

Support for Parents While at Home

Suddenly being at home can be an unnerving change for all children and young people, especially for autistic children. It can also be difficult for parents to adjust to. This resource can provide some advice to parents who may feel overwhelmed with:

1. Covering a curriculum
2. Loss of personal time
3. Isolation
4. Underlying mental health difficulties

Covering a curriculum

A child's school day not only involves work which is completed on pen and paper, but also involves: social learning, activities to support wellbeing, pastoral care and support, and staying active. Children have scheduled break or "play times", where they may choose their own activities in a playground or rest area.

The absence of a structured curriculum in a school environment can cause anxiety for parents, believing that the time spent at home may result in their child being behind in the curriculum. Children may struggle to engage in formalised work at home, causing both parents and children to become stressed during this time.

Things to remember:

1. Teachers are professionals who engage in years of training, parents cannot be expected to replicate these skills.
2. Parents may not have engaged in some curriculum materials in years (e.g. algebra) and may not be able to explain these concepts to their children. Teachers can support them with this on their return.
3. Activities such as choosing to play with siblings or watching a DVD are also activities children may engage with in school.
4. Taking time out of the "school day" to talk to and support your children with their feelings would be pastoral care support given in school.
5. Be mindful of how your friends and family are communicating their children's progress and engagement over social media. This may not always be an accurate representation of what is going on.

Supporting an autistic child with learning at home may be very different to supporting other children. Autistic children may need more time to transition to these new changes, and may need more time to transition to going back to school.

Loss of Personal Time

For many parents, the school day is not the only opportunity for their child to gain their education. The school day is usually an opportunity for parents to focus on other things in their life, such as: taking care of the household, engaging in your job or career, engaging in study, or fulfilling personal hobbies or social life. It is normal to struggle with the idea of having your children around more often than usual; many parents do. Personal time has been removed from many parents, and it is okay to feel upset about that.

Things to try out:

1. Write down what you normally achieve within the time your children are normally at school. This could be a full day of work, or this could be activities which are broken down to meeting friends, doing shopping, watching television .
2. If you share caring responsibilities in the home with a partner, have an honest discussion with them about how these responsibilities would be best distributed.
3. Reserve time in your day whilst your children are occupied to engage in these activities. If you are disturbed, make a commitment to yourself that you will complete them later.
4. Reach out to friends and family who are in similar situations – make a commitment to connect at least once per day. Parents may often be experiencing the same difficulties, and it could help develop a strong mutual support network.

Isolation

This can be a lonely period for many parents, as supports which were in place have changed due to physical distancing. For example, this could be an after school club, a social care service, appointments with allied health professionals or social work, or personal support networks.

Although the closure of face-to-face appointments is a measure taken to protect you and your family, it is normal to be angry or upset about these closures. These support networks are important to you and your families' wellbeing. You may also feel isolated if your professional and personal support network has been taken away.

Things to try out:

1. Make use of online support networks. It may take some time to adjust to online support and appointments. Be honest about how you are feeling with your support provider(s).
2. Liaise with providers to see what may be available. For example, some clubs or social care services may be running through conference calls. Your child may not engage with it in the same way as face-to-face support, but it can be reassuring for them in some cases to see regular faces.
3. Use your spare time to engage in hobbies which you may have put to the side. This could be learning a new recipe, learning a new language, reading a book, or starting a new box set. Filling your time with meaningful activities can result in new social connections emerging online, and reduce focus on the isolation of physical distancing.
4. Contact Scottish Autism's advice line through email at advice@scottishautism.org. This can not only be used to gain information or advice, but to share your feelings with a professional who understands autism and the specific issues that can occur in your family home.

Underlying Mental Health Issues

Mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression can affect as many as 1 in 4 people at any one time. Temporary changes can aggravate some of the issues, and put more pressure on parents as they try to support their child's learning too.

Mood Diary

Mood tracking is a self-help tool which can aim to identify the factors that impact on your mood, and allow you to apply self-care strategies during that time. A mood diary has been developed and is attached to this resource pack. Life changes can result in your mood, stress, or anxiety patterns being different than usual. This self-help resource can help you see what changes may be contributing to differences in mood, stress or anxiety.

Questions to ask yourself:

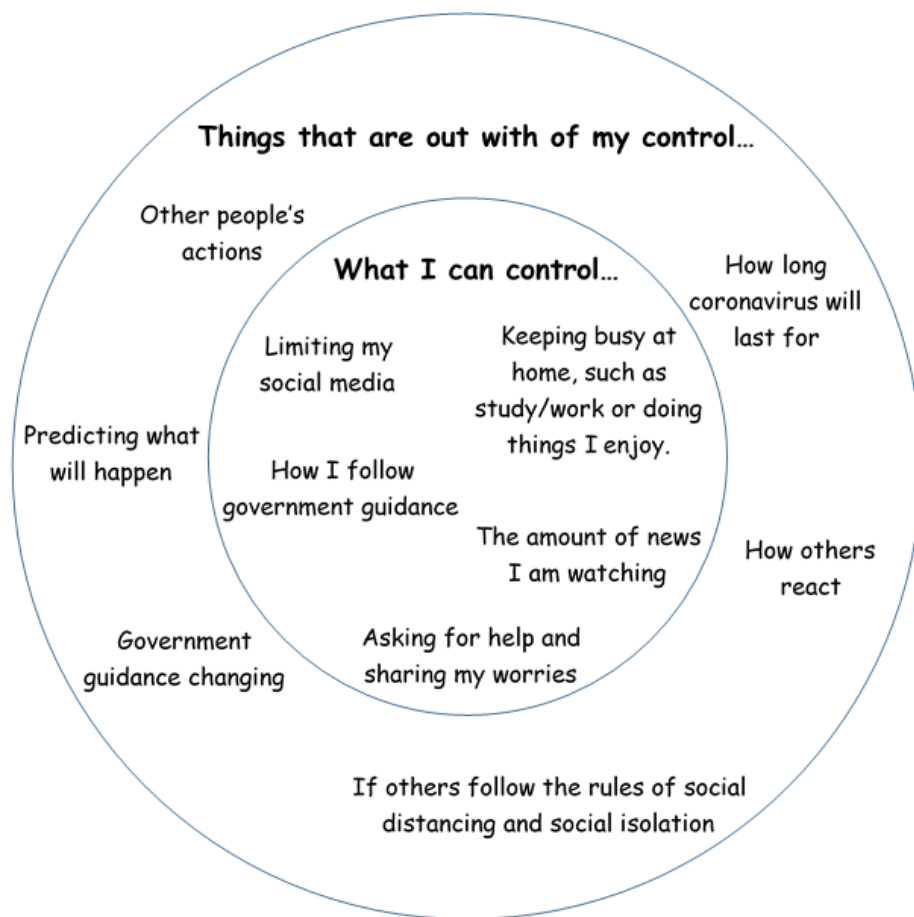
1. Do I become lower in mood, more anxious, or stressed at a certain time in the day? Consider changing the learning at home schedule to ensure there are no demands on you at this time.
2. Is my mood, stress, or anxiety increasing or decreasing with hours slept? See our resource on sleep hygiene to support you with this.
3. Does an increase in exercise per day support my mood? Consider increasing the intensity of your exercise during the time in which you are permitted to leave the house (current guidelines as of 26/03/2020). Some fitness classes are also providing remote classes.
4. Am I eating too little, at irregular times, or consuming more caffeine than usual whilst being in the home? Identify which intake patterns are corresponding to increases/decreases in mood, stress or anxiety.

Circle of Control

During this time of change and uncertainty it is important to remind ourselves of the things that we can control and the things that we cannot control. There are definitely things that we can control, for example, whether we limit our time on social media or not, however, there are many things that we cannot control right now. It is therefore important to keep questioning whether our thoughts revolve around what we can control or those that we cannot. If it's around things we cannot control it's important to refocus towards what we can control.

Like our example below, on a scrap piece of paper draw two circles, one inner circle and one outer circle, or if preferred print off our blank template. The inner circle is what you can control, therefore within this circle write down the things you can control, you may wish to add things as time progresses. In the outer circle, write down the things you cannot control, again you may wish to add things as time progresses.

By writing these down and having this as a visual it will provide you with a reminder of the things you can and cannot control and hopefully assist you with refocusing towards what we can control at this time.



[You will also find a blank template on our website](#)

Minfulness and Relaxation

People respond differently to different forms of mindfulness and relaxation. Mindfulness is the practice of being fully engaged in what you are doing in that moment. Relaxation is the use of strategies to reduce arousal and stress.

The NHS has a dedicated page to [understanding applying mindfulness](#)

This Mind UK page gives an overview of [the role of mindfulness in supporting your own wellbeing](#)

Guided meditation can also be used to support mindfulness, by talking you through the process of switching off to stimulus around you. Headspace is a popular app which can be downloaded to your device that can provide guided meditation. Please be aware that there is a subscription charge for the service.

Relaxation is a method bespoke to each individual as an activity that reduces their state of arousal. Here are some ideas of activities that can support you to relax. If you need some inspiration, here are some links:

[Article – Mind UK Relaxation tips](#)

[Article – 40 ways to relax in five minutes](#)

The concept may seem simple, but allowing yourself the reserved time for mindfulness, meditation or relaxation is a task that can be forgotten when dealing with the demands of supporting your child's learning at home.

Other self-help resources

The Scottish Association of Mental Health have developed a hub for support during the coronavirus outbreak. Here, you can find:

- Information on coronavirus and OCD/Anxiety
- Information on coronavirus and benefits
- [Free guided meditation and more](#)

Mind UK have developed a useful webpage that can help guide you on your wellbeing journey during the coronavirus outbreak:

- [Coronavirus and your wellbeing](#)

Sometimes, it can help to speak to another person over the phone. You can contact the following organisations for support:

Breathing Space

Number: 0800 83 85 87 (open 6pm – 2pm only, or 6pm – 6am on weekends).

Samaritans

Number: 116123

[Samaritans Website](#)

Autism Advice Line

We are running support from our e-mail system advice@scottishautism.org. However, if you would like a phone call, an autism advisor will arrange to phone you back. We are trained in providing a listening, advice, information and emotional support service.

You may also find our [My Week](#) reflective tool useful.