Supporting people who are isolated or at risk during the COVID-19 crisis

Updated: 28 May 2020

Updates and new rules from 27 May – England only

- **Testing**
  If you are supporting someone who has symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19), or they are living with someone that does, anyone can now ask for a test to check if you have the virus. Please the [NHS website](https://www.nhs.uk) for how.

- **Shielding**
  Shielding should continue for people labelled as 'extremely vulnerable' unless otherwise directed by a medical professional. Those who do still need to shield should stay at home and avoid face-to-face contact. For example, those who have had an organ transplant or are receiving chemotherapy or renal dialysis.
  People aged over 70, those with specific, chronic, pre-existing conditions, and pregnant women are 'clinically vulnerable' and should minimise contact with others outside their households, but do not need to be shielded. The [government document](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-extremely-vulnerable-people) said it is likely that the government will advise people who are clinically extremely vulnerable to shield beyond June – the end of the current 12-week period.

- **Travel**
  Everybody should continue to avoid public transport wherever possible.

- **Face coverings**
  These are not yet mandatory, but if you can then you should wear one on public transport and in some shops. They should not be worn by children under two years old.


The Government rules to fight COVID-19 mean that daily life is going to be significantly disrupted for the foreseeable future. This means a significant reduction in face-to-face interaction with people and potentially for some, none at all.

Social workers, care workers, personal assistants (PAs) and others are in a unique position not only to promote disease prevention efforts (including disseminating accurate information from trusted sources), but also to help address anxiety and other concerns, and keep people connected and safe during this public health crisis.

This quick guide shares information, resources and ideas that you can use – especially if you now are working remotely or in isolation, and which can be shared with the people you support. Whilst the term ‘social distancing’ is being used to describe these measures, it may be helpful to think about the need to ‘physical distance’ as it is crucial this doesn’t mean we socially disconnect. Social connection is core to our mental wellbeing, and there are many ways we can stay connected, including virtually.

[SCIE’s COVID-19 hub](https://www.scie.org.uk/coronavirus) contains more relevant information including safeguarding, Mental Capacity Act and infection control. It can be used when working and supporting people who are isolated or vulnerable through COVID-19, and can also be shared with community groups.

This is a live document and will be updated regularly with emerging good practice and other sources of guidance and information.

### Five things you can do

- **1. Think of others**
Consider your actions and be kind. People in every community will face the challenges of COVID-19 in some way – from needing basic provisions, to help when they are unwell.

### 2. Connect and reach out to your neighbours

As self-isolation increases, we need to find new ways to stay connected and check in on one another for our physical and mental wellbeing. Make sure your elderly and vulnerable neighbours have everything they need. Share phone numbers and stay in touch.

### 3. Make the most of local online groups

Keep up to date, share information and be a positive part of your local community conversations, using platforms like Nextdoor.

### 4. Support vulnerable or isolated people

The Government has launched Get coronavirus support for those who may need additional assistance, such as prescription deliveries, during the ongoing lockdown. The new registration system is open to everyone in England, regardless of whether or not they have been contacted by the NHS.

About the coronavirus gives useful information about the virus in easy read.

### 5. Share accurate information and advice

Support anyone who may be anxious about COVID-19. Signpost them to the correct advice at Public Health England and SCIE’s COVID-19 hub, and encourage people to follow the correct hygiene practices.

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**Encourage digital communication**

**New rules for social contact from 13 May – England only**

As long as you adhere to the 2-metre physical distancing rules, you can meet up with one person from outside your household, like a friend or relative, in an outdoor public place.

Although the rules have changed, any change to current activity and social contact will need to be re-assessed through positive risk assessment. It is important to try to enable and work with people to achieve their goals wherever possible, balancing the risk to physical and mental health.

Digital communication will be key to keeping connected both with colleagues and also with other people and communities. There are some great ways to help practitioners stay connected and continue to feel well emotionally, for example:

- regular meetings with team members over video
- non-work-related coffee catch-ups with colleagues
- regular breaks and moving about
- trying not to feel stressed if you are feeling less motivated
- accepting that this is an unprecedented time, and no-one has all the answers.

You could look into having video consultations with people you support. There is no formal advice yet from social care leaders about video consultations with people who use services, and we will share good practice as it emerges but Video consultations: a guide for practice developed for general practice might help you explore this area.

This guide covers:

- thinking about when a video consultation might be appropriate
- how to set up video consultations
- how to conduct a high-quality video consultation
- how people who use services can prepare for, and participate in, video consultations
- research evidence for the quality and safety of video consultations.

The Q community has produced a webinar on setting up video consultations and although health focused, it may be useful.
Digital Social Care’s COVID-19 guidance provides information about how technology can be used to support staff and the people you support.

Channels to connect

For those that are online there are a number of ways to stay in touch for example:
- WhatsApp groups
- Google Hangouts
- Google Duo
- Zoom
- GoToMeeting
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Microsoft Teams
- Snapchat
- TikTok
- Houseparty app
- Instagram

All these are free and many have teleconferencing functions, however this will depend on access to smartphones, tablets, computers, internet and data. So, cost could be a factor too. It may be worth exploring what funding streams you may have access to, or the person has, in order to enable this connectivity.

There may be local businesses or libraries willing to loan out IT equipment that is not being used. Neighbours may also be happy to share the wi-fi codes with others to enable connectivity, so this is also an option to explore.

Even for those who aren’t online, or comfortable using technology, ideas such as talking through windows, book club dial-ins, or weekly phone chats could be arranged. Connecting with a neighbourhood watch coordinator, or other neighbours who do use technology, are also good ways to make sure that the people you support are connected into emerging community groups.

Additionally, is there a current offer to support people to develop their digital literacy so that they can get online? It may be that a little help and support is required. Given the restrictions on social contact this may only be possible either via telephone, written instructions or when social contact is unavoidable, which may include your roles.

For older and or vulnerable people not able to use smart screens or computing devices, simple-to-use products are available, like Kraydel and KOMP, that allow older people to see and stay in contact with their family and friends on screen.

There are also examples of the open schools teaching children of key workers writing letters or painting pictures to residents of care homes, which could be something to explore.

For further information see the SCIE Prevention practice example.

Where care homes are not accepting visitors, it is important that systems are put in place to enable people to keep in touch. Supporting people to keep in touch when care homes are not accepting visitors (Care Inspectorate, 2020) includes examples of the different computer apps that you can use.

Access to virtual museums, concerts, plays, book reading, etc

Lots of museums, musicians, theatres and artists are putting content online for people to watch or live stream via Facebook, Instagram and other online platforms.
- Audible is making some of its books free
- Google Arts and Culture: Collections
- Good Housekeeping: Best virtual tours
- UpgradedPoints: Best virtual museum tours
- COVID-19 and social isolation (MARCH Network, 2020) This tool shares some home-based, creative ways to support mental health during these unique and uncertain times

Access to online learning

Many universities and learning institutes are sharing or making their content discounted for free:
- FutureLearn
- Metro: 15 free tutorials to try during self-isolation
- OpenLearn

Encourage activity and movement

Currently the advice for people labelled in the most vulnerable groups throughout the COVID-19 crisis is still to stay indoors for the foreseeable future. For some people such as older people, those with underlying health issues and pregnant women, this will be up to 12 weeks. However, activity and movement are essential for health and wellbeing.

Additionally, for yourself and people you support that may still be able, you are now allowed to go outside as many times in the day for exercise whilst adhering to physical distancing (at least 2 metres away from the next person). You will still not be able to use areas such as playgrounds or outdoor gyms, where there is a higher risk of close contact and touching surfaces.
You can exercise with up to one person from outside your household, which means no team sports unless every participant is from the same household.

Although the rules have changed, any change to current activity needs to be re-assessed through positive risk-taking, but it is important to enable working with people to achieve their goals wherever possible, which may include increasing exercising outdoors.

For those that can't go outside, there are ways to keep active with not a lot of space, including:

- cleaning your home
- sorting out old clothes, books, toys etc. Given the impact of COVID-19, most, if not all, charity shops have closed and stopped their home collection services, but it may be a good time to do some sorting out for when the days comes that your things can be collected or taken to a charity shop
- sitting exercises
- dancing to music
- online subscriptions - some are free but some are not. These can range from yoga to HIIT workouts
- downloading workout apps on your phone or smart tablet
- online sessions with gyms or personal trainers. Some gyms offer streaming sessions of classes now that they are closed. There are also some great free resources, such as Joe Wicks Body Coach, who live streams workouts for adults and children.

Mind recommends telling people to interact with nature where possible. During the COVID-19 crisis, this might involve continuing to tend to any houseplants and window boxes or opening a window to watch and listen to the birds.

Sport England's Stay in, work out has lots of ideas and ways to stay active.

### Mental wellbeing

This is an unprecedented time and the impact it can have on our mental health, and that of the people we support, should not be underestimated. This section includes information and guidance about supporting mental wellbeing. The British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy offers some key points:

- Think about access to media and social media. Try to limit the amount of time you spend on social media, watching, reading or listening to the news and think about where you are getting the information from and how it is written.
- Don't ignore your anxiety. It is completely normal to feel scared or anxious during this time, and these feelings should not be ignored. It may help to discuss this with someone you feel comfortable with. Someone you work with who wants to discuss their anxiety with you may find this section helpful.
- Do something you can control and that you enjoy or are grateful for. Think about doing something you have control over, or that you are looking forward to doing in the day. It may be something as simple as a TV programme that day or a phone call or video call you have arranged with friends or relatives.
- Let it go. Sometimes it's helpful to write worries down, and if you've written something down, put it away and try to let it go.
- Bring it back to the present. Try not to think too far ahead and try to focus on what is happening right now and what you know about your current situation. What can you hear? What can you see?
- Think about your thought process. It is hard not to think about the worst-case scenario and thinking about 'what ifs' but try to focus on what is known to reassure yourself.
- Wellbeing check. Look after yourself and do things that you enjoy to help you eat and sleep well and do exercise.
- Self-management. Although anxiety can exacerbate physical symptoms, try as much as possible to maintain the self-management of any conditions.
- Breathing techniques and mindfulness. This can really help to manage anxiety and help focus on the present.

See also COVID-19: guidance for the public on the mental health and wellbeing from Public Health England. The guidance covers what can help your mental health and wellbeing, where to get further support, and additional advice for groups with specific mental health needs.

The five ways to wellbeing framework (connect, be active, be curious, keep learning and give) developed by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) is a well-established framework that helps individuals understand and incorporate wellbeing into their everyday lives. NEF explains how you can interpret the guidelines for the current crisis in Five ways to wellbeing at the time of social distancing.

### New app for the social care workforce

A new app has been launched to help the adult social care workforce during the coronavirus pandemic including providing support with mental health and wellbeing.

The app, which can be downloaded from now on Apple or Android smartphone or accessed online, is being launched under the new CARE brand.
Shopping and medicines

Many supermarkets are opening early for key workers and for vulnerable groups. Sainsbury's is reserving next-day delivery slots for vulnerable groups. You may also be able to get around the necessary restrictions for essential items by showing your ID badge if you are picking up food or medicines for people you work with.

In more rural or less built-up areas there is some good practice emerging of local shops and pharmacies making home deliveries so this may be worth exploring, especially if it can support people you are working with.

We also know of local authorities that are working closely with some supermarkets so that people who are collecting the shopping for individuals do not have to pay in store at that time, but the store then connects with the individual who can pay for the shopping over the phone. This reduces the need for cash to be handed over, safeguarding the individual from financial abuse who is self-isolating and cannot get to the shops. Other areas have given people shopping pre-payment cards.

Volunteer your time if possible or tap into those that do

If you are able or want to, volunteering is a vital way to support people in communities at this time of crisis. Additionally, there may be people you support who would like to volunteer in different ways and this should be enabled where appropriate. For example, there could be ways to connect people to share skills that do not involve being face to face. For example, now children are at home, you could connect people who can share knowledge with children virtually to help their learning.

Many local authorities are connecting to, or supporting local networks and charities, including local business. So it will be worth exploring what approach your local authority is taking to connect with local groups for yourself and for the people you support.

Unfortunately, there are reports of elderly or vulnerable people being the victims of crime through people pretending to be from the community to get shopping and stealing money and debits cards. Additionally, many councils are setting up volunteer groups in the local community so you will be able to explore these channels too. See SCIE's Safeguarding adults during the COVID-19 crisis.

Please note that SCIE is not affiliated with following examples of ways to connect

COVID Mutual Aid UK

This is a group of volunteers supporting local community groups organising mutual aid throughout the COVID-19 outbreak in the UK. It focuses on providing resources and connecting people to their nearest local groups, willing volunteers and those in need.

COVID Mutual Aid UK is a support network for people organising in their communities. (Local support groups are not directly affiliated with SCIE and we are not accountable for their activities.)

COVID-19 Mutual Aid UK is run entirely by volunteers and not medical professionals.

National Care Force

Originally set up as a way to match qualified healthcare workers to care homes who needed staff, the platform is now looking for anyone across the UK who wants to donate their time to helping others.

As mentioned above, you can connect through Facebook groups or other online platforms if you are supporting people who can support connect them.
Nextdoor

Nextdoor is a neighbourhood hub for connections and the exchange of helpful information, goods, and services. Also see a blog to describe Community Action Response.

Jointly app

Developed by Carers UK, Jointly is a mobile and online app that is designed by carers for carers. Jointly makes caring easier, less stressful and more organised by making communication and coordination between those who share the care as easy as a text message.

NHS Volunteer Responders

As mentioned in SCIE's Safeguarding adults during the COVID-19 crisis, the number of volunteers has reached 750,000. Members of the public can sign up quickly and easily to become NHS Volunteer Responders, and can be called on to do simple but vital tasks such as:

- delivering medicines from pharmacies
- driving patients to appointments
- bringing them home from hospital
- making regular phone calls to check on people isolating at home.

NHS Volunteer Responders is not intended to replace local groups helping their vulnerable neighbours but is an additional service provided by the NHS.

GPs, doctors, pharmacists, nurses, midwives, NHS 111 advisers and social care staff will all be able to request help for their at-risk patients via a call centre run by the Royal Voluntary Service (RVS), who will match people who need help with volunteers who live near to them. Some charities will also be able to refer people to the service.

Giving World

Giving World is a national charity offering help to local hubs and councils in the response to COVID-19, including providing essentials to the people in the medically shielded groups and other vulnerable people free of cost. They are also providing patients and front-line staff with changes of clothing and personal hygiene products. For more information visit their website.

Donate food and sanitary products

Food banks say they have seen a decline in donations and therefore may be unable to keep up with demand in the coming weeks.

You can check for which items are most needed at your local food bank or at Trussell Trust.

Do not spread panic or misinformation online

It is important that you do not share unverified information and guidance online or with the people you support.

New social media guidance has been drawn up by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH). This has been endorsed by the culture secretary, Oliver Dowden, who asks people not to reply to or share misinformation on social media, even if they want to point out it is wrong. This is to avoid spreading it further, as any engagement can place it in other people's timelines.

Instead people are being asked to report misinformation to social media platforms and group administrators, and to share official information such as from the NHS, the government, Public Health England, and SCIE's COVID-19 hub as much as possible to push it into social media algorithms.

If you hear misinformation from people you are supporting, please make sure you support people to access the verified information from the above sources.

Advice for people who receive direct payments

Think Local Act Personal (TLAP) have created a page where information and advice for people who receive direct payments including documents about testing PAs/key workers.
However, there is updated guidance published (21/04/2019) from the the Department of Health and Social Care for individuals who receive care and support through direct payments. It states that LAs and CCGs can help direct payment holders get personal protective equipment (PPE) where the fund is not already set up to pay for this, and for people or their families who have COVID-19 their PA is eligible to receive PPE.

The Q&A provides practical advice for direct payment holders, and may not answer all questions but is intended to by a live document and updated regularly.

Testing for COVID-19 for PA

Additionally, further specific guidance has been issued that invites personal care assistants (PAs) – both health and social care – to register for coronavirus testing where they are self-isolating due to experiencing coronavirus-like symptoms or because a member of their household has symptoms.

The guidance includes the following practical documents:

- **An invitation for personal care assistant to register for a test** if they meet the conditions, to be issued by their employers upon request.
- **A slide pack** that contains information and detail on the process for employers and personal care assistants on testing.

Information for people who have visual or hearing impairments

Specific information can be found through the following links:

- **British Sign Language materials related to coronavirus** (PHE Campaign Resource Centre)
- **COVID-19: five ways RNIB services can help** (RNIB)
- **FAQs from blind and partially sighted people** (RNIB, Guide Dogs, Visionary, VICTA, Fight for Sight, Vision UK and the Macular Society)
- **Coronavirus resources** (Signhealth)
- **British Sign Language video with advice and guidance on handwashing** (NHS Inform, Scotland)

Working with people who are experiencing financial hardship

We know that many people will feel the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic financially and people may seek advice on how to access extra support.

Firstly, you may have access to local funding and many councils are setting up or increasing their financial hardship funds so it would be worth exploring this locally.

Local and national charities may also be able to support with grants or goods or advice on benefits, debt and finance. For example, Macmillan offer small grants and financial advice for people affected by cancer and Citizen Advices cover all aspects of finances for anyone such as benefits, debt and mortgage holidays.

There are also national schemes and advice below:

- **COVID-19 council tax hardship fund** (GOV.UK)
- **COVID-19 council tax hardship fund letter** (GOV.UK)
- **Coronavirus and claiming benefits** (Department for Work and Pensions)
- **Coronavirus: what it means for you and what you’re entitled to** (Money Advice Service)
- **Guidance on economic abuse during COVID-19** (Surviving Economic Abuse)
- **Domestic violence and abuse: Safeguarding during the COVID-19 crisis** (SCIE)
- **The NRPF Network has developed a factsheet on councils’ roles and responsibilities** for supporting people with no recourse to public funds during the pandemic.

SCIE Support

SCIE's COVID-19 hub contains more relevant information including safeguarding, Mental Capacity Act and infection control. It can be used when working and supporting people who are isolated or vulnerable through COVID-19, and can also be shared with community groups.
[link 74] | https://www.sightadvicefaq.org.uk/
[link 75] | https://signhealth.org.uk/resources/coronavirus/
[link 77] | https://www.macmillan.org.uk/_images/Money-worries_tcm9-326184.pdf
[link 81] | https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/
[link 83] | https://survivingeconomicabuse.org.uk/resources/