autism
wellbeing

Top Tips for supporting people who find PPE distressing.

- Respond to each person as an individual.
- For some people, clear masks may help because the mouth can be seen; but for others this may look even more disjointed or distressing.
- Names written on masks and a photo attached to the mask, may help people to recognise who is who.
- Clear face shields that cover the whole face may be preferable to masks that hide the mouth (the whole face is within the outline of the mask so is easier to visually process)
- Do staff have to wear masks? All the time? How can it be minimised?
- Take time for sensory regulation for everyone involved - at frequent intervals throughout the day. These are unprecedented times.
- Acknowledge the distress that everyone is feeling – recognise how this can affect interactions.
- Consistency across staff teams. Some people may cope better if there is a rule about masks that is communicated clearly and stuck to rigidly.
- Involve the individual in choosing (or making) a mask for their support staff to use. Staff need to wear the same type of mask each time if possible and try different styles (if available) to see what works best.
- If the staff member puts the mask on in front of the person they are supporting, it may be less distressing than suddenly being faced by an unfamiliar sight.
- Explanations may help. Social stories or YouTube videos are available. Recognise that the issue may not be solely about understanding, and an explanation or aim to desensitise the person could be counterproductive.
- Communication. Use visual communication as well as talking if this is helpful or indicate clearly with a sign that you are talking to someone. They may not be looking at your face because of the mask and to avoid eye contact so may have no idea the muffled voice is coming from you - or is directed towards them.
- Keep things familiar wherever you can to provide predictability and a feeling of safety. Staff should behave in their typical way (e.g. having a joke) and wear easily recognisable clothes or do other things that reinforce to the person they are supporting that they are the same – just dressed differently.