

Helping and Protecting Babies and Young Children



Briefing

Introduction

This briefing focuses on helping and protecting babies and young children. We would welcome this being used to promote discussion at team meetings.

Everyone involved in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in North Lincolnshire is working extremely hard due to the unprecedented challenges to support the most vulnerable children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These unprecedented times can create additional pressure across society, which we know presents heightened levels of risk for some children and the different needs of babies and young children, as well as children with special educational needs and disabilities, who may not have verbal communication abilities and/or be independently mobile. It is especially important that these children continue to receive the help and protection that they need.

The COVID-19 situation foregrounds the importance of sharing information and providing early help and protection in a timely way.

Learning from serious case reviews / child safeguarding practice reviews highlights that preparation for parenthood needs to involve both parents and ensure that fathers are given the same advice and support as mothers and that this covers practical and emotional aspects of caring for a new-born baby and throughout their early years. Also professional curiosity especially about members of a child's household including hidden or unknown males and family dynamics are important considerations for practitioners.

National Context

The national Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel have indicated that serious incident notifications with a COVID-19 related context have been primarily for children under one years old for physical abuse, with domestic abuse as a significant feature.

The Department for Health and Social Care have highlighted concerns over increasing incidents involving babies and that pressures on families of new babies have increased and risks have amplified.

The Children's Commissioner has produced a report [Childhood in the time of Covid. \(September 2020\)](#) that sets out the key ways in which children's lives have been impacted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The report outlines:

Early years

In England 1,688 babies are born every day, meaning over 270,000 children have been born since the pandemic began in mid-March... many new families will have faced significant reductions in support.

Public health guidance has meant reduced contact with family, friends and informal support networks, as well as changes to formal support services.

Babies, toddlers or children with certain communication needs cannot engage virtually...

Face-to-face contact can be a vital time to pick up on additional needs and provide help, or to make a referral to other services. Many young children are living in circumstances which may make them vulnerable – estimates by CCO show that 379,000 under-fives live with parents suffering from severe mental ill health, and 145,000 are living with parents suffering drug or alcohol problems. We also estimate that 235,000 under-fives live in houses where domestic violence has taken place in the last year, clearly placing them at risk of harm, yet less than a quarter of these children are known to children's services. These difficulties are likely to have been exacerbated by the crisis, with signs that domestic abuse and poor mental health have increased, at the same time as opportunities for identifying these children were significantly reduced.

Local Key Policies, Procedures and Guidance

Helping Children and Families in North Lincolnshire 2020/24 Document - Children's MARS Policies and Procedures

In North Lincolnshire, our One Family Approach aims to create **a system that works for all children, young people and families** where we work together to provide and commission integrated services for children and young people.

Our ambition is for children to be **in their family, in their school and in their community**. As partners take a One Family Approach across North Lincolnshire, we want children, young people and families to be able to build upon their strengths and their resilience to find or be enabled to find solutions when things are not going so well. They should be able to access available information, advice, guidance and be enabled to maximise their potential and enhance their life chances. We want all children and families to have a sense of belonging and equality of opportunity and through our integrated working, we will address inequalities and enable those more in need to achieve positive outcomes. Where there are significant concerns, we want children, young people and families to be able to access swift, creative and flexible help so they can remain independent. We will protect children and young people with an aim to build resilience and help them live within their family, attend their school and be a part of their community.

This **One Family Approach - Helping Children and Families in North Lincolnshire 2020/24** sets out how services support children, young people and families to participate, find help online and in their networks and communities, to be resilient, stay safe and independent. This includes a key role for the three statutory partners – **Police/Clinical Commissioning Group/Council** - and other relevant partners on how we **safeguard** children.

We want children, young people and families to be supported by a workforce that is resilient, confident, competent and with authorisation to do what they think is the right thing to do without escalating children and families unnecessarily through a range of organisational systems and referral processes when the day to day contact with trusted professionals can make the difference. We will listen to families, work to build upon the child and family's strengths, help them find solutions and only when necessary consult with others to seek assurance, check they're doing the right thing and continue to support the child and family. We want to create equality of opportunities by acknowledging inequalities and removing barriers and we will prioritise services to our most vulnerable children and young people so they have fair and equitable opportunities to be the best they can be, irrespective of their background and circumstances. We will develop an integrated workforce, one that works with the whole family and where we reduce unnecessary duplication of professionals involved with a child and family. We will do so by implementing an agreed

practice model, based in psychological approach to consultation and formulation where the initial contact both with the child and family and or professional is one of enablement.

When making a judgement about level of need and determining whether to make a referral to children's services, professionals should seek guidance and approval from their supervisor or safeguarding lead within their agency and follow any referral up in writing including sharing the early help assessment and plan. Where it appears that a child may be suffering, or at risk of suffering significant harm, Children's Services Single Access Point should be contacted immediately on 01724 296500 or via freephone number 0808 1689 667.

[Assessing Need and Providing Help – Children's MARS Policies and Procedures](#)

This policy and procedure underpins the Helping Children and Families in North Lincolnshire 2020/24 document and outlines that providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later and that early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years.

It outlines that where there are more complex needs, help may be provided under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (children in need) and where there are child protection concerns (reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm) the action that must be taken under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

[Multi-Agency Protocol for the Assessment of Injuries to Babies and Children - Children's MARS Protocol](#)

This protocol focuses on the assessment and management of injuries to **Non-Mobile Babies**, and **Children who are not Independently Mobile**. It outlines that the protocol is relevant to any practitioner operating within North Lincolnshire who may come into contact with babies, children and young people, particularly those who are not independently mobile, and who may be in a position to identify that such a baby or child has received an actual or suspected bruise, burn, scald or fracture.

Bruising is the most common accidental injury experienced by children, and research shows that the likelihood of a baby sustaining accidental bruising increases with increased mobility. The evidence suggests that it is extremely rare for a non-mobile child or baby, for example one that is not yet crawling, to sustain accidental bruising or injuries.

A bruise or an injury must never be interpreted in isolation and must always be assessed in the context of medical and social history, developmental stage and explanation given. Therefore, all such bruising should be **suspected** by practitioners to be an indicator of physical abuse and **thoroughly explored**.

It should also be borne in mind that other unusual marks on the skin or unusual sites of bleeding e.g. bleeding from the mouth in young children without a clear explanation may also be a sign of non-accidental injury and should also be considered in line with this protocol.

It is recognised that a small percentage of bruising in non-independently mobile babies and children will have an innocent explanation (including medical causes). However, practitioners should not make decisions in isolation, due to the difficulty in excluding non-accidental injury.

Published evidence suggests that children under the age of three and particularly those under one year, are most at risk of suffering physical abuse. However, practitioners are reminded that all children are vulnerable to harm and as such practitioners should remain alert to signs of abuse, unexplained or unusual injuries; or injuries where the explanation provided is not congruent with the injury sustained.

A decision that the child has not suffered abuse must be a joint decision and must not be made by an individual. Early recognition and action in such cases is key to preventing further injuries

This protocol requires that

- **all actual or suspected injuries to babies/ children who are non-mobile, OR**
- **where it is suspected that an injury to a child is non-accidental as a result of abuse or neglect**

should be subject to further enquiry in order to assess the risk of harm.

For this reason, any practitioner who identifies such an injury may be required to make a referral to Children's Services Integrated Multi-Agency Partnership via the Single Access Point, dependent on the explanation offered by parents or carers, and any decision made by the identifying practitioner in consultation with another professional about how the injury may have been caused.

Further Information and Resources

ICON

The ICON programme has been developed to help parents, carers and families understand that increased crying between 2 weeks and 6-8 weeks of age is normal and helps families cope with a crying baby. It also raises awareness of the dangers of a baby being shaken, something that can be triggered by a baby crying, and the devastating injuries this can cause sometimes resulting in death. The [ICON website](#) provides further advice for both parents and professionals working with children and families.

Relationship Matters

Relationship Matters is a partnership between the Children's MARS Arrangements and 14 other local authorities across the Yorkshire and the Humber region helping families who may be having relationship difficulties. The [website](#) offers families information, tips and help and what better time than now to take a look as the coronavirus has made big changes to the way in which we live our everyday lives.

Reducing Parental Conflict Training

Reducing Parental Conflict training is provided as part of the Children's MARS education and training programme. The training explores how to recognise the signs of parental conflict and highlights how to support parents in finding constructive outcomes. Further information on the course content and how to book is available through the [Children's MARS website](#).

The Blue Door

The Blue Door is a specialist service who provide support to anyone that has experienced domestic abuse and sexual violence in North and North East Lincolnshire and those who have experienced rape and serious sexual offences in Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire through a variety of advocacy, outreach workers, groups and programmes.

Office Telephone: 01724 841947

Helpline: 0800 197 47 87

Further information and referral forms are available from [The Blue Door's website](#)