DERBYSHIRE
County Council

Early Help & Safeguarding Briefing – 22 May 2020

'Lockdown Lens' for schools: Safeguarding children in Derbyshire

To provide schools with information about identifying vulnerable children during lockdown; and about assessing and supporting their needs.

What is different during lockdown?

The lack of visibility of children can amplify the risks for children, and indicators of emerging need could be missed. The message is to be vigilant and work with partners to safeguard children.

During lockdown, some families will experience a range of challenges, which could compromise their parenting and children may become more vulnerable. These pressures could include:
- Inter-parental conflict, domestic abuse or family breakdown
- Parental mental health, impact of social isolation and limited support
- Substance misuse and increased dependency on substances to cope
- Parental ability to provide home schooling e.g. language barriers, cross cultural dynamics, parents' cognitive skills
- Children becoming young carers for siblings or parents.
- Financial pressures on families for basics such as food, utilities and other essentials
- Lack of parental boundaries, home routines with meals, bedtimes and supervision including screen time.

During lockdown indicators of concern may be:
- Lack of parental engagement with home schooling arrangements
- Children not attending school when they have a place
- Families only engaging via phone calls or emails and not using video calls (lack of visibility)
- A range of indicators (see above) particularly where a child is not already open to Children's Services (see your Early Help & Safeguarding School Report, which is circulated via Perspective Lite on a fortnightly basis)
- Parents new to the school with previous history of social care involvement and some emerging concerns e.g. school attendance.

What is a vulnerable child?

The government has provided a definition of 'vulnerable children' for the purposes of school attendance during the COVID-19 pandemic. The government's guidance is available here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people

In brief, the government's definition includes children with a social worker, children with an education, health and care plan and other children the education provider or local authority has assessed as being vulnerable. This could include, for example, children on the edge of needing social care support; adopted children; young carers; children in temporary accommodation; children not in education / employment and others at the provider's discretion.

It is important to be clear that this government definition relates primarily to school attendance. The Derby & Derbyshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership 'Thresholds document' should always be used as a reference point if there are concerns about a child that may require the provision of early help or support from social care.

Alongside this, the 'Lockdown Lens' needs to be applied and professionals should be conscious that the range of universal services and community support are operating differently following government Lockdown guidance. This could limit the visibility of a child and their need for help and protection. Partners are all still available to support vulnerable children and our Early Help Transition Teams can be contacted for advice and support.

What can the school do?

- Think about why I am concerned and what are the vulnerabilities?
- Identify the rationale of why you are concerned for the child now and what has changed to prompt you to think this?
- When making contact with the family think about whether you have you seen and spoken to the child – if not, why not? What were the barriers to doing so?
- Does the child require in-school solutions and how can you respond to decrease your concerns?
- Think about local support and services that can assist the parent/carer and child. (The Early Help Transition team can assist with directories and signposting and there are many resources detailed on SchoolsNet)
- What sources of support do I have access to assist me in making a decision? e.g.- Designated Safeguarding Leads, the Early Help Transition Team, the Starting Point Professionals Advice Line 01629 535353.
- Having considered the threshold document does the child/family require an early help assessment (EHA) to be undertaken, are there other agencies involved to work with to co-ordinate a response, does the concern warrant the involvement of children services? Your local Early Help Advisor is available to support you with the EHA process and links to key partners.
- For those children with allocated workers, keep in regular communication with them and escalate to the lead professional if you are not managing to make contact.
- If you believe the child is at risk of significant harm refer your concerns without delay by calling 01629 533190.

Resources and services that can support schools working with vulnerable children:

Emotional support for families, including mental health:
https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social-health/health-and-wellbeing/health-protection/disease-control/coronavirus/emotional-health-and-wellbeing/support-for-families/emotional-support-for-families.aspx

Staying safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, including keeping children safe, support for children and domestic abuse:
https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social-health/health-and-wellbeing/health-protection/disease-control/coronavirus/staying-safe/staying-safe-during-the-covid-19-pandemic.aspx

Safeguarding COVID-19 tile on SchoolsNet which has a range of documents published since the pandemic started including the Early Help offer, safeguarding updates and NSPCC information:
https://schoolsnet.derbyshire.gov.uk/administration-services-and-support/coronavirus-information/safeguarding-covid-19.aspx

Early Help Transition teams contact information:

Chesterfield & High Peak
Adam Cope, Early Help Development Officer
Mobile: 07827 313821
Email: Adam.cope@derbyshire.gov.uk

Erewash and South Derbyshire
Nusrat Sohail, Early Help Project Officer
Mobile: 07827980617
Email: Nusrat.sohall@derbyshire.gov.uk

North East & Bolsover and Amber Valley
Debbie Hadley - Early Help Transition Project Officer
Mobile: 07866 216 961
Email: Debbie.hadley@derbyshire.gov.uk