



Supporting Your Child with Complex Needs Learning At Home During School Closures

Complex Needs – what does this mean?

'Complex needs' refers to students with unique learning, social and/or communication strengths and needs. These students may have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Intellectual Disability, Down Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), or may have no diagnosis at all. Students with complex needs may have an Individual Education Plan (IEP).



Students with complex needs may have a particularly difficult time coping with school closure, due to loss of routine, and potentially a difficult time understanding what is happening. While you know your child best, the impacts of Covid-19 have required you to take on a new role, and this document provides some guidance for creating a healthy learning environment. Additionally, your child's school team may have some suggestions about what works well for your child at school.

While this resource is intended to give general ideas for supporting students with complex needs, we acknowledge that each student is unique and may require different or additional supports.

Determine Priorities

Start Where You Are and Take One Step at a Time

Everyone needs to feel safe and connected before they are ready to learn. With the significant change in routine and new stressors for adults, teens and children alike, it is expected that we may need to take more time to ensure our well-being. Don't worry about the learning until you and your child are ready.

Start by Establishing a Daily Routine

Routines support a sense of normalcy for everyone, but are especially important for students with complex needs. Plan times for specific activities and free time throughout the day. Set up routines for mornings, meal-times and evenings to help provide some structure. See examples of visual schedules below.





Learning is About More Than Academics

Learning goals often include life skills in addition to academics. Life skills are those used for every-day activities, like socializing with others, taking care of oneself, activities in the home, and going out in the community or on the land.

Think about what is an important life skill in your family or community. Then decide what the next step might be for your child - something they can safely do with your help.



Use Visual Supports

Many children with complex needs have more difficulty using and understanding language than other kids. Using visuals can support their understanding of what you expect and can support predictability about the day ahead. You need special materials - be creative and use what you have in your home. You can also ask your child's teacher what they use at school.

Create a Visual Schedule or a Visual List of Tasks to be Completed

Look at the schedule together often and find a way to show what has been completed and what is currently being worked on.



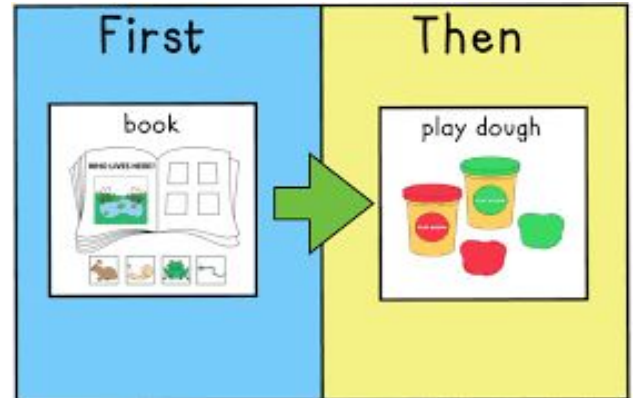


Use Visuals to Communicate Your Expectations

'First – Then' visuals are often used to communicate that a preferred activity (i.e., something your child likes to do) will happen once a necessary job is done. This helps to communicate that the job won't last forever.

Use Visuals to Teach Steps for Doing Something

Most things that we do have many different steps, if we really stop to think about it. Students with complex needs may have difficulty figuring out all the steps or which order to do them in. Pictures or drawings that break the task into smaller parts can be helpful.



See the Education, Culture, and Employment (GNWT) Website for Sample Print Resources



CONSIDER SENSORY NEEDS

Sensory needs refer to how the body processes and organizes information from the senses. Many students with complex needs are more sensitive to or need more sensory input. You know your child best, but you can also ask your child’s teacher about what works at school. If your child sees an Occupational Therapist, they may have recommended some activities. Here are some ideas which might be helpful for your child – but remember, everyone is different!



SQUISH

Make shapes, letters, or just play with play-dough, cookie dough, bread dough, etc.



TOUCH

Home-made play bin (rice, dried beans, bowls, spoons, toys etc.)



CHEW

Crunchy foods
Chewing gum



PRESSURE

For some kids, pressure is calming. Hugs or massage.



SOUND

More: Music, singing, drums
Less: Headphones; quiet spaces



GET MOVING

Move the body in a big way
Run, jump, skip, shovel, lift...

