

Watch out for children's welfare during lockdown

Residents are being urged to be extra vigilant of children's welfare during lockdown and report any concerns they may have.

The *'Their door is shut. Ours is open'* campaign has been launched following a fall in calls to local safeguarding teams since the introduction of social distancing measures.

However, the Leicester and Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Partnerships are concerned that, despite this fall, cases of child abuse may be on the rise, with fewer opportunities for it to be seen, reported and stopped.

Local councils, police and health partners acknowledge there are additional pressures on families at this time and potentially this could lead to increased safeguarding concerns for children. The number of individuals children see and are able to talk to about their concerns is reduced during this time. Therefore, these organisations are asking everyone to be extra vigilant about safeguarding concerns for children in their community.

Councillor Ivan Ould, Leicestershire County Council cabinet member for children and families, said: "We are all spending more time than ever at home and home should always be a safe place for children. But sadly, this is not always the case.

"We are continuing to work hard to protect our children. If family members, or members of the community have worries about children we encourage them to contact our duty team as soon as possible so that any necessary support and assistance can be put in place to keep children safe"

Councillor Sarah Russell, Leicester's deputy city mayor responsible for social care, added: *"The lockdown is an isolating experience for all of us, but it's going to hit our most vulnerable members of society hardest of all.*

"Communities have already shown tremendous resilience and resourcefulness in the way they're pulling together to support each other. This wonderful community spirit needs to extend to protecting children who need our help. We all have a responsibility to report any concerns we might have about a child."

Councillor David Wilby, Cabinet Member for Children's Services at Rutland County Council, said: "We want to ensure children are protected during these unprecedented times. We've all got to stay at home to keep safe, support the NHS and save lives.

"But if home isn't safe for a child, we need to know. Lockdown means households may be feeling the strain with greater anxiety about health and financial pressures. There are also fewer opportunities for adults to spot the signs of child abuse and help.

"We're asking residents to please look out for signs in your family or street. If you have any concerns or something doesn't look right, please let us know. Across the county front doors are being kept closed. But our door is always open."

Residents are asked to look and listen out for signs that may indicate abuse:

- Very young children being left on their own
- Children looking dirty or not changing their clothes
- Children are withdrawn or anxious
- Aggressive or repeated shouting
- Sounds of hitting or banging and things being broken
- Children crying for long periods of time
- Relatives denied access to talk to children by phone or video call

To report concerns about children's welfare in **Leicestershire** call: 0116 305 0005 (for urgent situations) or report online www.leicestershire.gov.uk/report-abuse-of-a-child

To report concerns about children's welfare in **Leicester** call: 0116 454 1004 or visit: www.leicester.gov.uk/health-and-social-care

To report concerns about children's welfare in **Rutland** call: [01572 758 407](tel:01572758407) or email: childrensreferrals@rutland.gov.uk.

If a child is in immediate danger call 999 and ask for the police.