

Extract from: <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/covid-19-and-masks-tips-families>



Talking to your children about masks

The COVID-19 pandemic has upset family life around the world causing stress, anxiety and sadness. Understandably masks may add to such feelings for many children, especially in places where they are not used to wearing masks. For younger children in particular, mask wearing can be confusing and upsetting.

If your family hasn't worn masks before, it's important to approach it in an open and supportive way with your children. Mask wearing is developing a habit, so ongoing reminders and consistent behaviour will be key. It's also important to remind your children that a mask should always be combined with other key precautions (such as physical distancing, frequent handwashing) to protect themselves and everyone else.

Here are some ideas to help you introduce masks to your family:

Be honest

Use age-appropriate language and be sensitive to your children's level of anxiety. Recognize that masks aren't super fun for any of us. But explain how by wearing masks, we can help keep people around us safe, including older and more vulnerable members of society. Wearing a mask shows that we care about each other.

Remind them that there are lots of experts working hard to stop COVID-19, but they need our help and that means taking every precaution.

And it's important for all of us to remember that wearing a mask alone doesn't make us safe, we need to keep washing our hands frequently and maintaining a distance from people outside our homes.

Listen and show empathy

Ask your children what they think and look for signs of anxiety such as a change in their body language or tone of voice. Answer their questions as best you can. It's

OK not to know all the answers – this is a new situation for all of us. Remind them that they can always come to you with any questions or concerns at any time. Check regularly on how they are feeling. Depending on their age, you could ask what they're hearing from friends to start the conversation and to make sure they have reliable information.

Start out at home

Try wearing the masks at home for a while together and gradually build up the time to help your children get used to wearing one. Using the [checklist above](#), practice putting on, wearing and taking off the masks together.

Remember that younger children rely more on visual communication cues like smiling, so practice smiling with masks on with them and consider how your tone of voice can help. You could also put a mask on a favourite stuffed animal with them to help masks appear more familiar.

Involve your children

Masks come in many colours and designs and children will see them as an opportunity to express themselves. Try to turn choosing a mask or fabric into a fun activity and involve them as much as possible. Remember, the more your children like the look of their masks, the more likely they are to wear them even when you're not around.

Be consistent

Successful mask wearing is about developing a new habit, so modelling the right behaviour and repetition are key. Find ways to repeat the importance of wearing a mask correctly and encourage your family to remind each other if you see something that isn't right. Children are quick to spot inconsistencies, so be mindful of the example you set and encourage relatives and friends around your family to follow recommendations on wearing masks as well.