

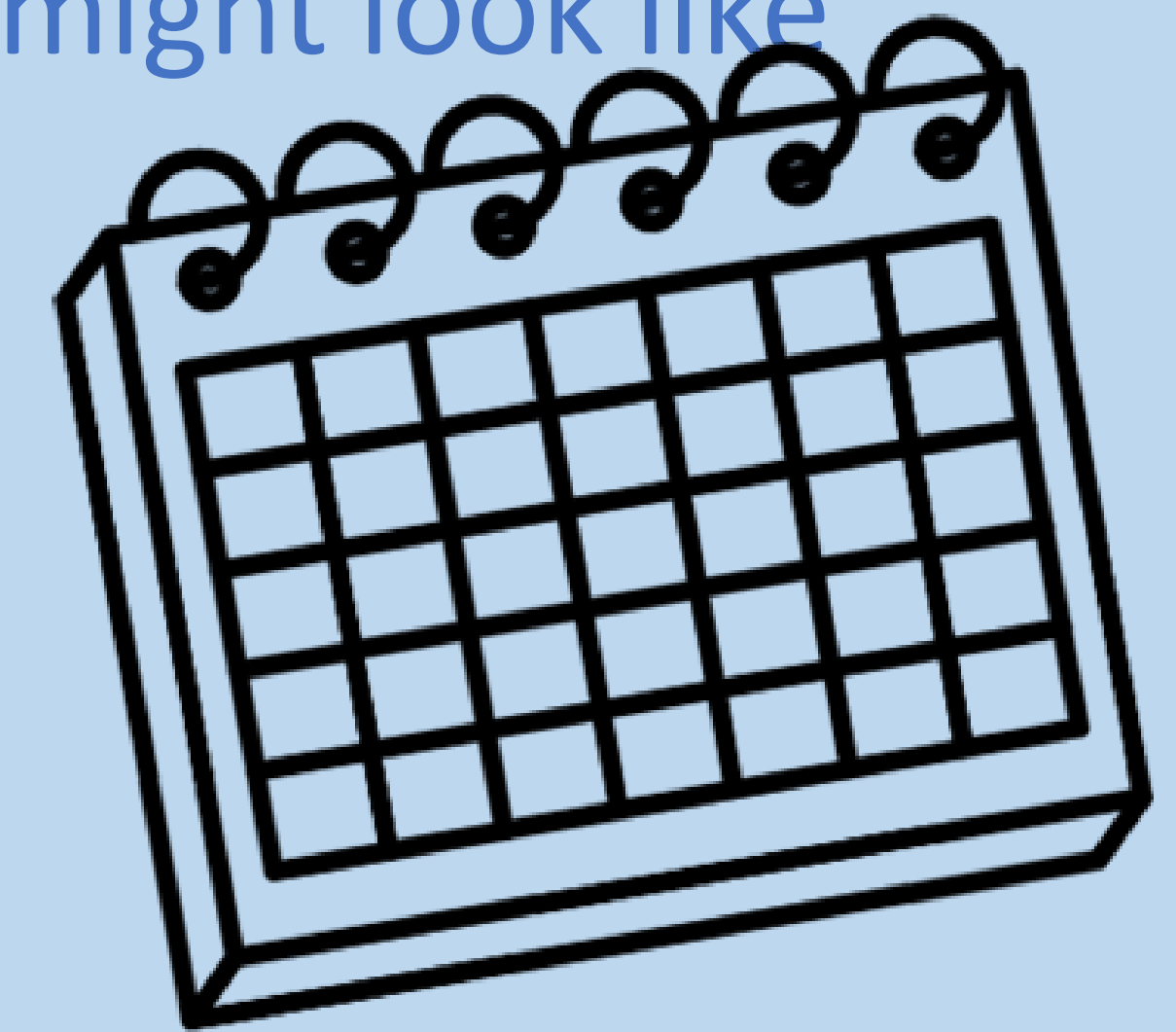
Living with restrictions due to COVID-19 Supporting your child with additional needs

Top tips for helping parents manage children's anxiety

THINK PREPARATION

Children with additional needs often find change difficult and will need time to adjust to the different ways of interacting

- Talk with them about what going out, to the shops, to appointments might look like
- Provide as much notice as possible for when they do need to go out
- Use social stories to show what going out could be like
- Prepare your child for the possibility of set backs



THINK SENSORY

Anxiety might be high when thinking about coming out of lockdown and supporting the sensory needs of your child can help reduce any additional source of distress.

- Use a sensory toy as a transitional object for them to take out of the house / to appointments (e.g. a fiddle toy, stress ball)
- Plan with your child what they can do to help with specific sensory difficulties if they feel overwhelmed when out



PLAN

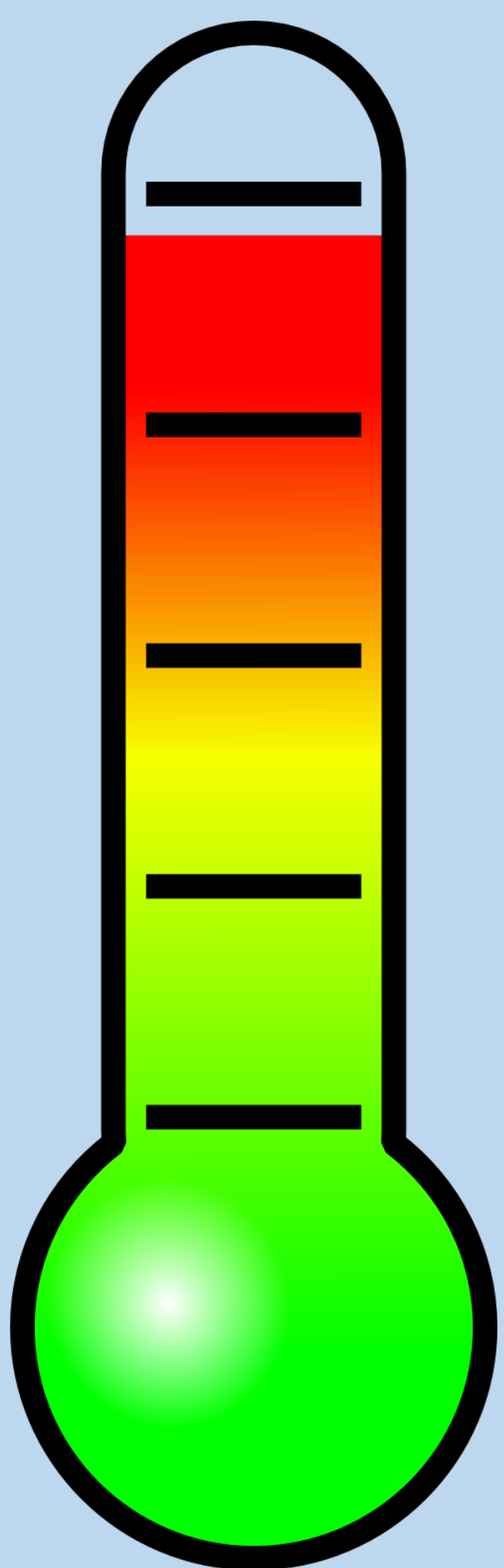
If I feel it is too much when we go out I can try:

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THINK EMOTIONS

When we are faced with dangers or threats our bodies and minds are programmed to respond with fight or flight. This means that fear can make us respond with anger or aggression and it can also make us want to avoid or run away. Right now, Covid-19 has presented as a real 'threat' and worry for everyone, including children. It is understandable and expected that children will experience strong emotions right now.

All children will have many different feelings about going back to normal after being in lockdown, this could be related to worries about contamination, or feelings of loss or worry about how to interact with others after it has been so long.



- Be prepared for emotions to come out in other ways such as changes in behaviour, eating, sleeping
- You can encourage them to draw how they are feeling if they struggle to put it into words
- Use visual prompts such as feelings thermometers or emotions faces cards to help them put into words how they are feeling

Responding to your child's worries.

- Listen to their concerns, validate how they are feeling and see if you can do anything together to make them feel better. What do you do to relax together? A hot chocolate? A film together?
- Try problem solving together solutions to possible situations – *what can you do/say if your friend wants to hug you?*
- Reassure your child that people have created guidelines to try to keep us safe
- Focus on maintaining social distancing and good hand hygiene as these are things your child can be in control of when other things feel out of their control

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THINK BEHAVIOUR/WARNING SIGNS

Children might find it more difficult to manage their emotions in response to the current uncertainty that we are all experiencing. They might attempt to calm themselves in other ways, and these may be more apparent at times of high stress. For example:

- Children might struggle with their usual sleep routines or existing difficulties with sleep might become more apparent and cause further challenges for parents.
- Children who have had difficulties with eating in the past might struggle with this more now and further restrict their intake. This is more likely to become a problem when other parts of their lives feel out of their control. Additional sensory needs related to eating may also be exacerbated by increased anxiety.



Responses to anxious behaviours:

- Notice changes in behaviours as a signs they are feeling anxious
- Use calming/soothing strategies early on to help your child manage their emotions.

THINK TALKING

Create a time when everyone is calm to talk with your child about what they are worried about

Be curious and ask open questions giving you child time to think and respond



- How do they feel about coming out of lockdown and what they are looking forward to – what couldn't they do that they can now or soon?
- Provide opportunities to ask questions even if you don't know the answer and you can be honest about that
- Ask them about what they are feeling, help them to name their emotions and to realise that these feelings are 'normal'.

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Supporting your child with additional needs

THINK YOU!

The COVID-19 lockdown has been a difficult process for any parent, especially when your child has additional needs. Looking after yourself means you can be there even more for them.

- Reflect on how you have found the past few months and how you feel about returning to normal
- Take some time for yourself – what do you enjoy doing?
How do you look after yourself? Who can you talk about your worries with?
- Think of what helps your emotional wellbeing – and reward yourself, you deserve it!



Further information

Sheffield Children's Hospital COVID-19 resources:

<https://www.sheffieldchildrens.nhs.uk/patients-and-parents/coronavirus-resources-for-children-and-families/>

National Autistic Society – guidance and helpline for parents, young people and staff:

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