

Face Mask Related Anxiety

Today's podcast is about face mask related anxiety.

Please know I am not trying to start any debate on the topic of masks with this podcast. I am only trying to offer some assistance to those who share my experiences.

Life sure has changed during this time of social distancing & wearing face coverings! One thing that I personally have struggled with is masks. For some reason, I have never been able to wear those things. I've tried many times over the years to wear them while doing certain household activities with no success. I would put one on, & my heart began to race as a panic attack quickly followed. Learning we were required to wear them in stores about broke my heart. Finally, I have been able to get my agoraphobia under control enough to where I could go into public places alone but I can't because of my reaction to wearing masks.

Recently I got fed up about this obnoxious mask induced anxiety, & googled this situation. I figured it can't just be me. There must be others out there with this same problem. Apparently there are! Plenty!

According to the various articles I read many people struggle with wearing masks. I don't mean the people you would expect to struggle, such as those with respiratory problems like asthma. Many perfectly healthy people struggle. Some folks have been the victim of a crime where the perpetrator wore a mask or bandana, so seeing others wearing them or even wearing them themselves can trigger panic attacks.

Other folks have been through very difficult & even traumatic medical procedures, so seeing or wearing masks is a reminder of that trauma.

Some folks have sensory processing issues, such as those with brain injuries, which can make wearing a mask feel as if it is smothering them.

Still others who panic about face masks fall into a different category. Victims of child abuse. There are a few suspected reasons for this behavior.

- When most of a person's face is covered, it can be difficult to pick up on subtle cues to their moods. Children of abusive parents often rely on parents giving their children such cues to make the children behave as they want them to. Missing those cues resulted in punishment. Being unable to read those cues, even years after the abuse, can create a great deal of fear.
- If someone tried to strangle or suffocate a child, or if a child was locked in a small room or closet, masks can recreate the claustrophobic feeling.
- Some abusive parents put their hands over their children's mouths as a punishment. That too can cause panic with masks.

I found some things that have helped me to work with this mask induced anxiety, & I hope these tips help you too.

Since I can't wear a mask, I have compromised with a bandana. Yes, I realize I look like a gunfighter in the old west, but at least I can wear it without as much panic as I would have with a mask. Bandanas are open at the bottom too, which means if panic starts, I can pull the bottom away from my face slightly. This helps me feel less claustrophobic while still offering some covering as protection to others. It also helps me to calm down.

Reminding myself that I can still breathe, I'm safe, I'm not smothered & am safe is helpful too. Grounding behaviors like this are very helpful during flashbacks, but they also can be during panic attacks.

I put on my bandana at the last possible moment before entering a place where masks are required, & I remove my bandana as quickly as I can when out of those places to minimize the time I wear it as much as possible. I also remove it as needed by going somewhere private, such as a bathroom stall or my car.

It also helps to avoid wearing masks in hot places when possible, because wearing them can make you very hot. That can add to panic or upset sensory processing issues.

I also don't go into public places alone. My husband is very helpful in keeping me focused if I get too panicky. Having another safe person with you can help a lot in this situation too!

I hope these tips help you manage your mask related anxiety!

Thank you for listening to my podcast!