



## Helping Students Wear Face Masks

Pairing and Shaping are two key components in teaching students with autism and complex needs to adapt to the routine of wearing a face mask.

In order to pair a new item, the item must be delivered with positive reinforcement. In order to shape a child's behavior, we must reinforce each small step towards wearing the mask. Find your child's baseline and start at that step.

| Pairing   | Shaping   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Becoming More Familiar with a Mask</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The adult wears a mask and lets the child touch the mask, follow a direction while wearing the mask, etc.</li> <li>• Show the child the mask. Let them touch it, put it on their favorite animal. Read a Social Narrative about wearing masks.</li> <li>• What is the texture of the fabric? Is the material highly motivating because it has a favorite character on it?</li> <li>• Consider the location where pairing and shaping will take place. Starting in a less stressful area, such as Leisure, may be more beneficial than starting in a Direct Instruction area. The goal is to keep it fun!</li> </ul> <div>  </div> <div>  </div> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforcement must occur after each successive step. Make sure to have a variety of reinforcing items. Make it fun!</li> <li>• Have the child put the mask on a stuffed animal. This can be done through imitation.</li> <li>• Have the child put the mask up to their face. This can be done through imitation.</li> <li>• Put a mask on your face, then say, "Your turn!". You may need to help the child put it on. Immediately take it off once it is on.</li> <li>• Have the child put the mask on for 5 seconds. Countdown from 5 and do something silly.</li> <li>• Slowly increase the amount of time you want the child to wear the mask. You might start with 5 seconds, then go to 8 seconds, then 11 seconds. Don't increase more than what the child can handle. Think about your end goal, and each successive step to get there.</li> </ul> |

- If the child is having difficulty with getting used to a mask, you might want to consider starting with familiar clothing. Use clothing that your child already wears and turn it into a mask. Does your child have a favorite scarf, or bandana?



- You will want to think of ways to keep little hands busy and away from the mask during the countdown procedure. For example, do dance moves during the countdown, or pass a bean bag back and forth.

### Resources

- TASN has resources available to further explain [Pairing](#) and [Shaping](#).
- Christine Reeves has [Five Tips You Need to Use: Shaping](#).
- Use a silly [countdown timer](#) from YouTube when counting down the seconds a mask in on the child's face. You will want to cue it and have it ready to go.
- [The Autism Helper](#) has a great article on teaching your child how to wear a face mask.
- The Autism Helper also has a wonderful [Social Narrative](#) on wearing a mask. Tara, from Autism Little Learners has a wonderful [Social Narrative](#) for younger students on wearing a mask.

### Teaching Considerations

- Consider using [Video Modeling](#). You may have to make your own video that is tailored to your student's specific mask type.
- If you have a student with good Imitation skills, you can use Imitation techniques to shape mask wearing behavior. For example, "Do this", touch mask, "Do this", touch mask to face, "Do this", hang elastic loop from one ear.
- Teachers who use a Verbal Behavior program with their student can build some of the following components into their programming.