

Covid-19: Protecting Families in the UK

Founded in the UK in 1919, Save the Children is a global organisation helping children to survive and thrive in 120 countries, including here in the UK. In response to the coronavirus outbreak, which we believe to be the gravest humanitarian challenge in our organisation's history, we have launched an Emergency Grants Programme and educational support for families in poverty in the UK, as well as responding at a global scale.

Too many children are living in households struggling to get by, and the coronavirus outbreak has put even more families on the brink of poverty. We cannot let that number rise. With earnings reduced or gone, some parents are struggling to provide basics such as food and support their children's education at home. Whilst the government have taken unprecedented steps to protect incomes, this crisis means children's growth and development, mental health and wellbeing are at real risk. Families are finding that their incomes are taking a hit at the same time as facing additional costs for essentials such as food, heating, and internet access. Without support, they will struggle to cope.

Key Issues Families are Facing

- **FOOD POVERTY AND SCARCITY OF ESSENTIAL ITEMS**
 - The most requested item of support through our emergency scheme has been supermarket vouchers. This shows that parents across the UK are struggling to afford the most basic of needs for them and their children: food.
- **INCREASED FAMILY STRESS**
 - Already overstretched parents are now dealing with the added pressure of financial uncertainty.
- **LACK OF EARLY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**
 - For many families, the stress of financial insecurity, a lack of books and toys and a lack of confidence can mean they are not able to support their children's learning as much as they would like.
- **LIMITED OR NO INTERNET ACCESS AND IT EQUIPMENT**
 - Being able to get on the internet is essential for many home learning resources but many families living in poverty don't have access to Wi-Fi, or don't have the right kind of devices to support their children's learning and development.

Our Covid-19 UK Response in the UK

We know that **parental engagement** and the home **learning environment** are key to children's development. Therefore, we have developed an **Emergency Relief Package for Families** affected by COVID-19, which offers:

- Early learning resources, including educational toys and books
- Food e-vouchers that can be used in major supermarkets or online
- Household products to support the home learning environment, such as a table and chairs
- Advice on how to support their children's learning at home, information on available services, tips on explaining coronavirus to their children and how they can manage their own stress.

*In the first two weeks of launching our emergency grants scheme, **we have reached over 300 children**. The biggest uptake has been for supermarket vouchers, signalling that families are struggling with their basic food needs. Alongside this support, all families are provided with an early learning pack, with ideas for everyday play and learning activities without any costs.*

What are families saying?

"I left my job on 11th March and was due to start new employment in April. My role was to support a child with additional needs...because that child was no longer in school there was no longer a job and they still can't confirm if there will be a job for me in the future. This job would have been £600 a month more than my previous job. I've lost over £1000 a month. This was the first month I am solely relying on Universal Credit but I was benefit capped £409. Unfortunately, there's no light at the end of the tunnel because without childcare I cannot work. I worry about my child's mental health and education. She's an only child so she missed her friends. An extra £20 Would be a brilliant start. It would help pay for bills and food."

Emma, London, Mother of a 5-year-old

Our calls on Government

The Government has set out some welcome measures to protect those most at risk, including the Jobs Retention Scheme and the increase to the standard element of Universal Credit and Working Tax Credits. However, sadly, many families will still fall through the gaps.

To help stop more children in the UK being pushed into poverty during this crisis, we will need to see further measures to support the most vulnerable. Save the Children is calling for a Family Rescue Package, to ensure that families have the support they need.

- 1. Strengthen the safety net of the social security system by:**
 - a. Increasing the child element of Universal Credit and Child Tax Credit by £20 per week to help families manage additional costs of lockdown, such as increased energy, internet, and food bills
 - b. Increasing the level of the benefit cap
 - c. Pausing repayment on advances to cover the 5-week wait for the first payment for at least six months.
- 2. Ensure all families have digital access to support children's learning** by ensuring online connectivity, access to devices, and ongoing financial support for digital access.
- 3. Our priority is making sure parents are supported to engage in their children's learning at home – this is where children spend most of their time, and home has the biggest impact on our early development. To make sure schools and early years settings in England have the resources they need to support parents through this crisis and in the future, the Department for Education will need to boost guidance and resources – funding, volunteer support and anything else needed - they give to settings.**

What you can do

Meet with us – we would be delighted to meet with you to discuss our Covid-19 UK response and what we are calling on the Government to do to ensure families and children are protected during this crucial time. To arrange a meeting, email Sarah Murray on s.murray@savethechildren.org.uk

Put down a PQ

- 1.** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment he has made of the impact that school closures will have on the attainment gap.
- 2.** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what conversations he is having with charities, like Save the Children about the impact lockdown is having on the early years learning within disadvantaged families.
- 3.** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent work he has carried out to ensure all families have digital access to support children's learning.
- 4.** To ask the Secretary of State for the DWP what recent assessment she has made of the child element amount for Universal Credit and Child Tax Credit.
- 5.** To ask the Secretary of State for the DWP what recent assessment she has made of calls from charities, like Save the Children, to increase the child element of Universal Credit and Child Tax Credit by £20 per week, to help families manage additional costs of lockdown, such as increased energy, internet, and food bills.
- 6.** To ask the Secretary of State for the DWP to confirm when her Department will review the benefit cap as this something that is reviewed once in every Parliament.