

## Hartlepool Psychology Team – Support and Advice

### **COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ADDITIONAL AND COMPLEX NEEDS INCLUDING LEARNING DIFFICULTIES, AUTISM AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS AND SCHOOL STAFF**



As a service, the Hartlepool Psychology Team have brought together our knowledge and collated information from reputable resources to support you in school and at home during this uncertain time. We are aware there is a lot of information available via social media, however, we recognise that this can feel overwhelming and parents can be unsure about what advice to follow. We hope you find this a simple, clear guide to supporting your child at home.

#### **Advice for school staff and parents in response to Coronavirus.**

The current Covid-19 situation is likely to be a stressful and worrying time for many children and young people. A number of factors will contribute to this:

- Being out of school for an indeterminate length of time, with reduced access to outdoor play facilities and social spaces.
- Families living in close proximity for extended periods of time.
- Uncertainty around when they will return to school, see wider familiar adults and their friends.
- A lack of control around how it might impact them and wider people they are close to.
- News and social media sources providing conflicting evidence and potentially sensationalising the impact of the virus.

#### **Advice for parents**

Below is a selection of some useful resources to share with your child. Talking to children using stories or through visuals often supports their understanding and provides a conversation tool. These stories often prompt further questions and discussion.

Every child is different in terms of their awareness, understanding and verbal abilities. However regardless of their needs they are likely to have sensed change and anxiety in the recent weeks. We have found that children can show their awareness, uncertainty and emotions in a number of ways such as physical symptoms (i.e. poorly tummy), acting out ('challenging' behaviour) and withdrawal behaviour (becoming very quiet, not wanting to join in at home). Different reactions are normal and are ok. Being attuned to your child and recognising changes in behaviour will help you understand how they are coping.



For some children they will benefit from some basic, clear and reassuring advice about the current pandemic. It is likely they will have over heard conversations and have some information already. This in itself may be causing uncertainty and anxiety.

For other children, they may be aware of changes in routine, such as school being closed and not being able to go to their favourite activities but will not be able to understand information linked to the pandemic. It is important for all of our children, regardless of understanding, that we create safety and reassurance by providing as much predictability, routine and structure as possible.

Don't use all resources at once but as a parent or supporting adult in school assess what you think will be most useful in a given moment.

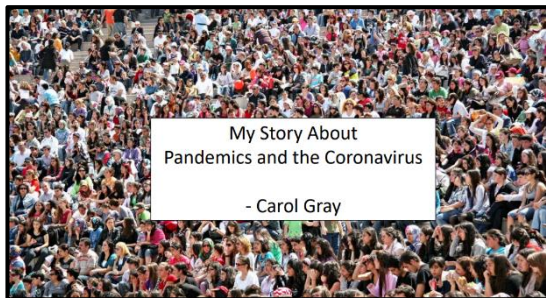
As with us all, our emotions are likely to change over time and we may appear calm and content one day but very unsettled on another day. This is likely to do with the change and uncertainty of the current situation. You may like to revisit certain stories and resources over the coming weeks.

### Talking to children and young people about Covid-19 (Coronavirus) - Resources

Knowing where to start when explaining Covid-19 (Coronavirus) to children with additional needs can be difficult and therefore it's good to begin with a discussion about:

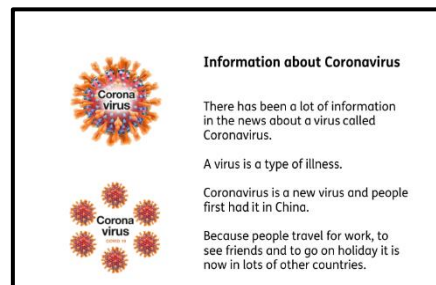
- What they already know (they've likely to have picked up on conversations).
- Ground their understanding with facts
- Prepare them for what's to come (if we know)

#### Social Story - My Story About Pandemics and the Coronavirus - Carol Gray



<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf>

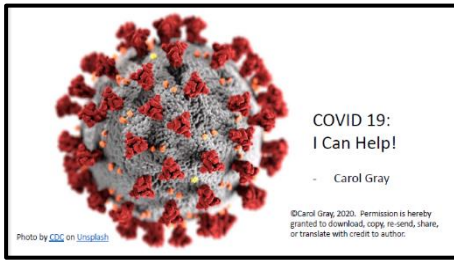
#### Easy to read guide - on what Coronavirus from Mencap



<https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Information%20about%20Coronavirus%20ER%20UPDATED%20130320%20SD%20editsAH.pdf>

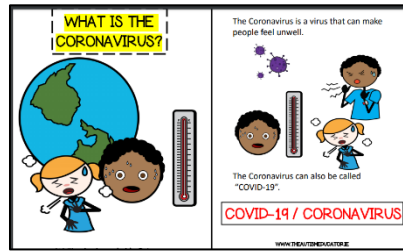


**Social story about washing hands – I can Help by Carol Gray**



See Appendix 2

**Social Narrative – ideal for younger children by Amanda McGuiness**



<https://littlepuddins.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Corona-Virus-Free-Printable-Updated-2-The-Autism-Educator-.pdf>

**Managing and expressing emotions**

Some children can find it very difficult to express their thoughts, feelings and emotions with words. Visual aids can support this and can be used to prompt children to express their building feelings before they escalate. For children with more complex needs and those unable to express themselves in this way, we have to support them to feel calm (co-regulate). This might be showing them calming activities such as deep breathing, counting slowly or engaging in some basic yoga exercises. Being attuned to your child’s emotions and offering support, reassurance and breaks to reduce the chance of escalation.

**5-point scales**

	Feels like	Looks like	I can
5		Screaming Hitting Kicking Running away	Go to break area Take deep breaths Go back to a 4
4		Yelling Not being in my space Arguing	Drink water Take a break Go back to a 3
3		Loud voice Not following directions	Take deep breaths Ask for help Go back to a 2
2		Listening to others Calm words & body Doing my best	Earn stars & have a great day!
1		Tired eyes Lying on floor Not listening	Get a drink Stand & Stretch Get fresh air

<https://www.5pointscale.com/> - free downloadable scales



## Supporting daily routines – routine, predictability and consistency reduces anxiety and provides a sense of safety.

Children with additional and complex needs, including those with Autism have a strong desire for consistency and routine and find change challenging. It's a great idea to contact your school to ask how they normally support your child. You can help reduce anxiety by:

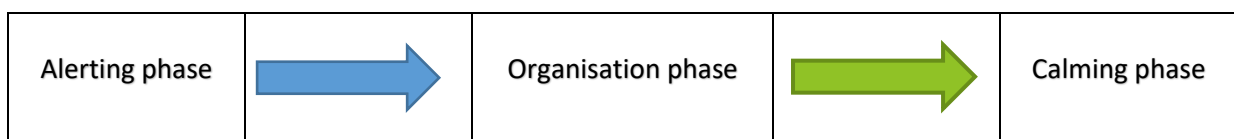
- Providing a **predictable** pattern to the day - Visual schedules of 'now' and 'next' cards, visual timetables and calendars (<http://www.autismni.org/educational-resource-kit.html> - See appendix 3).
- **Consistency** – As best you can use predictable and consistent responses to all behaviours.
- **Forewarning of change** – use a cue to signal when a change is coming. This might be a symbol on the timetable or a set phrase. It might be helpful to ask school what they use to prepare your child for unexpected.
- **Strategies to self-calm** - strategies for reducing anxiety may be as simple as listening to calming sounds or music, deep breathing, squeezing a ball, chewing on a chewy tube, self-massage, or eating something comforting.

## Supporting sensory needs

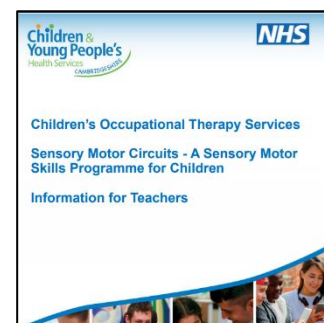
Within your daily routine it is good to include some sensory activities. These might be done at the beginning of the day and in the afternoon as well as offering sensory breaks between other activities.

**Sensory Circuits** provide a sequence of activities done repeatedly to provide the child with the right type of sensory input in order to calm and organise them for the day ahead.

The order is important to support your child to feel calm and relaxed:



See - <https://www.cambscommunityservices.nhs.uk/docs/default-source/leaflets---sensory-strategy-leaflets---april-2015/0218---sensory-circuits---info-for-teachers---april-2018.pdf?sfvrsn=8> for a full guide, including a set routine,



## References

- National Autistic Society - <https://www.autism.org.uk/>
- Cerebra – <https://cerebra.org.uk/>
- <https://inclusiveteach.com/>
- AutismNI
- Incredible 5 Point Scale - <https://www.5pointscale.com/>
- Zones of Regulation - <https://www.zonesofregulation.com/learn-more-about-the-zones.html>
- Carol Gray - <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/> - regularly updates social stories in Carol's Club/Clubhouse Projects



**Appendix 1 – Story about washing hands**  
Reference – reproduced with the permission of Carol Gray

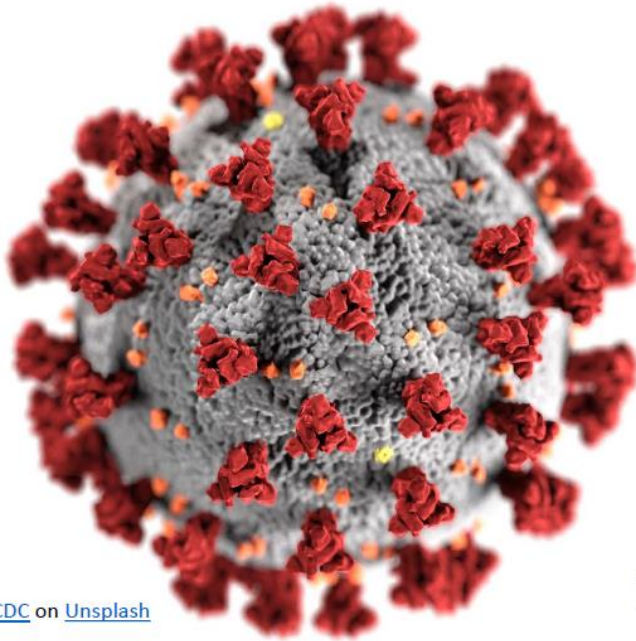


Photo by [CDC](#) on [Unsplash](#)

**COVID 19:  
I Can Help!**

- Carol Gray

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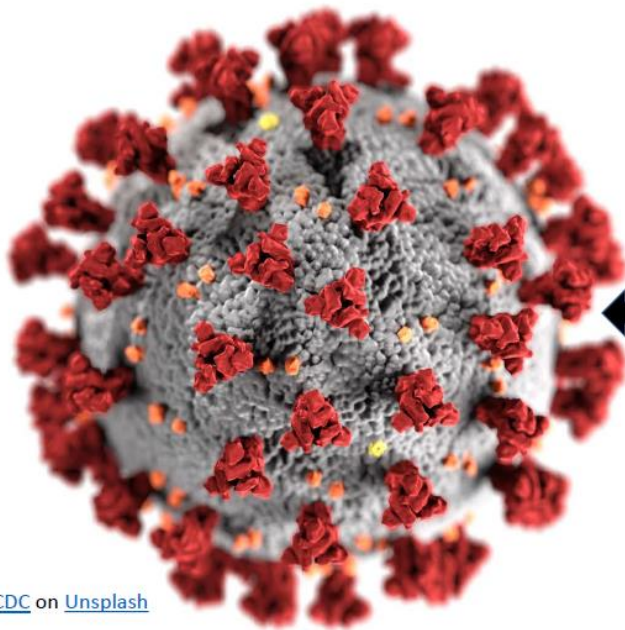


I am learning about a new virus called COVID-19. It is the cause of a *pandemic*. A pandemic is when many people in a large area become sick. COVID-19 is moving around the world from one person to another faster than colds or flu. Kids like me can help.





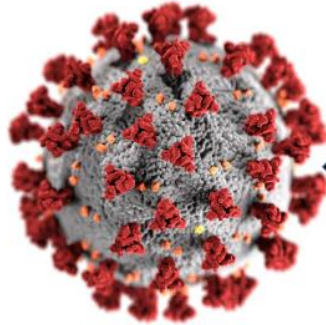
Like many kids, I learned to wash my hands when I was very young. It helps to wash germs away. A *virus* is one kind of germ.



This is a picture of a COVID-19 virus taken with an electron microscope. A real virus is much smaller than this.

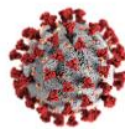
Photo by [CDC](#) on [Unsplash](#)





That's better,  
except the real  
COVID-19 virus is  
much smaller than  
this, too.

Photo by [CDC](#) on [Unsplash](#)



That's better,  
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Photo by [CDC](#) on [Unsplash](#)







That's better,  
except the real  
COVID-19 virus is  
much smaller than  
this, too.

Photo by [CDC](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Yes, that's it! People  
need an electron  
microscope to see  
the COVID-19 virus.

Photo by [CDC](#) on [Unsplash](#)



← The Covid-19 virus is smaller than tiny and causing huge problems for many people.

Photo by [CDC](#) on [Unsplash](#)



I can help!





I can help by washing my hands in warm water on all sides, rinsing well, and drying with a clean cloth. To make sure that I wash long enough, I may sing my favorite song or count very slowly to twenty. Washing my hands helps me stay healthy.



Especially during a pandemic, washing hands well and often helps to keep moms and dads healthy, too.



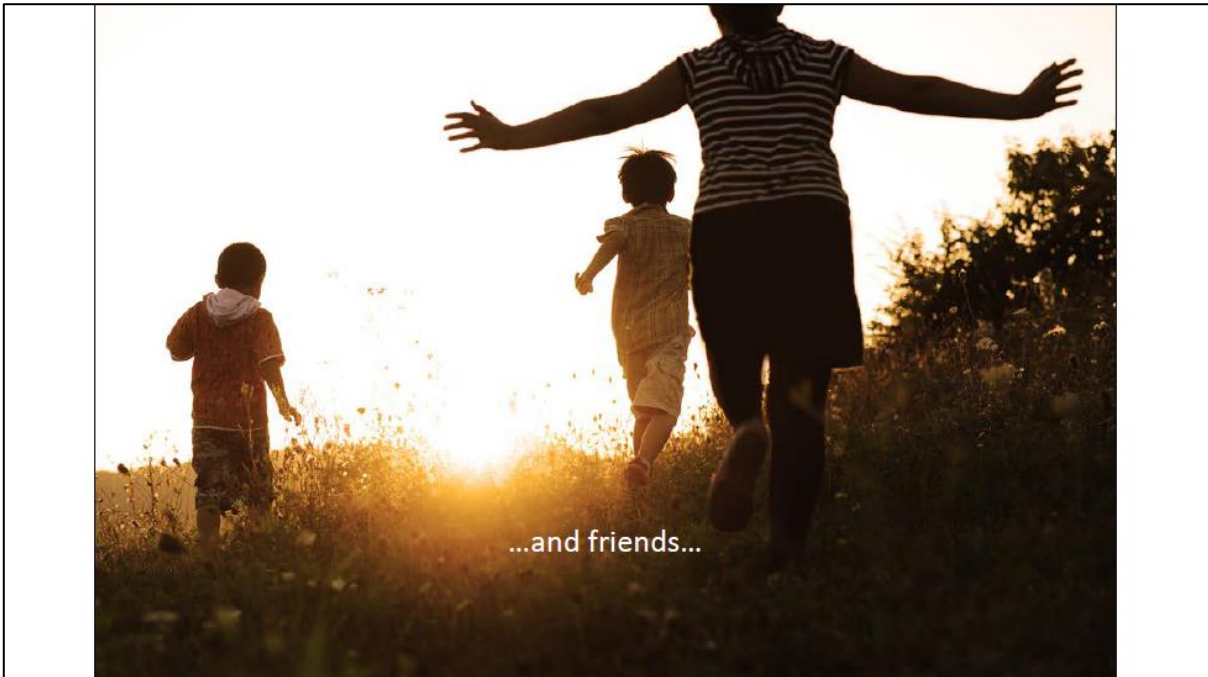


...and brothers and sisters...



...and grandparents...







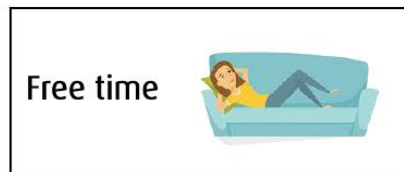
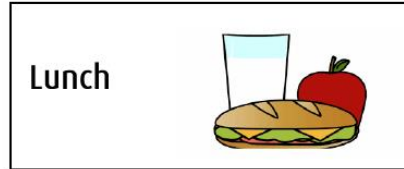
In a pandemic, it's  
amazing how kids can  
help by washing their  
hands well and often!  
I will try to help, too!



## Appendix 2 – examples of visual supports

Reference - <http://www.autismni.org/educational-resource-kit.html>

# Daily Schedule pictures cut out and put into your schedule



# I can wash my hands



I am learning to wash my hands more  
Its important to keep my hands clean  
Sometimes my hands don't look dirty but they still need to be  
washed. Sometimes we cant see all the dirt with our eyes  
because it is so small.

I will wash my hands during these times



Before I eat food	After I go to the toilet		
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I will follow the pictures above when I wash my hands  
Washing my hands keeps me and my family healthy  
Washing my hands is a good thing to do

