

‘Practical Solutions. Handy Home Pack’

Sefton Council SEN and Inclusion Service.

Social and Communication Team – a specialist team who work with complex autistic pupils in mainstream schools via a referral from the SENCO.

‘All Together Now’ are virtual sessions for parents and carers of children with social communication needs/ autism.

*Session #1 - ‘Learning in lockdown. A point of reflection.’
An opportunity to share what’s worked*

- School liaison is key
- Calendar/ schedule – a regular and visual sequence of events is what is important – not the time of day
- Week at a time – plan on a Sunday as a rolling programme
- Designated work/learning space
- Think structure
- Routine/ consistency
- Small bursts/ chunk it up
- Rotate time with siblings – use visuals to show the schedule
- Have reasonable expectations for yourself and your children
- Down time for all – and your own mental health!
- Moving and grooving – sensory and movement breaks are important
- Reinforce new concepts together – but schedule independent tasks
- Motivate and reward
- Non school curriculum activities and life skills
- Make it fun/ hands on
- Get creative
- Try and get a group time/ family game a couple of times a week
- Friday is enrichment day – ‘Golden Time!’
- Be mindful of good sleep routines/ levels of anxiety/ diet etc.
- Bespoke to your child’s needs
- Don’t compare – it’s not a competition!
- Screen free time
- Ask school for help with resources
- Remember - Parents first – not teachers!

It can be difficult to generalise and transfer skills that have been obtained in school over to home, and this can create a lot of anxiety for some children. They may also be used to having an adult by their side to prompt and support, and the absence of this will add to the stress. Also, for children who compartmentalise their young lives... home is home, and school is school!

Rather than using language such as ‘school work’ or ‘home schooling’ etc, less threatening phrases such as ‘activity’ is open for the adult to decide what the activity could be. The ‘activity’ need not be necessarily what has been sent from school. If it is causing anxiety for both parent and child, then it is not conducive to learning anyway.

- 'Activity' does need to have a clear end, and could be:
 - reading 10 pages of a book
 - building a lego model from a template
 - matching all socks from the laundry
 - a baking activity
 - making a snack or lunch from a 'how to...' task card ('how to' make a ham sandwich for example)
 - organising the cutlery drawer (take all the cutlery out, and get your child to organise and return – known as 'product sampling')
 - completing a jigsaw puzzle (a large puzzle could be broken down again – 'find 10 pieces')
 - planting some seeds

Activities and games that *promote* literacy/ numeracy/ problem solving/ life skills are more fun, don't look like school work and more likely to reduce resistance.

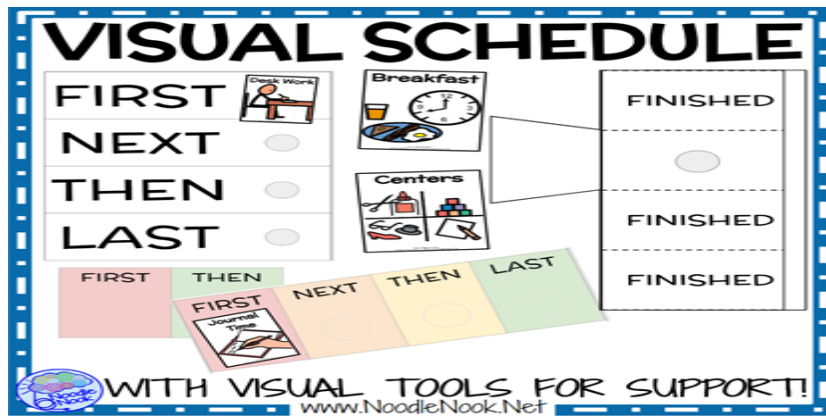
For younger children, alternate 'activity' with 'play', so your child is getting adult led then self-led tasks. If your child can see that they can have their choice at 'play', it will reduce anxiety, and motivate and reward.

Include regular sensory breaks, or sensory play. Yoga can reduce anxiety and physical activity will help to burn off some energy. A simple assault course around the home can be fun... step on the cushions that are lined up, do 5 star jumps, commando crawl through the kitchen, forward roll into the living room, 5 big strides, 10 small steps, etc, etc.

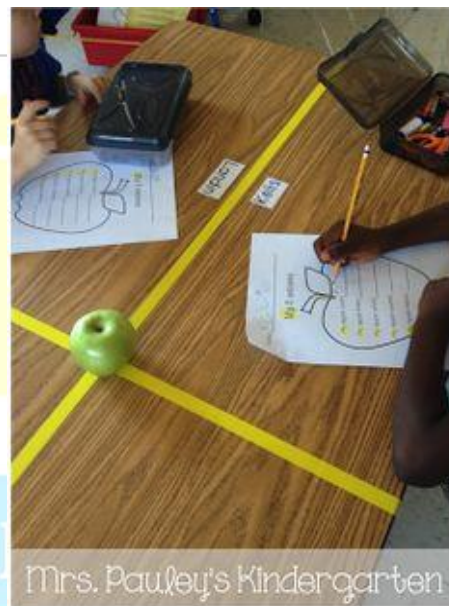
Schedules and routines are crucial for every school day, keeping things the same in this current situation. Even wearing a particular set of clothes to indicate a school day will help (full school uniform at home can be stressful for some children with autism). Weekends and the holidays need to feel and look very different, perhaps colour coding the family calendar in 3 different colours to clearly show what day it is.

Trying to keep some structure and routine can be tricky when not in school, and these unusual circumstances we find ourselves in are even more challenging.

- Having a visual schedule clearly displayed is always helpful, so everyone in the family can see what is going to happen during the day. Even using a 'first', 'next', 'then' and 'last' can be helpful to break up the morning until lunch, then again from lunch until the end of your 'school' day.
- Consider 'chunking' up your session into 20 minutes or so and having a rolling programme of school work/ sensory play/ choose/ movement and moving/ snack.
- Ensure you clearly mark the end of the learning day, by emphasising 'finished', and showing what is next, i.e. TV time or tea time etc.
- You don't need fancy pictures or symbols – just draw a simple line representative. The children could help make the cards for your timetable.



If you have limited space or other children in the house, you might want to section off some areas. Use tape to organise each child's own work space, or to separate 'work' from 'play' or 'snack'.



Home schooling does not look like the school classroom but having designated space for school work is really helpful. Even using a specific table cloth on the dining table can help children understand work time. Everything can be packed away at the end of the day in a 'school box' to signify 'finished'.

- The 'work' section of your session doesn't always have to be work set by school, particularly if your child sees the school book as 'school' work, and this is 'home'.
- Use everyday items from around the house to make simple and easy activities for the 'work' time.
- Activities such as baking will cover topics such as numeracy, literacy, science, problem solving, language development, turn taking etc.
- If you can get out into a garden, plant some herbs or vegetable seeds.
- Matching/ sorting/ organising/ sequencing are great activities for reducing stress and anxiety for children with autism. They provide order and predictability.
- Choose a 'Book of the Week', and use its theme for role play/ picture matching/ creative activities etc.
- Collect natural items and bits from the garden to make pictures and sculptures.
- It's OK to repeat activities too. Once you have a week's worth of ideas, re-visit and consolidate again the following week.



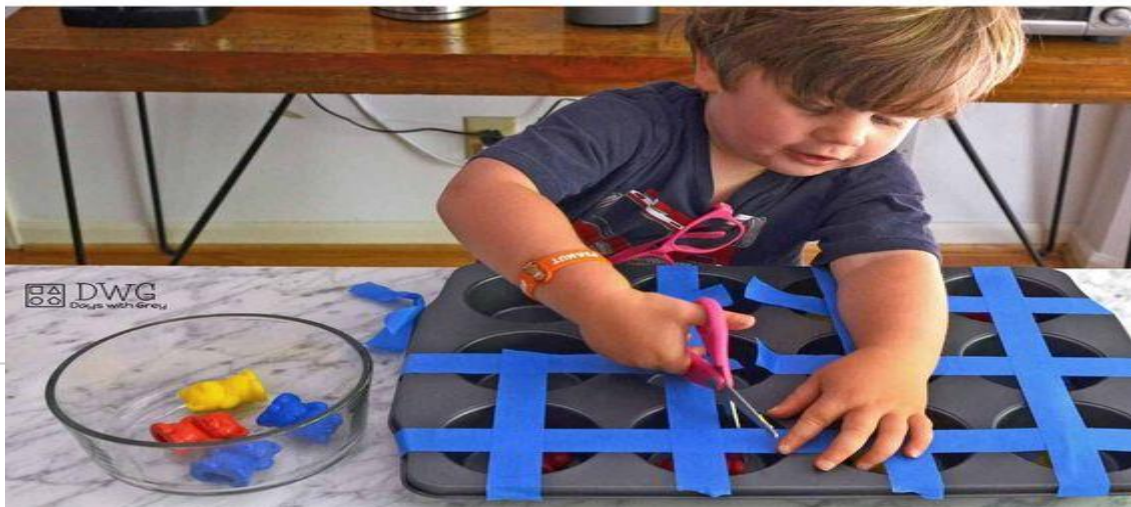
- Sensory activities will remain key to reducing anxiety and keeping focus during the next few weeks, and there is no upper age limit. Offer simple activities that will provide fine motor as well as gross motor.
- Just pulling elastic bands wrapped around any small toy can provide fine motor and pincer grasping for younger children, all good for mark making and writing practice without a pencil.
- Self-help skills such as cutting, moulding, threading, matching etc are fun and practical.
- Playdough is great for all ages.

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/playdough-recipe>



TRAP, CUT, & RESCUE!

super fun cutting practice for kids



Music and movement and anxiety

- Use music for energising – dancing and moving, particularly if you can't get outside.
- Then use restful and soothing music to calm children ready for learning and concentrating.
- Yoga and mindfulness techniques have been proven to be beneficial for children with social communication differences.
- Youtube is a great resource for playing short but child friendly exercise routines.
- Mindfulness colouring in and breathing techniques could be taught and practised daily.





Some more ideas -



Useful websites and resources:

<https://www.seftondirectory.com/autism>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/coronavirus-supporting-children-special-educational-needs-disabilities/>

<https://www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/support-for-children-with-additional-needs-during-lockdown/>

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/coronavirus/education-and-schools/guidance/a-guide-for-parents>

<https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/help-resources/resources/covid-19-support-and-guidance>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zh9v382>

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk>

