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Is wearing a mask affecting our children's development?

#Coronavirus the facts

#Coronavirus

Sunday Feb. 14, 2021

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Masks could affect children's development

For adults, the need to wear a mask can be inconvenient. For children it could be more serious. Masks disguise key cues in our expressions, making it harder to read someone's face, and there is growing evidence that this could be affecting child development.

Child carers who wear masks while at work say it is difficult to establish a relationship of trust with children because they have to conceal their mouths.

Infants need to see faces

Professor Myowa Masako specializes in the human brain and psychological development at Kyoto University Graduate School of Education and Faculty of Education. She says adults must be especially careful about interacting with infants from when they are born until they are about a year old. That's the age at which babies are studying people's faces and learning expressions.

Babies need to see the eyes, nose and mouth to recognize a face. As the months pass, they learn to distinguish emotions such as joy or anger. This ability forms the foundation for understanding other peoples' feelings.

Myowa says that only adults can communicate using just their eyes. She says it's important to give babies opportunities to see peoples' facial expressions. She advises family members to show their faces to their babies at home even more than before.

Adverse effects on elementary school children

Elementary schools in [Japan](#) are reporting that masks are having adverse effects on their students, including more unruly behavior as masks disrupt communication.

Professor Myowa says children between four and ten years old are developing the ability to empathize, to imagine what others think, and how to respond.

Children normally have ample chances at school to put themselves in someone else's shoes, but masks in classrooms mean the opportunities are much scarcer now. She suggests that teachers should consider how to create those opportunities for students in the current situation.

Use body language

Myowa says body language can compensate to some degree, and recommends that adults express their emotions more physically for children of preschool or elementary school age.

This information is accurate as of January 21, 2021.

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