

Young children look for emotional cues from caregivers to help interpret the environment and rely on their caregiver's facial expressions, tone of voice, and body posture to identify and understand emotions. Here are tips and ideas for helping children identify emotions when your face, your most expressive feature, is covered by a mask. Use these strategies to let children know that behind the mask, a kind and warm expression is still there!



1. Practice emotional expressions with a mask on in front of a mirror. Pay attention to facial cues that can be seen, body movements, and hand gestures.
2. Incorporate ASL when teaching emotions (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91foGHKuwL0>).
3. Direct children to look at your eyebrows, eyes, body movements, and gestures when talking about emotions. For example, "Look, I am happy. You can't see my mouth smile, but my cheeks lift up, my eyes crinkle, and my shoulders and arms look like this."
4. Increase the use of gestures throughout the day and when talking about emotions (e.g., shoulders shrugged for sad, arms out to indicate a happy mood).
5. Talk about your feelings as much as possible (e.g., "I am feeling happy that it is almost time to go outside and play."; "I am feeling sad that it is raining right now."; "I am feeling excited that we have a new toy in centers today.").
6. If using an emotion check-in, encourage all adults in the classroom to participate and check-in when the children do (https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/FeelingFaces_chart_template.pdf).
7. When talking about emotions, hold up the corresponding emotion card or visual near your face. Consider wearing a lanyard with a visual of an emotion expressions (e.g., tired, happy, excited, sad, angry, mad, nervous).
8. Be sure to face children and remain nearby when talking to them while wearing a mask. Wearing a mask muffles the speaker's speech, which can make it more difficult to understand what is said.
9. Provide an activity for children to practice wearing a mask and making different faces while looking in a mirror or at each other. Point out how their face looks (e.g., eyes, eyebrows).
10. Allow children to use masks during play with stuffed animals to help familiarize them with seeing masks in their environment.