

Asking Guests to Wear Face Covering: Wearing is Caring

Respiratory illnesses, including colds, flu and COVID-19, spread from person to person through respiratory droplets in the air when we talk, shout, sing, cough and sneeze. Masks are a simple barrier to prevent respiratory droplets that cause illness from reaching others in the air.¹ Masks provide the most protection when everyone wears one, especially in a community setting.

It can be intimidating to ask others to wear a face covering or mask. Below is a strategy using communication and trauma-informed practices to have this conversation.

“GOAAT” = Greet, Observe, Ask, Acknowledge, Thank

1. **Greet** guests and check in with them to build a connection.

- If known, use their name.
- Listen with interest to their reply and respond appropriately.
- It is important to connect first with a person when making a request.

Examples:

Hi Juan! How are you today?

Just checking in, how are you today?

2. **Observe** using an “I statement” that the person isn’t wearing a mask or wearing one properly.

- “I statements” convey what you are seeing. “You statements” convey judgement and can cause people to be defensive.

Examples:

I’m noticing that you don’t have a mask on vs You aren’t wearing a mask.

I see that your mask fell under your nose. Would you please pull it up? vs Your mask is below your nose. You need to fix it.

3. **Ask** the guest to wear a mask.

- Asking conveys concern for a person’s wellbeing. Asking guests to wear masks is trauma informed.
- Be polite. Asking with “Please” conveys respect.
- Let guests know the mask helps to protect them and everyone in the shelter from many types of respiratory illnesses.
- Have a mask available to give the person immediately and be present to see the guest put it on.

Examples:

We are now asking everyone to wear a mask unless they are in their personal space, eating, drinking or sleeping. This will keep us all healthier. Please put on this mask.

Please make sure your mask covers both your nose and mouth.

5. **Acknowledge** the person's feelings and or concerns. Validating people's emotions is respectful and promotes dignity. It shows compassion.

- It's not necessary to agree with their feelings, just reflect what you heard by paraphrasing and state that wearing a mask if necessary.
- Acknowledge this might be a different expectation from earlier this year.
- If a guest wants to wear another face covering such as a bandana, encourage this option.

Examples:

It's sounds like you might be afraid that you won't be able to breathe. The mask is safe to use. Let me know if you have trouble and I will check back. We all have to wear masks now.

I hear and respect your belief. Face coverings protect us from many illnesses not just a COVID-19 virus. We all need to do this together.

4. **Thank** the person for wearing or adjusting their mask. It's also beneficial to thank people who already wearing masks to acknowledge their contributions the health of the shelter.

- Gratitude lets people know that what they are doing is appreciated. People need to know that what they do matters.
- Gratitude focuses on the strengths of guests rather than on the challenges and fosters a culture shift.
- Gratitude also helps the person expressing it by building resilience.

Here's an example of a conversation

Hi, how's your day going? (Listen actively)

I notice that you don't have a mask. Here's one to wear. It's cold and flu season, and we all have to do this together.

Please put it on. Thank you!

ⁱ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html>