

**‘Southend SEND: Parent and carer school  
closure support pack’**

**For statutory school age pupils**

SEND Support Advisory Team

Southend Borough Council

**Version: 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020**

(Refer to Southend’s SEND Local Offer and  
Learning Network SEND Resources Portal for  
electronic versions)

## INTRODUCTION

There is at present, understandably, a lot of worry, anxiety and uncertainty around the Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak and related school closures.

Your child will have gained information from a range of sources, likely not all of it accurate, and will be affected by the huge changes that are going on around them - regardless of their age or any additional needs.

These are difficult and quickly changing times and we hope that this pack is a helpful downloadable support tool, for the parents and carers of *all* children not only those that may have a special educational need (SEND), to bring together key information in one place.

In this pack you will find:

- Top tips on how to talk to your child about the Coronavirus and websites that can provide accurate, factual information to help with these conversations.
- Suggestions about how to support your child if they are behaving differently or showing emotions such as worry, anxiety or anger.
- Signposting to additional websites that may further support fun activities at home.
- Signposting to sources of additional sources of support or advice should this be needed.

We hope that you find this pack useful and would welcome comments or feedback.

Keep well and warmest wishes!

The SEND Support Advisory Team

School Performance and Provision, Southend Borough Council

## TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS

### Top tips:

#### Be a good listener

If something scary happens to your child, or in the world around them, or things change unexpectedly they will probably have some questions. While addressing a difficult or worrying topic can be intimidating, conversations about day-to-day issues can be just as challenging. Regardless of the subject matter, it's important to be a good listener. Make eye contact. Take the conversation slowly. Repeat back what they say and share your empathy.

If your child doesn't want to talk, that is fine. Let them know that you saw the news, it is worrying and that you're there if they want to talk about it. On the other hand, if a question is unexpected or catches you off guard, it's OK to say, "I'm not sure. Let me think about that." But be sure to follow up at a later time.

#### Follow your child's lead

When talking to children about difficult topics, try to only answer the questions that they are asking or else you risk creating more worry. Don't assume they have taken in all the details or will want to know more. Your child may want to ask the same questions over and over again but this is fine and normal.

With older children, you may find that they don't want to talk, and that's OK. Tell them you're there and available if and when they want to talk.

#### Acknowledge your child's feelings

As much as you want to ease your child's fears, try to avoid comments that might dismiss their feelings, such as "everything will be fine" or "don't worry about that.". When a child's feelings are dismissed, they may think you're saying their feelings are not OK. In that case, they may not share those feelings again. It also doesn't help reduce worry or anxiety.

Here are some examples of responding in a way that lets your child feel heard without minimising or dismissing feelings:

- "You're scared because of what you have heard on the news. I can imagine that's really scary for you."

- “You are sad at not seeing Nanny. I know that is upsetting.”
- “I understand that you are sad about not being able to have a birthday party. It is normal to feel sad and disappointed.”

### **Don't dismiss difficult conversations**

The Coronavirus outbreak is understandably a worrying time for everyone and if your child is unable to go to school or has different arrangements they may feel upset or anxious. They may want to talk about what they have heard on the news or from friends and family. Use reliable sources of information to reassure them. It's going to be better coming from a trusted adult or for older children an internet search using a reliable website and that you research together.

Here are a few ways to ease your child's fears without promising everything will be easy:

- Help your child be present in the moment. For example: “We are fine now. We are not poorly. Everything is ok now.”
- Try to remain calm and neutral – even if you are feeling worried or scared too.
- Talk about the things that you are doing to keep well to reassure your child that you are doing all that you can. Talk about and share good hand washing, use a tissue to catch a sneeze and other guidance given by Public Health England.
- Teach coping skills, such as grounding your body and mind (focusing on your five senses), guided imagery (picturing a relaxing scene or somewhere that makes you feel safe), deep breathing, snuggling a friendly pet or writing in a journal.
- Be mindful that it isn't always possible to say something to comfort your child. You can say, ‘That makes me a little scared too. But right now, we're OK, so let's take some deep breaths together and try to calm down and get ready for bed.’

## WEBSITES TO SUPPORT WITH TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS

- Mencap easy to read guide - <https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/202003/Information%20about%20Coronavirus%20ER%20SS2.pdf>
- Place 2 Be Helpful information to answer questions from children – <https://www.place2be.org.uk/about-us/news-and-blogs/2020/march/coronavirus-information-for-children/>
- Young Minds: talking to your child about the Coronavirus - <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/talking-to-your-child-about-coronavirus/>
- Carers UK: Coronavirus guidance - <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health/looking-after-your-health/coronavirus-covid-19>
- Covibook: supporting and reassuring children around the world - <https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>
- Public Health England easy read advice - <https://www.easy-read-online.co.uk/media/53192/advice-on-the-coronavirus-v1.pdf>
- Southend EPS SLN portal has a wealth of support, advice and resources - <http://www.southendlearningnetwork.co.uk/educationalpsychology>
- Essex Gov. Coronavirus dedicated page - <https://www.essex.gov.uk/news/coronavirus>
- British Psychological Society news - <https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/talking-children-about-coronavirus>
- Zerotothree: tips for families – the Coronavirus - <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3210-tips-for-families-coronavirus>
- The Dads net: resource for explaining about the Coronavirus - <https://www.thedadsnet.com/this-free-book-is-great-for-explaining-covid-19-coronavirus-to-your-children>
- My Story about Pandemics and the Coronavirus: Carol Gray- <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf?fbclid=IwAR23zxNlbEumpw4oKIM7Xy3VIKnA25b8Gi53N6YiFleKB9Vx0LQypSPYzzg>
- What can we say to children about the Coronavirus - <https://krisepsykologi.no/what-can-we-say-to-children-about-coronavirus/>

- This is an informative animation for older children and young people - <https://www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus/>
- A comic exploring coronavirus to help young people understand - <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus?t=1584464333506>

## MY CHILD SEEMS TO BE BEHAVING DIFFERENTLY...

At present, everyday life has changed and will continue to change, often with little notice. Children may struggle with significant adjustments to their routines, e.g. school closure, social distancing, which may affect their sense of structure, predictability and security. They may worry about what is going on around them, their family and other factors, for example the availability of food or medicines.

At times children don't react to change immediately but a little later on. This can even be a few weeks or months in, when they realise that the change is longer term. There are many things to watch out for in children during times of change such as:

- Change in sleeping pattern.
- Crying more than normal.
- Showing heightened emotions such as worry, anxiety, anger etc.
- Feeling that that they are not so close to siblings– a shift in their level of confidence.
- Developing behaviours such as phobias and generally a change in behaviour.
- Difficulty cooperating.
- Becoming clingy.
- Change in eating habits.
- ... and others, as each child is unique and will respond in many different ways.

In addition to keeping your child safe by following the Public Health England advice it is also important to care for their emotional wellbeing.

## Top tips:

- **Involve your child** as much as you can in what is happening. Help them to understand what the change is and why the change is taking place.
- **Give your child extra time** during this period. Try to give them more one to one time so they have time to talk with you and stay connected. We can often be more busy ourselves during times of change, especially if, for example, you need to work from home, but children need our focused time.
- **Social distancing does not mean social isolation** – can your child (under your supervision) ‘facetime’, make a phone call or write a letter to friends and family that they may not be able to see face to face at present.
- **Think of the ‘3R’s’** – ‘Reassurance, Routine and Regulation’ – *reassure* your child about their and loved ones safety and that everyone is following ways to keep well. Follow *routines* to provide a sense of stability and predictability for example breakfast, meal, bed times, garden or learning time, games etc. Support your child with regulating their emotions, such as worry, anxiety or anger etc. Support them with activities that help *self-regulation*, such as exercise, deep breathing, mindfulness, meditation activities, regular routines for sleeping and eating.
- **Support with home learning** – your child is likely to have been given home learning or work by their school during the school closure period. Can you talk to them about related learning that they have done in class, research more about the topic together through safe use of the internet, can they talk to a friend by telephone about their learning, can you make it ‘hands on’ and practical, can you ‘have a go’ together, praise the effort and not only the outcome. Many parents at this time will need to work from home, which may present some challenges, but can your child focus on a fun activity or project that they can safely carry out independently. Such as dressing up and role play, painting, drawing, reading, play dough, imaginative play, sensory play, puzzles and board games.
- **You do not need to ‘be their teacher’** – talk, listen, have a go together, learn new things together and importantly enjoy the time that you are able to spend with your child.
- **Reflect on any changes** you have noticed in them. Do not ignore behaviours or get into punishments and consequences. Think about what the child is trying to tell you through their behaviours. Remember all behaviour makes sense. What is the sense of this behaviour?
- **Be patient** – it can take some time for everyone to adapt to change.



- **Be flexible and use lots of praise** – remember home learning does not mean that your child has to spend the same amount of time on learning activities or work as they would in school or in a way that replicates school. Schools may request that older children follow a more structured timetable, possibly involving virtual classrooms, and this may involve your child working independently. Routine is good but be flexible should your child not be willing or able to focus on home learning or work. Can they play in the garden, do some exercise, read or share a book, research safely online, play some music, try something new, have a go at arts and crafts, paint or do a practical based project instead?
- **Look after yourself** - make sure that you do this and have some time to do some of the things that you enjoy doing too. Have a cup of tea, read a book, call family or a friend, do some exercise - while your child plays safely or does some independent learning.
- **Seek additional advice and support if need be** - contact your school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) or seek external advice and support.
- **Be positive** and see this period as a time to try new things, spend quality time together and have fun!

## SOURCES OF ACTIVITIES TO ENJOY AT HOME

It is very important that you follow the requirements and information given by your child's school for any home learning activities or work.

You may also wish to access some additional activities or resources. You can be as imaginative as you like with the activities that you and your child does. Can you try some cooking or baking, play some board games, have a 'spring tidy up' day, tidy the garden or plant some seeds, share a book, build a den (indoors or the garden!), try some arts and crafts, painting, make or listen to a podcast or learn a new hobby for example learn a new language, play an instrument etc.

It may be quite hard for parents and carers to encourage and ensure that their child engages with learning at home so below you will find websites to access a range of activities to inspire and motivate children (and adults) to have fun and learn.

The resources have been split up into curriculum based activities and those which are more creative. It is important that you check any website first and make sure that the activities are age appropriate for your child before they access any activities. There has been a surge in demand for online learning platforms so you may need to have a back up plan should you not be able to access these.

### Curriculum-Based Activities and Websites

#### General activities:

Twinkl is offering free resources (initially for a month) - <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/blog/how-to-utilise-twinkl-during-the-coronavirus-shutdown-a-guide-for-schools>

There is a wide range of on-line activities to develop learning skills across the core curriculum at <https://uk.ixl.com/>

BBC bite-size has a wide range of resources, games and ideas - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize>

List of companies offering free subscription at this time <https://kidsactivitiesblog.com/135609/list-of-education-companies-offering-free-subscriptions/>

#### Literacy Activities

National Literacy Trust- <https://literacytrust.org.uk/family-zone/>

Creative writing exercises - [http://www.expresseumpoetics.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2016/07/04\\_c\\_creative\\_writing\\_exercises.pdf](http://www.expresseumpoetics.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2016/07/04_c_creative_writing_exercises.pdf)

## Maths activities

Activities that improve focus, concentration and visual attention - <https://www.myhomeschoolmath.com/visualperception.html>

A maths dictionary for children - <http://www.amathsdictionaryforkids.com/>

Home learning system - <https://www.10ticks.co.uk/>

<https://www.drfrostmaths.com/> - secondary age Maths resources

## Creative Learning Opportunities

Paper and pencil type activities develop problem-solving skills, such as: Noughts and Crosses (or make up your own shapes – for example use cats and dogs where you can use the same grid but just draw cats and dogs); Hangman; Squares etc. More ideas can be found -

- <https://www.playworks.org/resource/fun-paper-and-pencil-games-to-play/>

Story line Online - lots of free on-line stories read by actors and with animations ('When a Dragon Moves In' is great!)

- <https://www.storylineonline.net/>

Free mindfulness colouring - <https://diaryofajournalplanner.com/free-mindfulness-colouring-sheets/>

Mindfulness games cards - <http://www.unm.edu/~unmvclib/gamification/cards/mindfulgamescards.pdf>

Learn to knit handout - [https://media.craftyarncouncil.com/files/teach/WUA-PTG\\_Bk\\_web\\_5.pdf](https://media.craftyarncouncil.com/files/teach/WUA-PTG_Bk_web_5.pdf)

Cheap and easy home crafts - [https://wvla.org/downloads/Annual\\_Conference\\_2013/craftbookletforwvla.pdf](https://wvla.org/downloads/Annual_Conference_2013/craftbookletforwvla.pdf)

Free e-book for arts and craft ideas <https://www.vipmumsndads.co.uk/shop/ready-to-go-art-ebook-one-free/>

Great, wide ranging selection of activities and links to other websites - <http://www.thesensoryprojects.co.uk/covid19-resources>

Take a virtual tour of museums and places of culture - <https://artsandculture.google.com/>

Ideas to spark curiosity - <https://ed.ted.com/parent>

## WHERE CAN I OR MY CHILD ACCESS ADDITIONAL ADVICE AND SUPPORT?

### General support

Advice for young people <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus/>

The Anna Freud Centre for Children & Families has good advice to support mental health and wellbeing <https://www.annafreud.org/>

Thinking around coping with isolation, maintaining links with extended family & friends, maintaining mental health and learning from home activities <https://www.phoenixgroupqh.com/covid-19>

Resources to support trauma or times of adversity - <https://beaconhouse.org.uk/resources/>

### Support for specific needs

National Autistic Society - [https://www.autism.org.uk/services/nas-schools/vanguard/news/2020/march/coronavirus-\(covid-19\)-advice.aspx](https://www.autism.org.uk/services/nas-schools/vanguard/news/2020/march/coronavirus-(covid-19)-advice.aspx)

Support for speech, language and communication needs - <http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/>

Advice and support for pupils experiencing Dyslexia or Dyscalculia - <https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/>

Support for children experiencing specific learning difficulties - <http://www.thedyslexia-spldtrust.org.uk/>

Support for deaf children - <https://www.natsip.org.uk/>

Support for blind or partially sighted children - <https://www.rnib.org.uk/health-social-and-education-professionals/education-professionals/teaching-and-learning-guidance>

For those experiencing Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) - <https://www.ocduk.org/ocd-and-coronavirus-survival-tips/>

Thank you to Southend Educational Psychology Service (SEPS) for some information obtained from their SLN portal, this will be updated regularly - <http://www.southendlearningnetwork.co.uk/educationalpsychology>.