

Making Masking Manageable

Wearing a face mask can be stressful and difficult, especially among children or those with autism. Here are some tips to help make it work.

Recently, the CDC and Pennsylvania Department of Health have recommended wearing cloth face masks in public. Wearing a face mask can be stressful and difficult, especially among children or those with autism.

Masks should not be worn by babies and children under two years of age. For young children over age two and for people with autism, wearing a mask may be uncomfortable or an experience that causes significant anxiety and fear.

Here are some tips and recommendation to make it manageable:

Talk to Them

Children and individuals on the autism spectrum are more likely to be afraid when they see others wearing masks.

Before venturing out, talk to them about what masks are and why they are needed in simple terms, using language they can understand.

- Let them know that the masks are necessary to protect themselves and others.
- Draw comparisons to superheroes wearing masks to protect their families or sports heroes protecting themselves and other players from getting hurt.

Interest Them

Masks can be more appealing if they are more interesting. You can make masks more appealing by helping kids or those with autism make or decorate their own masks or finding masks that use favorite colors, characters, games, or other favorite things.



Practice with Them

Practice wearing masks at home. Look in the mirror together and talk about how it looks and how it can protect people they care about. Putting a mask on their favorite stuffed animal is a fun way to get used to the idea of wearing them.

Take a look at these resources available to help families adjust to the changes that have come with the COVID-19 outbreak.

- ASERT (Autism Services Education Resources and Training) [has developed several social stories and other resources](#) related to ways to help stop the spread of COVID-19, including one about wearing a mask.
- The Matilda Theiss Program at UPMC Western Behavioral Health is a member of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCSTN). The NCTSN has many [free resources available online](#) to help children through this stressful time.

UPMC is committed to helping you and your family navigate these uncertain times with resources for your mental and physical well-being. [Access additional COVID-19 information and resources.](#)