

FACES ARE ESSENTIAL

Roseann Fricks, YC:PO District Chair

You've heard about it, read about it, and understand it, "Wearing face masks is necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19." BUT, are you familiar with the potential harm to young children in early learning environments all day when the adults that interact with them, teach them, and nurture them have their faces covered with face masks?

This doesn't mean those adults should not wear face masks, but that options should be explored to insure the young children in their care are receiving the best we have to offer them. Options do exist and are available, at a minimal cost, to our childcare professionals.

What does the research say? We know that even for adults it can be difficult to read facial expressions when someone is wearing a mask. It is impossible to see a smile unless you know how to see that smile in a person's eyes. Young children don't have this knowledge and experience. Young children depend on facial expressions from those caring for them to gain the emotional cues necessary to interpret various situations. According to a recent article, "Are you happy or sad? How wearing face masks can impact children's ability to read emotions" by Rachael Katz and Helen Shwe Hadani, April 2020, Brookings, the development of this emotional communication is referred to as "social referencing" and occurs between infancy and the early preschool years.

As adults we are able to provide a mechanism to assist young children understand about masks while allowing their normal development for emotional communication to occur. We know that learning happens for children through their relationships with caregivers, they require visual input in order to develop strong, healthy brain connections.

Dr. Wil Blechman has shared with us on many occasions, brain connections are going to happen. To what extent and to what end is what adults contribute to. Healthy brain connections in young children are the responsibility of adults caring for them.

According to Jack P. Shonkoff, M.D., Director at the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, "Early experiences and exposures during the prenatal period and first 2 – 3 years after birth are likely to have as much or greater influence on later health as on school achievement." *"Connecting the Brain to the rest of the body"*, July 9, 2020.

For our childcare professionals, they have already demonstrated their passion for children and their commitment to provide a healthy and safe environment for those children. When they put on a face covering for insuring a healthy safe environment, their efforts with assisting the child develop strong healthy brain connections is greatly diminished.

The Florida Association for Infant Mental Health (FAIMH) is committed to protecting the mental health and communications skills of all of Florida's infants and young children. The leaders of Kiwanis District agree with this commitment and are partnering with FAIMH to take appropriate steps to provide the "ClearMask" to every child care provider working in Florida.

This transparent mask is the first to receive FDA approval for a fully transparent surgical mask. According to Dr. Christine Hughes, FAIMH, "babies and young children need to see the full faces of their caregivers, because all

learning happens through interactions with the important adults in their lives. ClearMasks™ help keep everyone physically safe, while also protecting their lifelong mental and emotional health” with <https://www.faimh.org/faces>

How can you help? Educate your club on the benefits and necessity of clear masks and assist your club with taking on this project for your community. Through minimal financial contributions the child care professionals in your community can receive a ClearMask and the long term benefits for the children in their care support the mission and vision of Kiwanis.

The Kiwanis Foundation is actively supporting this initiative and following the lead of our clubs. When your club provides Past Governor Allen and Governor Mary-Lynn with proof that you purchased a case (or more) of the ClearMask for your community, the Foundation will match your purchase by providing funds to purchase another case of the ClearMask for child care providers determined in need by FAIMH in the State of Florida and will ensure those child care providers receive the ClearMask.

Consider contacting the Early Learning Coalition in your community to explore a relationship and partnership with them. There are 30 Early Learning Coalitions in the state that serve families and children, focusing on child care providers. If you need contact information for the one in your community, let me know.

The ClearMask cost is \$1,152 for a case of 432 masks plus \$100 shipping, for a total cost of \$1,252, which is approximately \$2.90 per mask. In order to take advantage of this offer, your club must purchase a case and coordinate with FAIMH for the distribution of the ClearMasks to child care programs in your area. Get started by using [this link](#), and learn more at <https://www.faimh.org/faces>

Then the fun part starts! Lewis Matusow, District Public Relations Coordinator **is ready, willing and able to assist your Club in creating a distribution event! Let FAIMH know that you want Lew’s help when you complete the form linked above. Lew can be reached at Lew@resortappbuilders.com, Office: 305-238-1889; Cell: 305-775-6575.**

I look forward to working with you in the 2020 – 2021 Kiwanis year as we continue to follow the lead of the amazing and wonderful Dr. Wil Blechman by strengthening the YC:PO activities in YOUR community. “Among the millions of hours of community service hours Kiwanis clubs around the world do, Young Children Priority One has been one of most impactful and long lasting,” said Dr. Wil.

Please contact me at Roseann Fricks, Early Learning Coalition of Marion County, 2300 SW 17 Road, Ocala, FL 34471 or via email at rfricks@elc-marion.org. I look forward to working with you.

Roseann Fricks
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