

Remote support for children with SEN in the Early Years

Creativity and independent remote learning at home

Tania Choudhury, SENDCo,
Sheringham Nursery School, UK

What's the idea?

Remote online learning has become the new norm in light of the pandemic. But how appropriate is this for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the Early Years? This guide offers alternative ways in which educators can encourage learning at home without the use of IT.

What does the research say?

Evidence suggests that children exposed to higher screen time tend to have poorer physical health and are more likely to form symptoms of depression (Stiglic and Viner, 2019). Likewise, Twenge and Campbell (2018) found that more than an hour's use of screen time a day was associated with lower psychological wellbeing including impaired focus, difficulty making friends and reduced emotional stability. This poses a challenge for our children with SEN in the Early Years who are only just developing their skills in these areas.

Key abstract concepts such as space and measure and social communication are hard to grasp online. The role of the adult is key in facilitating and scaffolding skills and then taking a step back. Educators can suggest an alternative offer that considers real-life, tactile experiences, which are crucial for early learning.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- Burke N (2018) *Musical Development Matters in the Early Years*. Watford: The British Association for Early Childhood Education.
- Nind M and Hewett D (2006) *Access to communication: developing the basics of communication with people with SLD* (2nd ed). London: David Fulton Publishers.
- Stiglic N and Viner R (2019) Effects of screentime on the health and well-being of children and adolescents: a systematic review of reviews. *BMJ Open* 9(1). Available at: <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/9/1/e023191.info> (accessed 15 February 2021).
- Twenge J and Campbell W (2018) Associations between screen time and lower psychological well-being among children and adolescents: Evidence from a population-based study. *Preventive Medicine Reports* 12: 271–283.

What does it mean in practice?

- How activities are communicated to parents is your first hurdle, as they should feel empowered to take part. What method of communication would work best – an email, a WhatsApp message or something else? After that, establish in what format you would like the information to go out – is it something that can be read, or a demonstrative video by a familiar member of staff? There are some great examples at: www.sheringham-nur.org.uk and <https://www.youtube.com/NHSELFT>.
- For children in the Early Years and with SEN, I always remind parents that playing with their child is key. Irrespective of what their level of need is, having that intensive adult interaction can teach them skills including empathy, self-regulation and language. Intensive interaction includes the adult observing and copying the child to become in tune with them. They watch the child's responses, and extend the interaction. When musical instruments are introduced, it encourages a great deal of creativity. Such instruments can be home-made shakers or pots and spoons.
- Messy, sensory play is easy to do at home. It is a process-led activity, so the fun is in joining in. Parents can feel hesitant about the mess that may be created, so gradually build up their confidence. Dry messy play can involve rice, pasta or even shredded paper. Wet

messy play can be paint in plastic bags. Generally, parents can use items they already have at home. For fussy eaters, playing with food items can help with fears of texture and encourage a varied diet overtime.

- In the garden, suggest play with soil and water to watch it turn to mud. Understanding cause and effect is a key cognitive skill, so identify opportunities to develop it through the child's interest. For those that focus on local details, observe the loose objects around the garden – leaves, sticks, stones – and together make a pattern or create transient art. Putting down a base such as a black bin bag can help to frame the child's masterpiece.
- Cooking is a wonderfully rich experience – the aromas and textures all provide sensory stimulation. It follows in stages, and for many children with SEN, routines are vital. By offering families a numbered photo routine of the recipe, children may find it easier to cope with staying focused. It is important to keep the recipe simple and reflective of the local community. Some of my favourites are cornflake cakes, chickpea curry and chapattis.

Finally, as with all great teaching and learning, feedback is crucial. Find out from parents what has been helpful and what has not to better inform your offer.