

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 Team Member Refuses to Wear a Mask

Scenario

A team member 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.”
 - AND/OR: “What concerns you the most about wearing a mask?”
 - AND/OR: “Thank you for sharing that.”
- **Empathize - Acknowledge the emotion**
 - Verbally acknowledge.
 - **Say:** “Wearing a mask all day is new for most of us – you’re right, it feels awkward.”
 - AND/OR: “You sound overwhelmed.”
 - AND/OR: “I know, it’s difficult to hear others when we’re all wearing masks.”
 - AND/OR: “We can figure this out together – it hasn’t been easy.”
- **Apologize – Express Regret of Situation**
 - Offer apologies on how challenging these times are AND communicate expectation.
 - **Say:** “These last few months have been hard and I’m sorry. I wish we were in different times.”
 - AND/OR: “I’m sorry the mask is uncomfortable and we still need to wear it, so what can we 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. I’d like us all to model that behavior — all eyes are on us to do the right thing, and I need your help. We wear masks because we care about others.”
 - 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?”
 - 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 keep each other safe. I care about you and I know you care about the team.”
 - AND/OR: “You may not realize that COVID is spreading again, and more caregivers have become infected as a result. We also have more data now that masks can prevent spread. 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:** “I appreciate you wearing your mask to keep our team members and patients safe.”
 - AND/OR: “I mean 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.”
 - AND/OR: “Thank you for wearing your mask to protect me and others. Because I care about you, I will do the same for you.”

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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.