

Top tips for supporting autistic young people to return to school/college after Covid-19

Leadership teams should explicitly include reintegration support strategies for autistic young people on their re-opening plans.

Before the transition back to school/college:

- Devise a personalised, detailed and robust plan to support the young person to transition back to the setting. The plan should be shared with parents, the young person (as appropriate) and all staff who will be working with the young person. Include information on:
 - Dates and times
 - Staffing
 - Any changes the young person may not be expecting (rooms, class sizes, environment, timetabling, staff wearing PPE etc.)
 - Additional adjustments to support wellbeing and happiness during the transition period.
 - Include these details in a Transition Book for the young person to read at home.
- Work closely with parents and the young person to devise the plan, taking account of the young person's responses to lockdown and social distancing measures, emotional wellbeing, cognitive development and understanding. Use this information to update the young person's pupil passport/profile and sensory profile and redistribute to all staff working with them.
- Try to minimise the number of changes that the young person will have to cope with; for example if their class is to be split to facilitate social distancing, try to keep them with preferred peers, familiar and preferred staff and in familiar rooms wherever possible.
- Facilitate the completion of a Talking Mat with the young person where appropriate. A Talking Mat on re-integration after lockdown and instructions for use can be found on the STARS Team website: <http://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-resources>.
- Facilitate opportunity for the young person to talk to a trusted staff member via email/another agreed video communication platform in the days running up to their return to school.
- Provide clear visual information about what will happen when the setting re-opens including what will be the same and what will be different. The young person should be provided with a personalised Transition Book/Guide to read in the week before the return to school or college. Examples are available on the STARS Team website: <http://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-resources>.
- You may also need to provide Social Stories to address particular concerns that the young person might express in the weeks prior to returning to school or college. Examples can also be found on the STARS Team website.
- Allocate time for staff to plan and prepare resources for the young person, in preparation for the first day back.

During and following the transition back to school/college:

It is very likely that when the young person returns to school/college they will be experiencing much higher levels of stress and anxiety than normal. This may affect their behavior and engagement or may be successfully masked, but should nevertheless be given careful consideration. When the young person returns to school or college they may need additional adjustments in place. These should be determined through observation, discussions with the young person (including the Talking Mat), discussion with the family and school/college staff and will probably include:

- Consistent use of all approaches, systems and strategies that supported the young person before the Covid-19 lockdown.
- Additional opportunities (planned and responsive) to aid the young person to address worries via mentoring sessions. Wherever possible visual supports should be utilised to reinforce information given verbally and provide non-fade information that is easily referred back to. Examples can also be found on the STARS Team website.
- Additional opportunities for breaks/chill out time (planned and responsive), where the young person can follow their own agenda for short periods of time. Time out cards can facilitate this.
- Planned special interest time in order to increase happiness and well-being
- Option to arrive earlier/later than peers and leave earlier/later than peers in order to avoid busy, noisy periods. This should be discussed and agreed with parents and the young person.
- Option to start back on a reduced timetable. The timetable can be increased gradually in response to the young person's progress. Alternatively they may benefit from spending part of the first day in SEN support area whilst they regain the confidence to join lessons. This should be discussed and agreed with parents and the young person.

Further advice to support on emotional and mental wellbeing is available from:

- Mindmoose – www.mindmoose.co.uk
- Mindmate – www.mindmate.org.uk
- CAMHS – www.camhs-resources.co.uk