



Family Time Policy COVID-19 arrangements (16.06.2020)

Background

On the 25.03.2020 all face to face contact was suspended within Birmingham Children's Trust as a safety precaution to reduce the potential transmission of COVID – 19. During this time there remained a duty to children and their families for the Trust to continue contact. Affected families were written to at the beginning of lockdown to explain the Trust position regarding contact. It was noted that the Trust would resume face to face arrangements as soon as practically possible.

Guidance published by the Department for Education on 3 April 2020 stated:

“What about court orders related to contact for children in care?”

We expect that contact between children in care and their birth relatives will continue. It is essential for children and families to remain in touch at this difficult time, and for some children, the consequences of not seeing relatives would be traumatising.

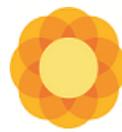
Contact arrangements should therefore be assessed on a case by case basis taking into account a range of factors including the government's social distancing guidance and the needs of the child. It may not be possible, or appropriate, for the usual face-to-face contact to happen at this time and keeping in touch will, for the most part, need to take place virtually. We expect the spirit of any contact orders made in relation to children in care to be maintained and will look to social workers to determine how best to support those valuable family interactions based on the circumstances of each case.”

The Trust is mindful of its legal responsibilities and the Courts powers which are summarised here as:

- For children in care the duty is to allow reasonable contact to persons set out in statute subject to a duty to safeguard and promote a child's welfare.
- Reasonable contact implies contact which is agreed between a local authority and parent or in absence of agreement, which is objectively reasonable.
- The general duty for all looked after children is to promote contact with parents, relatives and friends unless not reasonably practicable or consistent with their welfare to do so.



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- Parents may apply to court for contact. The court has the power to make orders with conditions.
- Any important decisions about a looked after child involve obtaining the wishes and feelings of the child and parents and consulting with them before a decision is made.

To address the requirements above and to reflect the very severe restrictions put in place by the government family time was offered almost entirely via indirect / virtual means.

Current Position

As the [restrictions](#) that the Government imposed have been reduced since the 1st June 2020 BCT have taken steps to review the current position in respect of family time. It must be recognised that there are still restrictions in place from the government regarding social distancing and steps to safely re-open a contact centre to re-instate face to face family time has been complex. This means that the way in which face to face family time is conducted and the frequency we are able to provide will not at this point be the same as what families experienced previously. There will need to be a phased approach and it is likely that for some time family time will be a mixture of face to face and virtual (this will be referred to as hybrid).

At the date of this policy release, BCT have taken steps to re-open 1 building for supervised contact. After a trial opening of the contact centre week beginning 22nd June, it is anticipated that face to face family time will be able to resume from 30th June 2020.

It goes without saying that should there be increases in infection rates and further increased restrictions this could impact on plans

What this means?

The agreed priorities for face to face family time are:

- Children subject to care proceedings
- Final goodbye contacts as part of a child's adoption plan
- Children living with family and friends, who can safely facilitate and supervise family time. This includes children subject to care proceedings as well as children living with connected carers long term. This would remove the need for a supervisor from BCT (minimising the mixing of households) and arrangements could be made more easily for meetings to take place in private gardens or public parks
- Children in care – this is to be defined on a case by case basis. A risk assessment would determine whether family time can be facilitated by the child's carer or requires a supervisor from BCT. Where family time was previously took place in the community these arrangements will resume.



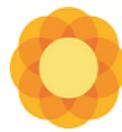
Risk Assessment

- Before any direct family time takes place a [risk assessment \(will need hyperlink\)](#) will need to be completed by the child's social worker in conjunction with the parent, supervising social worker, carer (residential, connected, foster carer) and/or contact worker. Following the completion of a risk assessment, the social worker will contact the child's carer and parents prior to the next planned family time to check whether there have been any changes to their circumstances and that face to face family time can continue as agreed. **No family time should be taking place without a completed and authorised risk assessment.**
- All professionals involved will sign the risk assessment and the parent / family member will also receive and sign a family time agreement.
- If the child or parent or any member of their household has symptoms of COVID-19 or has been asked to self-isolate following advice from the Track and Trace service, family time will not be able to take place. If a family member or child presents at family time with symptoms, the family time will not take place. Virtual family time will resume instead for the isolation period to ensure everyone's safety
- Each child's situation is different. Some children are living in foster families where their foster carer or household member is shielding or vulnerable. We will work with all involved to agree the method needed for family time for each family, based upon the risk assessment.

Supervised Family Time within Contact Centres

- **The number of professionals and individuals attending the contact centre will be kept to a minimum in line with Government guidance.**
- In order to ensure we abide by social distancing guidance, a staggered rota for family time sessions is in place to ensure only 1 family arrives and leaves the building at any time and to allow for cleaning of the room before and after each session which will be for 90 minutes.
- Face to face contact will only be for immediate family (parents) or proposed connected carers.
- Each family time session will be arranged by the social worker and contact service. There is very little opportunity for family time to be changed from assigned sessions. The child's social worker will need to inform the foster carers of the arrangements and liaise with the contact service to agree on transport arrangements.
- A cleaner will be at the contact centre and will prepare rooms and maintain cleaning between family time sessions.
- Parents are asked to arrive at the centre 10 minutes before family time is due to start – this ensure time for our reception staff to direct you to handwashing facilities and to provide PPE if required. If any parent is exhibiting symptoms, then family time will not be able to go ahead.
- Children should be brought to the centre by their carers where possible. This will enable us to further reduce the risk of virus transmission. Children will be met at the door at the exact allocated time - carers should not be entering the building unless this is required to comfort and reassure the child





- Foster carers will be required to provide a toy / game for the child and their parent to enjoy during family time. Meals are to be avoided where possible – any food / milk / drinks are to be provided by the foster carer only. The carer should provide a bag for all times to be returned for cleaning.
- Parents will be unable to prepare food for their children. Any snacks must be in their original sealed packaging and shown to the contact worker.
- Supervisors will request that children and parents to wash their hands throughout the session especially before and after eating, after sneezing and coughing, before and after use of the toilet and on exit from the contact centre
- Personal hygiene for children is to be carried out by one parent only to minimise handling e.g. nappy changing. No touching of eyes and placing fingers in mouths/nose. Children will be actively discouraged from touching faces.
- PPE equipment will be available at the centre; however as highlighted by the government, it is not a requirement for family members to wear PPE when seeing their children, unless they are undertaking personal care such as nappy changing. Aprons, gloves and masks will be provided to parents for tasks such as nappy changing or feeding.

Family Time in The Community

- Currently community family time will only take place in outside spaces such as parks and gardens, in groups of no more than six within socially distanced guidelines
- When the weather is poor, we may need to rearrange face to face family time and virtual family time will be provided
- Where children / parents need to use the toilet, they will be asked to use hand sanitiser and wash hands if facilities are available.
- To minimise the use of public transport for parents, the social worker / carer will explore the possibility of family time taking place near to where parent lives within the risk assessment

Virtual Family Time

Social workers will liaise with parents, relatives and carers on a case by case basis to agree the duration of virtual contact, which best meets the needs of the child. The below is a guide:

- **0 – 2 years old:** A video of the child will be sent to parents by the social worker, this is on the basis that a video call will not provide opportunity for meaningful interaction between a parent and child. Where parents wish to, they should be offered the opportunity to provide video clips of themselves talking to their child/ren to ensure continuation of sensory connection.
- **2 – 4 years old:** Up to 10 minutes in duration. If the child disengages with the call, the carer will seek to encourage engagement but if this cannot be achieved the call will be ended.
- **Infant school children (Reception – Year 2):** Up to 20 minutes in duration. If the child disengages with the call, the carer will seek to encourage engagement but if this cannot be achieved the call will be ended.
- **Junior school children (Year 3 – 6):** Up to 30 minutes in duration. If the child disengages with the call, the carer will seek to encourage engagement but if this cannot be achieved the call will be ended.





- **Secondary school children:** Up to 40 minutes in duration. If the child disengages with the call, the carer will seek to encourage engagement but if this cannot be achieved the call will be ended.

These arrangements will remain under constant review and considered in line with government guidance as this emerges.

The necessity for this policy to be put in place immediately for the safety of all has meant that it has not been practicable to consult widely.