**Update from the Department of Education:**

We have received more information from the DfE on contact, respite and the capacity of the foster care system in England, which you can read below.

We are also currently liaising with the Governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland on this matter, and will provide you with more information as soon as possible.

**Contact**  
In light of the new rules around social distancing, all regular face-to-face contact between family members living in different households should cease. This is to prevent the spread of infection. Whilst we recognise that it is hard managing children’s expectations, it is very important for many children that they can continue seeing and speaking to their family, and particularly any relatives who may be unwell. Therefore, we expect all children in foster care to continue to be supported to maintain contact with their birth families and to be able to spend time with their siblings, in any way they can, for example through daily or regular phone calls, video chats, the use of social media platforms or other means. We would only expect face-to-face contact to be taking place, in person, in the most extreme cases, for example, the death of a relative. Foster carers will need support to help children to keep in touch. We know that lots of local authorities and fostering service providers are exploring new ways to help families to stay in touch and will look to share good practice in the near future.

**Respite**Given the Government’s advice around social distancing, respite for fostering households will cease for the foreseeable, unless in extreme cases where the stability and continuity of the placement is at risk. We recognise that this will have financial implications for some respite carers. However, we believe that those individuals have valuable skills that could be put to use elsewhere in the system given the current demands on capacity, either as additional support for foster families, or as emergency carers for example. We would encourage respite carers to approach their agencies to see how they can be most useful and for fostering services to draw upon the experience and skills of respite carers when looking at how they can continue to best support children and their foster families.

**Capacity in the system**We want fostering services to be prepared in case they need to provide more fostering placements. We would encourage all fostering providers to be thinking creatively about how they can meet any additional demand. For example, they should consider where existing fostering households may have the capacity and willingness to offer new or additional placements, including respite and emergency carers. In addition, they should consider whether foster carers who have recently stopped fostering as a result of personal or environmental factors, such as work pressures or retirement, could come back into the service temporarily. The Department for Education is looking at the regulations around temporary approvals for foster carers to understand whether there are ways to make this process quicker and easier.'

As always, please keep checking our website for updates, information and advice too.

[www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/coronavirus](http://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/coronavirus)