

Hi there.

Below is the template that I have used for my Year 9 son, just a little adapted to become more generic across many age groups. You're more than welcome to use it, adapt it etc to your own situation.

A few things I'd like to note with this template however, as both a teacher and a mum of a Deaf child.

- Please be kind. While we are super stressed about how this is going to look for our children, teachers are also super stressed about a potentially dangerous workplace, protecting the many kids in their classes, and protecting themselves and their own families. Demanding, aggressive and thoughtless interactions are just going to make things worse for everyone.
- Most teachers are likely unaware of how reliant our kids are on lip reading and facial expressions; it is not something that will have occurred to those who have no direct experience with it. Therefore the first and most important step is to let them know. The huge majority of teachers truly want their students to thrive, and will do whatever they can to ensure this, but no one can make changes without knowledge. A gentle, informative chat goes a very long way.
- Our kids are probably pretty stressed about this situation even before we add in our own worries. When talking to your child, the emphasis needs to be on making things as normal as possible, and for the child to communicate any concerns with a parent or a teacher early on. Try not to assume that it will be awful for them; kids are pretty resilient and they may find things go far smoother than we thought.
- While the government has put in place an exemption for those communicating with Deaf/ hard of hearing people, at the end of the day it is up to them whether they feel safe removing their masks. If we can all provide options or other ways of doing things, it will go a long way towards ensuring everyone is happy and safe.

We have overcome many challenges as a country in the last few years; we will manage this one as best we can by keeping calm, being kind, and advocating for our babies as we have always done.

Kate Lyde (Vice-President; Deaf Children NZ, Teacher and mum of three)

Template to email to school

Good morning (Name of appropriate staff member; could be SENCO, classroom teacher, principal etc.)

I am emailing you with a slight concern, and I hope that we can all work together to try and make things easier for (name of child) in the classroom this year.

Deaf people are finding the mandatory mask wearing really hard, as most rely on lipreading to get the full meaning from conversations. Those with aided hearing (eg. Cochlear Implants or hearing aids) still use lipreading to supplement the poor clarity that they get through their devices. Even using the FM/ Remote microphone wouldn't work as the mask muffles the sound before it hits the microphone.

Here is an article that talks about a few of the challenges.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/nelson-mail/news/126260739/face-masks-creating-anxiety-and-stress-in-the-deaf-community>

While there is an exemption in place for teachers with Deaf/ Hard of Hearing children in their classes, I know I can't ask (name of child)'s teachers not to wear a mask if they really want to. However, if they do choose to wear a mask, I really need them to be aware that he/ she will not hear or understand most of

what they say. If they do wear a mask, can I please ask that they write down everything that is needed on the board, even the questions and answers from other children.

Another option is to perhaps have the teacher talking with a Google Meet open right in front of them, and (name of child) having a device in front of them to access the video with captions. Google Meets were game changing for many deaf/ hard of hearing children over the lockdown as they have live captions that are actually very good quality. Many children were able to follow almost all of the conversations; both what the teacher said and what the other students said, better even than the day to day classroom. While the microphone wouldn't pick up the other children's voices if it was being used in the classroom, it would get the teacher's voice and they could then reword what the children had said.

Here are a few other teaching ideas that could potentially help in the classroom;

- Increasing the amount of visual resources.
- Using technology, eg speech-to-text app on devices eg google chat or [Otter](#)
- Consider trying a mask that has a clear window so people can read your lips eg [this one](#)
- Increased use of Resource Teachers of the Deaf and NZSL if the child signs.
- Be patient, remember children who are deaf and hard of hearing may be struggling with communication and may feel overwhelmed during this time.
- Allow more rest time
- Ask for feedback from the student to check they have heard and understood.
- Correct operation of hearing devices such as hearing aids and FM systems are more important than ever - consider 'sound tests' with the child, or asking an ASSIST or AoDC to visit the class to check
- Use subtitles/captions on videos, especially if speakers are wearing masks
- Consider teacher aides, especially during tests
- Have an IEP as early as possible and include both the child and family to incorporate their views on how they can be assisted to access the curriculum while masks are being used.

I know this is a lot of information, but (name of child) relies so much on being able to read lips and facial expressions, and masks are awful for people with a hearing loss. Much of the time he/ she won't even know if people are talking, let alone who. It is extremely isolating and confusing in a time where there is more than enough stress for everyone to deal with.

I am more than happy to talk via phone, Zoom/ Google Meet or face to face to discuss ways we can all work on making a tough situation easier for everyone.

Thanks,
(Parent Name)