

# Pooky Ponders: Does the Covid context mean that children are less safe right now?

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## Key safeguarding issues impacted by Covid-19

- Children continue to be at risk of all forms of abuse or neglect.
- The lack of face-to-face contact with schools and services means that children may not have had opportunity to disclose abuse or neglect.
- More time online means that children are more at risk of grooming for child sexual abuse, criminal exploitation and radicalisation.
- Domestic violence has increased during lockdown and this has considerable knock-on effects for children.
- Children's mental health and wellbeing may have been impacted and this may make them more vulnerable to abuse.
- Parents may be struggling with the behaviour of their children and this may be causing significant tension in the family home.
- Children may have been more at risk of Female Genital Mutilation during this time because of a lack of contact with school and services.
- Parents or carers may be experiencing mental health issues or drug or alcohol problems and this may heighten the risk to children.
- Financial concerns and poverty. Many families will be struggling with financial issues and parents/carers may have lost their jobs.
- Peer on peer abuse. This occurs even when children are not regularly at school and cyber-bullying and sexting are key issues to consider.
- Bereavement. Children may have faced bereavement during this time and may need support around this.

## What can we do to keep children safe when they are not physically at school?

- Continually review which children might be vulnerable. New vulnerabilities have emerged during this time.
- Share information with parents and carers around safeguarding issues and mental health issues. Make sure you share information regularly about online safety.
- Share information with parents about issues that may affect them. Do this for all parents initially. You could share information about domestic abuse helplines and where to seek support (e.g. [supermarkets and pharmacies](#)), drug and alcohol services in the local area, or mental health support.
- Make sure safeguarding information is clearly displayed on the school website and the school building (in case a child comes to school to seek help out of hours)
- Try safeguarding 'clinic' hours, where children know that if they call a particular number at a particular time it will be answered and they know who will answer it.
- Set up a safeguarding email address, with a permanent out of office sharing safety information in case a child emails out of hours.
- Regularly contact all children, not just those that are deemed as 'vulnerable'.

- Signpost parents to activities and free things to do at home to support them in managing their child's behaviour.
- Consider how you can help families who are struggling financially. Provide lists of support in your local area, information about food banks and ensure everyone entitled to Free School Meal vouchers are receiving them.
- Consider language and cultural barriers and try to mitigate against this by using members of staff who speak other languages when contacting home to check on the welfare of children. Be mindful of using local interpreters if you are concerned about honour-based abuse.
- Consider reporting channels for peer on peer abuse and share them with children. You might wish to consider anti-bullying apps that allow children to seek help, such as 'SpeakUp!' or 'Tootoot'.
- Ensure that all staff have been trained on any updates to your Code of Conduct and how to conduct themselves when communicating with children online. Make sure they know that they should only communicate with children through the approved channels.
- Liaise with social workers and early help practitioners in your area to ensure children are supported and families in need of early help receive support. Inform social workers if children they are working with are not attending school.
- Continue to work closely with your three safeguarding partners – the Local Authority, health and the police.
- Continue to work with charities and non-statutory agencies in your local area and make sure you are aware of how they are supporting children during this time and if/how you can refer children to them.

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