

Mask Wearing 101

COVID-19 has prompted many changes to our daily routines. While many children adapt well, some children experience significant difficulty with these changes – such as the new recommendation/requirement to wear face masks in public places. If your child or student struggles to wear a face mask, one or more of the following **teaching tips** may help. Consider your child’s unique needs when identifying strategies most likely to be effective.

Important: Children who cannot verbally express discomfort with a mask may exhibit aggression or other challenging behaviors. If this happens, **consult with your child’s team** (school staff, medical providers, mental health providers, etc.) for individualized support. For children who have underlying respiratory or immunosuppressed conditions, it is especially important to **consult a pediatrician** for guidance. Finally, **inclusion** of children with disabilities within school and public places remains a top priority, and face-mask requirements should not be the cause for exclusion.

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <p>Break it Down</p> | <p>Choose a time when your child is calm to explain what a face mask is, why it is required, and how to wear it. Use concrete language to facilitate understanding. For example, “People are getting sick. Masks will stop us from getting sick,” or “Viruses can spread when we breathe, cough, or sneeze. Wearing a mask makes it harder for the virus to spread from one person to another.”</p> |
| <p>Take it Slow</p> | <p>Assess your child’s comfort with their mask and practice accordingly. If your child is fearful or avoidant, model by wearing your mask and have your child practice these steps slowly over time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Holding the mask - Bringing the mask toward their face - Touching the mask to their face - Placing the elastic over one ear, then the other - Keeping the mask on, covering nose & mouth - Removing the mask and washing hands <p>Use a visual timer (such as a kitchen timer or smart phone app) to help your child increase the length of time they wear the mask. Start with a just a few seconds and gradually work up to longer time.</p> |
| <p>Make it Fun</p> | <p>Reward your child for progress toward successful mask wearing, and eventually for keeping the mask on for a certain period of time (remember to start small).</p> <p>Allow your child to participate in a favorite activity (such as watching a video, playing a game, or taking a walk) while wearing the mask. “First-Then” language may be helpful: “First, mask on. Then, video.” Have your first public outing be short and to a favorite place.</p> |
| <p>Change it Up</p> | <p>Once your child is showing progress, consider expanding their skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practice wearing different masks, for options when one is in the laundry. - Practice mask wearing at different times and places. - Practice having different people ask them to wear the mask. <p>Again, reward your child for progress!</p> |
| <p>Problem Solve</p> | <p>If your child struggles with their mask, consider one or more of these strategies: 1) Try several types of masks of different fabrics and styles, 2) Tighten or loosen the straps, 3) Try using an elastic ear saver, 3) Clean the mask regularly and/or apply a preferred scent, 4) Brush teeth immediately before putting on mask to prevent odors inside the mask</p> <p>Use a social story to support understanding. Read it regularly before activities requiring a mask. Incorporate mask-wearing expectations into your child’s visual schedule.</p> <p>Prioritize key activities for mask wearing (i.e., when physical distancing is not possible). It will be much easier to teach and get compliance for short and discrete times when masks are most important.</p> |

Mask-Wearing 101: Teaching Tips for Home and School

References

Fraser-Ball, Leslie. (2020, June 22). Working through the challenges of wearing a mask. Retrieved from <https://www.autismsociety-nc.org/challenges-wearing-mask/>

Helping individuals with autism wear face masks. (2020, May 19). Retrieved from <https://www.autismnj.org/article/helping-individuals-with-autism-wear-face-masks/>

Teaching your child to tolerate wearing a face mask: Tips and guidelines. (2020, April 27). Retrieved from <https://www.thesummitcenter.org/app/uploads/2020/04/Desensitizing-to-Wearing-Face-Mask-Parent-Resource.pdf>

Additional Resources

Social Stories - <https://www.autismlittlelearners.com/search/label/COVID-19>

Infographics for Parents and Children - <https://www.actionlearningnetwork.org/covid19>

Multilingual Educational Resources - <https://scdhec.gov/infectious-diseases/viruses/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/educational-outreach-materials-2019-ncov>