

*sensation***ALL**

SC043156

transition

TOOLKIT

A must-have guide for parents/carers

2020



welcome to the transition toolkit

Inside this pack is everything you need to know to support your family during the return to school, work and post-lockdown life.

As an organisation, SensationALL is used to being flexible, adapting to change and using tailored approaches to support over 500 individuals a year who rely on our diverse service provision.

Lockdown was a time when we had to interpret new rules, deal with uncertainty, adapt to new forms of communication, new routines and cope with less structure. Our homes have been used for different purposes, while access to education and recreational activities were denied. The learning curve has been steep and the 'coronacoaster' certainly had an impact on all our emotions, self-regulation and sense of control.

These changes were extremely testing, particularly as lockdown was more prolonged and impactful than any of us initially imagined. But it's not over yet!

Returning to a 'new normal' after such a lengthy period, could be our biggest challenge yet as it brings new anxieties, uncertainties and the need for re-learning of skills and habits.

We created this Transition Toolkit following consultations with families living with a range of support needs.

While this pack has a main focus of returning to school environments, the content (based on our practices) can be used to prepare for any change that involves a new routine or situation.

Returning to school/college/place of work gives us chance to re-connect with each other, but being in group and social settings will take some getting used to again.

This kit contains practical templates and guidance to empower you to tackle any challenges that transitioning out of lockdown life may cause.

An electronic version of the toolkit and its resources is also available online at:

www.sensationall.org.uk

Thank you to Children In Need and The National Lottery Community Fund for their emergency funding to support our virtual services and enable us to produce this toolkit.

Credit also to the external sources of information (as denoted where appropriate) and to our dedicated SensationALL staff who worked hard to develop this content.



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To accompany this guide, there are a range
of **FREE** downloadable templates and
resources online at:

www.sensationall.org.uk/resources

general advice

Top tips for addressing big changes in routine or situations

Discuss & acknowledge

Communicate with your loved one about the current situation, your feelings/experiences and encourage expression of their emotions...

Their emotions are real to them, regardless what we think.

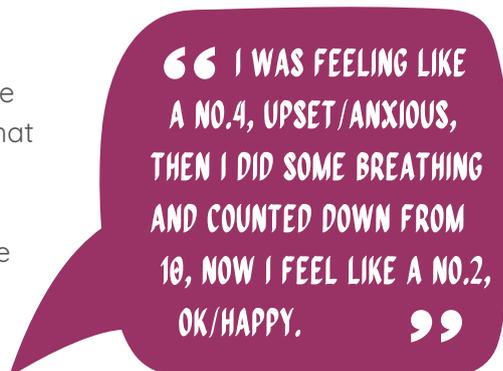
Look out for changes in behaviour that might indicate an increase in their levels or anxiety or stress.



Be a positive influence

It's important that you model a positive attitude with your language and behaviour. Practice what you preach!

Demonstrate your emotions (use a rating scale like in this pack) and openly do the coping strategies together.



Share information

Keep up to date with national and local changes in restrictions, recommendations and guidelines to so you can share clear explanations with your individual. Ensure information regarding their school/college or workplace is current and include key instructions that relate their proactive coping strategies to certain situations.

Tailor your strategy toolbox

There isn't a one size fits all approach and you may have to trial lots of different strategies before finding 'the best fit'. Include a mixture of emotional education, sensory preferences, self-regulation, anxiety management, explanations and visuals to keep it varied. Always try to tailor each one to your individual's learning style, communication level, preferences and needs.

The suggestions and strategies in this toolkit are designed promote self regulation, develop coping techniques and promote a positive approach. If you would like advice about how to personalise strategies, we can offer private consultations. We also recommend you contact the school/college/employer as soon as possible to start a dialogue about available support.

structure & change

How to adapt to the new 'normal'

Change is difficult for most of us but for those with support needs it can cause huge upset and anxiety escalating pre-existing symptoms. Many have told us they are worried about the virus, family members getting ill/dying, being in public, wearing masks and about the general lack of structure and certainty in their lives.

We recommend using visuals to explain and outline timetables and expectations of activities - making the 'obvious-obvious'! Visuals are static and consistent, not transient like language so they make expectations clear, particularly when communication is difficult. But be aware that the advance warning may heighten some individual's anxieties.

Countdown visuals are useful for processing new information especially when anxiety levels are raised.

It's going to be a shock to all our systems to have busy morning routines again in order to leave the house on time! Not many of us have continued to get up at the same time, wear work/Mon-Fri clothes or factor in commuting time for the last few months.

This page has our top tips for preparing for new routines...

Templates are in the toolkit box and on our website for social stories and visuals.

For more about creating structure, read our newsletter, available online now.

www.sensationall.org.uk/resources

2 weeks before:

- talk about positives e.g. seeing friends, teachers, choosing their lunch etc.
- make a personal passport (next page) with their input to share with teachers/employers
- practice & reinforce hygiene practices
- discuss and acknowledge their worries and emotions. Emotional rating scales are useful or books like **'Everybody Worries'**
- discuss and practice their preferred coping techniques (highlighting options for using both at home and school/college/work).

1 week before:

- create a visual timetable or social story for a typical day. (include changes re transport, staff, class/year/school, times, noise levels, peer/colleague numbers) if details are still uncertain you may have to be a little vague in order to avoid creating false expectations.
- practice the new routine - have a 'dry run' of getting ready and (as long as it doesn't confuse them) putting on uniforms/PPE to remind them how different clothes/items feel.
- look at photos or go to school/college/work and walk to the entrance/around the building.
- make a list of fun activities to do when they get home.

explaining situations

How to inform without increasing worries

Explaining situations, new experiences and changes to individuals with support needs can often reduce anxiety levels while increasing their understanding of the world around them and therefore positively impact on challenging behaviours.

However, it is crucial to introduce new information in the right way so to avoid having the opposite effect on your loved one.

Do

Be considerate of the fact that so much has changed in a relatively short period of time. Reduced social contact and more 1:1 time with parents/immediate family has become normal so transitioning back into busy social settings may take some getting used to again.

Allow for the fact that they have spent more time doing their preferred interests/activities which probably resulted in less varied stimulation, stress or information to process but offered a lot of consistency and security. This could mean that your loved one will be more resistant to adapting back to school/work routines than they were going into lockdown as we expect them to return to doing things they might think are difficult or less fun.

Encourage questions. The world is a very different place to a few months ago. There are changes in social rules, familiar environments are set out differently, expectations unclear. Talking about uncertainty and potential triggers can reduce the likelihood of meltdowns due to miscommunication, confusion, over stimulation or stress.

Be patient and understanding - it will take time for us we all adjust back to 'normal situations and everyone's timescale will differ.

Don't

Expect too much - even those of us keen to get back to some kind of 'normality' are likely to feel unsettled, unsure and unfamiliar with previous routines, relationships and expectations.

Use complicated language - *covid-19, coronavirus, pandemic, transmission rates, social distancing, PPE, furlough...* we are hearing so many new words and phrases which is particularly confusing for someone with a support need. Minimise the jargon when you talk to them and use words you know they understand that won't be intimidating.

Rush back into busy routines - we've been used to a slightly slower pace of life so it may feel like going from 0-60! Take as much time as needed to prepare for situations and re-learn previous skills that may have been forgotten.

We have provided a selection of links on our website so you can develop your own personalised social stories, visuals and strategies for new routines and explanation of different expectations www.sensationall.org.uk/resources

all about me!

Sharing of information needs to be a 2-way street!

Just as it is important to share as much detail about changes and expectations with your individual with support needs, it is crucial to share key details about your loved one's presentation with people involved in their care, education or employment.

You have probably had previous 'passports' or profiles compiled but as lockdown and all the disruption over recent months may have had an impact on your loved one (both positive and negative) it's a good idea to update the information to make sure it is accurate.

Plus, there could be significant new obstacles or transitions to take into account (starting primary school, going to secondary school, beginning work experience/employment etc.) or change (of class, staff, friend group, environment, transport etc). This is when a current passport can play an important role in assisting with support and accommodation for successful experiences.

In the toolkit box we have included a 'passport' template - more can be found on our website too.

Remember: A passport does not always need to be a visual document with pictures or symbols. Regardless of the format, it should include certain topics and 'golden nuggets' of key information that you need to share about your individual.

A focus on strengths & positives is essential! We recommend including the below things:



motivators
triggers
sensory presentation
likes/dislikes
behaviour management techniques
preferred coping strategies

top tip

Involving your individual (if appropriate) in creating the 'passport' is a great way of encouraging self-reflection and acknowledgement of their personal attributes, strengths and skills!

anxieties & worries

Coping strategies and practical techniques

Many people have experienced increased levels of worry and anxiety during the covid-19 pandemic. **THAT IS OK!** These are unprecedented times and we shouldn't feel ashamed of not coping well with the hugely unsettling situation we are in.

Anxiety can take many forms and for those with limited communication skills, you may need to look for changes in behaviour to give you clues about their feelings/emotional state...

repetitive questioning
repetitive body movements
self-stimulation activities
difficulty sleeping
separation issues
stomach aches
increased outbursts and meltdowns.

Give extra reassurance, appropriately pitched factual information and practical strategies to manage **BIG** feelings. The extensive changes that have occurred and impending ones, can make you feel 'in limbo' and even cause a constant state of anxiety and stress.

During lockdown, in our virtual groups we focused on what we can and cannot control in our lives.

Here are our easy-to-follow steps for emotional regulation:

step 1 - acknowledge emotions

Expressing emotions and feelings are very important. Start by learning what emotions are called, what they feel like and then talk about how they express theirs. Visual strategies (like the emotional rating scale in the toolkit box) are an effective way of communicating how they are feeling on a daily basis.

A list of tried & tested practical strategies by many of our service users are in the toolkit box and on our website.

Remember, personal preference is a big factor and not all might be suitable for your individual, so we suggest trialling a few to see what works for you.

You may also find our online newsletter on emotions helpful.

step 2 - gain control

Clear expectations and choices can all help to make individuals feel less stressed and anxious. As can taking a positive approach and focusing on strengths and good experiences.

We have created When I'm Not in Control (WINC) activities to help individuals regain the control they need to stay balanced.

step 3 - practice

Make coping strategies part of everyday life and routine so your loved one is used to them and feels secure in the ability to use a technique whenever they need to. Over time and with lots of reinforcement they will start to use their strategies unprompted as they become more aware of their own emotions and triggers.

sensory considerations

Coping strategies and practical techniques

During current times, for many with sensory processing issues, there are likely to be new or greater exacerbation of presentations - more avoidance of situations/experiences, frequency of variable responses, greater sensory reliance, self-stimulating behaviours or behaviours like shut-down. This will result in the need for more patience, accommodation, reassurance and reinforcement of strategies. A review of your individual's environment and experiences is also a good idea.

Self regulation is not just about keeping your emotions or behaviour in check, it is a complex system that we all tend to take for granted in our ability to control how we respond to stimulation (internal and external to ourselves).

Many individuals with support needs have difficulty in processing sensory based information, sometimes feeling hyper sensitive to or a lack of awareness of touch, sight, sound, taste/smell, movement or internal body senses. Our reactions and ability to regulate our responses to key information can be directly influenced by stress and emotional state (think of how well you cope in an emergency/following a shock, during a job interview).

We've included some sensory based strategies to trial and discover what might work for your individual (electronic versions are available at www.sensationall.org.uk/resources).

Read more about utilising a sensory approach in our online newsletter.

HOW TO DO IT:

Our ideal state to aim for is **calm & alert** – so we are ready to optimally process and respond to various stimulation from our bodies, environment and the people around us.

Being able to regulate sensory stimulation is a skill that takes time to develop! Here's how to do go about it:

Sensory ladders

Use these brilliant visual representations so individuals learn to recognise and acknowledge their state of mind and identify what they need to move towards the preferred emotional state.

Sensory activities

Choosing the right activity is crucial to either slow or 'gee-up' your sensory system. That will differ from person to person. E.g. one may need to be in the alert phase for an academic or focused task, whereas another could need to be 'lower' on the ladder, in a state of calm for clearer thinking and attention.

Sensory acts

Sensory diet, sensory break cards, safe spaces or stops, deep pressure, fidget toys can all make up your sensory based regulation strategies or toolkit. You might have to be their external regulator at this time as your individual might find it harder than normal to know or recognise when they are becoming stressed, overwhelmed or need more input to stay calm, alert and regulated. This might involve you acting on their behalf and guiding them to appropriate activities and strategies.

sleep

Improving sleep patterns for everyone

Sleep is such an intrinsic need for all humans and often it is something that individuals with support needs struggle with. But regardless of whether coping with broken sleep patterns is a new issue since lockdown or pre-existing, the impact is significant and often detrimental.

Did you know?

up to 83% of individuals with support needs have sleep challenges

Research data by Richard et al (2001)

Prolonged periods of poor sleep will have a impact on activity levels, attention span, memory, processing of information, communication, emotional regulation and behaviour (irritability, aggression, sensory reliance or repetition). Not to mention the wider implications of being unable to keep appointments, attend school/college or work, maintain healthy relationships and have a balanced lifestyle. These issues apply to the whole household, not just the individual!

Plus, there can be safety considerations to accommodate for that will require adult supervision whenever your individual is awake.

Difficulties with sleep can be caused by a variety of reasons, but it's important to pinpoint what is causing your loved one's problem before trying solutions:

- Disordered sleep patterns (night into day)
- Frequent waking during the night
- Difficulty sleeping in own bed
- Symptoms of medical conditions (e.g. pain)
- Breathing difficulties
- Medication
- Self regulation
- Sensory issues
- Perception of social rules/behaviour
- Continence
- Sensory factors (light/dark, texture/weight of bedclothes, noise etc.)

WHAT TO DO:

Use a sleep diary for a couple of weeks to identify patterns.

Create a routine - this helps our bodies create melatonin (our natural chemical that makes us feel sleepy) and reduce levels of the stimulating chemical cortisol.

Be consistent - sleep place and time should be the same every night in order to establish the routine.

Use visual schedules to explain the routine.

Have 'wind-down' time as sleep is very difficult if we are not in a relaxed state. Minimise physical activity and no screens at least an hour before.

Do some relaxation exercises - that could be bathtime (maybe with Epsom salts or a few drops of essential oil - velarium, sandalwood, chamomile, bergamot or lavender all promote sleep), do some breathing techniques or deep pressure activities together.

Keep discussions light-hearted but share emotions and worries if it will help them relax. A worry monster or a journal can help them offload and by recapping on the day's best bits or positives they will affirm successes and content state of mind.