

## Moving Children During Covid



The reintroduction of tighter restrictions has once again complicated the position for social workers and others making decisions about whether a child should move between households, for example to progress plans to move to an agreed permanent placement. Emergency legislation and guidance do not provide detailed instructions about how to manage the complexities involved. Although social workers are unable to refer to any definitive set of rules, and must make decisions on the individual circumstances in each case, we do at least have the benefit of the experience of managing similar situations in earlier stages of the pandemic.

It remains the responsibility of the social worker to undertake a risk assessment to determine the most appropriate plan for the child – and if the child’s legal status requires it, to present this to the children’s hearing or court. Public Health Scotland has overall responsibility for advice in relation to what individuals can do subject to the particular restrictions in place in their area. In some areas, public health staff have strong links with the medical advisers who have particular responsibility for looked after children (and generally act as medical advisers to the fostering and adoption panels), but in many areas this is not the case. AFA Scotland’s Medical Advisers Forum has raised this issue with the government to try and improve the situation, but for the time being it will often be necessary for social workers to have separate discussions with both public health and their medical adviser.

AFA’s general advice to social workers needing to make decisions about contact and transitions, is that these must be based on the best possible risk assessment and a judgement about what is in the best interests of the child. This should include an assessment of the health risks associated with the plan for the child and those who care for them - and the social worker should seek the views of their medical adviser and other health professionals to help define these risks.

The social workers need to clearly record the reasons for any recommendation they are making on the basis of the risk assessment – for example about whether the child should move and if so how the risks are minimised. The courts or the children’s hearing may of course reach a different view but that does not alter what is required of the social worker in making what they see as the best possible plan.

Experience from earlier in the pandemic was that practitioners developed adapted risk assessment frameworks and found new ways of managing contact or children’s moves in the safest ways possible – for example agreeing periods of self-isolation in the run up to moves, doing as much outside as possible, and using technology as appropriate to build and sustain relationship. Examples of many of these approaches are included in the Covid updates on the AFA website at [Covid updates](#).

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