

21st August 2020

Dear family member,

This is my sixth letter to you since this horrible virus came on the scene, and I'm sure, like me, you're sick of it! I think many of us were hoping that the pandemic would come to a clear end at a certain point and things would then get back to normal. I remember seeing the graphs at the daily Downing Street briefings which suggested a sharp rise in infections followed by a smooth downwards curve back to zero. However, we all know now that this virus has refused to follow such hopeful modelling and the situation is incredibly complicated.

And yet as the restrictions are eased across the country, apart from in areas with local lockdowns imposed, we can begin very carefully to ease our own restrictions. I know that many of you have been frustrated and even baffled by our continuing ban on indoor visits to the homes of your loved ones, and as summer gradually turns to autumn, meeting outside will become increasingly uncomfortable. While our support teams have been doing everything they can to keep the people we support in contact with their families, and to facilitate outdoor meet-ups, I understand the desire many of you have to see your loved one inside.

I am pleased to let you know, therefore, that we have carefully considered the situation and have decided that we can remove the blanket ban on indoor visits to people's homes where meet-ups cannot happen outside. I want to stress, however, that it is still the case that meeting your loved one in their garden or in an outside public space is preferable and safer. Meetings outside will remain our default policy for now. Another option would be meeting in a café or restaurant as long as this had been risk assessed beforehand.

In cases where meeting outdoors isn't possible, our new guidelines do set out how indoor visits to people's homes can now go ahead, as long as they are carefully managed and planned. I have attached a summary of our guidelines to this letter which I hope you will find helpful. If you have any questions or queries about it, you can speak to your locality manager or phone the helpline for families (open from 9.30am to 1.30pm, Monday to Friday) on 0300 303 9161. You can also contact the team by email at [family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org](mailto:family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org).

Unfortunately, social distancing will still be necessary for those not in a support bubble when meeting up inside or outside. If this won't be possible, facemasks will need to be worn. This is not easy, but I want to assure you that we are doing our best to be flexible and we realise that it can't be one size fits all at the moment. Every situation is different, and we absolutely understand how difficult it is for you as family members of the people we support right now. However, as I'm sure you appreciate,

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the health and wellbeing of your loved ones remains our top priority. Indeed, the restrictions we have imposed have been vindicated by the considerable success we have had to date, so that against a national picture of steadily rising infection rates and local spikes, at the time of writing there are no people we support who are showing Covid-19 symptoms at all. Maintaining this record and keeping the number of infections as low as possible is our overriding determination, and it is this that will shape all our priorities, actions and how we are managing our organisation through these unprecedented times.

And the context to this is a changeable and complex situation. We are finding that with extra responsibilities for tackling local Covid-19 outbreaks, local authorities are becoming increasingly risk-averse. Take the London Borough of Barnet, for example, where a spike in Covid-19 cases saw the Local Authority step in and ban non-essential visits to Registered Care Homes. We followed suit, including at our supported living services in the borough, only for the Council to partially reverse its position a week later. However, while they now say that non-essential visits can re-start, that is only if people receive regular coronavirus testing – and they are only available for homes providing support to people over 65 or with dementia!

We are keeping all our rules and guidelines under constant review, and we won't keep any of them in place a moment longer than we judge they are necessary. We are also guarding against complacency setting in. We will get through this horrible time, and things will get back to normal eventually.

One thing we are reviewing right now is when and how we will be able to re-open our short breaks and day services in a safe and 'Covid-secure' way. We are examining how we can do this, probably with reduced capacity, but as with everything to do with this pandemic, it's complex and multi-faceted. I know that many families and people we support have been really struggling without these services. If you really can't cope, and that's perfectly reasonable, then I do recommend contacting a social worker who will be able to provide emergency support if required.

Finally, I would like to thank you again for your patience and forbearance at this difficult time. Dimensions is in a good position to emerge from this crisis strongly, and I am constantly impressed (though not surprised) by the professionalism and dedication of our support teams who are united in a common purpose to keep your loved ones safe and well. There is light at the end of the tunnel, and better times do lie ahead.

Regards,



Steve Scown  
Chief Executive  
Dimensions

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## **Summary of new guidelines on visits to family members supported by Dimensions in England**

We understand that families want to spend time with their loved ones and will do our very best to make this possible.

### **Before you visit your relative**

- We will work with you to draw up a visiting support plan, this will help us to make sure we keep all the people we support and our staff healthy and safe.
- We will ask you about your health – we ask that visitors are in good health and have not been asked to quarantine by the track and trace service.

### **When you visit your relative in line with government guidelines we ask:**

- That there is only one regular visitor (where visits take place indoors) to limit the risk of transmission.
- That you allow us to take your temperature when you arrive. If your temperature is raised we will not be able to go ahead with the visit.
- We ask that you wear a face covering when you visit. If a two metre distance cannot be maintained we will provide you with PPE. If you are unable to wear a mask please let us know and we can look at this in our risk assessment to see what we can do to make sure everyone is safe.
- Use hand sanitiser when you enter and leave your relatives home.
- Be aware if you cough or sneeze please use a tissue and dispose of it before washing your hands or using hand sanitiser.
- Stay in the agreed meeting room/ space and don't go to other parts of the home.
- If you need to use the toilet please use the cleaning materials to wipe down all surfaces you have touched.
- Please try and maintain a social distance as much as possible with your relative and avoid hugging and touch if you can.

- Limit your visit to an hour – the team will make sure that the other people who live with your relative are having fun in another part of the house, this can be quite difficult as they may be eager to join you. We limit the time of the visit in order to be fair to everyone.

If you wish to bring a gift for your relative we ask that you place it into a plastic bag for at least 72 hours before your visit, if you are unable to do this we will have to do this, which may cause upset to your relative.

Outdoor visits remains our preferred and safest option and we will make a welcoming space in the garden for you. If it's not possible we will try and find alternative solutions, including, where possible indoor visits.

Our visiting guidance could change at short notice if the government changes their advice or if there is a local corona virus hotspot. We must follow the advice from the local authority public health officer in each area.

#### **Some things to think about when you are wearing a face covering:**

- You need to speak clearly and may need to speak louder than you normally would.
- Keeping eye contact is important.
- Try to not wear a hat or anything else which might conceal your face even more.
- Wear clothes or hair in a way that your relative will recognise as being you.

#### **For further advice**

Remember you can phone the helpline for families (open from 9.30am to 1.30pm, Monday to Friday) on **0300 303 9161**. You can also contact the team by email at [family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org](mailto:family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org).