

Wearing Masks During COVID -19

Strategies to help your loved one with Down Syndrome

While some kids may feel comfortable wearing a mask, for others it may be a more challenging task. When faces are partly hidden by masks, kids cannot see the friendly smile or familiar look that usually puts them at ease. In addition, wearing a mask can be an aversive sensory experience or even scare some children.

Sensory Considerations of Wearing A Mask

- **Breathing** – *helps regulate nervous system*: For some kids, masks might make it more uncomfortable to breathe.
- **Tactile** – *sense of touch*: Kids may not like how a mask feels on their face or the pressure of the elastic loops around their ears.
- **Olfactory** – *sense of smell*: Kids may not like how a mask might smell.

Here are some ways you can help your loved one with Down Syndrome get more comfortable wearing a mask:

- **Help them get used to masks**: As much as you can, give kids time to practice wearing their masks before they might need to wear one outside of your home. Teach them how to put them on and take them off.
- **Increase the amount of time worn each day**: Start off slow using a count down (5-4-3-2-1) and gradually increase the time.
- **Provide praise and rewards for each step**: Use rewards for small steps towards wearing a mask. Steps can vary for each child, but examples can include:
 1. Putting the mask near the face
 2. Touching the mask with hands
 3. Touching face with the mask
 4. Putting elastic over head
- **Talk to your kids**: Ask them to express what they like or dislike about wearing the mask – use an open-door approach.
- **Encourage kids to decorate their mask**: This might help them feel a sense of ownership and control over the situation. A personal touch can help make it more of a normal part of their routine and make it more likely they will want to wear their mask. Depending on the type of mask, kids can draw on it with markers or put stickers on it.
- **Make them together**: If you make face coverings at home, let your kids help you. There are *no-sew masks* that are easy to make, often with materials you probably already have (T-shirts, bandannas, etc.). If you sew masks, maybe kids can select the fabric or patterns for the masks they will wear.
- **Trial different fabrics**: Choose breathable, non-itchy fabrics and ear attachments that minimize pressure around the ears.
- **Help make it fun**: With younger kids, introduce a sense of play. Kids can pretend to be a doctor or nurse while wearing their masks. They might want to use a doctor kit and "take care" of a stuffed animal or doll.
- **Have a few masks handy while kids play**: This lets them use their imagination about how to use them during playtime. It also helps make masks a more normal part of their everyday world. You can ask your child to put a mask on a stuffed animal, and then ask follow-up questions about why the stuffed animal is wearing the mask. Depending on your child's response, you can clear up any confusion and offer reassurance.
- **Practice wearing a mask during everyday tasks**: Encourage your kids to wear a mask while they are engaging in every day routine tasks such as washing hands – this way their hands are busy and they are more likely to keep the mask on.



Adaptations & Modifications



Using a hair clip / toy
Makes it more fun and customized



Using a headband and button:
Prevents elastic from putting pressure on the ears



Using a shoelace / drawstring:
Prevents elastic from putting pressure on the ears

Behavioral Strategies

Offer Choices

- “Do you want to wear your orange or blue mask today?”

Use a ‘First-Then’

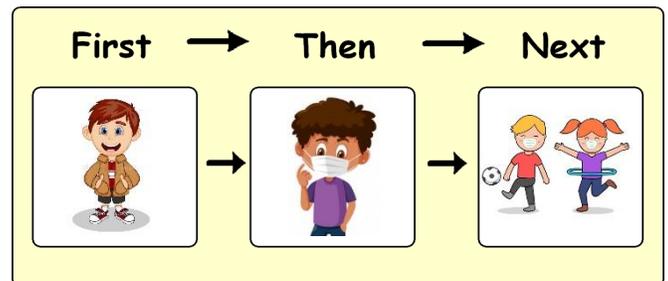
- “First put on mask then play outside”

Use Praise & Positive Reinforcement

- “Great job putting on your mask”
- “I like that you put your mask on by yourself!”

Use Visuals

- Social Stories
- Visual sequence for a routine



Additional Resources

BC-CDC Guidelines

- <http://covid-19.bccdc.ca/>

Down Syndrome Resource Foundation

- www.dsrff.org

Social Stories

- <https://paautism.org/resource/wearing-mask-social-story/>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnP-uMn6q_U