



**A resource pack to support autistic students
navigate public health guidelines
during COVID-19**



The following resource pack can be used as a tool to help your students navigate the health and safety environment which has changed due to Covid-19. It will help you to:

- i) plan and prepare
- ii) communicate
- iii) support your child as they take the necessary steps

The resources included are designed to support children of different ages, aptitudes and abilities both at home, in school and in the community.

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Supporting children to navigate the Covid-19 public health guidelines: an information document

Preparation and planning

This information based document is a basic guide to some of the public health measures that have been implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic. It also helps to prepare for encountering them and breaks down the issues into manageable steps. This approach enables us to:

- 1) plan and prepare
- 2) identify steps that the child can complete
- 3) support the child as needed
- 4) build on steps

As you get to know what measures are most challenging for your child or student, you can begin to plan for how to navigate the issue.

- Identify new or difficult activities and ways to integrate them into the day
- Identify possible challenges so they can be navigated
- Routine and scheduling are often very important. Preparing for a new or challenging activity can help to make it easier
- Sensory issues can also be a stumbling block so we need to try to find ways of alleviating this. This may be through sensory breaks, gradually approaching a new task or behaviour in a phased way, or trying different approaches (e.g. different types of masks may be more or less acceptable) .

The Guidelines

Government guidelines have changed regularly since the onset of the pandemic. It can be difficult to keep up on the latest guidelines but also means that it is important to prepare and plan for any new changes which are implemented. The resources in this toolkit are designed to help this process.

Regular hand washing, social distancing, and mask wearing indoors are widely recommended to reduce the spread of the disease.

These are all behaviours that may need to be taught or at the very least prompted for many students. Communication is the first step.

1. Communicating

It is very important to communicate clearly with your student regarding new routines and changes around the virus more broadly.

- Your student's *visual schedule* can help to introduce a new activity. Use a picture or symbol for preparing and undertaking a new activity.
- Tell your student what these pictures mean.
- Creating and reading a *visual narrative* might be useful for communicating this message to your student. Make sure to include the picture used on the visual schedule in your visual narrative.
- Have your student use their visual schedule just before they get ready to undertake the new task .
- Some students will need a visual schedule to be shown to them as they start the task.
- Students will need you to let them know the task is about to start by
 - a) telling them, "It's time to....."
 - b) counting down "5, 4, 3, 2, 1" and or using a countdown strip or a timer
 - c) having them check their visual schedule.
- If your student likes to carry a distractor such as a favourite toy or a transition object that helps them ensure that it is available at all times.

2. Let's break the steps down for a new task or behaviour

Any new task or behaviour may cause a problem. It can help to break it down into small achievable steps which can then be followed one by one. An example is given below for mask wearing:

Getting ready to wear a mask:

- 1) Check my schedule
- 2) When will I have to put on my mask?
- 3) When can I take it off?
- 4) Wash my hands
- 5) Get my mask

Wearing mask:

- 6) Put mask on over ears
- 7) Ensure it covers mouth and nose
- 8) Do not touch it while wearing it
- 9) Take it off
- 10) Put it away in a clean place or dispose of it

This example identifies eleven steps but there may be others. These steps will be specific to your child and the circumstances involved. Typically, smaller steps are used for students who are having difficulty. It may be useful to gradually build through the steps before completing them all. It may also be useful to wear the mask for a short time before building it up.

3. Things to consider

If your student is having difficulties it might be a good idea to:

- pick a time of day when your student is generally settled
- make sure that your student child doesn't feel like they are missing out on something happening
- keep supports in place even when the going is good

- choose an alternative day but *always* try again
- reward for your child's best efforts such as a word of encouragement, a smile, a high five or a thumbs up.
- use your child's token board or reward
- consider a different reward if this one is not effective
- remember that all steps of the activity might not be completed on the first attempt. Practice small manageable steps with your child to help them to gradually build on their success.

4. Specific public health behaviours

Social distancing requires us to stay further apart from one another than we usually would. Social distancing may be a difficult concept for some children. It is important that we follow the guidelines but these can be different depending on the setting.

- [This social story](#) from the Middletown Centre for Autism may be useful in preparing and practicing

Mask wearing is something that was quite alien to most of us prior to the pandemic but has become a regular part of life since Covid-19. It can cause a range of difficulties around communication, sensory and other issues.

- For how to properly wear a mask, see [this resource](#) that we've created
- Use [this ASIAM template](#) to help children to recognise the face behind the mask
- It is also important to keep your mask clean. You can use [this resource for hand washing your mask](#) and [this resource for machine washing your mask](#)

Hand washing has become very important due to the virus. Building it into your student's schedule may be important. We have included a resource at the end of this pack which outlines how hand washing may be integrated into a visual schedule. You may also want to think about breaking hand washing down into small manageable steps in order to teach it to your student. What are the steps involved? Look at the example for mask wearing and above then use the template at the end of this resource pack to help you to break down the steps involved. Can you think of things that are specific to your class situation? For example, using paper towels vs bringing your own towel; a tap that is lifted to turn on the water vs one that is twisted.). However, some children may not understand why or how we have to wash our hands or may have some sensory issues.

- This video from the HSE provides simple to follow instructions on for everyone on how to [wash your hands](#).
- Many children will find hand washing difficult in terms of sensory difficulties. This video from Sensory Integration Education provides tips on [hand washing for people with Sensory Difficulties](#)

- Hand sanitiser can be dangerous. Make sure to stay safe with our [hand sanitiser safety](#) guidelines.

5. Our resources

Let's break down the Steps for Hand Washing

1. Check my schedule
2. Turn on the Tap
3. Place one hand under soap dispenser
4. Press soap dispenser with other hand
5. Rub hands together under the water
6. Dry hands with towel

This example identifies six steps but there may be others. These steps will be specific to your student and the circumstances involved. Typically, smaller steps are used for students who are having difficulty or if the activity is new to them.

Visual Schedule: Hand Washing

 <p>Turn on the Tap</p>	 <p>Get some soap</p>
 <p>Wash hands together</p>	 <p>Turn off the tap</p>
 <p>Dry hands</p>	

For further support on public health guidelines such as queuing, social distancing, following one-way systems, and bubbles and pods; click [here](#)

Staying at home

- Explaining why we must stay at home if we're sick is important and this [social narrative](#) might be helpful. It even includes colouring pictures.
- During the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, school closures occurred. While we are all hopeful that this won't be necessary again, we have linked some of the resources we created at that time here.
- It is important to communicate clearly with your students if their school closes or their class has to stay at home. This social narrative will help to explain [School Closures to children](#). It is always best to edit such resources so that they are as relevant as possible to your situation. You can use this [template](#) to create your own.
- If teenagers end up stuck at home or online school returns you can use the [Home School Survival Guide for Teenagers](#)