

GUIDANCE FOR COMPLETION OF COVID-19 RISK ASSESSMENT AND SAFETY PLAN FOR FACE TO FACE FAMILY TIME

Shropshire Children's Services adapted face to face family time arrangements in response to the Government guidance issued on 23rd March 2020 to address the risks from COVID 19. A Guide was issued to enable as many children as possible to remain in contact with their families by the safest means possible.

This is now the sixth revision of this Guidance following the national restrictions which came into force on 5th January 2021 (V.7)

[Guidance published by the Department for Education on 3 April 2020](#) stated:

"What about court orders related to contact for children in care?"

We expect that contact between children in care and their birth relatives will continue. It is essential for children and families to remain in touch at this difficult time, and for some children, the consequences of not seeing relatives would be traumatising.

Contact arrangements should therefore be assessed on a case by case basis taking into account a range of factors including the government's social distancing guidance and the needs of the child. It may not be possible, or appropriate, for the usual face-to-face contact to happen at this time and keeping in touch will, for the most part, need to take place virtually. We expect the spirit of any contact orders made in relation to children in care to be maintained and will look to social workers to determine how best to support those valuable family interactions based on the circumstances of each case."

Since that guidance was issued we have had the Court of Appeal decision (Re D-S) which confirmed that the ordinary principles apply and that in making its assessment of what contact is appropriate, the court will give paramount consideration to the children's best interests, taking account of all the circumstances (*section 34(3), Children Act 1989*). Each case will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and whilst the COVID-19 pandemic continues, the court needs the following information to make its assessment:

- The children's circumstances.
- The LA's resources.
- The current government guidance.

1. PRINCIPLES FOR AGREEING FACE TO FACE FAMILY TIME FOR A LOOKED AFTER CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON WHILST RESTRICTIONS TO PROTECT AGAINST COVID INFECTION ARE IN PLACE**General Principles for arrangements for family time**

Shropshire Children's Services is mindful of its legal responsibilities and the Courts powers which are summarised here as:

- For children in care the duty is to allow reasonable contact to persons set out in statute subject to a duty to safeguard and promote a child's welfare.
- Reasonable contact implies contact which is agreed between a local authority and parent or in absence of agreement, which is objectively reasonable.

- The general duty for all looked after children is to allow contact with parents, relatives and friends unless not reasonably practicable or consistent with their welfare to do so.

These are links to relevant legislation and practice guidance (The RIP link is especially helpful):

<https://coppguidance.rip.org.uk/court-application/contact-with-children-in-care/>

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents>

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>

Covid-19 Principles for arrangements for face to face family time

Shropshire Children's Services wants to ensure that any face to face family time is as safe as possible for all involved and has agreed these principles:

- Must be assessed as able to be safe within current Government and Public Health COVID guidance.
- Must take into account the needs and vulnerabilities for all who are to participate and the people they live with. NB. *Obvious vulnerabilities related to shielding/health are important but less obvious vulnerabilities need to be taken into account-e.g. age, ethnicity, disability, mental or emotional health.*
- Must be kept up-to-date and updated if notified of any changes for anyone participating.
- Must be within permitted national government guidance at the time of assessment -*national restrictions across the 4 countries of the UK apply.*
- Must utilise public open spaces, family gardens, local authority family time garden whenever possible to reduce the risk of infection.
- Must take account of the limited number of open indoor venues available to the Council and the need to ensure sanitised between separate family time arrangements.
- Must use PPE and social distancing measures when face to face indoors or where closer contact cannot be avoided (e.g. small children)
- Must continue to utilise opportunities for virtual family time whenever possible.

Face to face family time will be deemed as too high risk to take place where:

- A participant has tested positive for COVID 19 or has to self-isolate due to COVID symptoms or having been in contact with someone with COVID symptoms/positive COVID test.
- PPE cannot be worn where close contact cannot be avoided (e.g. a participant cannot wear a mask for any reason).
- A participant has been advised to shield and an outdoor socially-distanced visit is not possible.
- A participant has not kept to the COVID guidance to protect themselves and others and may bring a COVID risk to others to the face to face family time.

Other risk factors will be taken into account and assessed on a child by child basis using the COVID face to face visit risk assessment.

This risk assessment will now be completed by the Family Time Team in consultation with the social work team, carers and parents/connected persons. The outcome will determine the nature of the family time that is assessed as safe and meets the needs of each child and the frequency and venue. Where required the Family Time Team will request Service Manager authorisation if there is a dispute or concern arising.

2. LINKS TO GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE

These are the links to the relevant current guidance for England:

[National lockdown: Stay at Home - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-authorities-on-childrens-social-care)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-authorities-on-childrens-social-care>

See also:



200324_Kinship-cor Govt Guidance on
ona Family Rights G Family Time Arrange

Interpreting the Government COVID Guidance*:

- There is no 'blanket' policy for face to face family time arrangements under COVID guidance.
- However, when making arrangements, following a positive COVID risk assessment, please refer to the guide on resources available to ensure any arrangement agreed can be facilitated.
- Any potential flexibilities through interpretation of the Government COVID-19 guidance must be assessed based on the Risk Assessment outcomes.
- For assessment purposes or as part of a planned reunification, the guidance on social 'bubbles' or 'shared care' arrangements can be utilised but must be risk-assessed in the context of carer/residential home households looking after children from other households.
- Connected carers who are only caring for children in their extended family may be able to 'bubble' with a parent, but this must be within government guidance.
- Parents with babies or very young children who have been assessed as needing to have some physical contact to aid bonding, and observations of parenting skills, may be able to do this if, in addition to the usual safety factors of hand washing and social distancing and suitable venue:
 - Parents have been self-isolating/social distancing
 - Short periods of direct physical contact with suitable hygiene arrangements and PPE in place, and no kissing of lips/nose
 - Limited to one parent per face to face family time offering the personal care for baby
 - Toys/bottles etc are sterilised
 - No sharing of food/drink/utensils
 - Baby has change of clothes and bath on return to placement
- Please refer to the RIP research on family time with new born babies as this will impact on what is assessed as in the best interests of the child.

There is a specific exemption to the 'National Lockdown' arrangements for children that do not live in the same households as their parents and guardians. Please see full guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-authorities-on-childrens-social-care>

The exemptions are as follows:

- Arrangements for contact between family members should continue (subject to risk assessment taking account of all risk and vulnerability factors on a case by case basis).
- For arrangements where children do not live in the same household as both their parents to continue, even if this would mean that more than 6 people would be present. This can take place indoors if unable to be facilitated outside (subject to risk assessment and risk management measures in place).
- For anyone attending contact meetings for work or volunteering purposes (for example, a social worker or key worker) to also be exempt and thus not count towards the limit of 6 people.
- Arrangements should be maintained with a maximum of two households meeting, the exemption to this would be when a third person is needed for the purpose of supervising this arrangement.

Note: Key workers may travel for work across borders and families may travel for 'necessary journeys'. It will be part of the risk assessment as to whether the family time proposed involves a 'necessary journey'

**Note this may change as guidance changes- we will update if it does*

3. RESOURCES

Resources available for supervised or supported Family Time and availability of venues:

- Outdoor spaces should be utilised when possible as they are more flexible re. numbers of people who can meet socially-distancing, and there is therefore less risk from COVID. This includes common land, parks, public gardens and private gardens belonging to a carer/family member. *Remember -we can't change the weather, but we can change our response to it- good outdoor clothing, a good outdoor space, access to hot drinks & a toilet, and a positive activity means family time can still be a good experience in the rain.*
- Indoor spaces in the home of a foster carer or residential home should be avoided at this time but may be risk assessed as safe where connected carers have made a 'bubble' with a parent. This must follow Government guidance and can only be one bubble.
- The Family Time Team will take referrals for supervision or facilitation of face to face family time but it has limited availability due to having to ensure they do not risk carrying any potential infection between families. **Please refer to the Family Time Team before agreeing frequency, time or dates of face to face family time if you need a Family Time supervisor.**
- Children's Services currently has limited indoor venues to utilise due to most venues being closed and the need to sanitise rooms used between different family time arrangements. **Please refer to the Family Time Team to check availability before agreeing the frequency, time or dates of any face to face family time if needing a Council procured venue.**
- It is important that all follow the guidance in the Safety Plan checklist before any face to face family time.

4. DOCUMENTS REQUIRED BEFORE FACE TO FACE FAMILY TIME CAN BE AGREED AND TAKE PLACE

Document 1- Covid-19 Risk Assessment for Face to Face Family Time (*embedded Doc at end of Guidance*)

- This is to be completed when considering whether physical face to face family time can be facilitated during Covid-19 restrictions. The Family Time Team will co-ordinate all face to face family time risk assessments.
- Face to face family time under COVID-19 restrictions is complex as there are many factors to consider. Decisions must be made based on the circumstances for each child, following the safety checklist below (*Doc 2*).
- The Risk Assessment must be completed in consultation with the child's social worker, carers and parents/connected person and a conclusion agreed and recorded at the end of this risk assessment, signed off by the Family Time Team Supervisor, and referred to the relevant Service Manager if contentious.
- This Risk Assessment must be completed before any face to face family time is agreed but does not need to be completed again unless it needs to be updated with any significant changes.
- The agreed manager who has signed off the Risk Assessment must record the decision in the child's LCS record and alert the child's social worker and team manager when completed.

Document 2- Covid-19 Safety Plan & Checklist for Face to Face Family Time (*Doc embedded at end of Guidance*)

- This must be completed prior to the actual face to face family time arrangement.
- It must be checked before each arrangement to ensure it remains valid and updated with any change to the arrangements agreed.
- The family time supervisor will complete this. If the person supervising is a carer/residential worker they must also complete this.

- If there are any significant changes the risk assessment must be updated, placed in the child's LCS record and social worker must be informed. This might mean that face to face family time can no longer take place.
- All parties must have an updated copy & this must be on the child's LCS record.

How to Complete:

Document 1-Risk Assessment

- This must be completed before a face to face family arrangement can resume/new one begin.
- Agree who is completing each part of the Risk Assessment and who the agreed manager will be to sign off the Risk Assessment.
- One Risk Assessment will be completed for each proposed arrangement that is the same arrangement each time (*e.g. a child/children seeing a parent weekly/monthly is one risk assessment, only updated if something significant changes*).
- A separate Risk Assessment must be completed for each different arrangement (*e.g. if a child sees each parent or brothers/sisters in separate arrangements*)
- All blank spaces are to be completed:
 - For each child taking part in a proposed face to face family time arrangement
 - For each person they are proposed to be having face to face family time within this particular arrangement
 - For each household in which the child/ren live (*e.g. if 2 children in same foster family complete Carer Household 1 details; if 2 siblings in different foster families complete Carer Household 1 & 2 details*)
 - Analysis and conclusion
 - Agreed Manager approval/reason not approved
- Before concluding each Risk Assessment please liaise with any social worker with a looked after child in the same household/family who may also be risk assessing for face to face family time and include this in your analysis of risk
- The Risk Assessment to be recorded in the child's LCS record (and internal foster carers) by the agreed manager.
- A letter must be sent with the Risk Assessment to all parties to advise they MUST alert the child's social worker of any changes.
- The Risk Assessment must be reviewed and updated if notified of any changes before further face to face family time is agreed.

Document 2-The Safety Plan

- This can only be completed once it has been agreed that face to face family time is safe and in the child's interests to take place. This will be an outcome of the Risk Assessment.
- The face to Family Time Team will complete the Safety Plan, and will check it remains up-to-date prior to each face to face family time, and will notify the social worker of any changes. This must be recorded as part of the Safety Plan.
- Answer the questions about the current circumstances to ensure nothing has changed.
- Follow the guidance below to complete the Safety Plan and check before each face to face arrangement.
- Complete the Safety Plan in consultation with all involved.
- Ensure the social worker and all parties have a copy.
- Update when needed and send updated copy to all parties.

CHECKLIST FOR COVID-19 FACE TO FACE FAMILY TIME SAFETY PLAN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check the up-to-date government COVID guidance for the UK country(ies) where the child/person they want to see lives. Stay within the guidance.

- Ensure it is clear who is part of this face to face family time arrangement and that people not agreed to be part of this will not be allowed 'on the day'.
- Consult and agree the venue, time, dates, supervision and transport arrangements.
- Use outdoor venues wherever possible. Use PPE and well-ventilated rooms when not possible.
- Cover the mitigating actions in place for any vulnerabilities identified.
- Clarify any boundaries and ensure all are aware of government COVID guidance on keeping safe and social distancing.
- Prior to visit contact all concerned to check if anything has changed e.g. symptoms.
- Upon arrival at the venue/collection of child do not start the family time until you have made observations of presentation e.g. any visible signs of symptoms.
- For each family time, ensure all wash/ sanitise hands prior to starting the family time. Avoid direct contact as much as possible and follow COVID guidance on social distancing.
- If agreement has been made that PPE is required, please ensure there is sufficient available for all who need this: gloves/mask and hand sanitiser.
- Ensure there is agreement as to who is bringing/providing soap & water/sanitiser/hand wipes and towels (and any change of clothes/nappies for babies and small children).
- Ensure all are prepared for outdoor family time with the right clothing/footwear.
- Ensure there is agreement about how and where food/drink is brought and prepared.
- Ensure there is agreement about who and what can be brought re. toys, games or gifts and ensure they are sanitised before and at end of family time.
- Ensure there is agreement about what is permissible/not permissible as an activity during the face to face time.
- If a young child/baby is involved ensure there are adequate emergency toilet arrangements/nappies and wipes if outdoors.
- If this is taking place in a family home/garden follow COVID guidance on disinfecting toilet and any furniture/handles after each use.
- Ensure all wash/ sanitise hands at the end of family time.
- Advise all involved to disinfect cars, shower and change clothing as soon as get home.

