

Fostering Support Team – Response to the current Covid-19 (coronavirus) situation

Dear Carers,

Firstly, I want to thank you for all that you are doing to respond to the extraordinary demands and pressures resulting from the Covid-19 (coronavirus 19) situation. We know and appreciate that this will be a very worrying time for you and your families, including the children that you care for.

We appreciate that this will be a difficult time to manage these scenarios with children and young people and we are sure you are doing all you can to maintain children's health and are rigorous with your hygiene standards as well as ensuring the emotional health and wellbeing for children is supported with sensitivity and care.

We are writing to all Lambeth foster carers to provide an update on what Lambeth Children's Services will do to support you and to minimise the spreading of the virus to keep you and the children you care for safe as possible.

Your supervising social workers (SSWs) will have been calling or emailing you over the last few days to gather information in relation to what would happen should you be unable to care for a child or young person due to becoming ill yourself. At the same time they will also have been asking you whether you have any underlying medical conditions that might put you at a higher risk of contracting the virus.

This will help us all to plan ahead to see what additional support might be needed in respect of you and the children you care for. We want to provide you with the best possible responses but, as you will appreciate, the nature of the situation means that some of the questions and possible scenarios have been quite challenging to respond in a very detailed way, and we are having to refer to government guidance as it stands presently.

We will be doing the following to support you.

- There will be no home visits to minimise the virus being brought into your home.
- SSW's will contact you by phone to undertake supervision sessions and via phone or email for any other matters. Meetings, including CLA reviews, foster carer reviews where possible can be completed virtually, via phone conferencing or Skype.
- SSW's will maintain regular contact with foster carers, particularly where it is known that there are specific vulnerabilities for you or the child/young person.
- A fostering support duty system will be available from tomorrow (**25/03/2020**) for carers who are unable to get in touch with their SSW and need a response. This duty service is available from **9.00am to 5.00pm only (closed from 12.00-1.00pm)**. The duty email is

FosteringSupportTeam@lambeth.gov.uk. The telephone number for fostering support duty is **020 7926 3006**.

- A SSW should be available each day to respond to placement queries if your SSW is not available. The duty rota will be sent separately.
- Training and support groups and other meetings where foster carers would have gathered will now be postponed to further decrease the risk of infection through social gatherings.
- Close liaison with our colleagues in the children looked after teams to ensure that appropriate support is maintained in respect of the children and young people placed with you. Whilst the government have encouraged Londoners to work from home, it is critical to note that they have NOT suspended any of our statutory duties to visit our most vulnerable children. How these duties will continue to be undertaken, we be informed by government guidance and Lambeth's Children's Service Response to Covid-19.
- Our Children looked After Children's health team have issued specific guidance which has been sent to you recently. (see attached again with this letter)
- The recent announcement that schools will be closing as part of the strategy to contain the spread of the virus has implications for carers who are in employment and are not able to work from home. The government has announced that school provision and childcare will be made available for all vulnerable children, which we now know includes children who are supported by social care, those with safeguarding and welfare needs, including child in need plans, on child protection plans, 'looked after' children, young carers, disabled children and those with education, health and care (EHC) plans. This will mean that the children that we have placed with you, will have the opportunity to continue to attend school or college.
- In addition, the government has further identified the definition of key workers, where education and childcare provision will be made available to them. As a carer of our children, this will include all our foster carers.
- To ensure we continue to support you and your families and deliver our statutory requirements to protect and safeguard looked after children, Lambeth Council Social Care have implementing the following:
- Social Workers will ask if anyone in the household displays any of the following:

Are there any high-risk groups in the household?

- People over the age of 70
- People with immunocompromising conditions
- Pregnant Women
- People who have serious chronic medical conditions like: Heart disease, Diabetes, Lung disease.

The advice remains that if a child that you care for or you contract the coronavirus you should stay at home for 7 days if you have either a high temperature and/or a new continuous cough. Staying at home and separating yourself from other people, is also known as self-isolating. If you live with someone who has coronavirus, a new cough or a fever, you should stay at home for 14 days (the 14

days starts from the day the person became ill). This helps to reduce the chances of you spreading coronavirus to others.

After 14 days, you and anyone you live with who does not have symptoms can return to their normal routine. There is an online service to help people understand what to do if they have symptoms www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/. If you or a child that you care for has been effected by the coronavirus, you need to let your supervising social worker and child's social worker know.

Multi-agency Meetings- Professional meeting guidance:

- We will continue to meet our statutory duties regarding meetings for children and young people subject to Child in Need/Child Protection plans/YOS clients (e.g. Strategy Meetings/Core Group Meetings/Risk Management Panel/MACH Panel). **However, these should be conducted virtually using Skype.** The lead worker (Social Worker, Early Help Practitioner, Personal Advisor, YOS officer etc.) should contact professionals to give them the Skype conference details for the virtual meeting or agree another suitable digital channel e.g. WhatsApp or google hangouts.
- To provide a sustainable, contingency service to our vulnerable children and families we will need to develop rotas for the rest of the week and foreseeable future, this will include us looking at where staff live and where children and families are based, so we can best meet the needs of our children and limit extended travel for staff.

CP conferences/ CLA reviews/ Fostering Panel:

- We will continue to run Child Protection conferences and Children Looked After Reviews. However, these should all be conducted **virtually**. The IRO/CP chair should contact the family and professionals to give them the Skype conference details for the virtual meeting or agree another suitable digital channel e.g. WhatsApp.
- Our Looked After Children's Health team, based at the Mary Sheridan Centre; Evelina Children's Hospital have issued specific guidance which is enclosed.
- **Supervised contact**, provided by Swanstaff Contact Centre will continue, however there will not be face to face contact and all contact will be facilitated virtually, unless agreed otherwise.
- **The Independent Volunteer** service, provided by Barnardo's will cease from the 17th April
- **The Advocacy Service**, provided by Barnardo's will be provided over the telephone only.

I acknowledge that this is a difficult time and I greatly appreciate that each of us is taking care our families, ourselves and thus taking care of our respective communities. As foster carers you are having a lasting positive impact on the lives of our most vulnerable children and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your personal commitment in creating brighter futures for our children and young people. Your safety and the safety of the children in our care will remain our top priority.

Below we set out some things that we would ask you to do to keep yourselves and your family safe and well.

Things we would ask you to do:

Take care of yourselves and others

1. The public health information regarding the containment of the virus is changing every day and we advise that you regularly consult the Department for Education website <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus> or Public Health England website <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>, listen to the daily news on the radio or watch the news on the television.
2. **Wash your hands more often for 20 seconds with soap and hot water.**
Watch this short NHS film for guidance: <https://youtube/bQCP7waTRWU>
3. **Teach young children how to wash their hands with the NHS hand washing song:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9VjeIWLnEg>

1. **Consider your own emotional health**
<http://theconversation.com/7-science-based-strategies-to-cope-with-coronavirus-anxiety-133207>
2. **Look out for communication from schools** regarding curriculum/other school work that will be posted on line for children and young people.
See below some resources that may be helpful for you. We will consult further with the virtual school regarding out of school provision/resources
3. **Educational Resources:** Teaching Remotely for Grades K - 12 | Free Resources and Strategies

Southend EPS have collated some resources, including info on coronavirus and activity ideas for families who are self-isolating

- <http://www.southendlearningnetwork.co.uk/educationalpsychology>

For EPs and other mental health professionals:

- Opinion articles and research collated at The Psychologist
https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-33/april-2020/coronavirus-psychological-perspectives?utm_source=BPS_Lyris_email&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=

For Secondary age students

- <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus/>

Social stories/stories with visuals for Primary age children

- A Carol Gray social story about corona virus at <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf?fbclid=IwAR23zxNlbEumpw4oKIM7Xy3VlKnA25b8Gi53N6YiFleKB9Vx0LQypSPYzzg>
- Another nice visual story to explain to children:
<https://twitter.com/thelovelymaeve/status/1238399538878087169> or also available at <https://www.thedadsnet.com/this-free-book-is-great-for-explaining-covid-19-coronavirus-to-your-children>
- Also <https://www.ppm.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Corona-Virus-Free-Printable-Updated-2-The-Autism-Educator-.pdf>

For families of early years age children

- <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3210-tips-for-families-coronavirus>
- including an activity guide <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3264-at-home-activity-guide>

Talking to children about the Coronavirus:

Many of our children and young people would have heard on the news, social media, from family, friends, school and college about Covid-19 (coronavirus) and they may be feeling overwhelmed and scared by everything they maybe hearing about coronavirus disease right now.

Children will have heard about Coronavirus and likely noticed changes around them (such as people wearing face masks). It is important they feel comfortable talking to you about Coronavirus as you will be the best source of information and reassurance for them. It's also likely they will talk to their friends or other children, which can involve imagination and misinformation. So having the chance to check-in with them is even more helpful.

Uncertainty can make all of us feel anxious or worried and is important that the children are given space to ask questions and talk through their questions and have answers, is a good way to alleviate anxiety. In case of any of our children or young people are worried about this virus and what this means for them, they can also speak to their social worker, personal advisor or IRO. There is also advice online provided at www.kooth.com who are equipped to support young children.

Once again, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for all your commitment to our children at this difficult time. This guidance is under constant review and we will update you if are there any changes.

Alex Kubeyinje

Director Children Social Care

London Borough of Lambeth