

## **Supporting children with ASC,** **and their families,** **during the Covid 19 isolation.**



This time of uncertainty is a particularly challenging time for children and families as we are instructed to self-isolate or distance ourselves from friends, family and other support. This is vital to stop the spread of Covid 19. Normal routines and structures are gone temporarily, and we are coming to terms with a new 'normal'.

We have put together this pack to support families. The information within it has been generously shared by individuals and organisations, and in this spirit, we would ask you to share it with anyone you feel it could help. It is by no means 'complete' but contains some ideas which we hope will help.

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## **A: Information about COVID 19.**

There is a lot of information available about COVID 19, some it is correct and some not. It is best to stick to reliable sources of information



<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/>



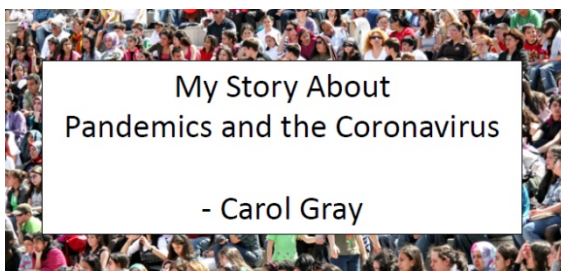
<https://www.autism.org.uk/>



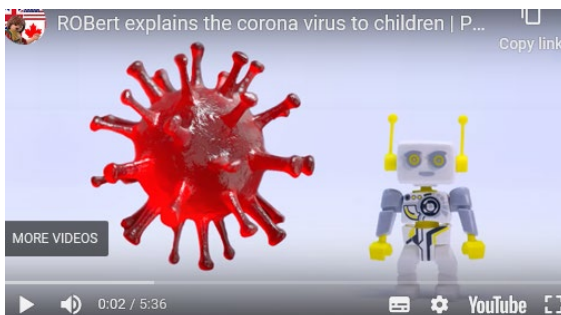
<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

## **Explaining COVID 19 and the necessary restrictions**

Social stories allow us to explain complex concepts in a clear, visually supported way.




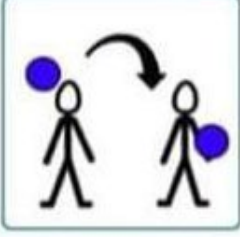
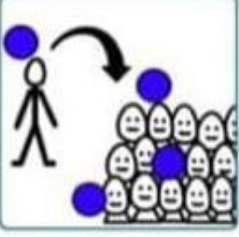


<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf>








<https://metro.co.uk/2020/03/29/parents-love-playmobil-video-explains-coronavirus-kids-12473079/>

## Social story about school closure

### School is closed

				
School is closed because of the Coronavirus.	Coronavirus can pass from one person to another.	Coronavirus can pass more in big groups.	It is best to NOT be in a big group.	We have big groups at school.

				
So school is closed.	I will stay home for many days.	My family and my teachers want me to be safe.	When it is safe, I can be in big groups again.	When it is safe, school will be open again.

## Social story about staying at home

### I have to stay in my house.

In my house I can do lots of things like the work my teacher has set, some drawing, play with my toys and Facetime my family and friends.



I have been told I can only go for a walk, a run or ride my bike once a day. I can only go out with someone who lives in my house. If I go to the play park, I must not go onto the play equipment.



If I meet anybody, I need to stay 2 metres away from them. Two metres is about 6 of my long footsteps.

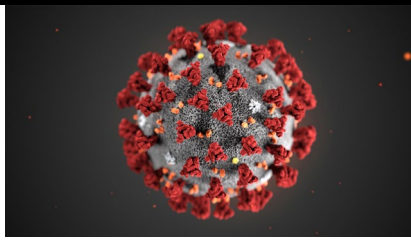


I can wave, say hello and ask them how they are.

Even if I see my friend, I can't go near them or give them anything. It's kind to share but for now I must only share things with the people who live in my house.



I don't feel ill, but I might be carrying the virus. The virus can only be seen when using a microscope.



When I get home, I need to wash my hands for 20 seconds with soap, then dry them thoroughly.



Soon we will be told we can go back to normal and we will go to school again.



*By Rosalind H*  
*Age 7*



## **B: Self-care advice**

### Handwashing



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9VjeIWLnEg>

a great song that shows how to wash hands correctly



<https://www.sensoryintegration.org.uk/News/8821506>

## **C: Structure and routine**

We all know how important routine and predictability is for children with ASC to feel safe and secure. In these uncertain times, the loss of routines and predictability leads to anxiety. To reduce this the following strategies may help:

### Structure in daily routines



Waking at a regular time, getting washed and dressed as usual. Some children will want to wear their school uniform whilst they 'home learn'

Starting the day with a 'wake and shake' activity

Following the same structure everyday, a regular activity- break- activity- break routine.

Using songs or alarms to signify the change from one time slot to another (this mimics school)

Eating at the same times and in the same place

## Visual timetables

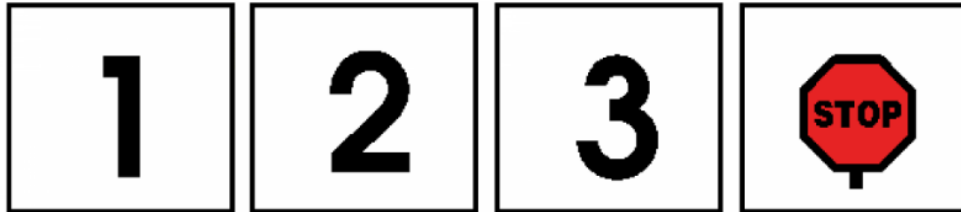


Remember, there is no 'perfect' timetable. Create one that supports you as a family. There are many examples to print online e.g. <https://do2learn.com/picturecards/printcards/> but you may prefer objects, photos or drawings. Your child's school may have shared these resources with you. Their key feature is that they reduce anxiety by providing a predictable structure and visuals reduce the need to take in and remember verbal information.

## Transitioning between tasks

If possible, keep the prewarning systems you or your child's school already use and are familiar with.





### Visual Transition Cues – Defined Beginning and End

- preferred and non-preferred activities
- prepares the student that an activity / task is beginning and when it will end
- clarifies expectations regarding the activity / task

A traffic light system will be useful when you want your child to stop a favoured activity, for instance screen time!



## D: Sleep routines

Many children, and their parents, with ASC have difficulty with sleep.

In times of anxiety this is likely to be more difficult, and this is understandable.

If possible, keep to the usual routine as it provides security.



<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/health/sleep.aspx>

This advice focuses on; establishing a routine, a comfortable bedroom, explaining why we sleep using a social story, the effects of diet and medication.



More advice can be found on;

<https://www.thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk/>

<https://cerebra.org.uk/get-advice-support/sleep-advice-service/>

## How to get to sleep

@DrRoseStewart

### A sleep hygiene guide for anxious times

During times of prolonged worry it's very normal for people to experience sleep disruption. These seven suggestions might help you to get a better night's sleep.

- 1) A good night's sleep starts in the day**  
There's a lot you can do during the day to help your nighttime sleep - making your bed in the morning, doing daytime physical exercise, and getting some sunlight can all help. Daytime naps should be limited to 30 minutes maximum. Avoid alcohol, caffeine, nicotine and rich foods in the evenings.
- 2) Protect your sleep space**  
Try to make your sleep space as calm and uncluttered as you can. It also helps if your bedroom is dark and cool. Your bed should be used for sleep and sex only, so keep other activities like working from home out of the bedroom wherever possible.
- 3) Switch it off**  
Looking at mobile phones and other electronic devices at night disrupts sleep, particularly during times of high anxiety and increased news traffic. Try to stay off your phone for at least one hour before bed, and use functions such as 'do not disturb' to minimise nighttime disruption.
- 4) Get into a bedtime routine**  
Try to establish a regular bedtime and a nightly relaxation routine. This could include having a warm bath or shower, doing some gentle stretches, reading a soothing book, or practicing a relaxation or mindfulness exercise. Try to avoid upsetting conversations or news during your relaxation period.
- 5) Write down the worries**  
If you're finding that particular worries are keeping you up at night, it can be helpful to make a 'worry time' deal with your mind. Write down your worries in a notebook by the bed and agree that you'll think about them in the morning - things tend to feel a lot less scary in daylight.
- 6) Relax your mind**  
Holding on to frustration and tension will not help you sleep. Try practicing deep breathing and mindfulness exercises to help your mind switch off ('Body scan' and 'Leaves on a stream' are great exercises to start with and are widely available online).
- 7) Practice kindness**  
During times like these, we all need some extra love and support. Focussing on feelings of love and compassion can help to trigger your body's relaxation processes, so be kind to your mind, and send love to those around you.

## E: Emotional regulation and managing behaviour

It is natural that everyone will be more emotionally heightened during this situation.

Being kind to yourself, not expecting perfection and accepting what you cannot control will help.

### Primary prevention –

Emptying the stress bucket.



This **bucket** fills up with all the stresses of the day, and can be emptied by a good night's sleep, or by engaging with things which make us feel happy and relaxed. If the **bucket** starts to fill or overflow, we can start to feel anxious and overwhelmed.

- A regular routine of activities that reduce stress will support emotional regulation.
- You may be prevented from accessing your child's preferred activities, swimming, going to the park. Look at the input they receive from the activity, swimming gives strong resistance, and try to replicate this, resistance using therapy bands or brushing the floor.

Your child may already use a system in school to show their regulation;

What zone am I in?

REST AREA  
→

GO

SLOW

STOP

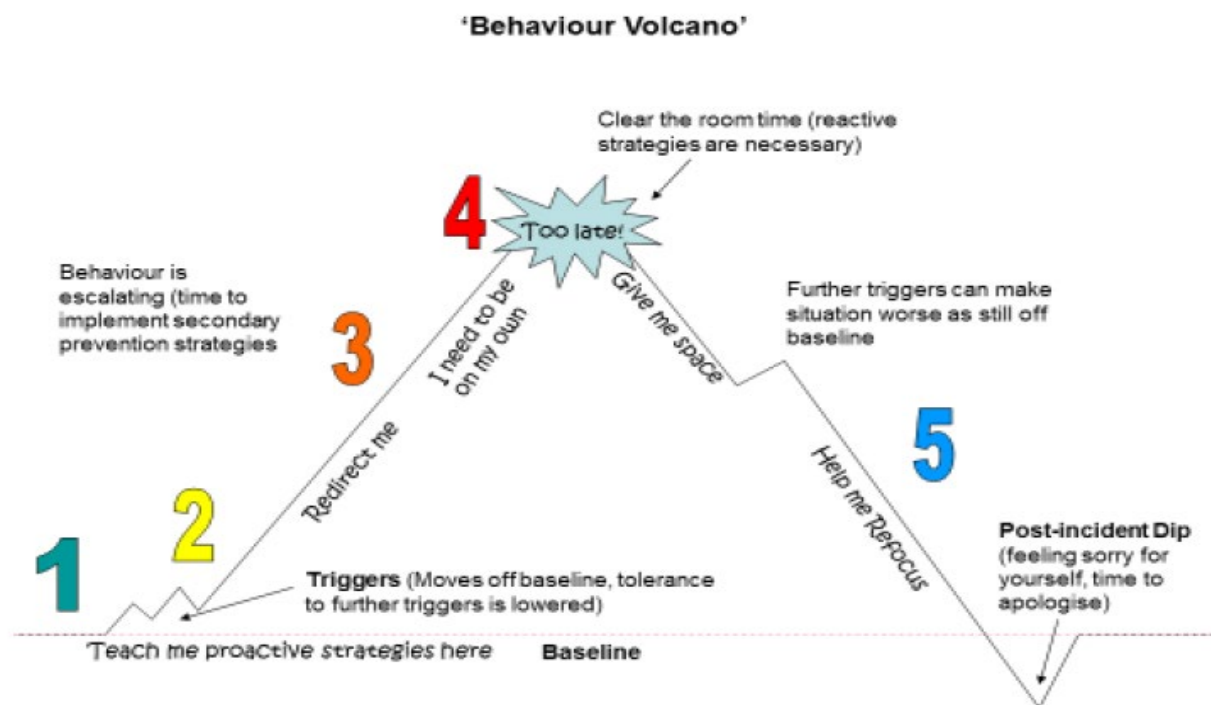
sad tired sick bored	calm ready to learn happy okay	silly or wiggly frustrated hyper upset	mad angry yelling hitting
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Use tools to get in the green zone.

drink water	count to 10	take deep breaths	sense and release	do wall push ups	use fidgets	draw	write	talk to an adult
ask to take a break	self talk	ask to take a walk	volcano breaths	do stretches	listen to music	lift something heavy	ask to eat a snack	time calm place

5	<p>Feels like <b>Bomb</b>. I can't seem to control my angry feelings. I need help.</p>	<p><b>What it feels like</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Shouting</li> <li>* Crying</li> <li>* Throwing Things</li> <li>* Banging Things</li> </ul>	<p><b>What it looks like</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Head feels like it's overheating</li> <li>* Start to say mean or hurtful things</li> <li>* Some crying</li> <li>* Take things away from people</li> <li>* Banging on things</li> </ul>	<p><b>What can I do about it?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I can leave the room to an agreed safe space to calm down.</li> <li>2. I can go for a walk</li> </ol>
4	<p>Feels like <b>Red</b>. Everything seems to be going wrong.</p>			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I can go for a walk</li> <li>2. I can hold my angry bear or squeeze my stress ball</li> <li>3. I can bring out my calm box and do some fine motor activities</li> </ol>
3	<p>Feels like <b>Chuck</b>. I might accidentally say or do something I didn't mean to.</p>	<p><b>Anxious/Worried</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Don't want to talk about it</li> <li>* A little scared</li> <li>* Tummy starts to hurt</li> <li>* Repeating Words</li> </ul>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Take a movement break</li> <li>2. Deep breathing</li> <li>3. I can have a drink of water</li> <li>4. Playing with a favourite toy/reading a book</li> </ol>
2	<p>Feels like <b>Matilda</b>. You are finding things a little hard.</p>	<p><b>Might be hard for me but</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* I will try to do it</li> <li>* I will let my teachers help me</li> <li>* I will listen</li> </ul>		<p>Self talk, Reassure myself that I can do it!</p> <p>Remind myself about my tokens and the rewards I will get</p>
1	<p>Feels like <b>Stella</b>. Optimistic and Bright. I'm good at this!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Happy</li> <li>* Calm</li> <li>* Peaceful</li> <li>* Interested in something</li> </ul>		<p>Stay happy!</p>

But everyone sometimes gets 'overwhelmed'.....



\*Diagram courtesy of Cardiff and Vale University Health Board.



## **Secondary Prevention**

But what happens if your child moves up the volcano and is heading for a meltdown.....

1. If possible, redirect them to a quiet and calming part of the house
2. If not possible to redirect your child, try and redirect siblings and family pets to another room.
3. Avoid interacting with your child
  - Try not to talk to your child when they are having a meltdown. (verbal information is difficult to process when you are distressed)
  - Try not to make eye contact with them
  - If possible, move away from them (keeping an eye on them from a distance)
4. Keeping the area safe
  - Move anything breakable away from your child
  - If your child is head butting the wall, you can place a cushion against the wall
5. After the Meltdown
  - When your child calms, tell them (using visual cues ideally) what you are doing next and engage them in an activity to move them on
  - Your child may have another meltdown and you will have to do all this again. But it is important to stick to your rules. If your child gets what they want when they have a meltdown, they will have a meltdown every time they want something. It is important to teach your child that having a meltdown will not get them what they want.

More advice can be found at;

<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/behaviour/challenging-behaviour.aspx>

<https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/understanding-behaviour/understanding-behaviour.html>

<https://cerebra.org.uk/download/factsheet-managing-challenging-behaviour/>



## **F: Strategies for sensory regulation**

Walking – a regular rhythmic activity



Bouncing and spinning – Can cause over stimulation so limit the action and freeze for a count between sets

Hanging and swinging – good vestibular input



Yoga - Lots of ASC friendly sites– take time to find a site you like with music that your child finds soothing

Heavy work

pulling, pushing, carry heavy objects provide regulating proprioceptive inputs. Some ideas include: gardening activities – digging and pushing a wheelbarrow, tug of war, cycling, helping with house work, row row your boat song, door pull up bars, wall press offs

Den building and obstacle courses

Provides dark, quiet spaces, a series of actions, a range of movements, crawling, .....

Some websites for further information around proprioceptive regulatory strategies and activities include:

<https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/child-learning-disabilities/sensory-processing-issues/heavy-work-activities>

<https://lemonlimeadventures.com/100-sensory-activities/>

<https://www.andnextcomesl.com/2015/06/heavy-work-activities-for-kids.html>



## G: Looking after yourself

Last but definitely not least....

Caring for others is demanding, to keep going for a prolonged time you will need to look after yourself.



### Coping with stress during the 2019-nCov outbreak



It is normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, scared or angry during a crisis.

Talking to people you trust can help. Contact your friends and family.

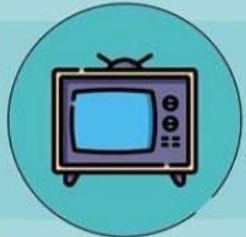
If you must stay at home, maintain a healthy lifestyle - including proper diet, sleep, exercise and social contacts with loved ones at home and by email and phone with other family and friends.



Don't use smoking, alcohol or other drugs to deal with your emotions.

If you feel overwhelmed, talk to a health worker or counsellor. Have a plan, where to go to and how to seek help for physical and mental health needs if required.

Get the facts. Gather information that will help you accurately determine your risk so that you can take reasonable precautions. Find a credible source you can trust such as WHO website or, a local or state public health agency.



Limit worry and agitation by lessening the time you and your family spend watching or listening to media coverage that you perceive as upsetting.

Draw on skills you have used in the past that have helped you to manage previous life's adversities and use those skills to help you manage your emotions during the challenging time of this outbreak.



# MINDFULNESS PRACTICES DURING COVID-19



## EARLY MORNING COMPASSION

Before you get out of bed:

- Sit in a comfortable position
- Take 10 breaths, with thoughts below:
  - **Inhale** - "May I accept things the way they are"
  - **Exhale** - "May I be at peace"
  - **Inhale** - "May I accept things the way they are"
  - **Exhale** - "May I be at peace"

## CALMING MINDFUL CORNER

Have each family member identify a Mindful Corner:

- This a place for alone time (i.e. no one can bother you while there!)

- When you sit in your Mindful Corner, practice **Square Breathing** (10 times, or set a timer!)

- Imagine a square:
  - **Inhale** as you go across the top of the square
  - **Hold** your breath as you go down the right side
  - **Exhale** as you go across the bottom
  - **Hold** your breath as you go up the left side



## COMMUNITY MINDFULNESS

Practice mindfulness as a family (or FaceTime a community member or another family):

- Dinner time (or right before everyone heads to bed)
- Set a timer for 5 mins and sit quietly with eyes open or closed
- Listen to the sounds in the room, feel your belly move with your breath, or simply let your mind wander
- When the timer goes off, congratulate yourself
- Talk about the experience!

## Mindfulness during trying times

- **Practice compassion** - if you feel edgy, so do your housemates; have empathy for what they are feeling
- **Have patience** - it is hard for everyone to be in close quarters, so we have to remind ourselves to be patient
- **Reach out** - there are others out there who need you. Reach out to a family member or friend who might be lonely
- **Pay it forward** - many in our community are not working or have struggling businesses. Try to help out where you can (e.g., tip bigger!)

Mindful Junkie @mindfuljunkie mindfuljunkie.com

Mindfulness

Breathe...

Be your own best friend...

You're doing your best in difficult times

Reach out to others...



Somerset Parent Carer Forum

<https://somerseparentcarerforum.org.uk/>



SOMERSET  
County Council

Autism and  
Communication  
Service

Providing support for children and young people with autism, language and communication difficulties.

**Autism and Communication Service -**

<http://www.supportservicesforeducation.co.uk/Services/3326>

**STAY AT  
HOME**

**PROTECT  
THE NHS**

**save  
lives**