



STARFISH PLUS

**Intensive Therapeutic Service
Child and Adolescent Learning Disabilities
Springwood
Blithemeadow Court
Sprowston
Norwich
NR7 8PU**

Top tips:

Everything is changing and it's really hard for us to adapt to this so fast and keep up with the latest advice.

What we do know is that there are some things that are really important for us and our families. Doing these things might take a bit of extra planning and thought but they will have positive benefits. Here are some ideas for our children during this time:

- Think about your everyday routine and all the key parts of this. Keep things as similar as you can. Key things can and should remain the same; getting dressed (if possible), cleaning teeth, meal times and bed times all need to happen at the same time each day. Think ahead about the types of activities you can do and make sure there are lots of different ideas; sensory, physical, calming, regulating etc. Be prepared- empty the garage to use, get the garden ready.
- Create a daily timetable (in a way that works for you and your child) and plan the day ahead. Keep the key parts the same (meal times etc.) and add in the activities you can do throughout the day. There are some really good links to activities and ideas. Predictability and routine are even more important now. We can help with timetables and produce these for you.
- Remember to include exercise, physical movement and sensory activities every day and more than once a day. We know that these things are very beneficial. This could be in the garden on the swing, dancing videos or bouncing on a gym ball. If this is something that your child doesn't usually do at home (but we know for example they do it at school) keep trying. It might take a while for it to become their "new routine" – show them, model it and in time they might join in. Be creative about how to do

this- set up games in the garden, hide and seek, treasure hunts around the house. Remember we are creating a “new routine” and it takes time.

- Include activities and things which we know are good for our own and our children’s mental health. This will of course vary for everyone but make sure each day has things in it which make us feel good. This could be having a bath, mindfulness, colouring in, hiding under a blanket or in a dark tent, being squashed or watching the same clips or videos over and over.
- Connect with each other- in times of change and anxiety we can forget to connect and now this is even more important than ever. Play a game, have tickles and cuddles, use intensive interaction- any moments you can create for closeness and connectedness are so valuable. Celebrate good news! Together with your child, talk, repeat, re-live and tell others what has been fun, what made you laugh and what you enjoyed.
- Consider carefully the information we share. The media and news coverage is constant, changing and anxiety provoking. Consider one or two concrete messages to share each day and ensure that we share this consistently and in the same way. Share information that is factual and that we can explain e.g. “schools are closed” as opposed to speculation. We always talk about using “positive language” (such as letting young people know what they can do as opposed to what they can not to). Explain what we can do to stay healthy rather than what the risks are. Avoid language that is; uncertain, doesn’t make sense and is confusing. Try and focus on this when the radio is on or there is an announcement from parliament. Ask yourselves: What are the key messages? What do I know for certain and what can I explain in a factual and concrete way? Be prepared to talk to family, friends and support networks to decide how best to communicate to your child.
- Think carefully about how we share information; what do we look like? How do our voices sound? Try really hard (even though we know it’s very tough!) to explain things in a way that doesn’t make our children feel more anxious.
- Keep messages and explanations about what is happening and what we know clear and consistent. Try also to think about what is different from our everyday lives and explain why this is to our children. For example; why have we not seen Granddad? Why can we not hear cars driving past? Not knowing and

not being able to tell people you don't know can be really scary. Remember to be clear and focused on the things we can do and what is possible currently.

- Consider setting up networks and ways of supporting each other. Other families may have found a brilliant exercise video or a way of explaining things that is really helpful- there are many useful groups already online.

With many thanks to the parents who helped us to develop this