

## **Short Breaks guidance for parents and carers relating to COVID-19**

Government guidance is very clear that children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities should stay at home with their families during the current period, where it is safer for them to do so.

For some children with Education, Health and Care plans (EHCPs), parents and schools will decide that the child or young person's needs can be met best if they continue to attend school. The Local Authority is working with schools, early years settings and colleges to make sure that all children and young people who need to attend, are able to attend. Children who may need to attend school include those who have EHCPs, other vulnerabilities, and those whose parents are key workers,

Government guidance recommends that households stay at home for most of the day except for a maximum hour a day exercising or shopping. It also recommends social distancing - keeping a distance of 2 meters from people who are not part of the household. This means that families should not be having visitors who are not part of their household.

A very small number of families have children with significant support needs that are usually met through a short breaks provider coming into the home. This might be to help the parent by providing sitting services or personal care for the child/young person. Other families may receive support from a provider to take the child/young person out of the home to access community activities.

During this unprecedented time, the local authority is advising parents/carers to consider whether it is absolutely necessary to their own and their child's needs to have a short breaks provider visiting their home.

If this is necessary to keep the child safe and to prevent carer burnout, the [Well Child charity has produced some useful advice](#) on how to manage carers coming to the home. The charity also has [some advice on keeping children with complex needs safe](#) at this time.

If it is essential for a child's wellbeing that they continue to be taken out of the home by a befriending service provider, both the child and provider should follow government guidance on handwashing and social distancing. The provider should ensure the child/young person is only out of the house for the one hour a day permitted and is kept away from crowded areas to allow for social distancing. The worker should avoid taking the child on public transport.

If any member of the household or the service provider suspects they have the virus, they should immediately self-isolate and follow all government health guidance.

The local authority is working with short breaks providers to make sure they can stay in business and where possible continue to provide their usual short breaks services to families once the Coronavirus emergency is over. Across Children's Services we are working with teams and our commissioned providers to identify children, young people and families who require additional support. Some of our commissioned providers will help us to stay in contact with you via phone or digital platforms to see if there is anything specific we can support you with.

### **Overnight short breaks**

The vast majority of disabled children are safest staying within their own household. Children and young people who receive a residential overnight short break may continue to do so only if the parent/social worker and provider agree that the child/young person will be safer continuing to receive this than being looked after full time at home. However, at this time overnight short breaks have been reduced to 2 nights per week (on days that they are open). Please contact Targeted Disability Team if you usually access this and are struggling.

### **Frequently Asked Questions.**

#### **Can we still have the targeted direct payment for a befriender during these times?**

In the current circumstances we can't agree to you using your direct payment for a befriender unless there are exceptional reasons, however we will support you to look at other ways this payment could be used. You could bank your hours and use them later in the year to pay for a befriender, or you could use your money to buy equipment for your child to use at home to keep them occupied or help them get some exercise, while you get a break.

Ideas for using your direct payment: what about a television subscription, equipment such as games, sensory toys, I-pads, 3D Virtual stuff, big tent for the garden / indoors, cookery equipment, indoor mini gym equipment.

These are just some ideas, if you are not sure what you can spend your money on, contact the Targeted Disability Team duty social workers on 01942 828468.

#### **My child has a specialist short break payment can we still have this payment as my Personal Assistant says she is happy to carry on?**

If the only way your child's needs can be met is through help from a Personal Assistant, yes, as long as you are following [Public health England guidance](#).

Sessions may need to take place in the home. Also, look at the [guidance from Well Child charity](#).

### **If my Personal Assistant is not happy to continue can I still pay them?**

If you employ your own Personal Assistant, you could ask them if they are willing to bank the hours they normally provide for use later in the year. You could pay your PA for the next month while you both review the situation. The PA may be entitled to [government support](#) while they are not able to provide short breaks services to families.

The local authority is working with agencies that provide personal assistance and befriending services for families, to make sure they are able to continue offering services once the Coronavirus situation is over

### **Will my short break service still continue?**

This will depend on the service you are receiving. If your service provider is not able to operate at this current time we may consider a another form of support or if a direct payment would be an appropriate temporary alternative to meet your family's needs. For instance, if you normally receive a befriending service to take your child to the gym, we could look at providing a direct payment for play or exercise equipment that your child can use at home.

Alternatively, you could bank the hours you usually receive from the short breaks service and have them once life is back to normal.

### **If the child/young person is accessing school would this count as a short break offer rather than banking hours?**

Many schools will be able to offer some support to children of key workers and vulnerable children, including disabled children over school holidays, so check with your child's school as this may provide the break you need currently.

If this is not the case the local authority would recommend you banking the hours until the current restrictions are lifted.

### **Can I use my direct payment to pay a member of my family?**

The government guidance on minimising contact with people outside your household also applies to family members. It is especially important for older people, such as grandparents who are over 70 or who have underlying health conditions to stay and home.

You could use your direct payment to buy play equipment which other members of the family who live in your household could use with your disabled child.

### **What about playschemes? If they are not running will there be an alternative?**

Schools can continue to offer support to vulnerable children and children of key workers over school holidays. Speak to your school about what is available.

Hop Skip and Jump and Leisure for All after school clubs and holiday clubs are not currently operating due to government guidelines, however there will still be some outreach support offered where needed. This however is limited, and the offer is dependent upon individual circumstances and needs, and in line with government guidelines and when safe to do so. Again if you feel you need to access this support then please contact Targeted Disability Team.

### **What help will I get through this time?**

- Regular updates / resources through the Councils website and Facebook page.
- We will be launching a website this week with lots of advice and guidance and we also have a specific number (01942 489018) you can call if you need any welfare support for example food banks, other financial support.
- Connection with other parents though the [Wigan Parent Carer Forum](#) and the [Facebook Page](#).
- [SENDIASS](#) will continue to offer advice and guidance on the telephone and other platforms
- [Wigan Council COVID-19 support and updates](#):
- Please visit [Wigan Council's #bekind website](#)- if you require any additional help and/or support.

### **My child is bored at home. How can I keep them occupied?**

All schools are sending out resources to pupils who are at home and putting resources on their websites. Special schools are also sharing resources on their websites that are suitable for primary and secondary pupils with special educational needs.

The council is currently co-ordinating contact with families through council teams, our commissioned providers and Schools.

Encourage your child to keep in touch with their friends and relatives through phone calls or social media following the national on-line safety advice.

### **I was due for a short breaks review - how will this now happen so I can continue to get short breaks support?**

Your social worker or key worker will contact you to arrange for your support to continue if you still need it until they can arrange for a proper review. They may need to change the type of support you receive depending on your individual circumstances.