

what to say to someone who isn't wearing a mask

Most parents have worked hard to get their kids to understand the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. They've used age-appropriate information to talk about the virus and ways to protect themselves and others from it. By now, most families are used to doing things like:

- Washing their hands well and often
- Wearing masks when near people who don't live in the same household
- Social distancing and staying home as much as possible

There's still much to learn about this new disease, and it may be some time before effective treatments or vaccines can make it safe to return to normal. Until then, wearing masks or cloth face coverings has been shown to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

So it can be frustrating to see people who aren't following the advice of medical experts. Why won't some people mask up? Experts think it could be due to things like:

- Not believing that COVID-19 is a serious illness
- Feeling like their area is safe or has only a few infections
- Disliking some of the effects of face covering (like making it feel harder to breathe, or thinking they aren't heard or understood)
- A reaction to what they feel is too much government control
- Not agreeing that masks help prevent the spread of coronavirus
- Not wanting to show fear or vulnerability
- Confusion because early public health recommendations didn't include masking

Because you know that you might see people out and about without masks, try to talk to your kids about it before you leave your house. That way, you can have a plan ready and avoid possible conflicts. Teach your kids to expect to move away from anyone not wearing a mask. If you're at a park or other open-air spot, getting 6 feet away should be easy.

But what if you're in a tighter space, or are in a situation that's harder to move away from (for instance, in line in a store)? Here are some ideas:

If it's someone you know or feel comfortable with:

- Start by acknowledging what they dislike about masks. After all, few of us enjoy wearing them. Then, use empathy to make a case for everyone "being in this together."

(continued on reverse)



- Talk about how covering our noses and mouths protects our most at-risk friends and family, like the elderly and those with other health conditions. Remind them: "Wearing a mask does seem to give me some protection. But mostly, I wear my mask to protect you and other people I care about."
- Keep it friendly but firm. You could say, "It would really make me feel better if you had a mask on." Or, "Since you don't have a mask on, let's continue this conversation at a further distance or via email."
- Consider keeping clean homemade or disposable masks on hand to offer to a friend who's not wearing one.
- If someone still won't cover up, it's OK to say that your social "bubble" includes only those who follow the safety precautions. Say you'll hope to see them again as soon as the pandemic is over. Then stick to it — keep your precautions in place, even if it means not seeing someone you care about for a while.

If it's someone you don't know:

- If you're shopping, look for security personnel or other store employees who can speak to customers who aren't wearing a face covering.
- Do not use public shaming, bullying, or threatening to try to change the person's behavior.
- Ask someone who is not masked to please stand back or please stand away from you. If they won't or it's not possible to keep 6 feet away, leave.
- If a store's masking policies seem lax, contact the manager or owner of the business and explain your concerns. If you don't feel they'll address them, take your business elsewhere.
- If an employee isn't wearing a mask or isn't wearing one properly (over their mouth and nose), ask them to do so. If they won't, bring the problem to the manager's attention.
- If you're uncomfortable with a lack of masking or physical distance, be prepared to leave. Even if you've got a cart full of groceries, it's not worth putting your family in an upsetting or potentially dangerous situation.

If someone got angry when asked to wear a mask, talk to your kids about it afterward. Explain that this is new territory for everyone. Someone who reacts badly might be missing loved ones, have lost their job, or be stressed about something that's not related to wearing a mask. Reassure your kids that in most cases, these reactions aren't personal.

Remind them that the good news is that most people are wearing masks in public and taking other precautions. By being careful, your family and most others are doing all they can to help stop coronavirus.



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