

Shropshire Council

Ref:

Date: 5th January 2021

To (parents and carers)

We are writing to update you following the Government announcements across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland enforcing a 'national lockdown'.

We know that this is a worrying time for us all and you are likely to have many questions about how we can ensure that your children are safe as well as the people who look after them.

We wish to assure you that our social workers will continue to visit your child where they live. It is a Government requirement that social workers see looked after children and where they are living face to face on a regular basis. During the last 'lockdown' the Government relaxed this requirement and allowed virtual visits. They have not done so this time.

Our social workers will try to do 'garden' or outdoor visits where possible and see their living space virtually. They will use all hygiene measures before and after their visit, wear PPE and ensure social distancing where the child is able to understand this.

However, if your child or someone they live with has been advised to be shielded, or if they or someone in the carer household has COVID or COVID symptoms we can risk assess and do a virtual visit in these circumstances.

As a parent you will also be wanting to continue to have family time with your child/ren and we want to support this where it is safe to do so.

As a carer you will want assurance that any arrangements made are safe for the child/ren you care for and anyone else living in your household. We know this is especially challenging where you are looking after children from different families, or where you are living with someone who has to be shielded.

Therefore, we have set out below some principles we will be following. We have a detailed COVID Face to Face Family Time Risk Assessment Guidance our staff will be using to assess the risks and make decisions.

Principles:

- We will always put the welfare and needs of the child first.
- We will continue to promote family time in the safest way we can.

- We will always follow the latest Government COVID Guidance-this means:
 - We will not arrange a face to face family time to include anyone who has COVID symptoms, had a positive COVID test or has to self-isolate or has been in contact with someone who has COVID or COVID symptoms
 - We will not arrange face to face family time to include anyone who has not been following the Government guidance to not mix with people from other households or not followed Government hygiene advice
- We will always risk assess on a child by child basis (no 'blanket policy')
- We will always take into account the circumstances of all the people involved in a family time arrangement, including others who live in the same carer household

Where a face to face family time is assessed as safe we will make a Safety Plan between everyone that we ask you to keep to. Face to face family time may have to be changed or postponed if the Safety Plan is not kept to.

We will make arrangements outdoors when possible as this is the safest way for face to face family time to take place. We will support you with the provision of outdoor weather gear if you or the child/ren need this.

There is a Government exception to allow for larger family groups of looked after brothers and sisters from different carer households to mix outdoors with each other and their parents for this purpose. This has to be subject to risk assessment.

Where outdoor family time is not possible (e.g. new-born babies) we will use one of our sanitised Family Time venues and ensure it is well-ventilated, PPE is worn by all, hygiene rules are followed, and social distancing rules used as far as possible.

Due to the limited availability of venues and the need to sanitise between family times, we may not be able to support face to face family time as frequently as you would wish.

We will ensure we arrange virtual family time where face to face family time is not possible and our Family Time Team will support you to take part in this and can give you ideas for how to make this fun and keep your child engaged.

We hope this letter helps to explain what we are doing to keep everyone as safe as possible whilst supporting family time and seeing children.

If you have a query about family time please contact Maria Morris or Clare Cadwell in our Family Time Team.

If you have a query about social work visits please contact your supervising social worker if you are a carer, or your social worker if you are a parent.

Lastly, we also enclose a letter from the Virtual School to advise on Government advice for how your child's education will be supported as a looked after child if they are school age.

Yours Sincerely

