

#StopTheSpread

Helping your Child to Wear a Mask

Make it Fun!!

Have dance parties with your mask on, incorporate in play, dress up your superheroes, put it on your dolls or characters, play doctor, wear yours briefly while you watch a show or screen time with your child. It's about exposure, de-sensitizing the mask and making your child more comfortable around them at this stage.

Practice Makes you Better

We didn't learn to drive a car overnight. Wearing a mask may have come easy for most adults, but for children or individuals with special needs, it's a brand new skill. The more practice, the easier it will come over time. Just because your child says no the first few times does not mean they won't wear a mask. Keep practicing at whatever step you're on, using these other tips, as many times as you can each day!



Start Small, Get Consistent

For most, expectations of going from never seeing a mask, to wearing one for an hour or more will not be successful. It may also result in less cooperation or problematic behavior. Here are some steps to help build cooperation gradually. Once you get consistent cooperation with one step, move to the next! First, the child should tolerate the parent wearing a mask across a variety of activities (i.e. sitting next to you, getting hugs, listening to a story). Next, build toleration for holding and incorporating the mask in play or other favorite activities. Last, start working on mask wearing one step at a time (straps on only, mask to face only, mask on for 3 seconds, etc.)

Give Choices and Modify

Let your child pick which mask you should wear before putting it on. Let them also pick which mask they want to wear when practicing or going out in the community. Allow them to pick which ones to buy. If there is a particular part of the mask that is most aversive, try to modify the mask you're using in some way to reduce the aversiveness.



Give Immediate Reinforcement!!

What motivates most adults to wear masks is increasing safety and health, protection, and stopping the spread. This is most likely NOT what's going to motivate and reinforce mask wearing in our children or individuals with special needs. It will be attention and praise from their loved ones, access to their favorite toys or snacks, screen time, music, taking their mask off, outdoor activities, etc. Deliver these things immediately after any cooperation with masks regardless of what step you are on.

Move to Practicing in the Natural Environment

Once you get cooperation with putting a mask on your child's face during play or short durations within the home, start embedding the skill out in the community. Remember start small and get consistent first! Your child can wear the mask to walk outside, then take it off. Have them hold it during a short car ride. Practice wearing it into a store, then take it off. Continue to build up gradually to more places and longer durations!



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Resources:

www.who.int * www.cdc.gov *
paautism.org * www.healthychildren.org