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Date 20 April 2020

### **A message to Parents/ Carers from the Social Communication and Autism Team during the Covid-19 pandemic**

*This message is for parents/ carers of children with Social Communication Difficulties and Autism in mainstream schools who were being supported in some way by the Social Communication and Autism Team prior to the lockdown/ school closures.*

- As you may know/ be aware the STePS Social and Communication Team (Miriam Price, Louise Bieluch and Davinia Hammersley) are still working during the school closure period but support is very limited and the Social Communication and Autism team are unable to carry out any face to face visits. During lockdown/ school closures it may take longer to reply to your email/ phone calls than usual.
- Your school may have set work for your child to do at home. Teachers have had very little time to prepare for this scenario and some schools are still open for a small number of children. Perhaps the teachers in your school have not been able to produce, find and provide appropriate work for your child. We know this may be causing you and your child some anxiety, particularly if your child is preparing for public exams.
- Daily routines will be very important for your child and will help to reduce anxiety and promote well-being. The daily routines may need to be presented visually using pictures and or words so that your child can refer to the schedule/ timetable when they need to. This approach may have been used at school for your child and you may not have needed to use this support at home, however introducing a familiar routine alongside the visual support during the week days may help your child to feel more relaxed and able to cope with the significant changes that are happening. A visual timetable may also help your child to understand that some school work now needs to be done at home instead of school. It is important to identify regular break times on the timetable and times to do favourite activities of their choosing. Further information and advice can be found on Derby City Local Offer.



<https://www.derby.gov.uk/education-and-learning/special-education-needs-disabilities/diagnosis/autism/> and on the National Autistic Society website <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is.aspx>

- Social stories may help your child to understand how the virus is transmitted and that if family members become ill, it is not their fault. It is important that your child understands that the situation will get better over time.
- Recognising and understanding that the significant change to everyday life will have a huge impact on some children that find change difficult. As adults we must carefully and appropriately respond by adapting the environment and the demands placed.
- If you are a lone parent (even temporarily due to sickness) we know it can be particularly difficult if you have a child with Social Communication Difficulties and Autism especially getting out of the house to get your essentials. If you don't have any family members, friends or neighbours who you feel you can ask for help from then contact the Community Response Hub on 01332 640000 or email the Derby Covid Community Response Hub.
- If your child has communication difficulties and you are worried about how emergency services and hospital staff will understand their complex needs should they get taken ill suddenly and particularly if you are not able to accompany them to hospital. The NHS trusts locally have developed a template you can fill in to give to them in these situations. It is known as the A&E grab sheet. Email [stepsadmin@derby.gov.uk](mailto:stepsadmin@derby.gov.uk) if you would like a copy of this sheet.

If you have any concerns or queries about your child's ability to access the work being provided/ set by school during school closure first speak to the SENCO. If you are unable to contact the SENCO then contact the team in the usual way by email or by phone directly to the worker alternatively contact us on [stepsadmin@derby.gov.uk](mailto:stepsadmin@derby.gov.uk) or 01332 641400.