

Director of Public Health Office
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Web Site: www.sheffield.gov.uk

A Message from Greg Fell: Director of Public Health for Sheffield

Dear parents & carers

It is crucial as parents/carers you ensure the safety and protection of your children against the spread of Coronavirus (Covid-19).

Where possible all children and young people should be safe and at home.

It is important your children know how to socially distance themselves from other children/young people so we can protect them and the most vulnerable in society.

Why social distancing matters?



This picture demonstrates how just socially distancing yourself and others can have a dramatic effect in stopping the spread and protecting others. It has been suggested that given we do not yet have a vaccine and we need to slow the spread of the virus, maintaining a physical distance is effectively the next best thing in helping break the person to person infection.

Children/young people will pester to go out and socialise with their friends, they are kids and will want to do what kids do in their normal daily lives. However, over the coming weeks you need to make sure that the only physical social contact they have is with immediate family.

We know this isn't going to be easy

It's really important that you think about your own stress levels as you address this with your children and choose a good time to talk it through with them when you are both feeling calm and rational.

It is likely that children of all ages will need to revisit the discussion time and time again as they try to understand the message. It's important that you recognise this is normal, it's the way they process information. Continue to connect with them, listen to their worries and concerns. These might at times seem small compared to other worries going on in your family, but are very important to them. If they have their worries acknowledged, (even if you can't fix them) and a young person feels heard, it will help them to move on and help them to understand what they need to do and why.

It is a time where as a country we need to do all we can to maintain our health, our wellbeing and ensure the resilience in our NHS to be able to cope with the unprecedented demand it will face in saving lives and caring for the many people who will need hospital care as a result of the virus.

There is guidance set out in the national advice here;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people>

However we understand this is often hard to read and take in so we have tried to provide you with information that hopefully will be more easily understood by children and young people.

How to explain to primary school age children:

Try talking to your children about the virus for example;

'There is a virus called Covid19 that makes some people poorly, most people are fine but some can get very poorly and need to go into hospital. Children can carry Covid-19 but not know they have it. So we can't visit Nana for a little while in case we give her the virus. The good thing is that we can talk to her and (where possible) see her via our mobile phone'.

You can also help stop your friends from getting ill by being a 'Super Hero' and protecting them, this is how;

- If you have to go to school as your mummy/daddy/carer is also a 'Super Hero' then make sure you stay 2 metres away (show this distance by using a ball game with them, stand them 2m away and throw the ball) listen to the staff & teachers in school they know how to keep you safe.
- If you are in school you will find that things are different as there will be less children and young people and you will be doing different activities. You will get the chance to make new friends but it might feel a bit strange to start off with
- You can't play with your friends how you used to, this includes holding hands, giving each other piggy backs, sharing food, drinks or sharing secrets!. You can however talk to your friends on the phone or video call them
- Always stay 2m away from anyone who does not live in your home. Imagine your super hero cape is very long or you have an imaginary force shield around you; you can't possibly walk around safely if people are too close! Check out our new characters 2 Metre Rita and 6 Feet Pete. Look out for them on [Facebook.com/oursheff](https://www.facebook.com/oursheff)
- You can go on your bike, walk the dog, go outside but at the moment you can't do this with your friends, If you do see other people whilst you are out then wave and shout to them but remember the 2m 'Superhero' rule



Try to show children how they are helping others by their actions. You are showing them how to protect their friends and family but also being kind to them by keeping in touch.

Messages for adolescent young people

Young people are often very tactile. Holding hands, giving each other piggy backs, lifting/picking each other up, hugging, kissing each other. Therefore getting into a routine of social distancing will be difficult for them. Some may have boyfriends/girlfriends and want to spend time with each other.

Young people will have been absorbing all of the information on the news and social media. We'd really encourage parents/carers and friends to reinforce the importance of social distancing. Explaining why it's important in slowing the spread of the virus and reiterating the important role they play in following the social distancing guidance and steps being implemented to tackle Covid-19. It normally works best with teenagers to ask questions and help them think it through rather than just telling them what to do. It will be really important to listen carefully to their worries – it's probably a very difficult time for them – studies / exams have been disrupted, as have their normal routines and friends are so important

Young people have lots of ways of communicating with their friends through social media and via mobile phones. Under no circumstances should they be allowed to socialise in person and meet up with their friends.

These restrictions won't be in place for ever. Things will get back to normal and it's important to reassure this.

Finally this is a worrying time and many young people may be feeling anxious about Covid-19. They may be worrying about friends and family getting ill as well as their own health. It is ok to feel upset or anxious, this is normal. Encourage young people to talk about how they are feeling. There are lots of online resources and Apps including virtual exercise classes.

Try and ensure everyone in the house gets plenty of sleep, continues to eat healthy and stays connected with friends/family via social media and telephone. If young people are regularly using social media talk to them about their social media use and make sure they are taking regular breaks.

- The Sheffield Healthy Minds leaflet may help you
- www.kooth.com
– is a free online counselling service for young people aged 11-18 years old if they are feeling anxious and worried
- Have a look at www.epicfriends.co.uk

We hope this information is useful. We know these are difficult times and talking to your children about what they do not understand can really help.

Finally we think you are doing an amazing job. Some parents/carers are having to work and home school and for that we applaud you. Be kind to yourselves as parent/carers. Your children will not remember how good you were at algebra but they will remember how you listened and helped make them feel safe.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AG Fell', written in a cursive style.

Greg Fell
Director of Public Health
Sheffield City Council