

Helping Children Get Comfortable Wearing a Mask

Wearing a mask or cloth face covering when out in public is an important thing that we can all do to keep ourselves healthy and prevent the spread of Coronavirus. It is especially important to wear a mask at school!

We know that getting kids to wear a mask for any amount of time can be a challenge. With practice, patience, and positive reinforcement, you can help your child become comfortable and confident wearing a mask at school.

Be a role model

Wear your mask around your child and show them others wearing masks. Talk about why you are wearing it.

- Talk to your child about being a helper and explain that they can be a great helper for other people by wearing a mask.
- For children age 5+: talk about how germs can affect our bodies and how masks keep us safe from germs.

Customize their mask

Encourage your child to choose the mask that feels most comfortable to them.

- Try different materials and styles like adjustable elastic ear loops or ties behind their head.
- For younger children, make it fun and playful. Let your child decorate their mask, or pick a mask with their favorite character or a fun pattern. Encourage them to make a mask for their favorite stuffed animal or doll.

Start slow

Introduce the idea of wearing a mask to your child in a slow, gradual way. It's important to not move on to the next step until your child is comfortable. Remind your child to wash hands or use hand sanitizer whenever they put on or take off their mask.

Help your child work through these steps:

1. Ask your child to hold the mask up to their face. If using a mask with ear loops, have them practice wearing it with one loop over their ear, then over both ears.
2. Ask your child to wear the mask over their chin.
3. Ask your child to wear the mask over their chin and mouth, just below their nose.
4. Ask your child to wear the mask in the proper position: covering their mouth and nose. Make sure they know that this is the correct way to wear it.
5. Ask your child to wear their mask the correct way for a few seconds. Slowly increase the amount of time until they can wear it for 1-2 minutes.
6. When they are comfortable wearing a mask for 5 minutes, increase by 5 minutes each time (10 minutes, 15 minutes, etc.)
 - Use a timer or countdown to let your child know when they can take a break from wearing their mask.
 - Say lots of encouraging words and give high fives while your child is practicing wearing their mask.
 - Pause and restart if your child takes their mask off before the goal time. Be sure to end each practice session on a positive note.
 - » For example: if the goal was 1 minute but your child didn't quite get there, make the last practice a 30-second session so they can end with success.

Talk to your child's doctor if their skin becomes sensitive or irritated from wearing the mask for a period of time. Trouble spots often include the bridge of the nose and cheekbones. The doctor may recommend a skin protectant to help.

Rewards and reinforcements

Rewards and positive reinforcements are key for helping your child feel comfortable and confident wearing a mask.

- Use a timer or count down time to signal when they have earned a reward.
 - » For example: "If we can wear our masks for 5 minutes, then we will play trucks!"
- Do a favorite activity while they are practicing wearing their mask (board games, reading books, coloring, etc.)
- When they are ready, plan a rewarding activity that requires wearing a mask.

Take a mask break

Take a mask break when your child needs a breath of fresh air or if they are feeling anxious.

- You and your child should wash your hands or use hand sanitizer before and after touching the masks. Remind your child to not touch their face.
- Go outside and get some fresh air, if possible.
- If staying inside for the mask break, pick a spot away from other people. This might be a good time to remind them what social distancing means and why it is important.

Help with “mask breath”

Breath can get stinky when wearing a mask!

- Brush teeth often and rinse with mouth wash.
- Use scented lip balm or chapstick on their lips or inside the mask.

Tips for older children

- Validate their feelings of frustration or annoyance. Let them know they are being heard and you understand why they are annoyed.
- Remind them that we all have a responsibility to wear masks to protect ourselves and other people.
- Clarify any misconceptions they may have heard, like “masks don’t really help” or “it doesn’t matter if it’s covering my nose as long as it’s covering my mouth”. Talk with them about the importance of wearing masks correctly.

Tips for children with sensory or developmental needs

- Choose a soft fabric mask. This is helpful for children who are sensitive to touch.
- Choose a mask that ties behind the head. This is helpful for children who do not like anything touching their ears.
- You can also use clips or buttons to fasten ear loops to a headband, hat, or extender band.

Tips for children who are deaf or hard of hearing

- Choose a mask for your child that has straps or ties at the back of their head, rather than a mask with ear loops.
 - » Ear loops can be noisy when they rub against ears. This can be uncomfortable and distracting for people who use hearing aids or have cochlear implants.

- You (and other people around your child) can choose to wear a mask that has a clear window in the front. This will make it easier for your child to understand you by reading your lips.

Tips for children who wear glasses

Glasses can get foggy while wearing a mask. These tips can help:

- Make sure the mask is shaped around the bridge of their nose.
- Position the mask higher up on their nose. Set glasses on top of the mask.
- Use an anti-fogging solution on eye glasses. You can also dip them in soapy water, shake off, and let them dry before putting them on.

Tips for children with asthma

- Before helping your child wear a mask, be sure that their asthma is well-controlled and they are in the “green zone.” Follow their doctor’s instructions for using their controller medicine and keep track of peak flows.
- Choose a mask or face-covering that fits their face well and is made of thin, moisture-wicking material.
- Ask your child’s doctor if you have any questions or concerns about them wearing a mask.

For more information

These resources have more suggestions and tips for helping your child get used to wearing a mask:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Cloth-Face-Coverings-for-Children-During-COVID-19.aspx>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2020/05/11/some-autistic-people-cant-tolerate-face-masks-heres-how-were-managing-with-our-son/> <https://www.childrensmn.org/2020/06/05/make-face-masks-comfortable-kids/>

<https://www.connecticutchildrens.org/coronavirus/mask-up-tips-to-make-kids-more-comfortable-with-masks-broken-down-by-age/>

<https://www.connecticutchildrens.org/coronavirus/ways-to-introduce-your-child-to-wearing-a-mask/>

<https://www.childrensmercy.org/health-and-safety-resources/information-about-covid-19-novel-coronavirus/helping-your-child-wear-a-mask/>