

# INFORMATION SHEET

## Information During School Closures



The Government closed schools at the end of March 2020 in order to prevent the spread of Covid 19. Children with Education, Health and Care Plans and those who are vulnerable (including those assessed as being in need under the Children Act 1989) and have a Social Worker were permitted to attend school throughout the lockdown although we know this has not been the case for many in practice.

On 10 May the Prime Minister announced that schools will start to re-open from 1 June. Guidance published on 12 May for education settings (find the guidance [here](#)) states that “vulnerable children of all year groups continue to be expected to attend educational provision where it is safe for them to do so.” School transport should still be provided, as before.

Special schools are asked to make a phased return but do not have to focus on particular year groups. This may involve part-time attendance. It is suggested special schools should prioritise attendance based on “key transitions and the impact on life chances and development.” For children with EHC plans the return to school should be guided by a risk assessment approach.

Guidance states that Local Authorities must make a risk assessment of all children and young people with an EHC plan, alongside parents, to recommend whether a child’s needs are best met at home or at school. This should include consideration of:

- Potential health risks to the individual child of Covid 19
- Ability of families to meet health and care needs safely over an extended period of time
- Wellbeing due to change of routine
- Ability to support or manage behaviour or where there may be risks to other family members or siblings

The full guidance for local authorities can be found [here](#).

The new Coronavirus Act has made temporary changes to the Children and Families Act 2014 until 31 July 2020 (with the potential to extend this date)

- Previously, local authorities had a duty to provide education and healthcare specified in an EHC plan. The amendment removes this duty and asks local authorities to use ‘reasonable endeavours’ to secure the specified provision.
- Timescales relating to EHC assessment and plans have also been relaxed, so they can be completed “as soon as reasonably practicable.”
- Local authorities should keep a record of any changes, contact the family carers or the young person and explain why the changes are happening and how they will be applied.

The CBF know that many families continue to face extremely difficult decisions. These will often boil down to whether it is safe to send your child into school versus whether you can support your child at home for the foreseeable future. Please do what is right for your family in your circumstances and don't feel pressured by other people's opinions, below are some considerations and tips that might help you if your child is at home:

### 1) Plan your support network

The Prime Minister's announcement on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March clarified that those who need to go out to deliver care to the vulnerable are able to do so. You may be able to create a circle of support from your friends, family and neighbours who are not self-isolating – Could a neighbour come in through the back gate and supervise your child in the garden whilst you take a break? Could a friend do your shopping so you don't have to take your child to the supermarket? Just ask – you might be surprised who is willing to help! The Government have amended their guidance to allow people with autism and/or learning disabilities to exercise more than once a day and further away from home; so if you need to get out of the house for a second (or third!) walk you can. The CBF has produced a [card](#) you can download to show when you are out and about.

### 2) Use Community Pages on Social Media

In light of the current pandemic many communities have groups of volunteers willing to help others. You may be lucky and find a teaching assistant/personal assistant who is at home and willing to help you out, but even someone to pick up the essentials and drop them off could be helpful. If you have received a letter telling you that you or someone in your household is 'clinically vulnerable' and must stay at home you can register here for support: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable>. On-line many organisations and charities are sharing ideas and resources to help those with school aged children at home.

### 3) Creating a new routine

Many children will find it difficult to be out of routine and this confusion and lack of control may result in challenging behaviours. Think about a new simple routine that your child can follow, it might help to display this visually. You could use free PECs from [Widgit](#) to do this. If your child uses a 'now and next' board this might help to introduce the new routine. Don't worry about the school routine, think of what makes your child happy and try to include some of those things every day. For more information on how to create a new routine and activity suggestions for people with severe learning disabilities please see information on our [Covid 19 information page](#).

### 4) Free School Meals

If your child receives free school meals you can still get help with this. The Government has issued guidance to schools to sign up to a voucher scheme.

This allows them to send you a code that you can exchange [here](#) for an e-giftcard for a supermarket of your choice. If you cannot access the internet the school should use the code for you and send you the e-giftcard in the post. The Government have temporarily extended eligibility for free school meals. For more information about eligibility and vouchers see the guidance to schools here: <https://bit.ly/3b8fgU9>

### 5) Maintaining the EHCP/Help from the school

The law has temporarily changed to remove the duty to secure the provision specified in part F of an EHCP, instead local authorities must use 'reasonable endeavours' to secure the specified provision. Timescales relating to EHC assessment and plans have also been relaxed, so they can be completed "as soon as reasonably practicable." Local authorities should keep a record of any changes and contact family carers to explain why the changes are happening and how they will be applied. The full guidance can be found [here](#). It states that "At this challenging time it is even more important that... all those involved in the processes relating to EHC needs assessments and plans work with families to identify appropriate ways forward." Children's plans should be reviewed individually and there should not be blanket policies applied. Options you may wish to discuss with your school or local authority may include:

- If your child has 2:1 or 1:1 support in school, this could also be available to them at home and you could ask their school to send someone to the home to support them. In reality, this will need to be a discussion about what is possible; support staff may be self-isolating, may be needed at school or may be unable to get to your home. In addition to this you will need to consider whether your child will tolerate a member of school staff suddenly being in their home.
- If your child usually has input from a speech and language therapist or occupational therapist, try to find out if they are working from home and could give you any telephone or virtual sessions.
- You could ask for equipment or resources to be sent home and for a suggested programme to follow
- If you have online access the school may be able to provide programmes, activities or video sessions
- Children who have a social worker are also eligible for the laptop scheme announced by the Government. Please see [here](#).

[For a list of professionals who can help and provide support please see this information \(link to LD snate info sheet\)](#)

[Annual reviews of EHCPs should still take place but these may be in a different form and timing can be flexible.](#)

#### **6) Meeting needs creatively**

Some families may receive Direct Payments (DPs) to meet their child's Social Care needs. You may be fortunate enough to have a support worker who is still able to provide respite, however many respite centres are currently closed. Some Local Authorities are being more lenient about what DPs are spent on at this time and as long as you can show it is meeting a need and helping your child then there is a strong case for spending money on equipment during this period. Some suggestions include a trampoline to burn off energy, sensory equipment, items to create a safe space at home. Always try to get this approved by your care manager first, if you can't get an answer and the situation is urgent then keep documentation such as receipts to have a discussion at a later date. The Government have answered questions about the flexible use of Direct Payments [here](#).

#### **7) Paying members of the family**

You may find yourself in a situation where your normal support staff cannot come to you. The Government has said that in this situation family members can be paid but this must be discussed with a care manager, so if you can do get this agreed in advance as part of a contingency plan. If the situation is urgent you can put in place a short-term arrangement for 4 weeks, as long as you can justify and evidence it retrospectively. This could allow you to pay your partner or a sibling living in the same house as your child to provide you with a break from caring. For more information on this please see the [Government Q&A](#) and our [Legal FAQs](#).

#### **8) Make an emergency plan**

This is in case you or your child need to go to hospital. In a folder you could put copies of your child's care plan, Positive Behaviour Support Plan, Communication Passport, Hospital Passport and any other important documents. We hope you won't need to use these but being prepared will save time and stress if you do. For more information on emergency plans and going into hospital with Covid-19 please see our [Covid 19 information page](#).

If your child is remaining in residential school or college and you are unable to visit during the current situation, please see our resource [Keeping in Touch With Home](#) which gives ideas about how to keep in touch. Please feel free to share this with the school or college. It would be helpful to have an emergency plan shared with the school (see above) and to check the school have all the documents listed above ready in case they are needed.

The situation and guidance is changing fast and we know it is hard to make big decisions and to keep up with the guidance. We will do our best to share and summarise the latest and we are working on resources to help. Please do keep checking our [Covid 19 information page](#).

**The Department for Education has issued guidance and has a helpline:**

Answers to a wide range of questions can be found in guidance at:

<https://bit.ly/3doY5Ps>

It includes information about:

- educational provision for vulnerable children and children of key workers
- the closure of educational settings
- free school meals arrangements
- the cancellation of GCSEs, AS and A levels

If you are unable to find an answer to your enquiry, the department has set up a dedicated helpline for COVID-19 related education issues. Lines are open Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm, and 10am to 4pm on Saturday and Sunday, and can be contacted on 0800 046 8687.

Your local SEND Information and Advice Service (SENDIASS) may be able to support you in conversations with the Local Authority or the school. You can find your local service [here](#). There is an introductory film on how a local IASS team can be contacted [here](#). An additional film tells you more about what an information, advice and support service will do for you, find it [here](#).

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