

Introducing the Use of Masks

This is a simple guide to use when doing practice sessions at home to get your family member used to wearing a mask.

If your loved one is not willing to let you put a mask on even for a few seconds, you can start by modeling the use of masks by wearing one yourself. Take it on and off, move it around, talk with it on, etc., so they can see that the mask is not harming you.

Start in small increments of time. Depending on the tolerance of your family member / individual, you may need to start with increments as small as seconds. Be sure to remove the mask BEFORE they become agitated and the mask becomes aversive. If you need to start as small as just touching the mask to their face for a few seconds without securing it, you can do that as your first step as well.

Be sure to provide an abundance of verbal praise every few seconds / minutes to your family member / individual. Be specific about what you are praising them for! “Great job keeping that mask on; it is going to help keep you healthy!”

Another great idea is to give them something to do with their hands to distract away from trying to take the mask off.

Once you remove the mask, it’s a great idea to provide some type of reinforcer (reward). Give them a handful of their favorite snack or a favorite activity to use. Again, make sure to provide a lot of specific praise “Great job keeping that mask on for so long, here are some skittles for doing such a great job!” You can even let them know beforehand that they will be rewarded with the treat prior to putting the masks on... “John, first masks, then some skittles!” (Modify the language to fit the level of understanding for your loved one).

Slowly increase the increments of time, but not until your loved one has been wearing the mask comfortably for a few sessions. For example, if you start with one minute, do not increase until they have worn it for one minute without any issues for 2 to 3 sessions. Be careful that you do not make too big of an increase in your time intervals!

If your family member / individual is having difficulties even tolerating other people wearing masks around them, you can reverse the roles and provide praise / rewards for them tolerating you with a mask on for small intervals of time.

Be creative and make it fun. Make a game out of it. Decorate your masks!

We have also included some links to social stories that can be useful during this time.

If you need assistance tailoring these strategies to your loved ones specific needs, please feel free to reach out to their assigned behaviorist who would be more than happy to assist!