

How to help your child adapt to wearing a mask

Getting used to wearing a mask is difficult for everyone. For young children wearing a mask can be even more of a challenge and it is important that we try to find positive ways to encourage this.

1. START WITH MAKING IT VISUAL:

- * As a first step, wear your mask around your child. You might start by doing it around the house for brief periods of time, simply to normalize the experience for them.
- * Narrate to your child when you are going out that you need to put on your mask.
- * You might even show them pictures of other children wearing masks as well.
- * Take some selfies wearing the masks with your child.

2. KEEP THE EXPLANATIONS SIMPLE

- * If your child asks about why we need to wear masks, experts say you should be straightforward and keep it simple
- * State how masks help to curb the spread of the coronavirus by catching germs that come out of a person's nose and mouth
- * To keep everyone safe

3. MAKE IT FUN

- * Parents can use play to help children adapt to wearing masks.
- * Create games (see attached)
- * Provide positive reinforcement for putting it on and keeping it on (M&M, ice cream, stickers, high fives, and bubbles)
- * Provide praise and celebrate wearing it

Remember –don't rush it slow exposure to wearing the mask in small amounts at a time, stay calm, keep it fun and playful, invite them to experience this with you. Keep the mask around the house and play area so that it becomes part of daily life. Normalizing its existence and use will make wearing it predictable and familiar.

Making wearing masks fun!

Here are a few ways you can play with masks to help ease our children into their use and help them feel safe and confident about wearing them. You and your child put your masks on and play together as:

1. Doctor & nurse as you take care of their stuffed animals (who can have masks too!) or assess the vitals of mom and dad.
2. Fire fighter as you put a fire out in a house built of couch cushions, pool noodles or outside hoses.
3. Dentist as you check the teeth of your stuffed animals and dolls
4. Bug exterminator as you move around your house and squirt pictures of bugs or pick up plastic bugs with tongs.
5. Treasure hunter as you dig for hidden items in Playdoh, rice, beans, slime, or kinetic sand, using the mask to be sure that nothing gets in your mouth as you dig.
6. Scientist as you squish Playdoh together to make a concoction or make slime or other fun experiments.
7. Construction work as you repair edges of a couch cushion structure, the floor, or toys.
8. Window washer as you use a squirt bottle to clean the windows, or cars.
9. Nail tech as you take turns massaging and painting each other's nails
10. Super heroes pretend you have super powers but you must have the mask on to hide who you are from everyone

Communicating with children about masks

- **Keep Language simple and direct** - Use language that is developmentally age appropriate and direct. “For example, instead of saying, “Can you put on your mask” you might say, “You need to put your mask on?” The idea is to let your child know exactly what your expectations are in the moment, rather than giving them general instruction or language that allows them to take it as a choice.
- **Use visuals** - Often, children benefit from having a visual representation of their goal. So having pictures of family members, friends, teachers and the child themselves wearing mask with help support this. A visual that shows “when I go somewhere I wear a mask” with a picture of the car and child with his mask on can be posted on your fridge or by the door.
- **Reward Cooperation** - All kids appreciate acknowledgement for a job well done, so offer small rewards when your child does cooperate. This can be a high five, social praise, extra hugs and tickets or a small treat. You want to make following instructions a positive thing.”
- **Take it slow** - Add masks to your family’s routine gradually. Introduce it in a positive fun manner at home with no expectations of going anywhere. All them to explore with the mask during something they enjoy, play or movie time.
 - Start by having the mask out where your child can see it put it on stuff animals and wear it yourself.
 - Then have you child touch the mask, once comfortable have them touch mask to their mouth then they can hold mask while you count to 10.
 - Next have them cover their mouth with it put straps around ears and take right off. After they are comfortable with this have them leave it on while you count to 5 or 10. Continue to increase time with mask on while at the house. Once your child can tolerate it for a short time (10 min), practice going out where they will need to wear it for a short period. Such as getting ice cream, wear it while waiting in line and they can take it off to eat the ice cream. This is a great way to reinforce the compliance of wearing it.

- Be sure to provide lots of reinforcement for each step listed above.
- By practicing at home your child will likely find the mask less stressful and have an easier time working up to wearing it in public.