



Supporting Families in Isolation

COVID-19 has increased the number of vulnerable families in our communities and intensified the challenges facing those already within this group.

Most vulnerable more at risk

Even before the current pandemic, The Children's Commissioner estimated that more than two million children in England were living in families with substantial complex needs.¹ COVID-19 has exacerbated many of those needs, such as lack of food, cramped living conditions, job insecurity, substance abuse and mental health problems.

Chris Robson, independent chairman of the NSCP, said:

"We know that many families will be facing increased stress during the extraordinary conditions this lockdown has imposed upon us all. Those who were already struggling to cope with health issues, relationship problems and financial challenges before the Coronavirus outbreak will be finding it particularly tough."²

Stress from job insecurity

On top of this, families are facing further pressure as job insecurity increases. A new survey from the Central Statistics Office found the livelihoods of 50% of the population have been adversely impacted by COVID-19.

A quarter of 35 to 44-year-olds have childcare issues with 22% reporting difficulties in working from home with family around. Home schooling and childcare is particularly difficult where the child has additional needs.³

New ways to respond

In the midst of these issues, churches are finding new ways to engage with families. As new connections are made and approaches adopted, the way church-based family work is conducted could change completely.

In this resource, we'll explore:

- 1. New opportunities for churches**
- 2. Pitfalls you need to avoid**
- 3. Effective tools you can use right now**
- 4. What the future of family work looks like**

Cinnamon Connect Webinar

You can watch the full webinar on 'Supporting Families in Isolation', with Emma Tanner from The Princess Project and Eli Gardner from Kids Matter on the [Cinnamon Website](#).

¹ <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2018/07/04/over-two-million-children-in-england-are-growing-up-in-families-where-there-are-serious-risks-major-study-from-childrens-commissioner-reveals-2/>

² <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/news/2020/05/families-under-pressure-urged-not-to-struggle-alone>

³ <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2020pressreleases/pressstatementemploymentandlifeeffectsofcovid-19/>

1. New opportunities for churches



As everyone adapts to new ways of living and working there are new opportunities to reach out and engage with families.

- **Joint working** – Statutory organisations and charities are now actively looking to work in partnership with churches. They can bring finances, resources, expertise and support to help you shape your response.
- **People want to connect** – As our world has shrunk, many people are actively seeking to engage more with their own communities. This includes those who could volunteer with you and those who could benefit from church support.
- **Fewer distractions** – Many people now have fewer time and travel commitments and are able to engage in volunteering or participate in workshops in ways they couldn't before.
- **We're all 'upskilling'** – Whether we like it or not, we're all being forced to adapt to digital technology, and this could put us in good stead for the future.

Resources

Mum2Mum- www.princessproject.co.uk/

The Princess Project helps churches to provide support to mothers who need a little extra support. Through a variety of initiatives, they aim to provide a holistic package of support to mothers (and their families), addressing their physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

Kids Matter -www.kidsmatter.org.uk

Kids Matter engages local churches to equip parents and carers facing disadvantages with confidence, competence and community, enabling their children to thrive. Their team of psychologists and community workers have developed new resources for families and parents, tailored to provide specific support during COVID-19 and beyond.

2. Pitfalls to avoid



As regular activities came to an abrupt stop, we've all been grappling to adjust. Along the way, we'll all make mistakes, but here are some tips to help you protect those you support and your team of volunteers.

- **Where is your audience?** - This may sound like a crazy question, considering that everyone is at home right now. But if you're trying to reach families you need to meet then 'where they are'. Regular calls may not work for busy mums who are multi-tasking, so try text or Whatsapp. Many are also using social media to interact more and more - so use that as a place to find and connect with them.
- **Have clear boundaries** - Churches are doing so much to support individuals, but you need to be careful that your volunteers don't burn out. Having specific work phones and designated working hours will help to protect them. Make sure all the normal safeguarding procedures are still enforced as well.
- **Know when to contact professionals** - There are plenty of professional and statutory services out there who can support families with specific needs - so don't be afraid to pass on details of families you are particularly concerned about.
- **You don't need to have all the answers** - Sometimes people just want someone who will listen, so don't worry if you can't respond personally to all their needs. Many have no family or friends to share the ups and downs of life with, so your support will be vital.

Resources

Safeguarding - www.scie.org.uk

This quick guide is for practitioners working to safeguard children and families during the COVID-19 outbreak, including social workers and those working in social care settings.

Young Minds - www.youngminds.org.uk

Young Minds provide plenty of tips and advice on supporting mental health during COVID-19. They also have a helpline for parents who are concerned about their children: 0808 802 5544.

Edusafe - www.educare.co.uk/edusafe-cyp

Here, you'll find a short interactive modules to read on topics such as bereavement, anxiety, substance misuse, low mood, self-harm, and healthy relationships.

NSPCC - www.nspcc.org.uk

The NSPCC have some great tools to help parents balance the multiple pressures they face during COVID-19.

3. Effective Tools



Healthy relationships are at the heart of good family work. Even though you can't meet face to face any more, look for opportunities to maintain and build these friendships.

- **Connect with established charities** – There are plenty of great organisations, like Kids Matter and Mum2Mum, that can help your church to effectively reach families. Rather than starting from scratch, they can provide you with the resources to hit the ground running.
- **Frequent and consistent** – Personal contact is key, but it needs to be regular and consistent. Make sure you have several touch points with families and use methods that they'll respond to e.g. text, WhatsApp, Facebook or phone calls.
- **Consider how you can adapt** – The needs of families are changing and you'll need to adapt your support in response – some may have more practical needs; others may now be asking deeper questions about life; while some may be experiencing new financial strains. Be flexible in your response and prepared to connect families with other support services.
- **Posting resources** – Not every family has access to a computer, so if you are sharing resources, think about delivering hard copies or even sending cards and notes of encouragement.
- **Connecting with new families** – Connecting with new people is particularly challenging at the moment, so think about channels families in greatest need are already accessing. You could include cards with food parcels that are given to families; be active on social media; and engage with children's services who may send you referrals.

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Kids Matter - www.kidsmatter.org.uk

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Safe Families for Children - safefamilies.uk

This is why Safe Families are committed to working with, and through the local church to offer support, hope and belonging to improve the lives of those in our communities.

4Family - www.4family.org.uk

4Family equips local churches to train volunteers to support families in their communities, who may be isolated, vulnerable, or struggling to cope.

4. Rethinking the Future



While the future remains uncertain, we know that this pandemic will end. When it does, things won't snap back to normal, so you need to start thinking about what your family work will look like in the future.

- **This is an 'ice age' not a 'blizzard'** – It can be tempting to sit tight and wait for COVID-19 to blow over, but the evidence suggests that it will be a very long time before we get back to normal, so we all need to adapt.
- **Stay consistent** – People don't like change, so if they've got used to connecting with you online they may well want to continue receiving support in this way going forward. Don't presume they'll want to attend your usual sessions.
- **Set up training** – Consider what team of volunteers you will need to meet this commitment and how you are going to recruit and train them. Think about the skills and resources you currently lack and how you can fill those gaps. It may seem a long way off, but a little planning now will help you in the future.
- **Invest in technology** – Technology is already playing an increasingly important role in our lives and will continue to do so, so think about the tools you need to respond.

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*We hope the website links we've shared will be useful to you. It's worth just mentioning that we're not responsible for the information they share.