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Guidance

Health and wellbeing of the adult social care workforce

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Introduction

The government recognises the dedication and commitment shown by all our care workers and organisations to keep people with care and support needs safe during these unprecedented times. Care workers, caterers, cleaners, nurses, occupational therapists, personal assistants, registered managers, social workers, and others, all have a crucial role in ensuring that people's needs are met during this challenging time.

There are examples across the country where people are going above and beyond what could be expected under normal circumstances. Whilst most of the country is now expected to stay at home, this has not been an option for those providing care and support, who are a vital lifeline to people most in need.

Social care staff will be concerned about several things, including but not limited to:

- For some, entirely understandably, the desire to continue to provide high quality services will result in worry or anxiety – particularly when absences among colleagues are adding to individual workloads.
- Social care staff will face challenges caused by the pandemic in their personal lives too and will be worried for themselves, and their own families. This worry is heightened for those who are, or have dependents at home who are, considered to be clinically 'extremely' vulnerable (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19) and therefore have been advised to shield and take additional protective measures at home.
- Whilst not all care workers have high-risk dependents, there are many who will have school aged children and are balancing an increasing workload, looking after children and being less able to take time off
- During a time where we are told to practise social distancing, the feeling of isolation will inevitably increase amongst those working alone in isolated services, including personal assistants and home care workers.
- Many registered managers are struggling to maintain resilience during a time of increased pressure and difficult decision making.
- We recognise the significant anxiety surrounding access to personal protective equipment (PPE). It is important that all of those providing care and support feel protected whilst doing their job.
- There will be some care workers that are having to take time off work and may be facing additional financial worries as their financial support has been less than their usual pay.

While this is only natural it is important that, as far as possible, we safeguard the wellbeing of those who work in adult social care.

This guidance includes tips, advice and toolkits that employers and managers can use to help build the resilience of their team and address any concerns their staff may have.

There is also a section that provides guidance on how all those working in social care can manage their personal mental health in the current circumstances.

It is crucial that all those providing care and support; both employers and employees, take some time to think about their own colleagues, residents and family's health, safety and wellbeing now more than ever before. The resources included below will help to put in place solid foundations that can be built on in the future, beyond COVID-19.

Advice for employers and those who are self-employed

Staff wellbeing and support

It is essential that employers are reinforcing the message that staff wellbeing remains an utmost priority. Some workers will face increased isolation in their work as well as their personal life and many will face a period of increased pressure and anxiety.

There are some useful tips and advice available on how employers can take care of the wellbeing of staff at work.

Wellbeing support and building resilience

- Check in with team members regularly. It is important that connections with work and colleagues carry on for those working remotely or flexibly. Managers and employees should establish regular check-ins and try using video, when possible, to maintain face-to-face contact.
- The British Psychological Society has put together a guide (https://www.bps.org.uk/coronavirus-resources/professional/protecting-psychological-needs-healthcare-staff) aimed at leaders and managers that provides practical advice on how to respond to how staff may be feeling during difficult phases of working and living through the pandemic.
- Similarly, the Local Government Association has put together some key steps (https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support/wellbeing/wellbeing-front-line-staff) that they recommend employers take in order to support and protect the mental health of frontline staff at this time.
- The Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust in partnership with the Chief Social Workers of England have developed guidance for the support and wellbeing of adult social workers and social care professionals (https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Documents/Learning-and-development/social-work/psw/COVID-19-Guidance-for-Adult-Social-Care-Professionals-CSW.pdf).
- Employers can encourage their teams to create a Wellness Action Plan (https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/employer-resources/wellness-action-plan-download/) and encourage them to share these with line managers. This is a personalised and practical tool for employees to use to identify how to address what keeps individuals mentally well at work and what can result in poor mental health. It also opens up a dialogue, helping supervisors better understand the needs and experiences of employees.
- Registered managers can find advice on maintaining team resilience on the Skills for Care website (https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Leadership-management/managing-people/resilience/Building-resilience.aspx). It includes 2 guides. One gives examples of things that can be done to reduce workplace stress and the other provides examples and case studies of adult social care employers that have developed the wellbeing of their staff by building resilience.

Support for registered managers

- For registered managers, peer support is extremely important. Skills for Care has opened up its members Facebook group (https://www.facebook.com/groups/registeredmanager/) to other registered managers and frontline managers in similar roles. This is used to share advice, experiences and good practice.
- Similarly, registered manager networks (https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Leadership-management/support-for-registered-managers/local-networks.aspx) can offer local support and are establishing WhatsApp groups to allow registered managers to stay in touch.
- Skills for Care have also opened a new advice telephone line (https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Leadership-management/support-for-registered-managers/Advice-line.aspx) (0113 241 1260) and email inbox (RMAdvice@skillsforcare.org.uk) to provide registered managers with more support.

Support for those who work alone

- For home care workers, personal assistants and those working in isolated services, the nature of their work may mean that they already feel isolated. Skills for Care provides guidance on how to support staff who regularly work alone (https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Leadership-management/managing-people/Supporting-lone-workers/Supporting-lone-workers.aspx). It includes a section on supporting mental health and wellbeing and on communication and support.
- This is in addition to Skills for Care's existing guidance for people who employ their own staff and personal assistants (https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Employing-your-own-care-and-support/Information-hub.aspx), which includes where to find information about local support.

Other useful guidance

- To maintain the provision of good-quality care during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential that people who provide care and support can quickly and clearly communicate with primary care services, hospitals, community health services, local authorities, voluntary sector organisations, pharmacists and health services. There is practical guidance from Digital Social Care (https://www.digitalsocialcare.co.uk/latest-guidance/covid-19-information-governance-and-information-sharing-guidance/) that has information on best practice for information sharing.
- Digital Social Care has published lots of guidance and advice in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (https://www.digitalsocialcare.co.uk/covid-19-guidance/) on how technology can be used to support staff and the people they care for. They have also set up a new helpline to help providers access practical advice to troubleshoot a technical problem or give in-depth one-to-one support. The helpline is open Monday–Friday 9:00–17:00 and can be contacted either by telephone (0208 133 3430) or email (help@digitalsocialcare.co.uk).

Example of good practice: Barchester Healthcare

Barchester Healthcare is an independent care provider that runs care homes and registered hospitals across the UK. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, they have introduced a number of initiatives to promote and support staff wellbeing. They have emphasised the importance of not only providing their staff with the right mental health support tools but ensuring that their staff receive regular communication that gives them the information, support and confidence to continue fulfilling their roles well at this time.

There are 3 key areas that they have focused on.

Wellbeing support

A COVID-19 support line has been set up for all staff employed by Barchester. This gives their staff the opportunity to unload or share any worries that they may be having with workers that have more experience of working in a care home and/or hospital environment.

Specific guidance has been created for their staff that provides advice on health and wellbeing, remote line management and using technology to stay in touch with colleagues. The management team also continues to promote the use of health and wellbeing apps, such as Headspace (https://www.headspace.com/register) and Maudsley Learning (https://maudsleylearning.com/).

Internal communications

Barchester have implemented a timetable of planned daily and weekly communication for all their staff, which seeks to recognise and thank their teams while continuing to provide corporate and official updates. They engage with their staff in a variety of ways, including conference calls, vlogs, daily bulletins and letters.

Learning and development

The learning and development team at Barchester have created some specific learning modules on leading through a crisis, supporting others with empathy, maintaining morale, building resilience and more. All leaders and managers at Barchester are encouraged to complete these.

Example of good practice: Central Bedfordshire

Wellbeing has been a key focus in Central Bedfordshire since they participated in a research and wellbeing project in 2019, in partnership with Bath Spa University and with support from public health and other council departments.

They have 4 key streams to their workforce wellbeing approach and have adapted them in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Support systems

Central Bedfordshire have implemented a workforce and wellbeing cell that provides a clear focus on the needs of the workforce. They help to identify and support any member of staff affected by COVID-19 and provide a point of contact.

The Bath Spa University Healthier Outcomes at Work (HOW) app and wellbeing toolkit were developed with input from practitioners and they went live in October 2019. In the past 6 weeks, the University has supported an update to the app to ensure that content is COVID-19-related. It has further enhanced its support and extended access to the social care workforce.

Wellbeing promotion

Staff wellbeing is promoted through newsletters, and staff are able to express the diversity of their working days through videos, cards, drawings, stories and poems.

Peer-led initiatives

Staff themselves have introduced initiatives, such as meditation, yoga and physical exercise sessions.

Practice guides

Central Bedfordshire have produced guides for adult social care staff and managers to enable practice conversations about death, dying and traumatic situations.

Infection control

One of the biggest worries for social care staff is whether they can keep both those they care for and themselves safe by effectively managing the risk of infection. The government has published guidance on the steps that care homes should take in order to reduce the risk of infection and how all care providers should respond to staff concerns regarding personal protective equipment (PPE) and isolation protocols.

- There is guidance for care home providers (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-admission-and-care-of-people-in-care-homes) on how to protect their staff and residents. It details the process of isolation within a care home, testing residents, reporting cases and infection prevention measures.
- There is guidance for those who support and deliver care to people in their own homes on minimising the risk of infection and safe working procedures (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-residential-care-supported-living-and-home-care-guidance).

- In cases when a member of staff is concerned that they, or someone they have been in contact with, may have symptoms of COVID-19, they should follow NHS advice (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/). If they are advised to self-isolate at home, they should follow the government's stay at home guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance).
- There is existing government advice on what recommended protective equipment should be used by social care workers in various care settings (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control).
- Details about how the government is ensuring the long term supply of PPE to the care sector is explained in Annex F of the infection control advice for care providers (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-admission-and-care-of-people-in-care-homes). It provides contact details of social care PPE suppliers.

Employees that are clinically 'extremely vulnerable'

Government guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19) states that employees defined as belonging to a clinically 'extremely vulnerable' group (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19) are strongly advised, and should be supported, to stay at home. There are a number of ways employers can support those people who need to do so:

- Encourage employees in the clinically 'extremely vulnerable' group to stay at home. Many will be worried about the sector struggling without them working. Reassure them that the best option is for them to stay at home.
- Keep in touch – isolation can result in people feeling extremely lonely. Check in with employees every now and then to discuss their wellbeing. Use video calls when possible.
- Finances may be of increasing concern for employers if a number of workers are having to stay at home. Below is some advice on what employers should be providing for their staff financially and what government initiatives care providers are eligible for. For those who are unable to financially support any employees in the clinically 'extremely vulnerable' group, then please point them towards the financial support and advice listed further along this guide.

Financial support and wellbeing

Anxiety about personal finances can understandably have an impact on someone's ability to work. Employers can play a crucial role in supporting social care staff by taking proactive steps to promote emotional and financial wellbeing. However, we also recognise that staff absences and the need to back-fill roles will create additional financial pressures for care providers. There are several initiatives in place to assist with such pressures:

- Some social care staff will have been advised that they are included in the clinically 'extremely vulnerable' group and are shielding in line with public health guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19#what-is-shielding), or need to stay home with someone who is shielding. Some employers will decide to keep these workers on full pay, but employers can furlough these workers to ensure that they continue to receive 80% of their normal income through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme).
- People who provide care and support may have to self-isolate if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or live with someone who does (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/what-to-do-if-you-or-someone-you-live-with-has-coronavirus-symptoms/). The government recognises that employers may struggle to deal with

the increased costs of sick pay if many employees are unable to work due to coronavirus. That is why small and medium employers (fewer than 250 employees as of 28 February 2020) will be able to claim back up to 2 weeks' worth of statutory sick pay (SSP) paid to employees due to COVID-19 (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-back-statutory-sick-pay-paid-to-employees-due-to-coronavirus-covid-19) without the need to provide fit notes or isolation notes as evidence.

- The action plan for adult social care (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-adult-social-care-action-plan/covid-19-our-action-plan-for-adult-social-care) highlights the funding available to local authorities (now at £3.2 billion) to address the pressures on local services caused by the pandemic. This can be used to cover the cost of maintaining income as far as possible for social care staff that are currently unable to work as a result of following advice on shielding and self-isolation measures.
- There are a number of other business support measures (https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/financial-support-for-businesses-during-coronavirus-covid-19) that have been made available to UK businesses during COVID-19.

Advice for the social care workforce

It is entirely normal to feel worried and anxious about coronavirus and how it might affect your life. This is an unsettling time – your normal routine has been disrupted and you may have been isolated from your social circles and support networks. It is really important to look after your mental health during this time. We have set out some guidance to support your mental, physical and financial wellbeing.

Mental wellbeing

6 key steps to supporting your mental health

1. Add structure to your day and try to get into the habit of a daily routine. You might find it helpful to write a plan for your day or your week. It is also important to keep doing things you enjoy as this can give you some relief from anxious thoughts and feelings and can boost your mood.
2. Exercise – take a look at our section on physical wellbeing. Your physical health has a big impact on your mental wellbeing. Your body releases endorphins when you exercise, which provide stress relief and also boost your mood.
3. Connect with people – maintaining relationships with people you trust is important for your mental wellbeing. Try and stay in touch with family and friends via telephone, video or social media, particularly if you are feeling anxious.
4. Try not to continuously check the news. 24-hour news and constant social media updates can make you more worried. If this is having an impact on you, try to limit the time you spend engaging with the media coverage of the outbreak. It may help to only check the news at set times during the day.
5. Maintain a regular sleep pattern – good-quality sleep can have a positive impact on how you feel both mentally and physically. Every Mind Matters (https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/sleep/) gives advice on how to get a good night's sleep.
6. Seek help if you are struggling. You can send a message with FRONTLINE to 85258 to start a conversation with Shout (https://www.giveusashout.org/)'s messaging support service. If you want to speak with someone directly, there are a number of helplines (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines/) that can offer expert advice.

The guidance for the public on mental wellbeing (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19#what-can-help-your-mental-health-and-wellbeing) expands on these key steps and other ways you can support your mental health.

Building resilience and managing stress and anxiety

- It is important to find new ways of coping with increased pressure and being able to recover from difficulties. Skills for Care has a guide on how to build personal resilience (https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Leadership-management/managing-people/resilience/Building-resilience.aspx). The guide includes tasks for you to complete that help you to recognise pressure and stress. It provides advice on developing your resilience through emotional intelligence, accurate thinking and realistic optimism.
- MindEd (https://covid.minded.org.uk/) has been put together to provide care and health workers with specific advice for managing your mental health during COVID-19. There is advice on managing stress and how to help each other, as well as dealing with trauma and bereavement.
- The Every Mind Matters page on anxiety (https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/anxiety/) provides good advice on managing worries that you may be having.

Bereavement support

- During this difficult time, you may be struggling with the loss of friends, family members or colleagues. Being isolated from friends and family can make feelings of grief much more intense.
- Hospice UK have launched an Adult Social Care Bereavement and Trauma line. You can speak to a specialist counsellor at 0300 303 4434. They are available between 8am and 8pm to support you if you have experienced a bereavement, have witnessed traumatic deaths as part of your work or need to discuss any other anxiety or emotional issues you are experiencing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Cruse Bereavement Care (https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief) offers advice and support on dealing with bereavement and grief during the coronavirus outbreak.
- At a Loss (https://www.ataloss.org/) provides signposting to other services across the UK that can provide resources and support to those that are bereaved.

Existing mental health needs

There is existing guidance for those that have specific mental health needs, such as OCD, anxiety, claustrophobia, or a learning disability (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19#additional-advice-for-groups-with-specific-mental-health-needs) that provides advice on managing these needs at this time.

Further information and support

For further information and support, take a look at:

- Mental Health Foundation (https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak)
- Mind (https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/)
- NHS (https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-anxiety-tips/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwyPbzBRDsARIsAFh15JaYJeZnvusOJrRv9y8W5iz6y-9N37zdi8LuM54aPZ16OYSun53RJUEaAgcOEALw_wcB)

Physical wellbeing

- Try to keep active. If you are able to, go outside for a walk, run or bike ride once a day, as fresh air is extremely beneficial for your mental health.

- If you are not able to exercise outdoors, there are several online workouts that you can follow at home. Public Health England provides free, easy 10-minute workouts (https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/for-your-body/move-more/home-workout-videos/) and the NHS Fitness Studio (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/) also has a collection of accessible exercise videos.
- Take time to relax – continue to do things you enjoy or try something new if you are restricted by having to stay at home. People who have successfully completed a period of staying at home have kept themselves busy with activities such as cooking, reading, online learning and watching films.
- Take care of your basic needs, as set out by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (https://www.who.int/publications-detail/WHO-2019-nCoV-MentalHealth-2020.1):

  Ensure rest and respite during work or between shifts, eat sufficient and healthy food, engage in physical activity, and stay in contact with family and friends. Avoid using unhelpful coping strategies such as tobacco, alcohol or other drugs. In the long term, these can worsen your mental and physical wellbeing.

Financial wellbeing

Financial wellbeing is about a sense of security and feeling as though you have enough money to meet your needs. It's about being in control of your day-to-day finances and having the financial freedom to make choices that allow you to enjoy life. During the COVID-19 outbreak, many of us will be feeling more anxious or stressed about our finances than usual. You may face financial challenges due to having to shield and not being able to work, because you are unwell or because others in your household are not earning.

It is vital that we look after those employed in the care sector and the government is committed to ensuring that no care worker has to choose between doing the right thing and facing financial issues. The government has announced changes to the benefits regime and additional funding for adult social care to support employees financially during the COVID-19 outbreak. More details about the help that is available to you is presented in the following sections.

If you are unwell or someone in your household is unwell

It is important that you feel able to self-isolate if you have symptoms of COVID-19 or live with someone who does (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance).

First check the terms and conditions of your pay with your employer.

If they are unable to continue to pay you your full salary, you might be eligible for statutory sick pay (SSP) (https://www.gov.uk/statutory-sick-pay). SSP will be available from day 1 and you must need to self-isolate for at least 4 days to be eligible. Those on zero-hour contracts will also receive SSP or will be able to claim Universal Credit, depending on their circumstances.

Those who are not eligible for SSP can claim Universal Credit (https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit) and/or the new-style Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) (https://www.gov.uk/employment-support-allowance) depending on your National Insurance record and personal savings.

If you are shielding due to being clinically 'extremely vulnerable'

Some of you will be shielding in line with public health guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19). If you are shielding, you should talk to your employer about the pay options you have and the possibility of furloughing you as long as you are expected to shield yourself. Your employer can then claim up to 80% of your wages from the government through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme).

Wider offers of financial support

- Financial help if you're self-employed (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-a-grant-through-the-coronavirus-covid-19-self-employment-income-support-scheme)
- Get an isolation note to give to your employer (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/what-to-do-if-you-or-someone-you-live-with-has-coronavirus-symptoms/)
- Your rights if your hours are cut or you're laid off (https://www.gov.uk/lay-offs-short-timeworking)
- What to do if you cannot pay your tax bill on time (https://www.gov.uk/difficulties-paying-hmrc)

Additional resources

- Mind provides advice on managing debt (https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/money-and-mental-health/money-and-mental-health/) and the positive steps you can take to address this.
- Citizen's Advice offer some specific COVID-19 advice (https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/if-you-cant-pay-your-bills-because-of-coronavirus/) on what to do if you are struggling to pay your bills. This includes rent, council tax, mortgage, energy bills, court orders and tax bills. It is important that these bills are not ignored as this can make the situation worse. Please do read the advice and seek support to help you out.
- You can contact the National Debtline (https://www.gov.uk/national-debtline) for free, confidential and independent advice on dealing with debt problems.

There is further COVID-19 guidance for employees on GOV.UK (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-and-support-for-employees-during-coronavirus-covid-19).

If you are clinically 'extremely vulnerable'

Government guidance for employers (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19) states that employees considered part of the group defined as clinically 'extremely vulnerable' (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19) are advised, and are supported, to stay at home. While this is important in protecting your health, it is important to be aware of the mental health risks of being isolated at home. For help with supporting your mental health, please reference the 6 steps laid out above. You can find out more on taking care of your mind and body while staying at home at Every Mind Matters (https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-tips/).

If you are part of this group, ask friends, family and neighbours to assist you with getting food, medicine and other necessary supplies. If this is not possible, you can register to get further support you may need (https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable).

If you have any concerns

It is important that your rights as a worker are protected, especially during these challenging times. Similarly, you have a professional duty to act if you are concerned that the safety of those that you care for is at risk. If you have any concerns about employment practices, it is important that you raise these.

- First, any concerns should be raised with your senior management team. There will be guidance in your workplace about what to do.
- You can contact your union or professional body, if you have one, for advice about what to do if you have concerns. They can play a helpful role in trying to resolve any problems you may be facing and improve workplace practice.

- Finally, if you want to report a serious case of bad practice or have been unsuccessful in resolving any issues with your organisation, you can contact the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and local council safeguarding teams (https://www.cqc.org.uk/contact-us/report-concern/report-concern-if-you-are-member-staff).