



Coronavirus

How to help your child with ASD manage their home learning

This leaflet is aimed at parents of children at secondary school or upper primary

The majority of students with ASD and related difficulties will need additional help with home learning and the thought of them being able to sit down for an entire school day and diligently get on with their work may provoke shock and anxiety.

Around 80% of students with ASD are thought to have Executive Functioning difficulties. As a result the current situation where a great deal of home learning and independence is being expected may feel very daunting.

Executive Function skills are the cognitive processes that help us regulate, control and manage our thoughts and actions. It includes planning, working memory, attention, problem solving, verbal reasoning, inhibition, cognitive flexibility, initiation and monitoring of actions.

Because of this, we need to be aware that students with ASD will find home learning a particularly difficult challenge. The following tips are designed to support you and your child with home learning.



Focus on family mental health and well being

Education is important of course; however, if attempting to complete school work is causing stress, anxiety or meltdowns, it needs to take a back seat until you are on top of that. Many students with ASD find it incredibly difficult to blur the boundaries between home and school and once they walk out of the school gates it is often purposefully forgotten until the next day. Crossing that boundary and attempting home learning will therefore require preparation, time and patience.



Plan your day together, let your child take ownership of how much (or little) gets done.

Establish a routine

Keeping a routine that includes some balance is really important: A bit of what they like, a bit of what their school wants them to do and a bit of helping with chores and daily family life to encourage independence. It will be much harder to get back in to normal routines if you have not established a routine at home. Establishing a 'new' routine can also help alleviate anxiety around uncertainty and change.



Use Visuals (Timetables, schedules) and plan your day/ week together



Challenging and oppositional behaviour

For some people, dangerous, challenging and oppositional behaviour is rare whilst for other families it will be part of day-to-day life. Change and uncertainty can lead to challenging behaviour. Try and Structure the environment. Try to create as calm an environment as possible. Make a plan together for what helps when your child is feeling out of control – do they have a safe space to go to? Are they able to use relaxation strategies or mindfulness techniques?



Create a behaviour plan together, it might be useful to have one for the child and one for the parents with tips and strategies on how to manage behaviour when things get out of control (a parent will lose control at times too!)

Motivation

Almost all students with difficulties in organisational skills also struggle with motivation and desire to accomplish home learning tasks. Parents and teachers often don't realise this lack of motivation can stem from feeling overwhelmed by the task demands.

Many students need a concrete level of motivation, with very small work steps combined with reward early in the task completion process. For example, if your child cannot easily work for an hour, have them work successfully on a



single part of the task for just 10 minutes before they get to pause and congratulate themselves.



Use a visual timer like a sand timer or a timer on a mobile phone to break the learning into achievable tasks and incorporate rewards into their day

Negotiate and communicate with school

Nobody is expecting you to do this on your own. Although the school building is closed, teachers and school staff are very much working and are open to communication.

Talk to your child's school and negotiate what is a 'must do' and what is not so important in terms of work. They may have tips about what helps your child learn at school. A daily check in with school staff and the student may help motivate.



Create a way of checking in with the school; a reward system from school may also help

Most importantly; Relax and have fun!

This is an unprecedented time in our lives where we are suddenly able to spend a substantial amount of time with our family. We want our children to remember this time as a happy, relaxing and fun experience. Make the most of the time you have together if and when you can!



Create a memory box or write a journal or diary to enable you and your child to reflect on these times in months or years to come

| What we think our child needs | What is actually needed |
|---|--|
| Time tabled activities from 09.00am – 3.30 | Balance of activities |
| No Screen Time | Play - games - could include using electronic devices |
| Lots of school work | Learning /School work |
| Rigid Routine | Flexible Routines |
| To stay in the house all day and work | Exercise / Relaxation times |
| No face time with friends | Interaction with adults Conversation – can be through social media with friends |
| No playing around when work should be completed | Cooking, gardening, art, games, science experiments |
| New toys/ games | Making Memories |



Useful Websites

Home learning support

<https://www.priorygroup.com/blog/how-to-help-an-autistic-child-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

<https://weneedtotalkaboutchildrensmenalth.wordpress.com/2020/03/29/2and-getting-through-lockdown-together-with-teenagers/>

Parenting and mental health support

<https://www.familylives.org.uk/how-we-can-help/confidential-helpline/>

<https://mindedforfamilies.org.uk/#/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-helpline/#parents-helpline>

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

Who can I talk to?

Contact your school's SENCO or Educational Psychologist for advice and support;

edpsychology@octavopartnership.org

