

August 18, 2020

Press Release – For Immediate Distribution

### **Psychological Strategies for Wearing Masks**

The NL government recently announced the mandatory wearing of masks in all public spaces for individuals over the age of 5. While some individuals have been routinely wearing masks for many months, either as part of their work, or while running errands, for many this will be a new, and somewhat uncomfortable situation. Fortunately, Psychologists can help! Becoming accustomed to wearing a mask is just like making any other kind of behavioural change.

1. Attitude
  - How we approach the task (it's a burden/imposition vs it's for the safety of myself and others) will impact our willingness to change our behaviours
2. Take it in small steps
  - We very rarely make major changes in our behaviour rapidly/overnight. Take it small, practice for short periods of time, and gradually build up your tolerance
  - Try out a variety of mask shapes, styles to see what ones will work best for you. Every face is shaped differently, so it may take a while to find the best fit for you
  - If you feel claustrophobic/overwhelmed/out of breath, practice doing deep breathing, guided meditation or mindfulness activities for short periods of time wearing the mask to increase your comfort
3. Make it fun
  - Embrace this as a chance to express your personality. Seek out fabrics/designs that help tell the world a bit more about you
4. Help Your Kids
  - Kids will follow your example. If you express a positive attitude, and model appropriate usage your kids are more likely to be cooperative and positive
  - Explain to them in age appropriate language why we need to wear them – we're keeping ourselves and our friends and family safe
  - Give them a sense of control – COVID is frightening for many children, so reminding them there are things within their control, such as wearing masks, washing hands may reduce anxiety
  - Let them get creative – draw/decorate paper masks to wear around the house while building up tolerance. Let them express themselves through choice of fabric.
  - Turn it into play. For younger children make sure their toys/dolls also practice mask usage. For older children, get them to practice wearing masks while playing video games/crafts/doing fun activities – their hands are occupied and they are distracted. Play superhero/spy etc. – turn the mask into part of character play.

5. Make it safe.
  - Make sure everyone in the family has learned how to properly don, doff and store their masks. Discuss how masks will be handled/stored once they return to school.

APNL President Dr. Janine Hubbard states “Making any kind of behavioural change can feel very challenging initially, but with a positive attitude, practice, and taking small steps, we can see significant changes in our behaviour. Think back to the initial reaction when mandatory seatbelt use was first introduced – today most of our kids have no idea that we used to ride without them.”

#### Where/How to Get Help?

If you're really struggling, a session with a Psychologist might help. Psychologists can be accessed through your local health care centre, via workplace Employee Assistance programs, and privately (see [www.apnl.ca](http://www.apnl.ca) – click on Find a Psychologist for more details.).

Media interviews with a Psychologist on this (or other topics), can be arranged by contacting Dr. Janine Hubbard at 682-0235 or [janine@janinehubbard.com](mailto:janine@janinehubbard.com)