

## Top tips for managing time out of school or nursery

Due to the Coronavirus outbreak the Government may make the decision at some point, to close schools and childcare settings. Many children with autism or other additional needs may struggle with this change to their routine and the uncertainty this may bring. This may cause them to become more anxious or distressed which in turn may lead to them to show more difficult to manage behaviours. Here are a few tips for ideas to try to help your child:



### Information and preparation

Children often become more anxious when they do not know what is happening. Once you know of a change coming up, such as school closing, think about how you might let your child know what is happening in a way that they understand. Speak with your child's school as they may already have prepared resources you could use at home, e.g. a Social Story about why school is closing. It will probably be helpful to include information about all of the things in their life that will stay the same, despite the change, e.g. they can still have their usual bedtime routine; they will still be allowed some time doing some of their favourite activities at home such as playing with water or playing games on their tablet.

For children at an earlier level of understanding, for example children who use objects to help them understand, it will be more helpful to focus on helping them understand what is a happening right now, today, rather than trying to explain the reason for any changes.

Attached is a list of links to information for children and young people related to the Coronavirus.

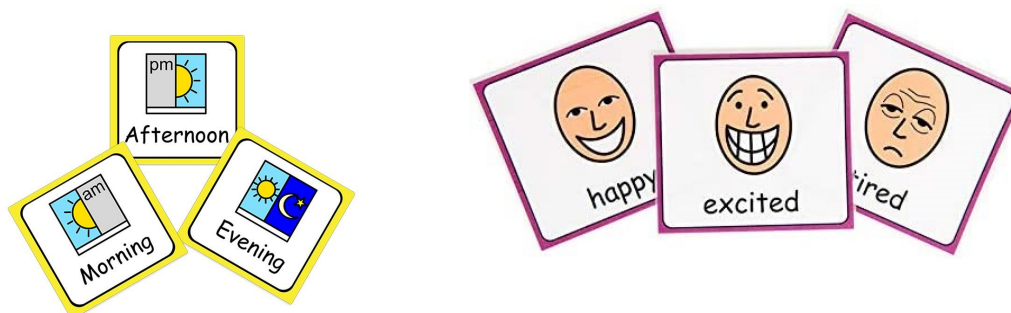
## Visual communication

Depending on your child's level of understanding you might be able to use written information, visual symbols or photographs to help you explain what is happening. When we are stressed it can be even more difficult to understand and remember what others are telling us therefore even children who don't normally depend on pictures and other visual information to support their understanding will probably really benefit from them at the moment.

Contact Olivia S-J at **0161 902 3422** for help with visuals.

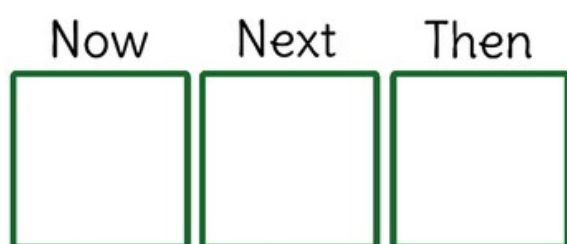
Here is a link to information about visuals you can use at home:

<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/visual-supports.aspx>



## Routine

Try to stick to your usual routines at home, e.g. around bedtime and mealtimes. This will provide predictability and reassurance for your child (i.e. although their usual situation has changed, some things have stayed the same). You may need to develop new routines for the day time if your child is out of school, e.g. time to play after breakfast, followed by screen time, then lunch, then a play in the garden. Try to stick to these new routines as far as possible as this will provide your child with some reassurance and make the day more predictable for them. Use visual supports to show them what is happening, e.g. picture timetables, Now and Next boards, etc.



## Structure and activity

Many children with autism and other additional needs can struggle to occupy themselves. When they are not busy and engaged in activities they may be more likely to show repetitive behaviours as a means of occupying themselves or may show difficult to manage behaviours as an expression of their distress. Many children do have a more limited range of interests, however it may be helpful to try to make a list of the things that they do enjoy or new activities you think they could try, e.g. messy play with gloop or shaving foam; joining in baking; researching something of interest on the internet. Try to use some of these ideas in our daily routine, as described above. Some schools may provide lessons and links to videos and other learning ideas that you could also include.

## Managing need for control

When children with autism or other additional needs experience significant changes they may cope with this by trying to keep everything else the same. This may mean they exert more control over other aspects of their lives and be more reluctant to do other activities that involve change. This may mean refusing a bigger change such as going somewhere new but might also mean refusing smaller changes such as stopping one activity at home to change to another (e.g. stopping the TV to come and have dinner). It is important to remember that your child is not trying to be difficult but rather this is probably their way of coping with other changes. It may help to try to reduce demands to the things they really do need to do, i.e. pick your battles. Offering choices and using timers to let them know when an activity will be ending, may also help.



## Emotional well-being

Children are likely to be more anxious or easily unsettled at this time. Try to think of activities that they find relaxing, soothing or just enjoyable. Are there any activities that they get so absorbed in that they become distracted from their worry and upset? Try to schedule some of these activities into their day so they have access to them even before they become very upset. This is like releasing the valve on tyre, allowing a little of the pressure out at a time rather than waiting for the pressure to build too high. Your child may need more access to these activities than usual. Including physical activities such as walking, jumping, scooting, playing with a ball, can also be good ways of reducing stress for some children.

## Social contact

For some children, social contacts are very important. If they are unable to see friends and family face-to face think about other ways they can stay in contact for example through emails, video links, social media (if appropriate and supervised).



## Looking after yourself

Don't forget to look after yourself. You may be in a position where you are caring for your child for many more hours of the day than you would normally do. Think about who else can help. What other sources of support do you have? Are there other people you can call even if it is just to off load about your day? Where you do have time without your child, for example if they are asleep or occupied in an activity, try to do something for yourself, even if it is something small like sitting down for 10 minutes with a cup of tea.