

Getting Your Child to Mask Up

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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The new normal in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic will require many learning new ways to venture out in public as businesses re-open. Many places will encourage or require people to wear masks to cover their nose and mouth, which can be challenging for an adult to adjust to, let alone a child.

Kids, generally, are not as familiar with masks, or don't understand why they're necessary. They may already have a fear of what they are hearing about COVID-19 and how it has changed their world – not seeing their friends, not going to school – along with being required to wear a mask for what are normal, everyday, activities.

Couple that with masks that may not fit a child's face well or ear loops that hurt or are uncomfortable, and it has the potential to lead to more stress on them and their family.

So what's a parent or guardian to do? One way to help your child adjust is by having them become the caregiver, says Lori Grooms, Director of Prevention Control for OSF HealthCare.

"You can create a mask and have it with ties so the child can put the mask on the doll or the teddy bear and explain it to them. It gives you the opportunity to talk to them about it, and them the opportunity to talk and teach someone about it, someone who they want to protect. And it makes it less fearful for them if they are teaching someone how not to be afraid."

Another good way to help you child adjust to wearing a mask is to find one that can be decorated or has a theme. You also want to make a couple of trial runs with the mask well before leaving your house so there isn't a public meltdown.

"Get them to see it as kind of a dress up, make them in to a superhero, play a game. If you get one that is sea creatures you can pretend you're swimming, it's your scuba gear. If it's a space theme it can be your astronaut gear. How long can you wear this, how long can we go out and explore."

When it comes to teenagers and pre-teens, the challenge in getting them to wear a mask can be different. According to Grooms, since mask wearing hasn't become the "cool" thing yet, you will have to help them find a way to make it more socially acceptable. Don't be afraid to let them add some bling to their mask or find a way to show their own personality.

And remember, any type of face covering over their nose and mouth is better than nothing.

"The point about wearing masks out in public is for me to protect you. So any type of covering over my mouth to catch any droplets that I expel while I'm talking, laughing, sneezing, coughing, is going to be better than nothing."

Grooms says one of the best things you can do when it comes to getting your child to wear a mask – no matter what their age – is to make it fun and lead by example.

Want to make your own masks for you and your child? Learn how to [here](#).