

# East Lothian Children Services

## COVID-19 - contingency guidance for case management

### April 2020



This guidance should be read alongside the national interim Child Protection Guidance and the Public Protection Committee local Child Protection guidance.

#### **Keeping in contact with children, young people and their families**

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, it is important that our contact with vulnerable children, young people and their families continues. Where possible and adhering to social distancing guidance, we should continue to make home visits where necessary.

If a family or young person is symptomatic or self-isolating, this should be discussed with a team leader and we should consider contacting the family using other measures. There is a phone in the office available for WhatsApp Live and a number of staff have access to Skype via their laptop.

We recognise that families and young people are likely to be under increased pressure, have additional caring responsibilities, less support and their financial resources may also be under significant strain. These additional stressors need to be kept under consideration, they may increase the risk to the children or themselves and the level of contact may have to be increased. The frequency of home visits needs to reflect the level of risk.

#### **Home visits**

For all home visits staff should complete a risk assessment on the phone with families or young people before going out (please see **Appendix 1**). If it is not possible to do this by phone then this should happen on arrival whilst adhering to social distancing guidance. All staff are invited to wear personal protective equipment (gloves and masks) that is available in the office next to room 13.

Staff safety is hugely important. No staff with a health vulnerability should be carrying out home visits.

If there is more than one agency involved in visiting the family – please coordinate the schedule of visits to complement each other.

#### **Making contact purposeful**

Contact with families and young people might look and feel different during the pandemic. It is unlikely that any in-depth work will be undertaken but it is important that we communicate with families about the following specific points:

- Does the family / young person have enough food?
- Does the family / young person have enough medication? (if applicable)
- Is the family aware of the meals for children provided by the council? (if applicable)
- How is the parent / young person coping emotionally? What are they finding stressful? Are there any particular times that are stressful or particular stressors? Discuss tips to alleviate stress.
- If the parent / young person has a mental health problem do they feel this is getting worse or do they feel in control?
- Who is in in the household? Is that causing any particular difficulties?

- Speak to the child/ren. How are they coping emotionally? Is there anything they are finding particularly stressful?
- Do the parents have someone they can call to have a chat/sound off to (other than the SW)?
- Does the child/ren / young person have anyone they can call to chat with/socialise with (other than the SW)?
- Does the parent have any particular fears/worries?
- Does the child / young person have any particular fears/worries?
- If there is a substance misuse issue, is the parent / young person using more; has the parent / young person resorted to street drugs to top up any prescribed medication?
- If domestic abuse is an issue try to speak to the victim alone to find out how things are.
- Do the parents have enough resources to keep children entertained? Do they need some advice on things to do to occupy children?
- Is everyone getting some time on their own? How could this be managed?
- Does the parent/young person know who to contact in an emergency and out of office hours?

### **Looked After Children**

It is recognised that our Looked After Children are likely to be particularly vulnerable at this time, particularly those at home. We should try to keep in regular contact with these children and attempt to meet our statutory duty to see them monthly. This could take place via skype or WhatsApp if possible.

Please make sure decisions around social worker contact with children and young people are recorded clearly.

### **Continuing care / aftercare**

It is recognised that our older young people will face particular vulnerability at this time, particularly those without stable housing. We should try and keep in regular contact with these young people and offer necessary support as required. Contact can take place via WhatsApp if possible.

Please make sure decisions around contact with young people are recorded clearly.

### **Parental contact**

We are consistently reviewing the guidance about supervised / legally ordered contact. At this time, we are prioritising the health and safety of children, families, their carers and staff by looking at alternative, creative ways to keep connections without face to face contact. Good communication with all parties is crucial and we should be trying to find a practical solution if at all possible.

For unsupervised contact within kinship arrangements, the family should be encouraged to manage this while strictly adhering to national guidance about social distancing, self-isolation not meeting with people from other households. Telephone and video should be promoted as a safer way to keep connected.

Workers should ensure that all decisions about contact or any statutory work that is affected by COVID-19 are recorded clearly on MOSAIC.

### **LAAC Reviews**

Review Meetings for Looked after Children or young people should be considered on a case by case basis and in discussion with the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO). Some of these may go ahead via telephone or video conference, where absolutely essential.

The IROs should keep a tight overview of upcoming business and be communicating closely with the social worker to decide how to proceed for each child or young person. The IRO should take the lead in collating any necessary information (with support from the review team administrator) and keep people updated about what options there are to proceed with the review or not. It is important that we still prioritise the views of children and their families and this can continue via telephone calls.

Any decisions from a review should be communicated sensitively to children, young people, parents and/or carers via the allocated social worker.

We must keep a detailed recording of the business that is being postponed or cancelled.

### **SCRA and Children's Hearing Service**

We are receiving regular updates from SCRA in relation to the work they are able to complete at this time. This will change weekly and it is important that you communicate with team leaders to get a weekly update. Currently all hearings are taking place virtually with the only participants a reporter and three panel members. We receive a weekly list of hearings held and those cancelled. Reporters will contact allocated social workers after the hearings to let them know the outcome.

SCRA are not currently sending requests for reports electronically and hearings are being arranged between reporter and worker. It is important that social workers let business support know so they can schedule the task on mosaic. Please do this by emailing the CF admin mailbox which is checked daily.

### **Recording**

Recording of key information is essential throughout this period. Recording must clearly state if a plan has changed and the reason for this. The frequency of home visits should be informed by risk assessment and professional judgement and the rationale for the level of contact should be documented.

General recording should be extended to include details of any child, young person or family who are self-isolating in order to ensure that all staff have awareness and can take necessary precautions or provide additional support such as food and fuel.

There is a drop down box on case notes within Mosaic to record COVID-19 related matters whether; positively confirmed case, self-isolating, social distancing or child contact suspended today. Please use these headings when required.

The risk of staff needing to take time off work due to sickness or self-isolation is high – therefore recording of crucial information should be prioritised on a daily basis.

### **Partner Agencies**

Many of our voluntary agencies are providing support to families by phone. Please check the folder [Children/Management Information Centre/Coronavirus Service Availability](#) to find out what other services in each area are offering. These services could support families in creative ways and be incorporated into their plan.

Parentline is also a valuable resource if parents need support out of office hours. The number is 08000 28 22 33.

## **Connected Communities Hubs**

Each cluster area has a Connected Community Hub where we can refer for low level support for families or young people. This could include help with shopping or dog walking or other practical tasks that are difficult during the pandemic.

Senior Management Team  
April 2020

## **Appendix 1**

### **COVID-19 Screening checklist prior to each home visit**

Please carry out the pre-house visit checklist and record the following information on MOSAIC:

- Date and time;
- Name of person spoken to;
- Does anyone in the household have symptoms of COVID-19?
- Is anyone in the household self-isolating?
- Is anyone in the household particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 due to pregnancy, underlying health condition or being over 70?
- Does the family have any questions about the visit and how social distancing will be managed?
- Discussion to be held with team leader to balance risk of COVID transmission versus the risk of visit not going ahead;
- Decision to be made about whether the visit should go ahead and rationale;
- Alternative plan if a visit is not recommended;
- Date for decision to be reviewed if necessary.

### **Guidance to be followed for all house visits**

- Don't car share for home visits – take two cars if necessary;
- Maintain distance/avoid handshakes;
- Unnecessary members of the household to remain in another room;
- Take minimum equipment into the house, leave bags etc in the car;
- Keep phones in your pocket;
- Meet in the garden or other local open space (depending on Gov rules in force at the time);
- Use PPE as provided and please take hand sanitiser to use following the visit;
- Minimise time in house;
- Wash hands as soon as possible afterwards.