

Six Tips for Helping Students Wear Masks

Wearing a face covering during community outings can present challenges for some people with autism. While there are different requirements, accommodations, and exceptions in different states and regions, wearing a mask helps prevent the spread of COVID-19. People with autism may have challenges wearing a mask or face covering for many reasons: new routines can be challenging, and students have sensory challenges when it comes to different materials covering their noses and mouths, touching their ears, or causing general discomfort.



Show the student how to wear a mask

Model good mask hygiene on community outings (e.g. wear a mask, handle your mask without touching the cloth, keep your mask in a safe and clean location when eating or drinking).



Use visuals supports

Print the wearing a mask sequence (or save it to your phone as a picture or image) and review it in the car to establish a routine of wearing a mask in stores. This helps set the stage and reminds the student of the sequence of events.



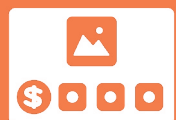
Watch a video

Show the student the “Wearing a Mask Video Model” before going to school or out into the community.



Make mask wearing fun!

- Practice placing masks on stuffed animals or dolls and role-play situations where masks are required in the community.
- Draw a mask on a favorite character and talk about why masks are required.
- Allow the student to choose a mask that meets the school’s requirements. Consider favorite colors or characters.



Teach mask-wearing

- Give praise and reinforcement for all steps of the wearing a mask routine (e.g. touching the mask to their face, trying new masks, putting on masks by themselves).
- The 5-token board can be used to help the student earn a reward at the end of the routine. Example: Before you go into the store, say, “First wear a mask, then you get pretzels.” While the student is wearing the mask in the store, remind them by saying, “I like the way you are wearing your mask!” or, “Nice job keeping the mask on!” and give them a token. Space the tokens out so that the student earns the reward when you can give it to them (i.e. in the checkout line or when you get to the car). Make sure the item you are using as a reward is really motivating and something the student chooses.



Practice!

- Use a timer to practice wearing masks at home. Practice good mask hygiene by placing dirty masks in a special bin.
- To increase the amount of time the student will tolerate wearing the mask:
- Identify how long the student currently wears a mask (i.e. the baseline).
- Allow the student to choose a reinforcer.
 - Identify an amount of time that you want the student to wear the mask (e.g. start with three minutes longer than the baseline).
 - When the student is wearing the mask, give a token for each increment of time.
 - After the student earns five tokens, give them a reinforcer.
 - Continue this process to increase the student's tolerance for wearing a mask for extended periods of time.



Resources

- [I Can Wear a Mask Social Script](#)
- [Wearing a Mask Sequence Strips](#)
- [Wearing a Mask Video Model - Primary](#)
- [Wearing a Mask Video Model - Secondary](#)
- [Token Board](#)