

# MASK-WEARING AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

## infants and young children

### WHAT IS SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT?

Babies and young children develop socially by interacting with others. By watching the faces of the people around them, they learn the difference between positive and negative emotions. This can help them to learn about how emotions change and how they map onto what people say or do. By interacting with others, children learn about their own emotions, start to understand how their behaviour impacts others, learn social cues, and develop language and non-verbal communication.



### HOW DO MASKS AFFECT SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT?

Because masks cover a large part of the face, some studies have found that children find it hard to recognise the faces and emotions of people wearing them. But does this impact social development? So far, there is no evidence that this is the case.

Even with masking mandates, children have opportunities for learning about emotions and communication through their interactions at home and through paying attention to eyes, tone of voice, and gestures. What's more, mask mandates help to ensure your child's health is protected, and reduce the likelihood of other things that may affect development, like school and daycare closures.



### WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

Use eye-contact with your child when you are communicating with them. Make the most of mask-free time by ensuring they can see your facial expressions when playing or talking. Help them to understand their own and others' emotions using words, explanations, and pictures ("Mummy's feeling happy because she gets to spend time with you" or "this doggy is sad because he misses his friend"). As children learn to talk, you can ask them to name the feelings of different picture book characters, and once they can draw you can ask them to draw different feelings. If you are concerned about your child's social and emotional development, or their language and communication skills, reach out to your local child development service for more information.

