focus narrows to the threat — everything else blurs
- Muscles tense**
Your body braces — shoulders rise, jaw tightens

How to take back control

Simple techniques that actually work

- 1 Box breathing**
Breathe in for 4 seconds; hold for 4; breathe out for 4; hold for 4. Repeat 3 times. Slows your heart rate immediately.
- 2 Feet flat, feel the floor**
Press both feet firmly to the ground. This physical anchor brings you back to the present.
- 3 5-4-3-2-1 grounding**
Name 5 things you see · 4 you can hear · 3 you can touch · 2 you smell · 1 you can taste. Breaks tunnel vision fast.
- 4 Long exhale**
Breathe in normally, exhale slowly for twice as long. Activates your body's natural calm response.

You are more capable than you feel in that moment. *These responses are your body protecting you - work with them, not against them.*

This is normal. When we sense threat, our bodies respond automatically - it's biology, not weakness. Understanding what's happening helps you take back control.

Psychological First Aid (PFA)

An immediate humane response for children experiencing distress after a crisis or emergency. It aims to provide practical care and support, reduce distress, and help meet basic needs.

1. Look

- Observe children for signs of distress or emotional reactions.
- Check the surrounding environment to make sure it is safe and identify anyone who may need urgent assistance.

2. Listen

- Approach affected children calmly.
- Listen to their concerns without pressure, help reassure them and reduce fear, and use a calm, reassuring tone of voice.

3. Link

- Make sure the child is in a safe place, reassure them, and guide them toward simple steps that help restore a sense of calm.
- Connect the child with the appropriate support when needed, such as specialists, social workers, or counsellors.
- Help them access assistance as quickly as possible.

Supporting Children of Determination (1/2)

Motor Difficulties

- Assign a dedicated evacuation buddy – confirmed before reopening, not on the day
- Use evacuation chairs where available – staff must know their location and how to use them
- Never use lifts under any circumstances
- If the child cannot be moved, direct to the nearest safe rescue point and stay with them – do not leave to rejoin the group
- Staff responsibility: practice the route with the child during calm periods, so it is not new in an emergency

Visual Impairments

- Provide continuous verbal description of every step and direction – narrate what is happening throughout
- Guide physically – place your hand on the child's shoulder and lead calmly at their pace
- Never leave unaccompanied at any point – stay with the child until confirmed safe at the assembly point
- Staff responsibility: walk the evacuation route with the child regularly, so they are familiar with it before an emergency

Supporting Children of Determination (2/2)

Hearing Impairments

- Never rely on verbal alarms alone – confirm the child has received the alert before moving
- Use clear visual signals: flashing lights, firm hand signals, or pre-prepared written cards
- Maintain direct eye contact throughout – face the child when giving any instruction
- Staff responsibility: visual alert cards must be prepared, labelled, and kept in the room at all times – not made in an emergency

Autism & Sensory Needs

- Use noise-cancelling headphones to reduce distress from alarms – keep them in the room, not in a storeroom
- Use visual PECS cards to explain each step in sequence, one instruction at a time
- Keep communication calm, short, and predictable – avoid raised voices or sudden changes in tone
- Named key person must remain with the child for the entire evacuation – handover to another adult only when the child is settled and safe
- Staff responsibility: practice the evacuation sequence with the child using PECS cards

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Daily Operations and Emergency Response

Entry, dismissal, supervision, wellbeing, and response

Responding to Alerts

SHELTER



Local incident, no direct impact

Projectile or falling debris

- Never leave children unattended to investigate an alert
- Stay with your group until an official instruction is received
- Your place is with the children NOT at the source of the sound
- Monitor official alerts and news

EVACUATE



Fire, smoke, or gas leak

Suspicious object on or near premises (do not touch)

- Stop all activity and issue a calm, firm instruction
- Check route to assembly point is clear before moving anyone
- Walk quickly and in an orderly line – no running
- Infant trolleys must be pre-stocked and ready for immediate use at all times
- Call 997 and 999

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

- Isolate the affected child without disrupting the rest of the group
- A second staff member immediately takes over group supervision
- The group must never be left unattended while first aid is being given
- Call 998 if the situation is life-threatening – do not wait

Two Operational Risk Levels

● GREEN – Low Risk / Stable

- No alert messages
- Normal day continues
- Use indoor facilities
- Enhance readiness at all times
- Outdoor activities and assemblies permitted under defined conditions — move indoors immediately if any alert is issued"

● RED – Potential Danger

- Switch to distance learning and remote work
- Do not resume on-site learning without official approval
- Authorities identify high-risk locations to determine response

The relevant authorities determine the risk levels.
All alert messages must be taken seriously and acted upon immediately.

Phase 1: Before Arriving at Centre

No alert

- Child leaves home as usual for the centre, either with a parent/guardian, or school bus

Alert before departure

Do not leave home. Await official all clear

Alert received while en route

- If with parents, proceed to the nearest safe, covered location, or return home
- If on school buses, child must not be dropped off in exposed areas and must remain inside the bus while staying away from the windows.

Phase 2: At Drop Off

No alert

- Children enter the building directly
- Morning assembly may resume
- Drop-off must be orderly and prompt. Proceed directly to the designated area — no crowding at gates or on the sidewalk

Alert issued

- Parents and child do not wait outside the building; enter immediately if it is safe to do so.
- Do not allow the child to get out of the car or bus unless the situation is safe.
- If entry is possible, move the child to the nearest pre-designated safe area.

Remember:

If any official alert is issued, all outdoor activities stop immediately and shelter-in-place protocols apply.

Phase 3: While Inside the Centre

No alert

- Classes continue as normal
- Morning assembly may resume
- Outdoor activities permitted in designated areas under direct staff supervision
- Break time may be held outdoors in organised, supervised areas

Alert issued

- Stop all activities immediately
- Move to nearest safe zone
- Children sit in low, calm position away from windows and glass

Staff outside the building:

- Proceed immediately to the nearest safe interior facility. Remaining in open areas is prohibited. In exceptional cases (injury, casualty, or facility impact), the relevant authorities organise dismissal.
- Bus drivers must remain inside the buses or proceed to the nearest safe facility if necessary.

Phase 4: During Dismissal and Return

No alert

- Dismissal proceeds normally in an organised, swift, and gradual manner

Alert issued

- Dismissal is suspended immediately
- Children are not allowed outside the building
- If the alert is issued before children board the buses, ensure children remain in safe places until further instructions are issued.

Alert during dismissal

With parent/guardian:

- Proceed to a safe place
- No standing in open areas

On the bus

- Children must remain inside, lower their heads, and not disembark in exposed areas.

When alert is lifted

- Dismissal resumes in an organised, gradual manner
- Children handed over to parents/guardians in an organised way
- Gatherings in front of gates and sidewalks are prohibited

Rapid Response - The First 3 Minutes

Three critical minutes can determine full control of the situation and prevent a disaster in the centre environment

1

Minute 1: Response and decision

Based on the directions given and alert type, make the appropriate immediate decision: evacuate or shelter in place.

2

Minute 2: Orderly movement

Direct children calmly and without panic according to the pre-designated safe evacuation or shelter procedures.

3

Minute 3: Assembly and headcount

Reach the assembly point or safe shelter area and immediately begin counting children and reporting any missing persons.

Firm direction

- Stop any explanation, shouting, or unclear instructions.
- Give children a clear and direct command to leave everything and follow instructions.
- **Suggested command:**
“Leave your belongings and line up quietly.”

Check the route

- Make sure the route is safe before directing children to move, to avoid exposing them to danger.
- Watch for any signs of smoke, fire, or obstacles in the corridor or nearby area.

After the All-Clear

The response does not end when the danger passes. Follow these four steps in order:

1

Return Protocol

- Await direction from the ECC Manager only – no independent decisions on when to return
- Return to rooms in an organised, supervised manner

2

Final Headcount

- Recount all children, staff, and visitors immediately upon return
- Verify the general condition of each child – note any signs of distress or physical harm

3

Documentation

- Complete the incident report form – record all injuries, damages, actions taken, and exact times
- Submit to ECC Management – do not delay or complete from memory

4

Ongoing Support

- Activate psychological support for any distressed children – do not wait for them to escalate
- Notify parents through the approved channel only – keep the message clear, calm, and factual

Roles and Responsibilities

ECC Managers and Teachers

ECC Manager is responsible for:

1

making sure every staff member is trained on all outlined protocols and participates in practice drills or routines

2

assigning roles to relevant staff members to cover all emergency procedures

3

effectively communicating all required protocol procedures to parents

4

staff members ensuring that children have rehearsed the relevant procedures and routines

KHDA and relevant authorities may conduct monitoring visits from time to time.

Teacher's responsibilities:

1 On-site leader

Manage the evacuation calmly and direct children clearly toward safe evacuation routes.

2 Protector and guide

Ensure all children are evacuated from classrooms and facilities, and make sure no child is left behind.

3 Communication link

Communicate effectively with centre leadership and emergency response teams to report on child's status and absences.

4 First responder

Provide basic first aid and initial psychological support to children until rescue teams arrive.

You are the first responder in protecting lives and property.

School Bus Drivers and Supervisors

1 Keep children away from windows

Seat children low and away from glass at the first sign of an alert or unusual sound.

2 Stay calm, keep children calm

A steady voice prevents panic. Give short, clear instructions and avoid raised tones.

3 Never drop off in open areas

Children must only disembark directly at the building entrance. If the entrance is not reachable safely, keep children on the bus.

4 Relocate if needed

If the current location is exposed or unsafe, move the bus to the nearest safe covered area and remain there until the alert ends.

5 Shelter, don't disperse

During an alert while in transit or parked, children remain inside the bus, heads low, away from windows. Do not release them.

6 Train children in advance

Rehearse on-bus shelter procedures, evacuation steps, and how to take cover — before an emergency, not during one.

Buses are an extension of the ECC. Drivers and supervisors play a critical role in protecting children during transit and at drop-off.

Complete before reopening – and review regularly. If you cannot answer yes to every question, act now – not during an emergency.

Staff Readiness Checklist

KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	TOOLS & EQUIPMENT	CHILDREN'S NEEDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I know all evacuation routes from my room? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I know the assembly point for my group? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I know when to evacuate vs shelter-in-place? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can I tell an official alert from an unofficial one? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I know my exact role and responsibilities in an emergency? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Have I physically walked all evacuation routes? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can I perform basic first aid, including infant CPR? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can I manage a distressed group without escalating panic? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can I apply Psychological First Aid (Look, Listen, Link)? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can I safely carry or move a non-mobile infant during evacuation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is my room's Go-Bag stocked, accessible, and checked this week? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does it contain: first aid kit, register, emergency contacts and medical info? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Are infant trolleys pre-stocked and ready for immediate use? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is the evacuation map posted clearly and up to date in my room? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I have the ECC Manager's direct number saved and accessible? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I know every child with additional or medical needs in my group? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is there an individual evacuation plan for each of those children? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does every child with additional needs have a named buddy or key person? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is all required medication and emergency equipment accessible at all times? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Am I actively monitoring for signs of distress or behavior changes?

Communication and Compliance

Parent engagement, access controls
and your responsibilities

How we communicate in a crisis defines how parents trust us. Every word matters.

Parent Communication

✓ Official channels only

Direct all parents to approved ECC communications.
No personal numbers, no WhatsApp groups, no informal messages.

✓ Keep parents informed

Share clear, calm updates before, during, and after any incident.
Tell them what is happening, what is being done, and what to expect next.

✓ Never release without contact

Exhaust every emergency contact if a parent cannot be reached.
No child is released until an authorised person is confirmed.
Document every attempt.

The ECC Manager is the sole authorised voice. All other staff refer parents to management — no exceptions.

✗ Photograph or film anything

Causes panic, violates privacy, obstructs the response, and carries legal consequences

✗ Answer individual parent calls

While an incident is underway your focus must be entirely on the children in your care

✗ Share unconfirmed information

No personal opinions, no rumours, no unofficial updates in any form or on any platform

✗ Issue the all-clear yourself

Never pre-empt the ECC Manager. Wait for official confirmation before saying anything to parents

Informing Parents: What to Share

BEFORE ECC

1 Before leaving for ECC

If an alert is issued before leaving for ECC, keep your child at home and wait for the official all-clear. Do not drop off.

EN ROUTE

2 On the way

If an alert is issued en route, move to the nearest safe covered place or return home. Do not proceed to ECC.

AT DROP-OFF

3 At drop-off

Arrive promptly and proceed to the designated drop-off area. No crowding at gates or on the sidewalk.

DURING THE DAY

4 During the day

Your child will be moved to a pre-designated indoor safe zone. The ECC will communicate through official channels only.

AT DISMISSAL

5 At dismissal

If an alert is active, dismissal is suspended. Children will only be released once the all-clear is received.

ANY TIME

6 Stay informed

Through official channels only. Do not rely on social media, forwarded messages, or unofficial sources.

ECC'S OBLIGATION: Share this with every parent at the start of term

Keep contact details current · Use one approved emergency channel · Update parents after every drill or incident.

External Communication Protocol

All staff are strictly prohibited from photographing, recording, or publishing any information about the incident on social media.

Protecting privacy

Photographing children in vulnerable situations is a violation of their privacy.

Preventing the spread of rumors

Fragmented or incomplete information can create panic and misinformation.

Maintaining a single official channel

The ECC Manager is the only authorised person to issue official statements.

Avoiding disruption to the response

Uncontrolled communications can overwhelm emergency networks and hinder operations.

Photography during emergencies is prohibited both legally and ethically.

Health & Safety Lead Responsibilities

Compliance gatekeeper

Audit the environment against KHDA reopening criteria (solid walls, concrete roof, ventilation, marked exits, safe zones reachable within 1 minute) and confirm the signed KHDA acknowledgment and Consent Form is in place before any reopening.

Drill and training lead

Plan, run, and debrief shelter-in-place and evacuation drills with staff and child; track training completion across all staff on PFA (Look, Listen, Link), basic first aid, and CPR; brief new joiners before they enter classrooms.

Equipment custodian

Maintain and weekly-check every room's Go-Bag (first aid kit, register, emergency contacts, medical info), evacuation chairs, noise-cancelling headphones, PECS cards, visual alert cards, and strollers; confirm evacuation maps are posted and current in every room.

Individualized plans for Children of Determination

Verify every child with additional needs has a named buddy or key person, an individual evacuation plan, and accessible medication; confirm routes have been walked with the child during calm periods — not improvised on the day.

Authority liaison and documentation

Serve as the centre's primary link to Civil Defence (997), ambulance (998), and police (999); maintain the incident and hazard register; submit incident reports and risk updates to the ECC Manager and KHDA through approved channels.

Risk monitoring

Track official alerts and escalate immediately to the ECC Manager identify and log hazards on an ongoing basis (not only after incidents); Ensure all outdoor activities and morning assemblies meet the required conditions: direct supervision, defined capacity, and clear evacuation routes to safe zones

ECC Manager Checklist

1 Train staff

Train all staff on protocols.
Use a train-the-trainer model to cascade using KHDA materials

2 Dual delivery

Separate provision for in-person and distance learners. Hybrid must not disrupt learning or overburden teachers

3 Staff wellbeing

Protect the wellbeing of all teachers and support staff throughout the reopening process.

4 Emergency plans

Submit shelter-in-place, evacuation, and emergency plans as part of application submission. Conduct drills with staff and children.

5 Submit data

E.g., on-site vs online children, on-site vs remote staff, school bus numbers etc. (*specific data points TBC*)

6 Contacts

Provide details for ECC Managers and both parents of each enrolled child.

Pre-requisites for Reopening

1. Need to complete the application form if not already submitted

2. Attend Training

- All centres must attend the KHDA reopening training session
- Attendance must be registered to confirm participation

3. Sign Declaration

- Centres sign a declaration confirming staff have completed the training and all required safety assessments are in place
- The signed acknowledgement and consent form is the centre's proof of readiness
- Date of intended reopening required on the acknowledgement and consent form

4. Safe Zone Inspection

- An inspection is not required prior to reopening
- KHDA will visit all centres to assess safe zones against an agreed rubric
- These visits will take place in due course following reopening and may be unannounced.

Have a question?

Scan the QR code to submit any questions related to the **reopening protocols** or **other related matters**.

Your questions will help us compile a FAQ to support the sector.

Education Institution Physical
Reopening Readiness Questions



Key Reminders

**Safety first. Outdoor activities under defined conditions.
Follow official alerts. Communicate through approved
channels.**

Appendix

Practical Scenarios

Training Scenario 1: Sudden Alarm

Situation: During class in the middle of the day, the fire alarm suddenly sounded continuously. Some children were startled and began shouting, while others moved randomly toward the door.

Immediate Control

Direct children in a calm, audible voice:

"Stop where you are."

This helps prevent pushing and confusion and restores order in the classroom.

Check the Route

Open the classroom door with extreme caution and confirm that the corridor is clear of smoke or fire before evacuating children.

Orderly Evacuation

Guide children to leave in an orderly line and move calmly toward the designated assembly point according to the evacuation plan.

Training Scenario 2: Evacuation Amid Disorder

Situation: During the evacuation, some children began pushing in the corridor because they saw light smoke, and one of them fell to the ground in the middle of the panic.

Challenge: How do you regain control of the children and continue the evacuation without stopping it completely?

Correct Response

1

Give a firm and clear command to stop the pushing immediately.

2

Help the fallen child quickly and calmly back to their feet.

3

Restore order and continue the evacuation safely.

Firm control prevents disasters.

Training Scenario 3: An Injured Child

Situation: During the evacuation on the stairs, one child tripped and fell, resulting in a leg injury and inability to stand, while other children continued moving behind him.

1 Secure the route immediately

Calm the children around the injured child and continue the evacuation in an orderly manner to prevent crowding.

3 Call for immediate assistance

Use the fastest available means to alert the centre's emergency team.

2 Quick assessment

Check the child's condition without moving them if there is a suspected fracture or severe injury, to reduce the risk of complications.

4 Stay with the injured child

Remain with the injured child, reassure them, and provide any safe basic assistance possible until rescue or medical support arrives.

Outdoor Operations: Approved Conditions & Requirements

Effective immediately — outdoor use is now permitted under defined conditions. All alert protocols remain in force.

✓ What Is Now Permitted

Morning assemblies — may resume as part of normal daily operations

Outdoor break times — permitted in designated areas under staff supervision

Extracurricular activities — may take place outdoors in an organised manner

ECC events — permitted with orderly, organised handover of children to parents

Organised outdoor gatherings — permitted under direct continuous staff supervision

⚠ Conditions That Always Apply

Direct supervision at all times — staff must be actively present during all outdoor activities

No overcrowding — capacity limits must be defined for all outdoor areas

Evacuation routes mapped — clear routes from outdoor areas to safe zones must be identified and approved before any outdoor use

External providers trained first — must complete in-person evacuation training before delivering any activity

Regular drills required — evacuation from outdoor areas to safe zones must be practised, not assumed

⚠ If any official alert is issued — all outdoor activities stop immediately, and the main approved protocols apply.
No exceptions.