

# Family Support and Complex Families

## Lone Working and Personal Safety Policy and Guidance

This document mirrors CSSW policy and guidance on lone working and personal safety, but has been updated during COVID to include links to FSCF-specific COVID policies, procedures and documents

Last updated 10 August 2020

To be reviewed no later than 1 November 2020

## 1. Introduction and purpose of policy

Social workers, personal advisors, family workers and mediators often work alone, travelling to visits and meeting families at their homes. Because of this, they may be vulnerable to risks to their personal safety.

As an employer, Camden has a duty of care to its staff to keep them safe whilst they are working and in FSCF, this duty is discharged by team managers and service managers.

This policy sets out how managers will make sure that all workers whose role involves direct contact with children and families have a safe working environment, working practices, and access to relevant training, resources and professional support to keep them safe and able to continue delivering social care services to families.

## 2. Policy framework

- Camden's corporate *Lone working and personal safety* policy sets out managers and employees' roles in identifying the risks related to lone working and taking action to eliminate or reduce them as part of a risk assessment. The policy is available at: <https://lbcamden.sharepoint.com/sites/intranet/HR/Pages/Lone-Working-and-Personal-Safety.aspx>
- This policy deals with managing risk to the personal safety of workers and sets out the steps FSCF managers and workers will take to ensure that workers are able to keep themselves safe whilst delivering a vital service to children and families.
- FSCF workers and managers should also refer to the CSSW "*Working with non-engaging, resistant and hostile families*" policy. This policy focuses on how service user aggression towards workers can negatively impact on engagement and service delivery, which can make it difficult for workers to continue to safeguard children. The policy also includes inter-agency strategies for continuing to work with families in order to keep children safe. <https://ascpractice.camden.gov.uk/early-help-guide/family-early-help-covid-guidebook/fscf-procedures-during-covid/general-policies-and-procedures/#main>

## 3. Roles and responsibilities

- **Heads of Service** are responsible for providing the overall structure and oversight of staff safety by:
  - putting in place a framework of policy and practice to ensure worker safety;
  - carrying out a risk assessment of working practice for the whole FSCF service and reviewing this as required;
  - ensuring policy and practice is implemented at team and service level across the FSCF Service;

- responding to any new risks to worker safety that may arise;
- monitoring the effectiveness of any preventative measures.
- **Team and service managers** are responsible for ensuring systems are in place within their team or service to keep staff safe by:
  - ensuring FSCF policy is implemented within their team or service and monitoring its impact;
  - ensuring a risk assessment is carried out cases allocated to the team or service where there are concerns for worker safety;
  - putting in place strategies and use of technology to keep workers safe;
  - responding to incidents and supporting staff;
  - reporting any new concerns around staff safety to senior managers.
- **Workers** are responsible for co-operating with managers to ensure their own safety by:
  - following divisional and corporate policy and guidance;
  - carrying out a risk assessment for cases allocated to them where there are safety concerns and updating risk assessments in line with this policy;
  - reporting incidents involving their personal safety to their manager or supervisor;
  - taking responsibility for their own safety.

## 4 Assessing and managing risk

Risk assessments should be carried out by managers in partnership with team members and should aim to identify all risks and look at ways of reducing risk.

### 4.1 Identifying risks

- There are specific risks relating to working alone and risks from the working environment as described in the *Lone working and personal safety* policy and which are addressed in the generic divisional risk assessment.
- Workers are also vulnerable to risk of threats and violence from service users and the case risk assessment template can be used to identify potential risks in relation to individual families.
- Teams should use team meetings to discuss any potential risks and agree what action the team will take to address these.

### 4.2 Carrying out case risk assessments

- Case risk assessments should be carried out by the allocated worker and their supervisor/manager on any case where the assessment (or incident) suggests

that there is a high risk to the safety of workers from the family. A discussion on risk should take place in supervision as soon as the case is allocated or the incident arises.

- When allocating cases, managers need to take into account levels of experience and the skills and expertise needed to work effectively with families that are known to be hostile or difficult to engage.
- The risk assessment should be completed following the child and family assessment or early help assessment when all information about the family and potential risk has been identified, or at any point where risk becomes apparent.
- The risk assessment should be recorded on the case risk assessment template available on MOSAIC and a warning note-stating '*Risk assessment completed*' on the Personal details screen. You can record a warning note via the *Person Details, Note* options on MOSAIC. Click on *Add* enter the text above and ensure to select Warning as a Type of Note.
- Workers who are carrying out work with a family in the absence of the allocated worker should refer to the case risk assessment to ensure they are aware of any specific risks attached to working with the family.
- Case risk assessments should be reviewed by the worker and their supervisor/manager at least every 3 months as part of the review of the child's plan and updated following any incident or when risk increases or ceases to be present. If the risk ends, the warning note should be removed. Use of case risk assessments will be overseen by senior managers as part of their strategic role in implementing this policy.
- If the worker and supervisor/manager disagree as to the nature or level of risk, the matter should be referred to the service manager for mediation.

### 4.3 Prevention

- Safety issues should be discussed at team meetings on a regular basis so that workers and managers are aware of any specific risks and to emphasise the importance of the team working together to ensure the personal safety of individual team members.
- Each team should have a system in place for recording the movements of family workers so that the whereabouts of workers is known to someone in their team at all times. This means that if workers fail to return from visits the alarm can be raised as soon as possible, and call cascade activated where necessary.
- Workers should keep colleagues informed when they are going out on visits and the team manager should ensure that a team member is available in the office at all times to monitor worker movements, take phone calls from workers who are working away from the office or raise the alarm where a worker fails to

return. The effectiveness of these measures will be monitored by service managers as part of their role in implementing this policy.

- Where workers are carrying out visits after office hours or are carrying out consecutive visits during the day, each team must have a process in place to allow them to report back to the manager or supervisor to confirm they are safe and well.
- All workers should be issued with mobile phones, and other safety equipment should be made available to workers to help them raise the alarm quickly depending on the level of risk identified.
- If there are high levels of concern, the manager or supervisor should consider joint visits to families. Any joint visit should be conducted with a more experienced worker or the worker's supervisor and families should be made aware of the arrangements beforehand.
- When meeting families in the Crowndale or in Childrens Centres, workers should be aware of the location of panic buttons in the meeting rooms and can summon support from Crowndale Security or the Childrens Centre Reception staff if needed. Workers can also request for Security to wait outside meeting rooms if there is a high risk of violence.

#### **4.4 Training and induction**

- Team managers should ensure that personal safety is included in the induction programme for new workers in order to ensure that workers are aware of their responsibilities under this policy.
- Workers should be informed of the team process for recording their whereabouts and reporting when working away from the office and should be made aware of how to report and record any incidents.
- Team managers should ensure that new workers are aware of the case risk assessment process as part of their induction. Workers should be able to assess risks and take any necessary precautions to avoid these risks.
- Managers and supervisors should ensure that new workers attend relevant personal safety training. Camden TDS runs a general personal safety and lone working training course for all Camden employees and it is an expectation that workers attend this course within their induction period.

#### **4.5. Emergency Call Cascade**

- Service and Team Managers must have a list of all staff telephone numbers (personal and work) with them at all times. This is kept centrally on the service call cascade. Service and team managers have access to their call cascade list at all times.

- Information on the call cascade is reviewed and updated to ensure it is accurate every 6 months.
- It is the responsibility of staff to inform their manager about any changes to their contact details for the call cascade, and to update all their personal details on the HR system.
- Staff must ensure that their family members have contact details for their office and line manager in the event a member of staff does not return home as expected or in the event of an emergency.

## 4.6 Mobile Phones

### In an emergency DIAL 999

- All staff must carry a fully charged, work issued mobile phone.
- Staff must not, under any circumstances, switch off their mobile telephone or set on silent, during home visits.
- All staff will save essential telephone numbers on their work mobile to make it easier to contact colleagues/managers in an emergency or threatening situation.

**However, MOBILE PHONES CANNOT BE DEPENDED ON ENTIRELY DUE TO POOR SIGNAL/CONNECTION IN SOME LOCATIONS.**

## 4.7 ID Badges

Staff should not display ID badges when travelling in the community to avoid identification by members of the public who may have a grievance about a council or health service.

# 5 Reporting and responding to incidents

- Workers must report any incidents of hostility or aggression that makes them worried about their personal safety, even if they feel able to manage the situation, as managers need to be able to monitor levels of risk.
- Managers should remain vigilant to the possibility that staff are experiencing difficulties and should also avoid making assumptions such as male workers being less at risk.
- Managers should also bear in mind that incidents are likely to be under-reported as workers may make assumptions about threats and violence being “part of the job”.

## 5.1 Procedures

- Workers should report all incidents to their supervisor and team manager immediately and the manager should meet with the worker for a debriefing.
- The manager should contact the service manager to decide on whether the incident should be reported to the Police and any further action to be taken against the service user. It should be made clear to families that aggression towards workers will not be tolerated.
- The manager and service manager should consider what information needs to be shared with the professional network and whether a multi-agency risk management meeting should be convened to obtain any relevant information about risks and devise a strategy for risk reduction.
- The worker should place a warning note on the MOSAIC case record stating that a risk assessment has been completed on the case but should put no further details. Other workers would then be expected to read the risk assessment and decide how to proceed.

## 5.2 Reporting incidents

- All incidents and accidents involving workers must be recorded and reported to the Incident Reportline Service so that Camden can monitor the safety of employees and take action to reduce workplace risks. All reports will be passed to senior managers to scrutinise as part of their strategic role in implementing this policy.
- Managers and workers should record details of the accident/incident on the LBC Incident Report Form available at: <https://camden.info-exchange.com/incidents>. The information is also on Essentials here [Reporting incidents at work \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
- A report can also be made by telephone on **02920 266787** or via HR on **6655 (option 2)**

## 5.3 Supporting staff

- Following incidents, it is important that managers offer emotional support as well as practical support to workers and provide staff with opportunities to discuss situations and how they are feeling. Managers may also refer staff to Camden's counselling service if this would be helpful.
- Team meetings, individual and group supervision should be used as a forum for discussing risks and allowing workers to explore issues in a safe environment. Managers should create a culture where worker safety is valued and workers feel able to raise issues knowing these will be taken seriously.

## 5.4 Ongoing threats on closed cases

- On occasion, a service user may continue to threaten workers with regard to cases that have been closed, often where there is conflict around decisions taken on cases, for example where a child has been removed from a parent's care.
- It is important that any threats are reported to the senior management team so that an appropriate response can be agreed. Team managers are responsible for ensuring that the worker involved receives support and carrying out a risk assessment and putting in measures to ensure their personal safety.
- If there is any media involvement this should be reported to the senior management team who will pass the information to Camden's press office on: [pressoffice@camden.gov.uk](mailto:pressoffice@camden.gov.uk) or call 020 7974 5717

## 5.5 Working with other agencies

- It is important that information about risks from service users is shared with the professional network as this will lead to a better quality risk assessment and more effective strategies for dealing with risk. Other professionals may have experienced threats and violence from families and this will help.
- Where there has been a serious incident involving a worker or other professional, and there is a high risk to professionals, the team manager should consider convening a risk management meeting to consider the risks and agree a strategy to ensure that professionals can work safely with the family.
- As it is vital that children are safeguarded, the professional network in social work cases must look at strategies to continue working with the family despite the risk to personal safety. This is covered in the *Working with non-engaging, resistant and hostile families* policy here <https://ascpractice.camden.gov.uk/early-help-guide/family-early-help-covid-guidebook/fscf-procedures-during-covid/general-policies-and-procedures/#main>

## 6 Safe working practice including COVID

### 6.1 Direct work with families

- Workers can be vulnerable to allegations being made against them by children and parents; this may arise for a number of reasons. Workers will be working with parents at a time of acute stress or their actions and words may be misinterpreted. There is also the risk of malicious allegations.
- Workers need to take steps to avoid this and should maintain professional boundaries at all times, working with children and families in a respectful way.

### 6.2 Communicating with families



- Workers should follow the following guidance in order to reduce the risk of threatening and abusive behaviour online and should refer to the *Multi-agency guidance for online safety* available here <https://ascpractice.camden.gov.uk/early-help-guide/family-early-help-covid-guidebook/fscf-procedures-during-covid/general-policies-and-procedures/#main>
- Workers must ensure they maintain professional standards of behaviour with regards to their use of social media and not use these as a form of communication with families or allow families to access their own social network sites.
- Workers should avoid using their personal mobile phones or email addresses when communicating with families and only use work telephones, email addresses and mobiles to contact them.

### 6.3 Risk assessment and COVID-19

The following procedures must be followed with regards to face-to-face and home visits made during the COVID 19 pandemic. The following section mirrors the advice provided by Camden and Islington Public Health.

- The FSCF face-to-face visits flow chart must be followed for all face-to-face work, whether in the home, in an alternative venue or in an outdoor space.
- Prior to visits being undertaken to families, family workers must complete a COVID family home risk assessment. This is the FSCF pre-visit checklist here <https://ascpractice.camden.gov.uk/early-help-guide/family-early-help-covid-guidebook/fscf-procedures-during-covid/face-to-face-visits-guidance-and-procedures/#main>
- All staff must also have an individual risk assessment completed prior to any face-to-face work, and this must be reviewed at least every 20 working days.
- As per the pre-visit checklist, face-to-face visits should not go ahead if it is known or suspected a member of the household has COVID 19, and arrangements should be made to carry out the visit remotely.

**If COVID-19 symptoms are observed in a family home or in an alternative venue when visiting, the following guidance provided by Public Health should be followed:**

#### **Immediate actions**

- Explain your concerns to the household and advise the unwell person to get a COVID test (online or by calling 119). Advise them to contact NHS 111 if they have concerns about their symptoms.
- Ensure you maintain a 2 metre distance from anyone in the household at all times, and wear a face covering at all times.

- The visit should then be terminated. Explain to the household that someone will be in touch to rearrange the visit. Wash or sanitise hands thoroughly immediately after leaving the household or venue.
- If there is an urgent need for the visit to be completed – and the rationale for why this visit is urgent must be determined with a supervisor or line manager before the visit - continue with the visit following the standard procedures recommended for a home visit to a household where someone has COVID symptoms. This means that you should keep a 2 metre distance from anyone in the household wherever possible. If it is not possible to keep 2 metre distance, wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds and then put on appropriate PPE (fluid resistant surgical mask, mask, disposable gloves and plastic apron). Wash hands thoroughly immediately after taking off PPE and again after leaving the household.
- It is extremely unlikely that a FSCF visit would be of such an urgent nature that the procedure in the bullet point above would be required. However as this is guidance from Camden and Islington Public Health, it is included in this document to cover such an eventuality.

#### **Straight after the visit**

- Family workers will call their line manager to report that there may be COVID symptoms in the home. They will tell their line manager whether they were at any time within 2 metres of the person with symptoms while not wearing a face covering and/or any additional PPE required by their individual risk assessment. The family worker should then return to their home and not undertake any further face-to-face work that day.
- The line manager will contact Public Health ([CIPHAdmin@islington.gov.uk](mailto:CIPHAdmin@islington.gov.uk)) if any concerns.
- The family worker does not need to self-isolate at this point (unless the person with symptoms has a positive test result). If the individual from the household tests positive for COVID, NHS Test and Trace will complete a risk assessment with the household, which will include an assessment of those who have been in close contact with them. If the risk assessment indicates the worker has been in close contact with the case, they will contact the service.
- Worker can continue to undertake their full work responsibilities, including home visits, unless contacted by NHS Test and Trace.

#### **Within 48 hours of the event**

- The family worker should make a follow-up telephone call to the household to check that they have arranged testing.
- The Line manager of the family worker to contact Public Health ([CIPHAdmin@islington.gov.uk](mailto:CIPHAdmin@islington.gov.uk)) if any concerns.

## **Appendix 1: Strategies for keeping workers safe**

***Workers should:***

- bear their own safety in mind when planning visits or work with families
- plan strategies for safety with their manager and other colleagues
- attend relevant personal safety training
- share information on risk with other workers, including professionals from other agencies
- keep personal contact details private and use only office mobile phones
- only carry out visits to families where hostility may be encountered during day light hours and never make a visit at the end of the working day or outside office hours
- consider making only joint visits with colleagues or other agencies
- make sure colleagues are aware of their location and what level of risk is present; the name of the family and exact location of the visit should be written into the workers calendar and managers calendar
- have a strategy in place to be followed in the event of not returning to or contacting the office after a certain time – this must be agreed in advance with their manager
- bring a fully charged mobile phone to summon help (see section 4)
- consider holding meetings at neutral venues or in the office
- always prepare for the eventuality of hostility
- not enter a property where there are clear threats, for example dangerous dogs
- make sure they have a clear exit from a property if they need to leave suddenly
- be aware of techniques to calm situations, such as maintaining eye contact and speaking evenly.
- leave as soon as there is any threat to their safety.

***Workers shouldn't:***

- blame themselves, accept the situation or take it personally
- get angry or overly confrontational with families
- ignore and/or fail to report incidents
- think they need to deal with the situation alone.

***Managers should:***

- include health and safety issues in the induction process for all new workers
- risk assess cases where there are concerns and monitor on-going issues
- have clear processes in place for workers going on home visits to report back
- use supervision to raise and deal with issues
- ensure workers attend relevant training and support.

## Keeping safe on the streets

- Avoid using mobile phones in public and keep lap-tops and valuables out of sight
- Plan your route to avoid looking “lost”
- At night, keep to well-lit main roads as far as possible
- Always be aware of what’s going on around you and avoid wearing headphones
- Keep car and bike keys to hand to make it quicker to find them
- Only use taxi firms that are approved by the Council and always sit in the back behind the driver
- If you are worried you are being followed, go into a shop or busy area and call for help.

## Keeping safe during visits

- Make sure colleagues know where you are going and what time to expect you back
- Find out as much as you can about the family you are visiting and any potential risk and complete the dedicated risk assessment on MOSAIC
- If the family is not well known, consider visiting in pairs or with a supervisor or manager
- On arrival, make a quick assessment of risk before entering the home; if you are not sure make arrangements to meet the family at an alternative venue
- On entering the home, make a note of the layout of the property and any exits
- Always consider your exit strategy and try to ensure your access to the exit is not blocked. Plan in advance how you can excuse yourself and how you can raise the alarm quickly

