



INFORMATION SHEET

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Activity Ideas for Children or Adults with Severe Learning Disabilities: Part 2

We know that many families are very concerned about the impact of the changes to everyday life due to COVID-19, while many children, young people and adults with severe learning disabilities are at home more than usual.

This information sheet can help you to think about activities including developing skills, exercise and connecting with others. Part 1 of this resource covers fun, sensory and down time activities.

All our information sheets are available to download free of charge.

To enable us to continue our work [please support us](#) or donate £3 by texting CBF to 70450.

Is this resource helpful? Please spend a few minutes giving us some feedback: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/cbfresources

Everyone is different and not all activity suggestions will be appropriate for every family. You are the expert in your relative so use ideas that you think will suit your family.



Important note: some activities will be unsuitable for people who display Pica behaviour (eating inedible objects) and will need to be amended. For more information see the CBF information Pica behaviour sheet or contact the Family Support Service [here](#).

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Developing Skills

Being together more indoors is a good opportunity to look at teaching new skills. You can start with more engagement in *everyday home activities* such as:

- Helping with preparing meals, snacks or drinks
- Getting saucepans out of cupboards
- Putting washing in the machine and helping take it out
- Putting the recycling out
- Hanging out the washing
- Dusting and polishing
- Tidying and sorting



Getting your relative involved in the things that happen at home on a daily basis is a way of using 'naturally presented opportunities' to create some structure, meaningful activity, as well as teach new skills. Use those things in daily life that are naturally motivating for your relative e.g., making drinks, food or sorting.

If your relative loves a cup of tea, it may be considered unsafe for them to use a kettle or hot water tap but they can still get involved. For example: Getting a cup out; putting a tea bag in the cup; adding milk; stirring (with hand over hand support if needed).

Task analysis is all about analysing a particular task (e.g. washing hands, making a drink or food or getting dressed), by breaking it down into smaller chunks and thinking about which steps someone might need support with. There may be only one or two key steps which are stopping the person completing the task, so by teaching these steps or providing support for these steps a person can maximise their achievement and independence. The steps can be made larger or smaller depending on who the task is being analysed for.

Chaining is a successful approach for many people with severe learning disabilities, who may otherwise find it difficult to learn new skills. Chaining breaks tasks down into manageable steps.

This is an example of 'forward chaining' which starts at the beginning of the task for 'Putting on a t-shirt' and works through each step:

1. Open drawer
2. Choose a t-shirt
3. Take t-shirt out of drawer

4. Shut drawer
5. Un-fold top
6. Hold t-shirt by the bottom
7. Place t-shirt over your head
8. Put your head through the hole
9. Find the sleeves
10. Put left arm through sleeve
11. Put right arm through sleeve
12. Pull bottom of t-shirt down over stomach



Backward chaining is useful for a person who finds learning more difficult. Rather than teaching them to go through each step at a time, it can be more useful to support the person through all of the steps until the last one which they do for themselves.

For example, if putting on a jumper: physically support all of the steps but ensure that the person pulls down the jumper to waist level (the last step in the chain) and therefore complete the last step independently. When they can do this, teach the person to do the last 2 steps of the sequence, i.e. pull jumper over face and then pull down. Thank or praise them for putting on their jumper. This is a good method as the person is completing the task for themselves each time and is gradually gaining independence.

To find out more about teaching new skills please click here to see the CBF Information Sheet [Teaching New Skills](#).

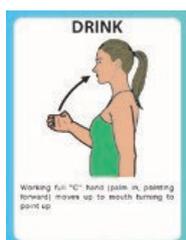
For more details, have a look at this handbook about *Person Centred Active Support*, which looks at how to actively support individuals with learning disabilities and autism to learn and develop skills:

<https://arcuk.org.uk/activesupport/files/2012/03/Active-Support-Handbook-updated-2019-1.pdf>

Work on communication skills

Time together at home provides an opportunity to work on teaching communication skills. This is particularly important if your relative is non-verbal or has very limited communication. They may resort to using behaviours described as challenging, as they are unable to communicate in a more effective way.

Communication skills can be factored into those things that happen in everyday life, teaching one (or more) of the following in the context of what is happening:



A sign



A word



Use of an object



Photo



Symbol

Teaching one of the above communication methods in the context of when 'an activity' is happening, will help to reinforce what the sign means. Using those things that help get basic needs met e.g., food, drink, activity, to express pain or distress, get an object, meeting sensory needs, for example:

- Going to the toilet
- Getting a drink
- Getting food
- Asking for an activity, game or tv programme
- Sensory needs
- To gain attention
- To leave or be removed from a place/activity, situation or person

Here are some different methods of communication that you might like to try:



Intensive Interaction

Intensive Interaction is an approach designed to help people at early levels of development, people who have severe, profound or complex learning disabilities and people who have autism.

Intensive Interaction teaches and develops interaction and communication by doing and taking part in interaction and communication (joining in or “mirroring” what your relative does). This method also supports choice making and two-way communication opportunities.

Many family carers have found that this is a great way to encourage interaction and engagement with a relative who has previously been ‘difficult to reach’ or engage. This is a link to information on our website about family carer, Jackie, using Intensive Interaction with her son Rhys:

<https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/cbf-articles/your-stories/interaction-with-rhys.html>

Below are video clips showing Intensive Interaction in action:

- Phoebe Caldwell and Olly:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhnaPJw_Wh8
- Jennifer and Lana:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgnDwRG0hXM>
- Phoebe Caldwell and Gabriel:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8wEkgOJnMU>

Signing

For some people signing is helpful and although a person’s signs may not be “textbook” signs, if they are meaningful and communicate something they should be encouraged. Signing is a fun activity that everyone can get involved in.

British Sign Language (BSL)

Dictionary - <http://www.british-sign.co.uk/british-sign-language/dictionary/1/>





Makaton

Makaton is a unique language programme that uses symbols, signs and speech to enable people to communicate.

Makaton Car Park Karaoke videos from Singing Hands UK are interactive, fun and help perfect signing skills at the same time. Here are two links suitable for different ages and different music tastes from

- pop music
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCfjV_G_x5s
- to nursery rhymes and songs:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0peZ5AN5vs8&list=PLjT4XhijakZiqAV_QjFd-8nV5CuO5Rpnz



For those who enjoy stories, click here for a signed story 'The Tiger Who Came To Tea'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwmkzeTAJ8I&list=PLGRmi0Ff2irbrrq7M0MBX4LZvpaX9pobs>

Signalong (Sign Supported Communication, focussing on 'key word' signing)

During this time Signalong are providing access to free resources to help improve signing at the same time as providing activities to do at home <http://www.signalong.org.uk/free-resources>



Read more about communicating using PECS, symbols and photos, objects of reference and communication choice boards in the Communication and Challenging Behaviour information sheet, here:

<https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/understanding-behaviour/communication-sheet.html>

Connecting with others

We know that many family carers whose relative does not live with them are likely to be unable to see each other until further advice is provided by the Government. Even though restrictions have been eased a little, it is still difficult for people to connect with family and friends during the lockdown period, however technology can help us to be closer to people. You can include calls with family and friends in your weekly routine so your relative can interact with his or her loved ones.

If you are unable to see certain family members you could:

- **Make a card and walk to the post box to post it**, rolling several activities into one by incorporating your daily exercise too!
- **Ring them** on the phone
- **Video call using Face Time, Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp or House Party** (using technology to connect will not work for everyone. Some people with severe learning disabilities may find this confusing, upsetting and too difficult to understand. It could make some people display challenging behaviours as they can't physically see their relative and feel confused or sad because they don't understand the restrictions and social distancing)



- **Use Touch Note App to create and send personalised photo postcards, birthday cards and messages** to your loved ones. This is an app you can use on a phone or tablet to upload your own photos. This could be displayed on the wall to give you something to talk about. Support workers could use this to help people keep in contact with their families. For more information click here: <https://touchnote.com/>

The CBF worked with others to produce a [Keeping in touch with Home](#) guide and the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) published a “Keeping in touch in difficult time” resource. You can find it [here](#).

As restrictions are relaxed on visiting and meeting up with friends and family, there may be a need to look at use of PPE (Personalise Protective Equipment) to help keep everyone safe (We are aware this will be difficult for some people with severe learning disabilities to tolerate).

The NHS have created information about how to make your own face mask. This could be a great way of your relative being introduced to PPE and also act as a fun, inclusive activity, with opportunities to help with choosing the material and design used. Click here for more information:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering>

For further advice on use of PPE for individuals with severe learning disabilities, take a look at our information sheet ‘People with severe learning disabilities and use of face masks’ please click here: <https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/learning-disability-assets/sldandppe.pdf>

What other families are doing during lockdown

Kate Sanger and daughter Laura have very kindly provided a couple of examples of what they are finding helpful during lockdown. Laura has a severe learning disability and doesn't understand Covid-19 and why she is unable to do the things she would usually do, like going to activities and seeing family and friends. Mum Kate explains how she has helped her daughter to gain some understanding of the changes to everyday life, whilst keeping Laura engaged, safe and active and giving her something meaningful to communicate about.

Helping Laura understand life during lockdown!



Laura's Tree of Hope



"We have created our tree together, it has made us both happy, we have laughed, been excited, we have worked hard but well together. Yes I had to spend time with Laura and engage her at the level she understands but if she didn't have that engagement or stimulation or interaction with me, the outcome would be boredom for her and this leads to behavioural issues.

Why not try to create your own tree of hope with your relative? Laura and I had a great time, we created a great memory and hope to do something else soon.

Thank-you all for listening to our story during Lockdown please stay safe everyone."

Kate & Laura x

This [video](#) is Kate and Laura talking about their 'Tree of Hope' and how this has helped Laura and her mum during lockdown. If you would like to have a go at making your own Tree of Hope, Kate can show you how to get started and the type of things you could use to get creative. Please feel free to share your own Tree of Hope with us and how your relative engaged with this. Positive stories are always great to share.



How we made Laura's Tree of Hope

We used anything we could find in house or garden as we are in lockdown, plus it is free!



The caterpillar was made from a small log sawn in to slices and painted. The legs were made using cable ties.

Laura loved helping me look for materials around the house, she became so engaged.



We made a scarecrow with material from old clothes and things we found at home.



Laura was able to choose what she wanted from selected materials. That is so important as sometimes others tend to make choices for our children/adults without asking them!



The old pinecones were lying in garden and I painted them with any nail varnish I had lying around.

I have found social stories helpful in engaging Laura as she has very poor concentration so we can pick it up and put it away, but always returning to where we left off.

She might not always understand the complete message but it certainly gives her something to communicate to others, helping her to interact and feel part of society. It adds to the happiness in her life.

Family Thought Box



Kate and Laura have also been working hard on creating a 'family thought box'. This is a great way for all family members, especially siblings of those with a learning disability, to get creative and share thoughts and feelings. Family members can post any thoughts or concerns they are experiencing during this time into the box and then as a family they can read them together.



This can be used as a safe way for all the family to express how they are feeling during lockdown. Posting your worries could help to let go of feelings of frustration, things that are upsetting you, what you are looking forward to most after restrictions are lifted. Also sharing any positives about your lockdown experiences could be useful e.g. any new skills learned or preferred activities identified. (The 'Thought Box' is best made out of cardboard)

Going out

Government guidance on outdoor activity has been updated. It now says that:

“From Monday 1 June, there are a limited number of things you will be able to do in England that you could not do before:

- spend time outdoors, including private gardens and other outdoor spaces, in groups of up to six people from different households, following social distancing guidelines
- visit garden centres, the beach and outdoor markets
- in line with the arrangements made by your school, send your child to school or nursery if they are in early years, reception, year 1 or year 6, if you could not before

The government “advised individuals with very specific medical conditions to shield until the end of June and to do everything they can to stay at home. From 1st June 2020, those shielding may wish to consider spending time outdoors once a day. This can be with members of their own household or, for those shielding alone, with one person from another household.”

If you and your loved one wish to spend time outdoors, you should always take extra care to minimise contact with others by keeping 2 metres apart if this is possible. For many people with severe learning disabilities social distancing rules may be hard or impossible to follow. The important thing is to try to socially distance from people who are not in your household, with the added exception of paid or voluntary care staff and family carers who are able to see their relative.

The guidance is available on the government website [here](#) and we will continue to update our FAQs [here](#).

To make the most of your time outdoors, think about where you can go that will give your relative the most freedom to move around or play. As we are now able to venture further afield and access more open spaces it could help to do some research and plan to visit areas you have not been to or have been unable to access. Your relative could get involved in choosing where you go next.

It could be helpful to avoid outdoor places where restrictions on using equipment and facilities are still in place e.g., play areas in parks which are closed, as this may be difficult for your relative to understand.

Keeping Active

If your personal situation and the Government guidance (above and regarding shielding vulnerable people) allows you to, do make the most of the opportunity to go out and exercise. When at home, it is also important to try and remain active and to help your relative channel their energy into activity they enjoy.

Here are some ideas for exercises you might want to try:

- **Bouncing or jumping** - using a trampoline, a pogo stick or big exercise ball if you have one
- **Online exercise** classes
- **Make up your own exercises** in line with your relative's abilities
- **Create an indoor obstacle course** out of pillows, toys and furniture.
- **Or an outdoor obstacle course** if you have a garden. Use whatever you have: chalk marks on the ground to run around, objects to weave around or jump over, a ball to kick around, a bucket to throw a ball into (or laid on its side, to kick a ball into).
- **Have your own disco at home!** Music is a great way to de-stress - singing, dancing or both. Dancing is a functional activity that is a great way to exercise and burn off excessive energy but can also help a person to 'self-regulate' and meet some sensory needs. It will increase the feel-good hormones and help promote feelings of happiness (for you and your relative!).
- **Link up with others to dance.** There are many apps you can use to 'have a virtual party' e.g. House Party, Zoom, WhatsApp, that enable you to link up with others on video calls.



Try any dance style or form of exercise from around the world by choosing free video classes on YouTube. The following links are not recommendations by the CBF, just some ideas of the kind of dances or exercise you might like to try:



- This is a link to an exercise video with music for people with learning disabilities <http://www.affinitytrust.org/what-we-do/opportunities-services/score-community-opportunities/fitness-and-exercise-for-people-with-learning-disabilities/>
- Five minute (ish) African Dance Lesson <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ewqg-3xJFdI>



- Bollywood Dance Class https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5M6AF_3lcI
- Muve dance workshop <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juSiKMo8Ocw>

External resources and links may support some of the activities we have set out in this information sheet. They are not recommended or endorsed by the Challenging Behaviour Foundation but are included where we feel they may be of interest for family carers.

Reviewed 20/01/2021

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation

We are a registered UK charity specifically focussed on the needs of children, young people and adults with severe learning disabilities whose behaviour challenges, and their families. We will make a difference to the lives of people with severe learning disabilities, whose behaviour challenges, and their families by:

- Championing their rights
- Ensuring timely information and support
- Raising awareness and understanding
- Promoting and sharing best practice

To access our information and support, call 01634 838739, email info@theCBF.org.uk or visit our website: <https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk>