**Anxiety and Coronavirus**

The Coronavirus pandemic has caused a great deal of change and uncertainty for people all around the world, which has led to much fear and anxiety. Many young people have struggled to take on board the vast quantities of information around the virus and keep up with the changes. For young people who are neurodiverse these changes and uncertainty can be more challenging than ever, so it is important that we consider and investigate what a young person’s concerns and worries are and help them to manage these.

**Worries around Coronavirus**

These are some of the common worries and concerns that some young people may be continuing to experience. This is by no means an exhaustive list and it is important that worries and concerns are explored on an individual basis.

* What if I get Coronavirus?
* What if somebody I sit next to or close to gets Coronavirus?
* What if I get Coronavirus and pass it on to somebody else?
* What if one of my parents or somebody I live with who is vulnerable gets Coronavirus because I have been in to school?
* If somebody I am close to gets Coronavirus will they die?
* What if I am sent home from school to isolate?
* How will I be able to continue to learn if I am not at school?
* What if my friends don’t want to be friends when I return to school?
* What if I can’t catch up with my work?
* How long will the pandemic last?

**Strategies to help reduce and alleviate anxieties around Coronavirus.**

* Explain what school has done to make it a safer place – set this out in a clear, succinct and visual way.
* Discuss the young person’s worries around Coronavirus and write them down in boxes or on post it notes so that each worry can be addressed one at a time.
* Use Social stories such as ‘Why I have to Isolate’ to help to explain the current situation.
* Explain what they can do further to help to protect themselves – create a small visual help card which they can access easily, such as in their pencil case or stuck into their planner. The help card could be enlarged to make a poster for their bedroom.
* Reassure the young person that most people who get Coronavirus do recover and that many people have few or no symptoms.
* Explain that as scientists, doctors and nurses learn more about the virus there are more things they can do to help patients get better.
* Teach relaxation techniques to help calm them – breathing techniques, distraction. Model calmness – show breathing, posture, facial expression of when you are calm. Think of a place or something that you do that makes you feel calm and try to picture yourself there (smells, sights, sounds, feeling).
* If the young person is interested in the facts, access reliable sources and give reassuring facts such as more people recover than get ill.
* Ensure that you listen to the young person’s worries and validate their feelings.
* Share any changes that are going to take place with the young person and make time to explain these in simple terms. Allow time for questions and concerns to be raised about the changes.
* Reinforce and re-establish routines both at school and at home – these can provide positive structures.
* Many anxieties are about ‘what ifs’. Explore the likelihood of something happening. Think about the outcomes and what actions could be put in to place if the ‘what if’ did happen.
* Focus on and discuss the positives of being at school – create a picture collage of these as a reminder and positive focus.
* Create a calm box with activities and pictures of things the young person has identified as making them feel happy and calm.

