

## Corona crisis And Children with Special Needs – Simple Solutions

COVID-19 has been making headlines around the world. While COVID-19 originated in China, cases have been reported around the world. The coronavirus pandemic has created unique concerns for caregivers and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Individuals with disabilities likely have the same risk factors as the general population — those who are older or have compromised immune systems are most vulnerable to the virus. But anyone with intellectual disability, moderate to severe developmental delay, autism spectrum disorder, muscular dystrophy or brain disorders like cerebral palsy may also be more susceptible to severe illness from COVID-19, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Beyond cancelling large events, the government recommends social distancing practices in residential facilities, therapy centres and adult day programs to prevent the spread of the virus. These practices include staggering meals and activity schedules, limits on visitors and daily body temperature screening. In situations where a positive coronavirus case is identified, quarantine or closure may be recommended.

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities are a diverse group of people, and so there is no one-size-fits-all approach to keeping them healthy.

The basic recommendations for everyone are the same — wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, avoid contact with people who are sick and disinfect high-contact surfaces like doorknobs and light switches.

Most importantly, do not go out in public if you're sick.

But those guidelines, while universal, become more complicated for people with disabilities and their caregivers.

Staying home when you're feeling sick may not be an option if someone with a disability relies on you for the activities of daily life. Therefore, the most important thing we can all do is remember that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the professionals who support them need to be part of the conversation, and that protocols should be tailored to the unique needs of the person and the situation facing their community.

It's important to communicate with family members about coronavirus using facts but not unnecessary fear. Watch for signs of distress that can be caused by changes in routine. If the family member lives in a group home or independently, make sure hand washing and other hygiene precautions are being taken.

We are living through a pandemic. Most of us have never experienced anything like this before and are feeling concerned and overwhelmed.

Since places across the India (and around the world) are closing schools, cancelling public gatherings, and closing non-essential government buildings(e.g. museums, parks, etc) children's daily lives will be impacted even if they do not get sick.

Given that many children with autism, intellectual disabilities, etc. have social-communication challenges, it might seem daunting to try to explain something like this. After all, if we can barely understand it ourselves, how can we help children understand without scaring them?

Hopefully, these recommendations given below can help parents/caregivers as we all try to navigate this challenging time.

1. Make sure to take care of yourself. Remember the airline safety briefing that tells adults to "put on your own oxygen mask before helping others"? Well, it turns out that the saying applies to challenging or traumatic experiences and children's well-being too. Children cope better when their parents are resilient and have strong social supports .
2. Try to establish a "new normal" in terms of daily routines. Children tend to like predictability and routines, and it can be tricky without school to structure the day. It might help to make a daily schedule while schools are closed so that kids know what will happen during the day and when it will happen.
3. Speak with kids about current events, but use age-appropriate language and demonstration that they can understand.
4. For children with ASD or other social-communication challenges, it can be helpful to use visuals to help explain both what is happening (e.g. there are germs making people sick) and what to do (e.g. wash our hands, cover our cough, etc). The social stories are particularly good, as it includes helpful images about both COVID-19 itself, best practices for good hygiene, and information about school/recreation closures.

Besides disturbance in their daily routine cause problem in special kids, even disruption in their therapies can affect the kids. Individual care, developing a sustainable home based activities and routine can be tried. To keep this in view, think following home activities can be helpful.

## **Activities for Home:**

### **Gross Motor:**

- Pushing or pulling heavy objects like furniture/sofa, therapand,etc.
- Pillow wrestle
- Crawl over the bed
- Catch and throw a ball to a target while on your tummy
- Lifting/carrying heavy objects in tall kneeling
- Jumping jacks
- Rolling over bed at the same time transfer objects from one end to other
- Play tug of war

### **Fine Motor:**

- Open and close water bottle, nut & bolts,etc.
- Putting and removing clothclips.
- Hide beads in putty and ask child to remove it.

- Making shapes from Clay
- Writing alphabet, numbers on wet sand
- Folding paper/ dress materials
- Colouring activities with crayon
- Move beads from palm to fingers

### **Executive Function:**

- Indoor obstacle course
- Clean room once a day
- Play board games/memory games with family members
- Prioritize important tasks to do first
- Do your chores
- Sort coins and coloured items
- Draw/write house rules
- Bodypart identification/alphabet matching/matching related objects like bat-ball, pen-paper,etc.

### **Visual Motor:**

- Connect the dots
- Matching shape and size
- Design copy
- Circle one alphabet from a word. E.g. ELEPHANT-Ask to make circle over 'P'
- Practicing handwriting patterns
- Peg board activities/ Insert toothpicks in to a container
- Colour a picture inside line
- String colourful beads

### **Oral Motor:**

- Make a big smile. Relax and repeat
- Blow bubbles/blow painting
- Drink through a straw
- Do a tongue pop. Suck the tongue up onto the roof of the palate & then pop it
- Hold the tongue in mid-air ( not resting on the lip or teeth). Tighten and relax the tongue
- Puff out the cheeks while keeping the lips sealed
- Make a big smile. Relax and repeat
- Chew crunchy foods

### **Sensory Activities:**

- Finger painting
- Guess that texture(Put few objects in a box and feel)
- Shadow play
- Upside down ball toss
- 100 seconds of spinning

- Listen 100 seconds of calming sounds
- Sounds pattern repeat: Clap, whistle or hum sets of sounds, child repeat
- Wall pushes/Hand squeezes/Animal walk races,etc.

**Self-regulation Activities:**

- Fun breathing
- Chanting Omm
- Scent guess
- Making Monster face
- Hide and seek game
- Freeze dance
- Hand clapping games
- Musical chairs

Hopefully, the above information can help parents and caregivers of kids with ASD and other developmental disorders during this tough time. Stay safe, everyone!

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