

Normalising Masks: Advice & Guidance for teachers and whānau

One of the key changes in our approach to managing COVID-19 is increased mask wearing. Young children use many cues and clues to identify those around them, make sense out of situations and learn language - masks can make this more difficult. For young children it can be difficult to identify even familiar caregivers with part of their face covered. We share some ideas below for normalising masks and minimising the impact on learning:

- If teachers/caregivers have to wear masks take a picture of yourself, laminate this and pin it to your top - this will help children identify you. A relaxed/happy head and shoulders shot work best so that the face is big enough to see easily.
- Verbalise your feelings, reactions and responses - you may be smiling or cross...it will be difficult for children to label or identify emotions - help them by giving these words, *"You can not see under my mask but I have such a big smile - your picture is making me so happy!"*, *"I am grinning - I am so proud of your persistence in trying and trying until you worked out how to do"*.
- It helps to be very clear and simple with your language related to instructions. Processing time may take a bit longer without the additional cues provided with facial expressions and movements. If you are waiting for children to follow instructions or verbally respond please allow a bit of extra time.

Videos and books for young children:

- SesameStreet - Julia gets used to her mask:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRYfw5hIWwM>
- A great NZ based book for young children:
<https://phoebemorriscreative.com/superfelix>
- Understanding viruses and washing hands:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2eqhw6yZk-c&ab_channel=DrMichelleDickinson



Using creative play to help normalise masks and minimise anxieties:

- Low cost print outs NZ based and incorporate te reo - a favourite of ours in hospital at the moment: <https://www.moshimoshiclassroom.com/resources/p/design-a-cool-mask>
- Look for masks your tamariki can decorate – or draw pictures of dolls, teddies wearing masks and decorate, or make some masks just for them!
- Play peek a boo – with a mask or scarf or a blanket...as you move the covering on and off your face it supports children to build an understanding you are the same person hiding away behind your mask
- What types of masks are there? Who else wears a mask for their job?
- Fire-fighters, astronauts, nurses, superheroes
- Make a mask. Allow your tamariki to choose the material or colour of their mask, and then decorate
- Activities that help to introduce emotions and label them are helpful... books about emotions are great but even in regular stories you can identify how characters are feeling. You can paint rocks with different faces, make faces on paper plates, make a selection of expressive eyes and mouths to group together in different ways...there are so many creative ideas online!

*Go well, keep safe,
Kia kaha, kia māia, kia manawanui*