



Derby City Council

## **Guidance for Supporting Home Learners with Social Communication difficulties and Autism.**

As time goes on we recognise that many children and young people (CYP) with social communication difficulties and Autism will find a transition back into school very challenging after spending a considerable time at home. We have had many requests for support from families with concerns of raised anxieties over leaving the house.

Understandably there will have to be a considerable time of adjustment. Key considerations that CYP may have are:

- Separation anxiety.
- Anxiety regarding the virus and is it safe to leave home, return to school and be near others?
- Increased anxiety and rituals, for example handwashing, fear of touching objects.
- The demands on communication are very different in school, communication may have been more indirect at home – online, gaming rather than face to face.
- Demands on learning time will have been reduced. Learning may have been directed by them and they had the opportunity for regular breaks/ sensory breaks.
- Heightened sensory responses to physical changes in the environment, for example frequent use of cleaning regimes causing a smell of cleaning products.
- Sensory sensitivities to wearing uniform.
- Difficulty with social distancing due to proprioceptive difficulties affecting sensory regulation, lack of awareness of their body in space.
- Heightened anxiety due to others not following the rules or someone coughing in school.
- Lack of familiarity may lead to increased anxiety and disengagement
- Opportunities for transition for the new academic year greatly reduced and different.

### **Continuing the relationship with school**

It is really important that CYP continue to have a maintained connection with specific members of staff in school reassuring them that you are still there and ready to welcome them back to school whenever that may be. This may be through telephone calls providing regular check in opportunities and also through the use of video. It is really important that the opportunity the pupil has to connect with staff is in a way that is supportive to them.

- Ask the child which staff member/s they would like to hear from.
- What form of communication do they prefer? Older pupils may prefer email, whilst younger ones may prefer a video call.



- These opportunities do not have to be 'live'. Pre-recorded videos could be sent with messages from staff members, or a video of a staff member reading a book, or talking about the child's area of interest.
- Postcards from school which include the school logo act as a visual cue for pupils and remind them of school.
- Showing the new layout of the classroom entrance etc and expectations on arrival using video before they return to school.

Children and young people are likely to have concerns over interactions and loss of friendships following time apart. Therefore, it is particularly important that schools focus on ways to re-establish these connections.

- Consider group video calls with children from the same class.
- Creating class videos are a great way of children re-connecting with their peers. Asking them to send a picture in to school and collating these pictures to make a video or asking children to sing a song, send it in and then collate into a video.

### **Working with Parents and Carers**

Working with parents to establish what has worked well at home and how to use those strengths in school.

### **Long Term Projects**

A lot of children find it difficult to complete school work at home as they only associate learning with school. However, it is important for children to keep busy, motivated and continues to use the skills they have learnt in the classroom.

Ideally, devise a project that is highly motivating for the pupil and focuses on his individual strengths and interests. Here are a few examples:

- Raising money for a good cause or doing something positive for the local community.
- Help pupils to identify and notice the good things around them by creating a Gratitude Journal.
- Gardening (potted plants and container gardening if you have no or limited outdoor space), mini- beast hunts, check out <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2020/03/kids-nature-activities-self-isolation/> or [www.naturallylearning.co.uk](http://www.naturallylearning.co.uk) for more fun outdoor learning ideas.
- Craft or art-based projects. One example would be to creating a scrapbook about lockdown. Include photographs and key facts/dates which will be a great keep safe for years to come.
- Researching a topic online and creating a presentation or talk for the rest of the family.
- Reading a highly motivating book and reviewing it verbally or in writing.
- Cooking and baking.
- Life-skills; laundry, cleaning, shopping online for food etc.
- Lego-based project <https://www.legofoundation.com/en/learn-how/knowledge-base/six-bricks/>

- Setting a weekly family challenge is also worth considering, for example 'Completing 3 Joe Wicks Workouts together as a family'.

## Structure

This is so important for children with Autism as it helps to reduce anxiety as they know what to expect throughout the day.

Having things to do helps the child to keep their mind and bodies active. It's important to include things that the child likes doing as well as regular rest breaks. For example "*Wake Up, Breakfast, Maths, Trampoline, Long Term Project, PlayStation, Snack* etc.

The day needs to be broken down into manageable chunks and presented in a visual timetable. Here are some examples:

- My Daily Routine - <https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources-and-downloads/files/daily-planner-routine-editable-ambitious-about-autism.pdf>
- Daily Planner – <https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources-and-downloads/files/daily-planner-editable-ambitious-about-autism.pdf>
- Weekly Planner - <https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources-and-downloads/files/weekely-planner-editable-ambitious-about-autism.pdf>

## Anxiety

Children with ASD experience anxiety much more than the typical population, so the recent events will most likely be adding to their anxiety.

Recognising and empathising with their anxieties and using visual resources to manage their worries and give their worries a context will support their regulation so that solutions can be created.

- Pupils should know someone that they can speak to at school. Get them to name one adult that they can talk to about their worries. They should know how they can speak to someone if they need to.
- It will be important to increase positivity to counter balance the negative feelings and ideas. Create a positive wall to put post it's on.
- Encourage pupils to think about their feelings. If pupils are at home, how can they express themselves to their parents and to staff. Explore worry boxes.
- Provide opportunities for emotional check-ins. Some example resources include: <https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/emotional-check-in/>

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/sentence-starters/>  
<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/emotion-wheel/>  
<http://www.starsteam.org.uk/media/Simple%20Worry%20Plan.pdf>

- This picture book on worries related to Covid-19 may be helpful  
<https://en.calameo.com/read/000777721945cfe5bb9cc?authid=Xu9pcOzU3TQx>
- A 14 minute video of Dr Tony Attwood speaking about the Coronavirus – Autism and Anxiety <http://www.autismhangout.com/#>
- The National Autistic Society have produced tips for families.  
<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/resources/tips-for-autistic-people-and-families>

### **It is important that parents and carers have a plan to respond to their child when they are dysregulated**

If a child is engaging in difficult behaviour, it is important to:

- Remember that all behaviour is a form of communication.
- Avoid taking the behaviour personally.
- Try and remain calm, taking a few deep breaths if needed.
- Tentatively acknowledge how the pupil is feeling without assuming you know what they are feeling or why (as there will be a range of emotions and reasons for these).
- Use positive language, e.g. telling them what to do rather than what not to do.
- Do not ask 'why' something happened, instead focus on 'what' happened. It may be that they are unable to tell you in the moment, and this needs to happen once the child is calm.
- Consider supporting parents to explore the 4 steps of emotion coaching:  
1/ Recognising the child's feelings and empathising with them.  
2/ Validating and label the emotion the child is feeling in the moment  
3/ Set limits (if necessary)  
4/ Problem-solve: identify the feelings that gave way to the problems; identify more appropriate alternatives; agree possible solutions the child could try if the situation occurs again.

### **Social stories**

- What is the coronavirus? Going back to school. I miss my friends and family <https://www.senresourcesource.co.uk/>
- Stories for younger learners including a going back to school story, greeting my teachers and friends plus some colouring sheets of people wearing masks.  
<https://www.autismlittlelearners.com/search/label/COVID-19>
- Social stories including 'what is lockdown and social distancing?', 'what is social distancing?' and 'why do I have to stay at home?'  
<http://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-resources>
- **NEW** Free Social story on getting a COVID test.  
<https://blog.goodchildhood.org.au/2020/06/12/free-social-story-getting-tested-for-covid/>

## **Guidance for schools on a range of topics including:**

- Managing unexpected endings and transition.
- Managing the transition back to school.
- 7 ways to support children and young people who are worried.
- Helping children and young people to manage anxiety.
- Supporting the most vulnerable children and young people.  
<https://www.annafreud.org/coronavirus-support/support-for-schools-and-colleges/>

## **Sensory regulation**

Children and young people with Autism can also have difficulty regulating sensory information and this can lead to dysregulation. Changes to familiar routines and heightened anxieties can escalate sensory behaviours due to less tolerance of sensory input causing increased sensory overload and therefore more time may need to be given to support their sensory regulation.

- NAS Information on sensory differences <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/sensory-differences/sensory-differences>
- A child's view of sensory processing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1G5ssZIVUw>

## **In preparation for children returning to school**

Refer to Derby City School Information Portal for COVID 19 Transition Guidance for Education Settings written by Derby City Educational Psychology Service which includes:

- Fostering a sense of belonging in school Emotion Based School Avoidance.
- [https://schoolportal.derby.gov.uk/media/schoolsinformationportal/contentassets/documents/step s/covid-19/Transition-Guidance-to-Schools-and-Settings.pdf](https://schoolportal.derby.gov.uk/media/schoolsinformationportal/contentassets/documents/step%20s/covid-19/Transition-Guidance-to-Schools-and-Settings.pdf)
- The Autism Education Trust have provided a free teacher toolkit <https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/covid-19-information-centre/>
- Preparing Autistic and SEND Children for going back to school – free online training <https://www.schudio.tv/courses/preparing-autistic-send-children-for-going-back-to-school>

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