

## SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS DURING THE LOCKDOWN



It has been a very challenging time for parents to care for children at home during the lockdown and for those with children with special educational needs, it is often even more difficult.

Schools will be working hard to ensure work is set appropriately and to keep in touch with parents, particularly those with children with special needs, so that they are supported to retain and to practice the skills they have been learning. There are also other ways in which parents can help their children.

Although children with special needs will always have unique needs, to establish a basic support structure ask yourselves questions such as:

- Is your child eating well and healthily, getting enough exercise and enough sleep at night?
- Despite the current situation, are you managing to spend some quality time with your child when you can give them undivided attention?
- Try to note when your child struggles the most or displays unwanted behaviours. At the end of the day when he/she is tired? Try creating a behaviour chart that helps monitor the times when your child finds cooperating most difficult. Knowing when

your child is likely to become more difficult, enables you and him/her to plan to enjoy the times which feel good for both of you.

- Does he/she enjoy completing tasks with you? Can you find hobbies that stimulate his/her curiosity, concentration and involvement? Consider whether your child is sufficiently inspired by what he/she is doing.

By understanding the nature of your child's needs you can begin to structure support, goals and parameters that will help you both manage this situation.

- You can help your child achieve improved focus and results in learning at home by empowering him/her by setting personal expectations for them – start with simply attainable goals to give them a sense of pride in their achievement.
- By channelling natural interests that inspire your child to concentrate and use his/her energies creatively, you can help them develop the ability to commit to educational challenges for short periods of time.
- Create opportunities for your child to take responsibility for tasks at home – perhaps with a list of 'fun tasks' (or chores if they are able) for the day as this builds a sense of pride and achievement.
- Break instructions down into clear and understandable chunks – children disengage when instructions are too long or expressed in dull tones. You could even create a visual breakdown to represent each instruction for a task, such as a string of illustrations or photos to picture how to follow through a recipe.
- Inspire your child to learn specific skills or a new skill which build self-confidence – parents may be able to encourage new skills while schools are focused on delivering more curriculum-based study. Think about making learning fun.

### **Praise and Encouragement**

- All children need to feel valued for what they do well, and not just told off for what they do wrong, especially if their special needs manifest themselves in disruptive behaviours. It will help minimise unwanted behaviour by showing you respect and appreciate all the good things that your children can do well to please you and to feel proud themselves.
- So do provide lots of positive, descriptive praise for what your child does well – this enables your child to believe that you notice and appreciate the efforts he/she has made.
- More than ever, it's important to give individual time to engage in meaningful conversations – children who do not feel confident in listening and responding retreat into short yes or no answers.

### **And two final tips!**

- Try not to blame your child with special needs in front of other children you may have, or to give the impression that you give special attention to this child. It is essential that all your children feel valued and equally respected.
- Talk to your child's teacher via email about how you're trying to support him/her at home, and explain the strategies that you may be using to support your child. Monitor their child's progress and ensure that you continue to bolster confidence and self-esteem. You may find that they are able to settle down once they

get used to the routine and even be able to employ strategies you have developed together through this crisis going forward.