

# Mask Up! Tips to Make Kids More Comfortable With Masks, Broken Down by Age

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By: Kathryn Robbins, Child Life specialist

Masks are one of the best ways to prevent the spread of [coronavirus](#). But even if your child knows they're supposed to wear a mask out in public, it can take some practice – and positive reinforcement – to get them in the habit. [Child Life](#) specialist Kathryn Robbins, MS, CCLS, joins the blog with tips.

Choose what will work best for your child based on their age, developmental level and other factors.

[> Is your child new to wearing a mask, or struggling with the adjustment? Read 7 Ways to Introduce Your Child to Wearing a Mask.](#)

## 0-2 years old: Focus on normalizing masks.

Babies and children under age 2 shouldn't wear masks, due to danger of suffocation.

- Instead focus on introducing your child to masks by letting them see you wear yours, and by being playful with masks at home, like playing peek-a-boo.
- **2-4 years old: Use play.**

Preschoolers learn through play – and it's also a great way to help them accept masks as a positive, everyday part

of life.

- Look for opportunities to be playful: Color a paper mask and add stickers to it. Decorate a fabric mask. Let them choose a mask with a favorite character or theme. Make masks for their stuffed animals or dolls too.
- Point out how many people wear masks, and show them [this fun resource with favorite characters wearing masks](#).

### **5-12 years old: Help your child understand.**

Typically, children ages 5 and up don't just want to be told what to do – they want to understand why.

- As you introduce your child to masks, talk about how the body works and how masks keep us safe from germs. [Check out our developmental pediatrician's tips for explaining coronavirus to kids](#).
- Kids age 3 to 7 also love to be helpers. So let your child know that when they wear their mask, they're being great helpers to their community.

### **13-18 years old: Validate your child's feelings.**

Teens want to be independent. They want to be understood. And they're at a developmental stage where they feel invincible.

- If your teen is frustrated with wearing a mask, start by validating their feelings: Let them know you hear them, and understand why they're annoyed. Once they feel heard, you'll have better luck reminding them

that we all have a responsibility to wear masks – for our own protection, and others.

- Take the opportunity to clarify any misconceptions they may have picked up, like “masks don’t really help” or “it doesn’t matter as long as you’re 6 feet apart” or “it doesn’t matter if it’s covering my nose as long as it’s covering my mouth.”
- Finally, ask for your teen’s help coming up with ways to make mask-wearing a little more tolerable for them, like finding a mask with their favorite sports team.

### **If your child has sensory or developmental needs: Pay extra attention to comfort.**

Consider if there are sensory components of the mask that might be hard for your child.

- For children who are sensitive to touch and sound, a soft fabric mask may be more comfortable than a paper mask that rubs and rustles.
- If your child doesn’t like any pressure on their ears, find a mask that ties behind the head, or use clips or buttons to fasten ear loops to a headband, hat or extender band.
- If your child is sensitive to their breath in the mask, offer them the choice of a scented lip balm for inside the mask and on their upper lip. For older kids, offer a hard candy or mint.
- If your child’s skin is sensitive or irritated by extended mask wear, talk to your doctor. Trouble spots often include the bridge of the nose and on the cheekbones. Your child’s doctor may be able to recommend skin protectant or another way to resolve the issue.

### **Keep in mind that masks are not a substitute for [social distancing](#).**

Remind your child to keep at least six feet from anyone who isn’t part of your household. And provide lots of praise and positive reinforcement as they adjust to this new aspect of everyday life.

*At Connecticut Children’s, every team member, visitor and patient over age 2 wears a mask.*