

My ref:

Your ref:

Tel No: 0121 569 3101

Date: 23rd March 2020

Dear Collegues,

**Contact arrangements**

Sandwell Children’s Trust understand that there is a lot of anxiety and uncertainty regarding the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. We want to reassure you that we will work together to do everything that we can to support you and enable you to continue to care for children placed with you.

We have received several queries from carers in respect of managing contact arrangements along with the expectations in respect of ongoing education provision for children in care.

We hope that this letter will provide you with the information that you need at this current time.

However, please be aware that as the Government are providing daily updates, this is a very quickly changing situation. We will do our best to keep you updated but please do not hesitate to contact your Supervising Social Worker for any updates or further clarification.

Contact arrangements for children in care.

There is still an expectation that wherever possible, contact between children and their biological family members will be supported in accordance with their care plans. We recognise the importance of children maintaining relationships with their family members and we have a duty to promote this for them. However, due to the impact of Covid-19, we have had to take the decision to temporarily reduce/change all contact arrangements. This is so that we can safely manage contact within our current staffing arrangements and in line with Government advice regarding social distancing.

Contacts supervised by the Contact Centre

With effect from Monday 23 March 2020, all direct contact (whether court directed or as part of a care plan) will be supervised **once per week** only for all children. All contact will take place at the Hollies or other approved building. Community based supervised contacts will be suspended. All supervised weekend contact will cease from this date.

Parents will be advised that the normal policy of three missed contacts will result in the temporary suspension of contact until the arrangements are reviewed.

If any parent presents as ill at contact (showing symptoms of Covid-19), contact will be suspended by the contact supervisor.

Your Supervising Social Worker and/or the child’s Social Worker will update you with the revised supervised contact arrangements.

Contacts independently managed by carers

We acknowledge that there are many contact arrangements for children in care that are managed and facilitated by foster carers. It is expected that where safe to do so, foster carers should continue to facilitate these contact arrangements in accordance with the child’s care plan. However, we recognise that where there are situations of families self-isolating or where the child may be ill, other forms of contact must be put in place to replace direct face to face contact. This can include use of skype or other social media, telephones calls and texts. It is expected that foster carers will discuss this with their Supervising Social Workers and the child’s Social Worker to agree the revised contact arrangements to be made.

Education arrangements for children in care

The Government has stated that children who have a Social Worker including children in need, children who have a child protection plan and those who are looked after, are classed as ‘vulnerable children’.

The majority of education settings are expected to remain open for vulnerable children – this could either be within their usual school or an alternative education provision. However, for some children placed with approved foster carers, it may be that the foster home is a safe and stimulating option for the child and that this would be the preferred option rather than attending education provision.

The decision of whether the child should attend education or not needs to be agreed between the Social Worker and the carer. We agree with Government Guidance that ‘if children can stay safely at home, they should do so, to limit the chance of the virus spreading’.

Please do not hesitate to contact your Supervising Social Worker if you have any questions and they will do their best to help you at this difficult time.

We will keep you updated as much as possible but please ensure that you stay in touch with daily updates from the Government and news programs as the situation is changing very quickly.

Thank you for your help and support.



Shanti Eaves

Head of Service