

## Anti-Social Behaviour and Covid-19

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We are in unprecedented times. This feeling of unsafe uncertainty will undoubtedly lead to an increase in anti-social behaviour. Many practitioners expect an increase of incidents during Bank Holiday weekends, significant sporting events and even when there is a full moon.



## So why will Covid-19 influence an increase in anti-social behaviour:

- Fear: people's behaviour alters, not always for the better, when they are frightened;
- Greed: some people will see this national crisis as an opportunity for personal gain;
- Boredom: some people will dismiss what is acceptable and find ways to entertain themselves at the expense of their neighbours;
- Living closely to others constantly may escalate and aggravate previous minor irritations;
- Intolerance: people become less tolerant the longer they are prevented from conducting their usual activities;
- Faulty and assumed beliefs: in times of crisis, people can target others unfairly because they perceive them as being in a better situation than they are, such as benefit claimants or those they consider more affluent
- Limited agency resources could lead some people to believe they can behave anti-socially without reprimand
- Blame: when people feel they have suffered an injustice they sometimes and arbitrarily, look for someone to bear responsibility

A good anti-social behaviour practitioner is tuned in to atmospheric, environmental and societal changes likely to alter people's behaviour and influence the character of anti-social behaviour.

Practitioners adapt and approach incidents with creativity, recognising the human dimension as multi-faceted. In most cases, forging a solution to a case invariably requires human interaction by visiting the victim and perpetrator in their homes.

This type of interaction can help a practitioner to identify subtle things that enable a thorough investigation and inform a decision on how to facilitate a solution. Those subtle things include recognising that someone is living in chaos which may be indicative of a significant personal issue which is influencing their behaviour. **Covid-**

19 will limit our usual investigative opportunities but this does not mean we cannot continue to fight anti-social behaviour successfully.

***Practitioners must now ADAPT. This will be the biggest test of our profession.***



There is no doubt that Covid-19 will influence people's behaviour at both extremes of the spectrum. Some refer to the best of behaviour as 'Blitz Spirit'. We hope that everyone will be tolerant, kind and behave in the best interests of their community.

But we must also be clear that anti-social behaviour is **ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**. Covid-19 does not legitimise unacceptable behaviour which causes harm to others. Indeed, that harm is likely to be exacerbated by victims feeling even more vulnerable than they may ordinarily because **WE ARE ALL VULNERABLE** now.

## Will Covid-19 reveal a new face of Anti-Social Behaviour?



**Absolutely.** We have already seen this globally and includes behaviours such as:

- Targeting individuals believed to be from China as being responsible for Covid-19
- Physical violence in shops in the course of panic buying
- Perpetrating noise nuisance or committing offences because emergency services are overstretched and cannot attend all call outs
- Looting
- Increase in acquisitive crime to fund alcohol or substance misuse where substitutes from services are unavailable

## How do Practitioners ADAPT?

Practitioners cannot visit perpetrators or victims in their homes for the foreseeable future. Neither will they have the resources of an office at their disposal. But we do have a commitment to victims to prevent and detect crime and anti-social behaviour. And, our innate and finely tuned skills of managing cases has given us the best skill set of all: COMMON SENSE.

## So how do we use it to help victims during Covid-

19?

- We prioritise our most vulnerable victims
- We establish regular contact patterns with them
- We continually update vulnerability and risk assessments
- We provide harm reduction advice and place safety first
- We help by reassuring them that perpetrators will not go unpunished for their anti-social behaviour even though it may take longer than usual
- We encourage them to use their own IT equipment to capture behaviour where it does not put them at risk to do so
- We approach victims honestly and invite them to be stakeholders in finding ways to manage and adapt
- We act as an extra level of support when victim services are overwhelmed or unavailable
- We insist that victims log and report every incident
- We reiterate that victims must call 999 where there is a risk to life or property
- We do not delegitimise their complaints because of the national crisis
- We do inform victims of their right to invoke the community trigger, but we inform them the usual timescales will no longer apply
- We safeguard where necessary

## **How do we deal with perpetrators during Covid-19?**

- We establish or reaffirm our agency contacts and impress upon them the need to be kept in the loop of incidents involving perpetrators
- We bear in mind the locality rule: if a perpetrator is behaving anti-socially (such as fighting over toilet roll) in a 1.5-mile radius of their home, this is important for enforcing tenancy agreements
- We do our absolute best to establish and maintain communications with perpetrators. This will enable us to negotiate a resolution while being up to date on any vulnerabilities or contributory factors influencing their behaviour. Will a phone call to a drug and alcohol service be a positive intervention to help a perpetrator to access services and reduce the likelihood of them being anti-social?
- We must be clear with perpetrators that their behaviour will not go unpunished

- We issue Warnings over the phone, by email or by handwritten letter if necessary
- We keep accurate records of every interaction including when we issue verbal warnings
- We can still apply to the County Court for Part 1 Without Notice Anti-Social Behaviour Injunctions when an urgent case arises
- We can still apply for standard Part 1 Anti-Social Behaviour Injunctions
- We can still issue Possession Proceedings although these claims will take longer, and the Court Service will try to conduct hearings via Skype (please note this may change and you should check the Court service website)
- We can still apply for Closure Orders and issue Community Protection Warnings
- We can still issue Noise Abatement Notices
- We can still issue Acceptable Behaviour Contracts by taking verbal consent from parties
- We can take witness statements over the phone and if they are required for legal proceedings urgently, we can exhibit them as part of our witness statements to avoid obtaining a signature
- We can keep on top of our prolific perpetrators by contacting them regularly by text, email, letter or call to remind them of their obligations, update their proportionality assessments and signpost to relevant support services
- We safeguard perpetrators when required and recognise that perpetrators are sometimes victims too

## **Everyone must be compassionate, tolerant and amenable to adapt to Covid-19.**

We must do so reasonably, fairly and proportionality and knowing that we behave with good conscience throughout our interactions with victims, fellow professionals and perpetrators.

If you are a victim or witness of anti-social behaviour, REPORT, REPORT, REPORT

If there is a risk to life or property call 999

If there is no risk to life then report it via 101, online to your police force or to a registered social landlord or local authority.

Stay Safe and see our other tips on managing anti-social behaviour

Rebecca Brown is the CEO of ASB Help.

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