

## Tips for Preparing Home Learning

This information document provides useful tips, to be read in conjunction with the Home Learning Strategy, to support the creation of Home Learning programmes for learners who have complex communication difficulties.

The information and suggestions have been divided into three categories to support appropriate planning. These are:

- Environment
- Structure
- Access

### Environment

Creating an environment that facilitates learning, communication and independence is a key factor in the success of Home Learning. Below are some top tips to consider during the home learning agreement stage, for creating an inclusive home environment.

- **Reduce environmental distractions**  
Some individual's sensory impairment may have underdeveloped habituation skills. This means they may not be able to ignore or block out meaningless sensory information which can create additional difficulty in concentrating or processing key information.
- **Create an optimum environment**  
This will depend on the specific needs of the individual. Some examples to consider are minimising visual clutter and avoiding busy work spaces. Present visual information against a plain, contrasting background; avoid glare from windows and avoid objects appearing in space.
- **Find the right environment to learn in**  
Where is the most suitable place for a particular activity to occur?

Is it in the living room, office or an outside space? Is the parent happy for you to suggest use of items within the room as part of the session?

- **Establish a working space**

Create a suitable set up where the learner has access to the equipment they require in an organised way. A desk lamp might be needed for additional task lighting for those with poor visual acuity. Where possible, table top work should be completed somewhere separate to other household activities, including relaxation or family time, to reduce anxiety and support learners who have difficulty with compartmentalisation.

- **Offer practical activities**

Activities that are easy to create and deliver in the home are likely to be more successful. Incorporate daily living activities around the house - this will support individuals to become more independent at home. Provide advice on specialist equipment for improving independence in the home.

- **Create a 'calm/safe' place**

It is important that we all have time to relax and feel safe, some learners will benefit from having 'a calm-down' or 'safe space' within the home, to help them establish a place to retreat to.

## Structure

During the period of undertaking home learning, learners are likely to be experiencing a wide range of emotions, some at a greater intensity than previously experienced. With usual routine and structure disrupted, individuals may be struggling to cope with this sense of uncertainty. The following suggestions are provided to help create structure to support wellbeing through home learning.

- **Establish a routine**

Help individuals and their family establishing a routine for each day with scheduled breaks for food, drink, movement, exercise and relaxation.

- **Encourage consistency**

Consistent sleep, wake up and eating patterns can support wellbeing.

- **Use a planner or calendar system**

Selecting and using an appropriate planner can help individuals gain some control over their routine. It can help learners be more independent, communicate about the day ahead and support those who have little to no concept of time, to anticipate events via structure.

- **Provide wellbeing support**

It is best to work on emotional literacy skills and coping strategies when an individual is calm. Try adding some wellbeing activities into an individual's schedule.

- **Minimise Sensory Overload**

Individuals who struggle to process sensory information from more than one sensory channel at a time will need this factoring into activities. Be aware of the individual's response time. Pause and give time for a response before stepping in.

- **Use repetition to develop memory skills**

Some activities may be repeated and developed over a period of time to develop actions and reactions.

## Access

Everyone is an individual and the specific need of a young person with a sensory impairment is unique to them. Therefore, it is **important to follow recommendations in Communication and Sensory or Therapy Assessments** and it is essential to follow an individual's communication and specialist assessments in order to tailor their activities and resources to meet their specific needs. Some other considerations to make when ensuring Home Learning is accessible are:

- **Format learning materials**

Use the correct symbolic representation, font size, colour contrast and reduced visual clutter.

- **Utilise accessibility features**

Video conferencing offers screen share features in which you can share a section of your screen to minimise visual clutter. Many devices have built in accessibility features including audio reader, voice note features, Reader View, etc, which all allow the user to amend page and font colour as well as font style and size.

For further information, please see information provided by the National Centre on Accessible Education Materials (AEM) on designing for Accessibility with POUR (Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, Robust), which can be accessed via:

<http://aem.cast.org/creating/designing-for-accessibility-pour.html>

- **Minimise disadvantages and social exclusions**

Set ground rules to prevent disadvantaging learners in a group session. Some learners might rely on lip reading or BSL. Hearing impaired learners might not be aware they need to make a sound to pop on screen for others so see them.

- **Use appropriate vocabulary**

Use words, signs and symbols the learner understands. Focus on concrete themes until language skills allow for more abstract ideas. Avoid use of stimuli which might provide incorrect clues about what's going to happen next particularly sensory objects associated with activities in college that could cause confusion and disappointment. Further reading and information can be found at *Using Clear Descriptive Language, adapted from Classroom Collaboration Laurie Hudson:*

<http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/this-that-there>

- Ensure worksheets and activities come with accessible learning instructions for example, voice notes or video instructions.

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