HOW TO EXPLAIN COVID-19 TO YOUR CHILD WITH ASD:

It's important to use age-appropriate words:

- **Ages 3-6**: "There's a germ going around and that's why the school/daycare is closed down" At this age, going into the specifics would only confuse them and make them anxious
- **Ages 6+**: More in-depth, "There's a virus going around and it can go away by washing our hands, avoid touching our face, and not going to school". You can explain that this virus lives on surfaces that we touch, and that we cannot see it. Also mention that it can go in our mouth and in our body if we do not wash our hands

When incorporating age-appropriate language with coping language, it can look like something like this "Mommy and daddy are doing everything we can to keep you from getting sick". It's important to use calm undertones so that your child does not get anxious.

You could also use this social story to help visualize it.

**Ask them how they're feeling**: During this time, it's crucial that you monitor and actively ask them how they're feeling. When explaining this, you can say that "The germ that's going around can make you feel sick, so we want to take care of you". Also explain that "The germ can make your temperature go up", so when you check, they know what it's for.

**Avoid showing your children any media/news related to the virus**: Make it clear that if they have any questions, they can ask you. When exposing them to the media, it can instill anxiety, as they can become confused and fearful about this time.

**Prepare them before going out into the public**: When going grocery shopping, explain to them before you go that there will be lots of toilet paper missing and other supplies because lots of people don’t want to go outside that often because of the germ.

**If they ask why school/daycare is cancelled**: When your child is used to the routine of going to school/daycare, it can be hard for them to wrap around the concept of suddenly not going. You can phrase it that " [Insert teacher's name] wants you to stay home so that the germ doesn't get you and your friends sick".

**Set up family time to talk about all of the changes**: This allows your child(ren) to ask questions and easily transition into a new schedule/routine.
TIPS AND TRICKS FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WITH AUTISM:

Start with yourself: Parents, caretakers, and guardians need to take care of themselves before anyone else. Children with ASD find comfort in their support system when they see its strong and resilient. It can be an anxiety induced time, and when your child see's you're emotionally unstable, it could do the same to them.

Building a new schedule: ASD children heavily rely on a schedule that barely changes. With school closing, it can be hard for your child to adjust from losing such a major part of their routine. The new schedule should allow your child to have time for academics, quiet time, chore time, meals & snacks, exercise, and crafting. If your child does extra-curriculars like karate or dance, suggest an alternative. Ask your child "instead of doing to dance practice, how about you pick your favourite songs and put on a show for mommy" or "because karate is cancelled, how about we go in the backyard and kick the ball around for a bit". It's also important to give your child a few options to pick from. A sample of a schedule can be found here.

Teaching your child how to wash their hands: It's important to make sure your children are washing their hands constantly and incorporating it in their new routine. Make a checklist where your child can mark off the times of the day when they've washed their hands. When washing their hands, you could sing the Happy Birthday song with them, or play a snippet of their favourite song. Additionally, they could pick out the soap they would like to use at the store, as some children with Autism are sensitive and particular about the scent and feel (some like foamy, some like the micro beads etc.)

Social-Distancing: Your children may experience some social withdrawal and miss their friends and family during this time. When building a new schedule, you can include time for Facetime/Skype or even just a phone call with those your child sees the most. Bring it up like so "How about at 1:00pm we Facetime grandma and grandpa?". Slotting time to reach out to those that your child sees during their everyday life can reduce anxiety and help them feel less lonely. If you take your children out, make sure you explain that if they're talking to someone, they should keep some distance in between and do not high five or shake hands.

Cleanliness: If your child uses sensory toys and/or chew tether, it's important to wash them with hot soapy water when not in use. Now more than ever, items that can potentially be inhaled should be cleaned more frequently, as COVID-19 can live on surfaces. It's also important to disinfect counter tops, railings, doorknobs, anything that your children touch in their daily lives. Also, talk to your child about how they cough and sneeze. Explain to them that when you sneeze and cough into your elbow, it stops the spread of this germ.
SOURCES:

- https://littlepuddins.ie/coronavirus-social-story/