

The Office of Patient Experience's mission is to ensure consistent, relationship-centered care by partnering with caregivers to exceed the expectations of patients and families.

When a Fellow Caregiver Refuses to Wear a Mask

Scenario

A fellow caregiver is refusing to wear a mask and/or forgot to wear their mask, or questioning why they are required to wear one.

- **Hear – Listen to and understand concerns. Approach with empathetic curiosity.**
 - Have open body language. Avoid multi-tasking to demonstrate listening.
 - **Say:** “It sounds like you are really concerned about wearing a mask. What makes you not want to wear a mask?”
 - AND/OR: “Help me understand how you are feeling. How is it impacting you?”
 - AND/OR: “What concerns you the most about wearing a mask?”
- **Empathize - Acknowledge the emotion**
 - Verbally acknowledge.
 - **Say:** “I know that wearing a mask all day can feel uncomfortable. It can also be difficult to hear. I miss seeing people’s faces.”
 - AND/OR: “These last few months have been hard. I’m sorry. I wish we were in different times.”
 - AND/OR: “You have been working so hard to care for everyone.”
 - AND/OR: “We are in this together and will get through it together.”
- **Apologize – Express Regret of Situation**
 - Offer apologies on how challenging these times are AND communicate expectation.
 - **Say:** “These last few months have been hard (that’s not even the right word) and I’m sorry.”
 - AND/OR: “I’m sorry the mask is uncomfortable and we still need to wear it, so what can I do to make it more comfortable for you?”
- **Respond – Take Action**
 - Explain why appropriate actions must be taken by all.
 - **Say:** “Because masks help us protect ourselves and others from COVID-19, masks are required while at work. All eyes are on us to do the right thing — and I need your help to do it with me.”
 - AND/OR: “I would feel more comfortable if you wore your mask. I wear mine to protect you, and I would appreciate you wearing yours to protect me.”
 - AND/OR: “All of us must wear a mask at all times unless we’re alone in an office or cubicle away from others. Do you need me to get you a mask? Is there something I can do to help?”
 - AND/OR: “Even if you’re not worried about becoming infected, others are. And even if you don’t have symptoms, you can spread the virus. We have to do what we can to keep safe.”
 - AND/OR: “You may not realize that COVID is spreading again, and more caregivers have become infected as a result. Wearing a surgical mask provides an extra layer of protection for our caregivers working with and around patients.”
- **Thank – Show Appreciation and Bring Closure**
 - Thank them for properly donning the mask.
 - **Say:** “Wearing your mask is an act of kindness and safety. Thank you for wearing your mask to protect me and others. I will do the same for you.”
 - AND/OR: “It means a lot to me that we were able to have this conversation. We may not agree on everything, and being able to talk about it is really important.”
 - AND/OR: “Doing everything we can every day to keep each other safe starts with the choice — to put on a mask. Thank you for making that choice.”

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Specific Strategies

- **“I Wear Because I Care”**
 - Wearing masks helps protect others, not only you.
 - A mask is an easy way to demonstrate we are all in this together.
 - Verbally thank caregivers wearing appropriate masking for showing concern for others.
- **Prepare Your Approach**
 - Take a few calming breaths. Potential conflict can be uncomfortable and that is an OK way to feel.
 - Use open and friendly body language. Avoid crossing your arms or placing hands on hips.
 - Be specific to masking, redirect away from personal views.
 - Assume positive intent of other people. Do not enter the situation ready to judge or blame another.
- **Provide Empathetic Delivery**
 - Lower your voice. It naturally causes others to lower their voice, too.
 - Behaviors continue because people believe it is allowed.
 - Use pausing or silence after delivering the message. Sometimes people need time to process the information they receive.
- **If HEART language is not effective, consider CUS words for safety:**
 - **Concerned:** “I am **concerned** that you are not wearing a mask, can you tell me more about why?”
 - **Uncomfortable:** “It makes me feel **uncomfortable** that you are not masking because of the spread of COVID-19.”
 - **Safety Issue:** “Proper masking helps us ensure **safe care** environments. We all have to do our part.”
- **Refer to the Appropriate Parties as Needed**
 - Utilize your supervisor or HR business partner.
 - Remember Caring for Caregivers resources.
 - Call the Ombudsman Office, 216.444.2544 or send an email to ombudsman@ccf.org and alert them of your conversation, if patients are involved.