



**One Parent  
Families Scotland**

*changing lives, challenging poverty*

**COVID-19**

# Single Parent Family Impact Monitoring Report



**Issue 3 May 2020**



## Parents Experiences



### Parents Experiences - Single Parent Proofing

In this new situation we are gathering information about the experiences single parents are facing through our local and national channels. We are also taking information coming from the single parents' experience to feedback into OPFS response to the needs of parents, to policy makers and those in charge of service delivery to encourage responses that are 'single parent proofed'.

To ensure we understand the impact of the crisis we have implemented a new '**COVID-19 Single Parent Family Impact Monitoring System**'. This enables us to gather in all we can from parents through our five local teams, our national advice and information service channels and website. We are now tracking and communicating key service responses and policy relevant issues arising from direct work with single parents.



## Parents Experiences



### There are five elements:



**Impact knowledge:** Data from parents is systematically collected and analysed.



**Monitoring Emerging Issues:** Arrangements are in place to monitor policy impacts and highlighting emerging issues.



**OPFS Response:** Our services respond by working to meet the needs identified.



**Dissemination and Communication:** Impact information and emerging issues communicated to key influencers.



**Policy Response:** OPFS policy response to parents experience which informs our campaign priorities.



## Parents Experiences

We have gathered feedback on some of the key issues single parents are experiencing through our local and national channels.

This report is based on feedback gathered across OPFS channels on single parent enquiries including:

- Ask an advisor a question on the website
- OPFS local community based services
- OPFS Advice and Information services advisor daily highlights
- Web analytics

The report content is organised by topic headings which mirror the OPFS website topic headings [www.opfs.org.uk](http://www.opfs.org.uk). Within these headings we report back on **key themes** arising from our contact with single parents across OPFS.





## 1. COVID-19 Impact

### Access to information about COVID-19

Parents are often confused about the apparent mixed messages from politicians and other families on whether to let children go out or not.

### Lack of access to food and shops

- Some parents tell us that they have no money for food. A small number of families need help with accessing food parcels and fuel.
- Some parents are not able to go out to the shops because they are shielding themselves or their children.
- The families who are shielding are concerned about the quality and amount of being provided by Glasgow City Council.
- Local services are receiving calls from parents who are still not getting food vouchers or money cards.
- Referrals to food banks continue to rise.
- Parents are having problems accessing food due to anxiety and poor mental health. For example, they are struggling to get to shops and feeling stigmatised when they arrive.
- The cost of food is the biggest expense for most families. Frontline service workers are spending time planning affordable meals which the children can easily help prepare.
- For parents ordering online, they are having to use more expensive supermarkets, thus paying more and saving less. Those who still insist on using their local shops “because it is easier” are also spending more.





## 1. COVID-19 Impact

- Children are often eating too much and this is leading to health concerns, for example, becoming overweight.
- Family are consuming more food due to changes in routine and boredom leading to bigger food bills.

### **Access to healthcare and essential items (prescriptions, medication, top-ups)**

- Parents are having problems accessing medication and prescriptions.
- A few parents report increases in medication or they have been offered other medication by their GP.





## 2. Health and Wellbeing

### Stress, anxiety and mental health

- Parents continue to experience increased emotional anxiety and stress the longer lockdown continues.



“Will my children be safe at school?”

- Staff continue to provide high levels of emotional support. Parents are also requesting ideas to keep their children and themselves occupied during lockdown.
- Some parents are feeling stressed and anxious for the future as lockdown starts to ease.
- Anxiety about the future is a common theme, for example:
  - Should I keep my child at home if I am concerned about the virus?
  - How will I ease my child back into school after so long?
  - How will I manage once the additional £20 benefit money stops?
- Mental health is still a concern as shown by the calls received. For some parents, pre-existing mental health and wellbeing issues continue to be exacerbated because of the coronavirus, preventing them from going outdoors. Consequently, this situation leaves them feeling even more socially isolated.
- Some local services have noted that their parent's mood fluctuates from day to day.
- Families are increasingly losing motivation to do anything as they are fed up staying in the house all the time.



## 2. Health and Wellbeing

### Stress, anxiety and mental health

- Lockdown also undermines social prescribing / wellbeing tools for families.
- For many the worry of 'returning to normal' is causing anxiety to health, housing and legal issues.
- Many parents had difficulty going out before lockdown. The expectation is that it will now be more challenging for them.
- The after-effects of lockdown will mean a lot more time spent supporting people in the future to attend appointments until their confidence grows. Any previous progress has been lost.







## 3. Your Benefits

### Universal Credit

- Significant concerns about applying for UC.

### Other Benefits

- Parents report problems in claiming benefits particularly around the furlough scheme. Parents find it difficult to claim benefits online.
- There are concerns about any changes in circumstances when applying for benefits.

## 4. Your Money

### Financial Concerns and Poverty

- Parents continue to need help accessing food, fuel and household items.
- Children have taken big growth spurts, but parents do not have enough money to buy new clothes. Due to an increase in food/utilities, parents on limited incomes are finding it difficult to buy clothing items.
- Increased enquiries regarding child maintenance calculations.
- Parents are facing financial stress due to limited income and increased outgoings.

### Digital Exclusion

- Parents on low incomes lack IT equipment to stay connected and have access to online information. Many parents worry that their children are falling behind in their schoolwork because they have no access to laptops or broadband during lockdown for studying.



## 5. Support for you

### **Loneliness, social isolation and access to essential services**

- Lack of access to key services and support, for example, limited peer support from other parents from groups they used to attend.
- Parents reported feelings of loneliness and isolation particularly when having to

shield and not being able to go out due to social distancing.

- Some parents feel very lonely and have no money to top up mobile phones to stay in contact with friends and family.
- Parents are engaging more and more with services for emotional support.



## 5. Support for you

- Frontline service workers report that their main role as support worker is listening to parents on the phone throughout the lockdown.
- Many parents feel that living in the house with their children is negatively affecting their mental health.
- The lack of digital resources is increasing feelings of social isolation.
- Families worry about attending hospital appointments due to the fear of contracting the coronavirus. In addition, travel compromise daily budgets.

### Increased stresses on family relationships

- Parents find it hard explaining lockdown to children while also dealing with their own fears about the current crisis.
- Children miss their friends and peers which is causing tension at home.

**Parents feel depressed and anxious about the future.**



- Social isolation is continuing to place stress on relationships between parents and children.
- Tensions in relationships continue to be an issue amongst extended family members, for instance, due to different interpretations of the moves out of lockdown and different attitudes towards the risk of COVID-19.
- Domestic abuse is increasing, and some parents do not feel safe anymore.
- OPFS have reported child protection concerns on rare occasions.
- Parents continue to struggle to get children to do homework leading to family tensions.
- Parents are having to manage different child behaviours, for instance, aggression.
- Conflict with ex-partners.



## 6. Separating/Being a Single Parent

### Children - Sole Care responsibilities

- Parents continue to find it difficult to keep routines in the household during the pandemic. They worry about children not engaging with schoolwork.

**Keeping children entertained during lockdown continues to be a challenge.**

- Local services are helping parents to provide ways to occupy children, for example, activity boxes.
- Home schooling has waned or stopped because the parent does not understand what is required or finds it too draining to battle with children to complete their schoolwork.
- Parents, who have children with additional learning needs, are particularly challenged by lockdown and feel overwhelmed.

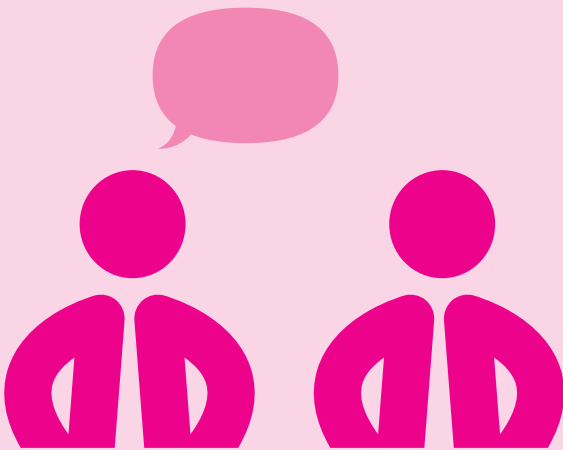
## 7. Your Home

- Some parents have very limited opportunities keeping their children physically active, for example, living in a flat, no access to a garden, restrictions on going outside, no parks open and play parks closed.
- Parents are finding relationships with their neighbours challenging due to the stress of lockdown. As tensions are running much higher and tolerance levels are lower.





## 8. Work/Education/Training



### Employment Rights.

- Parents are concerned about losing their jobs, having less income and not knowing where to go to get help with employment issues.
- Parents question how they will be able to find employment and what opportunities are going to be available?

## 9. Your Children



### Child contact and Child Maintenance

- Local services are supporting some families with Virtual Welfare and Contact hearings.



## Observations

The impact of COVID-19 on families' mental health and wellbeing is profound. Throughout the pandemic the uncertainty of the present and the future, competing challenges and demands at home, such as homeschooling and additional drains on finances, have all had a negative impact on the capacity of parents to cope during this crisis. While stringent lockdown measures are necessary, they provide an unhealthy environment for single parent families who are often just surviving at the best of times. Poor mental health has been exacerbated by the current situation. The lack of the resources to combat the detrimental effects of lockdown, such as digital and online interventions, make a difficult situation even more challenging. Let us therefore hope that as we enter the recovery stages and easing of restrictions, that families will have the resilience to bounce back with the assistance they require from local and central government.

Accessing a sustainable income to meet financial outgoings can have a significant impact on single parents' mental health and wellbeing. The analytics show that UC remains their main concern. Other financial considerations resulting from, for example, having a baby or coping with sickness and/or disability, are also weighing heavily on the minds of families. OPFS and partners must continue to listen, support and give practical advice. Subsequently, we can enable single parents to navigate the additional financial difficulties caused by the current health and social crisis.



# One Parent Families Scotland

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