

**Creating Positive Routines and Environments**

Our lives have had to change quickly since the arrival of COVID-19. We are trying to work out what this means for ourselves, our loved ones and our communities. Many of us are dealing with shrinking support networks, health concerns, job uncertainty or trying to work from home for the first time. So when we think about how to support our children, let’s try and be kind to ourselves and realise that we can take this in small steps.

All of us have recently experienced a big transition with most children and young people are now learning at home. However, it is important that there is a shared understanding of what can we reasonably expect from this time at home?

Introduction

Key steps in creating positive routines and environments – laying the foundations.

Initially parents and carers should explore with their children:

1. Why school is now closed and what learning at home means. There are a number of available online resources.
2. New house rules -what has changed now that you are learning at home?
3. The role as both parent and learning guide

Coping together: the importance of routine

Children and young people with ASN may struggle to:

* Predict what happens next
* Plan or adapt to what happens in the future
* Cope in unfamiliar situations
* Know what is expected of them
* Manage their anxiety



One way to support this routine could be by creating a visual timetable or using visual supports along with your day to support your child or young person to follow routine, transition throughout the day and make choices.

Reminding your child or young person that this is their new routine, but routines may continue to change in future may also be helpful to prepare the child or young person for change or adjustment in their routine, if necessary, at a different date.

Visual timetables could include just now and next, separate the day into chunks, look at the whole day, or even look at the whole week. Make sure what you are using is appropriate level for your child or young person to make it work for them and they are able to understand without becoming overwhelmed.

Below is an example of a visual timetable.

**How can we implement a routine?**

If your child cannot tell you, parents should consider contacting the school to see if there were set times/routines that could be helpful (for example, is it art before lunch rather than after lunch?)

•Consider ‘what would a good learning day look like?’ and work from there to build a routine

•Get your child involved with ordering tasks

•Consider sensory sensitivities -for example if a task is messy and dirty, it may be a good ‘final’ activity to the day -before we can change clothes

•Consider energy levels for your child (medication, sleep, energy)

•Get children to help draw visuals

Consider Physical Space

1. Where possible, use a room that isn’t your child’s bedroom and make it the ‘school area’

2. Reduce clutter and overstimulation -clean up each activity after it is done, only bring out materials for the next activity when you are ready to begin

3. If you’re using sofas, consider using blankets or sheets to transition from ‘school sofa’ to ‘chill sofa’ in the evenings

4. Consider sensory distractions in the school space. Noises, smells, textures, bright lights. Children can help with this.

5. Eat in an area separate to your study space. This is relevant even for children who use feeding tubes or gastronomy tubes

Transitions and timings

The average attention span of a child is 3 to 5 minutes per year of a child's age. This doesn’t take into account additional support needs. To this end, it may be more beneficial to take a general rule of thumb as attention span being 15 x minutes maximum. It is important to break up longer activities with some movement, reviewing work or even collecting something can make learning more manageable.

Crucially parents and carers will know their own child’s limits and it is important to build in time to **NOT FOCUS.**

Supporting Multiple children with different support needs at home

It may be the case that you have a number of children at home with different levels of ASN. In this case the following suggestions may be helpful whilst continuing to support each child at their own developmental level:

The use of **Filler material:** while explaining a task, you can give another child a filler task that takes little management (i.e. screen time, colouring in). Once one child knows their task, you can rotate to the other

Let your children be the teachers: children learn effectively by teaching others, so getting children to “teach” each other helps both. (Koh et al 2018)

Same topic, different levels: give different children different outcomes (Speedier children do ten sums and check with a calculator while you help another do 5 sums)

Promote turn taking through games (handout) which promotes children taking turns to ask for help.

Get more information from:

www.northayr-edpsychs.co.uk



**In conclusion**

1. Focus on setting expectations

2. Look at the learning environment -it’s about doing what we can with what we have and making it clear when we are in ‘learning mode’

3. Use physical indicators and routines to help children know what the day will look like

4. Start with one routine at a time

5. Let your children and young people be as involved as possible

6. Expect hiccups!

7. Know that routines are for parents as well