As children return to the classroom, many schools are requiring masks for both students and teachers. At others, they are optional, but recommended. Here are some tips and suggestions for parents and teachers:

1. Follow current CDC guidelines regarding children and masks. Recommendations can and will change over time as the pandemic evolves and more data becomes available.

2. Explain to children why we need to wear masks, using words and concepts kids can understand. Gear your explanations to the child’s age, language and developmental level.

3. Acknowledge and validate the child’s thoughts and feelings about wearing masks. Let them know that you think their questions and concerns are important and appropriate.

4. For young children, look for fun and colorful masks.

5. Give kids choices about which mask to wear. Make it part of their daily wardrobe selection.

6. Kids will observe and learn from the behavior of the adults around them. Model appropriate mask wearing, consistent with current guidelines and local regulations.

7. Some children, including those with ADHD or developmental delays, may have more difficulty keeping masks on throughout the school day. Parents and teachers should be patient, tolerant and understanding, to the extent possible. Use positive reinforcement to support and encourage appropriate mask wearing.

8. If children have ongoing questions or concerns about masks, talk to their pediatrician or the school nurse.

Changing guidance and routines can be challenging for both kids and adults. Fortunately, most children are quite resilient. They will adjust and adapt to wearing a mask with little difficulty. Parents and teachers can help by listening to their questions and responding in an honest, consistent and supportive manner.
For more information:

AACAP Resource Library on Coronavirus

Face Masks | American Academy of Pediatrics

Talking to Children About Coronavirus

Face Masks for Children During COVID-19

Mask Mythbusters: Common Questions About Kids and Face Masks

Mask Up! Talking to Young Children about Wearing Masks

Your Guide to Masks | CDC

Activities, Gatherings & Holidays | CDC

*David Fassler, MD is a child and adolescent psychiatrist practicing in Burlington, Vermont. He is also a Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Vermont Larner College of Medicine, and member of the Consumer Issues Committee of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.*

*Christopher Streeter, MD is a board certified child and adolescent psychiatrist working with young people at St. Luke’s Children’s Center for Neurobehavioral Medicine in Boise, Idaho. He is also an assistant professor of psychiatry at the Idaho College of Medicine, and an adjunct instructor for the University of Washington psychiatry residency programs.*