

Tips for Pediatricians to Help Children Anxious about Wearing Face Masks

Whether children are returning to virtual school or a real building, you may have patients who are anxious about wearing face coverings or masks. Here are some tips to help them:

Be sure that everyone in the pediatric practice is wearing masks properly.

Use CHKD signs to show children and their families how to wear masks.

Assess a child's anxiety about wearing masks. Ask them!

Use a validated screening tool, such as Screen for Child Anxiety Related Disorders (SCARED) for children 8 to 18 or Pediatric Symptom Checklist-17.

Address anxiety by pointing out the differences between real concerns and unreasonable anxiety.

- Having concerns and fears about COVID-19 is reasonable.
- Anxiety is not weakness, but it can distort your thinking.
- "Maladaptive anxiety" causes avoidance, which can make anxiety even worse. For instance, not wearing a mask because you are anxious is a practice that increases the risk of spreading or catching COVID-19 rather than protecting someone.

Provide tools for relaxation.

- Breathing exercises.
- Progressive muscle relaxation.
- Mindfulness exercises.
- Use coping strategies, such as physical activity, creative activities, and reaching out to support networks.

Describe graduated exposure that parents and caregivers can use with their child at home:

- Practice relaxation skills with your child.
- Have your child wear the mask at home for a short amount of time.
- Praise and coach your child in practicing relaxation skills.
- Have your child wear the mask for a little longer period of time.
- Praise mask-wearing behaviors and coach your child in practicing relaxation skills.
- Keep extending the amount of time wearing the mask.



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