

#weekly WISDOM

The Friendly Face Mask: Helping Caregivers & Kids by Making Masks Fun

This week's message of #WeeklyWisdom is brought to you by Tompkins County Youth Services Department, a proud partner of the Community Coalition for Healthy Youth. This week's theme is "The Friendly Face Mask: Helping Parents and Kids by Making Masks Fun."

The start of a new school year is typically marked by the purchase of new shoes, new outfits, and the needed school supplies. Regardless of when or how our students go to school this upcoming year, there will no doubt be a new accessory that they will need to have: their face mask. The typical face mask is difficult enough to wear for adults; it's hot and they tend to be ugly, not allowing for a sense of personality or self-expression by the wearer. In the case of children, the idea of wearing a face mask, or dealing with adults in face masks, can be a very scary prospect. However, the fact is that wearing them drastically helps reduce the spread of the Coronavirus and it's unlikely that we will stop wearing them anytime soon. So, what can we do to help our kids understand the importance of wearing these without scaring them into compliance?

Here are some suggestions for parents and educators to help face this challenge:

1. **Normalize the face mask.** Try your face mask on, look in the mirror. Practice wearing them around the house and demonstrate proper use of your mask. You might also consider showing them pictures of other youth wearing face masks.
2. **Have your child put a face mask on a stuffed animal.** It can be an easy way for them to practice and they can even tell you about how the stuffed animal feels about having to wear a face mask. It's a good role-playing exercise for the younger kids.
3. **Decorate them!** The truth is that the face mask was never intended to be a design accessory, and often they are just plain ugly! Make a craft out of it, allow them to personalize them, or use them to make a personal statement without having to say a word.
4. **Incentivize the wearing of a face mask.** Just like every other type of chore, keeping a mask on during a full day is hard to do and it's not a lot of fun. Invent a dance routine, give high fives, go out for ice-cream, or even give an allowance as a reward. Let's face it: we are all much more likely to do "un-fun" things if there is something in it for us!
5. **Make sure that the face mask is comfortable for smaller-sized faces and is made from a material that does not irritate their skin.** Remember that wearing a mask can also irritate behind the ears. To help with this, you can attach buttons to fabric. If the youth has long hair, they can loop the mask around their ponytail. Safety pins and clothespins also help provide some relief to the ears when needed.

Above all else, the most important thing we can do to support youth in the wearing of their face masks is to be transparent with them. Talk to them about the importance that they play in keeping everyone safe and make sure to provide a safe space for kids to share their thoughts about wearing face masks. It's okay to not like the idea. It's okay to wish that we didn't have to wear them or to have negative feelings around the idea of face masks. However, to be a good citizen, classmate, coworker, and friend we must do our part in keeping each other safe. Remember: the youth will look to you for guidance. Keep in mind that the conversation you have with your youth depends on their age and how much they understand about events in today's world.



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