

دائرة تنمية المجتمع
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT



**SUPPORTING CHILDREN OF
DETERMINATION AND THEIR FAMILIES
DURING COVID - 19**



TABLE OF CONTENT

#	Content	Page
1	Table of Content	2
2	Introduction	3
3	Strategies to Support children of Determination and their families during COVID - 19	4
4	Strategy 1: Support Understanding	5
5	Strategy 1 Resources list	6
6	Strategy 2: Provide Opportunities for Expression and Coping	7
7	Strategy 2 Resources list	8
8	Strategy 3: Organize Routines	9
9	Strategy 3 Resources list	12
10	Final Note	13
11	«Himam»- Family counseling service for people of determination in Abu Dhabi	14
12	References	15

INTRODUCTION

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of all schools, programs and services, all children require support from caregivers during this time of uncertainty and sudden changes in routines. Children of determination may need additional support to deal with this situation and adapt to change due to difficulties related to communication, language, comprehension, need for a structured and consistent routine... Parents and caregivers play a crucial role in supporting their children of determination understand, cope and learn through this phase.

The Department of Community Development (DCD) presents this guide to provide parents of children of determination with information and practical resources that would enable them to support their children's well-being, as well as promote development and learning by embedding countless learning opportunities throughout their daily routines and interactions and therefore to make the most of the time spent at home.

Considering that every child is unique and has his/her unique strengths and needs, this guide serves as a reference and parents will need to select and adapt strategies and resources to best meet their child's profile, needs and current state. Parents can also seek professional advice from their child's service provider on this subject.

The content of this guide has been adapted from select scientific and evidence-based references that are acknowledged and mentioned at the end of this guide.

3 STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN OF DETERMINATION AND THEIR FAMILIES DURING COVID - 19



Strategy 1: Support Understanding

Children of Determination have different levels of understanding about the COVID - 19 virus, how it spreads, and how to reduce the risk and prevent contracting the virus. Use the tips provided in this guide to help children understand this pandemic.



Strategy 2: Provide Opportunities for Expression and Coping

Some children of determination will have difficulty expressing how they feel about the amount of changes and uncertainty in their routines due to social communication challenges, limited verbal or non-verbal skills or comprehension difficulties. Instead they may exhibit problem behaviors to express their frustration, worry or anxiety through increased temper tantrums, whining or clinging behaviors, isolation, stimming, loss of interest and refusal to participate in activities or follow daily simple instructions, sleep/appetite disturbance, agitation or decrease in energy. Be Aware of these changing behaviors.



Strategy 3: Organize Routines

Every family needs a routine. It helps to organize life and keep it from becoming too chaotic. All children do best when routines are regular, predictable, and consistent. Even more some children of determination especially children with autism, may cope best when daily routines are only minimally interrupted as these routines provide them with increased comfort and may allow them to better express their feelings related to the changes. With the unexpected changes in routine resulting from the COVID-19, It is key to balance between maintaining key routines and building new ones to adapt to the new situation of staying home outbreak and it is necessary to implement structure into daily routines.

STRATEGY 1: SUPPORT UNDERSTANDING



1. Talk to your children first, before they hear about it elsewhere:

- Describe the situation by presenting facts that are appropriate to the child's age and understanding, but don't focus too much on the unnecessary frightening details.
- Use clear, direct and concrete vocabulary and avoid abstract wording. The understanding of abstract phrases and metaphors such as "she caught the virus" can be difficult for children with autism for example and can create confusion. Using direct and clear language is recommended like "The coronavirus is a type of germ. These germs are very tiny, and when they get inside your body, they can make you sick".
- Define the words you use – don't assume that your child understands the same meaning



2. Communicate in a way that your child prefers, such as pictures or stories:

- You can use a social story to support your talk. A social story describes a situation or an event and how to deal with it and manage expectations through multiple adapted formats such as adapted text or photo, or any technology that enable people to access information. This is important for children who presents difficulties in understanding verbal language.
- Several example of social stories should be developed to give the child more information about COVID-19, help them understand how to reduce risk, provide insight into how they may be feeling, and offer assurance that those feelings are normal.
- It is helpful to read a social story to/with the child regularly across several days
- Revisit and adjust as needed as circumstances shift.



3. Provide visual supports to explain to children what "rules" they need to follow during this period and what actions they need to do. For example:

- How we greet people with no handshakes
- How we interact with family members with physical distancing
- How often and when we wash our hands
- It is very important for some children like children with autism to break down the task they are required to do into small steps with using visual cue for each step



4. Offering visual cues to track time, especially during the school closure and quarantine situation where routines have drastically changed:

- Time is an abstract concept that is difficult to perceive by some children of determination. It is helpful to visualize it through monthly/weekly and/or daily calendar to help track the time flow and follow the set activities



5. Be a source for reassurance and positivity to help your child feel safe through this period:

- Schedule additional time toward positive emotions and countering the feelings that can flood when processing this event

STRATEGY 1 RESOURCES LIST:



From University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute Resources

From Autism speaks



Support Understanding-COVID-19



Support Understanding-Coronavirus



Support Understanding-Timer Apps



Support Understanding-Greeting People



Support Understanding-Giving People Space



Support Understanding-Handwashing (Clipart)



Support Understanding-Handwashing (Photos)



Support Understanding-Creating Visual Support and Social Narrative Apps



Support Understanding-Flu teaching story

STRATEGY 2: PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPRESSION AND COPING

Consider the following activities as part of the child's daily routine:



- Encourage expression through family collective discussion, individual discussions, art & crafts activities, collage, comic strip, writing daily journals, creative and sensory play (with sand, clay, paint, water...), music, dance, singing, movement, yoga, video-making, reading books, cooking, play, reenactment, story-telling



- Some children need activities that brings sensory input to be able to self-regulate and reduce anxiety such as rocking in a rocking chair, listening to music on headphones, deep breathing, massage.



- Some children enjoy calming activities as a way of unwinding through the use of calming and mindfulness applications or a calming routine



- Consider establishing basic exercise routine for the family since exercise/physical activity is a proven strategy to reduce anxiety symptoms with children of determination (wearing sport watch and counting daily steps or online/app-based workout)



- Stay in touch with friends through telephone, Internet, video games



- In the case where the child does not have any calming or coping skill as part of his/her skills' repertoire, parent will need to teach these skills based on the child's age, interest and ability.



- Make sure that children have plenty and regular opportunities to access these activities by embedding these activities in a visual and concrete way in the child's daily schedule



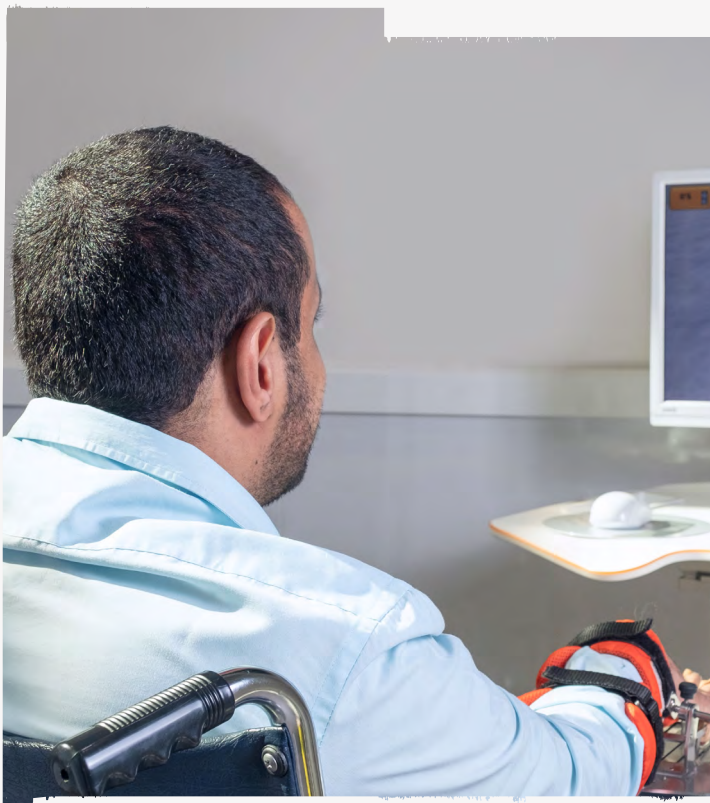
- Consider using augmentative and alternative communication systems (through I-pads or pictures) for children who need alternative forms of expression





- If you feel you need more support, please call your health provider.

STRATEGY 2 RESOURCES LIST:

From University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute Resources



-  Provide Opportunities for Expression and Coping-Calming Routine
-  Provide Opportunities for Expression and Coping-Exercise Activities
-  Provide Opportunities for Expression and Coping-Exercise Choice Board
-  Provide Opportunities for Expression and Coping-Mindfulness Apps

STRATEGY 3: ORGANIZE ROUTINES



1. Important routines to maintain include:



- Bedtime and waking routines: ensuring children of determination have a regular sleep/wake schedule with not much of a difference between the weekday and weekend schedule and get proper sleep reflects on their health and their functioning, especially that sleep disturbances are more common for some children of determination, thus extra attention may be required to support good sleep hygiene and maintain bedtime and waking routines.



- Household chores : plan and encourage children to take part in structured household chores as this will help them deal with the disrupted routines and stress related to COVID-19 but also learn numerous skills. For example, sorting out the laundry teaches them classification and matching skills. Some children of determination may need additional supports, such as a task analysis, to be able to take part in and/or complete these activities. You can find in the list of resources examples for common chores along with a template that can be used for a variety of daily living activities.



2. Ideas for new routines include:



- Interaction with siblings: Take the opportunity of having the siblings around to enhance interaction of the child of determination with his/her siblings



- Mealtimes: with most of the family members in the house, it is an opportunity to get together at a fixed time to have lunch or dinner for example. Additionally to having it as a regular routine activity, you can practice countless language, motor, cognitive and social skills while carrying out this daily routine (setting up the table, asking for specific food, making a sandwich...)



- Homeschooling time





- Family exercise/physical activity time





- Screen time including family movie night

STRATEGY 3: ORGANIZE ROUTINES

 3. There are several ways to establish structured routines. Some of the suggestions are found below:

 • **Transitioning off screens:** children may access screens more frequently and for longer periods of the day during this time. Transitioning away from a device, especially after a period of extended use, may be difficult for many children. It is helpful to prepare the child for the transition through the following tips:

 - **Use a visual timer:** time is relatively an abstract concept and may create confusion for some children especially children who do not master the time-telling skill. Presenting the information related to time visually where child get to “see” the remaining screen time instead of only telling the child “you have 5 minutes to get off your device” makes the process more meaningful and the transition off-screen smoother. One example is the [Time Timer™](#) app, which displays a section of red that disappears when the time runs out.

 - **Use a visual countdown system:** another alternative is the use of a countdown system. The countdown differs because there is no specific time increment used. This tool is beneficial if the timing of the transition needs to be flexible (e.g. caregiver would like the child to stay engaged on the device during a work call but doesn’t know when it will end). A countdown system can be made with numbered or colored squares or sticky notes, or any shape or style that is meaningful to the individual . As the transition nears, the caregiver can pull off or cross off the top item (e.g. the number 5) so the individual is able to see that only 4 items remain. The caregiver decides how quickly or slowly to remove the remaining items depending on when the transition will occur. Once the final item is removed, the individual is taught that it is time to transition. Several examples are provided, and these can be used to support any transition. Please refer to the examples provided in the resources.

STRATEGY 3: ORGANIZE ROUTINES



- **Use a visual schedule:** Expand the use of a visual schedule throughout the day to help facilitate participation in activities at home and reduce anxiety. The format and length of the schedule may vary based on the individual's needs, and several examples are included. Try to be patient and realistic as you adopt a new schedule. Getting consistent with a new routine, particularly when things are quickly changing day-to-day, means things won't be perfect. Start small, with more loose structure, if that feels less overwhelming. Involve your children in planning for their learning and the work of the family. That may help them cope better if things change over time. And, remember to schedule breaks – for everyone – throughout your day.



- **Put a reinforcement schedule:** an option could be a token system where, for example, for every 5 earned tokens, the child gets to have some screen time



- **Offer choices:** providing choices can increase a sense of autonomy and motivation. Creating regular opportunities across the day where family members have a voice about what happens and when it happens can serve as an effective anxiety reducing strategy and a communication tool. These choices might include meal options, order of activities for the day, and/or preferences for activities. Several examples are provided for use across the day and age range.



- **Creating a workspace with a to-do list:** For the first time, many children will be expected to complete schoolwork in the home setting and this could be relatively hard for some children who have difficulty generalizing the strategies and skills they used in the school environment to the home environment (e.g. organizing materials, attending to work activities, submitting assignments online). Therefore it will be helpful to establish a designated workspace to help clarify expectations and reduce distractions. This may be a spot at the dining room table designated by a colored placemat and facing away from the television or window. If multiple children are working in one space, consider adding a small visual divider (e.g. an open folder) between them.

Caregivers can create a visual “to-do” list in several different ways:















- placing the individual worksheets to be completed on the child's left and a small basket on the child's right to put them in when they are finished, or writing a short list on a sticky note of the tasks to accomplish during the work session. These can be crossed off when they are finished. Older children and young adults can likely generate their own to-do lists but may need some initial support to establish a workspace and launch these routines.

STRATEGY 3 RESOURCES LIST:

From University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute Resources



-  [Organize Routines-Make a Snack](#)
-  [Organize Routines-Task Analysis Template](#)
-  [Routines-Tips for Creating Task Analysis](#)
-  [Organize Routines-Daily Schedule Example Using Stickers](#)
-  [Organize Routines-Daily Schedule Example](#)
-  [Organize Routines-Daily Schedule Template](#)
-  [Organize Routines-Educational Resources for Kids](#)
-  [Organize Routines-How to Transition Off Screens](#)
-  [Organize Routines - Countdown Example](#)
-  [Organize Routines-Inside and Outside Activities](#)
-  [Organize Routines-Movement Resources for Kids](#)
-  [Organize Routines-Weekly Choices and Goals](#)

FINAL NOTE

During this time of unexpected changes and uncertainty, parents of children of determination face additional challenges. This guide aims at providing parents with strategies that will allow children of determination better understand COVID-19 outbreak, cope with related changes and their implications on their feelings and behaviors and engage in meaningful learning opportunities during their daily routines.

As a parent or a caregiver, and with the demands of remote work or lack of employment, distance learning, childcare and managing a household, your mental and physical health can be affected and in turn the social dynamics of your family. It is crucial to include self-care as part of your day. Schedule time each day to do something that recharges you: meditation or prayer, reading a book for pleasure, engaging in a favorite hobby or another activity that helps you feel better. In addition, try to get regular and adequate sleep. Fatigue can increase stress and risk for other negative outcomes.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the references we have consulted to bring this guide to you that are mentioned below.

«HIMAM»- FAMILY COUNSELING SERVICE FOR PEOPLE OF DETERMINATION IN ABU DHABI

Himam Initiative was launched in partnership with the Family Development Foundation and Zayed Higher Organization for People of Determination to provide family counseling service for people of Determination

- **Phone Consultation : 80033322**
- **Whatsapp: 0504440143**
- **E-Consultation: Shawer@fdf.gov.ae**

Saturday - Friday

8:00 AM - 8:00 PM



REFERENCES

- University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute Resources
Hume, K., Waters, V., Sam, A., Steinbrenner, J., Perkins, Y., Dees, B., Tomaszewski, B., Rentschler, L., Szendrey, S., McIntyre, N., White, M., Nowell, S., & Odom, S. (2020). Supporting individuals with autism through uncertain times. Chapel Hill, NC: School of Education and Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Retrieved from: <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/supporting-individuals-autism-through-uncertain-times>
[Supporting Individuals with Autism through Uncertain Times - UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute Autism Team](#)
- Centers for Diseases control (CDC) resources
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/-2019ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F-2019ncov%2Fcommunity%2Fschoools-childcare%2Ftalking-with-children.html
- Autism speaks resources
[COVID19- Video Teaching Story from University of Miami – NSU](#)
[Flu Teaching Story - Arabic version coming soon – keep checking the autism speaks website](#)



  
addcd.gov.ae
[@dcdabudhabi](https://twitter.com/dcdabudhabi)

#هذا هو مجتمعنا
#THIS IS OUR COMMUNITY