

Short Breaks and Covid-19

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The public health measures set out by the Government are intended to minimise the spread of Covid-19 (coronavirus). All of us (including foster care households) and those with whom we have contact must be kept safe. In practice, this has meant that opportunities for time away from family life have been greatly reduced. As we enter into the winter months, arranging much needed breaks from family life continues to be challenging.

Short breaks are a recognised element in fostering, and have been referred to as “respite” or “child care” (see ‘Note on terminology’). Short breaks refer to situations where children in foster care are looked after by trusted adults on a temporary basis for a short period of time that can vary from hours to days, or sometimes weeks. These arrangements can be a crucial part of an approach that supports and sustains relationships, maintains the stability and security of the placement for children, and enhances family well-being.

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (All Tiers) (England) Regulations 2020

These Regulations come into force on 2 December 2020 and continue until midnight on 2 February 2021. They apply to England only. All previous English health protection regulations are revoked, save for transitional provisions. Every local authority area in England has been designated Tier 1, 2 or 3. These are listed on the gov.uk website and the coronavirus websites of each local authority. There is a specific exception to the restrictions that allows for short breaks for looked after children to take place across all tiers. The regulations state that it is permitted to:

Place or facilitate placement of a child by social services in the care of another person, either temporarily or permanently.

This exemption follows on from Government guidance issued on 16 November, which addressed short breaks.

All looked after children and all disabled children and their families can continue to make use of respite care (also known as short break services). ([Department for Education](#))

We anticipate that short breaks will continue to be allowed under any further restrictions. All children get the very best care when carers have ongoing support, rest and space for reflection. Children enjoy time out when arrangements are made with trusted adults and when their views and feelings are at the forefront of decision making. Everyone can benefit from periods apart when arrangements are well managed and relationship-based.

Many factors have to be considered within a balanced and detailed risk assessment when making such arrangements, taking into account the risks associated with Covid-19 to the households involved. These need to be subject to review if and when circumstances change. The situation continues to evolve and we will endeavour to keep our advice updated.

Note on terminology

The term “respite” has been challenged by the disability rights movement and young people who have had experience of care (see [Language that Cares, 2019](#)). Recently, the [Scottish Care Review](#) has committed to ending its use, noting that young people strongly object to the term: ‘respite has felt stigmatising and scary’ (p.10). In response to these critiques, we have chosen to use the term “short break” in this paper. The term “respite” continues to be used in regulations and regulations.