

Autism Friendly Swindon Newsletter April 2020



Introduction

We recognise that with the outbreak of Coronavirus, there are huge changes and disruption to all our daily lives, which may particularly affect people living with autism. This newsletter is intended to provide some useful information and resources to support you, and your families during this time.

Details of support available from Swindon Borough Council including how to get essential household supplies, council tax relief for vulnerable people and help accessing library services can be found at: www.swindon.gov.uk/hereforswindon.

If you are aware of any useful resources for our next Newsletter, please contact **Susan Lambert**, Public Health Team, Email: susan.lambert@swindon.gov.uk Tel: 07980 933636.

Adjusting to a new routine



The National Autistic Association suggest looking at structures, supports and new routines to help manage anxiety and keep things positive. Visual aids can be a great way to support this, encouraging independence, confidence, improve understanding and avoiding frustration. It can make communication physical and consistent, rather than fleeting and inconsistent like spoken

words can be. More information and visual aids can be found at: www.autism.org.uk. Useful information including adjusting to working at home can be found at Autism Speaks: www.autismspeaks.org/blog/working-home-developing-new-routine. Also on the Autism Speaks website are forthcoming webinars on this topic by the Autism Research Institute, including: Coronavirus Impact: Talking to Kids about Changing Schedules, Altered Plans and Disruption.

If you need help getting essential household supplies, such as food and collecting prescription medication please contact Swindon Borough Council on telephone: 01793 445500 Monday-Friday 9am-5pm, or by email: customerservices@swindon.gov.uk.

**Thank you to all our Council staff and volunteers for helping to support this
Compassionate Swindon project.**

Support services are there to help



Key services from local and national organisations, such as the National Autistic Society, Swindon Carers Centre and Swindon & Gloucester Mind are still there to support you but are likely to be via telephone or online. They are all adapting to the current situation, and looking to adapt to meet need. Here's a summary of some useful numbers or websites:

- **The National Autistic Association** have a helpline for queries. They can be contacted via email: supportercare@nas.org.uk or via a website enquiry form: www.autism.org.uk. There is currently no phone line.
- There are lots of useful tips about dealing with the Coronavirus outbreak at www.autism.org.uk/services/helplines/coronavirus/resources/tips.aspx
- **Ambitious about Autism:** For parents of autistic children, young autistic people and autistic adults which has an online forum: Talk about Autism, where you can discuss anything relating to autism: www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk
- **Swindon Carers Centre** are there to provide support, including to Parent Carers via telephone: 01793 531133 or by email: carers@swindoncarers.org.uk.
- **Swindon Special Educational Needs Families Voice.** A Parent Carers Forum for Swindon which includes latest updates on Coronavirus: www.swindonsendfamiliesvoice.org.uk.
- **IPSUM** Mental Health and Wellbeing Centre supporting Swindon and the surrounding area at: www.ipsum.care or telephone: 01793 695 405.
- **Anxiety UK** has lots of tips and guidance if you are feeling anxious, there are webinars online and a helpline. Their website is: www.anxietyuk.org.uk or helpline number is: 03444 775774.
- **Mental Health 24/7 Helpline** provided by Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership Trust, every day on: 0300 3031320. If you, or a loved one feels unsafe, at risk or unable to cope without professional mental health advice, dedicated staff will respond on the 24/7 Helpline.
- **Age UK** (www.ageuk.org.uk) has a support & advice section on their website regarding Coronavirus. For practical information and advice, call Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65
Silver Line is a free confidential helpline for older people 24 hours each day on telephone: 0800 470 80 90.

Keeping Active

It can be hard to keep ourselves active at the moment, but there are lots of free tips, advice and guidance on how to keep or get active in and around your home at website: www.sportengland.org/stayinworkout#. From Joe Wicks the Body Coach workouts, to Disney Dance-along with children, free personalised mind and body apps to Cosmic Kids Yoga, there's definitely something for everyone! You can also share your pictures and thoughts on how you are getting active online.

The Government have now published new guidance making clear that, if you're autistic or have a learning disability, you can leave your home more than once a day and travel beyond your local area if this is important to your health. If you need carers with you, they don't have to stay the two metres apart from you that is usually required by social distancing. However, it is still important to be careful and only go out when you really need to, to reduce the chance of getting ill or making others ill.



Time to Catch Up with Each Other

Many people, including some with autism, have documented how hard they find it not being able to physically meet up with friends and family due to social distancing in place at the moment, and the huge impact this has on their mental health (see www.youngminds.org.uk: Coronavirus, autism & my mental health). Some people find scheduled videocalls are a good way to keep in touch, using apps such as whatsapp, facetime and zoom. Other people find they prefer social media, and following people on Twitter or other apps, which allow interesting conversations to start and coming up with ideas to help everyone feel more connected. Whatever is best for you, letting people know how you like to stay connected is a great idea.

Help with IT

Swindon Carers is currently advertising free technical support helpline for registered carers if they are struggling with digital technologies. This service is provided by Avagio IT Services, 9am-5pm on telephone: 01249 470148 or email: helpinghand@avagio.co.uk

Creating Sensory Environments

With so much change and uncertainty at the moment, it can be important to think about our environment and making these as autistic friendly as possible. There are lots of ideas on how to do this on www.autism.org.uk, and includes looking at making calms spaces, levels of lighting, noise and smells. What about a sensory room, or a sensory corner with a seat screened off from the room? Godwin Emmons & McKendy Anderson (2005) suggested creating a sensory bag or basket, which could contain things like: a stress ball, a whistle with the pea removed, unbreakable mirror (for the person to be able to see their emotions) and scented lotions.



Sensory Stuck at Home is a public group on Facebook where people can share ideas and activities for managing sensory needs at home. Twinkl also has online free resources. Gardens can also be a great way to explore the senses, with websites such as www.rhs.org.uk providing ideas and inspiration. Many garden centres are doing online ordering of seeds and plants during the coronavirus outbreak.

Parent Carer Communities

Connect with other Parents at the National Autistic Association Online Community, where you can post questions or discuss concerns: www.autism.org.uk

Looking After Yourself

It can be easy to spend so much time looking after others, that we don't think about looking after ourselves. The charity, www.mentalhealth-uk.org has information and tips for managing your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak. On the website is the 'Stress Bucket' tool which helps understand the stressors in your life, and how to release some of that stress. Staying connected to others through phone and videocalls, talking about your worries, looking after your body, taking time to relax, looking after your sleep and keeping your mind active can all make us feel better.

Live DJ sessions have been organised through the Men's Mental Health Swindon (MMHS) charity, to try and put a smile of people's faces and lift their spirits. The Sets are streamed live via the MMHS Facebook page during April at 4pm.

www.mmhswindon.co.uk has further information and support.