



## **Child Life Suggestions:**

### ***Assisting families of children with Autism during COVID-19***

*We acknowledge that no two children are alike, whether on the autism spectrum or not, with differing personalities and characteristics, and no one knows them as well as their parents or primary caregivers. Below is simple outlines of ideas and suggestions that families may find helpful during this very challenging time.*

#### **Limit input**

- Limit their access to media which often presents a sense of being out-of-control.
- If your child senses that you, or the community is anxious and stressed, they are more likely to display similar behavior.
- If your child has questions or concerns, be honest, keeping in mind that details or too much information may become overwhelming.

#### **Health and safety**

- It will be challenging to help your child understand the need to stay home, but whatever questions your child may express, try to be honest without unnecessary details.
- Take this as an opportunity to review the importance of personal hygiene, such as washing hands and covering your face while coughing or sneezing.
- It may be difficult for your child to understand images he or she may see of others wearing masks or gowns. Consider creating a mask from a bandana to demonstrate that a mask does not change a person.
- Be mindful that many children with autism do not accurately report pain or discomfort. In this time of such medical crisis stay attune to their behaviors and watch for signs or symptoms of not feeling well. Reporting anything of concern to their physician.

#### **Maintain consistency and routine**

- Like many of us, children with ASD do best with predictable routines that incorporate clearly defined expectations.
- Aim to be as consistent with both their home and school schedule and routine as is to the best of your ability.
- Make a visual schedule(s) to maintain both behavioral and educational goals and expectations.
- Incorporate whatever communication tools (communication board, sign language or pictures, etc.) that are generally used during school at home and be consistent.

## **Education/schooling**

- Parents are their child's number one advocate: stay in close communications with your child's teacher(s), therapists, and caregivers, either by phone/email.
- Know if appropriate web based lessons are available and incorporate them into daily routine whenever possible.
- Be prepared for an extended absence; keeping a predictable schooling routine during this time of school closures will help your child reintegrate to school once this crisis has subsided.
- Your child may have difficulty understanding a 'school day' when mom/dad/siblings remain at home. Help them to understand that for the time being school will look a little different, but assure them that it will continue.

## **Relationships**

- Keep virtual contact with friends and relatives with such internet apps as FaceTime, Duo or Zoom.
- Encourage close family or a friend to read to your child via these tools, or if possible, have your child 'visit' other people that are important to them through such platforms.
- It is important to keep those familiar connections; children often fear that when they do not regularly see people that they care about, they may be gone, which may increase anxiety.
- When asked what they want more than anything, most children will say they want more time with their parents. This may be a good opportunity to make that happen.

## **Behavior**

- Negative/acting out behaviors will likely increase during this time of stress and anxiety, try to focus on positive behaviors.
- Try to 'catch' your child doing something wonderful and reward positive behavior.
- Offer your child their favorite 'currency'; what is the best reward for your child?

## **Physical activity**

- Encourage gross motor activity (riding a bike, walking, etc.) as most appropriate for your child and weather conditions.
- Consider doing yoga, such as ZenDen on YouTube

## **Provide a safe, personalized space for calm and solitude**

- Put the child in control of what that space will look like and what it will contain.
- Consider creating a quiet corner or space within your home, reserved just for your child to unwind.
- Have favorite toys, books or calming items available to help self-soothing.
- Be sure to include a weighted vest/blanket and noise canceling headphones if your child finds comfort in such items.

### **Support for Parents:**

- Unfortunately, during this time there are less support resources available for parents due to stay-at-home orders. Remember to find time to take care of yourself.
- Reach out for support from the Autism Response team at *888-AUTISM2* or [help@autismspeaks.org](mailto:help@autismspeaks.org).
- Download a copy of the Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope With the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network includes age-specific tips.
- Download a copy of the FREE Social Narrative about COVID-19 specifically for children with Autism, which is a short social story aimed at younger students or individuals with autism who may be scared or confused about coronavirus.  
<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Coronavirus-COVID-19-Social-Narrative-for-Autism-Free-5315053>