

Advice for parents of students with autism during the coronavirus crisis

Firstly

- Don't put too much pressure on yourself, this is a crisis to be got through, not home-schooling
- Do what works for you, this will be different for everyone
- If work sent home by school helps, use it, if not don't

As one sensible head teacher put on Facebook:

'You are doing enough. You are loving your kids and supporting them through a difficult time. Look after yourself. Minimising stress is absolutely vital in a time like this for mental health. Don't let this be something that stresses you. Only you can control that by accepting it is in your circle of control, you are the primary educator and this is all your call.'

Structure and Routine

- Decide on a structure and routine for each day and stick to it as far as possible
- If possible, maintain the same routine each day
- Give clear, visual information about what is happening in a form that your child can understand. This may be objects of reference, visual symbols, pictures, written lists, depending on the needs of your child
- Give overall information on the structure of the day (e.g. visual timetable) but also structure to activities, where you can, or feel you need to
- Structure work sessions (if you are doing this) visually, e.g. using start and finish baskets, workstation systems, task lists

Hygiene and Social Distancing

- Use visuals to support hygiene routines such as handwashing
- Build hygiene routines into the day regularly
- Teach directly about personal space and social distancing

Communication

- Use visual supports if needed to find out what your child wants / needs
- Use clear visuals and social stories to talk about corona virus – examples in pack
- Speak clearly and reduce language, emphasising key words:
Say Less and Stress
Go Slow and Show

Anxiety and Well-being

- Build in regular physical and sensory breaks (see links on our school website)
- Use social stories, visuals to support to discuss coronavirus
- Support to understand and express feelings with visuals e.g. 5 point scale, emotion thermometer, traffic lights etc.
- Include activities that your child finds soothing and enjoyable – e.g. Lego, reading about/researching interests / outdoor activities e.g. den building or gardening / listening to music / playing suitable online games. Some of these could be an ongoing project that could be done daily.
- Teach relaxation techniques, e.g. breathing exercises and use relaxation tools e.g. a Happy Book

Sensory and Physical

- Build in regular physical movement breaks – more appearing each day online- e.g. Joe Wicks does a session at a regular time each day
- This could be a walk around the house or garden if you have one, or a daily walk as per government instructions
- OT or Physio programmes, if your child has one
- A series of simple exercises, yoga, tai chi etc – lots are available online to follow
- A game of table tennis or a ball game
- Include outdoor activities if you can - e.g. den building, mud pies, gardening
- Include sensory activities – particularly deep pressure and heavy work – at regular intervals throughout the day.
- Create a sensory area, e.g. tent or den where your can have a sensory break / stimulation according to sensory needs (I'm sure many of you have this already). In some cases, this may need to be very low sensory stimulation – e.g. a blackout tent with nothing in. In others, preferred sensory experiences may be provided e.g. lights, music and sounds, tactile materials, aromas etc.

Learning

- Provide clear structure to tasks so your child knows what to do, how much to do and when it is finished
- This can be done using work systems such as Start and Finish baskets, work-systems with coloured or numbered drawers, task lists visually clear tasks
- For activities without a clear finish – or to end a preferred activity – use timers
- Provide motivation for completing activities and ensure this is visually clear – incorporate into work-system or use a visual reward system