

Strategies for Wearing a Mask

Some children (and adults!) have a difficult time tolerating face masks. They bring on a variety of new sensations! Wearing a mask smells funny, feels different and changes our breathing, all of which affects our nervous system and how we manage our emotions.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHOOSING A MASK

Not all masks are created equal, especially for those with sensory processing difficulties. When selecting a mask, think about the following:

- Soft fabric liners can help reduce unpleasant sensations, such as scratchy material, around the face.
- Masks that tie behind the head or that can be attached to a headband or baseball hat can help reduce ear irritation. Face mask extender straps (see right) can also be helpful.



HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD TOLERATE A MASK?

- Allow your child to express what they like or dislike about wearing a mask.
- Let your child be involved in picking out the design or color of mask.
- Explain the why: "Germs are special to your own body, and we need to make sure they stay within your body. Masks help keep your own germs to yourself. Some germs are good, but some are bad. We can't always tell which are good or bad, which is why you need to wear a mask. Some germs can make you sick. We need to make sure you keep those germs away from your own body."
- Work on desensitizing the child's face with other textures prior to wearing a mask.
- Make it fun!
 - Practice wearing while dressing up as a doctor or nurse.
 - Practice wearing over a Halloween mask.
 - Put on stuffed animals.
 - Decorate your own mask with fabric markers.
 - While wearing masks, look in the mirror and talk about them.
 - Draw masks on characters in books.
 - Show your child pictures of other children or familiar characters wearing masks.
 - Read social stories about wearing a mask. For example, <https://paautism.org/resource/wearing-mask-social-story/> offers a video and social stories in a variety of languages.
- Use behavioral strategies!
 - Use transitional warnings: "In five minutes, we will put on our mask and go outside."
 - Start by wearing a mask in small increments of time (e.g., one minute) and gradually increase. This can be paired with reward charts or incentives.
 - Offer choices: "Do you want to wear your pink mask or blue mask today?"
 - Use visuals or a visual schedule to support routine.

References:

<https://icahn.mssm.edu/files/ISMMS/Assets/Research/Seaver/COVID-19-Webinar-Masks.pdf>

<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/masks-and-children-during-covid-19/>

<https://paautism.org/resource/wearing-mask-social-story/>

<https://www.aota.org/~media/Corporate/Files/Practice/back-to-school/Masks-and-Facial-Coverings.pdf>