



# Using CPAP with Your School-age Child (6 to 12 Years)

**Getting started with continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP)**

Sleep is an important part of staying healthy for children of all ages. About 3% of children have a sleep disturbance called obstructive sleep apnea. If your child has been prescribed a CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machine while sleeping, this handout offers tips to help you and your child adjust to it.

It's your job to help your child use CPAP during sleep. CPAP helps your child wake up rested and function well throughout the day. Using CPAP can become a normal part of your child's sleep routine and help keep your child healthy.

## **How is my child growing and developing?**

During elementary school and early middle school, your child begins to be able to think more logically and can understand cause and effect. School-age children understand that their actions often have direct consequences or results. Children at this stage begin to understand others' perspectives and about differences between themselves and others. Also, your children's relationships with friends outside the family increase in their importance for your child.

### What might happen

### Tips for CPAP use

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**Your school-age child may refuse to put on the mask or pull off the mask repeatedly. Your child may put on the mask while you are in the room and take it off once the door is closed or remove it partway through the night.**

- It is common when first using CPAP for a child to pull off the mask in the middle of the night. You can choose to check on the child in the middle of the night and replace the mask if it has come off. Hopefully, this will only be a problem for the first few weeks, and your child will become used to the mask and wear it through the night. Or, the child will understand that if the mask comes off, it will be replaced.
- Establish a transition time before bedtime. Let your child know how many minutes remain before it's time to begin the bedtime routine. Do not allow extra minutes or give your child fewer minutes than what you said. Allow them to be involved in discussing what their bedtime routine involves. It should not involve TV, video games or movies.
- Keep the bedtime routine simple. For example, a child's bedtime routine could include changing into pajamas, brushing teeth, reading a story or listening to music and putting on the CPAP mask. Shift other evening activities — such as homework or picking out clothes for the next day — to the next morning or other times of the day.

**Your child may also regress in their behavior or pout as a sign of frustration or dissatisfaction.**

- Many children at this age respond well to incentive programs, such as sticker charts, as a form of positive reinforcement. Contact the Child Life Department at Children's at 206-987-3285 if you want help learning how to effectively use a chart or incentive program with your child.
  - If possible, let your child pick the prize or reward.
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**What might happen**

**Tips for CPAP use**

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**Your child may try to bargain with you or need extra incentives to use CPAP.**

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- If possible, let your child pick the prize or reward.

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**Your child's friends become increasingly important. Your child may not want CPAP mentioned to people outside of the family or may refuse to talk about CPAP when outside the home.**

- Your child is increasingly able to communicate feelings to you about CPAP. Take time to talk about CPAP and find out about your child's understanding of CPAP, what it does to help and why it is important. Explore your child's feelings about the machine.
- Encourage your child to attend a CPAP support group to talk with other children using CPAP.
- Ask your sleep specialist if skipping 1 or 2 days is OK for special occasions like slumber parties or overnight trips.

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**If your child has not developed skills to communicate feelings verbally or in a constructive manner, your child may respond aggressively toward you, the bedtime routine or the CPAP machine and mask.**

- Stop aggressive behavior right away. Teach your child healthy ways to verbalize feelings, provide alternatives for aggressive behavior and give positive feedback for non-aggressive behavior.
- Avoid fighting or getting into a power struggle with your child over wearing the mask. Make using CPAP fun or make it a game or activity.
- Create a calm environment when introducing CPAP and be persistent so that your child will realize the importance of wearing the mask.

### What might happen

### Tips for CPAP use

**It is common for caregivers to be concerned about their child's reaction to CPAP.**

- Talk with sleep clinic staff about your concerns.
- If your child has special healthcare needs or emotional or behavioral disorders, stay in contact with your specialty clinics. The staff may be able to offer assistance in helping your child adjust to wearing a mask and using CPAP.
- Attend a support group meeting for caregivers of children using CPAP.

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### Desensitization tips for your child

1. Practice relaxation or breathing techniques and breathing through the nose. This could be incorporated into part of the bedtime routine or could be done in the car or anywhere.
2. Throughout the process, talk to your child about CPAP while putting on the mask or getting ready for sleep. Talk about why they need to wear the mask and what it does. Explain the parts of the machine.
3. If your machine or humidifier makes noise or hums, turn it on upon walking in the room so your child gets used to the noise.
4. Let your child examine the mask and machine. Answer any questions your child may have.
5. Try one or more of these ideas:
  - Put the mask and headgear on a teddy bear or doll. For older children, you may have your child put the mask and headgear on you and let your child help adjust it. You may also wish to give your child a doll or stuffed animal that wears a mask. Then have your child try the mask on.
  - Get masks or silly noses for family members to wear, such as toy animal noses, clown noses or a small plastic cup. Wear a mask or silly nose when your child is wearing the mask and getting ready for bed.
  - Give your child jobs related to CPAP that they can help with, such as holding the mask while you put on the straps, turning on the machine or helping you clean the mask.
  - Give your child a doll to draw on. (Contact the Child Life Department at Children's at 206-987-3285.)

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- Read a book about firefighters or other people who wear masks, color in a coloring book that features masks or create a puppet show about using CPAP. Encourage your child to draw pictures of people wearing masks or to draw masks on pictures of children or animals in coloring books.
  - Encourage your child to pretend to be a jet pilot, astronaut, firefighter or scuba diver wearing a mask. If age-appropriate, see a movie where people wear masks as part of their job such as “Top Gun” (PG) or “Spy Kids” (PG). Talk about the movie with your child and the importance of masks to the people in the movies.
6. Place the mask on your child’s face for 1 minute. The goal is to gradually increase to longer periods. Your child may want to hold the mask or may find it comforting to be near a parent during this process. Using distractions works well. Let your child watch a movie or play video games during the day while getting used to wearing the mask.
  7. With the tubing connected and the machine turned on, let your child play with the airflow. Your child might speak into the airflow, pretend the airflow is a hair dryer or blow air in the face.
  8. Once your child can comfortably wear the mask for 30 minutes with the tubing disconnected from the CPAP machine, connect the tubing to the machine and turn on the machine. Repeat the process in step 6 until your child can wear the mask with the machine turned on and tolerate it for several minutes.
    - Use positive reinforcements or rewards for any attempts your child makes. Use favorite video games, TV shows, toys, books and/or music to help distract your child from focusing on the new feelings of having the mask on. There is not a set length for the desensitization process, but it is important to work with your child every day. It is also helpful to work with your child on this process at least a few times each day, rather than only at night.
    - Being able to wear the mask during the day while awake means that your child will be more likely to wear it at bedtime.
    - During the day, work toward wearing the mask for longer periods by rewarding your child with something they like. Try placing the mask on your child while watching a favorite video. If your child pulls the mask off, then turn off the video. Continue this until your child tolerates wearing the mask with the machine on.
  9. Have your child wear the headgear and mask with the CPAP machine turned on to fall asleep when tired, either for a nap or at night. Once your child can fall asleep with the machine on and sleeps for most of the night with it on, you have successfully completed the desensitization plan. Congratulations!

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### To Learn More

- Sleep Disorders Center  
206-987-8938
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)

Call your home care company with any questions or concerns about the mask, mask fit or the machine.

For any concerns about your child's health or breathing related to CPAP, call the Children's Hospital Sleep Disorders Center at 206-987-8938.

### Sleep disorder resource

National Sleep Foundation  
[www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.
- For Deaf and hard of hearing callers  
206-987-2280 (TTY)

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Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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