**Sensory Therapist’s Suggestions for Increasing Mask Tolerance**

We’ve had better luck with integrating textures of the paper masks this spring and summer because they are lighter weight and don’t seem to produce as much heat. I would recommend having her practice wearing one when she’s doing some downtime preferred tasks such as coloring. Also, if she does have any cloth ones, having a motivating pattern and looking in a mirror might be motivating for her too. Trying to desensitize with mask wearing in 5-10 minute increments at first is highly recommended as well, so finding short tasks that she can wear the mask for would be ideal. Also, making sure she’s drinking plenty of water to help with the neurotransmitter balance may help a little too. If she’s sensitive to having the band around her ears, sewing on buttons to a thick and tight headband may help take some of the pressure off. Maybe she could practice wearing one while swinging on the porch swing. Does she have a little fan at her worktable that she could use if she starts feeling overheated with the mask on? Also, providing for sensory needs (comfortable chair, tolerable lighting and noise levels, giving heavy work breaks, giving transition cues, having a visual schedule of when she needs to put on the mask and providing extra cues/ warnings, having sensory tools at her work station, etc.) can make sure she’s in a positive place neurologically before adding the stress of wearing the mask. There are also a ton of free simple social stories on Google about the importance of why we’re wearing masks if any of those would be helpful for explaining the purpose of the masks. Also, having designated “mask” areas has been helping some of our teens and adults to understand and know in advance when they will have to wear the masks (i.e. not in the kitchen while eating, yes in the work space, etc.) and talking through it so that everybody knows the plan in advance and has time to adjust to the new environment requirements.

I had one extra thought in addition to the list I sent this morning; one teen that I worked with enjoyed having her mask be a little cooler so that she didn’t overheat. I put her mask in the freezer just for 5-10 minutes before she would wear it and that really helped her a lot! Not sure if she would like the cool sensation (I know that definitely doesn’t generalize to everyone) but thought I would mention it as well just in case it helps!