Coronavirus briefing: guidance for social work practitioners

This briefing summarises the latest guidance for social workers and social work practitioners during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

06 December 2021

Introduction

As restrictions have changed throughout the pandemic, social work practitioners have had to adapt how they support and work with children. We have pulled together key guidance from all four UK nations to help professionals understand their safeguarding and child protection responsibilities at this time.

This briefing will be updated regularly.

England

Child protection system

Social work practitioners should continue to follow the statutory safeguarding and child protection guidance, Working together to safeguard children: a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (Department for Education (DfE), 2018).
Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for children’s social care services

This guidance includes:

- legislation and regulations
- visits and virtual visits
- foster care
- family law courts

(DfE, 2021a).

**Best practice guide for risk assessment and prioritising children and families’ needs during the pandemic (PDF)** includes information on:

- prioritising children and families’ needs
- identifying protective frameworks and safeguarding needs
- assessment frameworks


**COVID-19: overview of the recovery of the civil and family courts and tribunals (PDF)** includes information on how family courts are operating during the pandemic, including the use of virtual hearings (Her Majesty’s Courts and Tribunal Service, 2020).

**Social work workforce**

The **Coronavirus Act 2020** provides emergency powers to social work regulators to allow them to register new social workers and temporarily re-register previously registered social workers.

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) has made temporary arrangements to provide **free-of-charge DBS applications and fast-track barred list checks** during the pandemic (DBS, 2020).

Social Work England has published **guidance about temporary registration of social workers during coronavirus**, including information on:

- applying for temporary registration and opting out
- social work employers managing recruitment
- professional standards
- concerns about temporarily registered social workers
- registration of students

Best practice guide for risk assessment and prioritising children and families’ needs during the pandemic includes information on:

- lone working
- social isolation
- supporting practitioners during the pandemic


The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) has published ethical guidance for social workers during the pandemic, which contains information on:

- receiving appropriate supervision
- advocating for professional needs
- establishing peer supervision and support

(BASW, 2020).

The Institute of Health Visiting’s COVID-19 (coronavirus) guidance includes information for health visitors (Institute of Health Visiting, 2021).

Direct work with children and families

Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for children’s social care services outlines guidance for social work practitioners on undertaking face-to-face and virtual direct work with children and families, including:

- visits and virtual visits
- face-to-face contact in residential family centres

(DfE, 2021a).

Skills for Care has published information for child and family social workers, which includes a toolkit to help social workers have conversations about school attendance with parents and carers (Skills for Care, 2021).

Children in care

Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for children’s social care services

This guidance includes:

- support for looked after children
- mental health of looked after children
- assessing and supporting foster carers
- unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- residential family centres
(DfE, 2021a).

The DfE has published guidance on **safe working in education, childcare and children’s social care settings, including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE)**.

This guidance includes:

- working safely in specific situations
- social distancing for young children or children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- organising transport for children

(DfE, 2021b).

**Care leavers**

**Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for children’s social care services**

This guidance includes:

- providing personal advisors to care leavers
- independent living
- loneliness, isolation and mental health support

(DfE, 2021a).

**Northern Ireland**

**Child protection system**

Social work practitioners should continue to follow the statutory safeguarding and child protection guidance, **Co-operating to safeguard children and young people in Northern Ireland** (Department of Health, 2017).

**Message from Sean Holland, Chief Social Work Officer (PDF)**

This guidance includes:

- prioritising support
- balancing individual rights with duty to protect
- urgent operational decisions

(Department of Health, 2020a).
Social work workforce

The Coronavirus Act 2020 provides emergency powers to social work regulators to allow them to register new social workers and temporarily re-register previously registered social workers.

Important regulatory changes during Covid-19 provides information on:

- registration and re-registration
- fitness to practice
- supporting the workforce

(Northern Ireland Social Care Council, 2020).

The Department of Health has published pre-employment vetting guidance for health and social care providers, outlining temporary changes to speed up vetting of staff and volunteers in health and social care roles during the pandemic (Department of Health, 2020b).

The COVID-19 - social work supervision policy outlines how professional social worker supervision should continue throughout the pandemic (Department of Health, 2020c).

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) has published ethical guidance for social workers during the pandemic which contains information on:

- receiving appropriate supervision
- advocating for professional needs
- establishing peer supervision and support

(BASW, 2020).

The Institute of Health Visiting’s COVID-19 (coronavirus) guidance includes information for health visitors (Institute of Health Visiting, 2021).

Children in care

COVID-19 - guidance for residential children's homes in Northern Ireland includes information on:

- social distancing and infection provision
- short breaks
- considering fostering or home placements before placing a child in residential care during the pandemic
- managing staffing levels

(Department of Health, 2021a).
COVId-19 - guidance for foster care and supported lodgings settings

This guidance includes:

- short breaks
- standards and inspections
- contact arrangements
- school attendance for foster children and children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- supporting children’s wellbeing
- infection prevention and control

(Department of Health, 2020d).

COVId-19 - guidance for 16-21+ jointly commissioned supported accommodation settings includes information on:

- visits
- supporting children and young people’s wellbeing
- social distancing and outbreak prevention measures
- using personal protective equipment (PPE)

(Department of Health, 2021b).

Care leavers

COVId-19 - guidance for foster care and supported lodgings settings includes information on targeting resources at care leavers with high support needs (Department of Health, 2020d).

Scotland

Child protection system

Social work practitioners should continue to follow the statutory safeguarding and child protection guidance, National guidance for child protection in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2021a).

Coronavirus (COVID-19): supplementary national child protection guidance contains information on:

- child protection during the pandemic, including streamlining service delivery
- information sharing
- decision making
• children’s hearings
• maintaining a child protection register
• child protection planning meetings and child protection orders
• domestic abuse

(Scottish Government, 2021f).

**Coronavirus (COVID-19): safe and ethical social work practice** includes information on risk assessments (Scottish Government, 2021b).

**Direct work with children and families**

**Coronavirus (COVID-19): supplementary national child protection guidance** includes information on:

• working directly with children and families who are self-isolating
• virtual and in-person visits and meetings

(Scottish Government, 2021f).

**Coronavirus (COVID-19): safe and ethical social work practice** includes information on:

• in-person contact and carrying out home visits
• risk assessments for in-person contact
• using personal protective equipment (PPE)

(Scottish Government, 2021b).

**Social work workforce**

The **Coronavirus Act 2020** provides emergency powers to social work regulators to allow them to temporarily register certain people to return to or enter social work.

The Scottish Social Services Council has published guidance on **temporary registration for social workers** (Scottish Social Services Council, 2021).

Disclosure Scotland has published guidance on **criminal record checks for coronavirus response workers** (Disclosure Scotland, 2020).

**Supplementary national child protection guidance** contains information on social worker support and supervision during the pandemic (Scottish Government, 2021f).

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) has published **ethical guidance for social workers during the pandemic**, which contains information:

• receiving appropriate supervision
• advocating for professional needs
• establishing peer supervision and support. (BASW, 2020).

The Institute of Health Visiting’s COVID-19 (coronavirus) guidance includes information for health visitors (Institute of Health Visiting, 2021).

Children in care

Coronavirus (COVID-19): residential childcare

This guidance includes:

• moving between care placements
• managing residential respite and short break settings
• family visits and visits by professionals
• managing staffing levels in residential childcare
• implementing social distancing and self-isolation measures for residential children’s houses, residential schools and secure care

(Scottish Government, 2021c).

Coronavirus (COVID-19): looked after children and young people - family contact includes information on arranging contact for looked after and accommodated children and their families (Scottish Government, 2021d).

Care leavers

Care experienced children and young people fund: national operational guidance

This guidance includes:

• attaining funding for care experienced children
• how the funding can be used

(Scottish Government, 2021e).

Wales

Child protection system
Social work practitioners should continue to follow the statutory safeguarding and child protection guidance, *Working together to safeguard people* (Welsh Government, 2021a).

**Keeping children and young people safe** outlines advice for practitioners working with children and young people, including:

- identifying harm, abuse or neglect
- reporting concerns
- responding to disclosures of abuse

(Welsh Government, 2020a).

**Social work workforce**

The *Coronavirus Act 2020* provides emergency powers to social work regulators to allow them to temporarily register certain people to return to or enter social work.

Social Care Wales has published guidance on *temporary registration of social workers*, including information on:

- applying for temporary registration
- following the code of professional practice
- information for social work employers

(Social Care Wales, 2021).

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) has published guidance on *free-of-charge DBS applications and fast-track barred list checks* for roles such as social workers during the pandemic (DBS, 2020).

**Vulnerable children and young people: coronavirus** includes information about resolving potential social worker staff shortages during the pandemic (Welsh Government, 2021b).

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) has published *ethical guidance for social workers during the pandemic*, which contains information on:

- receiving appropriate supervision
- advocating for professional needs
- establishing peer supervision and support

(BASW, 2020).

The Institute of Health Visiting’s *COVID-19 (coronavirus) guidance* includes information for health visitors (Institute of Health Visiting, 2021).
**Children in care**

**Vulnerable children and young people: coronavirus** includes information on supporting children and young people in care (Welsh Government, 2021b).

**Guidance for supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners** includes information on care-experienced learners and increased respite provision (Welsh Government, 2020b).

Public Health Wales has published **guidance to prevent and manage COVID-19 within residential and care settings alongside other respiratory viruses during Autumn / Winter 2021-22 (PDF)**. (Public Health Wales, 2021).

**Care leavers**

**Vulnerable children and young people: coronavirus** includes information on a bespoke package of support for care leavers who may be experiencing hardship (Welsh Government, 2021b).

**References**

British Association of Social Workers (BASW) (2020) **Ethical guidance for social workers during the pandemic**. [Accessed 06/12/2021].
<https://www.basw.co.uk/covid-19-pandemic-%E2%80%93-ethical-guidance-social-workers>


Department for Education (DfE) (2021a) **Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for children’s social care services**. [Accessed 06/12/2021].

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Department of Health (2020d) COVID-19 - guidance for foster care and supported lodgings settings. [Accessed 06/12/2021].


Department of Health (2021b) COVID-19 - guidance for 16-21+ jointly commissioned supported accommodation settings. [Accessed 06/12/2021].

<https://www.mygov.scot/coronavirus-disclosure/>


Northern Ireland Social Care Council (2020) **Important regulatory changes during Covid-19.** [Accessed 06/12/2021].
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Public Health Wales (2021) **Guidance to prevent and manage COVID-19 within residential and care settings alongside other respiratory viruses during Autumn / Winter 2021-22 (PDF).** [Accessed 06/12/2021].


<https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/registration/covid-19-temporary-registration/>

Welsh Government (2021a) **Working together to safeguard people.** [Accessed 06/12/2021].
<https://gov.wales/safeguarding-guidance>

Welsh Government (2021b) **Vulnerable children and young people: coronavirus.** [Accessed 06/12/2021].

Welsh Government (2020a) **Keeping children and young people safe.** [Accessed 06/12/2021].

Welsh Government (2020b) **Guidance for supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners.** [Accessed 06/12/2021].
More ways to help you protect children

Visit Childline for advice and resources about the coronavirus pandemic.

Sign up to CASPAR to stay up-to-date with the latest safeguarding legislation and guidance.

nspcc.org.uk/caspar

Visit NSPCC Learning for more information about safeguarding during the coronavirus pandemic.