

A quick guide to Masking

What is masking?

- **Masking** - saying you're okay when you're not, to avoid attention and blend in
- **Camouflaging** - acting like other people to fit in and to avoid being spotlighted. For example, a person who seems sociable might just be wearing their "sociable mask"
- **People pleasing** - doing things to make others happy even if you don't want to



"Masking is when I wear a metaphorical mask that gives me the appearance of being neurotypical"



Look for signs of maskers:

- Often quiet
- high personal standards
- reluctant to ask for or access support because they don't want to appear different
- feel a need to be very near friends (their "anchors")

"Long term masking can lead to shutdown, withdrawal and eventually complete burnout"





Why do people mask?

"Masking is a survival instinct and it's absolutely exhausting"

- Not all neurodivergent people consciously mask.
- If your natural way of being is widely viewed as "wrong" you may mask in order to appear like everyone else.
- For example, if you have been told to look at someone when you talk to them, you may do this even when it's very uncomfortable for you
- 94% of autistic adults say that they mask (NAS, 2022)

"I find it hard to distinguish between me and my mask if I've been wearing it for a while"

How can you help?

- Listen to parent carers when they say their child expresses anxieties at home, but you don't see these at school. Never say- "well they seem okay at school" (because they're not!)
- Don't spotlight - make them feel the centre of attention, e.g asking them to answer a question in front of a class
- Offer feedback very sensitively and support discreetly
- Make sensory adjustments in a covert way
- Respect different communication styles, e.g talking without looking
- Celebrate their successes - however small, but do so quietly
- Value and incorporate special interests
- Sit them with supportive peers or safe people
- Offer non-direct way to express anxieties: drawing, log-books, walk- and-talk, emails
- Talk about your own triggers, responses and ways to regulate - make it okay to not be okay
- Find out anxiety triggers (sensory and non-sensory) and reduce or remove
- Create an environment welcoming to everyone with good representative neurodivergent role models within classroom decoration

