

For Some Teens, as Masks Come Off, Anxiety Sets In

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For Belle Lapos, high school has been weird. Her freshman year started in 2020 with a mix of learning from home and in-person school in Stillwater, Minn. Now a sophomore, she has been full-time at school for months, with everyone in masks. So when her school lifted its Covid-19 mask mandate a few weeks ago, she and her friends had a lot of processing to do.

They worried they may be deemed less attractive. They worried about acne that had been exacerbated by face coverings. They worried about getting sick or getting family members sick. And they worried about whether wearing, or not wearing, masks might align them with certain political beliefs.

Ultimately, Belle, 16, and her friends decided to keep their masks on for now, “not because of their views on the pandemic, mostly because of their views on themselves and how they think people are going to judge them,” Belle said. “Only seeing half of someone’s face for two years straight and then completely opening up to them, like, ‘Oh, here’s my face’ — you know, it’s a lot.”

Adolescence has long been defined by insecurities about body image, social pressures to conform, a growing sense of identity and a [susceptibility to social anxiety](#). As mask mandates end in school districts around the country, many teenagers have mixed emotions like Belle and her friends do.

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