

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 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.