



UNMASKING GUIDELINES

Dear ECLC Families,

March 18, 2022

The transition to removing masks after two years of battling with our kids to even wear one in the first place is something that can feel confusing and anxiety-provoking—this applies to us adults and the children, too!

Here are some tips and examples to help everyone as we adjust to the “for now normal”:

- Explain everything: kids are incredibly smart and observant. Even when we think they can't possibly understand, chances are they are picking up more than we think. Be succinct and factual with them about what is happening. Acknowledge the shift of going from “you have to wear this to be safe” to “we don't need to wear one anymore” and explain in simple terms how that is happening. Give them space to share their feelings and let them know it's normal to feel scared or worried.
 - “You know how we've had to wear a mask to keep us safe for so long now? I have good news! The doctors and scientists say it's now okay to NOT wear our masks anymore. Starting Monday, we get to choose if you wear a mask to school.”
- Choices help empower children and let them feel in control (i.e., less tantrums!). If you feel it's appropriate for your family, ask your child if they would like to continue to wear one or not and let them make the decision for themselves. If your child is feeling particularly nervous about losing the mask, this is an excellent route to choose.

CONTINUED ON BACK

3/18/2022

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

- Judgment-free zone: It's important to talk to our children about the fact that some people at school will still be wearing masks and some won't. It's imperative that we remind our children that every family and person is different and whether they have a mask on or not is perfectly okay. Remind them it's not something that needs to be commented on or talked about.
 - "You will/won't be wearing a mask to school on Monday but someone else in your class might/might not be wearing one. Every family is different, and every person gets to choose if they want to wear a mask or not. Do you have any questions about that? It's not something we want to talk about in front of our friends!"
- "For now normal": this phrase was coined by Sesame Street at the start of the pandemic to help better conceptualize what was happening for our children who had a hard time grasping it. When discussing the change with your child, explain that going mask-free might be temporary. If another wave comes and masks are implemented again, having used a phrase like this will make that transition back easier.
 - "The same doctors and scientists who said it's safe to take off our masks could tell us to put them back on again later. It's their job to watch the germs and tell us what to do to stay safe. So this is our 'for now normal'."

The most important thing we can do is validate feelings of fear or hesitation, not only for our children but also for ourselves and the entire ECLC family. We all will continue to make decisions that are best for our families with the information available and do our best to make it through these uncertain times.

NICOLE SWARTZ, CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKER (LCSW) AND ECLC PARENT.