It’s ok to find changes hard during COVID-19

Resource pack

A resource pack for parents with children with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) to help with COVID-19 related changes
Please feel free to print out pages

This pack was created by the Early Intervention team in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) in NHS Grampian
Contents Page

Part 1: COVID-19
1. How this pack can help
2. What is COVID-19?
3. Tips for encouraging hand washing
4. COVID-19 and the media
5. COVID-19 and the media continued...
6. Should I talk to my child about COVID-19?
7. Looking after yourself

Part 2: Helping your child cope during COVID-19
8. Challenging behaviours
9. Supporting new routines and changes
10. Supporting new routines and changes continued...
11. Social Stories
12. Routines
13. Routines continued...
14. Sensory items
15. When COVID-19 starts to settle down
16. Further resources and websites
17. Further resources and websites continued...
18. Make your own sensory items
19. Make your own sensory items continued...
20. Example of daily timetable
COVID-19 is a new virus which has brought about different and difficult challenges in a short space of time that no-one has planned for. This can be especially difficult for children with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC).

The aim of this pack is to give ideas and suggestions for how to help your child with ASC during COVID-19.

Children with ASC are on a spectrum, which means not everything in this pack will be suitable for the specific needs of your child. Feel free to pick and choose what may support you and your child and adapt as necessary. If you already have strategies that are currently successful in supporting them during this time, keep using them.

As a parent, YOU are the expert at knowing your child best

Everyone has strengths and you know your child’s. You can use these during this time to give your child a sense of achievement.

This pack uses the term Autism Spectrum Condition (shortened to ASC). This is a term that encompasses many different diagnoses – autism, high functioning autism/Aspergers syndrome, and other pervasive developmental disorders.
What is COVID-19?

COVID-19, also known as coronavirus, is an illness that affects the lungs and airways.

**Symptoms include:**
- A high temperature – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
- A new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)

**In order to keep yourself and others around you safe:**
- Wash your hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds
- Use hand sanitizer gel if soap and water are not available
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- Put used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands afterwards
- Try not to not touch your eyes, nose or mouth
- Maintain social distancing - keep a 2 metre distance between you and someone who is not a member of your household

Explain to your child they have an important job they need to do during COVID-19.

The doctors and nurses are doing their jobs helping people who are sick, and the workers in shops are doing their jobs making sure we have food. We are doing our important job of staying at home, keeping our hands clean and stopping coronavirus from spreading.

You might be worried about how the government guidelines will affect your daily life and how this will impact on your child.

**Lots of people are feeling more anxious than usual during these uncertain times. This is a perfectly normal response.**
Tips for encouraging hand washing

You may be finding it difficult to get your child to wash their hands in accordance with government advice. This may be due to sensory issues or your child not being used to doing this as often.

Here are some tips for you to try:

• Make it part of a new routine. This could be in between activities or before eating.

• Use visuals to help children understand how to wash their hands properly. There are many visuals you can access online or you can create your own. Try using special interests or characters your child likes or have photos of your child doing each step.

• Some children with ASC have sensory issues around smells. It may be the smell of the hand gel or soap is unpleasant to them. You can try fragrance free soap or gently scented hand sanitiser. If your child likes strong smells, try having fun smelling soaps e.g. strawberry laces soap.

• You could stick a picture of your child’s special interest on the soap bottle or find a video of their favourite character washing their hands. If they have a favourite toy, have your child watch you wash the toy’s hands.

• Wash your hands at the same time or have a sibling join in so your child understands this is something the whole family has to do.

• Set a timer or sing/play your child’s favourite song for at least 20 seconds whilst they are washing their hands.

• Rewards can help children get into the routine of washing hands. You could schedule activities your child enjoys after hand washing or give them a sticker.

You may have a child who loves playing with water and might find it hard to get them away from the sink. You could try some of the other strategies in this pack to help with this.
Statistics can often sound scary especially when they are updated multiple times a day. If you or your child are experiencing anxiety as result of the media coverage on COVID-19, it might not be helpful to keep watching live news, use social media, or to have news updates appearing on your devices. **Most importantly, make sure your child only has access to developmental stage appropriate information.**

Children with ASC can become fixated on topics. Limit your child’s access to COVID-19 information to reduce them becoming anxious or obsessional. We’ve included how to reduce COVID-19 related posts appearing on social media accounts.

**Muting unhelpful words on twitter**

Twitter has an option to mute certain words, phrases or hashtags to stop them from appearing on your news feed.

**IPHONE (APP)**

1. Go to your Notifications tab.
2. Tap the gear icon.
3. Tap “Muted” words.
4. Tap “+Add muted or phrase”.
5. Type in the word or hashtag you’d like to mute (for example: #COVID-19)
6. Alternatively, long press the word as it appears on a tweet and press “Mute”

**ANDROID (APP)**

1. Go to your Notifications tab.
2. Tap the gear icon.
3. Tap “Muted” words.
4. Tap “+Add muted or phrase”.
5. Type in the word or hashtag you’d like to mute
COVID-19 and the media continued...

Muting unhelpful words on Facebook

**IPHONE AND ANDROID (APP)**

Unfortunately you can’t mute certain words, but you can mute pages or people if they are sharing/posting content you don’t want to see. To do this:

1. Click on the three dots at the top right of the post you do not wish to see
2. Press “Snooze for 30 days”
3. Alternatively you can “Hide all” or “Unfollow”

Muting unhelpful words on Instagram

Unfortunately, Instagram does not allow you to block posts or comments left on other users’ posts that contain words, phrases or hashtags that you wish to avoid. If you are experiencing distress as a result of content on Instagram it is advisable that you cut down on the time you spend on Instagram, choose social media sites that do allow you to filter out content you do not wish to see (such as Twitter) and avoid the ‘explore’ feature that recommends content to you.

1. Go to your profile
2. Click on the hamburger (the three lines at the top right) of the screen
3. Click on ‘Settings’
4. Click on ‘Privacy’
5. Click on ‘Comments’
6. Click on ‘Manual filter’
7. The manual filter bar will turn from grey to blue, then in the space that says ‘words separated by commas...’ type in words and phrases that you do wish not to see, separating each word or phrase using a comma.
Should I talk to my child about COVID-19?

**Short answer: YES!** Children already know about COVID-19 so don’t avoid talking about it with them.

**It is important to be truthful but remember your child’s stage of development.** Give them factual information but adjust the amount of information and the level of detail you go into.

Use concrete language and avoid using metaphors or abstract language e.g. avoid saying “she’s feeling under the weather”. Children with ASC often take things literally.

Allow children to ask questions. **It is natural that children will have questions and worries about COVID-19.** Giving them the chance to ask these questions is a good way to ease their worries. It’s ok if you don’t have all the answers.
Looking after yourself

Have you ever taken a plane journey and the cabin crew tells you to put on your own oxygen mask before helping others in an emergency? Supporting your child during a pandemic is exactly the same!

**It is important to look after yourself so you can help others.**

You might find it helpful to reach out to others in your own support network or organisations such as the National Autistic Society. You might find you’re not the only one facing challenges.

Try to do relaxing activities for yourself e.g. yoga or reading a book.

**Take the pressure off yourself.**

You are **not** expected to be a teacher during this time. Children can learn in many different ways, even games can be beneficial to their learning.

It is important to model to your child that you don’t always have to be perfect. You may be feeling difficult emotions and that’s ok.

Parents of children with ASC often work really hard to maintain boundaries and routines. However COVID-19 is an unusual situation, so don’t worry if you need to relax your usual boundaries (e.g. extra screen time).

Charlie Mackesy
Children with ASC often have difficulty understanding their own emotions. Sometimes we see challenging or difficult behaviours when children are worried or frustrated. Acknowledge your child’s feelings and support them to express and manage these.

**Remember COVID-19 has resulted in a lot of changes.** Change and disruption to routine can be really difficult for children with ASC to cope with, they are learning to adjust and cope with this. Creating a routine can make things more predictable and help make them feel safe.

COVID-19 means you will have to help your child manage changes to their typical daily routine. See the following pages for suggestions on how to help your child cope during this time.
Supporting new routines and changes

We know that children with ASC can find changes difficult to manage. COVID-19 has resulted in many changes in a short space of time.

While no one knows exactly what will happen as a result of COVID-19 it can be helpful to think about and prepare for things that could change.

The home environment

With the home environment being constantly busy and noisy, your child may experience sensory overload or feel overwhelmed. See page 14 for sensory items ideas.

Your child’s food preferences

COVID-19 may affect the availability of certain food items in supermarkets. It might be more difficult to source your child’s favourite food items. You could make a list of their favourite items that you do have and involve your child in meal planning with this list.

Activities your child enjoys

Your child may not be able to participate in activities they enjoy, particularly if these happen outside of the house. You could help your child to think about how they can do their favourite activities at home or indoors.

Daily routine

Your child’s routine will have changed as a result of COVID-19. It is likely you have to develop a new routine as a result. See page 12-13 for ideas on managing changes to routine.
Supporting new routines and changes continued...

**Now and Next cards**

Now and Next cards can support routines and transition times. If you find your child struggles with a full day timetable, you can use Now and Next cards instead.

![Now and Next cards](image)

**Timers and countdowns**

Timers are good for letting children know how long they have left on an activity. Other options include a simple 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 countdown.

**Offering choices**

Offering choices may give your child a sense of control. Limit choices to two options as more options may confuse or overwhelm your child – think ‘this or that’. Use visuals where possible as some children with verbal or processing difficulties or echolalia may just repeat the last option.

**Using special interests**

If your child has a special interest, you may wish to include this when adopting new routines and behaviours. For example, creating timetables and posters using the special interest (e.g. SpongeBob washing his hands).
Social Stories

Social Stories explain social situations, they help children learn what to expect, what other people might be thinking and suggest ways to respond. Social Stories are a good way of explaining difficult situations to children with ASC. You or your child’s school may be using Social Stories already.

Social Stories can be used to:

- Develop self-care skills (e.g. how to clean teeth, wash hands or get dressed).
- Help children cope with changes to routine and unexpected or distressing events (e.g. schools closed or self-isolation).
- Provide positive feedback to a person about an area of strength or achievement in order to develop self-esteem.
- Teach appropriate behaviours (e.g. what to do when they feel angry or how to manage obsessions).

During COVID-19 Social Stories can help explain:

- What is COVID-19
- Hand washing
- Social distancing
- Doing school work from home
- Why your child can’t see grandparents/their friends
- Why doctors and nurses are wearing PPE

You could create your own Social Story using photos of your child or using special interests.

See page 16 for examples of Social Stories
**Routines**

Children with ASC typically respond best to a routine. Unstructured times can be difficult for your child to manage. Due to COVID-19, it’s likely your child won’t be able to continue their usual routine.

Let your child be a part of putting together a routine

**Home routine**

Where possible, keep to your usual home routine:
- Time to wake up/ go to bed
- Bedtime routines
- Meal times
- Family time e.g. if you have a movie night on a Saturday

If your child usually does an activity out with the home, put an alternative in your routine e.g. if your child attends football on a Wednesday after school, have them play football in the garden at this time.

You might also want to share with your child a calendar of when you or another member of the household will be working.

**School routine**

Now schools have closed and some learning is happening at home, it may be helpful to try to follow some of your child’s school routine. Ask your child or their teacher about their school routine. Keep to the school term dates – take time off from schoolwork when it was meant to be!

See page 19 for example of a daily timetable
Routines continued...

Try to have a dedicated space for doing school work e.g. a table and chair (not the sofa!). If this is not possible, try to have items you can put out to indicate it is time for school work e.g. pencil case, books etc.

If your child uses symbols in school (e.g. Makaton, Widget/Boardmaker, PECS etc.) try to use similar symbols for your timetable or routine board. Ask your child’s teacher for access to these if possible.

Remember your child is still adjusting to the change of not being at school. There might be some resistance initially. It is important to stick with the new routine. Your child may become frustrated if the routine keeps being changed or adapted. If after 2-3 weeks it isn’t working, then try to alter the routine.
Sensory items are good way to create a relaxing, calm environment for your child. You may wish to try sensory items that are soothing for your child.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensory Modality</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>lava lamp light, bubble tubes, cloud gazing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditory</td>
<td>music, musical instruments, nature sounds (e.g. bird chirping)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>spicy foods, strong foods (e.g. mustard), favourite tastes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactile/Touch</td>
<td>slime, soft blanket or cuddly toy, smooth or rough stones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smell</td>
<td>nature smells (e.g. wood), scented lotions/soap/bubble bath, food smells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interoception (internal senses)</td>
<td>hot or cold drinks, deep breathing, mindfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vestibular (balance and movement)</td>
<td>dancing, standing on one leg, jumping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proprioception (body positions)</td>
<td>walking, chewing gum, stretching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is not an exhaustive list and many of these will activate more than one sense!

You could try creating your own sensory items. See pages 17-18 for some ideas.
When COVID-19 settles down

It’s hard to say when exactly COVID-19 will start to settle down and when things can gradually get back to usual.

Gradual preparation and (where possible) predictability could help your child get back into their usual routine.

**Going back to school**

When schools re-open, you may need to plan and prepare with your child and their school how this transition may go.

When schools re-open, it is possible your child will have new teachers, classroom and/or classmates. See if your child’s school will send photos of their new teacher or classroom before they go back to school.

Some children will have transitioned to secondary school from primary school. **For any child, this transition is big and can cause worries.** Let your child know this is ok or get them to speak to their friends who are likely feeling the same. Speak to your child’s Guidance Teacher, Educational Psychologist or familiar school teacher beforehand to discuss strategies that can be put in place.

**Changing routine back**

Special conditions (such as extended screen time) may change back. This could be done gradually e.g. if your child has been getting 2 hours of screen time instead of 1 hour, reduce this time by 10 minutes until it’s back to 1 hour.

Use the strategies suggested on pages 9-10 to help support this.

You and your child may develop ways to cope with the changes that COVID-19 may bring. Your child might then use these when new changes happen in the future.
Further resources and websites

Alert cards
NHS Grampian have produced alert cards for individuals with ASC and/or a learning disability and their carers. These can be shown to the police or members of the public if you are approached when you are out. The alert cards highlight the government guidance that it is ok for individuals and their carers to go out more than once a day and outwith their local area if needed.

Please note that these cards must be printed and signed by a health or social work professional. Please contact your GP for more information.

NHS Grampian CAMHS
NHS Grampian CAMHS have developed other resource packs for helping children and young people manage anxious feelings about COVID-19.

We also have a podcast series of 'top tips', recorded by our very own staff, to make managing stress in tough times just that little bit easier – please note this is not ASC or COVID-19 specific. You can access both these resources on our website: https://www.camhsgrampian.org/

National Autistic Society
The National Autistic Society have created a page with tips and further resources to help your child cope during COVID-19 changes:
https://www.autism.org.uk/services/helplines/coronavirus/resources.aspx
‘What is COVID-19’ Social Stories examples

- For older children by Carol Gray
- For younger children by Amanda McGuiness at The Autism Educator
- If your child uses Makaton, you can access a Makaton social story from the Makaton Charity website
- Comic strips conversations can also help explain social situations.

Children & Young People’s Strategic Partnership

Children & Young People’s Strategic Partnership have created a pack with additional resources and activities:

Edinburgh Children’s Hospital Charity

Edinburgh Children’s Hospital Charity has made a video to help explain why doctors and nurses are wearing personal protective equipment (PPE):
[https://youtu.be/6vT7vpQXV2A](https://youtu.be/6vT7vpQXV2A)
## Make your own sensory items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lava lamp</th>
<th>Rain stick</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fill a jar or bottle 2/3 with oil, 1/3 with water and some drops of food colouring. Drop in an Alka-Seltzer tablet and watch! The same mix can be used again and again, so put a lid on for another day of lava lamp fun.</td>
<td>Seal up one end of an old kitchen paper roll with paper or card. Scrunch up a long snake of tin foil to go inside the length of the tube. The more kinks and bends the better! Use dry ingredients such as rice, dried beans or popcorn kernels and pour into the tube until 1/4 – 1/3 full. Seal the other end of the tube, and decorate!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slime</th>
<th>Moon sand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Add food colour to 100ml PVA glue and mix. Mix 1 tsp baking soda and stir until smooth. Add 2 tbsp saline solution (e.g. contact lens cleaner) stirring slowly until a ball forms. Knead by hand, working in ½ tbsp. of the saline solution if required.</td>
<td>Mix together 8 cups of flour and 1 cup of baby or coconut oil. Add food colouring to make different colours.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Make your own sensory items continued...

**Take 5 breathing**

1. Stretch your hand out like a star.
2. Get the pointer finger of your other hand ready to trace your fingers up and down.
3. Slide up each finger slowly - slide down the other side.
4. Breathe in through your nose - out through your mouth.
5. Put it together and breathe in as you slide up and breathe out as you slide down. Keep going until you have finished tracing your hand.

**7 minute animal workout**

Set an interval timer and complete each animal movement for 45 seconds, with 15 seconds of rest in between. Do as many as you can!

- **Frog Jumps**
  - Hop, hop, back and forth like a frog

- **Bear Walk**
  - Hands & feet on the floor, hips high - walk left and right

- **Gorilla Shuffle**
  - Sink into a low sumo squat, with hands on the floor, shuffle around the room.

- **Starfish Jumps**
  - Jumping jacks as fast as you can, with arms and legs spread wide.

- **Cheetah Run**
  - Run in place, as FAST as you can! Just like the fastest animal in the Sahara.

- **Crab Crawl**
  - Sit and place your palms flat on the floor behind you near your hips. Lift off the ground and crawl.

- **Elephant Stomps**
  - March in place lifting your knees as high as you can and stomping the ground as hard as you can!
### Example of a daily timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Times</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Detail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before 9:00</td>
<td>Morning routine</td>
<td>Complete your usual morning routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00-9:30</td>
<td>P.E. with Joe</td>
<td>Daily YouTube exercise video with Joe Wicks <a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/thebodycoach1">https://www.youtube.com/user/thebodycoach1</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30-10:45</td>
<td>School time</td>
<td>Work set from school OR educational board games or electronic games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45-11:00</td>
<td>Snack</td>
<td>Remember to wash hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00-12:00</td>
<td>School time</td>
<td>Work set from school OR educational board games or electronic games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00-12:30</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Remember to wash hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30-1:00</td>
<td>Helping tasks</td>
<td>Wipe kitchen table and chairs OR hoovering/sweep floor OR tidy bedroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00-2:00</td>
<td>Creative time</td>
<td>Drawing, painting, Lego, music, cooking, baking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00-3:30</td>
<td>Fresh air</td>
<td>Play in garden, family walk, walk the dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30-3:45</td>
<td>Snack</td>
<td>Remember to wash hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:45-4:45</td>
<td>Sensory time</td>
<td>Explore sensory items such as those on page 17-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:45-5:30</td>
<td>Quiet time</td>
<td>Reading, puzzles, colouring/painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:30-6:00</td>
<td>Dinner time</td>
<td>Remember to wash hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00-8:00</td>
<td>Free time/ Family time</td>
<td>TV time, computer/games consoles, chat to friends/family online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00</td>
<td>Bedtime routine</td>
<td>Complete your usual bedtime routine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If you feel you or your child’s worries are getting bigger, you can contact:

Samaritans: 116 123
www.samaritans.org

Breathing Space: 0800 83 85 87
https://breathingspace.scot/

NHS 24: 111
https://www.nhs24.scot/

Your local GP