



Supporting Individuals with Autism through Uncertain Times

<https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/supporting-individuals-autism-through-uncertain-times>

All children and young adults require support from caregivers during times of stress and uncertainty, such as those we are facing now with the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). Coping with the unknown and navigating school closures, abrupt changes in routines, loss of connections with teachers and friends, and fear around contracting the virus- are burdens for all, and caregivers play an important role in helping children and young adults understand the changes and process their related feelings. Individuals with autism may need additional support to process the news and adapt to the many changes. This population may face additional challenges related to comprehension, communication, difficulty understanding abstract language, an insistence on sameness, and a greater likelihood of anxiety and depression—all of which may be exacerbated during this stressful period.

The following **7 support strategies** are designed to meet the unique needs of individuals with autism during this period of uncertainty. In addition, examples and ready-made resources are included to help caregivers implement these strategies quickly and easily. These materials purposely represent a variety of styles/designs/complexity to model the range of what may be most meaningful across ages and skills, and to demonstrate what can be generated with few materials by busy caregivers. Specific adaptations and additions may be necessary to best meet the varied needs of individual children and young adults.

These strategies are intended to be a menu or toolkit of ideas that may be helpful-- caregivers may take one idea at a time and find a way to make it work for their child(ren) with autism and their family. Caregivers may want to start with a strategy they have used in the past, or perhaps find a tool to address the issue that is creating the most immediate stress. Consider involving the individual with autism in the decision-making process about what tools would be most helpful.

7 Strategies to Support Individuals with ASD through Uncertain Times

- Support understanding
- Offer opportunities for expression
- Prioritize coping and calming skills
- Maintain routines
- Build new routines
- Foster connections (from a distance)
- Be aware of changing behaviors