



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Temporary Reassignment of SNAs to Children's Disability Services

Clarification (9th April 2020)

Children's disability services in Ireland are provided either directly by the HSE or indirectly by HSE funded agencies such as Brothers of Charity Services, Central Remedial Clinic, Enable Ireland or St Michael's House. In the normal course of events, the majority of children with disabilities access multidisciplinary therapy services from these agencies. Some children also access respite or home support services from these providers.

Many of these services have been scaled down during the COVID-19 emergency situation as clinical staff are redeployed. Access to respite and home support services are further impacted by the requirement to maintain social distancing.

The lack of these services, combined with school closures are putting substantial demands on children with disabilities and their families. It is intended that the reassignment of SNAs to support children's disability services during this public health emergency will help to alleviate the stress being experienced by these vulnerable families.

The HSE is mindful of the fact that under normal circumstances, SNAs work in a classroom setting under the direction and supervision of the class teacher. The practice of providing remote supports for children and families represents a new way of working. The HSE and its funded disability service providers will ensure that appropriate supervision and support arrangements are in place for SNAs.

Ideally children and families who have been identified as needing supports will be matched to the SNA with whom they are already familiar. It is acknowledged that the availability of SNAs will not always allow this matching. In such cases an SNA may be assigned to an unfamiliar child / family. In all cases the SNA will be supported by a key point of contact in the children's disability service who is familiar with the needs of the child / family.

The type and level of supports to be provided to families will be agreed in consultation with the child's regular multidisciplinary team. An agreed key point of contact for each child / family will act as the link between the SNA and this multidisciplinary team. The key point of contact will provide regular support and supervision for the SNA.

In the first instance families will be supported remotely via telephone and / or video calls. The type of support to be provided will be guided by the child's multidisciplinary team and may include:

- Advice on what typically works for the child in school
- Demonstration / advice / training on strategies to support the child's needs
- Support to develop a schedule to structure the child's day
- Social stories to support their understanding of the on-going public health emergency
- Support, advice and reinforcement to address behaviours that challenge
- Provide educational or therapeutic resources / materials in collaboration with the key point of contact / teacher.

The SNA will be facilitated to access the necessary technology and resources at the relevant HSE or disability service premises. SNAs will be provided with a letter identifying them as an essential worker to facilitate their travel to these centres. Social distancing will be maintained at all times in line with public health guidance.

As essential workers assigned to children's disability services SNAs will have access to the range of COVID-19 supports provided to other health service staff. These include but are not limited to Employee Assistance Programme, Occupational Health supports and psychosocial supports.

As a member of the Children's Disability Team the SNA will have access to the support of their service manager and assigned key point of contact, as well as peer support from other members of the team.

It is intended that the work of the SNAs will be underpinned by dedicated ICT supports. Therefore, where the SNA prefers to work remotely and has access to the appropriate technology this can be facilitated with the agreement of the Service Manager and key point of contact.

Where a child / family is identified as requiring a higher level of support e.g. access to centre based or home based contact this will be agreed in consultation with the multidisciplinary team. All decision making in this regard will be influenced by and compliant with contemporaneous public health advice. (<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/> and www.hse.ie)

Where there is a risk that either the SNA or the child / family presents with symptoms of COVID-19, face to face sessions will not be sanctioned.

All direction and advice provided by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) will continue to apply to disability services, SNAs reassigned as part of this project and the wider Irish public.