

Parents' guide to supporting post-16 aged students at home to continue their studies during the Coronavirus outbreak

For many young autistic people, studying at home can present significant challenges for a number of reasons; compartmentalisation of home and school/college, difficulty with working memory and the expectations of online working.

Stress and anxiety can impact on learning, increasing processing time, impacting cognition and the ability to retain information and concentrate. Sensory sensitivities may become more profound due to the increase in anxiety.

It can be difficult for young people to articulate their thoughts at this age and this can be even more difficult when you are autistic.

They might be very anxious and fearful about the Coronavirus and may seek further information online and may become anxious about becoming ill. It is important therefore to ensure that they have access to appropriate and sound online information and resources.

There are specific resources relating to understanding the situation on the STARS website, including Talking Mats to identify particular concerns and worries:

<http://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-resources>

Support for mental health:

- <https://www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk/home/information-on-coronavirus>
- <https://healthyyoungmindspennine.nhs.uk/resource-centre/external-links/kooth/>
- <https://www.kooth.com/>
- Clear Fear App - This app is designed for young people to support their mental health using evidence based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques. This app is free to download. Further information can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/310537935>
- 'Living Life to the Full' -advice on how to cope with Coronavirus and feelings of anxiety and anger and how to continue studying: <https://www.lltffyp.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/LLTFF-YP-Coronavirus.pdf>

Online safety support:

https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/staying_safe_online_-_stonewall_childnet.pdf

If you have any safeguarding concerns arising at home, e.g. in relation to interactions/
material accessed online, report **immediately** to the designated safeguarding lead in your
young person's setting

The following advice and links to resources are suitable for students studying at Sixth Form and at College.

Structuring the day

Use a visual timetable or schedule to enable the young person to visualise the structure of the working day. It may be more effective if you work collaboratively with your young person to create an appropriate visual timetable. Check what works well for them, the following resources can be found on the STARS website:

- Post 16 Weekly planner template
- Post 16 Staying at home plan with completed examples

At <http://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-resources>

Adapting the environment

- If possible, establish a working area in the house where your young person can work quietly away from siblings/distractions and family areas, where possible.
- Ensure that your young person has the appropriate resources to enable them to study, such as a comfy chair, fiddle toys and the right lighting.
- The use of headphones to cancel out any background noise in the house may enable your young person to concentrate more effectively, but this depends on their individual sensory needs.
- If you have not already completed a sensory profile with your young person, this might be a good idea to do at this time. This will help to identify their particular differences and what support they might need at home. The sensory profile template:

Getting started with work

- If your young person is at sixth form then they will be receiving work via email or through Moodle (or similar student intranet platform), where they will access teaching resources. Check with the sixth form to find out what they have put in place for students to continue with their studies.
- Most sixth forms will be providing regular Coronavirus updates so check with individual settings for news and guidance.
- Staff are continuing to provide support in settings to ensure that parents are updated regularly.
- Exams will not proceed this year and it is likely that students will receive their predicted grades based on teacher assessments and mock exams already completed. Your setting will let students know about this and further information can be found at: <https://www.ucas.com/coronavirus-updates-hub>
- If your young person is studying at college then they are likely be accessing their lessons and work via Google classroom and Hangouts.

- SEND staff are available online and on the telephone and will be checking in with your young person on a weekly basis and providing resources when needed.
- Check with the SENCo or SEND staff member at college what support your young person is receiving.
- If your young person has an Education and Health Care Plan and has a review due, then this will not be taking place until educational settings are able to re-open.

Practical support to enable study:

- Ensure that you set achievable targets to complete work during the day. Provide opportunities for movement breaks at regular intervals, for example having a walk around the block, throwing a ball around outside. It is important to have periods of time away from a screen if your young person is using a laptop or PC.
- Use checklists and post-it's to write key notes and information on – colour coding can work well for students.
- Many autistic people can find the concept of passing time difficult to determine, therefore the use of the following (free) app will enable your young person to study within a time frame and set small achievable targets: <https://pomodoro-tracker.com/>
- Another useful resource for goal setting , particularly good for gaming fans: <https://habitica.com/>
- The following link provides technological support to record and complete written work for students with SEN currently studying at home: <https://www.controlaltachieve.com/2016/10/special-needs-extensions.html?m=1>

Planning transition

This is a good time to start thinking about and planning transition to the next phase of education/employment for your young person. This should only be discussed with the young person if they are not overly anxious at this time. It will be beneficial to look at these links and resources one step at a time.

The following resource supports transition from sixth form or college and provides links to resources and further support, for example learning to manage money and develop independence skills:

- <https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/downloads/education-health-and-care-planning/pfa-outcomes-tool.htm>
- The following resources will be useful to identify what your young person wants to achieve and can be found here; <http://www.starsteam.org.uk/talking-mats>

PATH – Person centred planning tool
Planning for the future Talking Mat
Guidance on using Talking Mats

- If your young person is in their final A level year and is planning to apply for university then the following guidance will provide you with up to date advice on how this process will work this year: <https://www.ucas.com/coronavirus>

Aside from work, take time to enjoy activities together, such as going for a walk, baking together or playing a game. If your young person is struggling to remain motivated then support them to complete projects based on their areas of interest, e.g.:

- Creating a PowerPoint on a particular topic and sharing it with family
- Writing a blog on a particular subject
- Participating in life skills such as cleaning, washing clothes, planning a meal and cooking tea once a week
- Participating in a virtual family quiz or party, e.g. using Zoom
<https://zoom.us/jt?zcid=2582>

Your young person may find the following videos and blogs created by autistic young people interesting to watch at this time:

- Asperger's Growth - created by an autistic university student, discussing a range of topics: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJr76B0ZPGNGEHvZHCenSdg>
- Elisabeth Wiklander - Neurodiversity the key that unlocked my world:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qvvrme5WlwA>
- The Aspie World: <https://www.youtube.com/user/AspieWorld1>