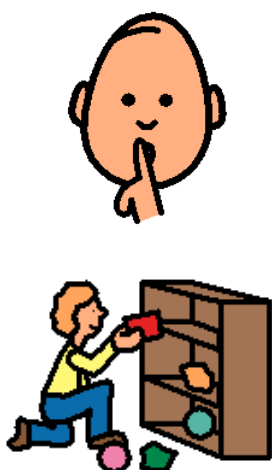


10 Steps to Creating Successful Learning Environments

As we continue to provide home-schooling, we wanted to share our “10 Steps to Creating Successful Learning Environments”, as a round-up of recommendations that have been helpful to parents/carers in these unprecedented times. However, the steps described are important in any setting, to help our students build skills across environments, situations and contexts. We recognise that every student’s needs and circumstances will be different, and this document is not intended to be a one size fits all guide. We therefore encourage communication with our Psychology and Therapy teams regarding individual differences and specific supports via our joint e-mail address: HASIR@nas.org.uk. All parents should have received communication from a key contact within the team, via this e-mail address.

If you require support implementing any of the below steps, please contact the Psychology and Therapy teams for support. If you feel you have implemented these steps already and would like support to target specific skills development or reduce specific behaviours that challenge, please do contact us.



1. Create the right physical environment

Consider the student’s needs/preferences in respect of: space, aesthetics, noise, lighting, state of repair and safety. A tidy environment supports sensory needs and reduces distractions. We would recommend ensuring that engaging/motivating items are only accessed through an adult – students are less likely to follow instruction and engage with work demands, if they can make their own fun! However, low arousal doesn’t mean no arousal! Try to have different areas for work and play. If this isn’t achievable within your environment, we can help with strategies to support your children to discriminate between times for work and play. Interested in ways to do this? Email your key contact to find out more!

2. Be aware of individual vulnerabilities

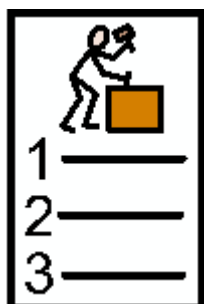
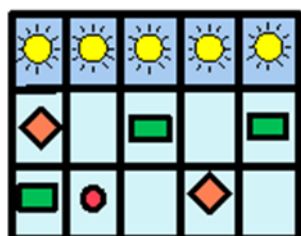
It can be helpful to support children and young people’s communication and sensory needs with similar strategies to those used within the school setting. There are lots of things that might make us more, or less, susceptible to following work demands – our mood, feeling tired, hungry, our health etc. It may be necessary to alter work demands based upon such factors. We can support with building skills such as asking for help and asking for a break for days/tasks that are more difficult.

Consider if the child or young person you support is presenting with worries related to the current situation. We may have strategies to help - contact your key contact to find out more.

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3. Build on relationships

It's easy to get bogged down with the negatives of this situation, but we are also presented with a great opportunity to build upon relationships with children and young people. Provide lots of opportunities for positive social interactions – join in their world and with what they enjoy, incorporate child-led play/interaction. Demands should be introduced slowly, at an achievable rate and always reinforced (more on that later). Building play, leisure and social skills are just as important as academic achievements!



4. Provide a predictable environment

Structure and routine is important, but be sure to consider individual differences. Involve children and young people in the creation of routines and support this visually – visual supports aid understanding and serve as a reminder throughout the day. We all use visual supports in some manner, whether it's a visual timetable, or a simple to-do list. Other reminders can also be useful e.g. using a timer, or giving warnings that an activity is about to start/end. Checking things off is also surprisingly reinforcing! Encourage children and young people to use a finish box or simply tick/cross off activities once completed. Celebrate each achievement. Be sure to also make time for and honour personalised routines, preferred activities and having fun! Finally, be mindful that many of our students find unstructured times difficult. Everyone 'relaxes' in their own unique ways and providing 'free time', without any structure or guidance, may promote uncertainty and boredom. Students may lack the skills to self-occupy, but this can be built upon. Interested in ways to do any of this? Contact your key contact to find out more!

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5. Be mindful when making demands

Some of our students will find the idea of school-work, at home, very difficult. First following the previously mentioned steps, helps to ensure good wellbeing. The next steps will also help to maintain good wellbeing.

If attempting to make demands, the following is evidenced as good practice: -

Offer choice where possible (order of activities, between activities, or between tasks within an activity e.g. you can do 5 or 7 maths questions).

Involve students' interests within the activity where possible.

Build momentum – do easy/short tasks first, then more difficult/longer tasks.

Use motivators (rewards) and only give access to them for following demands.

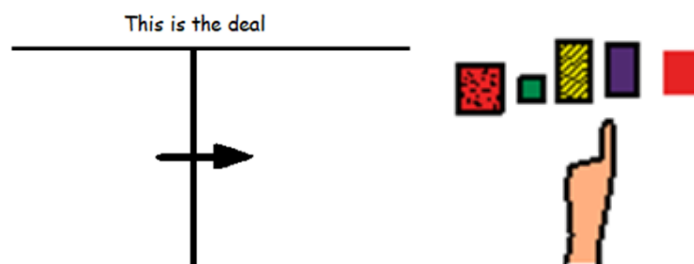
Ensure motivators and any reward system is preferred by the student, that they are time limited and sustainable.

Use less preferable motivators for tasks that require less motivation and more preferable motivators for tasks that require greater motivation.

Ensure expectations about the demand and reward are clear, e.g. first 5 maths questions, then 5 minutes in the garden.

Reward and reinforce! Try to use praise 5 times more than you provide correction.

Interested in ways to do all of this? Contact your key contact to find out more.



6. Support participation in meaningful activity

Provide access to enjoyable activities alongside the necessary tasks of everyday life. There are a wide range of virtual ways to try new things and widen both yours and the student's interests! Ensure there is a mix of joint and individual activities, as well as access to physical activities, to maintain wellbeing.



7. Support students to establish and maintain relationships with others

There is a wealth of technology available to help maintain relationships. While the virtual world is preferred by many of our students, it's important to also put boundaries around this. Remember that some of our students might be vulnerable online. Use parental controls and monitoring where necessary. Consider agreeing times/rules for use of technology.



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8. Encourage independent functioning and building of skills

Make the most of giving the child or young person you support, more time to achieve things (the school day doesn't have to start at 9 at home!). Try to reduce your level of prompting during activities your child already engages in. You could also try to build independence and skills in new areas (social, personal care, leisure etc.). At school we use contrived opportunities (set up situations) and naturalistic teaching (in the moment), as well as positive behaviour reward charts, to build and develop skills and appropriate behaviours.

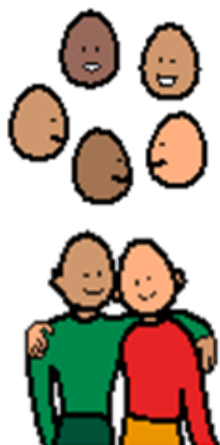
Interested in ways to do all of this? Contact your key contact to find out more!



9. Remember that behaviour is functional

Broadly speaking, everything we do is for a reason (i.e. it serves a "function"). We tend to repeat behaviours that have proven successful in meeting particular needs in the past. When trying to understand why a particular behaviour may be occurring, we would review it in relation to four function types: gaining attention (positive or negative), securing access to something tangible (a toy/activity/something done a certain way), escaping or avoiding something (work/demands), or to fulfil a sensory need/ responding to pain/discomfort. Sometimes individuals may display behaviours that challenge to meet these needs. This may be due to a lack of alternative skills, or because using more appropriate ways of meeting a need may require greater effort, take longer, get less of what they need, or is simply less successful.

If you would like to access further information in relation to this, or to seek support where necessary, contact your key contact.



10. Take time for you

To support the child or young person appropriately, you need to have a good amount of energy, be mindful, skilled and use effective management strategies. Take time out where you need it and request help and support if necessary. Through this tough time it's important to remember – we're all in this together – use your support networks, including teachers, psychology and therapy teams and many other professionals in school, still here to support.