



Associatie van Academische Werkplaatsen VB

The question below has been answered by the Academic Collaborative Centers affiliated with the Dutch Association of Academic Collaborative Centers Intellectual Disabilities. An overview of questions can be found on the [Association's website](#).

Question

Due to the Coronavirus-COVID-19 physical contact should be avoided as much as possible. How are you then able to make contact with persons with both intellectual and visual disabilities (visually impaired or blind)?

Answer

This is a good but also very complicated question. When supporting people with both intellectual and visual disabilities this requires extra adjustments and the use of physical contact can be supportive and important.

When someone needs physical care, physical contact cannot be avoided, we can at most limit it. When answering this question, we target the question of: how can you limit physical contact as much as possible when helping persons who are dependent on others for their daily care and guidance, while still offering the wanted help?

To answer this question, the researchers of the Academic Lab 'Social relationships and attachment' Bartiméus – Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam did a 'Quick search' for ideas and possibilities, these are viewed point-by-point:

1) Verbal communication:

- a) At first, it is important to explain to persons with (visual and) intellectual disabilities why we should increase the physical distance. It is important to explain about the coronavirus-COVID-19 in a way that the person with (visual and) intellectual disabilities can understand. Next, explain to the person that you will need to help the person more in a verbal manner, that the maintaining of contact with other people should be done in a different way and that activities continue but will need to be adjusted.



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For useful materials when talking to persons with intellectual disabilities, please see the literature references below.

- b) Of course, this is very difficult to explain to people with (visual and) severe intellectual disabilities. If possible, supportive pictograms/icons can be used. For persons who are visually impaired (partially sighted), enlarged pictograms/icons can be used. Focus on what is doable, for instance on hygiene, on washing of hands and keeping distance. For an overview of icons, please visit: <https://www.pictostudio.nl/2020/02/28/gratis-pdf-met-pictogrammen-corona-virus/>
- 2) *Exercising without physical contact with persons with (visual and) intellectual disabilities:*
Regular and enough exercise is anyhow a challenge for persons with visual disabilities and this is especially the case now everyone has to stay at home. When doing 'running therapy for people with a visual disability', objects are used to guide the other person, so to offer the freedom of movement. Think of the using of a band, a hoop or an exercise bar to move 'together' and to stimulate movement. Use materials that are easy to be cleaned after use.
- 3) *Offering security without physical contact*
There are various special swings, hammocks and rocking chairs available. Without physical touch, soothing movement can be offered by for example pushing a bird nest swing or a hammock. For examples, please visit: <http://www.sensomotorische-integratie.nl/spelletjes/spel-3-beweging.html>
- 4) *Maintaining social relationships without physically being present*
Many researchers name social relationships as the most important indicator for a high quality of life. Having secure social relationships contributes to the experiencing of less stress. Do you want to help people with (visual and) intellectual disabilities to experience less stress in these very stressful and insecure times, then it is crucial to support them in maintaining contact with the people who are important to them. It is also of great importance to facilitate conversations with parents, volunteers and other familiar supportive persons like behavioural specialists or doctors. Think about using Facetime, calling with Whats App or video calls via tablets/mobile phones. By using mobile devices, people with visual disabilities can themselves reduce the viewing distance. Please remind yourself to properly clean the tablet/mobile phone after use.



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For an overview of applications, please visit:

<https://www.kennispleingehandictensector.nl/gehandictensector/media/documents/Thema's/Gezondheid/applicaties-verstandelijke-beperking-technologie-apps-app-boekje.pdf>

Bartiméus FabLab has much experience offering digital aids. If you have a question, you can always contact Maaïke Meerlo (mmeerlo@bartimeus.nl) and Dick Lunenburg (dlunenburg@bartimeus.nl).

5) *Use of technology to be able to offer care without the use of physical contact*

Although this cannot be realized within short notice, it is important that in future there will be more attention for the use of technology in health care, for example the use of supervisory domotics, sensors, chips, GPS and cameras. When wanting to offer a clear day structure, perhaps robots can be used. Robots can also be put to use for recreation and entertainment.

These are exciting and complicated times. We realize that caregivers give all they've got to offer high quality care. Applause for your effort, perseverance and dedication! We hope that we were able to give you some tips. If there are any other questions, feel free to contact us via:

<https://www.socialerelatiesenict.nl/contact/>

Useful links:

- Overview of information materials on the coronavirus available for persons with intellectual disabilities:
 - <https://www.kennispleingehandictensector.nl/gezondheid/voorlichtingsmaterialen-coronavirus>
 - <https://www.vgn.nl/informatie-voor-clienten>
 - <https://iederin.nl/toegankelijke-informatie-over-het-coronavirus/>
- Short movie where the virus is explained in easy to understand language, using icons:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGc8wXQSaCg>
- Tips about the coronavirus and persons with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities:
<https://www.kennispleingehandictensector.nl/gehandictensector/media/documents/Thema's/Gezondheid/coronavirus-info-mvb-lvb.pdf>



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- Tips about the coronavirus and persons with severe intellectual disabilities:
<https://www.kennispleingehandictensector.nl/gehandictensector/media/documents/Thema's/Gezondheid/coronavirus-uitleg-tips-emb.pdf>

Literature related to technology:

Brok, W. den, & Sterkenburg, P. (2015). Self-controlled technologies to support skill attainment in persons with an autism spectrum disorder and/or an intellectual disability: a systematic literature review. *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*. 10(1), 1-10.

(doi:10.3109/17483107.2014.921248)

De Groot, J., Wingerden – Fontein, E., Sterkenburg, P.S., Lourens, T., Barakova, E.I. (2018). Self-disclosure in a conversation- and game-based human robot interaction for people with a visual and intellectual disability. 27th IEEE International Conference on Robot and Human Interactive Communication.

Woensdregt, G., D'Addabbo, G., Scholten, H., Alfen van, C. & Sterkenburg, P. (in press). Sensors in the care of persons with visual and/or intellectual disabilities: use, needs, practical issues, and ethical concerns. *Technology and Disability*.

Literature related to social relations:

Shalock, R. L. (2004). The concept of quality of life: What we know and do not know. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 48(3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2788.2003.00558.x>

Schuengel, C., Sterkenburg, P.S., Jeczynski, P., Janssen, C.G.C., & Jongbloed, G. (2009). Supporting affect regulation in children with multiple disabilities during psychotherapy: A multiple case design study of therapeutic attachment. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 77(2), Apr, 291-301

Sterkenburg, P.S. (2019). Ontwikkelen in Sociale Relaties. Hoe technologie sociale relaties kan bevorderen van mensen met een visuele of visuele-en-verstandelijke beperking.' Bartiméus Reeks, Eduweb. ISBN 978-94-91838-77-4 Zie: <https://www.bartimeus.nl/nieuws/contact-moeilijker-als-je-niet-kunt-zien-ict-kan-daarbij-helpen>

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