

Suggestions for managing additional time spent in the home

Over the next few days and weeks families might find they are spending more and more time together. For families that include an autistic child this might lead to some challenges relating to changes in familiar routines as the pattern of a predictable day/week is disrupted.

Dr Jude Mortell, our Head of Integrated Services, has put together some information, advice and guidance for families to see them through what might be a difficult time.

Draw up a family agreement

Try and prevent issues from arising by having a family meeting to:

- Discuss concerns about quarantine/ isolation
- Discuss what will be the biggest challenges for each family member
- Talk about each other's strengths and how they can be used to help each other out
- Discuss expectations of each other
- Plan how best to make the most of the positives and minimise the impact of the negatives.

Set up a structure for the day

Having a routine is helpful for maintaining well-being, but it need not be overly strict. It might be helpful to:

- Agree expectations for being up, dressed and having eaten breakfast
- Develop a schedule to ensure a good balance of activities are achieved each day
- Agree a bedtime – this will be supported by setting and sticking to a fixed waking time.

Set and achieve daily goals

Everyone in the family will benefit from feeling as though something has been accomplished each day. This can include working from home/ home learning or completing long-avoided chores, repairs or tasks. Don't forget to include goals like watching a movie or playing games together.

Give each other space

It can be challenging for families who are used to going off to do their own activities to be forced together for an extended period of time:

- Try and create zones or spaces in your home for each family member to retreat to, undisturbed
- While time alone is important, so is positive time together. Seek to create times each day to come together (for example meal times). This can be built into the day's schedule.

Exercise

Being active helps to boost mood. Family members are likely to feel frustrated and bored if they are inactive:

- Current advice is that people can go outside for fresh air and exercise, keeping a distance of 6 feet (the distance of a tall person) between people. Scheduling an hour's walk each day is recommended.
- If advice changes and we are asked to remain inside, there are lots of YouTube videos to guide you through home exercise and physical activities.

Keep in touch with others

A critical component of well being is feeling connected to others:

- Connecting with friends and family will be critical for all members of the family. Phone calls and social media can enable us to do this remotely. If you have family members who are not skilled/ able to do this independently, make sure you facilitate contact for them.
- A sense of well being is also achieved from helping and supporting others. Reaching out to others to make sure they are OK and to offer support will support both parties.