

10th July 2020

Dear family member,

This is the fifth open letter I have written to you since the start of this dreadful pandemic. Over that time I am sure all of us have gone through a whole range of emotions, from anxiety and fear to hope and relief now that restrictions are being eased and many of you have been able to visit your loved ones again. I think we've all come to appreciate more clearly than ever before what we cherish and what really matters to us. Just hugging my daughter who lives a few miles from where we live was something I took for granted until suddenly she couldn't visit us for weeks.

And yet for many of you, the easing of restrictions have also caused frustrations. While a minority of family members whose loved one lives alone have been able to form a 'support bubble' with them, which means that social distancing isn't necessary, for most of you this isn't possible and that's difficult and even perplexing. I really get that.

I am writing to you now in the context of a further easing of restrictions in both England and Wales, although the easing is more limited in Wales so far. In England, two households can meet indoors again – although while still observing social distancing if not in a support bubble. However, I can well understand the frustration many of you will feel about the fact that we have had to implement the new rules in a way that is somewhat more restrictive than the rules themselves allow. This is because our fundamental objective right from the beginning of this pandemic, and indeed in normal times as well, is to keep the people we support and our colleagues as healthy and safe as possible.

For example, as the risk of transmission of this virus is higher indoors, until 31st August we will continue only to facilitate meetings between the people we support and their family members in public spaces or gardens, unless they have formed a support bubble. However, these meetings can now include up to six people from any number of households at the same time. We are also sticking to the two metre social distancing rule, as the evidence suggests that this significantly reduces any risks.

When it comes to overnight stays, I'm afraid that only people we support who live on their own and who do not require staff support when away can stay away overnight, although

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this can now be outside of their support bubble. So, for example, if someone we support has formed a support bubble with the household where their mother lives, they can now stay at their father's house as well. And people we support who were shielding and live on their own can now form a support bubble with another household and meet up to four people outdoors.

You will have seen in the news that there are now local lockdown arrangements in Leicester, with greater restrictions imposed there. We do not currently support anyone in Leicester, but if local lockdown arrangements are put in place in areas where we do support people, we will of course comply with those local requirements including any new short-term restrictions.

Believe me, I don't like having to set all these rules, and by their very nature rules cannot take account all the many different and unique situations and circumstances affecting each person we support. All I ask is for your patience and understanding at this time as we do everything we can to keep your loved one safe. We are reviewing all of our policies and procedures regularly and we will only keep restrictions in place for as long as is absolutely necessary.

While I do regret the continuing restrictions, I believe that it has been these restrictions together with our strict infection control processes and the professionalism of our staff that have meant we have not been hit heavily by the virus. At one recent meeting of our Pandemic Emergency Response Team, our Health and Safety Manager was able to report that not a single person we support was currently self-isolating due to Covid-19, and only 32 members of our staff team out of some 7,000 in total were self-isolating. We are in a good place, and there is now light at the end of the tunnel. We are getting through this.

Please remember that if you have any questions about your loved one's support, you should contact their locality manager and, if you have any more general queries, you can call our helpline for families (open from 9.30am to 1.30pm, Monday to Friday) on 0300 303 9161 or contact the team by email at family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org.

Thank you again for your patience and understanding.

Regards,



Steve Scown
Chief Executive
Dimensions

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