

NSPCC note rise in referrals to police and local authorities during lockdown

NSPCC Scotland has noted a 40% increase in referrals to police and local authorities by the NSPCC helpline during the coronavirus lockdown. They say that this shows that children are the hidden victims of the pandemic.

The charity urges the Scottish Government to ensure that the recovery plan addresses the full range of children's needs. This means ensuring that schools are ready to help all those children who need support, particularly those who may have suffered abuse or neglect during lockdown. They call for investment in children's social care.

In the last three months more than 22,000 adults in the UK have contacted the helpline about the wellbeing of a child which is an increase of almost a third on the monthly average for the three months leading up to the lockdown. In May 8,287 adults contacted the helpline which is the highest single number on record for one month. Of these almost 40% were referred on to local authorities and police.

One adult who spoke to the NSPCC helpline during the lockdown said: "I've become increasingly disturbed by the noises coming from one of one my neighbours – it's been getting worse since the lockdown. I can hear the mother shouting and swearing at her two little ones, it sounds vengeful and aggressive.

Sometimes the mother locks her kids out in the front garden as punishment – last time this happened the youngest was crying hysterically for half an hour, it was awful. Is there anything you can do?”

The NSPCC has just published a [research report](#) underlining increased parental and family stress, reductions in protective services and increased pressure on children’s emotional wellbeing. Some long term effects can last until adulthood.

The charity is calling on the Scottish Government to urgently commit to a children’s recovery plan which sets out how it will:

- Deliver the long-term investment in children’s services that is needed to provide high quality preventative and therapeutic services for children in every part of the country;
- Invest in rebuilding support for families with babies and young children who have missed out on the normal support from health visitors during the lockdown;
- Support multi-agency partnerships of the local authority, NHS and police to work with schools to review support for children known to the designated child protection lead, and identify those who continue to miss class with a plan to understand and address any barriers to a child’s school attendance;
- Ensure schools are ready to help all children who need it – particularly those who may have suffered abuse, neglect or other traumatic experiences during the lockdown. Schools must be equipped to recognise and respond sensitively to children who have experienced physical or mental harm, trauma or adverse experiences when they return to the classroom. This includes putting in place support for teachers to enable them to support children confidently, including training on child development science and how trauma can manifest in behavioural problems or poor emotional regulation.

- Support recovery services across health, education and social care, including through the provision of additional investment, to develop a coordinated plan to respond to what is likely to be an increase in need for therapeutic services.

Matt Forde, NSPCC Scotland head of service, said: "The increase in referrals from our helpline during the lockdown highlights how some families have been driven to crisis point and the home has become an increasingly unsafe place for some children.

"It is vital that children are now supported to help them recover from any mental and physical harm that many will have suffered these past few months.

"Government's role is crucial, and it must put in place a detailed recovery plan that makes sure children and young people can receive the expert help they need if they have had difficult or damaging experiences.

"Putting children at the heart of recovery planning and taking this action quickly will mean the crisis of the last three months does not scar the childhoods of a whole generation."

A stepmother called in to say: "I'm calling about my step-daughter as I'm worried about the level of home schooling she's been receiving from her biological mother during lockdown. The mother does not have access to internet at her home, so the school has provided paper work for her to do instead. However, one of the teachers has just told us they've not received any of this work for the last 6 weeks! I've tried addressing this with the mother on the phone, but she was very evasive about the whole thing, it's hard to get any truth out of her. My step-daughter is back living with us right now and we really don't want her to go back to her mum's, seeing as she's fallen so far behind with her work."

A neighbour said: "I'm concerned about a young girl who

recently moved into the apartment block with her father. I can smell cannabis coming out of their flat every day, it's overwhelming. Their windows are always shut and there's never any clean washing on their line. I've rarely seen the girl playing outside, but when I do I've noticed her clothes are often stained and her hair is greasy and matted. Police have been called to the property a few times during lockdown, but I'm not sure why. I really don't think this is a safe environment to raise a child."