

ChAPS Covid-19 Response – March 2020

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and social distancing measures, ChAPS reluctantly had to suspend all face to face activities from 16th March 2020. As families across the country faced an uncertain and worrying time - trying to keep occupied and healthy and maintaining their children's education: our autistic children and adults faced an even more difficult time. Autistic people thrive on structure and predictability, and indeed struggle to function without it – all of life's routines and structures disappeared, and a prolonged period of uncertainty ensued. Managers and staff at ChAPS recognised the potential for significant harm to mental health and quickly diverted focus and resources to providing services for our families remotely, using virtual platforms and social media. Within a week ChAPS staff had a timetable of support activities and sources of information and advice available, ensuring that our children and adults felt supported, and were able to establish the fixed and/or predictable routines they need.



Google Classroom has become a valuable platform, as two of our specialist teachers have uploaded resources specifically for our families. Using their extensive knowledge of autism, and also their teaching experience, they have uploaded academic resources which they know will appeal to autistic children. Certain subject areas such as STEM, space, transport, animals can appeal to autistic children, who can become very

knowledgeable in their specialist subject. At the same time they can be very rigid in their thinking, and often object strongly to doing school work at home – school belongs in school, home is home! By appealing to their personal interests, it increases motivation, and parents are more likely to be able to get them to engage in their 'school work'. As the routine of accessing Google Classroom became established additional resources were added around fitness, social skills, life skills and mental health. In addition to children's resources, resources were added for our young adult learners around life and independence skills. For families generally, fun activities were added in an accessible way, giving highly structured and often visual instructions for crafts and cookery (all based around ingredients that were easy to get), to encourage families to spend positive time together.



You Tube sessions with our specialist teacher Emma, support children and adults to remain calm, and to develop social skills. Using her knowledge of sensory approaches to anxiety and stress management, she created a series of 'sensory circuits', a gentle exercise

programme which addresses the sensory issues people with autism face, and allows them to reduce their heightened senses, and so increase wellbeing and focus. Other sessions addressed the general anxiety around social distancing and Covid-19, and offered tutorials on social skills such as managing anger.



As well as being used for meetings, **ZOOM** became our preferred platform for support sessions. Groups of children and adults who were used to being together at activities were supported to join Zoom sessions and maintain contact and friendships.

ChAPS Online Timetable

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Uploaded Daily	Sensory Fun Platform: Google Classroom Class Code: _____ Staff Member: Emma	Sensory Fun Platform: Google Classroom Class Code: _____ Staff Member: Emma	Sensory Fun Platform: Google Classroom Class Code: _____ Staff Member: Emma	Sensory Fun Platform: Google Classroom Class Code: _____ Staff Member: Emma	Sensory Fun Platform: Google Classroom Class Code: _____ Staff Member: Emma
Uploaded between school hours	Cook Around the World Platform: Google Classroom Class Code: _____ Staff Member: Claire	STEM Make Project Platform: Google Classroom Class Code: _____ Staff Member: Claire	Art Club Platform: Google Classroom Class Code: _____ Staff Member: Claire	Sweet Treats Cook Lesson Platform: Google Classroom Class Code: _____ Staff Member: Claire	Jar of Dreams Platform: Google Classroom Class Code: _____ Staff Member: Claire
12.30-1pm	Adults Meet Platform: Zoom Meeting ID: _____ Staff Member: Emma	Adults Meet Platform: Zoom Meeting ID: _____ Staff Member: Emma	Adults Meet Platform: Zoom Meeting ID: _____ Staff Member: Emma	L4L Meet Up (Private) Platform: Zoom Meeting ID: _____ Staff Member: Emma	Adults Meet Platform: Zoom Meeting ID: _____ Staff Member: Emma
4-4.30pm	Children's Mindfulness Platform: Zoom Meeting ID: _____ Staff Member: Di		Children's Mindfulness Platform: Zoom Meeting ID: _____ Staff Member: Di		Children's Mindfulness Platform: Zoom Meeting ID: _____ Staff Member: Di
7-7.30pm	Teen Meet (12-17yrs) Platform: Zoom Meeting ID: _____ Staff Member: Di				
8.30-9pm		Adult Mindfulness Platform: Zoom Meeting ID: _____ Staff Member: Di		Adult Mindfulness Platform: Zoom Meeting ID: _____ Staff Member: Di	

Mindfulness classes, adult chats, check-ins with our Learning 4 Life young adults and parent support have all been added to the joint Google/Zoom timetable.



All of the above supports our most popular resource: our closed **Facebook** group. Our members use this resource constantly. They are used to logging in regularly to find out what's going on, share advice, and to virtually socialise. All of the above classes, activities and chats are posted on Facebook so families are triggered to access the activities. In addition our staff start chats about what we're all doing, and post pictures of their own activities, quotes and affirmations to maintain a positive feel. A daily photo share around a theme has proved very popular with themes like 'bright colours' and 'reflections'.



At the point of lock down, ChAPS were just commencing the delivery of **Autism Post Diagnostic Parent Training**, a 6 week course on behalf of Cheshire CCG, and run with our colleagues from the Autism Support Consultancy. Delivered across various locations in Cheshire East and Cheshire West, we were half-way through the first course, and about to start the second. Within days of lock down, we had approached the CCG Commissioners saying we could continue to deliver the course as a webinar, and a week later we scheduled the first sessions. Whilst this was initially a means to an end, it is apparent that for parents who may struggle to access training, this could well be an alternative form of delivery which could be separately commissioned going forward.

ChAPS mission is to enable individuals with Autism Spectrum Condition (whether diagnosed or not), and their families, to achieve their potential through the provision of support, education and advice.

Covid-19, social distancing and lock down will not prevent us from using our considerable expertise to maintain our mission. We are immensely proud of our team who have researched, innovated, shared expertise and worked incredibly hard, to make a difficult and frightening situation easier for our families.

www.cheshireautism.org.uk

Inspiring families to achieve more