

EA Literacy Service

Guidance for parents and carers supporting pupils experiencing literacy difficulties during COVID-19 related school closures



This document has been developed by the EA Literacy Service (Northern Ireland). It is intended for parents/carers who may be supporting a child or young person with literacy difficulties at home. Parents/carers may find some of these ideas useful. This is not a specific programme to be followed verbatim nor is it a prescriptive list of what should be done. It is a range of good practice ideas and activities you may decide to use based on the needs of the child. We hope you and your child find at least some of the content helpful and enjoyable.

The EA Literacy Service Team

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Setting the scene for supporting your child's literacy at home

It is very important that you:

- ❖ Try not to put too much pressure on yourself or your child.
- ❖ Consider how much support you can provide along with the other responsibilities you may have at home/work, i.e. caring for other children and elderly relatives, volunteering in your community, keeping everyone in your household healthy and safe.
- ❖ Provide some routine and structure - consider setting up a visual timetable (see below).
- ❖ Think about setting up an area in your home as a 'learning hub' – a comfortable and regular place for learning to happen.
- ❖ Let your child see you taking time to enjoy reading. Read together with your child and chat about what you enjoyed.
- ❖ Be encouraging and patient.
- ❖ Embrace the opportunity to play an active part in your child's learning experiences.
- ❖ Do not worry if the activities you plan do not happen every day. We are all doing the best we can in this difficult time.

Learning is not always about reading, spelling and writing

Use this time to develop life skills such as;

- ❖ Cooking, gardening, repairing and mending.
- ❖ Give everyone in the household the opportunity in the household to help around the home e.g. use the washing machine and tidy up.
- ❖ Playing board games and interacting with everyone in the household.
- ❖ Developing craft skills, model making or other art/creative hobbies.
- ❖ Developing IT skills, computer keyboard skills and searching for information online.
- ❖ Keep in contact with friends and family by posting letters and drawings and using information technology (IT).
- ❖ Exercise and get outside in the fresh air if possible – always following current government advice on public movement during the coronavirus pandemic.

Provide routine and structure

Here is a sample of a visual timetable. It might help with planning your child’s day. Ask your child to join in with planning for each day. Write or draw in each box to make it meaningful and visual for your child. It could also be adapted into a diary. The visual timetable will vary according to your child’s age. You know your child best and what might work best.

MONDAY			
Before 9am	Wake up	Get dressed Make bed Tidy room Have breakfast Brush teeth	<i>To make this a visual timetable let your child draw or find pictures to insert to illustrate what is happening each day</i>
9am -10 am	Exercise Time	Outdoor walk or indoor exercise <i>(maybe following a popular online exercise routine)</i>	
10am -11am	Work time	Using school packs, reading and sharing a book. Other sources. Balance the use of online activities.	
11am -12pm	Creative Time	i.e. Lego, painting , drawing, craft activities, singing and music, cooking and baking	
12pm-1pm	Lunch /Relax	Contact with friends and relatives. Chatting. Parental controlled electronics, iPad/ tablets, online gaming. Please always remember online safety	

You may want to insert a break time for a drink and snack. There are lots of ideas online for visual timetables/visual schedules for home, including fully visual schedules with limited text or no text.

What works best for learners with literacy difficulties?

When supporting your child, try to include the following:

- ❖ Multisensory (see below)
- ❖ Chunking the information into manageable amounts
- ❖ Over learning the same information to provide practice and reinforcement
- ❖ Structured and cumulative: building on and expanding what is already known

Multisensory

Multisensory support involves engaging as many senses as possible during a learning activity. By engaging visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and tactile information, strong neural pathways develop and strengthen in the brain.

Activities should include at least two of:

- ✓ seeing something (visual)
- ✓ hearing something related to what is seen e.g. letter names when spelling a word (auditory)
- ✓ linked to some form of related muscle movement such as tracing or clapping (kinaesthetic)
- ✓ touching or feeling something such as tracing shapes or letters on various surfaces e.g. carpet, tiles, table top (tactile)

Multisensory learning provides an opportunity for children to understand and learn through their senses. The following table lists the sensory area and some examples of linked ideas (page 5).

VISUAL  Learning activities using sight	AUDITORY  Learning activities using hearing	KINAESTHETIC  Learning activities using movement	TACTILE  Learning activities using touch
Demonstrations Watching DVDs and YouTube, Looking at pictures Holding books and watching/reading eBooks Picture books and magazines Laying out alphabet pieces Using strings of letters and patterns Making maps, charts and diagrams Making mind maps with drawings and words Using sticky notes in various colours Symbols Playing board games Spotting differences Flash cards Using colour	Verbal instructions Recording ideas Asking questions Figuring things out through discussion Listening to others Working in a pair or group Sound effects Watching and listening to videos Music and raps Clapping rhymes Being read to by another Audio books Self-talking through activities Repeating with their eyes closed Reading out loud Computers Sounding out words using phonics	All hands-on practical activities Cutting and sticking Sticky notes to sequence a story Writing and note taking Making models and building Drawing and sketching Role play and drama Movement and dance Talking Typing/computers Clapping and tapping Jumping and hopping Using body movement Using whiteboards Using magnetic boards and alphabets	Writing activities using pens, pencils and felt tips Using sand/salt trays Using play dough, gel, and shaving foam Carrying out experiments Using different fabrics in art and craft Touching objects Forming shapes using wiki sticks, pipe cleaners and plasticine Building words using wooden letters/magnetic letters in both upper (capital letters) and lower case Using feely bags

Tips to help keep your child engaged and motivated

The language you use:

- ❖ **The language of success:** use positive language e.g. 'I know you can', 'that's brilliant, I knew you could', 'fantastic', 'that is awesome!' etc.
- ❖ **The language of hope:** encourage your child to ask for help e.g. 'I'll try but I might need help'...support this with phrases such as 'you can do it' and 'what helped you do it?'
- ❖ **The language of possibility:** keep a focus on the positive e.g. 'yes you did get a little bit mixed up but that's O.K., let's see why and we can work together', or 'maybe I haven't explained this well enough'.

Choose activities which help your child:

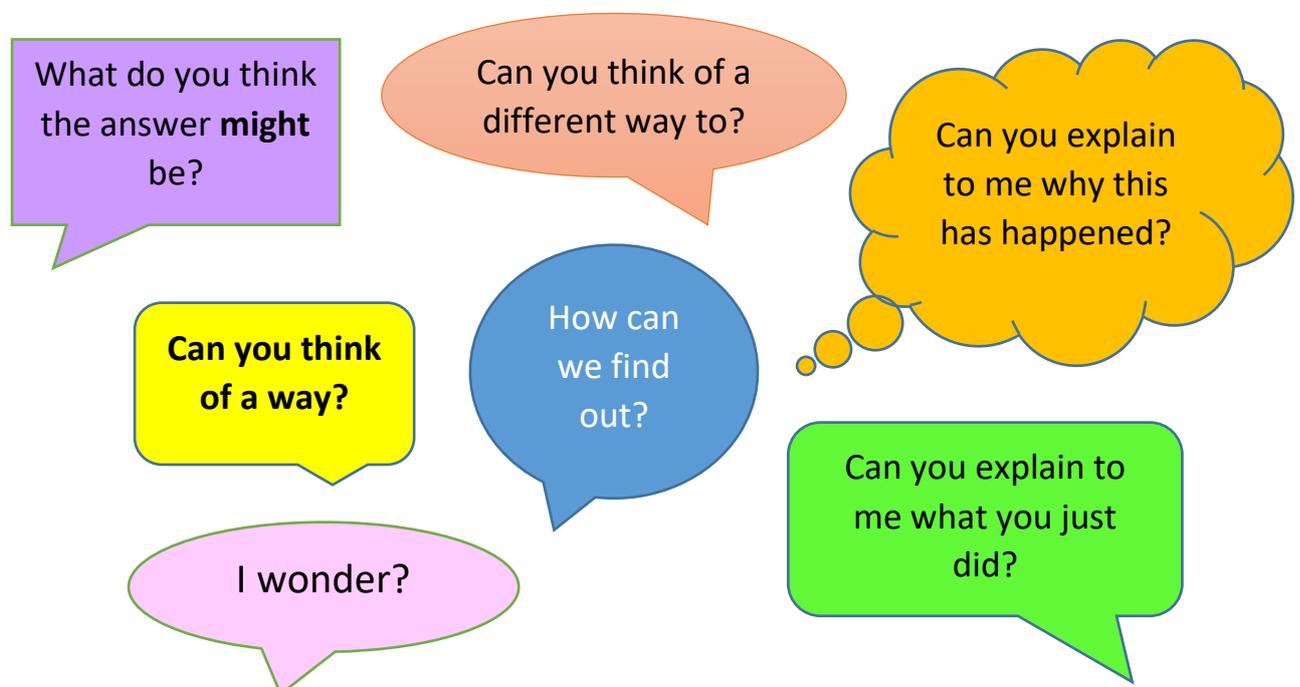
- ❖ **Experience:** pride in their work, success in mastering a skill, opportunities to pursue their interests.
- ❖ **Receive:** positive feedback from significant others, sincere praise, unconditional love, support and acceptance.
- ❖ **Feel:** capable, liked, valued, aware that they have specific strengths, optimistic.

Help them to:

- ❖ identify and recognise their strengths
- ❖ cultivate interests
- ❖ take on some responsibilities
- ❖ set realistic goals
- ❖ acquire skills
- ❖ display their work
- ❖ talk and then be listened to
- ❖ deal with negative emotions e.g. self-talk, 'I know I can do this', visualizing something positive
- ❖ be open and honest

Supporting your child's learning at home

- ❖ Give clear instructions.
- ❖ Break information or instructions into 'shorter chunks'. Pause after each, to allow your child to process.
- ❖ Say things in the order you want them done.
- ❖ Cut down on the amount you say. Studies show that adults can talk 90% of the time when teaching someone a skill. Try not to do this. For a young person with literacy difficulties this can be overwhelming. Talking less can mean your child will get a chance to say more.
- ❖ Avoid using complex sentences.
- ❖ Pause after you ask a question – practice giving time and space for your child to answer.
- ❖ Ask open questions, they often get a better response than YES or NO type questions. They help take the fear away that an answer might be wrong.



If your child gets stuck:

- ✓ Reassure them and encourage them not to panic
- ✓ Read and discuss the instructions with them or help them with the reading
- ✓ Encourage them to proofread all written work Use the **COPS** method (check for **C**apitals, words left **O**ut, **P**unctuation and finally **S**pellings).
- ✓ Sometimes it can help to read it aloud to 'hear' the mistakes.
- ✓ Provide spellings written down on a 'Post-it' for them to copy. Calling out spellings can cause frustration if your speed is too quick and the letters are not chunked. Many children need time to listen, process and then write.
- ✓ If a task is too difficult, you can leave it for now. Perhaps come back to it later or another day. Maybe it is something they have not covered yet in school.
- ✓ Keep fostering their independence and sense of satisfaction in completing as much of a task as possible themselves.

Further Guidance:

Further online guidance for parents/carers in supporting reading, writing and spelling at home, including the use of assistive technology, is available from the EA Literacy Service via our website.

Please visit <https://www.eani.org.uk/services/pupil-support-services/literacy-service>

