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Guidance

Advice to parents and carers on keeping children safe from abuse and harm

Published 25 June 2020

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Call the NSPCC helpline for support and advice if you have a concern for your own or another child's safety on 0808 800 5000.

If you feel that your child is in immediate danger, call the police on 999. You can report concerns to the police on their non-emergency number, 101.

You can also contact the relevant social care team at your local council to report a concern about a child or adult (<http://www.myguideapps.com/projects/safeguarding/default/>).

This guidance brings together sources of information about the main risks children may be particularly vulnerable to during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and signposts you to help and support available.

The essential measures to control coronavirus can potentially increase risks to children and this can cause concern for parents and carers.

This guide also includes information on the support providers who can help you have effective conversations with a young person, especially if you are concerned for their safety.

Visit the See, Hear, Respond service (<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/see-hear-respond>) or call on 0800 157 7015 for additional support, advice and information during this period (England only).

This includes online and face-to-face support for children and families, help for children at risk of harm outside of the home, and support to help vulnerable children successfully return to school or college.

Protect children from domestic abuse

The government's stay at home instruction does not apply if a person needs to leave their home as a result of domestic abuse. Refuges have remained open throughout the lockdown period to provide safe accommodation for victims and their children.

Domestic abuse can have devastating consequences for children, and can have lifelong impacts on their mental and physical health and behaviour into adulthood.

Domestic abuse occurs between those who are, or have been, in relationships. It can also occur between family members, such as between teenagers and parents (known as adolescent to parent violence and abuse (APVA))

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/732573/APVA.pdf).

Find out how to recognise and spot the signs of domestic abuse (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-abuse-how-to-get-help#domestic-abuse-in-a-relationship-recognise-it>).

If you or someone you know is a victim of domestic abuse:

- see domestic abuse: how to get help (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-abuse-how-to-get-help>) which includes specific advice on how to get help for children and young people (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-abuse-how-to-get-help#get-help-for-children-and-young-people>)
- call the NSPCC helpline for advice and support if you have concerns about a child on 0808 800 5000, as well as the National Domestic Abuse helpline on 0808 2000 247

If you are in immediate danger, call 999 and ask for the police. If you are unable to talk on the phone, listen to the questions from the operator and respond by coughing or tapping the handset if you can. Follow the instructions depending on whether you are calling from a mobile or a landline.

For help with parental conflict and relationship abuse:

- Co-Parent Hub (<https://cafcass.clickrelationships.org/>) - information for separated parents and advice to help you and your ex-partner to be good co-parents

Teenage relationship abuse

Teenagers can experience abuse in their own relationships, even if they aren't living with the abuser:

- NSPCC's 'Coronavirus and keeping safe from abuse' (<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/reporting-abuse/coronavirus-abuse-neglect-vulnerable-children/>) - common signs of teenage relationship abuse if you are concerned about a young person's relationship
- Parent Info (<https://parentinfo.org/>) - advice, tips, and key signs to spot for parents on talking to teenagers about consent (<https://parentinfo.org/article/talking-to-your-teenager-about-consent-0>) and spotting abuse in teenage relationships (<https://parentinfo.org/article/spotting-abuse-in-teenage-relationships-0>)
- NSPCC (<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/sexual-behaviour-children/>) - helpful information for parents and carers on how to talk to your child about sex and consent
- Childline (<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/friends-relationships-sex/sex-relationships/healthy-unhealthy-relationships/>) - interactive activities for children and signposts to support available

Child sexual abuse and exploitation

Call 999 and ask for the police if your child has been a victim of child sexual abuse – online or offline – and you believe they are in immediate danger.

When a child or young person is sexually abused, they are forced or tricked into sexual activities. They might not understand that what is happening is abuse or that it is wrong. They might be afraid to tell someone.

Sexual abuse can happen anywhere – and it can happen in person or online. It's never a child's fault they were sexually abused – it's important to make sure children know this.

See the government's definition of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779401/Working_Together_to_Safeguard-Children.pdf#page=103).

These are resources that can help:

- Together, we can tackle child abuse (<https://tacklechildabuse.campaign.gov.uk/>) – how to recognise child abuse, and how to report it
- report to the National Crime Agency-CEOP (<https://www.ceop.police.uk/ceop-reporting/>) (Child Exploitation and Online Protection) if you are concerned that your child has been a victim, or is at risk of becoming a victim, of online sexual abuse, or you are worried about the way someone has been communicating with your child online
- contact the NSPCC helpline (<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/our-services/nspcc-helpline/>) 0808 800 5000 for support and advice if you have any concerns about your own or another child's safety
- Stop It Now! (<https://www.stopitnow.org.uk/>) - information and advice on concerns about someone's behaviour, including children who may be displaying concerning sexual behaviour
- Talk Pants Guide for Parents (<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/advice-and-info/pants/pants-2018/pants-parents-guide-online.pdf>) – how to have age-appropriate conversations to help protect children from sexual abuse using simple, child-friendly language and give children the confidence and knowledge to stay safe
- Coronavirus: support for parents and carers to keep children safe online (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-keeping-children-safe-online/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-parents-and-carers-to-keep-children-safe-online>) - resources to help keep children safe from different risks online, including child sexual abuse and 'sexting', and where to go to receive support and advice

Sexual assault referral centres

Sexual assault referral centres (<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sexual-health/help-after-rape-and-sexual-assault/>) (SARCs) offer support services for children who have experienced sexual abuse or sexual violence, either recently or in the past.

Specially trained medical and support staff care for the child in a safe and comfortable environment and can arrange for ongoing support to help them recover physically and emotionally.

Steps are taken to ensure the child is protected from immediate harm and from any future harm. Partners, such as the police and social services, support the process and may be involved in arranging the initial referral to the SARC.

For additional advice and support, find your local sexual assault referral centre (<https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-services/Rape-and-sexual-assault-referral-centres/LocationSearch/364>).

More support for victims of sexual violence and abuse (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-victims-of-sexual-violence-and-abuse/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-victims-of-sexual-violence-and-abuse>).

Crime, Criminal Exploitation and County Lines, violence and gangs

Call the police on 999 if you feel that your child is in immediate danger. You can report concerns to the police on their non-emergency number, 101.

Children and young people involved with gangs, county lines and criminal exploitation need help and support. They might be involved in violence, be pressured into doing things like stealing, carrying drugs or weapons or be abused, exploited and put into dangerous situations.

- NSPCC's 'Criminal exploitation and gangs' (<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/gangs-criminal-exploitation/>) - if you have concerns that your child is being criminally exploited, involved in gangs or county lines, as well as more information on what these terms mean - phone 0808 800 500 or email help@nspcc.org.uk
- Children's Society resources on criminal exploitation and county lines (<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/tackling-criminal-exploitation-and-county-lines/county-lines-resources>) - for parents who are concerned their child may be being criminally exploited or involved in county lines
- Parent Info (<https://parentinfo.org/>) - information for parents about knife crime and gang involvement (<https://parentinfo.org/article/if-your-child-is-in-a-gang>)

If your child is missing from home

Contact Missing People SafeCall service (<https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/how-we-can-help/safecall.html>) - or you have concerns about them being involved in gangs, drugs dealing or county lines exploitation.

SafeCall provides confidential and one-to-one support to children, but they also offer advice and guidance to parents and carers who are concerned and need support.

To speak to someone urgently, contact Missing People's (<https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/>) free, 24/7 confidential helpline.

Phone or text: 116 000 Email: 116000@missingpeople.org.uk

Protect children from radicalisation

Call the police on 101 or contact your local authority safeguarding team if you are worried that a loved one is being radicalised - you can get advice or share a concern so that they can get safeguarding support.

Although rare, increased online activity and feelings of stress and isolation may be exploited by online groomers to target vulnerable children and young people – including extremist influences seeking to radicalise vulnerable people.

Extremists may use the coronavirus outbreak to promote hateful views, for example through conspiracy theories blaming a particular group for the virus, or through spreading misinformation about these groups' responses to it.

Online exploitation is often hard to recognise. Sometimes there are clear warning signs - in other cases the changes are less obvious. Although some of these traits may be quite common among teenagers, taken together they could indicate that your child may need help. The Let's Talk About It (<https://www.ltai.info/staying-safe-online/>) lists some of these signs.

You know your child best and you will want to speak with them first. Check in with them and ask about what they are viewing, who they are speaking to and how they are feeling.

These are resources that can help:

- Digital safety during Covid-19 (<https://www.ltai.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Digital-safety-during-COVID-19-pdf.pdf>) - advice produced by the Home Office
- Educate against hate parents' hub (<https://educateagainsthate.com/parents/>) - resources and government advice for parents and carers on keeping young people safe from extremism, including online
- Let's Talk About It (<https://www.ltai.info/staying-safe-online/>) - support for parents and carers to keep children safe from online radicalisation.

Prevent

Prevent can help your child get support to move away from harmful influences. The support can include help with education or careers advice, dealing with mental or emotional health issues, or digital safety training for parents.

Call the police on 101 to get advice or share a concern so that they can get safeguarding support through Prevent, if you are worried that a loved one is being radicalised.

You can also contact your local authority safeguarding team for help. Receiving support through Prevent is voluntary, confidential and not any form of criminal sanction.

Report online material promoting terrorism or extremism

You can report terrorist content you find online (<https://www.gov.uk/report-terrorism>). More information about what to report and what happens when you make a report can be found on the Action Counters Terrorism campaign (<https://act.campaign.gov.uk/>).

Online child safety

It is important for children and teenagers to stay safe online, especially as they will be spending more time online than usual. Parents and carers may be particularly concerned about the safety of their children online.

- advice for parents and carers on how to help children stay safe online (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-staying-safe-online#parents>) - how to make use of parental controls, how to have conversations with your child about staying safe online, and how children can stay safe and healthy during a time when they may be spending more time on their devices than usual
- Childnet's guidance for parents and carers (<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/have-a-conversation>) – how to begin a conversation about online safety, as well as guidance on keeping under-fives safe online (<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/keeping-young-children-safe-online>)
- Internet Matters (<https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/>) - expert age-specific advice to prepare and protect your child from a range of online issues, including: sexting, self harm, screen time, radicalisation, pornography, online reputation, online grooming, inappropriate content, identity theft, and cyberbullying
- more support on specific harms children may experience online during COVID-19 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-keeping-children-safe-online/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-parents-and-carers-to-keep-children-safe-online>) including guidance and support to prevent and address these harms
- online safety at home activity packs (<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Support-tools/home-activity-worksheets/>) – CEOP's simple 15 minute activities suitable for children aged 4-14+ can be done at home and focus on topics including image sharing, live streaming and watching videos on the web.

Mental health

If you are worried that someone you know is suicidal, including your child, Samaritans provides advice on how you can support others (<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/support-and-information/worried-about-someone-else/what-do-if-someone-you-know-suicidal/>).

Call Young Minds' free Parents Helpline (<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-helpline/>) on 0808 802 5544 for confidential, expert advice, if you have urgent concerns about your child's mental health and wellbeing.

This may be a difficult time for children and young people. Some may be struggling now, while others may be affected later.

During this time, it's important that you take care of your own and your family's mental health – there are lots of things you can do, and support is available if you need it.

- Action for Children (<https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/support-for-parents/children-s-mental-health/>) - helps parents to spot the signs of poor mental health in their child and explains what to do to help
- NSPCC (<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/childrens-mental-health/depression-anxiety-mental-health/>) - a range of advice on how to support your child if you are concerned that they may be struggling with their mental health or be anxious about coronavirus
- Public Health England advice (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>) - helps adults with caring responsibilities look after the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, including those with additional needs and disabilities
- Young Minds (<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/supporting-your-child-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>) - tips, advice and where to get support for your child's mental health - parents can also access activity ideas for use during isolation
- Every Mind Matters (<https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/>) – simple and practical advice to support your mental health and wellbeing, including advice on looking after children and young people.
- NHS England has published advice for parents, guardians and carers (<https://www.england.nhs.uk/blog/advice-for-parents-guardians-and-carers-on-how-to-help-and-support-a-child-or-young-person-with-mental-ill-health/>) on how to help and support a child or young person

More information

Contact the relevant social care team at your local council or through other referral routes if known. Report a concern about a child or adult to your local council (<http://www.myguideapps.com/project/safeguarding/default/>).

If you, a family member or someone you know is vulnerable or shielding due to the coronavirus and needs help getting food and other essentials during this time, see guidance on accessing essential food and supplies (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-accessing-food-and-essential-supplies>).

Information about vulnerable groups and volunteering (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-accessing-food-and-essential-supplies>).

Find out what you can do if you're struggling because of coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/find-coronavirus-support>).

Find coronavirus help in your local area (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-local-help>).