

Looking After Our Wellbeing:

A grab pack for parents/carers educating at home—supporting focus and attention (including strategies to support ADHD).

Psychology and Wellbeing Service

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There is a lot of uncertainty around the current **Coronavirus pandemic**, particularly given that the situation is constantly developing and our knowledge about the virus is evolving daily.

It is important to not only consider your physical health during such challenging times, but also to pay attention to your mental health. It is normal to feel worried, stressed and/or anxious when you are faced with uncertain situations, and the sooner you acknowledge and learn to take care of your mental health and general wellbeing, the healthier and better equipped you will be to cope with the situation we are all facing.

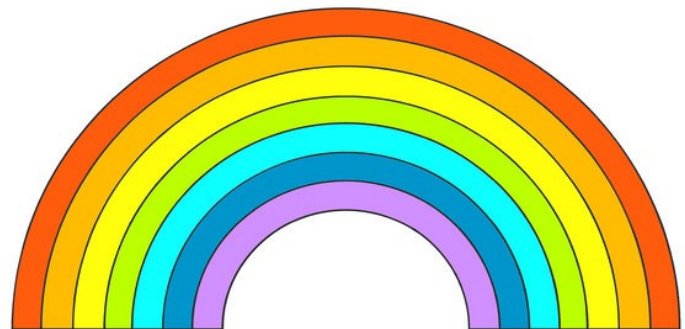
Whilst we all react differently to stressful situations, it is useful to remember that how you feel is a **NORMAL** reaction to an **ABNORMAL** event so, whether you are experiencing a little bit of worry, feeling anxious, becoming unsettled by the constant change, loving your new ability to work from home, or enjoying spending more time with family, it's important to take a moment to pause, think and plan what you're doing to look after you, your loved ones and the community around you whilst we are all together in this unique situation.

The media gives us all a lot of information that can help us stay safe and follow the virus guidelines but remember to stick to official sources for the facts. Gov.je also acts as a source of Jersey specific guidance with lots of our most frequently asked questions available for us to review.

This grab pack offers some handy tips to support you if you are a parent/carer supporting your child's education at home and feel they would benefit from some additional support to nurture focus. In truth, whether an individual has received a diagnosis of ADHD or not, the strategies used to enhance focus remain beneficial to all.

In this grab pack:

- Ideas and support around routines and structure
- Support to help children and young people focus
- Social stories for children to help explain current times
- Helpful websites for further reading



Supporting children and young people to focus

During these current times, nearly all of us are at home for the foreseeable future due to the Coronavirus pandemic. This is a challenging time for children and their families, particularly if your child has an additional need like ADHD. Below are some strategies to help adjust amidst uncertain times.



Providing a routine and structure

Many children with neurodiverse conditions such as ADHD or Autism respond well to having a routine. During this time of significant change, when so many things are unknown, creating a routine helps to provide predictability and structure for all children.

Consistency at home promotes reassurance and a sense of safety and containment for a child, despite the huge changes that have happened outside their home, which means that the majority of children and young people will crave this, regardless of what their learning style looks like.

There will be lots of advice emerging for parents/carers at this time and it might be confusing knowing where to start or what advice to take. Just remember, that every good parent/carer knows their children well and your parental instinct will count for a lot. No one is expecting you to be the expert but there is an expectation that you will be kind.... kind to yourself when it doesn't quite work ... kind to your child/children if they find it difficult to get the work done and so on. These are exceptional times, but we are all experiencing this unique situation together.

During this unique time we are all considering the changes we need to make to keep ourselves and our families safe. Check out our range of wellbeing grab packs online, offering helpful tips on a range of subjects including: the importance of sleep, supporting focus and attention for children with ADHD, Mindfulness, Study Skills, wellbeing for children and many more.



Here are some suggestions you might want to consider when thinking about how to support your child to focus as best they can to get the most out of educating at home:

- Try to stay true to what your routine would be like if we weren't on lockdown, as much as you can. Consistent wake up and bed-time routines will help.
- Consider a simple visual timetable to plan and show their day. This could be as simple as cutting out pictures from a magazine to explain each activity or a grid to put up on the wall. If you can create this with your child to give them ownership over their schedule then that's even better.
- No one is in control at all times so consider making an 'Oops card'. This can be used to add to your timetable or be shown to your child to symbolise those moments when you haven't been able to follow the structure and the unexpected has happened e.g. your internet signal has gone.
- Think about creating a basket of easy learning activities that you know your child can get on with independently and that they enjoy (so it won't be a problem to get them engaged). You can use this if they finish a task set by school early (i.e. an extension activity), or if your senses tell you they are finding it difficult to stay engaged today.
- Consider introducing a reward system into learning time. Make sure it's positive i.e. **what you pay attention to is what you get more of!** Discuss with your child, how this reward system could look and what behaviours/work/achievements are going to be rewarded. Once you've agreed, make sure they can earn agreed rewards quickly to get them invested in the system and chat about what agreed rewards might look like e.g. finishing a task on time or sitting to work without a reminder might earn some baking time together, a favourite DVD to watch on a Friday afternoon or some time on the internet. You can get more creative if you write down all agreed rewards on separate pieces of paper and put these in a jar to pick out as a surprise when the reward is earned. Once a reward has been earned, never take it away.

- Plan meal-times and snacks and include these in your timetable. Don't be tempted to miss them if you can see your child is working well. Everyone needs a break.
- Think about what motivates your child. Children with ADHD, for example, don't cope with a long delay for gratification and not knowing when the more rewarding/fun activities are going to occur.
- Alternate activities that are less appealing and most appealing to your child's interests. It will help to stagger their schedule and follow up activities based on less preferred things by highly preferred things. So, if they're expected to do 30 minutes of work it can be followed by a favourite snack, ball game, learning task that they find easy to access etc.
- Think in terms of learning bursts! Research shows children can only really focus for 45 minutes at the most. This will vary with the individual, and your child might find it easier to focus for a 15 minute learning burst followed by a brain break or activity they enjoy.
- Consider using a timer to record periods of activity e.g. an alarm on a mobile phone, an egg timer, stickers on your clock etc. Our children have bells that signal break time at school so this offers the same routine for them to get used to.
- Set realistic and clear expectations in advance for how long each learning 'chunk' will last and what they are to do in that period of time. Then follow up to check how they did. They may need you to be 'alongside' them for support until they get used to the new schedule.
- Children with neurodiverse conditions often find it challenging to get started on a task or to truly understand what is being asked of them from written, and sometimes verbal instructions. With this in mind, try to support your child with understanding what they've been asked to do by the teacher and assess their understanding by asking them to explain what to do back to you. Help them start the task before you leave them to work independently as this should increase their ability to achieve progress without you.



- Your child might also find it challenging to keep themselves organised so help them prepare their work space and include in their timetable a few minutes to make sure they have everything they need before they start their learning.
- Remember to keep in contact with their teacher, they may have great strategies that help your child to stay focused when in class. Discuss whether they use any 'props' in class to help your child concentrate on what you can copy at home e.g. use of headphones to dampen sounds around them, the use of blue tack to fiddle with which can help them concentrate by getting rid of unwanted excess energy, alternating between sitting down and standing up to complete work etc.
- Have a quiet workspace for your child to do their work and minimise distractions e.g. no phones/devices/TV. It's often challenging for children to ignore what's going on around them no matter how interested they might be in their learning task.
- Think about planning times for outdoor activities, such as a walk, a ball game, a bike ride. This will help your child to feel good and to focus again later in the day.
- Be present with your child when you are present. Although it's difficult to juggle work and childcare at home, try to avoid checking phone/emails during the moments you have promised them your attention.
- Don't expect instant success with new routines. It will take time to practise to see what works best. It's important to manage your own expectations and not set goals that are not achievable as if the child feels they are achieving their goal and are successful this will help routines to succeed.
- Use positive attention and make it BIG!!!
- Positive attention is the most powerful motivator we have for influencing children's behaviour. Children with ADHD need that attention to be as powerful as possible!
- Children with attentional and impulse control difficulties need their feedback big, bold, immediate and intense. This is very true during the current times when they are easily distracted at home or are less motivated.
- When giving positive feedback, recruit attention and eye contact of your child, get down to their level. Sometimes a high five, thumbs up is just as powerful, yet make it specific, they need to know what went well. Your tone of voice and facial expression needs to match what you say!
- Use attention as a motivator and reward. Your child is going to be seeking your attention a lot, which is a challenge especially when you need to work. So supporting your child to earn parental attention can be an effective way to help them focus on a task. As an example, you may ask them to do their English task whilst you are writing emails and if they don't interrupt during this time at the end you can play a game together.

Helpful websites for further reading:

<https://childmind.org/>

<https://childmind.org/article/giving-kids-with-adhd-support-and-structure-during-the-coronavirus-crisis/>

<https://chadd.org/guidance-for-uncertain-times/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/>

<https://www.additudemag.com/>

<https://www.acamh.org/>

Social stories for children to help explain current times:

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

<https://www.acamh.org/app/uploads/2020/03/Freddy-school-and-the-coronavirus.pdf>

<https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>

