

Tips & Resources for Preparing Your Child to Return to School

The two consistent recommendations in all the literature and research about returning to school is the importance of wearing masks and social distancing, both of which are not part of most children's experiences. However, with practice and reinforcement can help make routines that become second nature. Anything you can do to help your children, particularly young children, develop habits around the wearing of masks and social distancing will help make the return to school less stressful for staff and students.

Tips for building comfort with wearing a mask:

- Try different kinds of masks and let children pick their favorite – cloth, paper, shield, gaiter, bandana, and so much more.
- Let kids design their own mask – using unique materials or coloring or drawing on paper masks (masks are available in all sorts of designs, with cartoon characters, etc.)
- Associate the wearing of a mask with other fun or preferred activities. Wear masks during a favorite TV show or allow a child to play a favorite or new app as long as the mask is on.
- Let your child put a mask on a favorite stuffed animal or other toy.
- Talk about and point out members of the community who wear masks (Particularly if the child loves firefighters, police men, construction workers, etc.).
- Start with small periods of time wearing the mask. If 10 minutes is the longest amount of time your child is currently wearing a mask pick a reward and offer it after 8 minutes of mask wearing (so that they are most likely to earn the reward). Then increase the time a little bit every day. You can also make a chart with a big reward at the end – basketball if they can get to 60 minutes.
- Practice having your child read aloud at bedtime with a mask on to encourage them to speak louder and announce.
- Play games such as “smile with your eyes” or guessing facial expressions under the mask (making it playful and fun).
- Come up with a family code word or signal to pull a mask up when someone is getting closer than 6 feet.

Helpful resources for wearing a mask:

- [How do you get your child to wear a mask?](#) (Cook Children Health Systems)
- [“How to Help Kids Embrace Mask-Wearing”](#) (The New York Times)
- [Wearing a Mask Social Story](#) (Social Story for Pre-K/Elementary)
- [How to Help Your Child to Wearing a Mask](#) (Infographic to help your child learn how to wear a mask)
- [Helping Kids Wear Masks](#) (Action Learning Network)

Social Distancing

- Start with games that are already easily adapted to social distancing like Simon Says or Horse (you have to make basketball shots from the same spot) or Cornhole, water balloon toss using separate (soapy buckets if you choose).
- Alternate the use of playground/outdoor equipment/toys amongst children in the household to get them used to giving space and sharing.
- Spread out during meals at home while continuing to keep up conversation.
- Role play different scenarios at home that might occur at school.
- Work as a family to come up with solutions to your family routines that usually involve close contact.

- Develop strategies to help children wait their turn.

Helpful resources for Social Distancing:

- [What is Social Distancing?](#) (Social Story for Pre-K/Elementary)
- [Teaching Children to Social Distance](#) (Parenting Special Needs)

Visit our Return to School Planning webpage for additional resources and information, including District Communications, Return to School Plans, helpful videos and more.