

10th November 2020

Dear family member,

This is my eighth letter to you since the start of this dreadful pandemic, and it comes at a time when things are getting harder for many of you. The new national lockdown imposed across England will inevitably mean that you are less able to see your loved one and spend time with them. This, I know, is painful and upsetting. We shouldn't be in this situation now, some eight months into this crisis. One thing remains just as true now as it did back in March, however, and that is that we are as determined as ever to keep your loved one safe.

As you may have seen, the government has recently issued new guidance on visits to care homes (this only applies to a few of our services, but we are expecting guidance for supported living soon). As you may expect, the guidance isn't straightforward. We want to maximise the opportunities for you to visit and keep in contact with your loved one, and we will do everything we can to enable you to see and visit them especially as Christmas approaches. We understand how important this is to you and to the people we support.

The government's guidance says that visits to loved ones should take place as long as they can be done in a safe way. It advises only one or two constant visitors, who are meeting the needs of the person during lockdown. The guidance does not completely rule out visits; it does, however, place an obligation on the provider, such as Discovery, to assess and balance the local risk and the service's ability to manage visits safely. This is to be done by undertaking a risk assessment which would also take into account the advice of the local director of public health. It also says that, when visits can take place, appropriate PPE should be worn, social distancing maintained and all visits should be planned so that only one visit to a service happens at a time. Wherever possible, visits should be outside.

At Discovery we do want to facilitate visits wherever possible, in accordance with the current rules and guidelines. Our overriding priority must still be to keep the people we support and colleagues safe.

We have set up a round table group to look at creative solutions to enable visits, to make sure our policies about visiting are really clear, and to encourage our support teams and families

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to work together to find a way to facilitate visits in a safe way while considering risks. On this group we have two of our family consultants, two people we support, members of our executive team and other experts such as our Health and Safety Manager.

What I hope is clear from the above is that we are working really hard and doing all we can to make sure you can still visit your loved one or, at the very least, keep in regular contact with them over the phone or by using technology such as Zoom or WhatsApp. The current lockdown restrictions do allow people to meet one person from another household in a public open space like a park, and up to two support workers can also be present if needed. And further to this, there is the possibility in certain circumstances of visits taking place at someone's home. Please liaise with your locality manager about this, or you can contact our helpline for families (open from 9.30am to 1.30pm, Monday to Friday) on 0300 303 9161 or email the team at family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org.

I should stress, however, that these are difficult times and it's really important that we all keep as safe as possible. There are better days ahead, and I am feeling optimistic for next spring and summer. Please bear with us, and rest assured that we are not only focused on keeping your loved one safe and happy but also on helping you keep in regular contact with your loved one and seeing them wherever possible.

Regards,



Steve Scown
Chief Executive
Dimensions Group (including Discovery)

PS – I know that some family members prefer bullet points to letters, so attached to this is a simple rundown of the key points.

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Key points from the letter

- We know the new national lockdown is difficult for everyone.
- The government has issued new guidance on visiting people which we are trying to follow. It says that visits can happen but must be safe and usually outside.
- We really want to let family members visit their loved ones, especially as Christmas gets closer.
- We have set up a group to plan how visits can be made safely, even during lockdown.
- We want all family members to keep in touch with their loved ones, by seeing them or using a phone or computer.
- You can talk to your locality manager for more information or phone the helpline for families on 0300 303 9161.
- There are better days ahead next year.

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