



**YALE CHILD
STUDY CENTER**

Where discovery inspires care

Coping during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Yale's Guide for Families with Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Dear Families,

The spread of the novel coronavirus has resulted in unprecedented changes to the daily lives of children and families. We realize these changes may be particularly challenging for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), who tend to benefit from structure and routines. As such, the Developmental Disabilities Clinics at the Yale Child Study Center has compiled autism specific resources for individuals with ASD and their families. It is our hope these resources can help provide ideas and support families as they develop new routines within their homes. We have included information related to COVID-19 and a variety of other topics. Please remember to take care of yourselves and your families!

Best,

The Developmental Disabilities Clinics at the Yale Child Study Center

II. Resources for Parents

Note to parents: It is important for parents to care for themselves, both physically and emotionally, and set realistic expectations as they assume new roles in the family (for example, working from home parent, teacher, therapists, sports coach, etc.). We highly recommend that parents, and in particular those that are raising children with special needs, find opportunities to connect with loved ones outside of the home, other parents of children with special needs, and friends, during this unprecedented time of social distancing. As you are likely aware, social distancing is better understood as physical distancing; maintaining social connections is of high importance. While each day that passes can sometimes feel like days/weeks, we encourage you to take things one day at a time. Many parents are expressing feelings of stress, guilt, shame, and worry, among other negative emotions at this time. Simultaneously, you may also be experiencing joy, humor, love, and deep connection to your loved ones. Please remember that you are not alone.

[Zero to Three](#) offers resources for parents of young children at home during the COVID-19 outbreak

The following are reviewed in more detail:

- 1) Tips on self-care
- 2) Paying attention to how you are feeling
- 3) Imaging your child's behavior as communication
- 4) Making time for self-care
- 5) Taking care of yourself (including possible activities)

In the spirit of **self-care**, there are many apps and websites offering free yoga, mindfulness, and workout classes. Some may be appropriate to participate in with your child.

At-home workouts

- [Planet Fitness](#) is offering live online classes for members as well as non-members
- [Peloton](#) is offering a 90-day free membership

Yoga

- [Yoga International](#) is offering a 30-day free membership with access to articles and instruction regarding mindfulness activities, meditation, and all levels/styles of yoga.
- [CorePower On-Demand](#) is currently offering free classes

Mindfulness

- [2000 Mindfulness](#) exercises are offered
- [Palouse Mindfulness](#) offers users free resources on learning about and practicing mindfulness
- [Calm](#) and [Headspace](#) are 2 highly reviewed and utilized mindfulness apps; however, there are many others available.
- Specific to sleep, there are [Tracks to Relax](#) guided sleep meditations

Parent groups and networks can be invaluable sources of support, guidance, and information. Here are several Connecticut-based parent groups on Facebook:

- [CT Special Needs Families and Networking Group](#)
- [Connecticut Family Support Network](#)
- [Connecticut Special Needs Network](#)
- [CT Autism Parents](#)

III. Helping Children with ASD to Understand COVID-19

Below are some resources for helping your child with autism spectrum disorder to understand the coronavirus crisis:

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS AND CARE PROVIDERS WHEN TALKING WITH CHILDREN

The American Academy of Child Psychiatry provides 14 tips for talking to children:

https://www.aacap.org/App_Themes/AACAP/Docs/latest_news/2020/Coronavirus_COVID19_Children.pdf

Children's National offers answers adults can offer to answer common questions children may ask:

<https://riseandshine.childrensnational.org/covid-19-faqs-for-kids/>

SAMSA has a downloadable publication that provides guidance for talking with children of different ages in helpful ways: <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Talking-With-Children-Tips-for-Caregivers-Parents-and-Teachers-During-Infectious-Disease-Outbreaks/PEP20-01-01-006>

The National Association of School Psychologists has guide for parents addressing talking to children and creating structure and predictability for daily life at home, available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Amharic, Korean, French, and Vietnamese:

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-%28coronavirus%29-a-parent-resource> (see right side column on page)

Autism Speaks has also provided some resources pertaining to COVID-19:

- <https://www.autismspeaks.org/news/covid-19-information-and-resources>
- <https://www.autismspeaks.org/science-news/what-should-autism-community-know-about-coronavirus-outbreak>
- <https://www.autismspeaks.org/science-news/how-handle-school-closures-and-services-your-child-autism>

Autism Society COVID-19 Toolkit:

- <https://www.autism-society.org/covid-19/>

From Duke's Center for Autism and Brain Development

- [How to talk to your child with ASD about frightening situations](#)

RESOURCES TO SHARE WITH CHILDREN

These social stories help explain the COVID virus to children with autism spectrum disorder:

- <https://theautismeducator.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Corona-Virus-Free-Printable-Updated-2-The-Autism-Educator-.pdf>
- <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/FREE-Coronavirus-COVID-19-Social-Story-5319239>
- <https://odj291dvc2f1yylma1sfkyb5-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Corona-Virus-Free-Printable-.pdf>

Duke Center for Autism and Brain Development has provided helpful resources for children with developmental disabilities, including ASD. This would be appropriate for young children as well.

- [Flu picture story](#)
- [Visual supports: Social Story about not sharing germs](#)
- [Visual supports: Hand-washing steps](#)

Additional visual supports dealing with COVID-19:

- <https://www.smores.com/udqm2-covid-19-preparedness>

This comic book from NPR may appeal to younger school age kids or kids who like picture books to calm fears about catching the virus:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>

This children's guide is appropriate for school-age children:

<https://www.livescience.com/coronavirus-kids-guide.html>

This article from PBS provides parents with language for talking to their kids and has **cool links to public television episodes** that address different aspects of health (washing hands, germs, resting when you are sick):

<https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-coronavirus?fbclid=IwAR2S4HdQIcIBKD3IMtF5I8DeasdaadUjhNhqFM38WFMgmsrNncRW8aVCU68>

Additionally, this Daniel Tiger episode - "Daniel's Very Different Day / Class Trip to the Movies" (Season 3, Episode 18) - helps children learn how to deal with change and disappointment. It is available for purchase on Amazon Prime video:

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B074V32X5F/ref=atv_dl_rdr

ACTIVITIES FOR AT HOME LEARNING WHILE SCHOOL IS OUT:

Scholastic is offering fun online learning for pre-k through grade six and beyond:

<https://classroommagazines.scholastic.com/support/learnathome.html>

This website has a very comprehensive list of companies offering free online learning while schools are closed due to COVID-19:

<http://www.amazingeducationalresources.com/>

IV. Visual Support Strategies for Families of Children with ASD during the COVID-19 Pandemic

For many children with ASD and their families, the transition from a structured daily schedule in home, school, or community programs to extended unstructured time at home is challenging. Visual supports can be a helpful way to create structure, provide guidance, and encourage independence while your child is at home. Here you'll find some different types of visual supports (with examples), strategies for using them with your child, and additional resources for creating your own visual supports.

1. **Visual schedules** are visual prompts used to help individuals predict or understand upcoming events. They show the sequence of activities that will occur using written words or images. You can use clip art, your own pictures, or written words in a list. Put the visual schedule wherever your child can see it (e.g., phone, iPad, refrigerator). Here are some examples of visual schedules for everyday activities and for teaching new skills (e.g., brushing teeth, toileting, increasing independence with cooking):



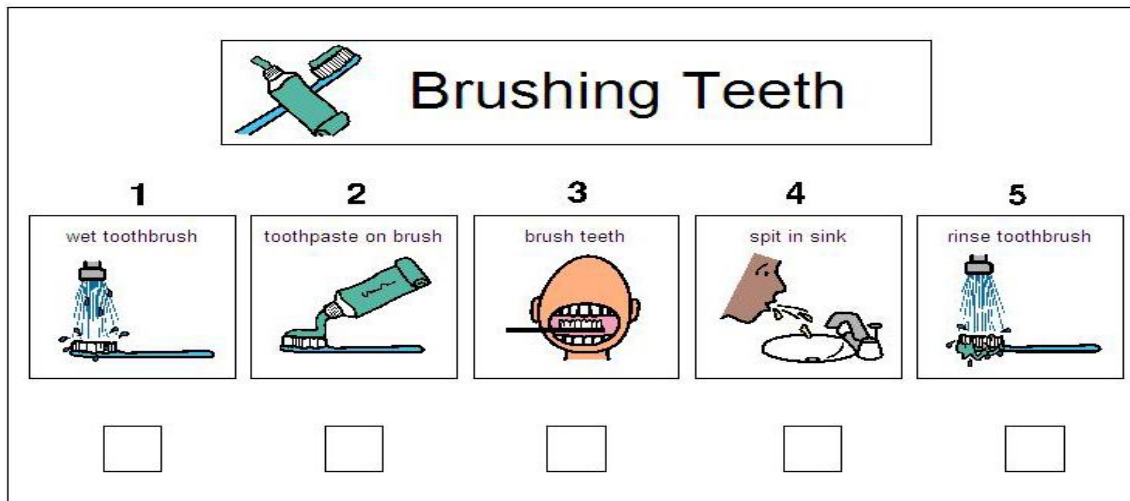
In the Home



In the Community



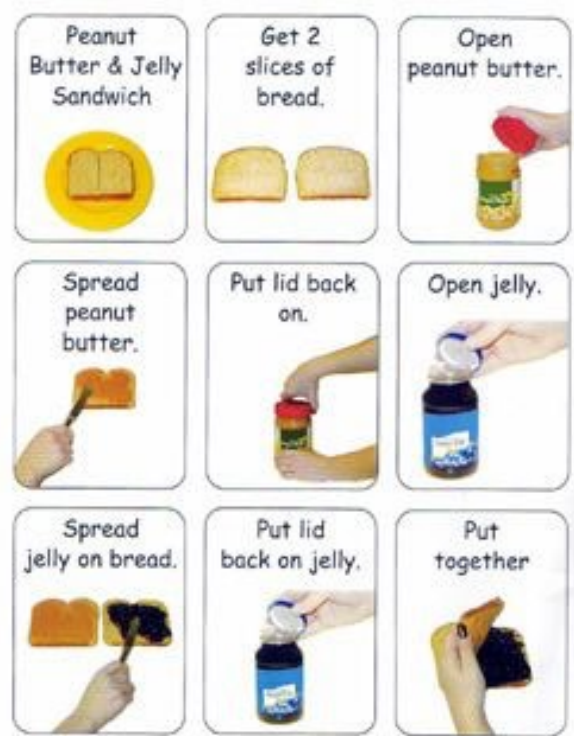
Toothbrushing



Toileting



Meal Preparation and Cooking



2. **Activity schedules** are visual schedules that use pictures or words to describe a sequence of activities to follow and engage in. They can include leisure activities, playing with toys, tasks around the house, or having a snack. Activity schedules promote independence and self-management skills.



Here are some helpful teaching strategies to keep in mind while using activity schedules:

- 1) Start with short, simple activities that your child already knows how to complete independently.
- 2) Have a binder with activities and a reinforcer (something your child really enjoys) at the end.
- 3) Start with items on a table, and work up to further distances.
- 4) Prompt (point/complete/turn page/reinforce) from behind your child.
- 5) Start with close-ended activities that have a clear start and end (e.g., puzzles).
- 6) Teach use of timer to include more open-ended activities (e.g., painting).

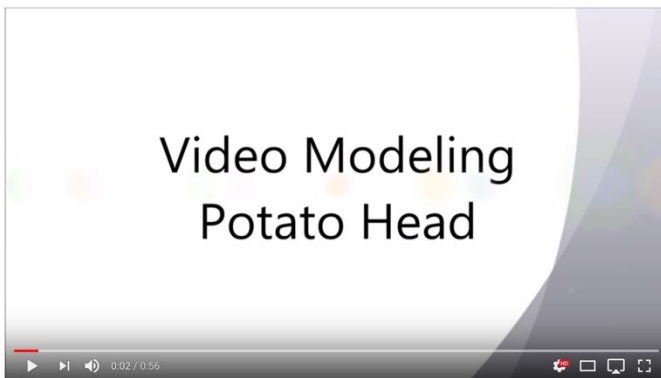


Modeling can also be a useful visual support for your child.

- **Live modeling** uses opportunities as they're naturally occurring, and you can comment on them.
- **Video modeling** uses videos to provide a visual model of various skills. These videos feature an individual with ASD, parent, or other actors going through the process of completing a task. You can also pause the video if needed for your child to perform each step before continuing on to the next step. Here are some examples:

Teaching Play Skills

Playing with Mr. Potato Head

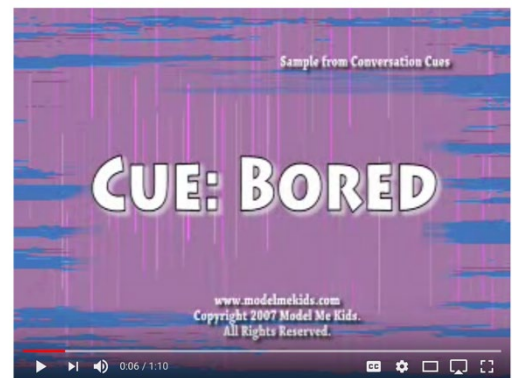


Video Modeling Play for Children with Autism - Potato Head

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BuDSiZkr1Pc>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bmz_c3z3JUJ

Teaching Social Skills

Picking up on cues that friend is bored

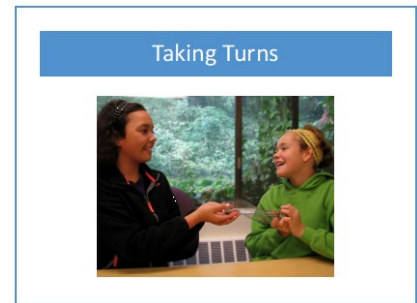


Model Me Conversation Cues™ - Video Modeling

Social stories are short descriptions of situations or activities used to clarify social expectations. They provide guidance and instructions for responding to various types of social situations, based on your child's experiences or responses to situations.

Here is some advice on building a social story for your child:

- 1) Use photos or images of events, people and places, paired with words.
- 2) Write in 1st person from your child's perspective.
- 3) Include descriptive sentences.
 - a. *The teacher likes it when I listen while she's talking.*
 - b. *The other students want the classroom to be quiet so they can learn.*
- 4) Include directive sentences.
 - a. *If I need a break, I can hold up my break card.*
 - b. *I will try to stay quiet while my teacher is talking.*
- 5) You can use this downloadable, personalized social story to get you started.
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/templates-personalized-teaching-stories>



Additional resources to help you use visual supports with your child:

Apps



iGet Cooking: Cooking Vocabulary and Create Recipe Photo Sequence Books \$2.99
<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/i-get-cooking-vocabulary-create-recipe-photo-sequence/id627533361>



iPrompts: Visual support tools \$49.99
<http://www.handholdadaptive.com/iPrompts.html>



ModelMe Kids: Teaches kids about reading different emotions. Free
<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/autism-emotion/id550027186>



First Then Visual Schedule: Visual schedules for caregivers \$9.99
<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/first-then-visual-schedule/id355527801>



Visual Schedule Planner: A visual support to ease transitions, anxiety, or who simply need a way to visually represent their day. \$14.99
<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/visual-schedule-planner/id488646282>

Other resources

- [Visual Supports and Autism Spectrum](#) Disorders from Autism Speaks
An explanation of when and why your child could benefit from different types of visual supports.
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/Visual%20Supports%20Tool%20Kit.pdf>
- [Visual Schedules: A Practical Guide for Families](#) from University of Utah
Tips and resources to create a visual schedule for your child. <https://ed-psych.utah.edu/school-psych/documents/grants/autism-training-grant/Visual-Schedules-Practical-Guide-for-Families.pdf>
- [Functional Activities for Younger and Older Students](#) from Pyramid Educational Consultants, *Some fun (and functional) activity ideas for children of varying abilities.*
<https://pecsusa.com/download/FunctionalActivitiesYoungerAndOlderStudents.pdf>
- *“Making Visual Support Work in the Home and Community: Strategies for Individuals with Autism and Asperger Syndrome”* by Jennifer L. Savner and Brenda Smith Myles
https://books.google.com/books/about/Making_Visual_Supports_Work_in_the_Home.html?id=sXLKLnzFKelC
- *“Visual Strategies for Improving Communication”* by Linda A. Hodgdon
<https://usevisualstrategies.com/visual-strategies-improving-communication/>

V. Visual Teaching Tasks

Many children with autism spectrum disorder are visual learners. They benefit from tasks being structured in a way that is visual in nature, and in which task expectations are clear. This type of structure also helps them to complete work as independently as possible.

The following pages provide some examples of visual tasks that teach a variety of skills. Feel free to borrow these ideas, or work with your child's classroom teacher to develop tasks targeting your child's specific educational goals.

There are also many websites with printable educational worksheets and "file folder tasks." Here's a website that's a great place to start, with links to free, printable file folder tasks organized by category:

<https://www.earlywood.org/Page/676>

Matching Tasks:



Match colors



Match pictures to a book



Match numbers

Sorting Tasks:



Sort by color



Sort by size



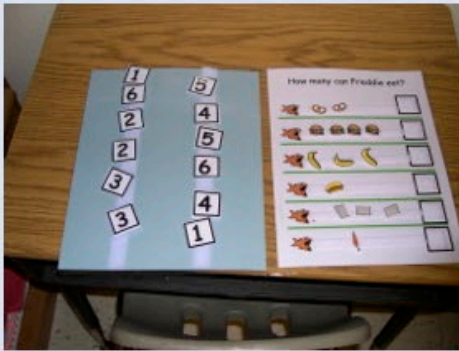
Sort by category

Play Skills Task:

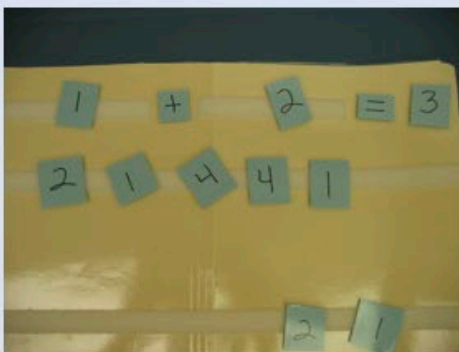


Pretend play with doctor kit

Math Tasks:



Counting



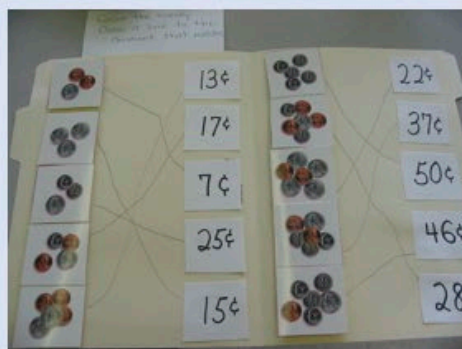
Addition and subtraction



Sequencing



Telling time



Counting change

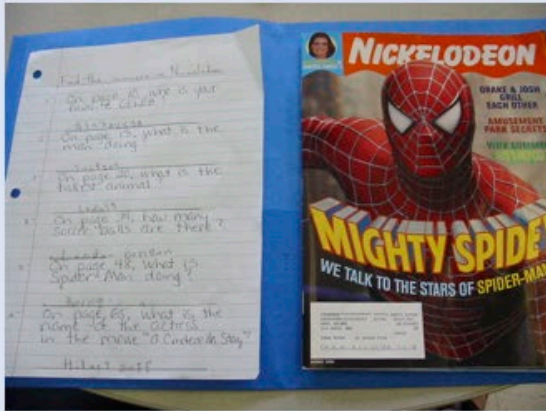
Reading and Writing Tasks:



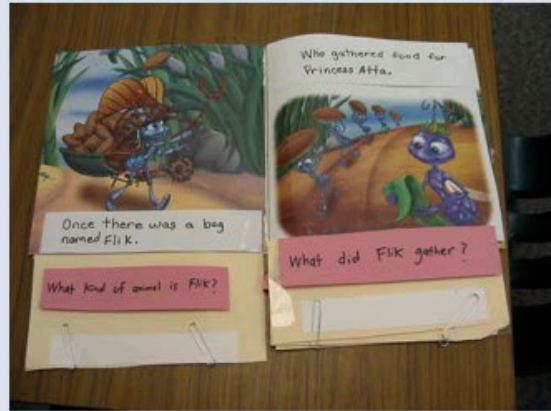
Match words to pictures



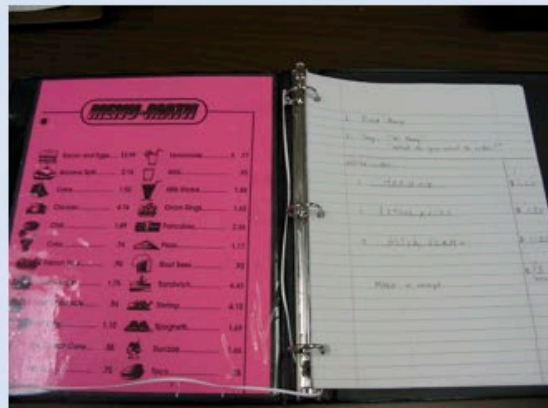
Match pictures to phrases



Reading Comprehension



Vocational Task:



Taking restaurant order

Visual-Motor Tasks:



Place blocks in slot



Clip clothespins on box



Screw nut on bolt



Slide key on keyring



Stack cubes
(and match color)



Assemble jigsaw puzzle



Roll play dough

VI. Resources for Teens with (and without) ASD during the COVID-19 Pandemic

INFORMATION ON COVID-19

There is a lot of information (and misinformation!) about coronavirus. Below, are some basic facts about coronavirus, originally published on March 14th from scientists from Harvard Medical School.

What caused coronavirus?

This coronavirus is believed to have started in animals and then passed on to humans at a live animal market in China.

Why now?

This is actually not the first time that there has been a widespread virus that started in animals and spread to humans. Another example is the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2002 that was caused by a different coronavirus. That virus eventually was contained. Doctors, scientists, and government officials are working hard to do the same with this newest coronavirus.

Can our pets get sick?

There is little evidence that domesticated pets, including dogs and cats at home, are likely to get sick from this new coronavirus, or spread the virus.

STAYING HEALTHY

- 1) Sneeze or cough into tissues (and throw them away) or sneeze or cough into your elbow. These behaviors help keep germs from traveling and making other people sick.
- 2) Try to avoid touching your mouth, eyes, and nose, which are places where the germs can enter your body.
- 3) Try to get enough sleep and eat well to help your body stay healthy.
- 4) And most importantly, WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY!

Here's the correct way to wash your hands (It may seem obvious but most of us actually don't do it correctly!):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3PmVJQUCm4E>

Here's an interesting video on how germs spread and why we should wash our hands:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5-dI74zxPg>

ADDITIONAL TIPS & REMINDERS

- Everyone is working hard to manage the virus. Do your part by washing your hands and respecting social distancing suggestions. However, it is normal to also feel nervous, scared, and confused. If you feel this way, talk to your parents or guardians.
- Stay calm! Others around you, especially younger siblings and children, may model your behavior. If you remain calm, that could help others remain calm too!
- Prepare yourself, to the best of your abilities, for changing plans. There is a good chance that trips or travels you have planned for or activities you wanted to attend have been cancelled. Continue to talk to your parents or guardians about any upcoming changes in your family plans.

The information above was taken from:

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/how-to-talk-to-teens-about-the-new-coronavirus-2020031419192>

NOW THAT YOU'RE AT HOME...

STAY ORGANIZED

- For many of us, this is the first time we've needed to do school from home. So, it's important to stay organized!
- Here are some great ways to stay organized:
 - 1) Online planners/calendars
 - <https://www.google.com/calendar/about/>
 - <https://www.canva.com/create/daily-planners/>
 - <https://www.mystudylife.com/>
 - <https://www.additudemag.com/daily-schedule-coronavirus-home-school/>
 - 2) Or get creative!
 - <https://bulletjournal.com/pages/learn>
 - <https://crazylittleprojects.com/diypplannerideas/>

STAY ENGAGED

- The next page has a great list of books, specifically for teens with autism spectrum disorder

10 Books for Teens with Autism

Non-fiction:

- 1) [The Reason I Jump: The Inner Voice of a Thirteen-Year-Old Boy with Autism](#) by Naoki Higashida
- 2) [Thinking in Pictures, Expanded Edition: My Life with Autism](#) by Temple Grandin

Fiction:

- 3) [The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time](#) by Mark Haddon
- 4) [Anything but typical](#) by Nora Raleigh Baskin
- 5) [Rain Reign](#) by Ann M. Martin
- 6) [Mockingbird](#) by Kathryn Erskine

Educational:

- 7) [The Asperkid's \(Secret\) Book of Social Rules: The Handbook of Not-So-Obvious Social Guidelines for Tweens and Teens With Asperger Syndrome](#) by Jennifer Cook O'Toole
- 8) [Uniquely Human: A Different Way of Seeing Autism](#) by Barry M. Prizant and Tom Fields
- 9) [The Autism Playbook for Teens: Imagination-Based Mindfulness Activities to Calm Yourself, Build Independence, and Connect with Others](#) by Carol Moog and Irene McHenry
- 10) [Asperger's Teens: Understanding High School for Students on the Autism Spectrum](#) by Blythe N. Grossberg

- You can also download over 300,000 e-books from the New York Public Library:
<https://www.timeout.com/newyork/news/you-can-now-download-over-300-000-books-from-the-nypl-for-free-031820>

- Audible is currently making many youth audiobooks available free of charge
<https://stories.audible.com/start-listen>

- Bored of reading? Then check out:

1) Zoo livestreams:

<https://www.thecut.com/2020/03/zoos-closed-over-coronavirus-continue-animal-live-streams.html>

2) Online Broadway shows:

<https://www.playbill.com/article/15-broadway-plays-and-musicals-you-can-watch-on-stage-from-home>

<https://www.insider.com/stream-broadway-musicals-plays-for-free-online-limited-time-coronavirus-2020-3>

3) Many streaming services are now offering free options:

<https://watch.sling.com/browse/my-tv>

<http://www.amazon.com> Prime Video

Great TV shows (including this one about individuals with disabilities):

<https://www.aetv.com/shows/the-employables>

VII. Resources for Siblings of Children with ASD during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Siblings of children with autism spectrum disorders have their own unique needs, and these needs may be heightened during this period of increased time together as a family. Here are some ways you can support your children who do not have ASD:

- 1) **Acknowledge Your Child’s Experience:** Recognize that it may be challenging for your child to have the whole family together in the same house all the time. Siblings may have numerous and complex feelings about their experience as a sibling of someone with ASD, ranging from pride and joy to guilt and frustration. Realize that these feelings may all be amplified during this time. Allow your child to express their feelings; listen openly, be supportive, and try not to judge or reprimand their honest feelings.
- 2) **Manage Expectations:**
 - a. *Expect household responsibilities from all of your children* (with or without ASD), appropriate to their developmental level. This builds skills for all children and prevents feelings of unfairness. Apps like Chore Bot (<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/allowance-chores-bot/id629797415>) can help structure and provide visual support for chores and, if appropriate, allowance.
 - b. *Encourage your typically developing child to help out as appropriate* – for example, they might play a board game with their sibling to work on turn-taking skills. However, be sure your expectations are not too high. Your child should not function as another parent or a disciplinarian.
 - c. *Expect typical sibling rivalry.* All children argue with their siblings – do not deny this “right” to your typically developing child by telling them, “You should know better.”
- 3) **Ensure Safety:** If your child with ASD has any aggressive behaviors, ensure that your family has a plan in place so that your typically developing child knows what to do if they ever feel unsafe. If you are homebound, this might mean creating a “safe space” in your home where they can go (e.g. their bedroom).
- 4) **Create One-on-One Time:** To the extent possible, try to find some one-on-one time with each of your children. Siblings of children with ASD sometimes feel they get less of their parents’ attention, so making a point to have some time dedicated just to them can be very beneficial. This could be as simple as watching a show together or playing a board game.
- 5) **Allow Private Time:** During this increased time together, you probably sometimes just long for a break. The same is likely true for your children! Allow your child to have some time to themselves to just unwind from the stressors of this unique time.
- 6) **Provide Opportunities for Social Support:** The inability to hang out with their friends during this time of social distancing may be especially isolating, so make sure you give your child opportunities to text and “see” their friends via Facetime / Zoom / Skype and other social media outlets (as appropriate for their age). For teens, you might pursue social support specifically for siblings of children with disabilities. “SibTeen” is a Facebook group where teens who have a sibling with a disability can connect: https://www.siblingsupport.org/connect-with-others-sibs/meeting_other_sibs_online/sibteen

To help your child process their feelings, there are a number of workbooks, journals, and toolkits for siblings of children with autism and other disabilities:

- *The Sibling Slam Book: What It's Really Like to Have a Brother or Sister with Special Needs* (Don Meyer)
<https://www.amazon.com/Sibling-Slam-Book-Brother-Special/dp/1890627526/>
- *A Sibling's Guide to Autism* (Autism Speaks):
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit/siblings-guide-autism>
- *Life as an Autism Sibling: A Guide for Teens* (Organization for Autism Research):
<https://researchautism.org/resources/life-as-an-autism-sibling-a-guide-for-teens/>
- *Autism, My Sibling, and Me* (Organization for Autism Research):
<https://researchautism.org/resources/autism-my-sibling-and-me/>
- *Sesame Street & Autism: The Sibling Experience*:
<https://autism.sesamestreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/SiblingGuide.pdf>

VIII. Social Games to Play as a Family

Here are some resources for finding games you can play as a family, to encourage social interaction and social skill building (and just for fun!).

- The following book is a great resource for group games, and highlights developmental skills targeted by each game:
Best New Games by Dale N. LeFevre, available on Amazon:
<https://www.amazon.com/Best-New-Games-Dale-LeFevre/dp/1450421881>
- This website has a large database of icebreaker and team-building games, and allows you to search by age-appropriateness, number of people, etc.:
<https://www.jubed.com/>
- Special Olympics has an activity guide for developing athletic and team building skills for young children:
<https://media.specialolympics.org/resources/community-building/young-athletes/young-athletes-activity-guide/YoungAthletes-Activity-Guide-Print.pdf>
- This website has great suggestions for adapting popular children's games for children with ASD:
<http://blog.stageslearning.com/blog/12-popular-games-adapted-for-children-with-autism>
- Here are some additional websites with fun group games for kids:
<https://www.activityvillage.co.uk/group-games>
<https://www.familyfuntwincities.com/indoor-games-for-kids/>
<https://kidactivities.net/games-for-small-groups-of-kids/>