|  |
| --- |
| Early Years settings and their staff form part of the wider safeguarding system for children. In conjunction with other agencies, they play a vital role in safeguarding children during the current emergency arrangements due to COVID-19. During this period, settings retain their statutory duties to safeguard children and must adapt their existing processes to the current situation to ensure they continue to operate effectively. As well as supporting safeguarding, regular contact with children and families will enable settings to provide important support, address any relatively minor concerns before they escalate and to maintain relationships. This will be of value as part of re-opening arrangements as settings will be able to identify any additional interventions required to support children when they return.Settings should have in place a child protection policy which sets out interim safeguarding arrangements. Settings will decide the means and frequency of contact with children and families and identify staff to undertake this. All staff should understand the importance and purpose of this contact as part of their role to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children. More detailed guidance is provided below.The purpose of this guidance is to provide a framework to support settings in fulfilling their safeguarding responsibilities during the closure period. The framework is based on the [Essex Effective Support](https://www.essexeffectivesupport.org.uk/) windscreen of need and, at each level, it defines cohorts, sets minimum expectations for settings in terms of actions and then identifies key partners and agencies with which settings could / should be linking to access support.  |
| **Level of need**  | **Cohort** | **Setting type** | **Education setting intervention** | **LA support / intervention and support from other agencies** |
| **UNIVERSAL** | All children registered at an EYS setting | ChildminderNurseryPre-school | * Assess the needs of all children, risk assessing as appropriate *(see notes below and Appendix C)*
* Provide information to all parents / carers about how to support their child’s early learning at home
* Agree arrangements for regular welfare check *(method, frequency and record keeping – at least weekly, for all pupils, more frequently for those with higher need)*
* Ensure there is a mechanism in place for regularly reviewing risk assessments and plans, which should include a system to identify children who become vulnerable
 | Early Years Education Partner *(previously EYFS Adviser)*[Essex Child & Family Wellbeing Service](https://essexfamilywellbeing.co.uk/)Voluntary agencies*Details of local agencies who could provide a service are available in the C&FH* [*Directory of Services*](https://www.essexeffectivesupport.org.uk/media/1138/directory-of-services-01042020.pdf) |
| **ADDITIONAL** | Children with additional need (for example, medical, mental health, SEN, behavioural, CWD, those working with Family Solutions or with other vulnerabilities identified by the setting)Children with EY Pupil Premium eligibilityChildren in receipt of Free Early Education Entitlement funding for 2-year olds (FEEE2)Children in receipt of Early Years inclusion fundingChildren with a sensory and / or physical impairment (without an EHCP)Children who are privately fostered / subject to Special Guardianship Order (SGO) / recently adopted / recently returned home from CareNew starters Families with English as an Additional Language (EAL)Children from a Traveller family | ChildminderNurseryPre-school | * Provide information to all parents / carers about how to support their child’s early learning at home

*(where applicable, personalised to meet any additional needs – this may include a One Plan for children with SEND)* * Agree arrangements for Welfare check *(method and frequency)*
* Consult with C&FH
* Organise a virtual TAF (Team Around the Family) meeting, where there are concerns about a CYP and a multi-agency approach is felt helpful
* Request support via [Essex Effective Support](https://www.essexeffectivesupport.org.uk/)
* Implement transition planning for starters and leavers, including school readiness with all relevant settings
 | Early Years Education PartnerEngagement Facilitators[Essex Child & Family Wellbeing Service](https://essexfamilywellbeing.co.uk/)[Essex local offer](http://www.essexlocaloffer.org.uk/)[Essex One Planning](http://www.essexlocaloffer.org.uk/listing/one-planning/)[Essex Team Around the Family Support](https://www.essexeffectivesupport.org.uk/early-help/) Essex Physical and Sensory Impairment Specialist Teaching Service [Essex Welfare Service](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.essexwelfareservice.org.uk%2F&data=02%7C01%7C%7C9c807afff6374d2c27e408d7d7b9bda9%7Ca8b4324f155c4215a0f17ed8cc9a992f%7C0%7C0%7C637215065107284008&sdata=FFVL6e7RUyi6dh%2Fb2smrxAzvyWf%2Fr5WrS392PNKYSPY%3D&reserved=0)Inclusion PartnerVoluntary agencies*Details of local agencies who could provide a service are available in the C&FH* [*Directory of Services*](https://www.essexeffectivesupport.org.uk/media/1138/directory-of-services-01042020.pdf) |
| **INTENSIVE** | Children with a significant medical or emotional wellbeing needChildren living in a household where there are significant risk factors (for example, domestic abuse issues, parental substance misuse, neglect issues)  | ChildminderNurseryPre-school | * Provide information to all parents / carers about how to support their child’s early learning at home

*(where applicable, personalised to meet any additional needs – this may include a One Plan for children with SEND)* * Agree arrangements for Welfare check *(method and frequency)*
* Agree and review risk assessments and plans with other agencies involved (this may occur through existing meeting schedules)
* Organise a virtual TAF (Team Around the Family) meeting, where there are concerns about a CYP and a multi-agency approach is felt helpful
* Consult with C&FH
* Request support via [Essex Effective Support](https://www.essexeffectivesupport.org.uk/)
 | Critical Incident ResponseEducation Psychology Service[Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service](https://www.nelft.nhs.uk/services-ewmhs/)[Essex Child & Family Wellbeing Service](https://essexfamilywellbeing.co.uk/) [Essex Family Solutions](https://www.essexeffectivesupport.org.uk/family-solutions/)[Essex local offer](http://www.essexlocaloffer.org.uk/)[Essex One Planning](http://www.essexlocaloffer.org.uk/listing/one-planning/)[Essex Team Around the Family Support](https://www.essexeffectivesupport.org.uk/early-help/) Inclusion Partner |
| **SPECIALIST** | Child in Care (CIC)Child subject to a Child Protection (CP) PlanChild subject to a Child in Need (CIN) Plan | ChildminderNurseryPre-school  | * Provide information to all parents / carers about how to support their child’s early learning at home

*(where applicable, personalised to meet any additional needs – this may include a One Plan for children with SEND)* * Agree arrangements for Welfare check *(method and frequency)*
* Agree a personalised Education offer that sets out the elements of the EHCP that can reasonably be delivered during the closure period *(this must be agreed in partnership with parents / carers)*
* Agree and review risk assessments and plans with other agencies involved (this may occur through existing meeting schedules)
* Attend virtual CIN meetings (where applicable) and provide reports as required
* Attend virtual Statutory Reviews for CiC (where applicable) and provide reports as required
* Link with Virtual School Headteacher
* Attend virtual CP Case Conferences, Core Group meetings and CIN meetings (where applicable) and provide reports as required
 | Critical Incident ResponseEducation Psychology Service[Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service](https://www.nelft.nhs.uk/services-ewmhs/)[Essex Child & Family Wellbeing Service](https://essexfamilywellbeing.co.uk/) (for CiC)[Essex Family Solutions](https://www.essexeffectivesupport.org.uk/family-solutions/)[Essex local offer](http://www.essexlocaloffer.org.uk/)[Essex Team Around the Family Support](https://www.essexeffectivesupport.org.uk/early-help/) Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Team (MARAT)Virtual School |

This guidance is based on and compliant with key documents from the government as part of its response to COVID-19:

* [Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance on vulnerable children and young people](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people)
* [Coronavirus (COVID-19): safeguarding in schools, colleges and other providers](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers/coronavirus-covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers)
* [Actions for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus outbreak](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures)
1. **Risk assessments, welfare checks and plans to safeguard all CYP**

The needs of all children should be assessed (‘RAG rated’ – Red / Amber / Green) according to need and potential vulnerability. Risk assessments should be undertaken and appropriate plans to support and track children put in place. Children should be allocated to a member of staff, who will be responsible for welfare checks, according to the needs of the individual childd. There should also be a named ‘back-up’ member of staff, to cover absence in the event of sickness or leave of the lead member of staff.

Settings must use their knowledge of children and families to determine the method and frequency of contact with parents / carers and what constitutes an adequate welfare check. Many parents / carers may not answer a call from an ‘anonymous’ number or may just be unwilling to engage with the setting. Email contact can be useful, as some parents / carers may be more willing to use this as a means of communication and it provides an audit trail. In terms of frequency, at least weekly is advisable and parents / carers should understand this is part of arrangements to safeguard and support all children *(Appendix D and E).* Many settings will have arrangements in place to support learning activities at home and will be reassured where they are having regular contact with parents as part of those arrangements. Where there is regular engagement in this respect, settings may feel a fortnightly welfare check is adequate.

Risk assessments and plans will be fluid, with children potentially moving between categories. For example, many children for whom there have been no previous concerns may be at higher risk without the protective factor of attending a provision, so it is important there are systems in place for identifying those who become vulnerable (hence the at least weekly welfare check). Equally, some children will have vulnerabilities and be deemed therefore at higher risk although, once there are support mechanisms in place, they may be categorised as being at a lower level of risk. (This support may include a TAF multi-agency support plan, specialist service provision in relation to physical, emotional or mental health, extended family or community-based support). COVID-19 will start to impact on families in many ways potentially and it is important there is a mechanism for any concerns, stresses or bereavements to be identified so the setting can respond at an early stage and engage other agencies as required. It is important that assessments and plans are regularly reviewed to ensure they meet current circumstances and need.

Where other agencies are already involved, risk assessments and planning should be a joint activity so the approach and interventions can be co-ordinated. There may be children where other agencies are involved, but they do not have a social worker. Settings have the flexibility to offer these children a place on site (if they are deemed vulnerable), but this decision should be underpinned by a risk assessment which is contributed to by other professionals involved.

Where other agencies are not already involved, settings may want to consider how they could build capacity to support some children and families, using the [Directory of Services](https://www.essexeffectivesupport.org.uk/media/1133/directory-of-services.pdf) or linking with partners (the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service for example) to adopt a ‘Team Around the Family’ (TAF) approach to support. Such discussions and subsequent reviews could be held as ‘virtual’ meetings, so there is a more formal process in place, where this may be required. Further information on the TAF / Early Help process is available [here.](https://www.essexeffectivesupport.org.uk/early-help/)  Settings may also wish to seek advice from the Team Around the Family Support Officer [(TAFSO)](https://www.essexeffectivesupport.org.uk/media/1113/tafso-poster-aug-19.pdf) and can make contact by emailing: TAFSO@essex.gov.uk

In guidance issued to Social Care the government refer to decisions being made in the spirit of the following principles:

* child-centred - promoting children’s best interests
* risk-based - prioritising support and resources for children at greatest risk
* family focussed - harnessing the strengths in families and their communities
* evidence informed - ensuring decisions are proportionate and justified
* collaborative - working in partnership with parents / carers and other professionals
* transparent - providing clarity and maintaining professional curiosity about a child’s wellbeing

It is advisable that settings apply the same principles to their own risk assessments, planning and response.

1. **Risk assessments to inform decision on whether vulnerable CYP or those with an EHCP should be in school**

The governmental guidance on supporting vulnerable children states that local authorities, nurseries, schools, special schools, colleges and other training providers should undertake a risk assessment to establish the individual needs of each child with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan. This assessment should incorporate the views of parents / carers and will inform the decision about whether they should continue in school or college, or whether their needs can be safely met at home. The guidance also states that leaders of educational settings and designated safeguarding leads will know who their most vulnerable children are. Settings therefore have the flexibility to offer places to children who are “on the edge” of receiving support from Social Care. As with other vulnerable children, risk assessments should drive the decision making on this, undertaken in conjunction with any other agencies involved.

In partnership with special school Headteachers, the local authority developed two pro forma risk assessments to support schools in making these considerations.  The first *(Appendix A)* is more detailed and likelier to apply where the child has more complex needs such as underlying health conditions.  The second *(Appendix B)* is still comprehensive but would be more applicable where other needs are the challenge.  Where the child has a social worker or if there is involvement from a health professional, they should be consulted.  Governmental guidance on SEND risk assessment is available [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-send-risk-assessment-guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-send-risk-assessment-guidance)

1. **What to do if parents / carers do not respond to welfare checks**

Settings should have informed all parents / carers of safeguarding arrangements, so they are expecting a welfare check and understand the reason for this. Whichever method is used to ‘check in’ with parents / carers, there should plans in place for action to be taken where the family does not engage or respond.

Where parents / carers do not respond to a welfare check, all ‘reasonable’ attempts must be made by the setting to establish contact. If contact by phone or email has not been successful, the setting may feel a home visit is required. Any such visit must be risk assessed in advance and the member(s) of staff undertaking the visit should be involved in that process. Where a home visit is undertaken, staff members should not enter the home. Staff could phone the parent from outside the home to request sight of the child and to have a discussion with the parent, keeping a safe distance at all times.

Where attempts at contact with parents / carers have not been successful, settings should speak with any other agencies already involved with the family. If another professional is having contact with the family, this can be recorded as part of the welfare check process and should be written into the risk assessment and plan if agreed this is an adequate safeguarding measure. It is not the sole responsibility of the setting to undertake welfare checks, other agencies may be involved. However, the setting should be linking with other agencies as appropriate to ensure their role is reflected in the overall risk assessment and plan held by the setting.

Where all the above has been exhausted and the setting has attempted contact with the emergency contact numbers held for a child, there may be genuine concern that a child is at risk and the setting should respond accordingly, linking with other agencies as appropriate.

1. **What to do if a vulnerable child does not attend**

There is an expectation that vulnerable children will continue to attend educational provision, where it is appropriate for them to do so. Decisions on attendance will be based on discussions between settings, parents / carers, Social Care and other relevant professionals. Settings should make judgments with these partners about whether it is beneficial and appropriate for children to continue to attend on site. In doing so they will need to consider the balance of risk, including health vulnerabilities, family circumstances and the child or young person’s assessed special educational needs.

In circumstances where a parent does not want to bring their child to an educational setting, and their child is considered vulnerable, the social worker (where appropriate) and setting should explore the reasons for this, directly with the parent. Where parents are concerned about the risk of the child contracting the virus, the setting or social worker should talk through these concerns with the parent following the [advice set out by Public Health England](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19).

Local authorities and settings do not need to complete the usual day-to-day processes to follow up on non-attendance. Settings and social workers should be agreeing with families whether vulnerable CYP should be attending education provision and the setting should then follow up on any pupil that they were expecting to attend, who does not.

Settings should also follow up with any parent / carer who has arranged care for their child(ren) and the child(ren) subsequently do not attend. To support the above, settings should take the opportunity when communicating with parents and carers to confirm emergency contact numbers are correct and to ask for any additional emergency contact numbers where they are available.

Where a vulnerable child does not take up their place at the educational provision or discontinues attending, the setting must notify their social worker.

1. **What to do if there are concerns about a CYP**

The existing principles of safeguarding and child protection still apply, although they will need to be adapted to ensure they operate effectively during this closure period. Staff having contact with children and families during these emergency arrangements (either with a child in the setting or while they are at home) should continue to raise concerns in the usual way. As always, all staff must be aware how to refer a concern about a child

 and this should include how to record it and who to report it to. The Designated Lead or Deputy Designated Lead (DL or DDL) will then decide how to respond to the concern raised and progress it, liaising with other agencies as appropriate.

[Essex Effective Support](https://www.essexeffectivesupport.org.uk/)  brings together in one place the Essex Directory of Services, guidance and tools to support practitioners in their work with children and families across Levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the Windscreen of Need.

Where a child is at **immediate risk of significant harm**, the DL or DDL should call the Children and Families Hub on **0345 603 7627** and ask for the 'Priority Line' (or call the Police on 999). There is an ‘out of hours’ service (Mon-Thurs 5pm to 9am, Friday and Bank Holidays 4:30pm to 9am): Emergency.DutyTeamOutOfHours@essex.gov.uk or 0345 606 1212. **For non-urgent matters**, [Essex Effective Support](https://www.essexeffectivesupport.org.uk/) provides access to an online Request for Support portal.

The Children and Families Hub also offers a consultation line for professionals providing advice and guidance. This can be accessed by calling 0345 603 7627 and asking for the 'Consultation Line'.

1. **Children with a ‘shielding letter’**

Shielding is a measure to protect extremely vulnerable people (including CYP) by minimising interaction between those who are extremely vulnerable and others. This means that those who are extremely vulnerable should not leave their homes, and within their homes should minimise all non-essential contact with other members of the household. This is to protect those who are at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) from coming into contact with the virus. Any child who has received a shielding letter should not be coming on site and plans for these children should be discussed with other relevant agencies.

1. **Reviewing cases**

As stated above, it is important for risk assessments to plans to be regularly reviewed and updated to meet need. Where there is an existing mechanism for doing this, arrangements could be made to hold these virtually. Where there is not, settings should consider how cases are reviewed to ensure risk assessments and plans are fit for purpose. Discussions at reviews should be recorded and should include the rationale for decision making.

1. **Child Protection (CP) Records**

It is essential that robust recording of all safeguarding and child protection matters continues during the closure period and settings must have arrangements in place for this to be done effectively. All staff must be clear what and how to record and how to share this with the DL or DDL. All contacts with children and families (including attempted) should be recorded in the usual way. Settings should consider how any new information will be recorded and safely stored while access to the school site is not possible or practical. There are model templates on [Essex School Infolink / model templates](https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/Safeguarding/Templates_for_Reporting_and_Recording_Child_Protection_Concerns/Pages/default.aspx)  for reporting and recording, should settings wish to use them.

It is important the Designated Lead is able to access CP files. This may be to provide information to another agency when required or to inform decision making about how to progress with a particular case, or to review it. Where there is no access to an online system, or where the setting uses a paper file system, it is advisable to have a summary of concerns for each case (existing file chronologies may meet this need - these could be scanned or photocopies could be taken).

1. **Communication with parents / carers / children**

Settings should communicate to parents / carers what contact will be made (when, how and why), so there is a robust framework for welfare check procedures, understood by all staff and parents / carers. Parents / carers should be clear this forms part of the setting’s safeguarding arrangements during closure and be urged to support the setting by engaging in these arrangements. Settings should, as far as possible, confirm they have accurate contact details of all parents / carers (email and phone), including back-up emergency contact details (as is already required).

Where possible, staff should be provided with equipment for communication with parents / carers. Where this is not possible, there should be written advice for staff on how to use their own equipment safely. This should be based on the existing Code of Conduct but may need to contain additional information about how to withhold phone numbers, for example. If staff wish to come on site to undertake welfare checks instead of doing this from home, consideration should be given to whether this can be done in a safe way and the usual social distancing rules would apply.

Where considered appropriate (and for a specific reason, perhaps to support learning activities), settings may require certain staff to communicate directly with some children. To ensure this is done safely, there should be written processes in place to communicate to parents / carers and staff how this will operate. It is advisable to provide staff with written advice to support this and settings may wish to have a separate agreement signed by staff to cover this temporary arrangement.

Settings should ensure all parents / carers have contact details for key members of staff and, critically, that they are informed how to report a concern or seek support (including contact details for the C&FH). Key staff should have accurate ‘automatic replies’ set up on email systems, with clear information about how to access appropriate staff for safeguarding matters (bear in mind, this will need to reflect current staffing arrangements so there is a mechanism to cover potential staff sickness)

As under usual working circumstances, staff may encounter difficult and / or distressing discussions with parents, although perhaps more so during the current emergency situation. Headteachers should ensure there are adequate supervision arrangements in place to support staff wellbeing and to make all staff aware how to access support if they need to after contact with a parent (as set out in the ‘Covid Working from Home guidance previously circulated)

1. **Safeguarding / Child Protection Policy for closure period**

Settings should share an ‘interim’ child protection policy with parents / carers and staff – it would also be useful to publish it on the website.

**Appendix A – complex needs**



**Appendix B – additional needs**



**Appendix C - safeguarding risk assessment**



**Appendix D – letter to parents / carers (for children without a Care, CP or CIN Plan)**

Dear Parents / carers,

Settings are working closely with the Local Authority to offer a consistent and safe response to the current crisis. The health and safety of children and young people is everyone’s priority and I wanted to inform you about our ongoing arrangements to keep children safe during this period of closure.

To ensure we are able to continue to support you and your children, and as part of our safeguarding arrangements, we will be making regular contact with you during the closure period. This will be by phone, email and / or home visits. All children have been allocated a ‘lead worker’ (*use your own title here*) and they will be your main point of contact during this time.

*(Insert your own arrangements, taking into account the guidance above)*

We understand how worrying it is for you during this time and we will do everything we can to continue to support our children and families. It is vital that you support us in arrangements going forward and we will keep you informed of any important changes. Meanwhile, if you need to contact the school, you can do so by *(insert your own arrangements here)*

**Appendix E – letter to parents / carers (for children with a Care, CP or CIN Plan)**

Dear Parents / Carers,

Settings are working closely with the Local Authority to offer a consistent and safe response to the current crisis. The health and safety of children and young people is everyone’s priority and I wanted to inform you about our ongoing arrangements to keep children safe during this period of closure.

The government has advised that Early Years settings should be accessible for any child with a Social Worker. As part of our ongoing safeguarding arrangements, we will continue to work with other partners (as we do now) to support children and families. This will include making regular contact with you during the closure period. This will be by phone, email and / or home visits. All children have been allocated a ‘lead worker’ (*use your own title here*) and they will be your main point of contact during this time.

*(Insert your own arrangements, taking into account the guidance above)*

We understand how worrying it is for you during this time and we will do everything we can to continue to support our children and families. It is vital that you support us with these arrangements going forward and we will keep you informed of any important changes. Meanwhile, if you need to contact the school, you can do so by *(insert your own arrangements here)*