# Supporting Children with Learning Disability/ASD

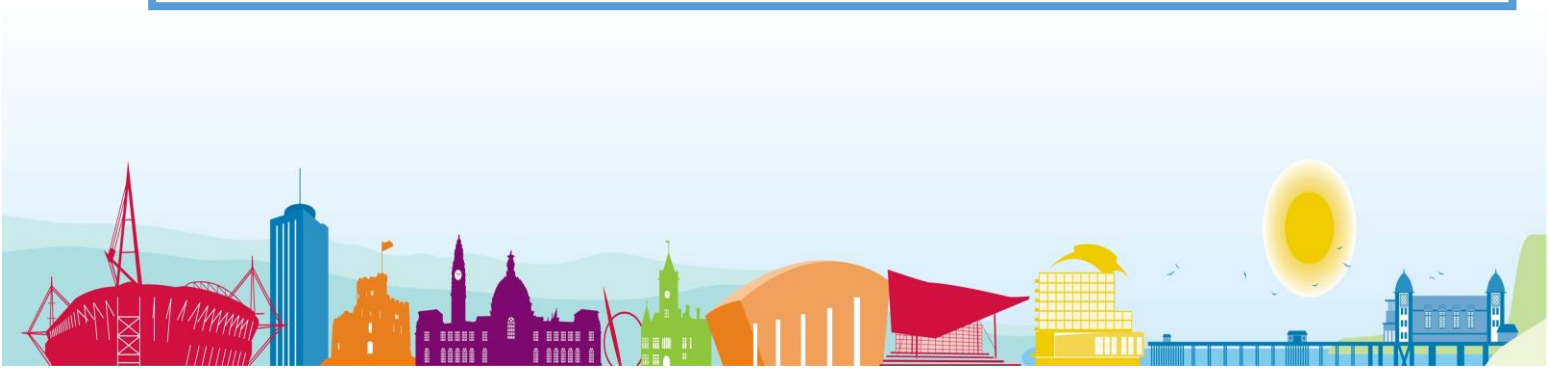
## Coping with COVID-19 Isolation

*The next few weeks (and possibly months) will be a particularly difficult time for children and families, whilst schools are closed and we are advised to self-isolate or socially distance ourselves from our friends and family. Our normal structure and routine will be out of the window. This information pack aims to support parents of children with an ASD or LD during this tricky time and will hopefully make things a little more manageable.*

This Booklet was put together by colleagues in Community Family Psychology, Neurodevelopmental Team and Children's Occupational Therapy (20th March 2020)

**Contents:**

A. Structure and Routine
B. Providing Easy-read Information on COVID-19
C. Looking After Yourselves
D. Advice from Occupational Therapy on Regulation
E. Sleep Routines
F. Indoor Activities
G. Exercise in the Home
H. Managing Behaviour



# A. Why Structure and Routine is Important

When your world is very chaotic and confusing, there is a lot of uncertainty which leads to anxiety. Children with ASD or a Learning Disability require a very concrete, literal and predictable world to feel secure. Something can have a specific meaning in one situation and mean something totally different in another. For this reason many children have a strong need to control all activity and interaction around them. To help deal with this insecurity and anxiety, we have to decrease the uncertainty in their lives. The following strategies can help do that:

## 1. Providing accurate and easily understandable information about COVID-19

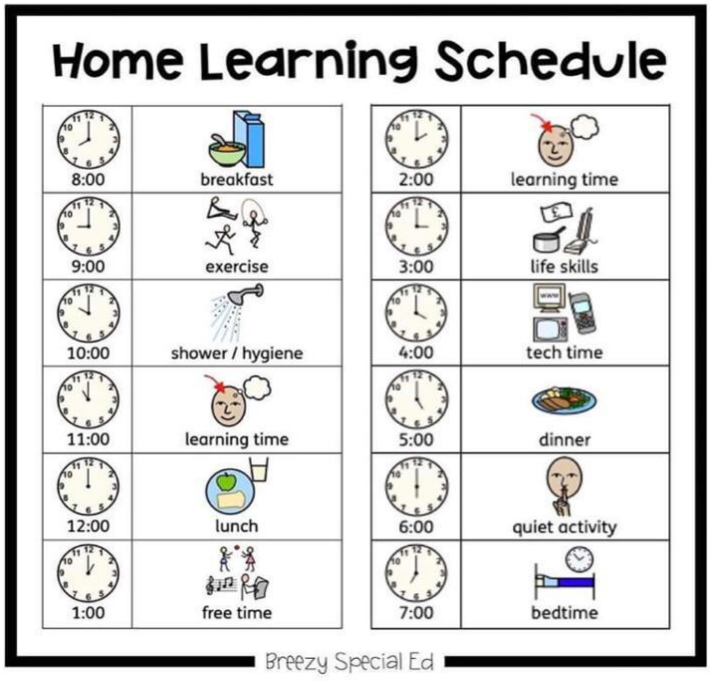
See Section B for more information

## 2. Build structure into daily routine

The more structured and predictable the daily routine is, the less uncertainty there is for the child.

**Using Alarms**

Set different alarms throughout the day. Keep the same ones every day to create a routine. You can use different songs to mark different points in the day. Eg. start the morning routine with a good morning song.



## 3. Using a Visual Schedule.

If possible, provide visual (pictures or written) schedules so children can *see* what is coming up next and what they are doing. This provides predictable order to their day. These visual schedules provide a nice detailed path to follow. It lets them know what to expect and when to expect it. This alone can drastically reduce anxiety.

### Visual schedules

A visual schedule uses pictures and symbols to demonstrate what activities will occur and in what order. We all tend to thrive on routines and children with additional needs especially respond positively to having structure. Structure enables them to be able to organise and predict events that will be occurring throughout the day/week. This can help to reduce anxiety levels of children with autism and/or learning disabilities. When feeling anxious it can be difficult to take in and hold onto any verbal information so having things presented in a simple visual format can also help to relieve this anxiety.

Visual schedules can be used to map out the activities of a day or even a whole week for a child, or can simply be used to show the process of a single activity such as brushing your teeth or getting ready for bed. PECS (picture exchange communication system) can be used to create your visual schedule (your child may be used to using these at school). These are available to download from various sites online such as http://www.do2learn.com/picturecards/printcards/. However you can also use your own photographs of places you regularly visit with your child. Visual schedules can be particularly useful for weekends or school holidays when there may be less of a routine than the child may be used to having at school. It may be useful to have the pictures on velcro or stuck down with blu-tac so that your child is able to remove it from the schedule once the activity has been completed.

## 4. Keep Your Routine Habits the Same.

Keeping familiar routines throughout the day uses less brain effort eg. keep the same personal care rituals. This adds predictability and certainty to the child's world. *See Section E on 'Maintaining Sleep Routines'*

**Handwashing Advice**

| | |
|---|---|
| Hand Washing Tips for People With Sensory Difficulties https://www.sensoryintegration.org.uk/News/8821506 | NHS hand washing song https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9VjeIWLnEg |
| Workbook for children about hand washing https://www.schuelke.com/gb-en/news-media/LD-Hand-Hygiene-Course-handout.pdf | Baby shark Hand washing Song https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72cNRdyyan8 |

## 5. Transitioning between Tasks

Children with ASD or LD often have difficulty switching their brain activity between different tasks. They do much better if they have warnings or reminders when the one activity is ending and another is beginning, especially if the current activity is a favourite activity. To ease transition difficulties try to:

- ★ ensure that the child always knows what will be coming up next (e.g. watch TV then bath) - *See box on Using Now & Next Cards*
- ★ give the child five, three, and one-minute reminders that the activity is going to end and they will move on to the next activity. Use timers if it helps.
- ★ Using traffic lights – *See box on using Traffic Lights*

This way their brain is prepared for what is coming up next, and the reminders help bridge the transition. This is particularly useful for limiting time spent on tablets – there are some apps available that allow you to control this from your phone, eg. *Screentime*.

## Using Now & Next Cards (sometimes called First & Then)

Shows the child what to do and what the reinforcer or preferred activity will be when they finish.

**When to use:**

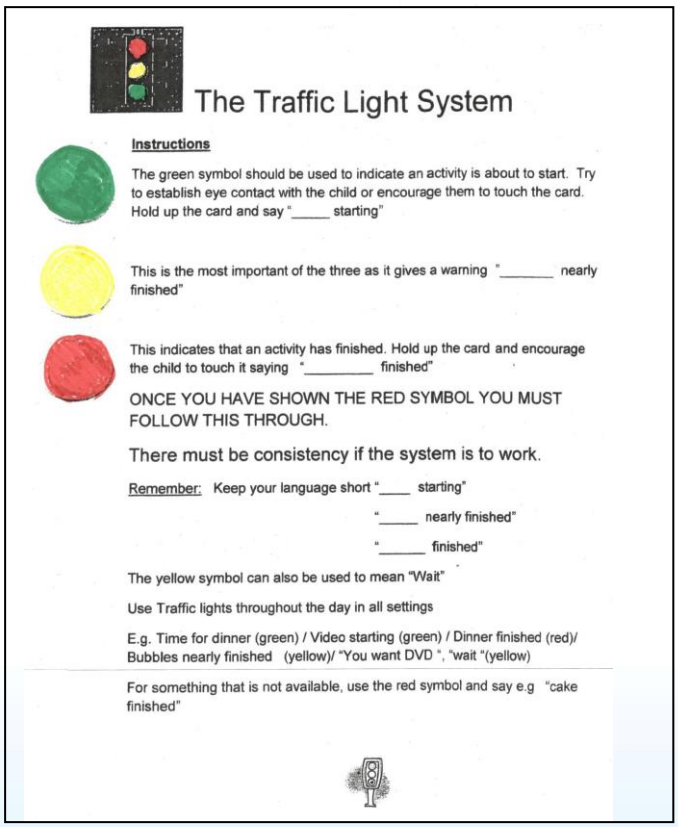
Use as a visual support for transitions.
Use to show a reward or activity that may motivate a child to engage in a less preferred activity.
Use with children who ask for reinforcers or preferred activities often.

**How to use:**

Show the child the first/then card, point to the two symbols, and say “First (Activity 1), then (Activity 2)”. If the child resists or gets off task, show them the card again and repeat this phrase. When the first activity is done, show the child the first/then card again and say “(Activity 1) finished!” while pointing at the first visual on the card. Then point to the second activity and say “Now, (Activity 2).”
Begin Activity 2 immediately.

*Tips:*

*This tool is only effective when Activity 2 is either one of the child's reinforcers or a more preferred activity. It is important that Activity 2 be started right after Activity 1 is finished, or the child will not understand that finishing Activity 1 is what allowed them to do Activity 2. The “Now” activity should not move to the “Next” activity upon the completion of the less preferred activity. It is a motivational tool for building behavioural momentum through less preferred activities.*



### The Traffic Light System

**Instructions**

The green symbol should be used to indicate an activity is about to start. Try to establish eye contact with the child or encourage them to touch the card. Hold up the card and say “____ starting”

This is the most important of the three as it gives a warning “_____ nearly finished”

This indicates that an activity has finished. Hold up the card and encourage the child to touch it saying “_____ finished”

ONCE YOU HAVE SHOWN THE RED SYMBOL YOU MUST FOLLOW THIS THROUGH.

There must be consistency if the system is to work.

Remember: Keep your language short “____ starting”
“____ nearly finished”
“____ finished”

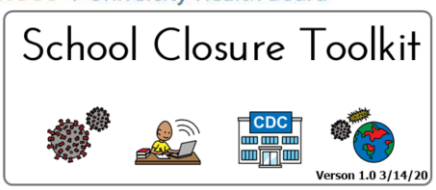
The yellow symbol can also be used to mean “Wait”

Use Traffic lights throughout the day in all settings

E.g. Time for dinner (green) / Video starting (green) / Dinner finished (red)/ Bubbles nearly finished (yellow)/ “You want DVD ”, “wait “(yellow)

For something that is not available, use the red symbol and say e.g “cake finished”

## 6. More Resources

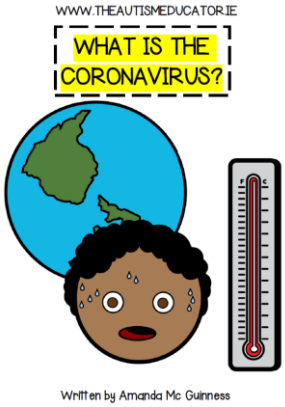



https://l.ead.me/bbTE3n?fbclid=IwAR0v2tMb8KiDBSRH1jvW4B4xNnR7HEGadMt4hE5wNPc55Mhc_lgzzPaeIxE

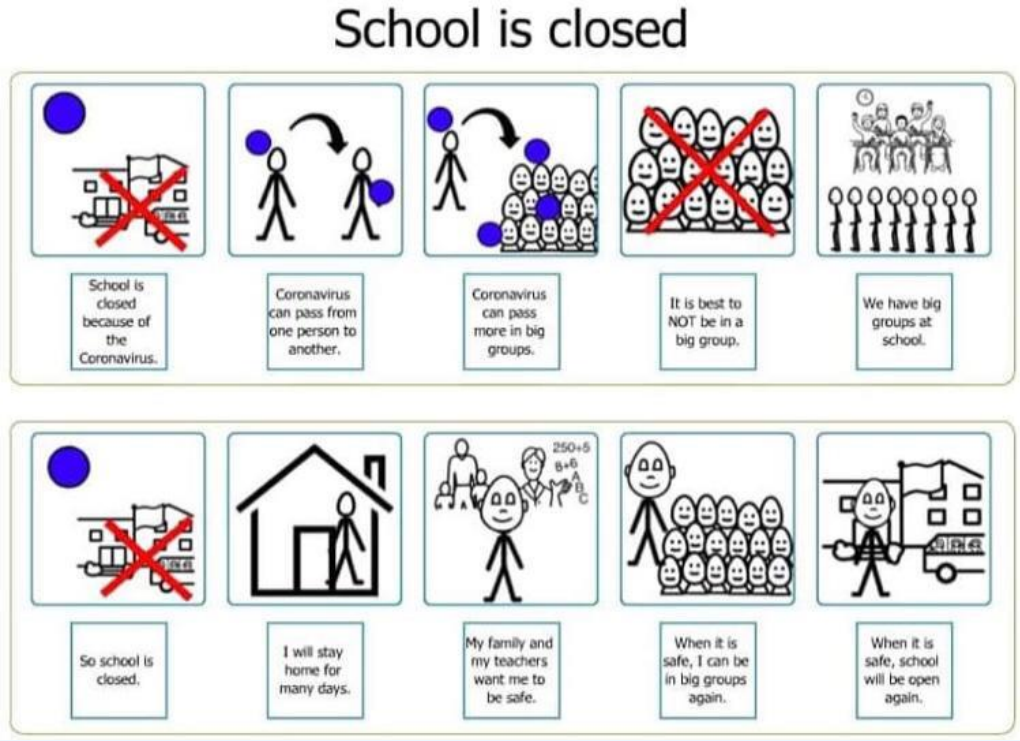
# B. Providing Easy-read Information on COVID-19

There is loads on the internet at the moment about the Coronavirus. Stick to government, NHS and well known charity pages for valid and up-to-date information.
https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/health/coronavirus

The link below is a fab Social Story on explaining coronavirus to children.




**https://littlepuddins.ie/coronavirus-social-story/**



## C. Looking After Yourself in Times of Uncertainty

***YOU CAN'T POUR FROM AN EMPTY CUP***

***HOW WE REACT TO STRESS***

When we are faced with a threat we become stressed and our body experiences a surge of adrenaline! Which is great as it gives us the much needed energy to react to increase our chances of survival. Our responses can usually be categorised into the following:
*(Examples of how we may react are given if we use the example of a hungry tiger stood in front of us)*

***FIGHT-*** *punch the tiger, or use a weapon to keep the tiger away*
***FLIGHT****- run, very fast away from the tiger!*
***FREEZE-*** *stand still or hide and hope the tiger cannot see you*

These reactions require our brains to focus on sending important messages to our heart and muscles, and will place extra effort on alerting our emotion centre (called the amygdala) of our brain to continuously inform us that there is a danger. This means that our ability to do things like use our memory, think logically, think rationally, plan ahead, consider how other people may be feeling or what they are thinking are all compromised! You probably notice that when you are stressed you don't act in ways you normally do!

Therefore if you are stressed it can make it really difficult to care for someone who is also stressed. In such cases it would be useful to try and calm yourself or try to remove your perception of a threat so you can calm others; *i.e. Look after yourself first, and then you have the resources to support others better!*

It can be really difficult to calm yourself when you are unsure about whether something is a threat or not, or when the threat can't be removed or we have no control over it! During these times of uncertainty our perception of a potential threat can be heightened, and can be unhelpful when trying to manage our usual lives and others. So what can we do so calm our brains down a bit?!

***PREPARE TO SELF-CARE!***

Self-care is key to calming ourselves so we have the resources (brain power!) to care and support others. We would recommend trying to implement structure, routine, and consistency to your life as well as those you care for! For self-care to be effective it needs to be sustainable and practical for your lifestyle!
Suggestions to self-care:

*MINDFULNESS*

The three main principles of mindfulness are:
- Being in the present moment i.e. focus on the right here, right now and not the future or past!
- Noticing and increasing our awareness of what is going on
- Placing no judgment on our experience, i.e. no labelling of things we notice as good nor bad, right or wrong, they just are!

There are lots of Mindfulness apps that you can access; we have enclosed a leaflet. Mindfulness practice does not have to take long, you can do it anywhere at any time for however long (even 30 seconds!)

*BREATHE*

We hear it all the time! But it's true, slowing down your breathing can really help ground you and slow things down. Try imagining blowing up a balloon in your stomach and slowly releasing it.

*BE YOUR OWN BEST FRIEND*

If your best friend came to you upset and struggling what would you say to them? Write this down... pin it in a place you regularly look. This is how you will speak to yourself when you are struggling. Give yourself a break, be kind, you're doing your best in a difficult time. Go you!

*DOING SOMETHING MEANINGFUL TO YOU!*

Think of an activity you enjoy. It can be ANYTHING! What is it about the activity that you value? For example, if you enjoy going out for a coffee with your friends, you may value connection with others. Although you may not be able to go for a coffee with a friend could you be creative about how you could still live your life by this value in a different way. For example, Skype your friend and sit and drink coffee together in a designated area of the house.

Try to identify what you **value** about the activities you enjoy doing in your life and think about how you can still live your life by these!

# D. Occupational Therapy: Regulating Sensory Activities

**1. Walking**

This is a very regulating activity as it provides rhythmical and predictable sensory inputs. Try to walk at the same pace and aim to walk for over 30 minutes. Walking up hills and/or wearing a back pack with bottles of water in will increase the resistance which will provide stronger regulating proprioceptive inputs.

**2. Local parks and outdoor gyms**

Hanging from monkey bars provide strong regulating proprioceptive inputs which quickly has a calming effect. If your child can't hang independently support them to hold on to the bars as they will still be getting some proprioceptive input.

Swings are regulating as they provide rhythmical and predictable linear vestibular and proprioceptive inputs. Encourage your child to swing themselves as much as possible as this will increase the calming proprioceptive inputs and help reduce the stimulating effect of the vestibular inputs.

Use roundabouts with caution as these provide strong rotational vestibular inputs which could quickly cause over stimulation. Spin the roundabout 10 times then stop it and ask your child to look at you and count to ten and repeat. This also applies to other playground equipment that spins.

Older children can use outdoor gym programme.
For older children and teenagers outdoor gyms provide strong regulating proprioceptive inputs. Refer to the attached program for ideas how to use the equipment.

**3. Trampoline**

These proved strong vestibular input which can cause rapid overstimulation. You can increase the regulating proprioceptive inputs by standing /sitting on the edge of the trampoline as will increasing the amount of effort your child uses to bounce. This should reduce the stimulating effects of the vestibular inputs.

You could also reduce the possibility of overstimulation by controlling the amount of bouncing by counting the number of bounces to 20 then say stop. Ask your child to stand still like a solider and look at you while you count to 10 and repeat.

**4. Den building**

Use blankets, throws, tarps etc to build as these create a regulating environment and reduce the amount of sensory input your child has to process. You could have a picnic in the den with crunchy and crisp foods which are regulating. Or play regulating games like colouring or connect 4.

**5. Hot Dogs Game**

Please refer to attached programme.

**6. Obstacle Courses**

These provide great regulating sensory experiences. Encourage your child to carry/punch objects to make the obstacle course. Try to include things that will allow your child to crawl and have different body positions.

**7. Cosmic Kids Yoga**

There are lots of fun and child friendly You Tube clips that include simple yoga poses which are regulating and you and your child could do them together. To slow YouTube clips down:

1. Open the video in You Tube.
2. Click the three dots in right hand corner or settings icon on the bottom right.
3. Select 'playback speed' to 0.5x or less.

**8. Heavy Work Activities**

Any activities that involves pulling, pushing, carry heavy objects provide regulating proprioceptive inputs. Some ideas include: gardening activities – digging and pushing a wheelbarrow, tug of war, cycling, helping with house work, row row your boat song, door pull up bars, wall press offs

Some websites for further information around proprioceptive regulatory strategies and activities include:

https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/child-learning-disabilities/sensory-processing-issues/heavy-work-activities

https://lemonlimeadventures.com/100-sensory-activities/

https://www.andnextcomesl.com/2015/06/heavy-work-activities-for-kids.html

## Occupational Therapy: Hot Dog Rolls

**Hot Dog Rolls Programme:** This deep touch pressure of this activity is relaxing and calming.

**What you will need:**

- Foam mat or flexible gym mat
- Large beach ball or therapy ball
- Variously textured household items such as a washcloth, sponge, pot scrubber, vegetable brush, basting brush or large paintbrush, wooden foot massager and fabric swatches

**Preparation:**

- Spread the mat on the floor or bed
- Have the child lie tummy down on the mat, near one end. The child's head should be off the mat

**What you can do:**

- With consistent, firm pressure roll and press the ball up and down all over the child's body
- Say "I am making sure this hot dog is really well packed."

- Crouch next to your child and roll them gently and tightly in the mat toward the other end. Put one hand on their shoulder and the other had on their hip, rock them to and fro for a movement

**Benefits of the activity:**

- Deep touch pressure from the mat and textured materials provides input to your child's somatosensory (tactile/proprioceptive) system
- The rotary action of rolling organises the vestibular system

## Occupational Therapy: Oral Motor Activities

**Adaptations to everyday activities**

- When drinking encourage the use of a straw or water bottle that's opening requires sucking.
- *For alerting sensory inputs*: during snack/meal times try to include food items that are crunchy (such as dry cereal, bread sticks, apples and raw carrots), cold (ice cream, frozen fruits and cold water) and sour (lemon, lime, and grapefruit).
- *For calming sensory inputs*: during snack/meal times try to include food items that would require greater chewing (such as baguettes, dried fruit and granola bars) and items that have a sweet taste.

**Oral Motor Activities**

***20 Seconds***

Using raisins and a straw see how many you can suck up and move within twenty seconds.

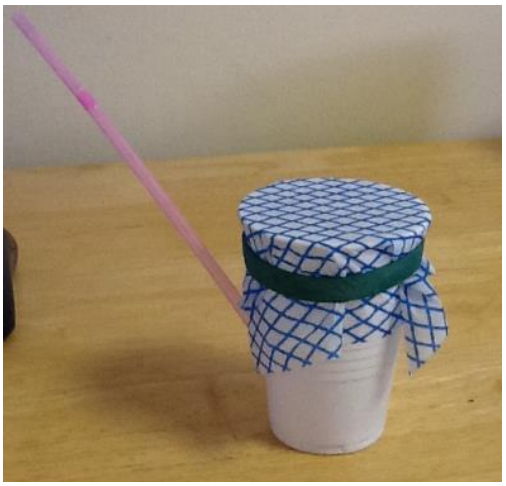
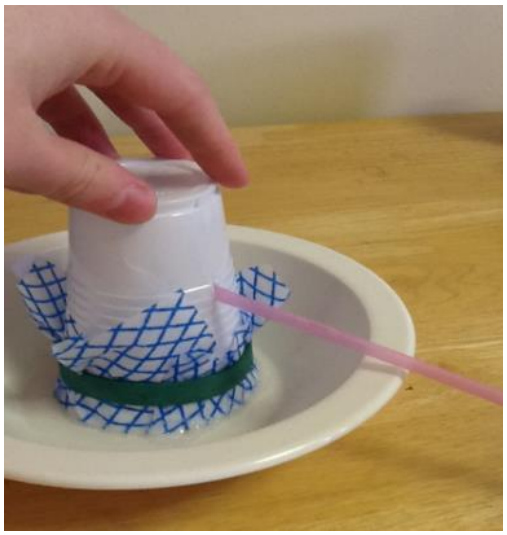
***Table Football (to be played in pairs)***

For this you will need straws and a ping pong ball or foam ball. Set up barriers on the table to form sidelines to keep the balls flying over. Then by blowing through straws only, see who can force the ball off the opponent's end of the table.

For this football pitch we used two pieces of green felt stuck together with masking tape to form halfway line. We then used masking tape to form the goals

***Blowing bubbles***

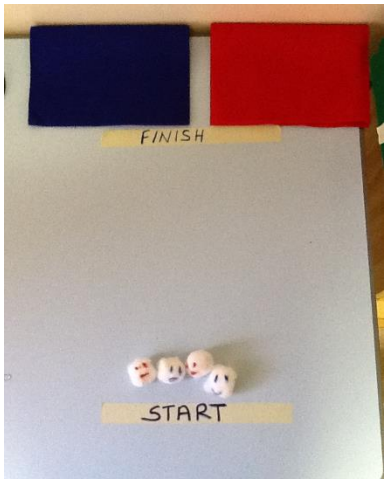
For this, you will need a plastic cup, washing up liquid, elastic band, cloth, small dish, something sharp to pierce the cup and a straw.

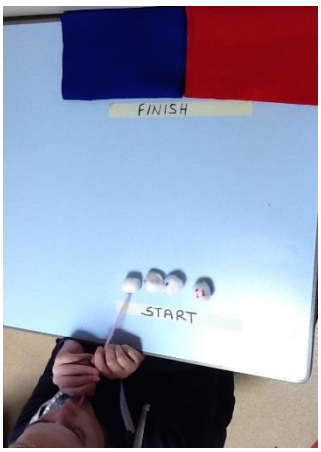



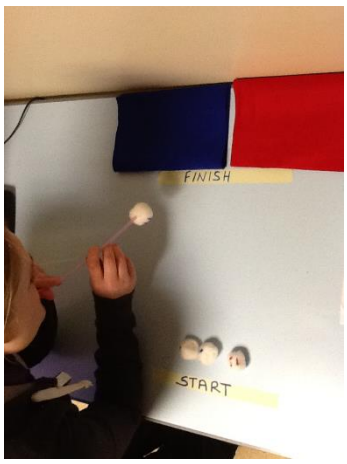
- Pierce the side of the cup so that there is room for the straw to go through.
- Cover the top of the cup with the cloth and secure with elastic band.
- Fill a shallow dish/bowl with washing up liquid and small amount of water; rub the top of the cloth into the mixture.
- Blow down the straw to see bubbles appear out of the cup.

***Shepherds***

For this you will need a large open floor or table space, masking tape, cotton balls for 'sheep', straws, different coloured pens (dependent on how many players) and containers/material to mark out the 'sheep pens'.






- Put a strip of masking tape at each end of the space to mark a start and finish line.
- Take a handful of cotton ball sheep and place them on the floor by the start line. The 'sheep' can be marked with different coloured pens to make them identifiable.
- Place two containers 'sheep pens' by the finish line (depending on number of players). Here we used two different coloured pieces of felt.
- Take a straw and sitting by the start line, blow through the straw to herd the sheep towards the sheep pens
- Once at the finish line, suck through the straw to drop them into the correct coloured pen.

***Bubble snake***

For this, you will need a plastic bottle, scissors, washing up liquid, dish cloth and elastic band.

- Cut bottom off water bottle.
- Cover with dish cloth, securing with elastic band.
- Fill shallow dish with water and washing up liquid. Dip cloth covered end into mixture.
- Blow the top of the bottle to make bubbles.
  See how long you can make your snake before it falls.

*Adaptations*
Add food colouring drops to the cloth-covered end of the bottle to make colourful bubble snakes.

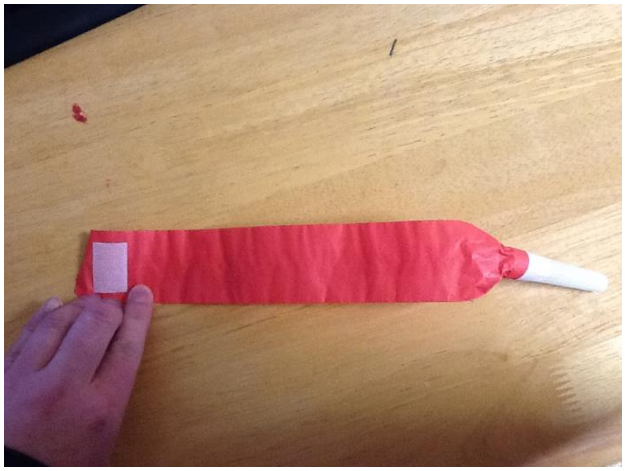
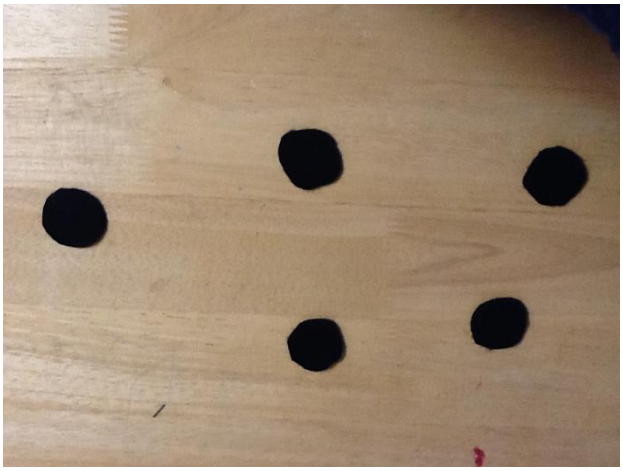
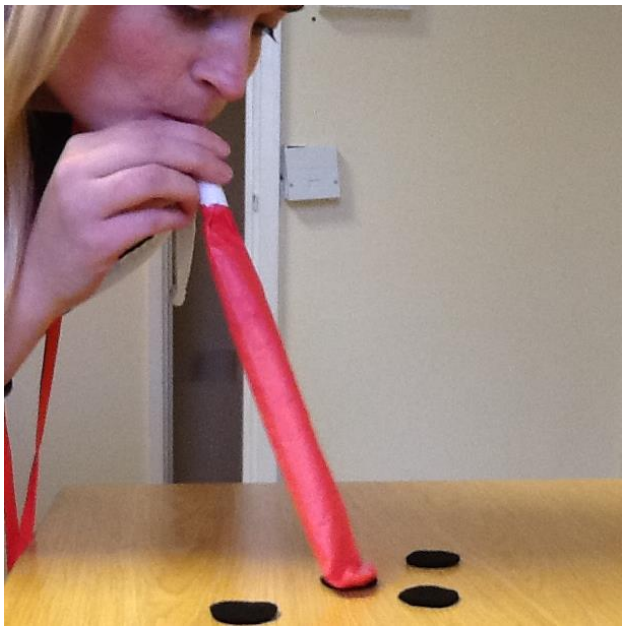
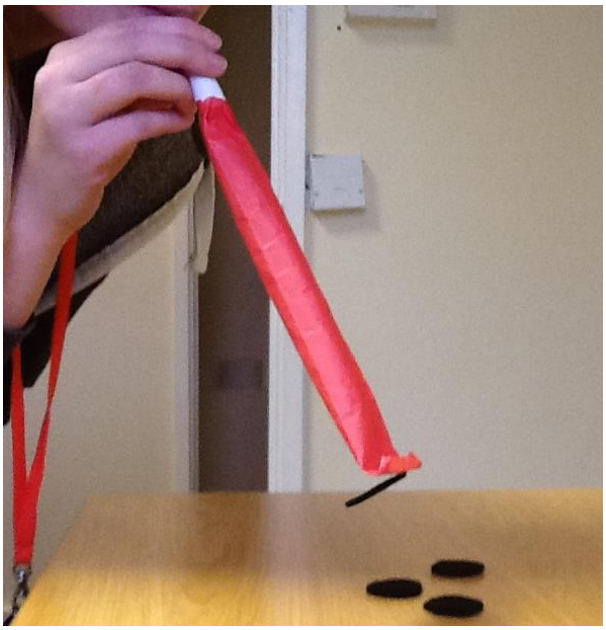
***Cup Races (activity for pairs)***
For this you will need string, 2 plastic cups, 2 chairs (or places to tie string at each end), scissors.

- Pierce a hole in the bottom of the cup.
- Cut 2 lengths of string (same size) and thread a cup on to each.
- Attach ends to the chairs ensuring that there is a gap between the two strings.
- Move the cups so they are at the 'start' line.
- Race to see who can blow their cup to the finish line the fastest.

***Catching Flies***

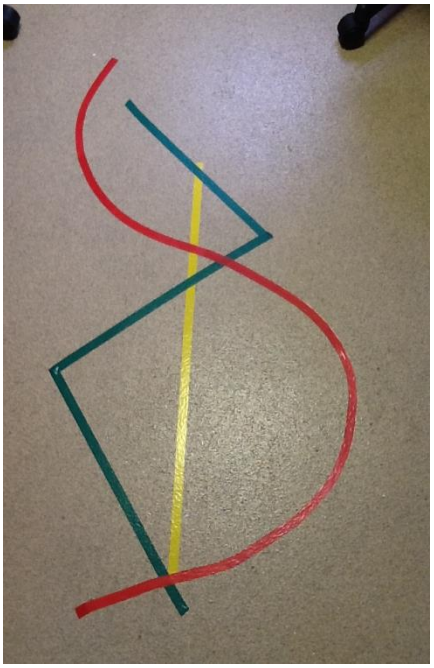
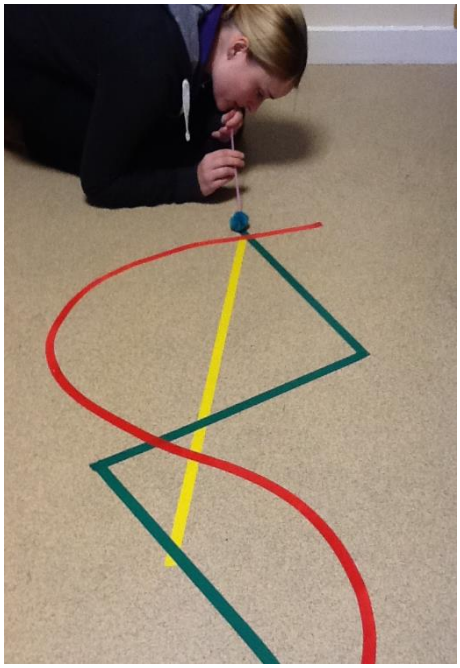
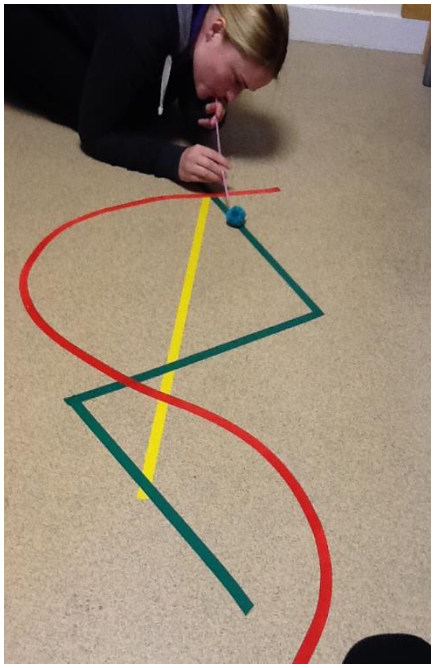
For this you will need a party blower, pieces of felt to form the ‘flies’, piece of Velcro.

- Attach piece of Velcro to end of party blower.
- Lay out the ‘flies’ on to table or floor.
- Use the party blower to pick up as many flies as you can.

***Coloured Lines***

For these you will need 3 different coloured masking tapes with matching coloured pompoms and some straws

- Stick the tape on the floor forming different shaped lines e.g. curvy, jagged, and straight.
- Place the matching pompom at the start of the line.
- Using the straw, blow the pompom along the line, trying to keep it as close to the line as possible.

***How Heavy?***

For this you will need straws, masking tape and objects with different weights and structures:

| | |
|---|---|
| Lightweight | Cotton balls, feathers, tissues, balloon. |
| Cylindrical | Empty cans, paper cups, paper towel/toilet paper rolls, wooden dowels. |
| Spherical | Golf balls, marbles, ping-pong balls. |
| Flat | Lollypop sticks, plastic container lids. |
| Bumpy | Wooden beads, pebbles, small blocks |

- Clear a large floor space, putting strips of masking tape down to mark start and finish lines.
- Take a straw, choose an object and see if you can blow the object across the floor, from start to finish.
- Decide which objects are easy to move, not easy and which do not move at all.

*Adaptations*

- Hold up a lightweight object (tissue, feather, balloon) and blow underneath to keep it aloft. Pass it back and forth in pairs, keeping it from touching the floor.
- Races: everyone choose a similar object and see who can blow their object across the floor to the finish line first.
- Build a miniature obstacle course with blocks, train tunnels, cardboard tubes, and other items to blow items: over, around, under, and through.

# E. Maintaining a Sleep Routine

There are a number of reasons as to why a child may struggle with sleep especially at the moment when routines have all changed. These can include things such as an inability to self-settle, waking problems behavioural issues or sensory issues to name just a few. If you are worried about your child's sleep, keeping a sleep diary will help you get an accurate picture of your child's sleep patterns. This can be helpful in identifying possible reasons to why your child is having difficulties sleeping.

Some possible reasons for troubled sleep:

***An over-stimulating room*** – does your child get out of bed to play with their toys. Distractions in a child's room can delay them from settling.

***Noise*** – are there any noises inside or outside the home that may be disturbing your child. Some children with sensory issues are particularly sensitive to noise therefore what may seem like a really quiet sound to us may appear rather loud to the child and affect their ability to settle and fall asleep. Masking sounds in your home with something like a white noise app can help if noise is an issue for your child.

***Light*** – is the room dark enough? Melatonin (our sleep hormone) is produced when it's dark. Black-out blinds can be purchased to help keep the room dark at bedtime.

***Bedding*** – is your child kicking the bedding off during the night and getting cold. If so you could consider a sleep suit for your child or tucking a double duvet under a single mattress to stop it coming off during the night

**Strategies to support sleep:**

***Settling***: Many children with additional needs struggle to settle themselves to sleep.

- If you stay with your child until they go to sleep you may need to gradually distance yourself to enable them to settle alone. For example if you currently lie in bed with them until they sleep, try sitting next to the bed for a few nights then gradually move your chair further away each night until they no longer need you in the room.

- Once you have turned the lights out and said goodnight do not engage in conversation with your child. Try using a 'broken record' phrase such as "It's bedtime, go to sleep" if your child tries to continue to interact with you after this. By engaging in conversation with your child after bedtime has been established they are being rewarded for remaining awake.

***Bedtime routines:*** Routine is very important at bedtime. We tend to thrive on routines and children with additional needs especially will respond positively to having structure at bedtime. Once a routine has been established it must be kept consistent throughout the week even if your child is staying elsewhere for the night. When constructing a routine it is helpful to decide what time you would like your child to be in bed and work back from this (despite not going to school). If bath-time is incorporated into this routine ideally it should occur at least half an hour before your child goes to sleep so their body temperature has time to regulate as a warm bath can increase body temperature and lead to difficulty sleeping. The child should have quiet time up to an hour before bedtime so the house becomes a quiet sleepy place. This time can incorporate doing a relaxing

activity such as reading a book or having a gentle foot/hand massage. Avoid watching the TV or using tablets in this time as the light can stop the body from releasing melatonin.

***Visual Timetables:*** A visual timetable is a way of demonstrating to a child what they can expect to happen in the lead up to bedtime using pictures and symbols. It may be useful to display the routine that you will be using at bedtime to help them to become familiar with the order of events.

***Explaining sleep:*** Some children can have difficulty understanding the need for sleep. A social story could be used to explain this and help them settle, for example; *'All people sleep... They wake up each morning. I sleep in a bed. Usually Mum or Dad says, "Time to go to bed." This means it is time to get into bed and go to sleep.*

***Rewarding your child:*** It is important to remain positive with your child about bedtime so as to reduce any anxiety associated with it. Give your child praise at bedtime for what they are doing well and give consistent rewards until the behaviour is firmly established.

*For more information:*
*https://cerebra.org.uk/get-advice-support/sleep-advice-service/*

## Don't forget your own sleep routine too!

# F. Ideas for Indoor Activities

Many of the following ideas are around sensory play. Sensory play is aimed to include activities that stimulate your child's senses by engaging one or more of the senses: touch, small, taste, sight and hearing.

**Cloud Dough***:* Pour 4 cups flour into the centre of a large tub. Create a crater in the middle of the flour and pour the ½ cup oil into the crater and mix it all together. You can add glitter or food colouring or essential oils.

**Goop:** Mix the 2 cups of cornflour with 1 cup of water. Add food colouring if you like. You can also make the goop dance by placing a bass speaker next to it and playing something really 'bassy'.

**Sensory bins/bags**: This simply involves filling various containers with dried beans, lentils or rice and allowing your child to scoop, stir and transfer them between pots etc. You could try making a beach or treasure island out of rice. The same concept can be used using zip-lock freezer bags. For example you could try filling them with shaving foam, or jelly etc.

**Fizzing fun**: By adding vinegar to bicarbonate of soda it makes the powder fizz and bubble. You can play with this idea by either filling mugs/pots with bicarbonate of soda and adding vinegar and food colouring to them to create a 'fizzing tea party' or by filling a tray with bicarbonate of soda and putting the vinegar into a water pistol which your child can then squirt into the tray and watch the powder bubble up when the vinegar hits it.

**Marbled painting:** Squirt a layer of shaving cream onto a tray and let your child spread it about with their hands. Dribble some of the paint (watered down enough to pour) onto the shaving cream. Allow your child to swirl the paint around either using the back of a paintbrush or their fingers to make a marbled effect (make sure to stop before the colours mix together too much). You can print the marbled effect onto paper by placing a sheet of paper/card onto the foam. Gentle lift the paper off the shaving foam and set aside. Then use a credit card or a cardboard square to scrape the shaving foam of the paper. The swirled/marbled pattern should remain of the paper. Set aside to dry.

**3D Paint:** Mix roughly equal amounts of PVA glue and white shaving cream together. Add little bits of food colouring or paint and stir into the mix. Your 3D paint is then ready to use. It works best to dab the paint onto the paper or card rather than smear , as you want it to be quite thick. Try finger painting with the paint. The paint will have a puffy, 3D texture when dry and will feel squishy like foam to the touch.

**Play Spaghetti:** Cook as much spaghetti as you wish to use then divide it up into separate containers – one container for each colour that you are making. Add a few drops of food colouring to each container and mix. Add a little cooking oil to the coloured spaghetti to stop it from becoming too sticky. Your coloured spaghetti is now ready. Allow your child to play with it!

**Raised salt painting:** Place a piece of paper onto a tray (e.g. a baking tray) and pour PVA glue onto the page. You can use the glue to draw a picture or create patters. Then pour table salt onto the page, ensuring it covers all areas of glue. Once all the glue is covered in salt shake off the excess.

Using a paintbrush drip watercolour paint onto the patches of salt. The colour will spread out and run along the lines of salt. Try and engage your child in watching the process of the paint spreading along the salt.

**Water-play:** Water is familiar to children and can provide an easy, safe and free form of sensory play. Fill a large container with water and provide your child with some simple toys such as funnels, various sized pots or containers, marbles, cloths or sponges, bubbles or foam etc and simply allow your child to experiment and play. A tray/container of water can be used for play both indoors and outdoors.

**Coloured rice:** By simply mixing dried rice with food colouring you can create brightly coloured rice grains that your child can use for sensory play. Simple mix approximately a cup of dried rice with a teaspoon of food colouring by placing both in a screw-top container and shaking until the rice is adequately covered and then setting aside to dry on paper towels. Once the rice is dried your child engage with it by passing it between containers or playing with it with their hands.

**Sand foam:** By simply mixing clean sand with shaving foam in a large tray/container it will create a fluffy, textured mixture that provides a material kids can use for sensory play. Engage your child in mixing the two materials together. Once the sand and foam are mixed you can hide objects such as shells or plastic toys in the sand-foam for your child to find. You can also draw and write in the sand foam using your fingers.

**Bottle-tops and bubbles:** Simply fill a large tub/container with water and washing up liquid to create a container of bubbles. You can then hide bottle-tops and ask your child to find them. See if they can do it by colour, (i.e. pick out all the red bottle tops). Your child could also try using different utensils to make more bubbles such as a whisk.

**Jelly play:** When making up the jelly try hiding objects that are similar in colour to the jelly you are hiding them in. This will help disguise them better. Allow the jelly to set in various containers/pots/jugs. Your child can try building things with the jelly, making pictures or words out of it. Again this is a great activity to do with your child if they have a tendency to put toys/materials in their mouths.

**Rock Monsters:** For this you will need googly eyes, paint, and glue. Make a bunch of rock characters, give them names, you could even give them personalities!

*Some ideas suggested in this handout have been sourced from' Learning For Kids – List of Sensory Play Activities' http://www.learning4kids.net/list-of-sensory-play-ideas/*

World Book Online have just made their collection of over 3,000 ebooks and audiobooks available for free for children to access at home. They have books suitable for all ages. Click on the following link to access them.
https://worldbook.kitaboo.com/reader/worldbook/index.html?usertoken=Mjk5MzQ6MTpJUjA5MjAxNjoyOmNsaWVudDE2OTc6MTY5NzoyMjE2Mjg4OjE6MTU4NDM4MDExMzA2Mjp1cw==

**More activities to do with your children…..**

Without knowing how long the current measures may last, it can feel hard to prepare. Improvising on a snow day is one thing—longer school closures call for creative planning on the part of schools and parents alike. Every day more stuff is appearing on the internet for ideas of things to do and your child's school will probably also be sending ideas and activities to do.

https://www.mother.ly/child/homeschool-resources-for-school-closures?rebelltitem=2#rebelltitem2

## G. Physical activity

Maintaining physical activity when stuck indoors is a huge challenge for both you and your children. Mr Motivator recommends setting an alarm every 45 minutes as a reminder to stand up and move. Children with a Learning Disability or ASD may rely on physical movement to regulate. They may also have physical needs that require regular stretching and moving (in this case, you may already have physiotherapy advice on exercises to do at home). Physical activity is also very important for emotional wellbeing. It alerts the nervous system, increases focus, releases stress chemicals from the nervous system and better organises the neurochemistry. Exercise reduces anxiety and enhances mood. The greater the anxiety the more important the physical exercise.

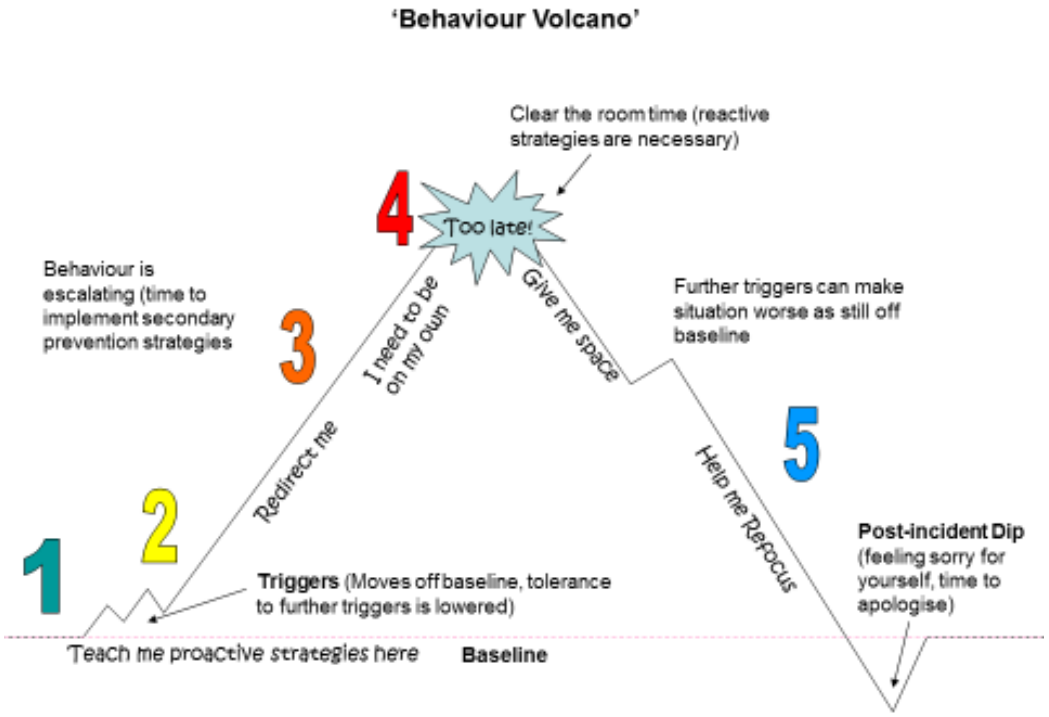
**Activities to try with your child**

- ★ Star-jumps/ jumping jacks
- ★ Bear- crawls or Crab-walks
- ★ Balancing on one leg
- ★ Touching your toes and reaching the sky
- ★ Catching and throwing a ball
- ★ Wallsits
- ★ Hoovering and mopping!
- ★ Looking on Youtube for home exercise programmes aimed at children.
  - Joe Wicks has this one…. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rN0h6EZd6TM
  - Or try Harry Potter Yoga https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=R-BS87NTV5I&vl=en

# H. Managing Meltdowns in the House

## Primary Prevention

The aim of Primary Prevention is to reduce the number of triggers that a child will encounter so that they are more likely to remain at baseline and difficult situations less likely to occur. Many of the strategies in this booklet are 'Primary Prevention' strategies. These strategies support keeping the 'baseline' low and help ***reduce*** triggers as shown on the volcano below.




## Secondary Prevention

But what happens if your child moves up the volcano and is heading for a meltdown……

I. If possible, redirect them to a quiet and calming part of the house

II. If not possible to redirect your child, try and redirect siblings and family pets to another room.

III. Avoid interacting with your child

- Try not to talk to your child when they are having a meltdown. (verbal information is difficult to process when you are distressed)
- Try not to make eye contact with them
- If possible, move away from them (keeping an eye on them from a distance)

(If you have received advice from OT about regulation activities, you may find them useful to use at this time)

IV. Keeping the area safe

- Move anything breakable away from your child
- If your child is head butting the wall, you can place a cushion against the wall

V. After the Meltdown

- When your child calms, tell them (using visual cues ideally) what you are doing next and engage them in an activity to move them on

Your child may have another meltdown and you will have to do all this again. But it is important to stick to your rules. If your child gets what they want when they have a meltdown, they will have a meltdown every time they want something. It is important to teach your child that having a meltdown will not get them what they want.

If your child is hurting themselves during a meltdown then please contact Community Child Health on **02920 536 789** to speak to the appropriate health professional.

For more information about managing behaviour, please have a look at these pages….

https://www.autism.org.uk/about/behaviour/challenging-behaviour.aspx

https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/understanding-behaviour/understanding-behaviour.html

https://cerebra.org.uk/download/factsheet-managing-challenging-behaviour/

This information was compiled by Child Health Professionals in Cardiff & Vale UHB.
It is not to be copied or reproduced without permission from the authors.
Updated 20th March 2020