A Caregiver's Guide to
Help Children Feel Comfortable Wearing a Mask

Children see people wear masks in public and on TV and are, perhaps, wearing masks themselves. Because wearing a mask is new and different, children might have questions or concerns. Here are some creative tips and child-friendly language to help children feel more comfortable wearing masks.

Explain Why People Are Wearing Masks

First, it is important that children understand why they need to wear a mask. Use simple, age-appropriate language to initiate a conversation. We encourage you to assess your child's understanding to help clarify any misconceptions. Below are some examples of what you might say.

"It is important to wear a mask over our nose and mouth to keep from spreading germs. We don't want to share our germs with other people.**"**

"By wearing a mask we are doing our job of protecting other people from our germs.**"**

"Sometimes we have germs even if we don't feel sick. Sharing these germs with other people could make them sick. That is why we should wear a mask even if we feel healthy.**"**

After explaining the importance of wearing a mask, ask if there are questions or concerns so you can understand the child's perspective.

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Provide Appropriate Choices and Get Children Involved

- Give children simple choices about their masks so they feel more in control and part of the process. Appropriate choices include which mask they want to wear or what fabric to use to make the mask.

- Provide options if the mask feels uncomfortable. One idea: Make or buy a headband or hat with buttons and attach the mask straps (see photo). When children are more comfortable wearing their masks, they are less likely to fidget or remove them.

- Give children the option to add a scent to their mask. For example: They can choose a flavored lip balm they like and wear it on their lips or put it inside their mask. When children like the way the mask smells, they may be more comfortable wearing it for longer periods of time.

Make It Fun and Practice

Practice wearing a mask at home and use this opportunity to assess the child's comfort level. Be a role model. Demonstrate the proper way to wear a mask – i.e., over the nose and mouth. Find creative ways to increase comfort levels in a familiar environment. Below are some examples.

- Younger children best express themselves through play, so encourage them to put a mask on a favorite stuffed animal or toy. Together, you can use a mask that your child uses or create a new one for their toy.

- For older children, turn mask wearing into a game. Use a timer to see who can wear their mask the longest or keep it on for a set amount of time. If you feel it is appropriate, create an incentive chart or reward system (e.g., stickers) for keeping the mask on in public or during practice at home.

Validate Feelings

During times of change and uncertainty, it is normal for children to have different emotional responses.

- Let your child know that all feelings are valid (*"It is okay to feel scared. There are a lot of changes and new things happening. I am here for you and we are doing our best to stay safe and healthy by washing our hands and wearing our masks."*)

- Use books or coloring pages to normalize mask wearing.

- Younger children often have difficulty finding the right words to express how they feel and may act out as a result. Be patient and help them convey these emotions with words. (*"I can see that you are frustrated by having to wear a mask. I know it can be uncomfortable. Tell me what you don't like about the mask, and I will try to make it better."*)

- Children often model adult behavior. By identifying your feelings and demonstrating appropriate ways to wear a mask, you can help them learn to do the same.

- Be an active listener and encourage discussion about how your child is feeling.

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