**Warrington Children's Services Procedures Manual**

**Interim Guidance for Arrangements for children to have Family Time (contact) with parents and connected persons**

Warrington Children’s Services have a Procedure for approving and planning Family Time. <https://www.proceduresonline.com/warrington/cs/p_contact_parents.html?zoom_highlight=family+time>. This procedure applies to arrangements for children placed in foster and residential care to have family time with their parents, anyone with parental responsibility who is not a parent, siblings, any relative, friend or other person connected with the child.

This interim procedure covers:

1. Approving and Planning Family Time

2. Different Types of Family Time

3. Supervised Family Time

4. Review of Family Time Arrangements

5. Cancellation, Suspension or Termination of Family Time

We also have separate procedures for arrangements for social visits and overnight stays away with friends which staff/carers may agree, see Social Visits (Including Overnight Stays). <https://www.proceduresonline.com/warrington/cs/p_overnigt_stays.htm>.

There is also guidance available regarding frequency of family time within the context of permanence. <https://www.proceduresonline.com/warrington/cs/files/permanence_policy.pdf?zoom_highlight=permanence#search="permanence>".

**Covid-19**

On the 23rd March 2020 the Prime Minister Boris Johnson gave a directive that placed the UK on a police-enforced lockdown in order to manage the impact of the coronavirus outbreak. The Prime Minister ordered people only to leave their homes under a list of "very limited purposes". Therefore a decision was made by Warrington Borough Council that face to face contact between children in care and their families could not be arranged until the lockdown had been lifted. This decision was not made lightly and we recognised that our children in care and their parents would be affected. We agreed that face to face contact should be replaced by alternative contact, such as telephone calls, skype, facetime and letters etc. We agreed to review our position once the lockdown is lifted.

**Covid-19 Updates**

On **1 June 2020** amended regulations provided an exemption to the general requirement for social distancing as follows:

* To continue existing arrangements for access to, and contact between, parents and children where the children do not live in the same household as their parents, or one of their parents. (Regulation 7 of the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020, as amended).

On the **10 June 2020** the Government announced that it was starting to lift restrictions in relation to who people could meet outside of their households. This was in recognition of how difficult it has been for people to be cut off from their family and friends in recent months.

In England, there are 2 ways that you can do this:

* Meeting outdoors in a group of up to 6 people with those you do not live with, whilst observing social distancing guidelines and keeping at least 2 metres apart
* Single adult households – in other words adults who live alone or with dependent children only – can form a ‘support bubble’ with one other household. All those in a support bubble will be able to spend time together inside each other’s’ homes, including overnight, without needing to stay 2 metres apart.

Following the above advice Warrington Borough Council will start to re-introduce family time as follows:

PLEASE NOTE A FAMILY TIME RISK ASSESSMENT MUST BE COMPLETED PRIOR TO FAMILY TIME COMMENCING AND PARENTS MUST SIGN AN AGREEMENT.

THIS MUST BE SIGNED AND AGREED WITH YOUR MANAGER PRIOR TO ANY FAMILY TIME TAKING PLACE.

1. In cases where a parent lives alone and their child / children are placed with a Family & Friend Foster Carer – they can form a ‘support bubble’ – but only if the Family & Friend Foster Carer agrees, and no other child in placement is negatively affected.

Previous contact arrangements must be considered. Therefore, this may not be appropriate if contact was previously supervised at the Family Time Centre. The safety and well-being of our children should remain paramount at all times.

1. In other cases, where UNSUPERVISED contact in the community had been previously agreed, and the Foster Carer / Residential Home Manager are in agreement, contact can take place outdoors. No-more than 6 people can come together at once. This includes any supervisor assessed as needed. All attendees must follow current social distancing and remain 2 metres apart.

1. In any case which falls outside the above sets of circumstances, and following completion of the Family Time Risk assessment, there are exceptional reasons why it is deemed in the interests of the child concerned for alternative family time arrangements to be made. This requires the consent of the Foster Carer/Residential Home Manager and the written approval of the Head of Service.

We will not be opening the Family Time Centre until further guidance / instruction is received from the Government or Department of Education.

Please be aware that if the local authority shares parental responsibility for the child in question we have a duty to promote reasonable contact (family time) under section 34 Children Act 1989. If there is a defined contact order made by the courts we can only vary its terms by agreement with parent, failing which we must seek an order of the court. Legal advice must be taken urgently in these circumstances.

If a decision is taken to suspend contact/ family time (which must be taken following assessment and management approval) for more than 7 days, legal advice must be sought as it may be necessary to apply to court.

If the local authority does not share parental responsibility for the child in our care then any arrangements for family time must be made by agreement with parents or anyone else with parental responsibility for the child. If agreement is not forthcoming then you must discuss the matter with your manager urgently and seek legal advice.

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