

# Children and families group response to Coronavirus Crisis

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) is the professional association for social work in the UK with offices in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. With over 20,000 members we exist to promote the best possible social work services for all people who may need them, while also securing the well-being of social workers working in all health and social care settings.

- **Recent group activities in relation to COVID-19**

There have been significant discussions within our PPEG regarding the Coronavirus Act and we have fed back via our professional officer views on:

1. The Coronavirus Act 2020
2. DFE Guidance for Childrens Social care
3. Professional Guidance drafted by the Professional Officer

We have also offered a series of telephone discussion groups for members, each facilitated by 2 members of the PPEG. These have had 2 functions. Firstly, to consult with our members and secondly to act as a forum for offering professional support and advice. The themes from these discussions have been

1. The very uneven experiences of practitioners across the country. Some feel very isolated, under extreme levels of pressure and that consistent advice around for example home visiting has been lacking.
2. Some less experience colleagues in particular but not exclusively have also expressed concern about the management of risk and safety in all contexts in which children and families social workers operate. Some have apparently felt under supported and alone with the management of risk which has caused considerable anxiety
3. However there have also been some very good examples of the creative use of systems such as WhatsApp, daily team check ins, online supervision to provide support and mitigate professional anxiety.
4. In these more supportive authorities, there has also been a strong sense of very visible management oversight of risk and that workers have not felt in any sense alone when making decisions
5. There have also been some very creative and positive reports of home visits via social media apps and direct work with children, albeit also a strong theme in the feedback to suggest that these cannot negate the very real challenges and ethical dilemmas that are present in some situations
6. In the various discussion fora, there has been a strong theme of this being a highly volatile and fast changing situation. Whereas this initial phase has been dominated by an adjustment to new ways of working/ living there are very real concerns that many families we work with will face mounting and

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cumulative pressures over the coming weeks. This will mean that child and families social workers may well find themselves at the sharp end of a growing social crisis

- **Concerns/comments about the Coronavirus Act 2020**

As a group we have offered feedback elsewhere. At a broad level we are concerned about emergency legislation setting precedents that might undermine children and their family's human rights. At a more specific level this legislation is more directly relevant to adult services but nevertheless does have implications for many of the parents we work with and for disabled children and their families

- **Proposals/suggestions to overcome the concerns you have specified**

As a professional member led organisation, we need to continue to articulate the daily experience of our members, many of which continue to be ones of working in very challenging circumstances. We should also stress the lived experience of those who use our services and the extreme stress the current crisis is placing on their lives. This crisis has shown in sharp relief the inequalities in our society and the impact a decade of austerity has had on services

We can and should continue to offer guidance around for example practice issues such as home visits. We should also seek to highlight example so good practice by social workers and by their employers when they have offered high levels of support.

BASW UK have developed [Top 10 best practice tips](#) to guide our thinking and to remain child outcome focussed.

- **Ethical dilemmas/implications**

Much of the publicity in our sector has been with regard to challenges to the child protection system posed by this crisis. It is important for us to firstly stress that first and foremost children social workers are part of the child welfare and family support system. We are strongly committed to offering an ethical and humane service as such a difficult time for children, their families and their communities. Secondly children and family social work covers a wide range of activities that go far beyond services that are exclusively focussed on the protection of children. We need to ensure that we reflect this in both our activity and publicity

At a child and family level many individual cases will present all sorts of difficulties and dilemmas. Whilst practice guidance can offer a framework and reference point for decision making there is no substitute for professional discretion and decision-making based on individual children. This can only be carried out safely and efficiently if it is an environment where there is close collaboration between professionals and managers and a no blame culture.

## **James Blewett (Chair of the Children & Families group)**

For further information please contact:

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