

October 2020

Dear Colleagues,

We are all aware of the impact that coronavirus is having on all our lives. Now, more than ever, 'Getting it Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC) needs to be at the heart of our practice and contact with children and their families. It is vital that we work together to provide support to children and families coming out of lockdown to ensure our children are safe. The Children's Commission GIRFEC Group has prepared a GIRFEC update for all staff during COVID-19. Please share this across all services, and with all staff, to ensure our GIRFEC systems and practices are clearly understood and reaffirmed during this time.

* Child(ren) is used throughout and should be taken to mean infant, child, young person and young adult.

How we work has changed and may change further. However, what we do remains the same. Everyone is busy, we were all busy before COVID-19. All practitioners need to continue to do what is required to ensure wellbeing and protection needs are identified and responded to appropriately. The rights of children do not alter during this pandemic, and nor do professional roles and responsibilities in relation to Getting It Right for Every Child.

How do we support our Vulnerable Children?

Face to face meetings and contacts have reduced but are still happening for those children and families we assess need to be seen. Social work, education, health visitors, school nurses, third sector and Police are contacting families and visiting them when required. COVID Guidance regarding Hubs has been developed they are being used by key workers and vulnerable families. Fewer places have been taken up by vulnerable families than was anticipated.

key workers' families are using them. However, not many of our vulnerable families are accessing this support. This means that the calls and face to face contacts being carried out are vital to assessing children and their families' needs.

Who are our Vulnerable Children?

Scottish Government is asking us to consider vulnerable children in 3 groupings: High risk Groups – Looked After Children, Children on the Child Protection Register or Children in need: Section 22, Children with existing multi-agency Child's Plans, and emerging or new concerns. The Falkirk definition of 'Vulnerable Children' has been agreed by the Child Protection COVID Action Group June 2020 as:

- Looked After Children including Kinship/ Foster care
- Child Protection register
- Section 22
- Multi-agency Child's plan (more than one agency)
- Children on health visitor additional, or vulnerable pathway (as per Daniel & Wassell definition)

Children in these categories should be being contacted regularly and these contacts should be planned and relevant information shared across service involved in the Team Around the Child (TAC) Meeting.

Team Around the Child Meetings/ Child Protection Core Groups

Lead Professionals should continue to coordinate and ensure Children's Plan are meeting the needs of children. Core Groups continue to meet and Team Around the Child meetings should still be happening where possible. These could be online, by phone – whatever method the child, young person and family find most accessible. Needs will likely change during this time and ongoing assessment and monitoring of existing child's plans must be taking place.

New/ Emerging Concerns

We are seeing a significant rise in wellbeing and child protection concerns due to the impacts of the pandemic on families and wider society. New stresses arising from changes to Early Learning and Childcare, school and business arrangements, family confinement and isolation alongside physical and psychological health impacts, could be a trigger for abuse and neglect. High stress home environments will increase the likelihood of domestic abuse. We must also be alert to signs that individuals or groups are using the pandemic as an opportunity for online, criminal or sexual exploitation of children. This is occurring at a time when children will be less visible to a range of professionals who are normally engaged with them and when services and practitioners working with children are under acute pressure.

The GIRFEC update will give more information but please remember to talk to children and families. Use the GIRFEC 5 key questions and National Practice Model: Wellbeing Wheel, My World Triangle and Resilience Matrix to inform your assessments. Talk to families about the pressures and work with them to identify needs and possible supports.

Established Falkirk GIRFEC and Child Protection Processes remain unchanged

Many of our roles will have changed or require to change as the pandemic continues. We are all being flexible and sometimes having to step out with our normal roles. Practitioner roles and responsibilities around GIRFEC continue. The GIRFEC update (attached) will help you to refresh your GIRFEC knowledge, and provide you with the tools to work alongside families. You can also find more information on the GIRFEC Falkirk practitioner pages – [GIRFEC Child's Plan](#) and [Child Protection](#)

Data protection law is not a barrier to proportionate information sharing with other agencies/services where the child or young person and their family are in agreement with this, or where there are real concerns about a child's wellbeing.

Talk to children, families and other practitioners

Be mindful of the impact of the changed circumstances on colleagues, partners, and service users. To this end please;

- Continue to have conversations with families and other professionals. Pick up the phone and talk to each other to discuss and share concerns, information, and discuss supports, what will be provided and by whom.
- Remember that any wellbeing concerns must be shared with the child or young person's named person.
- Remember that a formal meeting is not always required to ensure a child gets the support they need. But remember that the Child's Plan should still be being actioned and monitored.
- When arranging meetings please be attentive to, and understanding of, others' availability and access to technology

Do not work or make decisions in isolation: silo working benefits no-one, least of all our vulnerable children.

What are we asking you to do?

Now more than ever we need all staff to be up to date with GIRFEC processes and practices in Falkirk. The update is a summary of key GIRFEC messages and tools and should be a helpful reminder, or induction for new staff.

- Individual Practitioners – please read the statement and update to make sure you're up to date with GIRFEC in Falkirk.
- Team Managers - please put the statement and update on your team meeting agenda and discuss. How GIRFEC compliant is your team? What GIRFEC Learning and development would you like to see made available? Use the update as part of any new staff induction programmes.
- Service Managers - please ensure the update is included in any induction for new staff.
- Help inform Learning & Development Opportunities – The Commission GIRFEC and Commission Learning and Development groups plan to develop a suite of GIRFEC resources and materials. Let us know what you or your teams need.
girfec@falkirk.gov.uk

If you have any questions, please contact the GIRFEC group via the GIRFEC email above. Thanks for your continued commitment and hard work. Your ongoing partnership working is supporting children and their families during this really difficult time.

Yours sincerely



Robert Naylor

Chair of Falkirk Children's Commission/ Director of Falkirk Council Children's Services