

SUPPORTING PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM / ANXIETY OR A LEARNING DISABILITY THROUGH CORONAVIRUS.

1. General Tips.

These are some general ideas and principles that may help support you through this challenging time. You know your child better than anyone else and probably have lots of effective strategies of your own. Please share with me so that this support pack can continue to be developed and as many families as possible can benefit.

- keep structure and routine - use a visual timetable to map out the day, including weekends. Use <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-c-081-visual-timetable-for-home> or : <https://do2learn.com/picturecards/printcards/> Include daily household activities in these to eg getting dressed, brushing teeth, mealtimes. Keep the 'learning time' minimal to begin with and choose activities linked to their interests giving the new routine time to 'bed in.'
- give warning or reminder before changing task eg use timer to prepare for transition, or traffic light colour card (green=ready to start / orange = nearly finished, end coming / red = activity has finished)
- take lots of breaks! Parents need down time as well as children. Mark these onto the timetable so that your child knows when they have free play and **you** are not to be disturbed!
- try to stay calm and positive! Children with autism will read how you are feeling very quickly, absorb and mirror. Know your own triggers and calmers eg walking away, breathing techniques, read though positive messages etc
- Remember that sensory strategies are vital. Gather together a sensory/fiddle tool box if this isn't already around at home. This can support anxiety via fiddling but also sound and taste/sucking. (See separate list of sensory resources.) Maybe a designated space could be helpful eg a pop-up tent or den?
- stay connected with others. Can you agree times with your child's friends / other family members to skype or facetime at the same time each day?
- physical activity is really helpful for positive thinking, wellbeing and concentration. Include regular slots for these, whether at home (eg Joe Wicks

or <https://www.gonoodle.com/>) or going for a scavenger walk outside <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2020/03/kids-nature-activities-self-isolation/>) Make a leaf collection as you walk to the local shop or count the clouds you see!

- Many children on the spectrum have a great flair for organisation and sorting. Have a think about any jobs/roles that your child could help with or take charge of over this time. This could be functional things like taking charge of the recycling or sorting out a cupboard!
- Screen time will be needed through this time, giving you both some independence. But be mindful that it can be quite 'alerting' and can impact energy levels and sleep. Try structuring it in chunks across the day and limit before bed – the visual timetable can be really helpful to organise this.
- Try to include a little bit of choice to help your child feel like they have some control eg a pear of strawberries for snack time, counting or number bonds in maths.
- Talk to your child about how they are feeling. This can be very difficult for some, especially if very young and may need you to make suggestions eg 'I think you might be feeling disappointed about that.' You could discuss and show ways to feel a bit better eg breathing techniques, massage, positive mantra, yoga.

There's a fabulous video with many more ideas here: <https://youtu.be/dXPtgmHKNoE> -

Supporting neurodiverse children in challenging times such as during self-isolation