

## **Guidance for staff contacting children using online devices, during Covid 19 Pandemic.**

Babcock staff are being asked to support children and young people during Covid 19 in a number of different ways. Due to the current social distancing measures schools and key adults working with children are only undertaking face to face visits as a last resort and if there are safeguarding concerns. The majority of social contact between children and professionals is happening online, using a number of different platforms, including FaceTime, Zoom, Skype etc. These platforms are a great way to communicate effectively with children, however it can also increase safeguarding risks for both children and professionals so any communication needs to be carefully risk assessed and where possible risks need to be mitigated.

For good practice wherever possible professionals should be contacting children with another professional present (part of the call) and this contact should take place in a work building, however due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, this is not always possible.

Please consider the following when undertaking a risk assessment prior to contact with a child:

- Ensure that there is clear consent between the professional and parents /carers (and child if over 13 years old) this consent should clearly state the type of communication, frequency, purpose and other key safety factors.
- Ensure that there is a clear and robust record of the communication between the professional and child – this may include an audio recording of the meeting, however this record should be in addition to written notes.
- Be mindful of where video calls are taking place – what can be seen in the background? Ensure it doesn't take place in a bedroom. Where possible the child should be taking the call in a communal area with their parent /carer aware the call is happening.
- Ensure that the platform being used is age appropriate – don't contact children using apps that are for ages older than they are.
- Ensure that you set up professional accounts for the platforms used – don't use personal accounts.
- Professionals should only contact children during usually office hours – in exceptional circumstances these times can be altered but must be agreed with a line manager. This must be clearly documented, including justification.
- Ensure that online calendars are up to date with who you are contacting, so there is clear evidence of which children are being contacted.
- Where possible use a parent /carers contact details to contact the child. If this is not possible be clear in records why this is not appropriate (safeguarding risk) if you are contacting the child using their own contact details where possible try to use their school email address.

If during communication with a child, you feel there are safeguarding concerns, please ensure that you follow the in house Child Protection Policy and pass these concerns on to the appropriate person.

If you feel the child is at significant risk or at immediate risk, please consider contacting MASH on 0345 155 1071 (for children living in Devon) or the police 999/101.