

Wearing Face Masks During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Strategies to Overcome Sensory Issues

Michelle Gorenstein, PsyD

Jessica Zweifach, PhD

<https://mssm.zoom.us/j/98261469115>

Meeting ID: 982 6146 9115

*Featuring: Andi Sachs, MS, OTR/L
Occupational Therapist*

April 23, 2020 from 12-1 PM



Agenda

- Introductions
 - Michelle Gorenstein, PsyD
 - Jessica Zweifach, PhD
 - Andi Sachs, MS, OTR/L
- What is Sensory Processing?
- Face Masks and Sensory Processing Difficulties
- Strategies to Support Use of Facemasks
- Question and Answer

What is Sensory Processing?

- **Sensory Processing:** How the nervous system receives input from the senses and turns input into an appropriate motor and behavioral responses.

Why should we make this a focus?

- Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)
- Over-responsive vs Under-responsive

Facemasks and SPD

- **Face masks impact on a person with SPD:**

- Breathing = nervous system regulator
- Tactile = sense of touch
- Olfactory = sense of smell
- Proprioception = where body is in space
- Emotional Regulation*
- Impulsivity*

- If possible, allow child to express what they **like** or **dislike** about wearing a facemask

Strategies to support wearing a face mask...

- Parent / sibling/stuffed animal as a model for wearing
 - Make it “fun”
- Practice wearing at home
 - Increase the amount of time worn each day
- Include child in the process
 - Design, color, putting on
- Explore different fabrics
 - Choose breathable, non-itchy fabrics
 - Ear attachments (minimize pressure around the ear)
 - Adult sizes vs Child sizes

Simple Modifications



Behavioral Strategies: Language & Visuals

- Use **transitional warnings**

- “In 5 minutes we will go outside. Remember, we will put on our jackets and masks”

- Offer **choices** when possible

- “Do you want to wear your orange or your blue mask today?”

- Structure your language including the **reward** of a preferred activity

- “When you put on your mask, we will get to ride on your scooter”

- **Visuals** to support the routine

- Social stories
- Simple visual schedules by door (e.g. steps to going outside)

First →



© Can Stock Photo - csp37504640

Next →



Wear a mask

shutterstock.com • 342743117

Last →



seaver autism center

Social Stories: For both wearing a mask and seeing others wear a mask

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnP-uMn6q_U&feature=youtu.be&t=5

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

Wearing a Mask Social Story

Overview

This resource provides a visual guide for individuals with autism about wearing a mask to avoid spreading germs. The resource includes why it's important to wear a mask, as well as information about how to safely wear and remove masks.

[View all at once](#)

[View as slides](#)



Because of coronavirus, I need to wear a mask when I go places.



People in my family, neighborhood, and community are wearing masks.

WEARING A MASK



A social narrative for children



Sometimes adults and kids need to wear masks to protect other people from getting sick. This might be something new for me!



<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/FreeDownload/Wearing-A-Mask-Story-for-Children-5463572>

Behavioral Strategies

Pairing: You introduce the individual to the mask pairing it with frequent positive reinforcement

-start by simply showing the mask or giving it to the individual, followed by a reinforcer, such as tickles or hugs. The goal is for the individual to be comfortable holding or seeing the mask.

-Once individual is comfortable with the mask you will take small steps toward them wearing the mask.

Chaining: You provide positive reinforcement for small steps towards wearing the mask. Steps could vary by individual but might include putting mask near face, touching face with mask, putting elastic over head, etc.

Additional Resources

American Academy
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®

Masks and Children During COVID-19

Critical Updates on COVID-19 / Masks and Children During COVID-19

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

Questions & Answers

- Thank you for your attention and participation!
- Please write questions into chat feature and let us know of additional topics you would like covered
- For copies of slides, please email: audrey.rouhandeh@mssm.edu or bari.britvan@mssm.edu