



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>Becoming More Familiar with a Mask</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The adult wears a mask and lets the child touch the mask, follow a direction while wearing the mask, etc. • Show the child the mask. Let them touch it, put it on their favorite animal. Read a Social Narrative about wearing masks. • What is the texture of the fabric? Is the material highly motivating because it has a favorite character on it? • 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! <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;">   </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforcement must occur after each successive step. Make sure to have a variety of reinforcing items. Make it fun! • Have the child put the mask on a stuffed animal. This can be done through imitation. • Have the child put the mask up to their face. This can be done through imitation. • 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. • Have the child put the mask on for 5 seconds. Countdown from 5 and do something silly. • 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.

- 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?



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.

- 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.

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.

Things to Remember

- Each step may require several trials. It's important not to move ahead too fast. Teachers can decide how many days of successful data for each step a child will need before they move on to the next step.
- Reinforcement can be anything the child loves, such as tickles, hugs, praise, high fives, edibles, videos, toys, etc. Access to reinforcement will make all that work the child is doing worth it!
- If your child is still reluctant, think about the function or WHY the child doesn't want to wear the mask. The elastic bands may be causing a sensory issue, or it feels weird to breathe with a mask on. You may also want to read a Social Narrative to help them understand why wearing a mask is necessary.

Verbal Behavior Programs

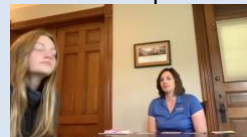
- **Basic Skills:** Use a facemask for novel and learned LR's, such as: "Touch" (mask), "Put in" (mask in container), "Slide" (mask on table). A facemask can also be used for novel and learned Imitation's, such as: "Do this", (touch mask, put in container, slide back and forth, touch mask to face, etc.). Watch this **video** to see how a mask can be introduced within Basic Skills.



- **Card Sort:** **Tact:** "What is it?" (object: face mask). **Listener Response:** "Point to face mask" (object or picture). **Imitation:** See Imitation under Teaching Considerations. **Intraverbal:** "You put on a ____". (mask), "What is something you can put on your face to keep you healthy?" (mask). **Match to Sample:** Match a face mask to a picture of a face mask.

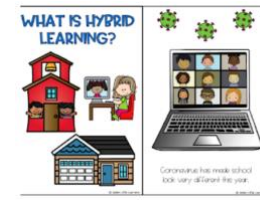
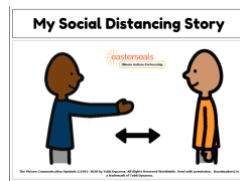


- **Advanced Skills:** Have the child tact parts of the face mask once the child has learned how to tact face mask and is working on advanced skills. For example, you might want the child to tact the elastic part that goes around the ears. Tacting Parts and Features protocol can be found [here](#). Watch this **video** on how to teach parts and features.



Extra's

- Learning the concept of social distancing is almost as important as wearing a mask. Autism.org has a nice [Social Narrative](#) for students who are a little older. Easter seals has a nice [Social Narrative](#) for younger students that also talks about why washing hands is important. Autism Little Helpers has Social Narratives about [Getting My Temperature Taken](#) and [What is Hybrid Learning](#), along with many other great Social Narratives.
- TASN-ATBS has many different Social Narratives, and several on [washing hands](#).
- Intermediate Unit 1 has a [Wear a Mask](#) game that can be played with children.



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