

Supporting All Learners: Resources for Families and Caregivers of Children with Special Needs

Having an extended break from school can be challenging for parents, caregivers, and children—especially when you're not prepared for it. A sudden change in schedule and disrupted routines is even more challenging for students who thrive on consistency and predictability. Many of our students with autism spectrum disorder and other development delays also require specially designed instruction to support their educational needs and daily functioning so you might be thinking "I'm not a teacher. How am I supposed to educate and entertain my child during these days off?" The truth is that while it might take some time and effort to create a new schedule and develop new routines, YOU know your child best and absolutely have the ability to not only provide a supportive and safe environment while your child is out of school, but can have fun with him/her while doing it! Below are tips and resources to consider as you plan for this time out of school. Remember, too, to take care of yourself! Just as in an airplane, you need to put on your own [oxygen mask](#) first before helping anyone else. As you consider these resources keep in mind you don't have to implement every single thing. Don't overwhelm yourself; choose 1 or 2 strategies that might work for your family and your circumstances and add as you need or can.

- [20 Things Every Parent of Kids with Special Needs Should Hear](#)
 - [Parenting in a Pandemic](#)

Supporting Daily Routines

1. Create daily routines and schedules (these assist with predictability, self-regulation, staying calm, alleviating anxiety, and help make what could be perceived as a scary situation more understandable).
 - a. Provide a visual schedule: **See Appendix A for examples.**
 - b. Consider having the same morning and evening routines.
 - c. Consider having the same lunchtime as at school.
 - d. Provide the schedule in pictures for early learners or checklists for readers.
 - e. Allow for down time as well as learning activities.
 - f. Read [Establishing Routines at Home](#) and [Maintaining Skills Over the Summer](#).
2. Prime children about the daily events.
 - a. Go over the daily schedule each morning.
 - b. Schedules can be interrupted. Review any changes in the schedule before they happen to prepare the child as much as possible.
 - c. Review the schedule throughout the day to show what is coming next

3. Design a specific area where “activity/academic” time will take place.
 - a. This will help your child learn which activities take place in which location.
 - b. Labeling the area and materials provides another way to support structure and routine.
 - c. Learning activities can be done in short increments throughout the day.
4. Set specific instructional times within the daily schedule.
 - a. Try to have materials ready in different containers/bags. This allows your child to see how many tasks he will be doing.
 - b. Vary the activities: **See Appendix B.**
 - c. Use a timer to show how long he will be working on an activity.
 - d. Use a First/ Then visual to show what the child does first and what comes after (useful for showing that something highly preferred comes after doing a less-preferred activity!)
See Appendix C.
5. Utilize [reinforcement](#).
 - a. Praise often throughout the day.
 - b. Try a token board. **See Appendix D.**
6. Create a safe spot or [peace corner](#).
 - a. Provide a specific area for calming or down time.
 - b. Provide a bucket of sensory or preferred items your child might use in the safe spot.
7. Support emotional regulation.
 - a. Communicate with your child’s teachers about words and strategies they use at school to support emotional regulation.
 - b. Utilize social narratives to provide information about topics that might cause anxiety.
See Appendix E for examples.
8. Schedule in down time /play time.
 - a. Create a down time list your child can choose from. Sometimes children aren’t aware of the options that are available!
 - b. Include favorite activities.
 - c. Consider introducing new leisure activities. **See Appendix F.**
9. Use screen time wisely.
 - a. Watching movies and favorite shows will be inevitable. However, be sure to include time in the schedule for educational screen-based activities. (Note this on the visual schedule or use the “First/Then” visual).
 - b. Try one of the many free educational on-line resources that are available! See list below.
10. Keep the main thing the “MAIN THING”. FAMILY, SAFETY, EMOTIONAL and PHYSICAL HEALTH #1.
11. Enjoy this time with your child and family. Allow yourself some grace as you create this new temporary normal in the weeks ahead.

Online Resources

Emotional Regulation

- [Helping Children Cope with Stress During the 2019-nCoV Outbreak](#)
- [Talking to Children About COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\): A Parent Resource](#)
- [Talking With Children: Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers During Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#)

Fine Motor

- [Occupational and Physical Therapy Home Program Activities](#)

Gross Motor

- [Get Moving Today Activity Calendar](#)
- [Little Twisters Yoga and Emotional Wellness](#)
- [Occupational and Physical Therapy Home Program Activities](#)

Math

- [Free Resources for Students to Practice at Home](#)
- [Addition practice-Robin's Nest Free activity.](#)
- [Learning at Home During Coronavirus School Closures](#)
- [Scholastic Learn at Home](#)

Reading

- [Between the Lions Early Reading](#)
- [Dog on a Log books](#) (free phonics and dyslexia printables for learning to read)
- [Free Resources for Students to Practice at Home](#)
- [Learning at Home During Coronavirus School Closures](#)
- [Reading A-Z](#)
- [Scholastic Learn at Home](#)
- [Storyline Online](#)
- [StoryPlace](#)
- [TarHeelReader](#) See [TASN Resource for implementation support](#)

Science/Social Studies

- [Maker Stations Home Pack](#)
- [Scholastic Learn at Home](#)

School Closure Resource Lists and Articles

- [Here's the Entire List of Education Companies Offering Free Subscriptions Due to School Closings](#)
- [School Closure Autism Toolkit](#)
- [Staying Structured and Engaged During this Challenging Time](#) Autism Society of North Carolina

Sensory

- [And Next Comes L](#)
- [Occupational and Physical Therapy Home Program Activities](#)

Speech and Language Activities

- [FREE activities to motivate and engage children to learn speech, language, and communication skills.](#)
- [Free resources for speech and language activities. \(sign up for free newsletter and get password\)](#)
- [11 Free Speech Therapy Materials](#)
- [For Caregivers of AAC Users: Three Things to do at Home When School is Cancelled](#)
- [Have More Fun](#) (Speech articulation games)
- [PrAACtical AAC](#)
- [Tongue Twisters](#)
- [Speech and Language Apps for kids](#)

Virtual Learning Opportunities

- [A Week of Awesome Afternoon Activities](#)
- [Chrome Music Lab](#)
- [Funbrain](#)
- [Lunchdoodles with Mo Willems](#)
- [150+ Educational Shows on Netflix](#)
- [Over 30 Virtual Field Trips with Links](#)
- [Scholastic](#)
- [Stuck at home? These 12 famous museums offer virtual tours you can take on your couch](#)

Other

- [Cover your Cough Video](#)
- [How to Keep Up Healthy Routines](#)
- [How School Closures Can Strengthen Your Family](#) from The Greater Good Magazine
- [Three Ways to Boost Your Resilience as a Parent](#) from The Greater Good Magazine
- [Infinitic: Home Resources for Families](#)
- Spectrum Internet: Call 1-844-488-8398 for free internet (2 months) during the shutdown. Also consider calling your local internet some are offering discounts or free access for a few months.

Appendix A

Visual Schedule Examples

EXAMPLE OF A CHECKLIST

- Eat breakfast
- Review the days' schedule
- Brush Teeth
- Get Dressed
- Listen to online book or read social story
- Activity at table
- Movement/sensory time
- Choice activity
- Educational Screen time
- Play break
- Lunch
- Chore time
- Rest/Quiet Time (movie time)
- Activity at Table
- Movement/Sensory Activity
- Choice Activity OR Art Activity
- Educational Screen Time
- Outside Walk the block
- Play Break
- Dinner



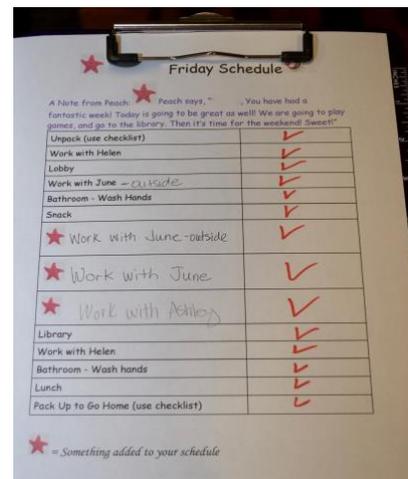
<http://woodallkids.org/a-spectacular-at-home-visual-schedule/>

Before 9:00am	Wake up	Eat breakfast, make your bed, get dressed, put PJs in laundry
9:00-10:00	Morning walk	Family walk with the dog. You & it's friends.
10:00-11:00	Academic time	NO ELECTRONICS Sudoku books, flash cards, study guide, Journal
11:00-12:00	Creative time	Legos, magazines, drawing, crafting, play music, cook or bake, etc
12:00	Lunch	
12:30PM	Chore time	A- wipe all kitchen tables and chairs B- wipe all floor handles, light switches, and door knobs C- wipe both bathroom- sinks and toilet
1:00-2:30	Quiet time	Reading, puzzles, nap
2:30-4:00	Academic time	ELECTRONICS OK iPad games, Prolog, Educational show
4:00-5:00	Afternoon fresh air	Bikes, Walk the dog, play outside
5:00-6:00	Dinner	
6:00-8:00	Free TV time	Kid showers x3
8:00	Bedtime	All kids
9:00PM	Bedtime	All kids who follow the daily schedule & don't fight

<https://www.facebook.com/.../a.1015272857.../10156740579012536/>

Visual Schedule Resources

- [Boardmaker](#)
- [Create Visual Supports for Your Child](#)
- [Individual Schedules](#)
- [Indiana Resource Center for Autism visual support ideas](#)
- [Printable daily home schedule](#)
- [School Closure Kit](#) (contains printable visual schedules)
- [Visual Schedule Series: Resources and Research](#)



Appendix B

Educational Activities to Consider

- If possible, collaborate with your classroom teacher as you plan for instructional time.
- Review the goals and objectives on the IEP.
- Think about your child's strengths and needs. Begin with successful activities.
- Have activities they are good at mixed with activities you might be teaching for the first time.
- Incorporate high interest activities within the instruction.
- Use positive reinforcement as often as you can. Reinforce for sitting, trying, following through, finishing, and even just staying with you.
- Yes!! We teach **math** (counting, adding, subtracting, etc.), **reading** (identifying and naming letters, letter sounds, sounding out words, reading simple words and sentences, etc.) and **writing** (copying letters, writing name, etc.) However, there are additional skills that can be targeted during this instructional time. **Some ideas** are below:
 - Imitation skills, put-in tasks, copying, matching, sorting, labeling pictures, following directions, pointing to pictures, learning how to play with toys, turn-taking, communication skills, fine motor skills (stringing beads, copying or tracing shapes, using scissors, tracing/writing letters) listening to a story, answering questions after a story, learning how to play a game, role play social skills, everyday functional skills (grooming, cooking, cleaning) and really **anything** you would like your child to learn that would support independence.
- Use items around your house – Below are examples that might elicit additional ideas:
 - **For Early Learners:** use a bowl and spoon to practice imitation, use socks to practice matching, use cans of food to give directions (examples: put on chair, put in sink, put on table), use family photo albums to point to pictures, and use cups to practice stacking. Don't be afraid to play during academic time! **Planned PLAY** is a way for us to show our early learners how to use toys, how to share, how to take-turns, etc. We know this is how our early learners acquire skills. Keep in mind some students may need specific instructions on how to play or specific modeling demonstrating the desired play skills. Other students may need full support through the movements until they acquire the skills needed.
 - **For Intermediate Learners:** practice writing family names, phone numbers, point to pictures in magazines, practice following directions around the house and consider daily living skills for such as: picking up toys, washing dishes, putting away the dishes, folding towels, etc.
 - **For Advanced Learners:** read new recipes, read a chapter of a favorite book, make an outline and draw pictures to share with the rest of the family, write letters, and consider daily living skills such as laundry, cooking, yard work, etc.
- **Don't underestimate yourself. You know your child better than anyone.**

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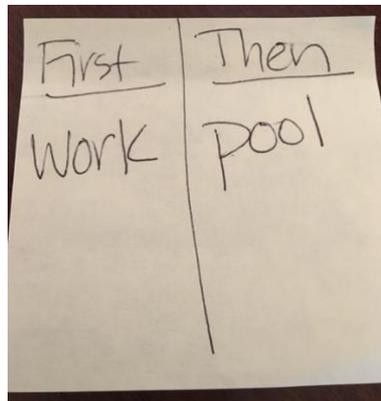
***We often ask what I can learn from this challenge.
But it's more powerful to ask what can I become.***

Twitter @Jon Gordon11, March 18, 2020

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Appendix C
First/Then Visual

First	Then



Keep it simple!

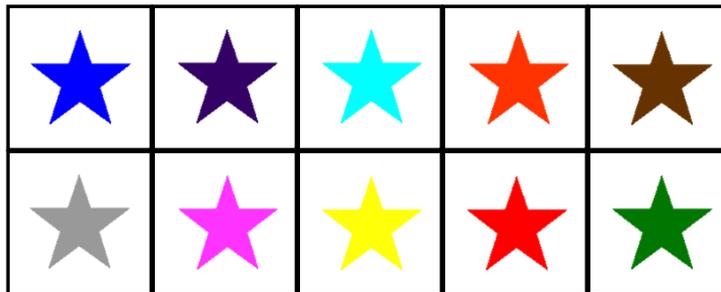
Use a sticky note.

First/Then Resources

- [Autism Classroom News and Resources](#)
- [School Closure Kit](#) (contains printable first/then visuals)

Appendix D
Token Boards

I am working for...

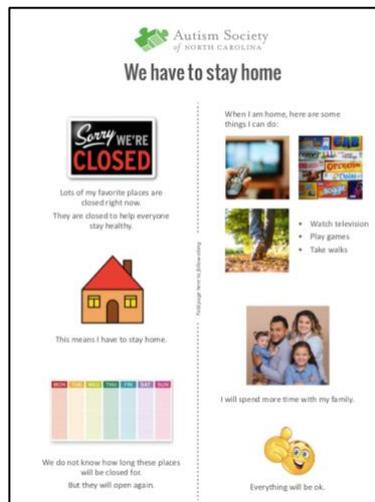


Token Board Resources

- [3 Ways to Make Positive Reinforcement Work in the Classroom](#)
- [School Closure Kit](#) (contains printable token boards)
- [Free Token Boards](#)

Appendix E SOCIAL NARRATIVE RESOURCES

- [Corona Social Story](#)
- [Coronavirus Social Story](#)
- [FREE Coronavirus/COVID-19 Social Story](#)
- [Just For Kids: A Comic Exploring the New Coronavirus](#)
- [My School is Closed \(made with icons\)](#)
- [My School is Closed \(made with photos\)](#)
- [My Story About Pandemics and the Coronavirus](#)
- [Now What FREE Coloring Book](#)
- [Now What FREE Coloring Book \(Spanish version\)](#)
- [COVID-19 Information By and For People with Disabilities](#)
- [No School Today](#)



Social Narrative Resources

- [How to Write Social Stories™ by Vanderbilt Kennedy Center](#)
- [Make A Social Story Fact Sheet](#)

Appendix F

Leisure Activities



[School Closure Kit](#) (contains ideas and pintables for leisure activities)



<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Leisure-Schedule-Board-Freebie-Autism-Special-Education-729063>

Leisure Activity Resources

Don't Forget the Leisure Skills.