



## Help! My Student Won't Tolerate a Mask!!

Wearing masks can be especially difficult for autistic students or those with other sensory issues. Pairing a face mask with a positive reinforcer may help! Think of where the child is on the continuum of wearing a mask. The goal is simply to move one step closer to the child wearing the mask.

### Will the child:

- ❖ **Put the mask on, even for a very short amount of time?**
- ❖ Allow a trusted adult to put the mask on the student before removing it?
- ❖ **Hold the mask?**
- ❖ Put the mask in their pocket?
- ❖ **Tolerate the mask sitting on their desk in a case?**
- ❖ React negatively to others wearing masks around them?

Now that you know where the child is, think of other things the child tolerates near his face or head. Does the child wear glasses, hats, ski masks, sports helmets, scarves, or hoodies that zip up over their face? Which mask option available is most like something they wear now or have worn in the past? If possible, make it fun and involve them in decorating the mask or picking a mask with a favorite character or design.

Start pairing mask use with a positive reinforcer and move progressively through the steps towards the end goal of consistent mask use. Provide the same rewards for bringing the mask toward their face, touching the mask to the face, allowing us to pull back the elastic, and fitting the elastic over the head. Each step may require several tries, and it's important not to move ahead too fast. You may need to practice bringing the mask toward the child's face every day 10 times for a week for two weeks before you can move on to the next step. Additional ways to support mask wearing:

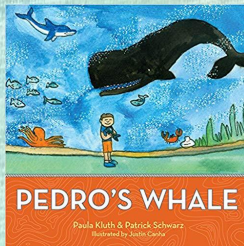
- ❖ **Talk about mask wearing. Let the child ask questions about why they need to wear the mask.**
- ❖ Use simple, direct language to explain why wearing a mask is required.
- ❖ **After getting a mask, have the child engage with it to develop comfortability.**
- ❖ Associate the mask with people or careers that typically wear masks and allows the child to role-play.
- ❖ **Introduce it as a toy or something to play with.**
- ❖ Make sure that you wear your own mask properly all of the time to model correct mask wearing and encourage participation in wearing the mask! Set the example.
- ❖ **Avoid complaining about the mask verbally or using facial expressions that show annoyance with the mask.**



## THE PODCAST FOR SPECIAL EDUCATORS LOOKING FOR PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL GROWTH.



<https://autismclassroomresources.com/podcast/>



*A great book for teaching kids about autism!*

Pedro, a young boy who loves whales more than anything, is heartbroken when he's told to put away his favorite toy whale on the first day of school. But then Pedro's teacher discovers the secret to helping him do his best work: not only giving him his whale, but also incorporating his special interest into the whole curriculum. Soon, Pedro's whale is helping all the children learn, as the teacher works whales into math lessons, storytime, simple science experiments, and more! Pedro's whale helps him make friends, too, as the other children start to share his special interest.

*Read the full article here*

## Autism vs Autistic?

There appears to be a shift in verbage when discussing autism. In college, we were all taught to use person first language as to not define a person based on their disability. As we learn more about autism and acknowledge its prevalence, many are moving towards **Identify First language**. Jed Baker, PhD, recently addressed this question during an ARC presentation. He mentioned that during a recent conference with participants who all have autism, 80% stated that they would prefer to be addressed as autistic than as a person with autism.

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network website also has an interesting article on Identity First Language. "In the autism community, many self-advocates and their allies prefer terminology such as "Autistic," "Autistic person," or "Autistic individual" because we understand autism as an inherent part of an individual's identity —"

<https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/identity-first-language/>

The takeaway from Jed Baker's answer and this article is, **just ask the individual what they would prefer!**