

# Autism Spectrum Disorder: NETWORK NEWS

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In light of the current world health circumstances and province-wide school closures, the Centre of Excellence for Autism Spectrum Disorder (CoE-ASD) has put together a set of activities that you can do with your child at home. The activities are grouped by developmental domain and sequenced by level of difficulty. Feel free to pick and choose the tasks that are most appropriate for your child and the resources that you have available in your home. It is worth noting that you can select activities with varying degrees of complexity depending on your child's skill level in the different learning spheres. For instance, you might choose activities from the *Beginner* column for Communication and Social/Emotional domains, and from the *Intermediate* column for Hygiene & Personal Care. There is no right or wrong way to proceed as these are simply suggestions for having fun and staying active. Be sure to check the [Centre of Excellence webpage](#) every two weeks for new resources and activity ideas!

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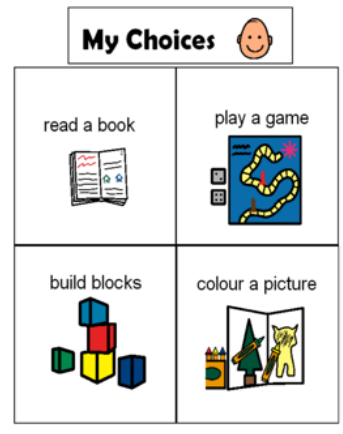
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## BEHAVIOUR TIP

Recess, lunch, free class time, Spring Break or winter holidays are usually considered enjoyable times where students engage in preferred leisure activities. However, these unstructured periods can be overwhelming for students with autism. The lack of predictability, as well as possible increases in both social demands and sensory stimulation can be challenging to navigate. All of these factors can lead to students engaging in negative or problematic behaviors. Providing some structure during these unstructured times can be very beneficial in reducing stress for our students with ASD.

Try using a [visual choice board](#) during unstructured times. A choice board allows the student to know what activities are available and gives them the opportunity to independently choose what they would like to do. Choice boards should provide a minimum of two options for the student to choose from. Fill the choice board with activities you already know the student likes to pursue - after all free time is meant to be relaxing and enjoyable!



During these times of uncertainty and lack of structure or routine, it is important to get some learning in while having fun! A *natural teaching environment* (NET) is a way of teaching or generalizing skills within a natural environment (e.g., at home or at the park). The best way to incorporate NET is by using activities and toys that motivate the child. The use of intrinsically motivating activities/toys significantly increases the likelihood of the child wanting to participate. An example would be playing at a table with playdoh. This would be a great opportunity to practice labeling or categorization by having the child ask for specific colors or specific shapes that you have created while also working on eye contact when exchanging the items. It is important to take these opportunities to teach and generalize these skills so that our students can then apply them in different settings. So, get messy and have fun with it! NET can be done in a more spontaneous way!

## Supporting your Child at Home

During long periods of time at home many children only want to engage in highly motivating activities such as playing video games or watching YouTube videos. It may be a struggle to move your child away from these activities to complete necessary tasks or other activities.

A very helpful visual support is the use of the *First/Then* strategy. This is an easy to implement strategy to assist your child in completing an activity or task that is not very motivating. A First/Then card visually shows your child the non-preferred activity that needs to be completed and then clearly represents the preferred activity or item that your child will have access to immediately after finishing the task. An easy way to accomplish this is to take pictures using your phone. Google photos allows you to create a collage so both photos can appear on the same screen (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=STpB4GpOzw4>). If you would like your child to complete a task such as getting dressed or making their bed, the picture should show what the completed tasks looks like by taking a picture of the made bed or your child already dressed. As a parent, you will need to decide how much assistance your child will require to complete the task. Once they have completed the task, immediately allow them access to the preferred activity. A timer may be useful to show your child how much time they have with their preferred activity so that you can later transition them to a different task. For more detailed information about this strategy follow the links below:

<https://www.erinoakkids.ca/ErinoakKids/files/f9/f9e82917-4dc7-40ca-901e-3a27591b2c0a.pdf>

<https://childrensautism.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/first-then.pdf>

### ASD TEAM MEMBERS

**NATHALIE ALLAIN**  
Consultant for  
Inclusive Education

**DR. ANDREW BENNETT**  
Psychologist/Coordinator

**JENNIFER BOOTH**  
Consultant for Autism

**PATTY CLORAN**  
ASD Coordinator/Consultant

**KATIE COHENE, PhD**  
Consultant for Autism

**SABRINA GABRIELE**  
Consultant for Autism

**JADE LAWSANE**  
Consultant for Autism

**ILANA LOGGIA**  
Consultant for Autism

**HELENE PACKMAN**  
Speech & Language  
Pathologist

**DR. AMIRA RAHMAN**  
Psychologist



### Tips from LBPSB OTs on Ways to Meet the Sensory Needs of Your Child at Home

Having to change our daily schedule and adapt to this new reality has been very challenging for all of us. For children with sensory difficulties, this new lifestyle of staying home can be very overwhelming and difficult. Here are some tips that may help to balance your child's day. Try to incorporate the following activities into your child's schedule so as to support their self-regulation: (a) heavy work activities, (b) physical activities, (c) relaxing activities, and (d) time in a quiet space.

Heavy work can be moving furniture (e.g., pushing in kitchen chairs), rolling out recycling bins, carrying laundry bins, cleaning up books, making the bed, dusting, etc. Physical activities can include rolling on a mat, structured jumping or hopping, and practicing yoga poses. Both heavy work and physical activity are of great assistance to all children in calming down.

Relaxing times and calming activities should be a part of your child's daily schedule. Activities like blowing bubbles or other similar activities can assist with deep breathing and are quite calming. Some children may find eating crunchy or chewy food or drinking from a straw relaxing as well. Creating a quiet and calming corner with cushions and books may help reduce the child's anxiety and prevent *sensory overload*. You can also create a scheduled *quiet time* at home, where all family members take a break and are quiet. If your child has a pair of noise-canceling headphones at home, he/she may use them during this time. However, please remember that the headphones normally should only be used during loud times and for durations of 20 minutes or less.