

Autism Ready Communities Take Action Webinar



**BACK TO
SCHOOL
DURING A
PANDEMIC**

Strategies for Success

Objectives:

- Wearing a mask/face covering
- Hand hygiene
- Social distancing
- Routines to prepare for school
- Parent – Teacher Collaboration
- Making a Plan

Key Considerations:

- Most students have been out of school since March in the USA.
- Many have received little to no summer programming.
- There will be new routines to learn – masking, social distancing, increased hygiene expectations.
- There will be changes in practices – cafeterias may serve food differently; recess and gym classes may look different; water fountains will likely be closed; etc.
- Consider if the student is returning to a familiar program/teacher or also transitioning to new buildings or staff.
- Consider routines or rituals for the student that may be impacted.

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Teach and Build Tolerance for Wearing Masks

- Teach tolerance for masks – this is a process, not an event
 - Find a comfortable mask.
 - Identify a reinforcer – use until wear is consistent, then fade
 - Start small and gradually increase the amount of time tolerated.
 - Teach proper donning/doffing
 - Teach where to place a mask when removed.
- Teaching tools: Social Stories, Videos, Modeling, and Practice-practice-practice!

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Problem Solving Mask Tolerance:

- Do they understand what it is for? (teach, teach, teach)
- Are they seeing mask use modeled?
- Is the mask comfortable?
- Does something hurt (ears, skin irritation, etc.)
- Are they hot?
- Do they just need a break? (teach a request for a mask break)
- Did we start with too big of a requirement? Are we practicing enough?
- Do we have a helpful reinforcer?

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Donning and Doffing Masks

- Teach tolerance first, then work on building in better hygiene
- Teach Students to Wear the Mask Correctly
 - Wash your hands before putting on your face covering
 - Put it over your nose and mouth and secure it under your chin
 - Try to fit it snugly against the sides of your face
 - Make sure they can breathe easily
- Teach to Remove the Mask Carefully
 - Untie the strings behind your head or stretch the ear loops
 - Handle only by the ear loops or ties
 - Fold outside corners together
 - Place covering in the washing machine or specific place for dirty face coverings
 - (learn more about [how to wash cloth face coverings](#) on the CDC website)
 - Be careful not to touch eyes, nose, and mouth when removing and **wash hands** immediately after removing

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Tips for Mask Comfort



- Reduce temperature of the room to prevent sweating with masks on
- Strategies to address mask irritation
 - Friction and irritation is common on the bridge of the nose, behind the ears and on the chin.
 - Make sure the mask fits properly
 - Wash face twice daily and apply moisturizer
 - A thin layer of zinc oxide or Aquaphor can be used where irritation develops to develop a layer of protection from friction
 - Wash cloth masks regularly
 - Consult a physician if challenges persist
- How to manage glasses fogging up
 - A mask with a nose bridge can be fitted to your face to prevent air from escaping out of the top of the mask.
 - A pipe cleaner or twist tie can be sewn into a homemade mask to create the same effect.
 - Wash glasses with soapy water and allow to air dry or dry with soft cloth. The soap film acts as a barrier to the condensation (check with your eye optician to make sure this will not hurt your glasses).

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Finding a Comfortable Fit

Ideas for addressing sore ears, hearing aides, or different sensory needs:



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When Masks are not Tolerated:



- CDC does not recommend use of face shields for normal everyday activities or as a substitute for cloth face coverings.
- Face Shields need to be approved by the school district if attempts to teach wearing a mask are not effective or if there is a medical indication for not wearing a mask.
- It is not known if face shields provide any benefit as source control to protect others from the spray of respiratory particles.
- Face shields without a mask should wrap around the sides of the wearer's face and extend to below the chin.
- Disinfect reusable face shields after each use.

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Masks to Support Communication



www.anchorhandmadedesigns.com

- Face masks reduce effective communication:
 - Affecting the sound quality that contributes to speech understanding
 - Reduces the overall volume of speech
 - Decrease the visual or non-verbal aspects of speech (lip movements, facial expression, etc.)
 - Lowers the ability to be understood, especially when students struggle to articulate or use adequate volume
- If a student relies on lip reading caregivers may need to wear masks that allow the student to see the caregivers mouth

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Strategies to Support Communication

- Adjust your volume and rate of speech to help students hear.
- Use clear, concise speech
- Repeat instructions or directions. Ask questions to gauge understanding.
- If you need to temporarily remove your mask to communicate, increase distance or consider using a face shield.
- Use masks with a clear window when appropriate and necessary
- Support verbal communication with written communication and visuals to enhance communication
- Offer choice boards, Picture Exchange Communication Systems, Speech Generating Devices and other tools to augment communication for student's if needed.

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Handwashing

- Develop routines around handwashing – teach when to wash
 - Upon arriving home (or to the classroom)
 - Before food prep, before and after meals
 - Before and after cleaning
 - Before touching your face, mouth, nose
 - After restroom, blowing nose, coughing, sneezing, etc.
 - After using shared items, touching surfaces
- Teach handwashing skill using visual cues, social stories and a song or other auditory cues to help increase the washing time to 20 seconds.
- Increase the use of hand sanitizer in appropriate instances.
 - CDC recommends hand sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/hand-sanitizer-use.html>
- Teach to cough/sneeze into elbow. Practice this skill and use social stories to explain the reasons.

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Social Distancing



- Try to stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms' lengths) from other people who are not from your household in both indoor and outdoor spaces
- **How to teach:**
 - Start out with a social story specific to the where the individual needs to practice the skill.
 - Review the rules prior to entering the environment.
 - Develop a simple cues. For example stickers for where to stand or sit.
 - Introduce the cues. Teach what they mean and practice using them. Continue to teach and practice until they become a natural part of the routine.
 - Reinforce response to cue. When a student or students take appropriate action on the cue, praise them for the actions taken based on the cue. For example, "James, thank you for standing on the feet sticker while waiting for the restroom."
- **Share cues that have worked at home or other environments with teachers.** Teachers should share cues used at school that may be helpful to students going to other environments.
- **Be consistent.** If the cue is used only some of the time, it will lose effectiveness.

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Creative Ideas for Teaching Awareness



- <https://www.kidsnews.com.au/health/kids-in-china-get-creative-to-keep-covid19-at-bay-in-reopened-classrooms/news-story/8375624a69d9cebcfc13db5f9cd26e8c>
- Consider using fun visual aids (e.g., painter's tape, stickers, funny hats) or barriers to illustrate traffic flow and appropriate spacing to support social distancing.
- Avoid community supplies when possible. If supplies must be shared, are necessary, use designated bins for clean and used supplies.
- Give the child who uses a teether or other personal sensory items a special place to store them when not in use, such as a bin at their desk.

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Re-establish School Routines



- Start working on bedtime adjustment at least 2+ weeks in advance.
- Establish morning routines. Practice taking a drive with a mask on to prepare for the bus ride.
- Work with the school to get as much information as possible to help prepare for the classroom. (social stories, pictures, ideas)
- Use a visual schedule at home to do a few structured activities each day to begin to prepare for the school routine. Start small and gradually increase.

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Collaborating with Your School:

- Remember - We are all navigating new territory. Reach out with a with a collaborative spirit.
- Take advantage of your school district's website and any opportunities to gather information on new practices and strategies prior to the school year.
- Organize questions to be addressed. Remember teachers will be answering questions from many families.
- Teach and establish new routines at home. Be prepared to share what has worked with your student with the teacher.
- It may be helpful to meet early in the year to address challenges.

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Information to Discuss: Physical Environment

- Classroom temperature – masks can be hot
 - Changes on the bus and in the classroom: new class organization, routines, how lunch and recess will be structured, etc.
 - Social stories, pictures, etc. or any materials that will help you prepare your student for the first day of school
- Do anything you can at home to support and prepare your student for the new routines.

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Information to Discuss: Masking Strategies

- If you have not been successful in teaching your child to wear a mask, ask about other options while you continue to teach. Share the challenges so your educator can help you teach.
- If your student is wearing a mask and is likely to need breaks, ask if there is a place where masks can be removed for a break.
 - Will a shield be used during mask breaks or during specific activities?
 - Will mask breaks be scheduled proactively?
 - What will happen if your student refuses to wear a mask?

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Information to Discuss: IEP/Behavior Concerns

- Discuss special considerations for students whose communication is disrupted by masks.
 - Consider shields during speech therapy or masks with windows.
 - Augmentative systems for children who have trouble articulating
- Teaching strategies and behavior management around wearing masks and following new routines.
- Strategies for behavior that involves hygiene or fluids – using teething/chewies, spitting, sneezing, coughing, nose picking, vomiting/reflux, etc.
- Behavior management strategies for significant problem behavior

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Make a Plan --

- What will you do if your child is exposed to COVID-19?
 - How will you manage quarantine within your home?
 - How will this impact work? Can you take off work?
 - What resources do you have to help?
- What will you do if your child has symptoms of COVID-19?
 - Understand how your pediatrician/primary care is navigating these concerns and when and where they would want to consider testing.
 - Consider how your child might tolerate a nasal swab? Will you need support to have them tested? What are those resources?

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Resources

- CDC information: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/>
- Websites with Multiple Resources (social stories, education, ideas, etc.):
 - <https://echoautism.org/parent-resources-during-covid-19/>
 - <https://www.covid19.autism-society.org/>
 - <https://www.ucucedd.org/covid-19-information-for-people-with-disabilities/>
 - <https://www.autism.org/covid-19-resources/>
 - <https://www.autismspeaks.org/covid-19-information-and-resources>
- Video about teaching mask wearing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1I4BcpTflk>
- Social Stories:
 - https://www.ucucedd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/I-Can-Wear-a-Mask-Social-Story_FINAL.pdf
 - <https://www.autismresourcecentral.org/social-stories-for-young-and-old-on-covid-19/>
- Webinars on supporting students through COVID-19
<https://icahn.mssm.edu/research/seaver/resources/covid-19-autism-resources>

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Building Autism Ready Communities, Together!



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