

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

**Coronavirus – A guide for parents
and carers of children and young
people with special educational
needs and disabilities**



Coronavirus – A guide for parents and carers of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

This is a difficult time for all parents, particularly for those whose children have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This guide draws together a range of advice and useful information for parents on how to cope and support their child with SEND.

Being out of school for an uncertain length of time, with reduced access to outdoor play areas and social spaces is likely to be difficult for many children, particularly those with SEND. Families living in close proximity for long periods are likely to find this to be stressful.

How to manage anxiety in children and young people

Expect stress – This is an uncertain and unpredictable situation, **stress and anxiety is normal**. Try to **reassure children** – Children can sometimes believe they are responsible for things that are clearly beyond their control. **Reassure children that it is the adult's job to try to make sure things are OK and to keep them safe**. Reassure children that lots of adults and other children are in the same situation.

Signs of stress will vary for every child. Some children may talk about their worries, others may withdraw into themselves, others may show challenging behaviours.

Some children and young people, particularly those who are older, may be able to self-manage their stress, but this is more difficult for younger children. Adults will need to help younger children to understand and name their emotions, and help them to do things that will reduce their stress level. Exercise, art, drama, music and other creative activities are good choices.

Dealing with challenging behaviours

Regularly ask your child about how they are feeling. Children who are experiencing more meltdowns than usual, being defiant or acting out may actually be feeling anxious. Pick a calm, undistracted time and gently ask how they're feeling and make sure to respond to outbursts in a calm, consistent, comforting way.

This guide provides details of lots of services that are able to help and websites with useful information if you are finding managing your child's behaviours difficult. If, however, you are concerned that you or your child are in immediate danger you should contact the police on 999.

Mindfulness and relaxation exercises to help with managing anxiety

<https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga>

<https://www.headspace.com/meditation/kids>

<https://mindfulnessforteens.com/guided-meditations/>

How to communicate with children about Coronavirus

- **Allow children to ask questions:** It is natural that children will have questions and worries about Coronavirus. Giving them the space to ask these questions and have answers is a good way to ease anxiety.
- **Non-verbal or younger children might understand a cartoon or picture better** than an explanation (see resources below).
- **It is ok to say you don't know** - at the moment, there are questions we don't have answers to about Coronavirus.
- However natural and tempting it is, **try to avoid saying everything will be ok** and 'the adults will look after you'. You will of course, but the point here is to remain hopeful without promising things that you cannot provide – this is a difficult balance to strike.
- **Maybe your child has an idea too – let them tell you or draw them.**
- **Give practical guidance:** Remind your child of the most important things they can do to stay healthy but find motivation for keeping going, like thinking of a song they want to sing while washing their hands.

Information on coronavirus for children

The BBC Newsround site has a comprehensive section on coronavirus with text and video guidance focusing on tips if a child is worried, how to wash your hands, and what self-isolation means.

www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus

Story books for children about the virus

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Story-about-Coronavirus.pdf>

https://660919d3-b85b-43c3-a3ad-3de6a9d37099.filesusr.com/ugd/64c685_319c5acf38d34604b537ac9fae37fc80.pdf?fbclid=I

Social Stories can be a helpful way of sharing information in an accurate and reassuring way. The following links are to two Social Stories which may cover the main issues surrounding Coronavirus. These stories are meant as templates from which parents and carers can adapt to suit their individual child.

<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Learning-About-the-Corona-Virus-by-Dr.-Siobhan-Timmins.pdf>

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

The Sheffield Children's Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has put together a number of Coronavirus resources for children and families, including easy Read communication boards and social stories using Widgit symbols

<https://www.sheffieldchildrens.nhs.uk/patients-and-parents/coronavirus-resources-for-children-and-families/>

How to try to manage your own worries

Uncertainty can make all of us feel anxious or worried. Find other adults you can talk to about your own worries. Use techniques that help to make you feel a bit calmer - if you are at home, music, breathing and relaxation techniques, distraction (such as watching something funny), and time with family who are in your household can all help. However, the most important thing parents can do during this very odd and stressful time is to be kind to yourselves.

www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/
<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/#collapse1644b>
<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/blog/health-and-other-forms-of-anxiety-and-coronavirus/>
<https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/2020/28-february-coronavirus-anxiety-how-to-cope-if-you-re-feeling-anxious-about-the-outbreak/>

If you, or someone in your family, is in a mental health crisis and needs urgent help please contact your care co-ordinator or the single point of access on 0114 226 3636, or visit <https://www.shsc.nhs.uk/urgent-help>

Top tips for Parents and Carers

Ask for and accept help

If you have a partner at home, agree that you'll take turns when it comes to childcare. **Schools have not 'shut down'** – Although most children will not be able to physically attend school you will still be able to communicate with key people in school. Please contact your school SENCo for support and advice; however be aware that they will be very busy at the moment so please be patient in awaiting a response.

Schools continue to care for children whose parents are critical to the Covid-19 response and children who are 'vulnerable'. Vulnerable children include those who have a social worker, and those children and young people up to the age of 25 with education, health and care (EHC) plans. Government guidance is that where a child is safe to be at home they should be. We know that situations can change over time. If you feel that you need further support or that your child needs to return to school please contact your child's school who will be able to review their risk assessment with you.

Have a routine and structure

- It is important to remember that your new home routine will be very different to a school routine and your normal home routine; this can be difficult for children with SEND to understand as they often think of school as school and home as home.
- Having a plan and a predictable routine for the day can be very reassuring. As adults we like to know what is going to happen, and children like this too. **A consistent routine lets everyone be secure about the plans for the day.** It is often useful to involve children in creating this routine, so that they feel part of the plan, rather than

the plan being imposed on them. You could display the routine using a timeline, or maybe pictures and visuals. Encourage children to develop independence by referring to their own routine/plan themselves.

- **Don't worry if the routine isn't perfect** – Remember, this isn't a normal situation. If you find that planning and sticking to the routine is causing more stress, friction or conflict, then **it's OK to be more 'free-flow'**. Perhaps be guided by the activities that children want to do.
- **Free visual timetables and resources:**
<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resources/wellbeing-parents/parents-home-routine-and-timetable/parents-home-routine-visual-timetables>

Avoid putting too much pressure on academic work

- **Don't try to replicate a full school timetable** – It won't be possible to replicate a full school timetable for a variety of reasons. Giving yourself and your children permission to accept this can be a big weight lifted.
- It is more important to be spending time together, building relationships, enjoying shared activities and reassuring children.
- Many children with SEND will compartmentalise home and school, and may refuse to do school work at home. If you can't motivate your child to do "academic" work at home, you could try to work on their speech and language targets, physiotherapy targets, or independence and life skills – This is really valuable too! Your child's therapist should be able to provide guidance and ideas for games and activities that don't feel like "work" and school will be able to talk through other activities for home learning.
- Families can also use the daily exercise time as educational time, for example by playing games about what they see on their walk.
- **Try to keep school or project work in one place** – This can help to maintain a work/home boundary. We know that different home situations might mean this isn't always possible, so perhaps there might be other ways to 'signal' the end of 'working' e.g. putting away the work and then enjoying a favourite song or shared dance!
- This is also a particularly stressful time for pupils in year 6 or year 11 who have found out that school is closing and they might not be doing things that were planned or exams this year. **Provide reassurance about exams being cancelled** – they may feel like all their hard work has been for nothing. Reassure young people that the Prime Minister has said that all children and young people will get the qualification they worked towards, but acknowledge that the plan is a bit uncertain right now.
- **Play – Play is fundamental to children's wellbeing and development – children of all ages! It's also a great way to reduce stress in adults.**

Be creative in your home activities

- Set up a den in the house or a camp in the garden – This activity can be useful to create a safe place for children and a place they know they can have some quiet time.
- Do puzzles, Lego, visual-spatial activities – These activities tend to be calming as the brain focuses on putting things together rather than verbal or emotion demanding

tasks. Offering these activities in the house will be of benefit to everyone as it will help all involved to be grounded and calm.

- Set up a fun project – such as: making a scrapbook of different drawings, paintings, making characters out of modelling clay, picking up leaves from the garden and finding the name of the tree online, taking photographs of wildlife in the garden such as birds, animals, painting rocks with emoji's on them, drawing a cartoon strip or writing a collection of short stories, inventing characters and drawing these, so many things that can be done. Some children may like the challenge of a research project.
- Start a collection – Stamps, stones, leaves and lots of other things can start collections.
- play board games
- Create memories – make a photo album or create a home video of songs or stories.
- Try the ELSA Support 14 days of activities challenge <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Coronavirus-home-challenge.pdf>

Make plans

In the face of events that are scary and largely out of our control, it's important to be proactive about what you *can* control. The **activities below can help children and young people to feel in control, needed and capable are helpful.**

- Invite children to help plan activities for the day
- Helping around the house with chores
- Involving children in decision making, e.g. making a shopping list.
- Cooking together
- Learning a new skill together and/or teaching a new skill
- Implementing routines for self-care and mindfulness
- When a child says they miss something, make a 'bucket list' to look forward to in the future when restrictions have been lifted.

Connect with Others

It is really hard right now not to feel cut off from our family and friend support networks. It is important to find ways to send messages or letters; or use technology to keep in touch family and friends.

- **Help children stay connected to their friends** – Friendships are a key resiliency factor for children and young people. Most children see their friends nearly every day of the week and so not being in contact with them for some time might be upsetting. Is it possible for children to talk to their friends on the phone? Perhaps establish a group Skype or WhatsApp call? Perhaps they could write letters to each other?
- Encourage teenagers to stay connected to their friends virtually, in a healthy way, rather than going out and putting other people at risk. Acknowledge that you know it's frustrating for teenagers to be cut off from friends, listen to what they're feeling and then be direct about how you can work together to make this situation bearable.

Control access to electronics and social media

- **Reduce access to continuous news** – It is important to keep up to date with new developments and announcements, but it can be hard to switch off from the constant

stream of news from media outlets and social media. Reduce the time spent hearing, reading or watching news – at the moment it might be overwhelming for adults and children. Try to protect children from distressing media coverage.

- **Supervise children with screens** – It is likely that children and young people will be using screens more often over the coming weeks e.g. phones, tablets, gaming consoles and the internet. That is okay, as long as that isn't ALL they do - **Try to ensure all children have a balanced range of activities each day.** If this is the case make sure that younger children are supervised where possible and older children's use is monitored as appropriate. Ensure appropriate content filters are active – the UK Safer Internet Centre (<https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/>) offers guidance on setting up parental control.

Encourage healthy habits

- **Get Fresh Air!** - social distancing does not mean you have to be cooped up inside the walls of your home. It is important for kids to get active outside time every day, and research shows daily time outdoors boosts adults' health and wellbeing.
- **Exercise regularly** – If you have a garden you could set up an obstacle course and time them going through the course. Walking the dog and playing with an animal can also be part of the routine.
- Some children with SEND will find it difficult to follow social distancing rules. They may not be safe in traffic or may display challenging behaviours, for example, if they are told they can't go into the playground. Try to find the way of getting some fresh air and exercise which works best for you and your child. You may need to think about the best time of day, driving somewhere for your child to exercise safely, or you may need to get out of the house more than once a day. Parents can ask services that support their child (like their social worker, MAST worker, CAMHS consultant) to write them a letter that details their support plan if they are challenged by the police or others or could take evidence of their child's disabilities out with them. You should, however, still aim to keep as close to your local area as possible and at least 2 metres apart from anyone who is not a member of your household or a carer.
- Keeping a **consistent sleep schedule**, with predictable times to wake up and go to bed, is especially important to maintaining a positive mood
- Eat healthy meals

Resources

General

The Sheffield Parent Carer Forum has put together a list of links to information, guidance and suggestions about support for carers, work and benefits, mental health and talking to your child.

<https://sheffieldparentcarerforum.org.uk/news/coronavirus-useful-links/>

The Sheffield Parent Carer Forum are collating updates and contact details for SCC and NHS services which can be found here:

<https://sheffieldparentcarerforum.org.uk/news/coronavirus-impact-on-local-send-services/>

The Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust are providing up to date information for families around appointments, visitor restrictions etc. here
<https://www.sheffieldchildrens.nhs.uk/news/coronavirus/>

NW SEND Regional Network Newsletter: Special edition: March 2020

<https://cyps.northyorks.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Emergencies,%20health%20and%20safety/1.%20Issue%2050%20-%20Special%20edition%20-%20March%202020.pdf>

The Educational Psychology Service is continuing to operate remotely. The service will carry on providing statutory psychological advice to the Local Authority. Advice, guidance and support are being provided through calls, emails and shared documents to all schools in Sheffield. This includes advising on active measures to meet the SEND needs of those children and families who are likely to be most at risk.

Parents can ask for support by emailing Educational.Psychology@sheffield.gov.uk Please include your child's name and date of birth, a contact phone number and your question or details of where you are asking for advice. The service will look to get back to you as soon as possible.

If you don't have access to an email you can leave a message with the same details on 0114 2506800 and someone will call you back. Please note that messages are being picked up daily and then passed to the team to respond.

Social, emotional and mental health needs

Managing challenging behaviours

<https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/information/information-sheets-and-dvds/info-sheets-and-dvds.html>

Advice for helping your child if they are worried:

World Health Organisation – how to help children cope with stress:

https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/helping-children-cope-withstress-print.pdf?sfvrsn=f3a063ff_2

Advice for parents whose children are worried: <https://www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/anna-freud-learning-network/coronavirus/>

This site was created for young people, carers and professionals to pool together lots of helpful resources from across the internet that are available to help support your mental health and well-being.

www.camhs-resources.co.uk

Advice for teenagers who are worried: <https://youngminds.org.uk/>
www.epicfriends.co.uk

Speech language and communication needs

Resources from the National Autistic Society for autistic people and their families

<https://www.autism.org.uk/services/helplines/coronavirus/resources/helpful-resources.aspx>

A range of resources with illustrations and symbols for students with disorders on the Autism spectrum from Twinkl.

<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resources/specialeducationalneeds-sen/specialeducationalneeds-sen-communication-and-interaction/sen-autism-spectrum-disorders>

Gina Davis Attention Autism Video links: Attention Autism is an intervention model designed by Gina Davies, Specialist Speech and Language Therapist. It aims to develop natural and spontaneous communication through the use of visually based and highly motivating activities. Gina's primary objective is that the sessions are fun and "offer an irresistible invitation to learn"!

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPPw7lj3k2Zhe19Fb3CO-aq>

Speech and Language activities from Twinkl

<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/search?term=speech+and+language+activities>

The Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust Speech and Language Therapy Service is continuing to operate. You should be able to contact your child's Speech and Language Therapist on their usual number and email address. If you need some help finding out who your therapist is, please contact:

Bev Charles for pre-school children (Ryegate): bev.charles@nhs.net

Dana Welch for pre-school children (Firth Park) at dana.welch@nhs.net

Alice Woods for children in mainstream primary and secondary schools: alice.woods@nhs.net

Claire Wickham for children in special schools: claire.wickham@nhs.net

Jane Shaw for children with eating, drinking and swallowing needs: jane.shaw2@nhs.net

Please contact by telephone on 0114 226 2333.

Autism Education Team support

The autism education team run a support line for families and services during term time where advice can be requested. Through this time they have moved this to an email support service for parents of children with autism to ask for help and support. Parents can ask for support by emailing autism.educationteam@sheffield.gov.uk Please include your child's name and date of birth, a contact phone number and your question or details of where you are asking for advice. The service will look to get back to you as soon as possible.

If you don't have access to an email you can leave a message with the same details on 0114 2506800 and someone will call you back. Please note that messages are being picked up daily and then passed to the team to respond.

Advice topics might be things such as:

- My child has become obsessive about washing their hands.

- My child only wants to be on their Xbox and won't try to do activities outside.
- My child gets very upset when I try and complete work set by his school.
- My child has started being frightened of having any contact with other people because they think they will die.

Physical and sensory needs

Exercise and activity ideas from the Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy team
<https://www.sheffieldchildrens.nhs.uk/services/physiotherapy-and-occupational-therapy/exercise-and-activity-ideas-for-children-and-families/>

The Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy Service continue to operate. They are offering all families telephone consultation and therapists will be in touch as soon as possible. They are also trialling skype and WhatsApp if parents and children would prefer to talk face to face online. Where it is deemed essential, they are offering face to face appointments in person. This should be discussed with your child's therapist over the telephone before you attend.

The physios and OTs are posting fun, new activities every week. Look out for Workout of the Week (WOW) on Mondays, something different on Wednesdays and the Friday Challenge.

If you do not have a telephone number for your child's therapist, please contact the department at Ryegate on 2717610 or 2717227 for the out-patient physiotherapy and occupational therapy team at the Children's Hospital and someone will be able to help you.

The service is working very hard to increase the resources they can send out to parents and offer through their webpage. Please bear with them.

Information for parent/carers of a baby, child or young person who has complex health needs.

<https://www.togetherforshortlives.org.uk/get-support/supporting-you/family-resources/coronavirus-ga/>
<https://www.togetherforshortlives.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Minister-Fords-open-letter-to-the-SEND-sector-002.pdf>

Vision Support Service/Service for Deaf/HI Children

The services that support children and young people with hearing or sight difficulties continue to operate, but will not be carrying out home or monitoring visits at present. If your child receives a high level of specialist support in their setting, or is in a HI Integrated Resource or at Tapton School Integrated Resource, your Teacher of the Deaf or Teacher of the Visually Impaired will be in contact with you by phone or email.

If you don't have the direct number for your Teacher of the Deaf or Teacher of the Visually Impaired, or you're not sure who to contact, or you have any general queries, please get in touch:

For Deaf/HI children and young people:

Caroline Chettleburgh, Caroline.chettleburgh@sheffield.gov.uk 07875 677532
For children and young people with a visual impairment:
Sarah Blake, sblake@taptonschoo.co.uk 07875 767408

Hearing Services, Sheffield Children's Hospital

Hearing Services are offering telephone appointments, with face to face only for medical emergencies. If you need batteries or a replacement for a faulty hearing aid, these will be sent in the post.

Please email SCH.audiologyreferrals@nhs.net, leave a message on 0114 2717450 or text 07854089810 if you have an urgent query and we will be in touch when we can.

Useful links – Deaf/HI

<https://www.cochlear.com/us/en/professionals/resources/school-resource-center>

<https://www.cochlear.com/us/communication-corner/program/toddlers-sound-foundation-toddlers.htm>

[NDCS Coronavirus support for deaf children and families](#)

[BSL learn online - huge reduction in the price currently £3 suggested donation for children](#)

<https://www.buzz.org.uk/coronavirus-information-for-young-people/>

[Useful links – VI](#)

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/advice/children-young-people-education>

<https://www.teachingvisuallyimpaired.com/online-parent-resources.html>

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

<https://www.sightadvicefaq.org.uk/independent-living/Covid-19-CYPF-SFAQ>

<https://britishblindsport.org.uk/british-blind-sport-announce-live-workout-week/>

Remember do what you can when you can.....

- Be visual
- Work with your child's topics/special interests/passions
- Take frequent breaks
- Incorporate physical exercise and movement breaks
- Create a safe space e.g. pop up tent. Put in soothing items ...squishies , books, music
- Build in rewards and motivators
- Spend time on self-help/independence skills - cooking, baking, domestic chores in the garden and home
- Regularly wash your hands
- Be kind to yourself
- Remember to have fun!!

Further information is available on the Sheffield Council local offer website:

<http://www.sheffielddirectory.org.uk/localoffer>