



INTAKE, ADMISSION, TRANSITION, AND DISCHARGE POLICY

2026 – 2027

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1. Purpose

This policy sets out how Small Steps manages referrals, admission, enrolment, transition, and discharge in a consistent, ethical, transparent, unbiased, and student-centred manner. Decisions consider the whole student, including their strengths, needs, risks, learning profile, educational environment, family priorities, wellbeing, and likely ability to benefit from the available services; they are not based on a diagnosis or single assessment result alone. Small Steps provides clear, accurate, balanced, and appropriate Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to support families in making informed decisions about their child's education, inclusion, intervention, therapeutic support, development, wellbeing, transition, discharge, and access to external services.

2. Scope

Small Steps Learning Difficulties Centre LLC ("Small Steps") operates as a social care service provider licensed by the Community Development Authority (CDA), Dubai. Small Steps delivers its services only within the activities, professional categories, conditions, and scope of services authorised under its current CDA licence and applicable CDA requirements.

This policy applies to prospective and enrolled students; their parents or guardians; Behaviour Therapists; Case Supervisors; the Programme Director; relevant administrative and operational staff; partner-school personnel; Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, and other professionals involved in multidisciplinary planning; and external providers supporting transition or discharge, subject to appropriate consent.

3. Policy Principles

Small Steps will place the student's safety, dignity, wellbeing, development, autonomy, independence, inclusion, and quality of life at the centre of all decisions. Small Steps operates as a social care service provider licensed by the Community Development Authority (CDA), Dubai, and will deliver services only within the activities, professional categories, conditions, and service scope authorised under its current licence and applicable CDA requirements. Admission, continued placement, transition, discharge, staffing, supervision, professional practice, documentation, and referrals will be managed accordingly; where a student's needs fall outside this authorised scope or Small Steps' competence and resources, the family will be advised and supported to access an appropriately licensed provider.

Information, Advice and Guidance provided during intake, admission, transition, and discharge must be individualised, fair, unbiased, evidence-informed, proportionate to the student's needs, and based on available assessment findings, direct observation, clinical data, family input, school input, and relevant information from involved professionals. Families must receive information in clear and accessible language, including the reasons for recommendations, available options where known, potential benefits and limitations, consent or documentation requirements, fee or scheduling implications where relevant, and appropriate next steps. Guidance must respect parental choice and must not involve inappropriate pressure, conflicts of interest, guarantees of outcomes, or recommendations outside the competence, authorised role, or professional scope of the staff member providing it.

Parents will receive reasonable opportunities to participate, ask questions, and provide required consent. Relevant input from the student, family, school, Small Steps team, therapists, medical professionals, and current or future providers will be considered where appropriate. Where services reduce, transfer, or end, Small Steps will plan reasonable continuity arrangements and provide balanced Information, Advice and Guidance. Small Steps does not guarantee treatment, educational, behavioural, developmental, inclusion, or placement outcomes.

4. Referral and Initial Enquiry

A referral or enquiry may be made by a parent or guardian, school or educational professional with parent involvement, Inclusion or SEND Team, or another appropriately involved and authorised source. Parents will receive initial information about the Small Steps approach, programme and school-based inclusion model, intake and observation process, required documentation, service and attendance arrangements, fees, contractual requirements, safeguarding and wellbeing considerations, and the limits of Small Steps' services. Information should be presented clearly and in a way that supports the family's understanding of the available pathway. An enquiry or referral does not guarantee admission.

5. Parent Questionnaire and Background Information

Parents will be asked to provide accurate and sufficiently complete information about the student's developmental, educational, health, medical, communication, social, adaptive, sensory, and behavioural history; current strengths, needs, diagnoses, assessments, medication, interventions, and professional involvement; safeguarding or risk considerations; and family priorities. Missing information does not automatically prevent intake, but additional information or assessment may be required.

6. Initial Student Observation

Following review of the initial information, the student and parents may be invited to a play-based Initial Student Observation, ordinarily lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes with an appropriate Small Steps team member. The observation provides preliminary information about communication, social interaction, play, engagement, learning readiness, behaviour regulation, participation, support needs, wellbeing, readiness for the school-based ABA and inclusion model, and any areas where additional assessment, specialist input, or external referral may be required. Small Steps will normally provide a written Observation Feedback Report outlining observed strengths, areas for further assessment, preliminary support needs, barriers to participation, programme suitability, any additional information or external referrals required, and proposed next steps. The feedback should be clear, balanced, and understandable to families. The observation is not diagnostic and does not replace the comprehensive assessment undertaken after enrolment.

7. Admission Decision

Admission decisions will be individualised, fair, unbiased, and based on whether Small Steps is authorised, staffed, supervised, resourced, and environmentally equipped to meet the student's behavioural, communication, medical, sensory, personal-care, safety, educational, wellbeing, and inclusion needs; whether identified risks can be reasonably managed; whether the student is likely to benefit meaningfully;

placement availability; partner-school requirements; and any relevant professional information. Decisions must be made in good faith, in the student's best interests, without discrimination, and without commercial considerations. Where an appropriate placement cannot be offered, the family will receive a clear explanation and, where possible, balanced and unbiased Information, Advice and Guidance about alternative support, further assessment, or external referral pathways. Families remain free to choose an appropriately qualified and authorised provider.

8. School Registration Approval

Where Small Steps services are delivered through a partner-school arrangement, admission is subject to applicable school enrolment and registration procedures. Relevant observation information and other necessary documentation may be shared with the School Inclusion Team in accordance with consent and data protection requirements. Final school registration remains subject to the partner school's approval and applicable enrolment requirements. Parents are responsible for providing required school documentation and completing school-related enrolment requirements and fees.

9. Service Agreement and Consent

Before services commence, parents or guardians must complete the required enrolment and consent documentation. This may include:

- Small Steps Services Contract.
- Consent for assessment and intervention.
- Information-sharing consent.
- Emergency contact information.
- Safeguarding and health information.
- Media consent, where applicable.
- Personal-care or toileting consent.
- Consent relating to appropriate physical contact.
- Medical and allergy information.
- Additional consent required according to the student's individual circumstances.

Parents must have the opportunity to ask questions before signing the service agreement or consent documentation. Information-sharing consent must normally be obtained before Small Steps shares student information with an outside professional, organisation, or receiving provider, unless disclosure is required by law, safeguarding duties, regulatory requirements, or serious and immediate risk. Any information shared should be relevant, necessary, proportionate, and limited to the purpose for which it is shared.

10. Pre-Admission Risk and Support Planning

Before or shortly after the student starts, Small Steps will identify individual safety and support requirements. Documentation may include a Student Risk Assessment covering foreseeable risks across participation, transitions, behaviour, sensory or environmental factors, transport, trips, medical information, and other individual circumstances; a Personalised Emergency Evacuation Plan where evacuation support is required; and an Intimate Care Plan with appropriate consent where toileting or intimate personal care is needed. Plans will be developed with parent involvement and reviewed when needs change.

11. Start Date and Soft Start

Once enrolment is confirmed, Small Steps will agree an appropriate start date. Where needed, an individualised Soft Start plan may include adjusted attendance, gradual transition into the setting, agreed support strategies, parent communication, and close monitoring during the initial adjustment period.

12. Initial Assessment Following Admission

During approximately the first four weeks, the Case Supervisor will complete an initial assessment through direct observation, caregiver and school input, records review, baseline data, behavioural and curriculum-based assessment tools, utilising standardised, norm-referenced, or criterion-referenced measures. Tools may include, but are not limited to, the VB-MAPP, ABLLS-R, Vineland-2, PEAK Relational Training System, or other appropriate measures; no single tool is required for every student. Findings will be considered alongside professional observation, family priorities, school information, and ongoing data to develop an individualised ABA programme covering strengths, priority needs, socially meaningful goals, teaching targets, measurement, behavioural and communication support, functional and adaptive skills, learning, inclusion, generalisation, and parent or school collaboration. The programme will be reviewed and adapted according to progress and data.

13. Mainstream Inclusion and Transition Within the Programme

Transition between Small Steps instruction and mainstream classroom participation will be individualised, collaborative, and regularly reviewed. Readiness will be considered in relation to the student's overall presentation, including behaviour regulation, communication and social engagement, group learning, tolerance of routines and environmental demands, sensory and academic needs, wellbeing, and the level of adult support required. Inclusion schedules will be agreed with the partner school and adjusted over time to support participation, independence, safety, and meaningful progress. The Case Supervisor and Inclusion/SEN team will continue to monitor progress, response to intervention, attendance, family priorities, emerging needs, and Small Steps' ongoing ability to provide appropriate support, with formal reassessment during the academic year and earlier review where needs change substantially.

14. Reasons for Transition or Discharge

Transition or discharge may be considered when key goals have been achieved; the student can participate with reduced or no direct Small Steps support; another service, educational environment, or professional discipline is better suited to current needs; needs exceed Small Steps' competence, staffing, resources, service model, or capacity to manage risk; the family relocates or changes school; a parent withdraws the student; or persistent attendance or participation concerns prevent effective delivery or evaluation of the programme. Before discharge for attendance or participation concerns, Small Steps will discuss barriers with the family, identify possible supports, document agreed actions, and allow a reasonable opportunity for improvement where safe and appropriate. Other significant circumstances must be lawful, ethical, safe, feasible, reviewed by the Programme Director, and documented. Urgent safeguarding or medical circumstances may require immediate action.

15. Discharge Must Not Be Punitive or Commercially Motivated

Discharge must not be punitive, retaliatory, discriminatory, or influenced by commercial advantage. Any discharge must be based on safeguarding, ethical, student, regulatory, or service-suitability considerations and made impartially and in good faith.

16. Planned Discharge Procedure

Where discharge is anticipated, the Case Supervisor will, where reasonably possible, review the student's progress, strengths, and remaining priorities; consult the Programme Director, family, school, and relevant professionals; document the reason and timing; consider reasonable measures that may maintain the placement; identify recommended services or support; agree an individualised transition plan and final service date; obtain consent for necessary information sharing; and prepare discharge documentation. The transition plan will be proportionate to need and may include gradual reduction of support, preparation and familiarisation with the receiving setting, transfer of effective strategies, coordination meetings, parent guidance, staffing or accommodation recommendations, and a defined end date.

17. External Referral and Information, Advice and Guidance

Where support needs fall outside Small Steps' authorised scope, professional competence, available resources, service model, or capacity to safely and effectively meet the student's needs, the Case Supervisor will provide clear, balanced, and unbiased Information, Advice and Guidance in accordance with the IAG Policy. This may occur during intake, assessment, intervention, school participation, transition, discharge, or where a family requests guidance about services that Small Steps does not currently provide.

Before making a significant referral recommendation, the Case Supervisor should review relevant information, which may include direct observations, assessment findings, progress data, behavioural information, risk information, family input, school input, and information from other professionals involved with the student. Guidance should explain the identified area of need, the reason further assessment or specialist input is recommended, the type of professional or service that may be appropriate, relevant qualifications or authorisation requirements, known referral pathways, and any information that may assist the family in making an informed decision.

Small Steps will not require families to use a particular external provider unless this is required by the partner school, competent authority, or another applicable formal arrangement. Families remain free to choose any appropriately qualified provider. Where Small Steps provides information regarding an external professional, clinic, or service, any relevant professional, organisational, or financial relationship must be disclosed where applicable. Staff must not accept personal incentives, commissions, or benefits in exchange for directing families to a particular provider. Where possible, guidance should focus on the type of expertise or service required rather than presenting a single provider as the only suitable option.

Where safe and operationally possible, Small Steps will support continuity through a reasonable transition period, coordination with the receiving service, consent-based transfer of relevant programme information, a transition or discharge summary, and guidance for the family. External placement availability cannot be guaranteed.

18. Discharge/Exit Summary

Where appropriate, Small Steps will prepare a factual, relevant, respectful, unbiased, and proportionate Discharge/Exit or Transition Summary. It may include student and service dates, reason for discharge, relevant assessments, programme areas, progress, strengths, remaining needs, successful teaching and communication supports, behavioural or safety considerations, inclusion progress, recommendations, referral information, transition actions, and the final service date. The summary should support continuity of care and assist the family, school, or receiving provider in understanding effective strategies, supports, accommodations, and priorities for the next setting. Information will be shared externally only in

accordance with consent, safeguarding, and data protection requirements, and only to the extent reasonably necessary for transition. Safeguarding, serious-risk, regulatory, or legal duties may require information sharing without routine consent.

19. Unplanned or Immediate Discharge

A normal planned transition may not be possible because of immediate safeguarding, medical, or safety risk; sudden relocation; abrupt parent withdrawal; placement interruption; loss of necessary authorisation or school placement; or circumstances outside Small Steps' reasonable control. Small Steps will make reasonable efforts to document the circumstances, address immediate safeguarding or safety actions, provide appropriate IAG, share relevant transition information, and support continuity where possible. Parents may otherwise withdraw their child subject to the Services Contract and notice requirements. Where sufficient notice is provided, Small Steps may review progress, identify transition priorities, prepare a discharge summary, provide guidance, and liaise with the next provider with consent. Significant or immediate discharge decisions will be reviewed by the Programme Director.

20. Safeguarding During Intake and Discharge

Safeguarding duties apply throughout intake, admission, transition, and discharge, including before formal enrolment and while discharge is under consideration. Safeguarding takes priority over routine intake, referral, IAG, transition, and discharge procedures. If information obtained during enquiry, observation, assessment, intervention, consultation, transition, or discharge indicates an urgent concern relating to abuse, neglect, exploitation, immediate medical risk, or other significant danger to the student or another person, staff must follow Small Steps' safeguarding and emergency procedures and escalate immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead as appropriate.

Where required, information may also be shared with the partner school safeguarding team, School Clinic, competent authority, regulator, emergency service, or law-enforcement agency. Routine referral or consent procedures must not delay action necessary to protect a student from immediate harm. Small Steps staff do not provide medical services or administer medication. Where significant medical or specialist needs are identified, the team will liaise with the parent and School Clinic, where appropriate, to determine whether safe arrangements can be made and recommend external medical, psychiatric, diagnostic, or specialist support where required. Admission must not proceed where a known safety need cannot reasonably be managed.

21. Waiting Lists and Availability

Where a student appears suitable but an appropriate place is unavailable, the family may be informed that admission cannot currently be offered. Waiting-list placement does not guarantee admission; updated information and a further needs review may be required before any offer. Families should seek appropriate interim support, and Small Steps will not advise delaying necessary intervention solely in anticipation of a vacancy. Waiting-list and future placement decisions will be fair, unbiased, and based on service considerations rather than commercial gain.

22. Records and Documentation

Small Steps will maintain appropriate records of intake, admission, transition, and discharge, including referral and questionnaire information, observations and feedback, assessments, consents, service agreements, risk and support plans, programme plans, communications, decisions, transition planning,

information-transfer consent, external referral or signposting guidance, parent questions or decisions, actions agreed, follow-up arrangements, and discharge summaries. Significant Information, Advice and Guidance should be documented where it relates to a clinical, educational, safeguarding, referral, transition, discharge, or service decision. Routine day-to-day communication does not require a formal referral record unless it results in a significant programme, safeguarding, referral, or service decision. Records will be stored and managed in accordance with the Small Steps Data Protection Policy and applicable requirements.

23. IAG Communication and Professional Boundaries

Information, Advice and Guidance may be communicated through appropriate channels, including intake meetings, observation feedback, assessment meetings, parent meetings, progress reports, Individualised Education Plan meetings, transition or discharge meetings, written recommendations, email communication with the Case Supervisor, and multidisciplinary meetings involving authorised professionals. Detailed questions concerning programming, assessment, referrals, transition, discharge, or recommendations should be directed to the student's Case Supervisor. Staff must only provide advice or recommendations within their professional competence, authorised role, and scope of practice. Behaviour Therapists may provide routine factual information concerning the student's day and implementation of approved programmes but must not independently make clinical diagnoses, alter programme recommendations, interpret complex assessment findings, recommend specialist services, or provide advice outside their authorised role. Questions requiring supervisory or professional judgement must be referred to the Case Supervisor.

24. Roles and Responsibilities

24.1 Programme Director

The Programme Director has overall responsibility for implementation of this policy. Responsibilities include:

- Oversight of intake, admission, transition, and discharge procedures.
- Review of complex admission decisions.
- Review of significant or contested discharge decisions.
- Ensuring that admission and discharge decisions are evidence-informed, and unbiased.
- Ensuring decisions are made in good faith, without consideration for commercial gain.
- Ensuring services remain within Small Steps' scope and resources.
- Supporting ethical decision-making.
- Overseeing high-risk transitions.
- Ensuring consistency of practice.
- Coordinating with safeguarding, operational, and school leadership.

24.2 Case Supervisors

Case Supervisors are responsible for student-specific assessment, programme, and transition planning. Responsibilities include:

- Conducting intake observations.

- Reviewing relevant student information.
- Completing or overseeing assessment.
- Developing individualised programmes.
- Monitoring progress and ongoing placement suitability.
- Communicating with families.
- Coordinating with school and multidisciplinary professionals.
- Identifying when transition or referral should be considered.
- Developing discharge and transition recommendations.
- Preparing relevant documentation.
- Escalating complex matters to the Programme Director.

24.3 Behaviour Therapists

Behaviour Therapists are responsible for implementing approved programmes and supporting transitions under supervision. They contribute through:

- Direct observation.
- Accurate data collection.
- Session documentation.
- Implementation of transition strategies.
- Reporting relevant changes or concerns to the Case Supervisor.
- Supporting the student during agreed transition arrangements.

Behaviour Therapists do not independently make admission or discharge decisions.

24.4 Head of Operations and Administrative Team

Operational and administrative personnel may support:

- Intake scheduling.
- Documentation.
- Enrolment requirements.
- Service agreements.
- School liaison.
- Records management.
- Logistical transition arrangements.
- Communication relating to operational matters.

Programme suitability, admission, and discharge decisions remain the responsibility of appropriately authorised programme staff.

24.5 Parents and Guardians

Parents and guardians are expected to:

- Provide accurate and relevant information.
- Complete required documentation.
- Inform Small Steps of significant changes in the student's health, medication, behaviour, services, or circumstances.
- Participate in assessment and transition discussions.
- Provide required consent.
- Cooperate with safety planning.
- Provide notice of intended withdrawal.

25. Complaints and Review of Decisions

Parents may seek clarification from the Case Supervisor about an intake, admission, transition, or discharge decision. Unresolved concerns may be escalated to the Programme Director and managed through the Small Steps Compliments and Complaints process without retaliation or disadvantage to the student. This policy should be read alongside the Parent Handbook, IAG, Safeguarding and Child Protection, Data Protection, Positive Handling, Personal Care and Toileting, and Compliments and Complaints policies and procedures; relevant student risk, evacuation, intimate care, positive behaviour support, and education plans; the Services Contract and consent forms; and applicable partner-school policies. The policy will be reviewed at least annually, or earlier following significant incidents, service or school-model changes, regulatory or pathway changes, implementation concerns, or relevant stakeholder feedback. The current approved version applies.

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