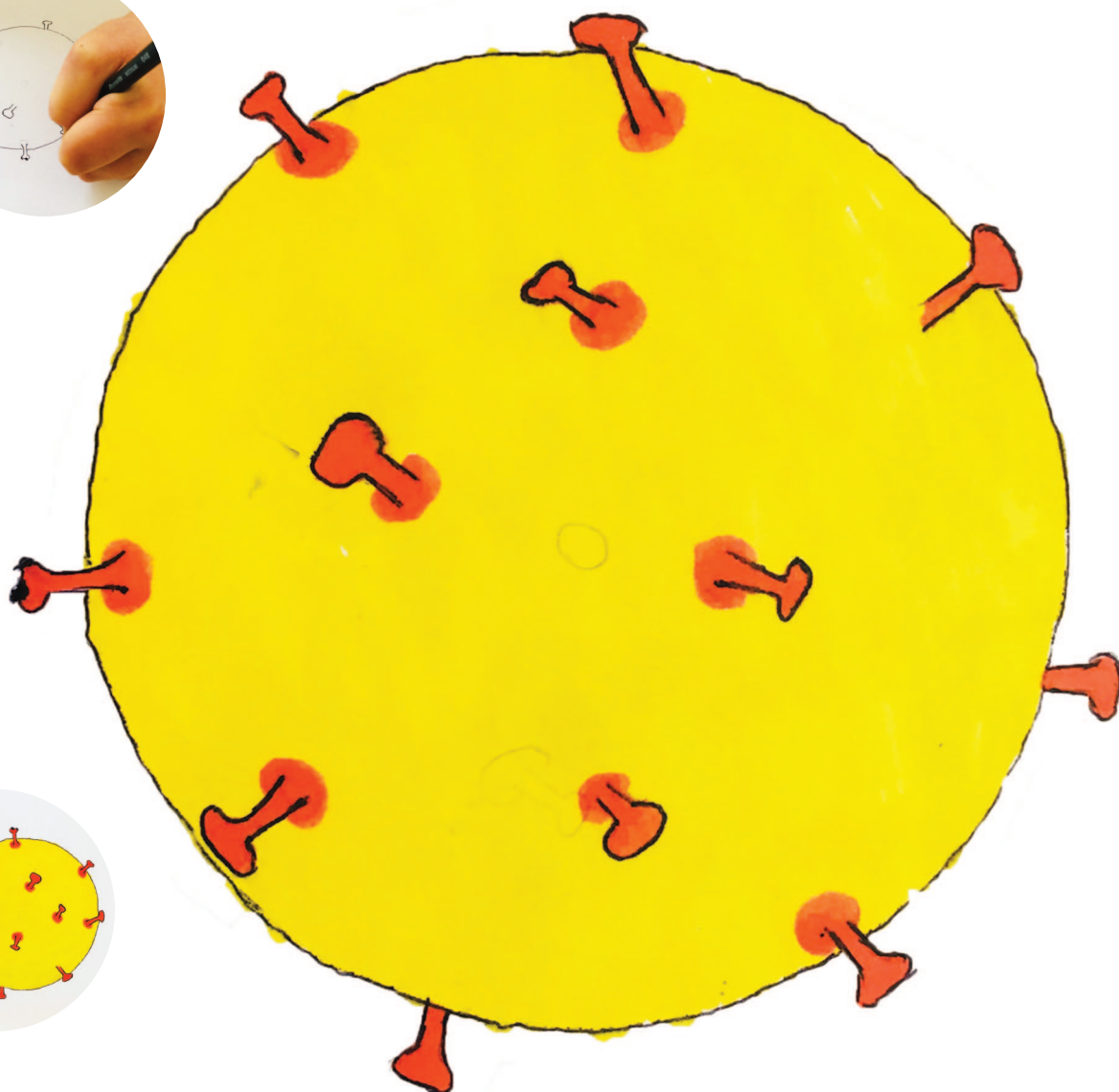
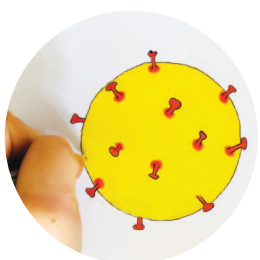
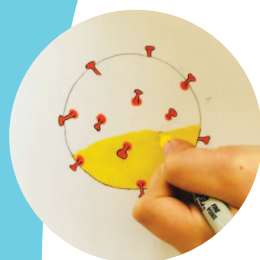
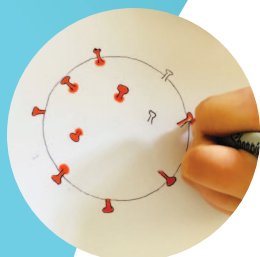
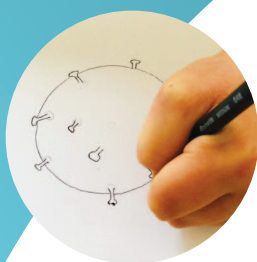


Autism in the time of **COVID-19**



Autism in the time of COVID-19

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are all having to work differently and provide support at a distance. The NAIT team's recent focus has been on the development and sharing of useful resources for the autism community: www.thirdspace.scot/NAIT.

These are for:

- Education and health professionals, focussed on supporting children and families at home
- Employers supporting autistic employees at this time
- Individuals and families who may now be waiting longer than expected for diagnostic assessment.

The resources we share on our website are relevant to those with a range of additional support needs regardless of diagnosis.

Working across community, education and health to improve outcomes for people of all ages with autism

National Autism Implementation Team




The NAIT Team are professionals from Education, Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Psychiatry, who have considerable experience and expertise in working with autistic individuals of all ages, their families and others who support them. NAIT provide practitioner to practitioner advice.


This cross sector partnership aims to support the delivery of the Scottish Strategy for Autism: Outcomes and Priorities 2018-2021, through facilitating evidence based actions in the areas of:


- Education and Inclusive Practice
- Assessment and Diagnosis for children, young people and adults
- Employment

NAIT Resources

 Education Resources

 Diagnosis Resources

 Employment Resources

 Information & Events

Autism and Education

Everything in Life is Learning

The last few weeks have been a time of significant change and learning for us all. Many professionals are having to make the adjustment from direct contact with children and families to supporting from a distance and this presents a whole new set of challenges.

Parents are also having to make adjustments to their daily lives, alongside managing the needs of their whole family, all together in the home for extended periods of time.

Unexpected changes and unfamiliar routines mean that many children will be feeling unsettled, dysregulated and perhaps even distressed. Some will be able to express this in words but many will not. The adults around each child can listen, observe and try to respond to the emotions that their child is conveying.

Doubtless some children will express their response to disrupted expectations through unconventional behaviours and many parents will be seeking support as to how to manage this.

The NAIT Team have received a number of queries from professionals about how to support parents to manage behaviour that their child is displaying at home. As always, it's about taking an anticipatory approach, acknowledging that providing the right support at the right time, can be so much more effective than using rewards and consequences.

In an effort to be responsive and supportive, it is sometimes hard not to react with a direct response to the behaviour that we see on the surface (or that parents are reporting) but it is so much more helpful to think about what lies beneath. For example, providing a Social Story explaining to a child that they should not hit out, runs the risk of failing to recognise the distress that the child is likely to be expressing, albeit in an unconventional way. It can be so much more helpful to reflect on whether the right anticipatory supports are in place and to consider what we need to do to make these more relevant and appropriate to individual needs.

We have prepared a set of Key Messages (relevant to developmental stages) that seek to guide this anticipatory approach.

Key Messages for families at home and resources to download:

1. Maintain routines
2. Create new routines
3. Use visual supports
4. Plan movement breaks
5. Play their way/
Find what motivates
6. Be a responsive partner/
Listen to your child
7. Provide an individual Safe Space
8. Everything in life is learning

Key Messages for Social Partners



- 1 **Maintain routines**
Where possible try to keep some familiar routines going
- 2 **Create new routines**
Some new daily and social routines, will introduce some fun and predictability to time at home
- 3 **Plan movement breaks**
These can help maintain feelings of calmness and focus
- 4 **Use objects as visual supports**
To prepare for the start and finish and to make choices
- 5 **Play their way**
Play is many different things, go with what the child likes just now
- 6 **Be a responsive partner**
Notice what individuals say and do and respond to that
- 7 **Everything in life is learning**
You learn different things with different people and that's okay

For more tips and resources visit

www.thirdspace.scot/NAIT

Key Messages for Language and Conversational Partners



- 1 **Maintain routines**
Where possible try to keep some familiar routines going
- 2 **Create new routines**
Some new daily and social routines, will introduce some fun and predictability to time at home
- 3 **Plan movement breaks**
These can help maintain feelings of calmness and focus
- 4 **Provide an individual safe space**
This can help children feel calm and avoid becoming overwhelmed
- 5 **Find what motivates**
Make sure each day includes desirable experiences
- 6 **Listen to your child**
Notice what your child says and does and respond to that
- 7 **Use visual supports**
These provide predictability and support communication
- 8 **Everything in life is learning**
You learn different things with different people and that's okay

For more tips and resources visit

www.thirdspace.scot/NAIT



Professionals may wish to give the following advice to families:

1. Maintain Routines

You may already have some regular routines which can carry on, for example around bedtimes, washing, dressing, reading stories or games you play. In your time at home, your child might be able to become more independent with some familiar routines, through the use of visual supports.

2. Create New Routines

Some routines will have to change, for example your child used to have lunch at school and now it's at home, or they used to play at the park and now they can only go out once a day and the park is shut. Through the Home Visual Support Project we have developed a range of visual supports and guides to using these which might be helpful in maintaining and creating routines.

have a wash



brush teeth



pyjamas on



3. Use Visual Supports

Visual supports are commonly used with autistic learners in schools and nurseries, they can also be a very useful strategy for use at home but have been less commonly used in this way. They are objects, pictures, photos or written words which are used in different ways to suit each individual and family. The first step is to think about the type of support that suits your child best and then what purpose would the support serve. They can:

- Increase predictability and help individuals to know what's happening now and what else will happen next, or in the day or week
- Support transitions and understanding that one thing is finished and what the next thing to do is
- Support independence, e.g. instead of verbally telling your child each step in dressing, they could follow a visual sequence on their own
- Support self regulation, communication and interaction, through making more abstract concepts concrete (e.g. using 'Never mind' cards to self regulate when disappointed or through using symbols to allow your child to choose and take turns in a song they like)

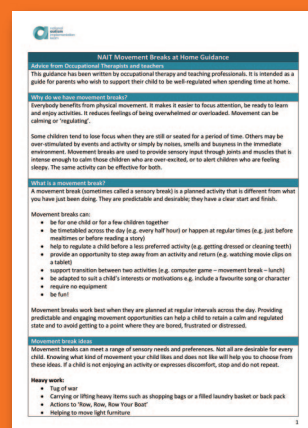
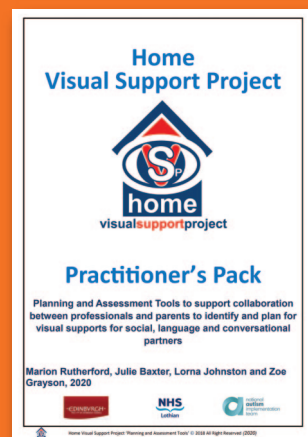
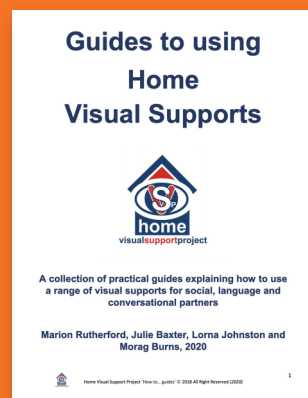
Home Visual Support Project resources are now available including:

- **Visual Support symbol resources**
<https://www.thirdspace.scot/nait/education-resources>
- **Assessment tools for professionals working with families to support planning**
<https://www.thirdspace.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Practitioner-Pack-Home-VSP-Planning-and-Assessment-Tools.pdf>
- **Guides to using different visual supports**
<https://www.thirdspace.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Guides-to-Using-Home-Visual-Supports-The-Collection-for-all-Stages-March-2020.pdf>

4. Plan movement breaks

Providing predictable and engaging movement opportunities can help children to retain a calm and regulated state and to avoid getting to a point where they are bored, frustrated or distressed. Movement breaks work best when they are planned at regular intervals across the day.

<https://www.thirdspace.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/NAIT-Guidance-for-Movement-Breaks-at-Home.pdf>



5. Play their way / Find what motivates

Children who communicate at an early stage, may prefer sensory or active play and they may find it hard to shift attention between people and toys. At this stage parents may need support to feel confident to join their child in the things they enjoy even if they seem unusual and to create simple social routines with songs and actions.

It is important for everyone that we have things in our day that are desirable, to help us get started and to keep going with activities and routines. As professionals we can support parents to identify ways to include the right balance of motivating experiences at home.

6. Be a responsive partner / Listen to your child

Many parent focussed interventions adapted for parents of autistic children involve teaching ways to adapt to our own communication style for children with differences in how they understand and use language and social communication. Another Key Message gives ideas of ways they can respond to and listen to their child's actions and signals as well as the words they say. Some children need adults to wait a long time, sometimes they can tell others when they are starting to find something difficult or why they don't like something, at others times they can't – especially at times of increased anxiety. The adults can support by interpreting and responding to what they notice.





7. Provide an individual Safe Space

A Safe Space is a place in your home where your child can choose to go when they are beginning to feel overwhelmed or need time and space to regulate themselves. They are not sent there as a sanction and it's not a reward they have to earn. It should be a calm and relaxing space that they can enjoy being in.

Observing the kind of space your child seeks out whenever they need time on their own might help you to think about the right kind of Safe Space for them. Once identified, it should always be available.

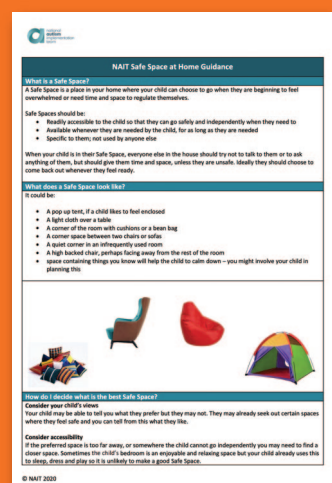
<https://www.thirdspace.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/NAIT-Staying-at-Home-Safe-Space-Guidance.pdf>

8. Everything in life is learning

Home is not school and it can be helpful to reassure parents that it is okay not to expect their child to be the same at home and school. Likewise, what children do at home does not need to replicate what would happen in a school day.

When spending extended periods of time at home, the priority should be for children to be supported to feel calm, well regulated and able to trust the people around them to respond in predictable ways.

The best approach to 'home learning' will be one which is tailored to the individual child's needs and preferences. Everything a child experiences in life constitutes learning, so all of the routines and activities that take place during time at home can be viewed as providing learning opportunities for a child.



Continuous learning opportunities for staff supporting autistic children and their families

Some staff are looking for reading and online learning opportunities

- **In World Autism Awareness Week staff have been taking The Autism Toolbox Challenge:**

<https://bit.ly/3dSRP3Q>

These might be useful ideas for ongoing professional learning:

http://www.autismtoolbox.co.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Autism%20Toolbox%20Challenge%202020_0.pdf

- **CIRCLE Online Module and resources:**
<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/inclusion-in-practice>

A list of useful links is on the back page of the newsletter.



Autism and Employment



The NAIT employment work is at an early stage and we are looking forward to engaging with a range of stakeholders, including autistic individuals, as we take this forward. We are conscious that workplaces are changing rapidly in these unusual circumstances and thought it might be timely to offer information to employers about how to best support autistic people within their workforce. It is our intention to reflect on these materials with the autism community and produce more comprehensive information in future.

Employment and COVID-19

COVID-19 is having an impact on all aspects of our daily lives, including our working lives.

Some workers have been identified as keyworkers. Employers such as health and social care, public services, food production and shops, transport and delivery continue to provide crucial services to the country. At times of high levels of absence due to ill health and isolation these staff may be asked to do more to meet demands.

Others employers have moved their staff to working from home rather than in their usual work environment. Adapting to this new way of working may be difficult. Employers are having to make the adjustment from direct contact with staff to line management from a distance and this presents a whole new set of challenges. Employees who are parents are also having to make adjustments to their daily lives, alongside managing the needs of their whole family, all together in the home for extended periods of time.

Working from home is not possible for all jobs and some people have been furloughed – where they remain employed but are not working. So regular routines will be changing in the absence of a work role.

All these scenarios have resulted in unexpected changes and unfamiliar routines. Many autistic people will be feeling unsettled, dysregulated and perhaps even distressed. Some will be able to express this in words but many will not.

Every autistic person is unique and will have their own skills, experience, needs and preferences. Workplaces which accommodate for difference in their employee team are better placed to ensure that adjustments are anticipatory (Equality Act, 2010).

You may already have asked your autistic employee what their needs are and how best you can support them. It might be worth reviewing your agreement in this time of change. Some of the ideas below might give some indication of things to consider.

- The work environment
- Maintaining routines
- Accessing advice or help when needed
- Adapting techniques you usually find supportive.

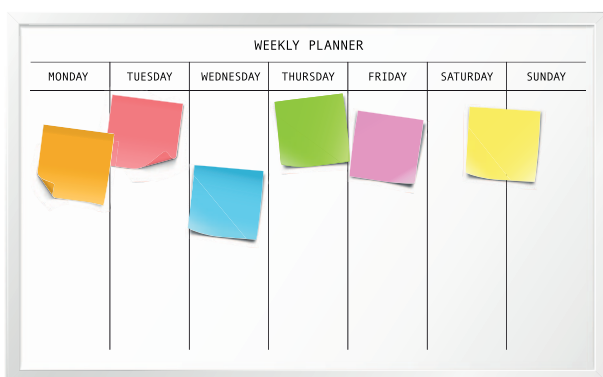
The work environment

Keyworkers may be able to keep their usual working place. If change is required due to home working or reconfiguration at work, ask what aspects of the environment are important to replicate. A calm zone for breaks, or maintaining separation between work and leisure environments is important.

Maintaining routines

Where possible, maintain existing structures and routines; start and stop at agreed times and plan regular breaks. Aim to maintain predictable and consistent tasks. Daily planners can be really helpful in maintaining routines (see figure 1).

Figure 1



When agreeing new ways of working ensure expectations are clear and explicit. It is usually helpful if information about change is provided in written form. This gives the autistic person the opportunity to read it, think about it and reflect upon it.

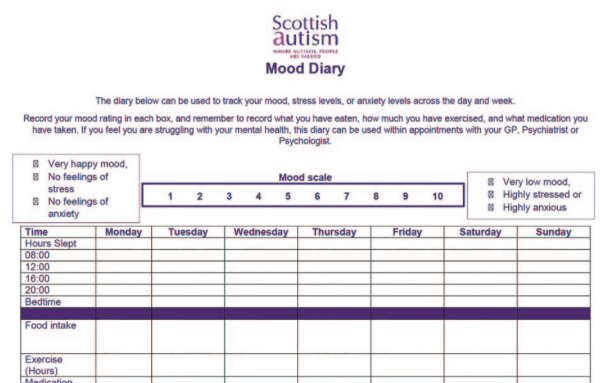
Providing access to advice or help when needed

Aim to maintain existing feedback structures if possible, these should be on a planned schedule and in the preferred medium agreed with your employee (e.g. text, email, phonecall). Everyone should be taking care of their mental health at the moment. Helpful online resources are listed below, e.g. mood diaries (see figure 2).

Adapting supportive techniques

Ask your employee to continue to use or adapt ways of working they have found helpful to manage stress and maintain focus.

Figure 2



Scottish autism
working at your pace
Mood Diary

The diary below can be used to track your mood, stress levels, or anxiety levels across the day and week.
Record your mood rating in each box, and remember to record what you have eaten, how much you have exercised, and what medication you have taken. If you feel you are struggling with your mental health, this diary can be used within appointments with your GP, Psychiatrist or Psychologist.

☐ Very happy mood,
☐ No feelings of stress
☐ No feelings of anxiety

Mood scale
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

☐ Very low mood,
☐ Highly stressed or
☐ Highly anxious

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Hours Slept							
08:00							
12:00							
16:00							
20:00							
Bedtime							
Food intake							
Exercise (Hours)							
Medication							

We have prepared information sheets

- **Keyworkers:**

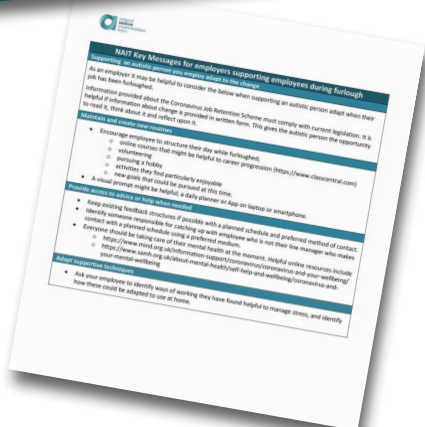
<https://www.thirdspace.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/NAIT-Key-Messages-for-Employers-Supporting-Key-Workers.pdf>

- **Working at Home:**

<https://www.thirdspace.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/NAIT-Key-Messages-for-Employers-Supporting-Employees-Working-at-Home.pdf>

- **Furloughed Workers:**

<https://www.thirdspace.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/NAIT-Key-Messages-for-Employers-Supporting-Furloughed-Employees.pdf>



Useful Links:

Helpful national information about employment

<https://www.gov.scot/about/how-government-is-run/directorates/fair-work-employability-skills>

<https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

Helpful national information about employment and COVID-19

<https://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/coronavirus-information/>

<https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/work/coronavirus-if-your-employer-has-told-you-not-to-work>

Helpful national information about employment and autism

<https://www.scottishautism.org/wg-employment>

and Scottish Autism youtube video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=166&v=DSH9RkH-4Wo&feature=emb_logo

<https://www.autism.org.uk/professionals/employers/information-for-employers.aspx>

<https://healthtalk.org/life-autism-spectrum/autism-getting-a-job>

COVID-19 and mental health

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing>

<https://www.samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/self-help-and-wellbeing/coronavirus-and-your-mental-wellbeing>

The NAIT Team have put together useful links at this time:

The Autism Toolbox – Resources and links for practitioners and families

<http://www.autismtoolbox.co.uk/supporting-children-and-young-people-home-coronavirus>

Scottish Autism – Information and resources for families

<https://www.scottishautism.org/services-support/support-families/information-resources>

National Autistic Society – Information and resources for autistic people and families

<https://www.autism.org.uk/services/helplines/coronavirus.aspx>

Scottish Commission for Learning Disability – Collated easy read resources

<https://www.sclld.org.uk/information-on-coronavirus>

Call Scotland – Free visual support resources

<https://www.callscotland.org.uk/blog/symbol-resources-for-covid19>

Enable – Easy read fact sheets

<https://www.enable.org.uk/coronavirus-information>

Peter Vermeulen – Autism and the Corona Virus - 20 Tips

<https://petervermeulenblog.wordpress.com/2020/03/16/autism-and-the-corona-virus-20-tips/>

Carol Gray – Social Stories about Coronavirus

<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf>

<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Learning-About-the-Corona-Virus-by-Dr.-Siobhan-Timmins.pdf>

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust – A Short film about Coronavirus for children

<https://twitter.com/i/status/1242116526137843714>

Highland - Website with collated ideas and information from education and health professionals and to support early learning at home

<https://bumps2bairns.com>

World Health Organisation – Visual hand washing guide

https://www.who.int/gpsc/clean_hands_protection/en

Enable – Easy read fact sheets

<https://www.enable.org.uk/coronavirus-information>

Scottish Centre for Conflict Resolution

– Support for family conflict resolution and early intervention

<https://scottishconflictresolution.org.uk>



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