



# Renaissance School of Medicine

## Stony Brook University

### Help for parents of children with ASD during the pandemic

In light of the social communication challenges and inherent rigidity of ASD children, these times may be extremely challenging. Below are a few tips to ease this transition.

- 1) Parents must do the best to take care of themselves. Adequate sleep, nutrition and exercise in addition to relying on your own social supports will have a direct and positive impact on your child's ability to cope.
- 2) As we are all in close quarters, be careful what your child hears adults and older children in the home may be saying. Children with ASD can be literal or concrete and may misinterpret dramatic and/or sarcastic comments.
- 3) Be sure to use developmentally appropriate language when explaining the virus. Young children and children who are developmentally delayed have difficulty understanding abstract concepts and benefit from basic and concrete information. This may be something like "There is a sickness going around and we need to wash our hands a lot. There will not be school for a while and we will get to spend more time with our family." Older and higher functioning children may understand more, however, be sure not to overwhelm your child with details of anxiety provoking information. Some ASD children will perseverate on this and it will be difficult to interrupt. Limit the amount of news your child is exposed to throughout the day.
- 4) Your child's greatest stressor may be the interruption in his or her routine, particularly not attending school. ASD children thrive on routines and often respond intensely when a routine is deviated from. Allow and assist your child in expressing his or her distress and empathize.
- 5) ASD children often benefit from the use of visuals. Visuals can be used to explain the virus and its impact. This link provides access to an excellent social story explaining many of the aspects of the outbreak.

<https://www.flipsnack.com/KeshetChicago/coronavirus-social-story/full-view.html>

- 6) Create a visual schedule for the home dividing the day into either half hour or hour sections depending on the age and developmental level of your child. Orient the day around three meals. Try to keep the weekdays somewhat consistent so your child develops a new routine. Post the visual schedule in several areas throughout the home.
- 7) In terms of school work, just do the best you can. Setting aside a time of day for school may help. Once the timeframe ends, school is over for the day whether or not the entire packet of work is completed. Have your child complete paper schoolwork in the same place each day and do your best to provide a quiet, clean and well lit area as free from distractions as possible. Make as much of the school work as you can multisensory and three dimensional. Cook, play, craft and look at the moon and stars. Do not be afraid to modify assignments if necessary.
- 8) Go back to the basics. Do not hesitate to use favorite reinforcers in conjunction with verbal praise to reward children for compliance and behavior. Fun activities, video games, snacks, late bedtime, etc can all be potential reinforcers. Make a bucket of reinforcers your child can pick from. The element of surprise will add to the process and decrease the likelihood of boredom and saturation from using the same reinforcer over and over. Catch your children being good. A little praise can go a long way.
- 9) Be sure your children get to exercise in some way daily. Walking around the block, having a relay race in the basement or even jumping can help burn off steam.
- 10) Inquire as to whether any of your providers (psychologist, SW speech and language therapists, teachers, OTs) are equipped to use telehealth to keep your child connected.
- 11) Reach out to other ASD parents and share your ideas!

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