



Children and Masks

We have all been impacted by COVID-19, but our children may have been more impacted than we realize. Their entire world has changed, and the way they are seeing the world, has also changed. Change isn't always bad, and sometimes change, even difficult temporary changes, can be used to teach valuable lessons to our children. As the school year starts, many parents and children are concerned about masks. Some are concerned about wearing them, while some are concerned about others not wearing them. There is a lot of information swirling around, and it's difficult to sort through sometimes, but one thing is clear: masks help.

Initially it may be a very difficult thing to tackle, teaching children to wear a mask, but it is possible. Kids are incredibly perceptive, and they learn from the world around them. If the new "normal" is to wear a mask, and they observe their parents wearing one, then they will learn that a mask, is a normal article of clothing to wear. Here are a few ideas for how to introduce this concept to your children.

- 1 Make it a game:** start with small amounts of time, and reward the child with something they like for wearing it.
- 2 Make it a competition:** see who can keep their mask on the longest.
- 3 Normalize mask wearing:** everyone in the family (including favorite stuffed animals) should wear their mask so the child learns that this is normal behavior.
- 4 Make it exciting:** have the child pick out their own colors, their favorite patterns, or make their own masks. Consider tie-dying a mask even!
- 5 Have conversations about anxiety/fear:** For older children create an open dialogue about why they are afraid or concerned to wear masks, and don't be afraid to ask questions. This may lead to other conversations about their anxieties: consider finding a counselor for your child if needed during this time.
- 6 Talk about the importance of taking care of others:** explain that a mask is not just a way to protect ourselves, but a way to protect others--both strangers and the ones you love.
- 7 Discuss the future:** remind them that sometimes, uncomfortable situations happen in life, but often these situations are temporary, and then they go away. Just like masks will one day.

We won't be masking forever, but to our kids, it feels like it. What a wonderful opportunity our children have today, to learn one of life's most difficult lessons at such an early age. It is up to us as adults to lead by example, and to help them learn that they can do this, even if they are afraid. We can teach them, that sometimes life is hard and a little uncomfortable, but if we all come together to help one another and do what is right, things will get better.

For more information visit this website from the AAP: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Cloth-Face-Coverings-for-Children-During-COVID-19.aspx>

Stay safe, stay healthy, stay strong Oklahoma!
Dr. Heather Weber