Tips for Wearing a Face Mask or Covering

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that adults and kids age 2 years and older wear cloth face coverings (or a face mask) when out to help slow the spread of COVID-19. However, some toddlers and young children may feel uneasy about masks. They may need extra support and comfort. Additionally, children with special needs or sensory concerns may have difficulty wearing a mask.

Here are some tips to help you teach your child how to wear a mask and how to make it more acceptable and fun!

*Before getting started, be aware of choking hazards, age guidelines, and any other medical complications.*

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**Give the mask a purpose**

- **Look in the mirror with face masks on** and discuss them with your child
  
  — **For children younger than age 3:** Answer their questions in simple language. Explain that sometimes people wear face masks when they are sick and to help others stay healthy.
  
  — **For children older than age 3:** Focus on germs. Explain that face masks help make sure you keep germs away.
  
  — **For older children:** Refer to trusted resources, such as the CDC, for illustrations that show how face masks can help prevent the virus from spreading
  
  - **Watch a video** with your child to help them understand

**Make it fun**

- **Decorate your face masks** so they are personalized and fun
  
  - **Draw a face mask** on their favorite book character
  
  - **Get fun prints to wear**
  
  - **With younger children,** introduce a sense of play. Children can pretend to be a doctor or nurse while wearing their masks
  
  - **Turn the mask into a costume**
  
  - **For older children,** make it into a game (e.g., when you are out, if someone touches their mask, they must do a silly dance)
**Practice**

- **Practice through role play** (e.g., using a stuffed animal or real-life)
- **Show your child pictures** of other children wearing them
- **Practice wearing the face mask at home**
- **Start small** (e.g., 1 to 3 seconds, if needed)
- **Practice wearing a mask** during rewarding activities (e.g., screen time or video games)
- **Systematically increase face mask wearing time**
- **Consider using video** modeling to support wearing face masks

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**Reward the effort**

- **Use praise or positive reinforcement** when your child/teen wears or tolerates wearing a face mask (e.g., earning marbles, or cotton balls for every time they put it on or wear it for 1 minute)
- **Each outing your child can keep the mask on** he/she earns a sticker. A predetermined number of stickers equals a prize

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Wearing a mask can be an adjustment for anyone. Many children can wear a mask, it may just take a little preparation and creativity. For some children, a mask alternative may be necessary. Some alternatives are face shields with various designs, hats with a shield attached, and turtlenecks that pull up over your nose and mouth. With practice, patience and fun, you can get your child to wear a mask when you go out. If you need extra help, we are here for you.

**Helpful Resources:**

- [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)
- [www.hopkinsmedicine.org](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org)
- [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)
- [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

**Need more ideas or help?**
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