

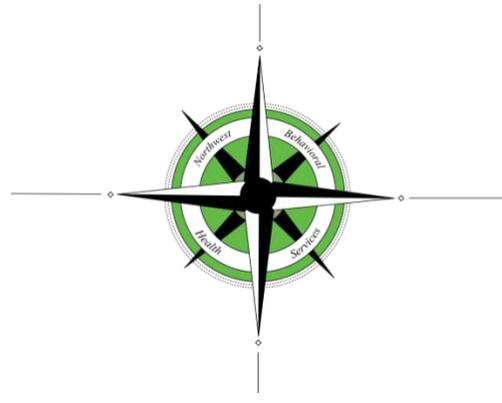
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As you know, our state is rapidly approaching the easing of mask restrictions, and this has already started with our schools. No matter what your personal feelings are on the topic as an adult, please remember that your kids may have a different take. Some younger kids will be anxious about removing masks because they have never known anything different in school. Some kids with social anxiety may have actually found comfort in wearing masks beyond any health concerns. Other kids will be happy to see their peers' faces and be seen in return! Here are some tips for talking to children/adolescents about the coming changes:

1. Examine your own feelings on the topic before you talk to your child. If you are anxious, this will raise your child's anxiety. If you see ending masking as a "win", keep in mind that you may unintentionally minimize any worried feelings your child may have.
2. Proactively start a conversation with your child in an open ended way like, "Starting Wednesday your school won't require a mask anymore. What do you think about that?" This will give you an in to ask follow up questions and really get to know your child's thoughts/feelings before you need to respond. Adults often over-plan for what to say in awkward conversations only to find out that they are thinking WAY more deeply about the matter than the child is.
3. Reassure your child that changes in policies happen because of new and important information from some really smart people who are helping them stay safe.
4. Explain that some kids (maybe even them) may still choose to wear masks because they may need them to feel safe...and that is ok. Each person has a right to do whatever they feel is best. You never know if a person has a specific reason that wearing a mask, not wearing a mask, getting vaccinated, not getting vaccinated, etc. is important to them.
5. Particularly if you have older children, please emphasize the need for kindness and grace with their peers. In the past few weeks there has already been an increase in bullying and threats toward peers on either side of the masking issue.
6. Limit the amount of exposure to media coverage of the pandemic, policy changes, etc. These are rarely without bias and are really confusing and challenging for adults to sort out, let alone kids.
7. Open the door for more conversation if there is anything that your child becomes concerned about as they return to school.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Watson'.

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Board Certified Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychologist

