

The Caledonian System

An integrated approach to address men's domestic abuse
and to improve the lives of women, children and men

Guidance for children's workers during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Background

Information gathered from across the world on the impact of Covid-19 indicates that domestic abuse rates continue to rise as the pandemic develops. Police reports from provinces of China indicate a tripling of domestic abuse incidents during the epidemic, Australia has seen the highest number of calls to domestic abuse helplines in the last five years, in Cyprus calls to domestic abuse helplines have risen by 30% - this pattern continues throughout the world (United Nations News, 2020) and Scotland is no exception. Safe lives (2020) report that a quarter of domestic abuse services have seen an increase in their caseloads as a direct result of the pandemic and Scottish Women's Aid have voiced their concerns about the severity of domestic abuse incidents increasing during lockdown. Cedar coordinators have noted that perpetrators abusive behaviour has changed at various stages throughout lockdown and that there has been a significant increase in fathers making contact with their children, in some cases where there has been no contact for several years. Caledonian women's workers have reported an increase in stalking behaviours and an increase in coercive controlling behaviours. These figures and reports may only be the tip of the iceberg in relation to reporting of domestic abuse incidents - it is likely to be many months before agencies gain a clearer picture of the impact that restrictions placed on society has had on victims experiencing domestic abuse.

In discussing the pandemic in relation to children, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres, stated that 'thankfully, children have so far been largely spared from the most severe symptoms of the disease, but their lives have been totally upended' (United Nations, 2020b). Given this, and the increase in domestic abuse perpetration, it is clear that all services supporting children need to be clear in their strategies to help children manage and heal from the trauma of this pandemic. Caledonian children's workers will continue to play a vital role in supporting children and their families who are involved with the Caledonian System through the pandemic and beyond.

Approximately two months into lockdown in Scotland, contact was made with each of the children's workers within the Caledonian System to gather information about the concerns of the workers, types of work that was being carried out, changes in practice and the learning from children. This document has taken this information into consideration and has been developed as a guide for children's workers whilst working through the pandemic and should be used to supplement existing working practices. This guide has been written in the phase one of the Scottish Government response to Covid-19 and clearly practice will evolve and develop as we progress through the pandemic. The guide is broken down into areas of work that emerged as themes during the telephone conversations with workers. A brief background to each heading is given followed by suggestions and tips to support children's workers navigate these areas.

The Caledonian central team encourage all children's workers to continue to share practice experiences as time goes on to ensure that we all support each other and are able to continue to provide an excellent service to the children and their families that are supported by the Caledonian System.



Role of children's workers during the pandemic

Many of the children's workers highlighted that their role and day to day duties had shifted significantly as a result of the pandemic and lockdown. Some workers noted that they had been repurposed/redeployed and as such were having limited or no contact with children linked to the Caledonian System, whilst others said that their role had shifted significantly to supporting mothers, and in some cases fathers, with direct work with children being significantly reduced as a result of the restrictions.

One of the aims of the Caledonian System is to keep children 'front and centre' of any work that is carried out. It is important to reassure workers that any intervention or support we provide to mothers, fathers, carers or other professionals *is* an intervention for children and as such regardless of current restrictions, we can still adhere to our aim of keeping children front and centre of the Caledonian System.

Tips

- When working with mothers (and in some cases fathers), help normalise their possible feelings of frustration/hopelessness/inadequacy at providing home schooling for their children. Acknowledge what an unprecedented situation we are in and that the vast majority of parents are likely to be feeling the same way. It's OK to say it is hard being with your children 24/7! Encourage caregivers to remain motivated to address the needs of their children – helpful tips can be found at: <https://www.parentclub.scot/topics/coronavirus>
- Encourage recognition of the positive steps that parents are taking to assist their children's learning at this time.
- Acknowledge and validate caregivers concerns and worries at having to become teachers almost overnight. Reassure them that they are in no way expected to replicate their children's classroom learning.
- Support parents to understand the platforms that schools use to provide learning to children. Many education establishments use 'Glow' to impart information to their students – helpful information can be found here: <https://glowconnect.org.uk/>
- Consider if you can help with providing basic items such as food and toiletry items.
- Help and encourage parents to establish and maintain routines and boundaries with their children. This could include getting up at the same time they normally would for school and getting dressed, having set times for school work and structured physical activity built into the day – also allowing time for play and



use of technology. Whilst parents may worry about excessive use of Play Stations and X-Boxes' during lockdown, it's important to remember that it is a platform that children can maintain contact with their friends over and can provide some 'normality' for children.

- When engaging with other professionals be mindful to ensure that the perpetrator's pattern of abusive behaviour is kept at the forefront of all conversations. If you become aware that a victim's parenting skills are being questioned, be sure to encourage all professionals to view the case through a 'Safe and Together' lens, i.e. by asking how his abusive behaviour is interfering with the family functioning and the mothers ability to care for her children.
- Maintain contact with appropriate professionals – schools can still be contacted as can other universal services.
- Maintain regular contact with your Caledonian men's and women's workers. Ensure that you are getting invited to client liaison meetings where there are children involved – even if you are not currently allocated to that child. Ask your manager for support with this if you are aware that you are not being invited to relevant CLMs. Consider sending out an e mail to your service reminding them that you should be invited to relevant CLMs.
- Be aware of abusive tactics employed by men adapting to lockdown situations. We have reports of men using contact they have with their children via video platforms to use this as an opportunity to gather information on women, by getting children to 'show' them around the child and mothers home. We also have reports of men stalking ex partners' through their social media activity, for example using posts in which women have expressed how hard parenting is at this time to question their parenting skills, and in one case seek legal advice to try and get the child removed from the mothers care. You could discuss the use of social media and platforms for video contact with mothers and take guidance from the COVID-19, Technologies, Tips and Techniques document (available on the Caledonian System's Knowledge Hub).
- Be aware that contact arrangements with children and their fathers may have changed. If the child's parents are separated, previous contact arrangements that previously worked well may have become more difficult. For example, schools not being able to be used as 'handover' points, or other family members unavailable to help with this due to shielding/self-isolating measures.

Trauma impact on children

A document produced by the United Nations highlights that whilst children might not be the 'face' of the pandemic, they are likely to be at risk of becoming the pandemic's 'highest victims' across the world (United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2020). This is



related to being victims of poverty, a learning crisis, and threats to their survival and health (ibid). Children in Scotland will not be exempt from this.

We need to be prepared to manage these potential impacts. We also need to recognise the very real and recent trauma that children will have been exposed to. Almost overnight they have had their sense of 'normal' taken away from them. Schools have closed, they are no longer able to see friends and family or go out and play and are confined to homes. Even for adults who are able to reason and make sense of the world lockdown conditions and the fear of the pandemic has been incredibly difficult to manage. For children who, depending on age and stage, may not have the ability to reason or understand the complexity of what is happening it is even more confusing and disruptive. The impact of this on child development should not be ignored especially in the context of their already traumatic experiences of domestic abuse. The Supplementary Violence against Women and Girls Guidance highlights the impact of the pandemic on children and can be accessed here: https://www.cosla.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/17762/COVID-19-Supplementary-VAW-Guidance-FINAL.pdf

Caledonian children's workers are in the position to be able to help children and their parents navigate the trauma that children may experience as a result of COVID-19. They can assist in promoting children's resilience by ensuring that a sense of safety and stabilisation is created and maintained for children. Children's workers have the knowledge and skills to promote the three building blocks of resilience for children which have been noted as:

- A secure base
- Good self esteem
- A sense of self-efficacy

(Gilligan, 1997)

Resilience

Using Daniel and Wassell's (2002) 'fostering resilience' model can help workers plan for and focus their work with children

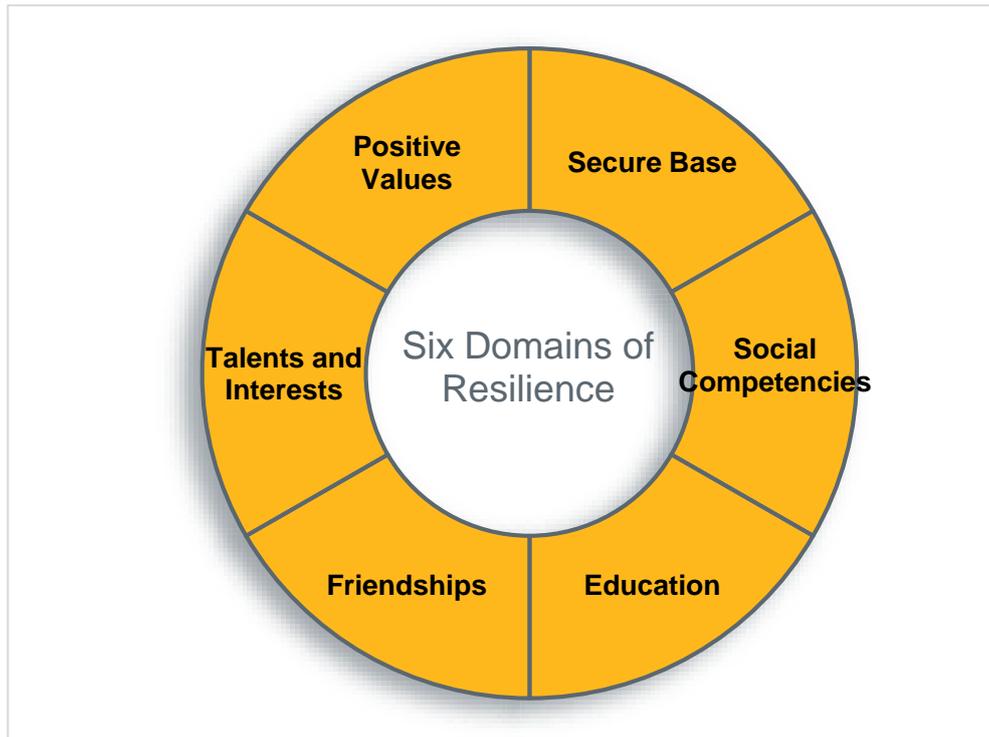


Figure 1 Six Domains of Resilience

Work can be focused on addressing each of the domains of resilience. Linking this to the 'getting it right for every child'(GIRFEC) wellbeing indicators (safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, respected, responsible, included) can also be useful and can help maintain a universal language that workers, children and their parents will be familiar with. The 'all about me' worksheets on the Caledonian knowledge hub can assist when considering a child's resilience. The ability to carry out this work with children whether it be during lockdown conditions (over the phone) or more relaxed social distancing measures should be age and stage appropriate. These domains can also be worked through with parents and caregivers. For example:

Secure base:

- Ask the child how they feel about their home environment, get them to describe the things that make them feel good about their home environment.
- Support fathers to recognise the impact of their abusive behaviour in light of the pandemic and the impact this may have on their child's feelings of safety – encourage them to recognise that they need to 'do more' to assist their children at this time.
- Support mothers to discuss any concerns that their children may have with them. These discussions can focus on the child's fear and concerns about the pandemic, concerns around their losses or fears about the future.
- Link to wellbeing indicators: safe, nurtured, healthy.



Education:

- Support parents to be able to deliver learning to their children, or assist parents to access support of local learning hubs if they meet the requirements. Advise parents of free online learning resources, such as BBC teach - available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach>.
- Ensure that the child has access to laptops/iPad – most schools offer loan of such items via their libraries. Check this out with the child’s school as schools are still offering services to vulnerable children and as such are still contactable.
- Link to wellbeing indicators: achieving, included, safe, respected, active, responsible.

Friendships:

- If having direct contact with children, ask how they are maintaining contact with their friends. If they are unable to maintain contact, giving them space to discuss their friendships can be helpful for children. For younger children you could get them to draw pictures of their friends and post them to you. For older children you could discuss their use of social media and how helpful they are finding it in maintaining contact.
- Link to wellbeing indicators: active, included, respected, responsible.

Talents and interests:

- Encourage children to talk about their talents and interests and provide opportunities to enable them to engage in activities associated with them. Can funding be accessed to support parents to develop their child’s interests? Encourage parents to continue to encourage their children to develop their talents despite current restrictions.
- Link to wellbeing indicators: included, respected, healthy, achieving, responsible.

Positive values:

- Encourage parents and their children to think about the impact of the pandemic wider than themselves. Is there anything they can do as a family to support others in their community? Could younger children draw pictures and put them up the window for others to enjoy? With parents support, can they assist a more vulnerable person at this time (social distancing regulations being adhered to)?
- Link to wellbeing indicators: respected, nurtured, included, safe, healthy.

Social competencies:

- Through work with children, workers can assess children’s social competencies and can help develop strategies to support both strengths, and areas to be



developed further. Assistance could be given to parents to help them develop an environment of social competence perhaps by helping children understand the wider impact of the pandemic – age and stage appropriate. As with any work, it is imperative that we do not overwhelm, scare, or burden children with additional worries so extreme care should be taken with this type of work.

- Link to wellbeing indicators: healthy, achieving, included, respected.

Additional tips

- Discuss children's mental health with them. Ask questions as to how they are feeling and how they are managing – age and stage appropriate. Discuss children's mental health with their parents and other appropriate adults in the child's life – make it a specific question that you ensure you ask. For younger children you could get them to draw pictures of how they are feeling and send them to you. If budget allows in your Local Authority, providing children with arts and crafts material to be able to do can help engage the child with the children's service.
- Explore what local schools are doing, some children may have the opportunity to return to school as vulnerable children, some schools are offering alternatives such as urban/forest school - however if this is available this must be a parent and child's choice rather than a professional's expectation that they attend.
- Be aware of mental health services available for children in your local area and provide details of these to parents and/or children if age appropriate.
- Provide opportunities for children to be able to discuss what they may have 'lost' as a result of the pandemic. This can range from having experienced the death of a family member, to having missed out on important life events such as last day of primary school or high school proms. Encourage children that it's OK and completely normal to be sad at missing out on things, even if they do not seem that important to other people – it's important to them and that's what matters!
- Explore the impact of not having the 'normal' transitions that children usually experience such as transitioning from primary school to high school – are they going to be separated from friends as they move to different school with no opportunities for 'goodbyes'? Explore how the children feel about going to high school without all the usual easing-in processes such as day visits and briefings.
- Encourage children and young people to consider what they might have gained in recent months. Have they enjoyed spending more time with their family, enjoyed having the time and space to get on with projects that are important to them, have they been able to spend more time doing things they enjoy, been able to teach parents and grandparents how to use social media? Engaging children in this type



of work may be part of a process that enables them to balance out the negative impact of the pandemic.

- Be extremely cautious about telling/discussing with children when ‘things’ may return to normal – we do not know what ‘normal’ will be or when a sense of normality will return and it is important to manage children’s expectations around this. Encourage children (and their parents) to focus on the here and now as these are areas that can be managed and this can provide a sense of safety and stability for children.
- Be transparent with children – advise them that we do not know all the answers regarding the pandemic and that everyone in the world is learning about this – however reassure them that everything possible will be done to ensure that they stay safe.
- Allow children the space to discuss their concerns about mixed messages that are given on media. Children may find it difficult to differentiate between the guidance given across the U.K. for example differing return to school dates between Scotland and England and they may need additional support to understand this. Children may be scared about having to return to school given the daily messages that are broadcast on TV about the importance of maintaining social distance.

Direct work with children

Almost all agencies that support children have had to change their working practices in light of the pandemic to ensure that the children of Scotland continue to receive appropriate support, care and protection. The Scottish Government has been working with a range of partners to try and mitigate the impact of the virus on children and young people and a £350 million communities support package has been put in place to support families and their children most impacted by the pandemic (Scottish Government, 2020). Advice is being provided to partner agencies on how to navigate supporting children through this time. Many of the children supported by the Caledonian System could benefit from this additional funding and it is imperative that we ensure that no child is forgotten, or denied access to services and funds that can assist them and their families at this crucial time. Caledonian children’s workers have been proactive in directing parents and caregivers to additional resources and continue to develop their knowledge about services and funding available in their local areas.

Despite lockdown restrictions, Caledonian children’s workers have been innovative in their approach to supporting and working directly with children and the following tips may be of assistance. These tips should be adapted appropriately during the easing (and potential re-tightening) of lockdown guidelines.



Tips

- Discuss the coronavirus with children – resource packs to assist in doing this are available at: <http://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/covid-19-coronavirus-resources-parents-carers/> and <https://beaconhouse.org.uk/covid-19-support-resources/> and <https://young.scot/campaigns/national/coronavirus>. In line with guidelines and age and stage appropriateness, this work could be carried out via the phone, or via direct contact upon easing of restrictions.
- Continue to ensure that you have consent to work with the child – e mailing or posting out consent forms with return envelopes (to your office) may be an option.
- Think about the best way to make and maintain contact with children and young people. Younger children are unlikely to be able to manage phone calls so you could send things in the post to them, or support their parents/caregiver to assist them to engage with you. Teenagers may respond best via text messages. When restrictions are relaxed you could go for socially distanced walks with children (appropriate consent being given). If using video platforms (from an office) to engage with children, think about the privacy issues around this – you can't see who may be standing next to the child or know if the call is being recorded by someone the worker cannot see. The same applies with phone calls – think about how much privacy the child or young person actually has to be able to discuss things openly with you.
- Safety and scenario planning – this is an area that should be covered with children as it is very likely that any safety and scenario planning that has already been done may not be appropriate – think about who their safe person may be, is that person approachable, or are they unavailable (such as the lollipop person) or could they be shielding and unavailable to the child? Consider this in your safety and scenario planning with children and with the support of their mother/caregiver, develop alternative plans where appropriate.
- For younger children, it can be helpful to get them to draw around their hands and then write on each finger one person they could go to for help. This exercise could be carried out over the phone (age and stage appropriate) and the availability of each person mentioned explored and perhaps discussed with the child's mother.
- Be aware that domestic abuse has an incredibly high media profile at the moment, with increased advertisements on TV and radio and on social media platforms. This may be frightening for children, and they may not know how to process this, it may trigger them or they might want to talk more.
- Many children will be incredibly bored at this time – encourage them to plan out their days in advance in order that they have some sense of control and sense of purpose at this time. It may be helpful to plan weekly sessions/calls for the same time each week to give some structure and to give children something they can look forward to.



- Social distance walks – consider if it is possible to have direct contact with children via walking with them. Could you support their parent to provide a packed lunch for them so you could picnic together at a suitable location?
- If children want to, support them to keep a ‘lockdown diary’. As we are in unusual times, this may be something that they can look back on in years to come.
- Maintain regular contact with children where appropriate in order that they can have a sense of stability about some aspect of support they receive from services.
- Be aware that children may become carers to parents who have COVID-19, or who may have to shield/self-isolate. Make opportunities to discuss this with children and be aware of support that is available to such children.
- Children of key workers can still attend school – discuss this with these children and provide them with the opportunity to discuss their frustrations around this (... but my friends don’t need to go to school and I do!!).
- Children, especially younger children can and often do engage in make believe to try and help themselves make sense of what’s going on around them. Support children with this and try to refrain from correcting them whilst trying to separate fact from fiction.
- It may be helpful for children to create a ‘feelings jar’ – where they write down how they are feeling each day. These feelings could be taken out the jar and discuss with you at your session with them. Parents could also be encouraged to support their children with this exercise.

Including fathers

As well as holding fathers accountable for their abusive behaviour it is a fundamental component of the Caledonian System to include fathers (where appropriate and safe to do so) in their children’s recovery and growth from their domestic abuse experiences. The need for fathers to be accountable and be a safe person that their children can rely on is even more imperative at this time, with the added stresses, disruptions and uncertain times that children are currently experiencing as a result of the pandemic. It is also important that fathers are supported through this time, they too are experiencing the difficulties associated with current day to day living and possibly parenting children 24/7.

Children’s workers in the Caledonian System play a vital role in supporting fathers and men who have caring responsibilities for children to take responsibility for their behaviour, improve their parenting skills and develop into the father that they really want to be. This support continues to be offered to men during the pandemic and the following tips may be of assistance.



Tips

- Children's workers can continue to support men regarding their fathering. This may be done over the phone or face to face when lockdown restrictions are eased. Children's workers can liaise with the man's worker to discuss what areas of work would be appropriate for them to undertake. A one to one version of the children and fathering modules has been developed. These are currently sitting with the accreditation panel (SAPOR) and will hopefully become part of the 1:1 version of the Caledonian Men's Programme. The Caledonian central team will update children's workers when this manual is available.
- Be sure to be aware of fathers' contact arrangements with their children. It may be the case that some fathers have been unable to see their children due to self-isolating or shielding issues. It is important that fathers are provided with the space to discuss their frustrations around this in a non-judgemental manner.
- There may be the possibility that children who did not want contact with their fathers previously now want contact. Managing expectations around this with both the child and the father would be helpful. This in an area that should be explored within CLMs.
- Talk about fathers parenting during the pandemic – how are they contributing to their children's wellbeing (regardless of contact arrangements)? How are they supporting their child's mother in her parenting role?
- Some fathers may be in prison at this time. Whilst children's workers will not be able to have contact with these men, they can support these men's children with the difficulties this presents. Children may also really worry about their dads that are in custody and how they are being kept safe from the impact of COVID-19.

Support for children's workers

As we know, there are a small number of children's workers within the Caledonian System and they along with their men's and women's worker colleagues, have the huge task of ensuring children are kept 'front and centre' of all the work that is undertaken. The wellbeing of all workers is crucial and given the small number of children's workers, it is imperative that they are provided with opportunities to get support from their colleagues and managers, other children's workers, and from the Caledonian central team. With this in mind there are a few things that we can do to maintain and develop the sense of community that is evident within the children's service across Scotland.

Tips

- Engage with other children's workers in the localities near you. Think about whether you could schedule regular meetings with each other (via appropriate media platforms or phone, or in person when lockdown restrictions ease).



- Recognise that as professionals you are doing as much as you can in difficult working conditions. Remember that you are providing the best service that you can within the limitations of lockdown/social distancing/working from home and are not expected to replicate exactly the level of service provided pre COVID-19.
- E-mail each other - maintain contact with children's workers who may be particularly new to the system.
- The Caledonian central team have set up a 'padlet' for children's workers to share ideas with each other. This is really easy to use and workers can add new topics to be discussed at any time. This can be accessed via the following link:
https://padlet.com/peter_smith5/fw9ljsth1rxc9rpc
- The Caledonian central team are in the process of rescheduling the postponed children's worker day that was scheduled for April 2020. This will give us all an opportunity to spend time with each other (this may be virtually!), share ideas and gain new knowledge.
- Contact the central team any time – we are here to support you and always welcome contact from the children's workers.

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First published June 2020

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