

# WHAT IS MASKING?

Masking is when a child hides their true self to fit in or avoid negative attention. It is common among neurodiverse children with autism or ADHD. This behavior can be emotionally exhausting and often goes unnoticed by others. If educators are aware of masking, they can provide better support by allowing a time or space for the child to be authentic without the need to mask.

## WHY DO KIDS MASK?

1. Social Pressure: desire to fit in.
2. Avoiding Negative Attention: fear of teasing or punishment.
3. Adult Expectations: influenced by adults to “act normal.”
4. Wanting Friendships: imitating others to make friends.
5. Sensory Needs: restraining stimming to avoid disruption.

## SIGNS OF MASKING:

- Emotional Exhaustion: they seem fine at school but have meltdowns at home.
- Inconsistent Behavior: quiet at school, expressive at home.
- Difficulty Asking for Help: they avoid speaking up to stay under the radar.
- Frequent Copying: they imitate others but lack spontaneity.
- Hiding Stimming: appear calm publicly but need to stim privately.
- High Anxiety: worry about perfection and apologize excessively.
- Poor Emotional Control: suppressed emotions can lead to outbursts.

# WHAT IS MASKING?

Masking impacts a child's mental health by:

- causing burnout from the effort to fit in
- increasing anxiety and depression due to low self-esteem and loneliness
- hindering their self-discovery
- possibly delaying diagnoses of neurodiverse traits, which prevents timely support.

## HOW TO HELP

1. Create Safe Spaces: kids thrive in accepting environments. Encourage them to be themselves.
2. At Home: praise their natural behaviors.
3. At School: support programs that celebrate differences.
4. Encourage Self-Expression: allow exploration of hobbies to foster self-worth.
5. Acknowledge Efforts: listen and empathize when they discuss masking challenges.
6. Provide Sensory Tools: offer fidget toys and sensory breaks for relaxation.
7. Teach Emotional Awareness: use tools like emotion charts to help express feelings.
8. Educate Others: inform teachers and peers about the challenges of masking.
9. Seek Professional Support: therapists can help boost confidence and self-advocacy.
10. Advocate for Accommodations: ensure access to sensory breaks and support in school.
11. Choose Therapies Wisely: avoid supports that encourage masking behaviors (e.g. don't force eye contact).

REFERENCE: [HTTPS://HELPANDHEALINGCENTER.COM/UNDERSTANDING-MASKING-IN-CHILDREN/](https://helpandhealingcenter.com/understanding-mask-in-children/)