



BRIEFING PAPER

Number CBP 8901, 21 December 2020

Coronavirus: Separated Families and Contact with Children in Care FAQs (UK)

By David Foster, Philip Loft

1. Introduction

This paper provides brief information in response to some key questions regarding the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on separated families, maintenance arrangements and access to children.

The paper is not intended to address the specific circumstances of any individual or family and suitably qualified legal advice should instead be sought.

Local restrictions should also be consulted. These can be found at the respective pages for [England](#), [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).

The paper addresses:

- Can children move between the homes of separated parents?
- Rules regarding children required to self-isolate
- Requirements to self-isolate when returning from abroad
- How should parents comply with a court-orders for contact?
- How are child maintenance payments impacted?
- Can I visit my child in care/residential home?
- My child contact centre is closed: What alternatives are being made?
- Where can I go for help and advice?

This is a fast-moving issue and the briefing should be read as correct at the time of publication.

2. FAQs

2.1 Can children move between the homes of separated parents (UK)?

[Local restriction tier 1-4 guidance](#) for **England** from 2 December 2020 (updated 19 December) states that exemptions from gatherings limits in all tiers include that for the

2 Coronavirus: Separated Families and Contact with Children in Care FAQs (UK)

purposes of “arrangements where children do not live in the same household as both their parents or guardians”. This includes moving between tiers for the same purpose.¹

In response to the initial UK Government [guidance issued in March](#), the President of the Family Division of the High Court (England and Wales) [noted](#) that the guidance does not mean that children must move between homes, the decision being one for parents to take after assessing their circumstances (bold original):

Government guidance issued alongside the Stay at Home Rules on 23rd March deals specifically with child contact arrangements. It says:

“Where parents do not live in the same household, children under 18 can be moved between their parents’ homes.”

This establishes an exception to the mandatory ‘stay at home’ requirement; it does not, however, mean that children **must** be moved between homes. The decision whether a child is to move between parental homes is for the child’s parents to make after a sensible assessment of the circumstances, including the child’s present health, the risk of infection and the presence of any recognised vulnerable individuals in one household or the other.²

The guidance from the Family Division has not since been updated.

Guidance issued by the Governments of [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#) states that where parents do not live in the same household, children can be moved between their parents’ homes.³

2.2 Children who are self-isolating (England)

Under [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(Self-Isolation\) \(England\) Regulations 2020](#), as amended, which came into force on 28 September 2020, if an adult is notified (other than via the NHS Covid-19 smartphone app) that their child has had close contact with somebody who has tested positive for coronavirus, the adult must “secure, so far as reasonably practicable, that the child self-isolates” for ten days.

A person subject to the self-isolation requirement must not leave their home except for a list of reasons specified in paragraph 2(3) of the [regulations](#) – e.g. where it is necessary to seek medical assistance. Visiting a parent whom a child was not living with at the time they were notified of the requirement to self-isolate is not specifically listed as a reason why a child self-isolating may leave the house.

In response to a Parliamentary Question in November 2020, the Department of Health and Social Care said that “if a child has been instructed to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace [...] where possible, the parents or guardians should arrange for a child to remain at the same address during their period of self-isolation”.⁴ Regarding joint-custody parents and an individual leaving self-isolation, the Minister, Nadine Dorries, [stated](#):

There are a limited number of circumstances where an individual may leave self-isolation, including where there is a need to fulfil a legal obligation or it becomes

¹ [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(All Tiers\) \(England\) 2020](#), Tier 1: Schedule 1, Part 1, Paragraph 1 and Paragraph (3)(25)(a); Tier 2: Schedule 2, Part 1, Paragraph 1(2) and 4 (22)(a); Tier 3: Schedule 3, Part 1, Paragraph 1(2) and 4(20)(a); Tier 4: [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(All Tiers and obligations of undertakings\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2020](#), Schedule 3A, Part 1, Paragraph 1 (2)(a) and Paragraph 2 (13)(a) and Part 2, Paragraphs 3, 4 and 6 (18)(a).

² President of the Family Division and Head of Family Justice [England and Wales] [Coronavirus crisis: Guidance on compliance with Family Court Child arrangement orders](#), 24 March 2020

³ [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus Restrictions\) \(No.4\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2020](#), Part 2 (4) (3) (e); Welsh Government, [Covid-19 alert levels](#); Scottish Government, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on travel and transport](#), updated 14 December 2020

⁴ Parliamentary Question 120834 [[Children: Coronavirus](#)], 25 November 2020

impracticable to remain at the original address provided for self-isolation. These circumstances may apply where there are legal arrangements governing the time a child spends with each parent. We do not offer advice on specific circumstances as each scenario is different for every family.⁵

If contact between a child and their parents is court ordered, individuals may wish to take specialist advice. Although it was published before the regulations above came into force, the [March 2020 guidance](#) published by the President of the Family Division of the High Court (cited in Section 2.1 and 2.3) states the following regarding situations where it is not possible to adhere to court-ordered contact due to self-isolation:

Where Coronavirus restrictions cause the letter of a court order to be varied, the spirit of the order should nevertheless be delivered by making safe alternative arrangements for the child. If it is not possible to maintain the child's routine due to illness or self-isolation, or non-availability of, or risk to, people who ordinarily support contact, the courts will expect alternative arrangements to be made to establish and maintain regular contact between the child and the other parent, for example remotely – by Face-Time, WhatsApp Face-Time, Skype, Zoom or other video connection or, if that is not possible, by telephone.⁶

Further information is provided in [guidance](#) published by Public Health England for contacts of people with confirmed coronavirus infection who do not live with the person.⁷

2.3 Children who are self-isolating after returning from abroad (UK)

Across the UK, unless an individual is arriving or returning from an exempted country or holds an exempted occupation, they must self-isolate for the ten days following their return and declare the address at which they will self-isolate. Individuals may also wish to consider court guidance on adhering to contact orders (see sections 2.2 and 2.4).

England

A list of exempted countries and occupations from the self-isolation requirement can be found at: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Travel corridors](#) and [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Jobs that qualify for travel exemptions](#).⁸

Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) [guidance](#) says returning individuals to the UK should go straight to the place they are staying to self-isolate. The DHSC guidance says individuals may only change their accommodation in a limited range of circumstances, including where “a legal obligation requires you to change address, such as where you are a child whose parents live separately, and you need to move between homes as part of a shared custody agreement”.⁹

The Department says individuals should “consider carefully whether your circumstances are exceptional circumstances that require you to leave your place of self-isolation” and should provide full details of each address where they are self-isolating on the [public health passenger locator form](#).¹⁰

⁵ Parliamentary Question 120834 [[Children: Coronavirus](#)], 25 November 2020

⁶ President of the Family Division and Head of Family Justice [England and Wales] [Coronavirus crisis: Guidance on compliance with Family Court Child arrangement orders](#), 24 March 2020

⁷ Public Health England, [Guidance for contacts of people with confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection who do not live with the person](#), 18 December 2020

⁸ Under [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, International Travel\) \(England\) Regulations 2020](#)

⁹ Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): how to self-isolate when you travel to the UK](#), updated 17 December 2020.

¹⁰ DHSC, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): how to self-isolate when you travel to the UK](#), updated 17 December 2020

Scotland

A list of exempted countries and occupations can be found at: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): International travel and quarantine](#).¹¹ The Scottish Government [guidance](#) says individuals may change the place they are isolating where “a legal obligation requires you to change address, such as if you are a child whose parents live separately, and you need to move between homes as part of a shared custody agreement”. If this happens, individuals should update their passenger locator form.¹²

Wales

A list of exempted nations and occupations can be found at: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Travellers exempt from Welsh border rules](#).¹³ Welsh Government guidance says individuals may change the place where they are isolating if “a legal obligation requires you to change the premises at which you reside for the purpose of an isolation requirement”. A passenger location form should be updated accordingly.¹⁴

Northern Ireland

A list of exempted countries can be found at: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Countries and territories exemptions](#), and exempted occupations at: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Jobs that qualify for travel exemptions](#).¹⁵ NI Direct says individuals may change their self-isolation location if “a legal obligation requires you to change address, such as where you are a child whose parents live separately, and you need to move between homes as part of a shared custody agreement”. Individuals should provide full details of each address where they will self-isolate on the contact detail declaration form.¹⁶

2.4 How should parents comply with court orders for contact (UK)?

In England and Wales, a child arrangements order is an order regulating where a child lives and when they spend time with each parent. Contact orders are the equivalent in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Background

Whenever a court makes or varies a child arrangements order, a “warning notice” is attached to the order itself warning of the consequences of failing to comply with it. A warning notice states that if someone breaches a child arrangements order, “the court may fine or imprison them for contempt of court, or may make an enforcement order or an order for financial compensation.” An enforcement order can require the person who breached the child arrangements order to undertake between 40 and 200 hours of unpaid work.

Under section 11J of the [Children Act 1989](#), however, a court can decide to not make an enforcement order when somebody fails to comply with a provision of a child arrangements order “if it is satisfied that the person had a reasonable excuse for failing to comply with the provision.” The Act adds that the burden of proof “lies on the person claiming to have had a reasonable excuse, and the standard of proof is the balance of

¹¹ [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus\) \(International Travel\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2020](#)

¹² Scottish Government, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): international travel and quarantine](#), updated 17 December 2020, ‘Self Isolation’

¹³ [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, International Travel\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2020](#)

¹⁴ Welsh Government, [How to self-isolate when you travel to Wales: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#), updated 12 December 2020

¹⁵ [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, International Travel\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2020](#)

¹⁶ NI Direct, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Travel advice](#)

probabilities.” The term “reasonable excuse” is not defined in the legislation or in the explanatory notes to the [Children and Adoption Act 2006](#), which inserted section 11J into the 1989 Act.

Failure to comply with a child arrangements order can be a serious matter. Someone considering doing so on the grounds that they had a “reasonable excuse” would be strongly advised to seek legal advice before doing so.

Compliance with child arrangements orders during the Coronavirus outbreak

England and Wales

The President of the Family Division of the High Court has issued [national guidance](#) for parents whose children are the subject of Child Arrangement Orders made by the Family Court.

This guidance states that parents, acting in agreement, are free to decide that the arrangements set out in a child arrangements order should be temporarily varied. Regarding situations where parents do not agree, the guidance states:

7. Where parents do not agree to vary the arrangements set out in a [child arrangements order], but one parent is sufficiently concerned that complying with the [child arrangements order] arrangements would be against current [Public Health England] advice, then that parent may exercise their parental responsibility and vary the arrangement to one that they consider to be safe. If, after the event, the actions of a parent acting on their own in this way are questioned by the other parent in the Family Court, the court is likely to look to see whether each parent acted reasonably and sensibly in the light of the official advice and the Stay at Home Rules in place at that time, together with any specific evidence relating to the child or family.

8. Where, either as a result of parental agreement or as a result of one parent on their own varying the arrangements, a child does not get to spend time with the other parent as set down in the CAO, the courts will expect alternative arrangements to be made to establish and maintain regular contact between the child and the other parent within the Stay at Home Rules, for example remotely – by Face-Time, WhatsApp Face-Time, Skype, Zoom or other video connection or, if that is not possible, by telephone.

The “key message”, the guidance states, should be that “where Coronavirus restrictions cause the **letter** of a court order to be varied, the **spirit** of the order should nevertheless be delivered by making safe alternative arrangements for the child” (emphasis original).¹⁷

Scotland

In Scotland, the Court of Session issued [updated general guidance](#) on 19 November 2020 on compliance with Family Court Orders during the coronavirus outbreak.

The guidance states that the arrangements of a court order should be adhered to, within the limits of the most recent Scottish Government guidance, unless both parents have agreed to alternative arrangements.

Regarding situations where parents do not agree, the guidance states (bold added):

Where there is a dispute about acting in accordance with a court order, parents should bear in mind that, if their actions are challenged by the other parent in court, the court will consider whether each parent has acted reasonably and sensibly in all of the circumstances of the case and the Government guidance in place at the time.

¹⁷ President of the Family Division and Head of Family Justice [England and Wales] [Coronavirus crisis: Guidance on compliance with Family Court Child arrangement orders](#), 24 March 2020

If there is any reason that a child does not spend time with the other parent or carer as set down in a court order, it is expected that alternative arrangements are to be made to establish and maintain regular contact between the child and the other parent safely. In such circumstances remote contact via FaceTime, WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom or other video connection or, if that is not possible, by telephone, should be facilitated.¹⁸

Northern Ireland

The Lord Chief Justice's Office has published guidance as [COVID-19 Guidance for Courts: Family proceedings \(All Court Tiers\)](#). This states that children should continue to travel between homes where possible and taking full account of Government and public health guidance. Guidance allows for temporary variations to contact orders without reference to a court (emphasis original):

CONTACT ORDERS under The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995

It is important that children should maintain their usual routine of spending time with each of their parents in compliance with a Contact Order unless to do so would put the child, or others at risk with regards to Government and Public Health Authority (PHA) guidance in effect at the time. Where Coronavirus restrictions cause the letter of a court order to be varied, the spirit of the order should nevertheless be delivered by making safe alternative arrangements for the child. If it is not possible to maintain the child's routine due to illness or selfisolation, or non-availability of, or risk to, people who ordinarily support contact, the courts will expect alternative arrangements to be made to establish and maintain regular contact between the child and the other parent, for example remotely – by Face-Time, WhatsApp Face-Time, Skype, Zoom or other video connection or, if that is not possible, by telephone.

Temporary variations to contact orders WITHOUT REFERENCE TO THE COURT can be made where parents agree to temporarily vary the arrangements of a contact order they are free to do so, and each should record such an agreement in a note, email or text message sent to each other and to their legal representative (if they have one).

Where parents do not agree and a party to the proceedings feels a **matter of contact requires a court determination** they may request a hearing by lodging the requisite Form HR1. On receipt of the form the judge will determine whether the matter can be dealt with administratively or will require a hearing. Where the judge determines a hearing is required the parties will be notified of the arrangements, date and time. It must be noted that new emergency legislation makes it an offence to record or transmit an image or sound which is being transmitted via audio or video live link.¹⁹

2.5 How are child maintenance arrangements impacted (UK)?

Broadly, there are three forms of child maintenance: informal (agreed between parents); court-ordered and statutory (organised by the separate Child Maintenance Service (CMS) in Great Britain or Northern Ireland). These are described in the Library Briefing [Child maintenance: Calculations, variations and income \(UK\)](#) (CBP-7770).

If child maintenance is paid under an informal agreement, then, in the first instance, any changes to payments would be between the resident and paying parent to discuss. If

¹⁸ Lord President, [Coronavirus crisis: Updated guidance on compliance with Court orders relating to parental responsibilities and rights](#), 18 November 2020. Initial guidance was made in March: Lord President, [Guidance on compliance with Family Court Orders](#), 27 March 2020

¹⁹ Judiciary NI, [COVID-19 Guidance for courts Family proceedings \(all court tiers\)](#), 23 October 2020, p4, from Judiciary NI, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

maintenance is made in accordance with a court order, individuals should seek qualified legal advice and refer to the contents of their specific order.

In **Great Britain**, regulation 34 of [The Child Support Maintenance Calculation Regulations 2012](#) states that adjustments to child maintenance payments for any paying parent will be made if their gross weekly income has changed by 25%. This remains the case during the Coronavirus outbreak.

On changes that should be reported to the CMS, CMS [Information for Paying parents](#) says it should be told:

- If you have lost your job
- If you are temporarily receiving no income while you are self-isolating during the outbreak of coronavirus
- If you are temporarily receiving statutory sick pay during the outbreak of coronavirus
- If child maintenance should no longer be paid because of a change in circumstances
- If you are adopting a child, or
- If you are reporting a bereavement

The CMS says it will “take action if child maintenance is not paid”²⁰ and “may begin collection action activity to recover any unpaid child maintenance”. The CMS will contact parents to discuss how this can be paid.²¹ If the paying parent used the Child Maintenance Service to calculate child maintenance but pays directly, the receiving parent needs to ask the service to take action.

It was previously confirmed by the Department of Work and Pensions that the CMS was accepting “verbal evidence of reduction of income but will revert to the previous standards when the crisis is over”, meaning action can be taken against parents “who abuse the change in the evidence threshold”.²²

On temporary changes to shared care, the CMS says:

If your shared care arrangements have changed temporarily due to coronavirus we will not be able to make any changes to the amount of child maintenance you pay. This is because this change in care arrangement is temporary.

If this change in care arrangements continues into a longer-term arrangement, please tell us as soon as you can.²³

The CMS has also said parents should expect delays in initial payments and in the time taken to make new arrangements with the CMS:

It is taking longer than usual to set up Child Maintenance Service cases because of coronavirus (COVID-19). [...]

The first payment is usually made within 12 weeks of making payment arrangements. Payments may take much longer because of coronavirus.²⁴

The Department for Work and Pensions said on 7 September 2020 that it was beginning to reinstate a full enforcement service, in consultation with its enforcement partners:

²⁰ Gov. UK, [Manage your child maintenance service case: If a parent does not pay](#)

²¹ Child Maintenance Service, [Paying parent information](#)

²² [Single mothers are losing out on child maintenance payments as a result of coronavirus](#), The Independent, 16 April 2020 (updated 13 July 2020).

²³ Child Maintenance Service, [Paying parent information](#)

²⁴ Gov. UK, [Manage your child maintenance service case: Overview](#)

Where payments have been missed we have asked parents to report the changes via the self-service portal. In order to ensure that receiving parents do not lose out in the long run, the Child Maintenance Service is updating cases with notified changes. Where payments have been missed the Service is taking action to re-establish compliance and collect any unpaid amounts that may have accrued.

Those found to be abusing the system are subject to the full extent of our enforcement powers and the Child Maintenance Service will pursue these, where appropriate.

The vast majority of CMS enforcement powers involve third parties, including Her Majesty's courts, enforcement agents and financial institutions. The COVID-19 crisis meant that these third parties had to pause business. The CMS is now beginning to reinstate a full service and remains committed to working with these key partners to establish how best to restart enforcement activity.²⁵

In **Northern Ireland**, the CMS guidance states that parents should inform the CMS if there is an increase or decrease of 25% or more in the paying parent's gross weekly income if they are on the 2012 statutory maintenance scheme.²⁶ The CMS has also said that "the Service will not be able to put child maintenance in place as quickly as usual, and may not be able to pursue missed payments."²⁷

The Northern Ireland CMS has confirmed that it is currently accepting verbal evidence of changes in income but action will be taken against those found to abuse the measure:

In the short-term, CMS will accept verbal evidence of a reduction in income and will prioritise loss of job changes over other changes in income. CMS will monitor the impact of this and will revert to the previous standards of evidence required for changes of circumstances as soon as possible.

In addition, CMS will also revise calculations, and pursue arrears and / or enforcement action against anyone who has abused this short-term measure once the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis has stabilised.²⁸

Further information can be found on the NI Direct page: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and Child maintenance services](#).

2.6 Can I visit my child in care/residential home (England)?

Under section 34 of the [Children Act 1989](#), where a child is in local authority care, the local authority must allow "reasonable contact" between a child and their parents, guardian, any person with parental responsibility or a named person who had previous care of the child. However, this can be halted for seven days if the local authority believes it necessary to safeguard or promote the child's welfare; the refusal is decided upon as a matter of urgency.

UK Government [guidance for children's social care](#) states that the Government expects court orders related to contact for children in care to be met, though there may be circumstances where this is not possible:

We expect that contact between children in care and their birth relatives will continue. It is essential for children and families to remain in touch at this difficult time, and for many children, the consequences of not seeing relatives would be traumatic. We expect the spirit of any court-ordered contact in relation to children in care to be maintained. However, there may be local or individual circumstances where face-to-

²⁵ PQ 84290 [\[Children: Maintenance\]](#), 7 September 2020; HC Deb, [CMS: Effectiveness](#), 19 October 2020

²⁶ NI Direct, [Changes Child Maintenance Services need to know](#)

²⁷ NI Direct, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and Child Maintenance Services](#)

²⁸ NI Direct, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and Child Maintenance Services](#)

face contact may not be possible, including where members of households are isolating or continuing to take precautions due to clinical vulnerability.

Contact arrangements should, therefore, be assessed on a case by case basis taking into account a range of factors, including the government's current [social distancing guidance](#) and [guidance on meeting people outside your household](#) and the needs of the child.

Under the current provisions for social distancing, there are exemptions from the 6-person limit for the purposes of 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. However, the 6-person limit will apply to meetings with other relatives. Therefore, it may be necessary for children and other friends and family to make alternative arrangements.

Where it is not possible for the usual face-to-face contact to happen, keeping in touch will need to continue to take place virtually. We would encourage social workers and other professionals to reassure children that this position is temporary. We would also expect foster parents and other carers to be consulted on how best to meet the needs of the children in their care and to be supported to facilitate that contact.

We recognise that some young children may not be able to benefit from virtual contact with their family, because of their age or other communication challenges. In these circumstances, local authorities should work with families to ensure that they can have safe face-to-face interactions, whilst still adhering to social distancing guidance or restrictions.

When considering the most appropriate ways for children to stay in touch with their families, social workers and carers should seek the views of children who may welcome different forms of contact, including less formal and more flexible virtual contact with their birth families.²⁹

Regulation 22(1) (contact and access to communications) of the [Children's Homes \(England\) Regulations 2015](#) has been amended in relation to children meeting friends, parents and relatives. It states that a children's home must ensure that there are suitable facilities to allow such meetings, and that, where meetings cannot take place face to face, facilities should be available to allow private meetings over the phone, video-link or other electronic communication method. The [guidance for children's social care services states](#):

Suitable facilities are to be made available within the children's home to enable such private meetings to take place.

As good practice, children and young people should be told why a face-to-face visit is not possible and be advised of their right to advocacy.

The use of virtual visits should be the exception and can be used as a result of public health advice or when it is not reasonably practicable to have a face-to-face visit otherwise for a reason relating to the incidence or transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). This could include in the event of local restrictions, self-isolation or social distancing advice due to coronavirus (COVID-19).

All uses of this temporary flexibility must be recorded, for example in individual case records, and those records should include the reasons why a virtual visit was necessary. Providers may also find it helpful to keep a separate collated record in which cases the flexibility has been used.³⁰

Concerning situations where a child in residential care needs to self-isolate, [guidance](#) states that arrangements should be made to determine where the child can be best and safely cared for:

²⁹ Department for Education (DfE), [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Guidance for children's social care services](#), 14 December 2020

³⁰ DfE, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Guidance for children's social care services](#), 14 December 2020.

If it is suspected or confirmed that a young person in residential care has become infected with coronavirus (COVID-19), it will be necessary for them to self-isolate.

[...]

Local authorities and providers should discuss the care planning arrangements to determine whether the child can be safely cared for at their home (the children's home), or whether alternative arrangements are required, for example, a temporary move to alternative provision, or a move of other children who are well to an alternative temporary placement. In all cases, we would hope that this could be done with the co-operation of the young person and their understanding of the significant risk of spreading infection.

[...]

As far as possible, arrangements for restrictions should be put in place with the consent of the young person and all professionals involved in the care of the young person are encouraged to explain how and why the temporary restrictions are being applied. The restrictions should last for no longer than is necessary and must be kept under careful and constant review.³¹

2.7 My child contact centre is closed: What alternatives are being made (UK)?

In **England, Wales and Northern Ireland**, Child Contact Centres are run by a variety of independent organisations that form the National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC). They deal with:

- Private law cases, where there is an agreement or court order made for supervised contact, and
- Public law cases, where a child is in the care of the local authority and a contact order has been made with respect to the child for supervised contact.

The NACCC is maintaining a [webpage on Covid-19](#). It reported that 46% of supported centres were open, and 31% were making plans to reopen, at 1 October 2020.³²

NACCC guidance issued on 21 December 2020 for **England** states that it expects Child Contact Centres to remain open, if they can take appropriate measures to ensure they are safe.³³

On those living in Tier 4 and travelling between tiers to use a contact centre, the NACC advises:

[...] People can travel for the purposes of child contact. However, individual centres will make their own assessments on this, which should consider the risks to children, families and staff. Centres may reasonably conclude that it is not appropriate to facilitate this in the short term.³⁴

NACCC Guidance issued for **Wales** on 22 October 2020 says centres are encouraged to "continue making individual assessments about measures and precautions" in line with Welsh and local government guidance. The NACCC says it is "acceptable for people to travel to and from contact centres in Wales for the purposes of child contact".³⁵

³¹ DfE, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Guidance for children's social care services](#), 14 December 2020.

³² NACCC, [Centre status update: 46% of supported centres now open with 78% of supervised centres open](#), 19 October 2020

³³ NACCC, [England local tiers- Take 2](#), 21 December 2020

³⁴ NACCC, [England local tiers- Take 2](#), 21 December 2020

³⁵ NACCC, [Coronavirus update](#), last updated 22 October 2020

In June, the NACCC said it was “recommending that centres make independent decisions about whether they feel able to re-open their services”. The guidance also says that “no centre should consider opening their services if they do not feel fully prepared or if doing so contravenes any local advice”.³⁶

The NACCC states that impacted members of the public should contact NACCC directly or a local contact centre to find out what services are available. Contact details for local centres may be found here: <https://nacc.org.uk/find-a-centre>.

In **Scotland**, parties should contact their local Contact Centre.³⁷

Contact Centres in **Northern Ireland** can also be contacted individually.³⁸

2.8 Where can I go for help and advice?

Anyone seeking to vary a court order should seek legal advice. The Library Briefing [Legal help: where to go and how to pay](#) provides further information.

The following charities and groups provide advice on family law and arrangements:

- [Gingerbread](#), a single parent’s charity: 0808 802 0925
- [Child Law Advice Service](#), providing an email service on [education](#) and [family law](#)
- [Family Rights Group \(England & Wales\)](#) for parents who have a social worker involved in their child’s life or require support for children’s services: 0808 801 0366
- [Cafcass](#) [Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service] (England), provide advice on co-parenting and child arrangements in relation to the Family Courts: 0300 456 4000
- [National Association of Child Contact Centres](#), provides advice to parents around child contact arrangements on 0845 4500 280 or via contact@nacc.org.uk
- [Scottish Child Law Centre](#), provides advice and information about children’s rights and law in Scotland, via advice@sclc.org.uk
- [Clan Childlaw](#), a legal and advocacy service for children and young people in parts of Scotland, on 08081290522
- [One Parent Families Scotland](#), offers advice to one-parent families, on 0808 801 0323 and info@clanchildlaw.org
- [Shared Parenting Scotland](#), a charity supporting separated families, on 0131 557 2440 and info@sharedparenting.scot
- [Families Need Fathers](#), a charity offering support to both parents, on 0300 0300 363
- [Gingerbread Northern Ireland](#): 028 9023 1417

³⁶ NACCC, [Coronavirus update archive](#), 15 June 2020

³⁷ Relationships Scotland, [Child contact centre services](#)

³⁸ Child Contact NI, [Centre locations](#)

About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email hcinfo@parliament.uk.

Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).