

Guidance for staff supporting young autistic people in secondary schools/post-16 settings during the Corona Virus outbreak

Good autism practice is often good education practice so this guidance may apply to non-autistic pupils too

Before school/college:

- Share pupil passports of those due to be in school/college with all staff on rota
- Use classrooms which have a separate quiet room/area where pupils can take a break as needed
- Use rooms that can be made low-arousal, e.g. have natural lighting so lights can be turned off, minimal displays on the wall, limited background noise
- Produce structured timetables, set out in same format as everyday timetables in planners, including details of activity, room, staffing and timings. Timetables can also include 'choose time' where pupils can engage in preferred activity
- Plan in activities you know will be very motivating for the individual person, e.g. relating to their special interests
- Send information home to families about which staff will be in, which rooms will be used, the daily timetable, etc. in advance
- Put autistic pupils in groups with familiar, preferred and predictable peers wherever possible
- Keep group sizes small in order to keep background noise to a minimum, avoid having all pupils in one space, e.g. school hall
- Write clear guidance on what will be different to usual, e.g. adjustments to discipline system, able to use phone and earphones, etc.

During the day:

- Read through the daily timetable with the pupil, be clear regarding arrangements for break/lunchtimes and which toilets can be used. Give hard copies of timetables to pupils
- Give guidance on what will be different to usual
- Allow pupil to bring in comforting/sensory items from home if they want to
- Complete Talking Mats to help pupils communicate their worries about being in school/college (see below)

- Monitor hand washing – some young people may feel a compulsion to wash their hands too much and be overly anxious about germs
- Pupils may like to do a project on their special interest, this can be built into timetable
- Be flexible, e.g. some young people may not want to join in group games/PE activities as this may heighten their anxiety
- Some pupils may be reassured by measuring out a 2 metre squared area around their desk and marking this with tape on the floor
- Allow pupils to have movement/sensory breaks as required
- Give opportunities for pupil to ask questions/share worries about Corona virus on a 1:1 basis (doing this in a group may exacerbate anxiety). Resources to support such discussions can be found here: <http://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-resources>
- Ask pupils for feedback on what could be improved in school/college tomorrow

Be mindful that some students will be exceptionally anxious – the following communication strategies may help:

- Use pupil’s name to focus their attention
- Allow time to process information
- Only give one instruction at once
- Use unambiguous language
- Say what you mean and do what you say
- If pupil is struggling to communicate verbally reassure them that this is ok. Provide pen and paper should they want to communicate this way instead
- Do not insist on eye contact
- Do not touch pupils

If further advice/resources are needed for specific autistic pupils please contact your usual STARS practitioner:

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