

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Activity Ideas for Children or Adults with Severe Learning Disabilities: Part 1

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.

Being at home at this time will no doubt be difficult for family carers, especially when you have a relative who has a severe learning disability who is unable to understand the reasons behind the restrictions.

This information sheet can help you to think about what activities you could do to fill the time, keep your loved ones occupied and help to maintain a calm, happy household.

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.

Remember:

- Some days will be better than others
- Your relative may have a very short attention span (but it may be longer if the activity is enjoyable and meaningful)
- It might be a time to try new activities
- Activities don't have to be fully completed, it's about having some 'fun' and for some that could mean engaging in an activity for as little as a few minutes

We hope you and your relative enjoy the ideas suggested.

If anyone has any further ideas that have worked for you and your relative please email us at support@theCBF.org.uk

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 <https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/understanding-behaviour/pica-polydipsia-sheet.html> or contact the Family Support Service (details at end of sheet).

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Setting a routine

Creating some kind of daily routine, that provides predictability and structure can help to reduce feelings of anxiety that your relative may be experiencing.

If your relative relies upon a structured week/activity plan or predictable routine, it could be really helpful for you and your relative to plan your day and build a new routine together.

Build in a variety of activities each day, rather than just focussing on one type.

You could try to 'replicate' (as far as possible) the activities that your relative does normally. For example: If they go trampolining or do activities such as: bouncing, running, swimming etc – think creatively about how you could replicate this e.g. water play if you have a garden; energetic or bouncy dance routines.

Using visual aids

Visual aids can be helpful in providing further clear structure and predictable routine for your relative, so they can see what is going to happen. They may help to reduce feelings of anxiety for your relative. They are also a great way of encouraging choice making and teaching about different categories of things e.g. food, activities, objects.

Print or draw images and put them on the daily plan or timetable. If you don't have a printer but do have a tablet or iPad you can create a digital visual timetable.

You can also create a simple visual to look at what is happening, **Now & Next:**



Choose the kind of visuals that your relative already uses or images that they will understand. Some people use:



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Widgit Symbols

Photos

Objects of Reference

For those without a printer, cutting relevant images out of catalogues or magazines could also be very helpful. Also using things you have photos of or using images from e.g. cereal boxes.

If creating your own images, it is helpful to use simple picture/photo/symbol e.g. for a bowl – just a bowl - not a bowl surrounded by other things on a table, as this can be really confusing and distracting from what the picture is meant to represent.

Special interests

If your relative has a special interest, you could use this to get them engaged in new activities. For example: if they love the tube map you can talk about tube stations as you do the washing, or labelling each room as a tube station and asking the person to deliver the clothes to a specific station.

Think creatively of activities that focus on your relative's specific interest and look at different ways of engaging with this e.g. finding a particular piece of music or song such as **'Every Tube Station Song'** by Jay Foreman - A song to help you memorise all 270 stations on the London Underground: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jPyg2pK11M>

Here is a link to a video by a tube enthusiast about abandoned tube stations:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOLQ3GqfNrQ>

You may be surprised by the amount of different songs and clips you find about a special interest!

Be careful not to over focus on 'special interests' as this could become a fixation on the interest for your relative. Perhaps it could be helpful to limit activities involving the 'special interest' to once or twice a day and mixing it in with other varied activities.

Sensory activities

Some sensory activities can be made without you having to spend any extra money or at very little cost, here are some ideas:

- **Make an 'ocean bottle'** <https://happyhooligans.ca/ocean-in-bottle/>
- **Watch a sensory story**, here is one about a Rainforest <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rj7YSv0v4kA>
- **Bag books** – make your own sensory story using things that you've got at home, for inspiration and DIY bag books, see Bag Books website here <http://www.bagbooks.org/bookshop/diy>

- **Try a 'Story Massage'** – this can be done with children or adults, here is one example of how this is done <https://vimeo.com/394192479>
- **A scented bath** with bubbles
- **Finger painting** - prepare for a lot of mess but also some great fun!
- **Use a foot spa** - try a bowl of warm water with oils or bubble bath if you don't have an electronic spa. 
- **Touching and sorting** - Put some pasta, dried beans, lentils or rice into a big plastic bowl. Place this bowl and three empty smaller bowls on the floor. Let your relative dig into the big bowl and separate the mix into the smaller bowls.
- **Live sensory events** are being held on Facebook for those who have it, here are some links that you and your relative may enjoy:
 - **Massage Stories** Tuesdays and Thursdays 2pm
 - **The Sensory Spectacle** twice weekly sensory makes at 2pm on Mondays and Thursdays
 - **Soundabout** inclusive music sessions on Tuesdays and Saturdays at 2pm

Make your own playdough

You will need:

- 8 tbsp plain flour
- 2 tbsp table salt
- 60ml warm water
- food colouring
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil

Method:

1. Mix the flour and salt in a large bowl. In a separate bowl mix together the water, a few drops of food colouring and the oil.
2. Pour the coloured water into the flour mix and bring together with a spoon.
3. Dust a work surface with a little flour and turn out the dough. Knead together for a few minutes to form a smooth, pliable dough. If you want a more intense colour you can work in a few extra drops of food colouring.
4. Store in a plastic sandwich bag (squeeze out the air) in the fridge to keep it fresh.

Messy play - sludge!

You will need: Cornflour, water, a wooden spoon, a bowl.

Method:

1. Pour half a box of cornflour into a bowl
2. Gradually pour water over and mix until it looks and feels like custard
3. Run your fingers through the liquid.

Fun activities

- **Make homemade musical instruments** from household objects – use these whilst playing your relative’s favourite music
- **Create a memory book** of activities you are doing at the moment. Print out photos, group them together and put them in scrap book. Talk about the groups of photos you are creating with your relative. Alternatively create albums on your tablet/ computer. Let your relative choose which ones to look at.
- **Make a simple sorting game** (or buy one). Find pictures (e.g. from magazines) or print some out, in themes. For example, farm is the theme and you print pictures of farm animals, tractors etc. You spread them out and use simple instructions like “Where are the pigs?”, “Find the tractors” etc. Different themes can be used depending on the interests of your relative.
- **Pamper time** – facial/face masks, painting nails, make up
- **Take a trip down memory lane** in the comfort of your home. Get out your family photos and re-live some happy times. Maybe filter out some of the photos of preferred activities that are not accessible at the moment, if it could cause your loved one to become anxious because they want an activity they won’t be able to do. Look at family photos – use family photos to – show me, who is, where is, give me etc.
- **Karaoke** – you don’t need a real microphone – a hairbrush will do (if safe to use!) and music
- **Do some jigsaw puzzles** together, you can also get free puzzles online
- **Gardening** – if you have access to a garden and it is safe for your relative to do



Virtual zoo trips

For the animal lovers, why not take a virtual trip to the Zoo! Some zoos have live webcams for some of their animals. The links below are for you and your loved ones to watch live footage of: tigers; penguins; pandas; koalas.

- www.edinburghzoo.org.uk/webcams/
- www.paigntonzoo.org.uk/explore/webcams

There are many live webcams from all around the world online. You can watch animals, birds and fish on www.explore.org

Or go on a 'Virtual Field Trip to The Amazon Rainforest'
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEsV5rqbVNQ>

Baking together

Basic cookie recipe

You will need:

100g butter (softened)

50g caster sugar

150g self-raising flour

Method:

- Pre-heat your oven to 180C / 160C fan
- Line a few baking trays with baking paper

Mix the butter and sugar together

- Measure the butter and put it in a large mixing bowl.
- Weigh the sugar and add it to the bowl.
- Beat together with a wooden spoon until well combined.

Add the flour

- Weigh the flour, then add to your mixing bowl.
- Carry on mixing then use your hands to bring it all together into a soft dough.

Form the biscuits

- Roll small pieces of dough (the size of a walnut or teaspoon) into round balls. Place on your baking tray, leaving space between them for spreading.
- Dip a fork in cold water and press down on each ball in turn to flatten each biscuit and make an imprint.
- Bake in the oven for 12-15 minutes until they are golden brown.
- Cool on a wire rack.

Chocolate nest cakes

If your relative doesn't have a long concentration span, this is an easy recipe to try which also doesn't involve too much waiting until they are ready to eat.

You will need:

12 cupcake cases
 200g milk chocolate, broken into pieces
 85g cereal (shredded wheat, cornflakes or crisped rice)
 Chocolate mini eggs

Method:

- Put the cereal into a large bowl (if shredded wheat, crumble with hands or use a rolling pin to crush it)
- Put the chocolate into a microwave proof bowl
- Microwave on high for 20 seconds, remove and stir
- Microwave again for 30 seconds, stir again- repeat until melted
- Pour the chocolate into the cereal
- Stir well until combined
- Spoon into the cake cases
- Make a small dip in the centre of each
- Place 2/3 eggs in each nest
- Chill in the fridge for 2 hours until set.

Art and craft ideas



- Make collages out of magazines
- Make a rainbow and put it in your window to show support for your local community
- Cut pictures out of paper or magazine/catalogue to make a free matching/snap game – this can also help with labelling and communicating
- Make some cards or postcards that can be sent to relatives you are unable to see at the moment

Create your own wall of handmade posters

- Clear some space on a wall in the house
- Find a large piece of white paper (or old rolls of wallpaper- the non- patterned side!)
- Collect different materials you can use for the poster
- Use water colours, pasta to stick on, other papers in different size, buttons, paper plates, old bottle caps, toilet paper rolls
- Be creative and use these materials to create beautiful posters
- Your goal will be to fill the wall space with these crafts
- Put up to 3 different materials in front of the person and help them choose and place whatever they like on the paper
- Stay close so you can help the person to stick the different materials on the paper
- Try this activity at the same time everyday, creating a new routine
- Encourage the person to be creative!

Down time

It is essential for you and your relative to have some down time during the day, maybe during the evening to help with preparing for going to bed. Activities that can help with relaxation can include listening to favourite music, watching TV or videos, having a hand or foot massage or a treat!

- Make the ordinary extra special by having a treat e.g. a luxury hot chocolate with cream and marshmallows. Get your relative to help if they would like to.
- If you have created a sensory space, use this as one of your calming, relaxing activities.
- Settle down to watch a film together if your relative has a good concentration span and would enjoy this. Make it a special event by having popcorn. For those with a short concentration span, watch short clips of things they enjoy.
- Hand/foot/back massage
- Listening to relaxing music or sounds
- Online stories



Story Line Online have lots of stories for children, read by famous actors:

<https://www.storylineonline.net/>

Cbeebies also have lots of stories being read by famous musicians e.g. Robbie Williams and actors, Jodie Whittaker (Doctor Who) and Tom Hardy

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/b00jdlm2/cbeebies-bedtime-stories>

Having calmer activities during the evening can also become part of your daily routine and may act as a cue for your relative that it will soon be time for bed.

It could be helpful to limit screen time, where possible, at night to ensure that your relative (and you) can get a good night's sleep.

Part 2 of this activities resource will cover:

Developing skills
Connecting with others
Keeping active
...and more

Support for you from the Challenging Behaviour Foundation

If you need emotional support at this time or require information in relation to your relative, you can talk to one of our Family Support Workers, Telephone: **0300 666 0126** or Email: support@theCBF.org.uk

You may want to join our Family Carers' Email Network. This is a great way for families who have a relative with a severe learning disability to share information about what works. Sharing your experiences with other family carers is a great way of supporting each other through this time.

See the CBF website for how to apply to join the Email Network, the CBF information resources and more about the support we offer:

www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/supporting-you/for-families/for-families

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