

Tolerating a Mask

INTRODUCTION

As we begin entering back into the community, it's important to follow guidance from officials by continuing to wear masks. Although tolerable for some individuals, this can be a new and difficult task for others. The purpose of this resource is to provide information to families and caregivers on how to help support a loved one to wear a mask.

TALK ABOUT IT

Start off by having a conversation with your loved one about the importance and reason behind wearing a mask in the community and the safety that it provides to themselves and others. This would be a good time to review the **“Wearing a Mask” social story.**

HELPFUL PHRASES:

- To leave home safely, there is a new rule that says everyone must wear a mask so that we don't spread or contract germs and become sick.
- I care about you and your safety, so wearing a mask is important.

ASK QUESTIONS

How comfortable do they feel about wearing a mask? If they seem uneasy, acknowledge and normalize their feelings. Questions include:

- Will you hold the mask in your hands? Will you hold the mask up to your nose/mouth?
- Would you mind putting the mask on for a few seconds to practice?
- How would you feel about leaving the house with a mask on? Are you okay with others around you wearing a mask while we are out?

GIVE THEM A CHOICE

Does your loved one have sensory preferences? Think about their comfort and which kind of mask better suite their needs. Present several choices of masks, or better yet, involve them in making their own mask! Consider the following:

- Some individuals prefer cotton over nylon.
- Elastic around the ears vs. a tie behind the head.
- They might prefer to wear a mask that is their favorite color or design.

DESENSITIZE

Desensitization is a way to gradually build up tolerance of a new behavior or activity over time. One way that family members and caregivers can move towards making wearing the mask a tolerable behavior for your loved one is by using a **desensitization tool**.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Practicing wearing the mask! Try this several times before venturing into the community. One way to practice this new behavior is by using a **task analysis tool**. Task analysis is a way to break down multiple components into much smaller steps, in order to teach a new behavior. Remember, for some individuals, communication might be more difficult while wearing a mask. It is important to use gestures to your communicate feelings, and use words to replace emotions that might be hidden by wearing a mask.

REWARD

Provide lots of praise for what they were able to do, even just trying. Using a preferred item or activity as a reward may also be helpful. You could say something like: “You’ve been working very hard. I’m proud of how far you’ve come with wearing your mask!”