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Safeguarding at a distance

Safeguarding remains a key priority for healthcare staff during the Covid19 pandemic. This guidance has been produced to support primary care practitioners in identifying safeguarding children and adult issues during 'virtual' consultations.

Knowing your families

There is often a significant amount of information about families available in the practice patient record which could help to identify those families where you may see safeguarding children or adult issues. Reviewing the records of other members of the household is often helpful in gaining a holistic view of the family and circumstances. For example:

- *Families whose children are or have previously been subject to Child Protection Plans;*
- *Substance misuse – in parents or children;*
- *Domestic abuse – including coercive control;*
- *Children and young people who are in care;*
- *Children where there is a history of them not being brought to medical appointments;*
- *Families where there are carers or young carers – are these families able to access support with shopping and prescription collection?*
- *Increase or decrease in presentation to primary care compared to pre-Covid levels;*
- *Emotional or mental health problems in parents or children– particularly if you are aware that these are being exacerbated by lockdown and limited access to support;*
- *Young, unsupported parents especially with very small children;*
- *Families where there are family members/children with learning difficulties;*
- *Family members with dementia or other issues which could impact on mental capacity;*
- *Situations where there are other safeguarding concerns such as exploitation or modern day slavery.*

Using a phone consultation

Picking up possible indicators of safeguarding concerns can be challenging over a phone call. However, there are a few things that could be useful:

- *Patient sounds guarded or you can hear that their conversation is being directed by another person;*
- *You hear sounds of possible altercations or vehement disagreements;*
- *Background sounds of persistent infant crying and/or a parent expressing anxiety about how to cope with this;*
- *Consultations where a family member is providing the 'translation' for a non-English speaking patient – particularly concerning if any of above risk factors are also present.*

Using a video consultation

Video consultations can be really effective and are a real opportunity to pick up possible indicators that things are not well within a family.

- *Do you know who else is present in the room? Are they someone you recognise from the family? Check if the patient is happy to proceed with the consultation if other people are around.*
- *How does the room look? Is there any obvious evidence of alcohol or drug use? Are there any obvious environmental risks, particularly if there are young children in the home?*
- *How does the parent present? Is this very different to usual? Do they appear guarded or watchful?*
- *If the consultation is about a child, is the child seen in the consultation or is the parent unwilling for them to be seen? If the child is seen, how do they look? Are they clothed appropriately for the season? How are the interactions with their parent? Did there appear to be any toys for them to play with? Is their presentation different to usual?*

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Trust your instincts

If something doesn't feel right...it probably isn't right!

You could:

- *Check it out with any other professional involved with the family (Health Visitor, Social Worker, etc.) – do they have any other information about how things are going?*
- *Go back to the family – follow up your instincts and check in again with a call or text.*
- *Suggest that the patient contacts you via email – this may be easier than them making a further phone/video call.*
- *Offer a face-to-face consultation.*
- *Check it out with the Safeguarding Team in the CCG.*

Useful links

Remote consultations in primary care:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/03/C0044-Specialty-Guide-Virtual-Working-and-Coronavirus-27-March-20.pdf>

Safeguarding in primary care:

<https://www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/resources/toolkits/child-safeguarding-toolkit.aspx>

<https://www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/resources/toolkits/adult-safeguarding-toolkit.aspx>

Covid19 and safeguarding:

<https://elearning.rcgp.org.uk/mod/page/view.php?id=10552>

Routine domestic abuse enquiry in virtual settings:

<https://future.nhs.uk/connect.ti/safeguarding/view?objectId=71190725>

RCGP/NHSE Principles of Safe Video consulting guidance:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/03/C0479-principles-of-safe-video-consulting-in-general-practice-updated-29-may.pdf>