

Face Masks and Complex Trauma for People with Disability

Blue Knot Foundation fact sheet about face masks and complex trauma

Face Masks

- People with disability and trauma can find it hard to wear or see face masks. There are lots of reasons why people find this hard.
- Seeing or wearing a face mask can make people feel upset or scared or anxious. These feelings can happen because of experiences from before.
- Some people with disability are sensitive to touch. Having a mask on their face can make them panic.
- Some people with disability feel they cannot breathe behind a mask. Masks can trigger trauma memories of not being able to breathe.
- Wearing a mask stops you seeing other people's faces. Not seeing a person's face makes it hard to know what the person is like.
- Masks can make it hard to understand what a person is saying. You cannot lip read when a person speaking is wearing a mask.
- Some people are not able to put a mask on or take a mask off without help.
- Some people with disability and trauma cannot wear face masks at all.
- If you live with trauma and disability and cannot wear a mask, no one can make you wear one.
- If you cannot wear a mask someone may ask you why you are not wearing one. You can tell the person that you have permission not to wear a mask.

Ideas to help you wear a mask. Remember that not every person can wear a mask. That is okay

- Wear the mask for a short time at first. You can wear a mask a little more each day so you can get used to it.
- Find a mask you like. You might like the colour. You might draw on the mask to make it better.
- Find a mask that is soft and gentle on your skin.
- Find a mask which is light. Find a mask you are comfortable to breathe through.
- Find a mask you can see through.
- When you put your mask on remember that it is helping you to be safe.
- Find a person who can help you put your mask on. Find a person who can help you take your mask off.

Ideas to help you be calm. Not all of these ideas will work for you but we hope some do help

- Take slow and deep breaths. Take calm easy breaths
- Chew gum or suck lollies. Sing or hum.
- Play soft music. You can play music through earphones.
- Feel the warmth of the sun. Walk in the park. Go to the beach.
- Relax the muscles in your body. Let your muscles take turns.
- Think of your favourite place. Think of a person who helps you feel calm. Think of an animal you like.
- Pat or hug your pet. Hug a soft toy or blanket.
- Connect with people you trust.

If you or someone you support lives with disability and experiences of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation OR is affected by the Disability Royal Commission, you can call the **National Counselling and Referral Service on 1800 421 458** between 9am and 6pm AEST Monday to Friday and between 9am and 5pm AEST Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays.

If you or someone you support has experiences of childhood trauma or is considering the National Redress Scheme, you can call the **Blue Knot Helpline and Redress Support Service on 1300 657 380** between 9am and 5pm Monday to Sunday AEST.