

Safeguarding Children and Young People within the Pandemic

Both the Children's Commissioner's report **Childhood in the Time of Covid (September 2020)** and the NSPCC report **Still Here for Children (December 2020)** highlight a number of safeguarding themes and the difficulties that children have faced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

These safeguarding trends and considerations can be summarised as follows:

Abuse and Exploitation:

- The Children's Commissioner's report cites that 'calls to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline went up 80% in June'.
- Children who live in households of domestic abuse are often not known to services. The Children's Commissioner's report states that it is estimated 'that 235,000 under-fives live in houses where domestic violence has taken place in the last year, clearly placing them at risk of harm, yet less than a quarter of these children are known to children's services'.
- The NSPCC reported that some parents were using drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism within the pandemic, therefore, increasing the number of children living within households of multiple adversities.

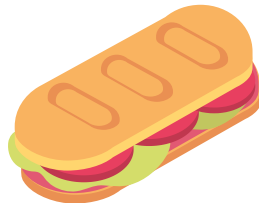
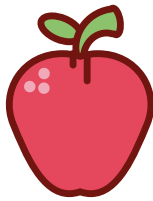
- County Lines activity has adapted, with gangs changing their methods of exploitation, for example, grooming young people to carry drugs within the same locality rather than transporting drugs from one part of the country to another.
- NSPCC staff outlined that children and young people have been more vulnerable to online abuse during the pandemic, with children having more unsupervised time using digital devices.



- The NSPCC reported that some parents used physical distancing restrictions to actively prevent workers from accessing their home. Disguised compliance by parents subjecting their children to abuse or neglect was also easier for them to achieve via communication by digital means.
- Children who experienced physical, sexual, emotional abuse and/or neglect were exposed to increased abuse and trauma, with more time spent within the home and less opportunities for safeguarding interventions to take place, due to reduced contact with professionals, extended family and the local community.

Poverty and Disadvantage

- Child poverty has increased during the pandemic. The Social Market Foundation highlighted that 16% of children have missed meals during the pandemic.
- Being at home all or most the time meant that families needed more food and were using increased amounts of gas and electricity.
- The Trussell Trust reported, in June 2020, that the number of families with children receiving food parcels has almost doubled compared to the same period last year.



- School closures and repeated incidences of needing to self-isolate are likely to have widened the gap of the most disadvantaged children from their peers in terms of educational attainment.
- Overcrowded or substandard temporary accommodation and/or a lack of computer and internet connectivity have impacted further upon children's learning.
- There is a growing digital divide, with some families not only lacking digital technology but also the knowledge to easily access resources and online services.

Social Isolation

- Care leavers have been more at risk of becoming socially isolated and unsupported during the pandemic .
- Children and young people had a lack of opportunity to socialise with their peers, leading to increased feelings of loneliness. This also included young children having a lack of opportunity to access outdoor space to play.
- The NSPCC reported that lockdown restrictions had impacted negatively upon the mental health of children and young people. This included depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicidal thoughts.



- Families have been separated from their support networks and, therefore, more socially isolated at a time of many additional stressors for caregivers.
- Many children and young people in care had no face to face contact with their birth parents during the pandemic.
- The NSPCC reported that ‘there is an urgent need for respite and support for children with additional needs and their families’.

Supporting Children and Families

Within the report **Still Here for Children (December 2020)**, one worker commented that 'a little help and thought for a family can go a long way.

This may be nappies, a telephone call, helping them apply for grants when they are struggling, but just having someone that is willing to try for them can make a big difference'.

If you have safeguarding concerns about a child or young person, please always refer to the Safeguarding Children's Partnership website:

www.lrsb.org.uk/childreport (Leicestershire and Rutland)

www.lcitylscb.org/what-to-do-if-you-are-concerned-about-a-child (Leicester)



References:

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/childhood-in-the-time-of-covid/>

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/2488/still-here-for-children-sharing-experiences-nspcc-staff-during-covid-19.pdf>

<https://www.smf.co.uk/16-of-children-missed-meals-due-to-hardship-during-pandemic/>

<https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/06/03/food-banks-busiest-month/>