



## Children with Social Communication difficulties and Autism returning to school.

As children gradually return to school - whatever that might look like – there will be challenges for everyone, but for children and young people with Social Communication difficulties or a diagnosis of Autism this will be even more challenging particularly as change and unpredictability can result in heightened anxiety that can be displayed in a range of ways.

This is a really difficult time with many aspects of everyday life expected to change and everybody's well-being during this time is extremely important.

We have identified some key strategies to support you at home.

	Challenges	Strategies that may reduce the challenges
<p><b>Routines</b> Consistent routines will be really important given that there will be significant changes to overcome.</p>	<p>There will be a significant change and new routines in school ,for example: The classroom layout has changed Your child may be in a different classroom. There are different adults in the room Different Year groups have different start dates Changes to the way that children arrive, leave school, lunchtime, breaks, assemblies and not able to take part in all sports etc</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Start to establish <b>routines</b> at home, getting up, dressed, having breakfast in time for the school routine as these may have been more relaxed during school closure.</li> <li>School sending <b>photographs</b> home showing the changes so you can spend time preparing your child and reassuring them</li> <li><b>Countdown to school calendar</b> to have at home.</li> <li>School will have new rules, for example handwashing on arrival. Ask school for a copy of the rules using a visual format</li> <li>Practise handwashing Free <b>Handwashing</b> visuals <a href="#">Washing your hands - symbols and posters</a></li> <li>Your child may need to arrive later than peers and leave earlier to avoid waiting in queues/ busy times.</li> </ul>
<p>Social Stories</p>	<p>The <b>different rules in school</b> – not being able to hug their friends, frequent hand washing, not being in school with</p>	<p>Social Stories support children to understand the changes in school, provide reassurance and reduce anxiety.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="http://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-">http://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-</a></li> </ul>

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	<p>all of their friends, not sharing resources, wearing masks etc.</p>	<p><a href="#">resources</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create your own social story by using a free 30 day trial using <b>Widgit Online</b> <a href="https://www.widgit.com/products/widgit-online/index.htm">https://www.widgit.com/products/widgit-online/index.htm</a></li> </ul> <p>Information on writing social stories can be found at <a href="https://carolgraysocialstories.com/">https://carolgraysocialstories.com/</a></p> <p>Write a social story in preparation in case the school/ class needs to close suddenly due to an outbreak of COVID 19.</p>
<p>Emotional Wellbeing</p>	<p><b>Anxiety</b> resulting from the changes concerns about catching the virus, difficulties understanding what is happening and why, managing demands and sensory overload</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce demands and expectations at home as your child gradually adjusts to the changes. Your child may need quiet time or a <b>safe space</b> and time to relax after being in school.</li> <li>• Your child may need to spend more time with their special interests to help them to self – regulate their emotions</li> <li>• Encourage children to think about the positives in school. Ensure you as a family are always talking positively about school.</li> <li>• Increase opportunities for movement and <b>sensory regulation</b>.</li> <li>• Encourage your child and provide opportunities for your child to communicate their worries and fears, this may be through play or be spending time with them and their special interest. Suggest ways of supporting them to understand their worries and develop solutions.</li> <li>• Your child may want to show more control at home due to the changes in school which are not in their control. Support them by allowing them to control some aspects of home life in agreement with the family. For example choosing what is for tea one night a week etc</li> <li>• Your child may find it difficult to be able to accept transition to a new setting if he/ she has not had the opportunity to see his/her friends in school and say goodbye or to say goodbye to staff that have supported them. Children in Year 6 who may not be able to</li> </ul>

		<p>have the usual celebrations at the end of the year. It is important to recognise that they will feel sad but maybe there will be other ways of keeping in touch as well as new people to meet. Consider how to keep in touch using technology, letters, goodbye books, memory books for children to look back on to remind them of happy times.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your child may be upset or angry that they are returning to school and their siblings are not yet returning</li><li>• Talk to schools about any worries or fears your child may have sooner rather than later, everyone wants the best for the children and it is important that everyone works together.</li><li>• Remember to praise and provide positive reinforcement maybe with a favourite activity when your child is showing that they are adapting to change and showing emotional regulation and empathise with them when they are finding it hard to accept and adapt to change.</li></ul>
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