



Coronavirus (COVID-19) Keeping Children and Adults Safe

Due to the Coronavirus crisis, social distancing and self-isolation are a priority. This means children and adults are spending more time at home and, for some, this brings increased risks. Risks change as circumstances change. The current situation may place increased demands on families, place stress on relationships, bring financial worries and all of these factors can increase the likelihood of abuse. For this reason keeping children and adults safe must also be a priority.

There are many children and adults who will be feeling unsafe at home and they may not have any outlet to talk about this. They cannot have that face to face contact with key people in their lives, e.g. their friends, other family members, their teacher, their support workers, counsellors etc.

Abuse can take many forms and children and adults are at risk of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, financial abuse and institutional abuse. Abuse is often perpetrated by those who are physically and emotionally close to the child or adult, and on whom they depend and trust.

Everyone has a responsibility to keep children and adults safe. Follow these guidelines to help keep people safe:

- Be vigilant for possible indicators of abuse including repeated yelling or swearing, humiliation or ridicule, threats, prolonged periods of crying, hitting or rough handling, children and adults appearing withdrawn, children and adults unwashed or wearing dirty clothes, inappropriate clothing, loss of weight, being left unsupervised for long periods of time, repeated callers at their door.
- Check in with the child or adult if you can and give them the opportunity to speak about what may be going on. If they tell you that they are being abused try to stay calm, listen attentively, express concern and sympathy and reassure them they have done the right thing in telling you. It's important that you don't promise to keep secrets, don't press them for more details or start to investigate. This is sensitive information and must be shared and handled appropriately.



- Report any concerns of abuse to the appropriate organisation or authorities. If you are a friend, relative or neighbour of the child or adult, you can contact the relevant Health and Social Care Trust Gateway Team or PSNI. Contact numbers (including out of hours) can be found [here](#).
- If you work for an organisation that provides a service to children or adults, try to keep connected. You may be able to continue delivering your services through the use of technology, e.g. over the phone, via video call or email etc. Be creative in keeping connected!
- If you have any concerns that a child or adult you are working with is experiencing abuse, follow your organisation's reporting procedures. If your concerns are in relation to a child, contact your organisation's Designated Officer. If your concerns are in relation to an adult, contact your Adult Safeguarding Champion or Appointed Person. If you cannot reach these individuals you can contact the Health and Social Care Trust Gateway Teams directly or PSNI. Contact numbers (including out of hours) can be found [here](#).

Remember it is not your responsibility to decide whether or not abuse has occurred. Your responsibility is to be alert to possible signs and to report your concerns. You may feel anxious about reporting your concerns but the child's/adult's safety is of paramount importance. Act without delay.

Further guidance can be found at [Keeping Children Safe: Our Duty to Care](#) and [Keeping Adults Safe: A Shared Responsibility](#).

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