

Determine whether the student's failure to wear a mask is intentional.

Although not unexpected behavior due to d

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) supports trauma-responsive practices by nurturing skills and communication that better equip school staff and young people to manage their responses to triggering experiences. In the process, resiliency skills are developed, and life-long outcomes improve. Consider engaging in restorative dialogue, restorative circles, and peer mediation with honesty and openness about the impact their behavior has on others. Some students may have heard adults say that they have a “constitutional right” to not wear a mask or face covering. This should lead to a class discussion about the school code of conduct. Similarly, for older students, this is an opportune moment for a class discussion about constitutional rights, and how they apply in a school setting.

Overall, students should not be singled out, disciplined or excluded from the classroom for occasionally failing to wear a mask or face covering. Concerns about the potential for increased virus transmission while the mask or face covering is removed can be mitigated by increasing social distancing to more than 6 feet and practicing good respiratory and hand hygiene.

If all methods have been exhausted and there is reason to believe that the student poses a health risk to other students and staff, it may be necessary to transfer them to remote learning until the situation can be resolved. We encourage school personnel and administration to treat this as a learning opportunity rather than a disciplinary matter. Communicate the school’s responsibility to protect the health and safety of all students and staff, allowing the student to return to in-person instruction at any time they agree to wear a mask or face covering.

Social Emotional Well-Being and Strategies for Teaching and Learning in a Masked Environment

Masks and face coverings present new social and emotional challenges for students and adults alike. A mask limits a substantial portion of our capacity for nonverbal communication by covering the lower portion of our face. This can lead to feelings of greater isolation and disconnection, even within a group.

The following suggestions offer strategies to acknowledge and mitigate some of the limitations we encounter when using masks and face coverings:

- **Share your own experience verbally and model strategies for students.** If you’re feeling frustrated because you’re finding it difficult to communicate with students wearing masks, you can model strategies for students to use when they are wearing masks. For example, you can say, “I’m having trouble hearing you when you wear your mask. Can you please repeat that?” or “I’m having trouble seeing your facial expressions when you wear your mask. Can you please tell me how you’re feeling?”

References

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