

Supporting children with Autism who are at home during the school closure.

The sudden changes to routines and daily life can be especially challenging for children with additional needs such as autism. Changes in your child's behaviour may be underpinned by increased anxiety and stress. While every child with autism has individual needs, here are some general things to consider.

- Try to **have a routine or schedule to your day**. Don't expect your home routine to be the same as the school day, as this probably isn't realistic. However it may be helpful to loosely follow parts of the school day, for example literacy and numeracy based activities in the morning. Try to include a balance of structured activities and choice/ free time. Involve your child in planning the routine and **make it visual** by making a list or timetable using words or pictures.
- Try to **keep some familiar routines going**, such as bedtime, evening and morning routines. Think about your own needs and the needs of the other members of the family in the routine too
- Once your weekday routine is in place, it might help to make a **visual weekly plan for the family**, so your child knows which days are 'school' days and which days aren't. Try to be clear when the 'school' part of the day is over, by finishing the day with a familiar activity such as tidying up together.
- Your child may worry about the impact of changes such as not being able to go to the shops or buy their favourite foods. Try to **be aware of your child's triggers and early signs of distress**. For example, if your child is stressed about mealtimes try involving them in planning a menu and prepare them for changes to meals in advance.
- Think about how you can create some **sensory down time** to recharge, away from the hustle and bustle of the household. This can be difficult at home but perhaps you could have a quiet corner or chair in a room where they can go for some alone time?
- **Try making a calm box** for your child to use when you spot early signs of distress. Keep some favourite toys and repetitive activities in the calm box, such as colouring books, listening to music with headphones, favourite stories, puzzles and games.
- Try to model good mental health behaviour by including self-care and wellbeing activities in your daily schedule . **Plan in relaxation and 'recharging' time**. This could be something you do together as a family (relaxation apps, yoga, reading a story together, quiet colouring activities, listening to music). Build in time for **physical activity and movement**. There are lots of YouTube and on line exercise sessions specifically aimed at children and families. Look at the Place2Be website for some useful links.
- It's important to think about the age and individual needs of your child when sharing information about the Coronavirus. Manage anxiety by **shielding them from an overload of information** and limiting news intake to specific times, and monitor access to social media stories. Try to stick to the facts and keep it simple, using reputable sources of information such as CBBC Newsround. Take your child's concerns seriously and provide reassurance and honesty. Remember to have plenty of activities where talking about the Coronavirus doesn't feature.

Here some autism friendly resources to help explain the situation to your child.

Social stories to explain about the Coronavirus.

For older and teenage children

<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf>

For younger, primary aged children

<https://www.ppmid.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Corona-Virus-Free-Printable-Updated-2-The-Autism-Educator-.pdf>

https://660919d3-b85b-43c3-a3ad-3de6a9d37099.filesusr.com/ugd/64c685_319c5acf38d34604b537ac9fae37fc80.pdf

Comic strip to explain Coronavirus

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>

Sensory info about washing

<https://www.sensoryintegration.org.uk/News/8821506>

Remember to look at useful websites like the National Autistic Society which is constantly updating information and resources. <https://www.autism.org.uk>

If you would like to discuss this further, Place 2Be staff can arrange a consultation with their Place2Be Educational Psychologist.