



Teaching Wearing a Mask



For most people, wearing a mask is either a neutral experience or an inconvenience. For others, wearing a mask may be especially aversive, possibly due to sensory challenges, anxiety, or other reasons. Wearing a mask is a skill. With practice, most people can learn to wear a mask.

Note: The CDC advises some people NOT to wear a mask, including children under 2, and any person who cannot independently remove the mask.

As you get started, view this video to understand more about how to teach someone to wear a mask, and to view examples of the strategies.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6T75jZ6v3I&feature=youtu.be>

TEACHING STRATEGIES- Here are 10 to choose from. Try one or a combination. Tailor instruction to the individual's learning needs and preferences. *(descriptions on pages 2 and 3)*

1. Steps
2. Practice!
3. Timers
4. Distraction
5. Individual preference
6. Model
7. Video models- youtube, facetime, homemade
8. Social Stories
9. Celebrate
10. Track progress

1. Teach smaller STEPS: Break skill into smaller, manageable steps. Teach the steps individually and then chain together. Here's a possible sequence
 - a. Hold the mask in hands
 - b. Bring mask to face
 - c. Put straps around ears/ head
 - d. Wear mask. This can be broken down further by time (e.g. 5 sec, 10 sec, 20 sec, 1 min, 5 min, etc). Take a baseline to decide the initial amount of time the person will wear the mask. If the individual does not wear a mask at all, start with 2 seconds.
 - e. Remove mask
 - f. Wear while walking around home, in area directly in front of home, around the block, around the neighborhood, into stores.

2. Practice! wearing mask every day. For beginners, try for at least 3 practice sessions daily. Practice in all the contexts where wearing a mask is expected, such as leaving home, walking in public, inside a store, and with all the people the individual will be wearing their mask with (e.g. family, various staff members, etc).

3. Timers: Use a visual timer so person knows how long the mask wearing will continue, and when it will end. Visual timers are available on smart phones / iPad, or use sand timer or physical time timer.

4. Distraction: Engage in other activities to distract from mild discomfort. Wear mask for duration of song, video, show, etc. Provide fidget or activity for individual to enjoy while wearing mask.

5. Individual Preference: Experiment with variety to find the most comfortable and motivating masks. Mask fashion is a thing!

6. Model wearing masks; relatives, friends, staff can all support individual to wear a mask by modeling the skills targeted in the task analysis, especially mask- wearing.
7. Video model: Videos are especially accessible, interesting, and motivating for some people. create videos of relatives, friends, staff, and the individual themselves putting on and wearing a mask. Create voiceover to cue the steps and encourage effort and success. Use facetime, zoom or other video chat platform to livestream model in real time.
8. Social story- short story to teach and prompt mask wearing, and explain or celebrate the benefits. Include photos, clipart, or drawings. Modify language to be accessible to the individual who is learning. Generic social stories are available online, or create individualized stories for persons.
9. Celebrate: reinforce mask wearing with praise; fist bump, high 5 or hugs (if living together), privileges, fun videos of mask wearing, tangible rewards as needed.
10. Track progress: keep a journal or data sheet to track progress on skills from task analysis, and amount of time per session.