



Parenting during pandemic

Day 9: Supporting children with additional support needs while at home during the COVID-19 pandemic

Many parents of children with additional support needs have relied on services that are cut back or simply unavailable during the pandemic. You may be at home with other children to consider, possibly even trying to balance doing some work at the same time. You may be seeing lots of posts on social media or the wider internet talking about it being difficult to keep everyone entertained at home for this extended period of time and if you are a parent of a child with additional support needs, you are likely to be reading these things and thinking these people have no idea how difficult this is.

Your child may not be understanding what is going on and why routines have changed. There may be issues around not going to favourite places or doing favourite things right now. There may be very specific difficulties like not being able to find the only food your child will eat or not being able to complete not only routines but compulsions. This may be leading to some very challenging behaviour at home and significant emotional impact for you.

When children show challenging behaviour it can be due to them struggling with something and not having the words to tell us about it in other ways. We are all feeling the impact of the pandemic and you will have noticed that there is a lot of additional advice about looking after mental health just now due to acknowledgement of the added pressures on us all just now. Children with additional support needs have added pressures on them too with changes they may be struggling to understand.

Our main tip around increased challenging behaviour from children with additional support needs right now is do not take it personally. We are aware of parents worrying that increased challenging behaviour at home means something is wrong at home but this is not necessarily the case. Think about yourself and how you manage things out in the world. Imagine something happens at work that you don't really like. You probably manage your emotion around this, maybe you smile and try to keep calm and carry on. You probably don't say all the things you are thinking about it. But what happens when you go home? This is your safe place and at home you 'let down your guard' and maybe say things like "you won't believe what happened today..." followed by all the things that were in your head about the

difficult situation at work that you didn't say out loud in the work environment. Children do this to some extent too. They may be letting you know what's really going on for them and what they are finding difficult because you are the person or people they are closest to and they know you will help them and won't leave them even when things are really difficult. If this is the case, then increased challenging behaviour at home may be a signal of how close the child is to the people at home and if you think about it like this, hopefully it slightly shifts the negative feeling attached to thinking you are a target or they only show challenging behaviour with you so something is wrong with your approach compared to others management style.

On a practical note, try to keep things simple. Think about the routines you had in place before the pandemic. You probably had or were establishing routines around getting up, getting dressed, getting washed, having some food etc. Try to stick to these routines as they will provide some sense of consistency for children making them feel safe. It can be easy to think that you don't need to get out so you can just wear pyjamas all day but setting this up as a routine now will make the transition out of pandemic again really difficult.

Have a think about the different environments that your child attended – school, clubs, groups, respite etc. Each of these places will have had their own ways of managing setting up of routines, limit setting, coping with challenging behaviour and so on. For example, some may have used visual timetables to structure the day, sticker charts and rewards to reinforce behaviours they want to see more, specific activities such as relaxation time or certain songs for tidying up. Using things your child is familiar with may be helpful in setting up new routines and limits at home.

One of the worries for parents right now may be missed opportunities around education for children. We have seen lots of advice around not trying to be the teacher right now and this makes sense because teachers spend a long time training to do what they do each day so we can't just do all of this without training because schools are closed. Also, teachers and schools have struggled with various aspects of the pandemic as well. There are lots of things being worked out about exams and assessments and how people may be able to get their qualifications to move on after the pandemic. Teachers and schools are well aware that this is a strange and difficult time for people meaning it's not the most conducive to learning but also meaning that they will be thinking about how they are going to manage gaps in knowledge when children return to school. There is an element of us trusting the system just now and accepting that we are all in this together so everyone will use their own individual skills to get us back on track at the other end of the pandemic.

If you are noticing that you have moved to a survival mode just now, don't worry, this is normal and is due to the pandemic, not you. The only issue with this is that it puts us in a state of arousal where we are more aware of danger and we are looking out for this. We can become anxious if this is the case and can react to things differently. Take a look at our free anxiety guides for some support around this.

One of the most important things to do at the moment is to use your sources of support. It may be helpful to think what these are. You may feel like your world is smaller in that you are confined to your home but there are still lots of supports out there. You may want to contact friends and family but if it's helpful to speak to someone else, there are lots of supports from charities and helplines, many of whom have added resources during this difficult time. We are of course also happy to speak to you for support.

We hope these tips are helpful. Well done on managing another day off school and we hope you will join us again tomorrow.

Tomorrow's topic: Staying positive while surrounded by difficulties during pandemic

Please [contact us with questions, comments or topics](#) you'd like to see covered. We'd love to hear your feedback.

Wishing you a safe and healthy path through this pandemic.