

# What Does Masking Look Like at Work?

Your neurotype is not unprofessional.

Many autistic adults mask at work to fit in, do their job, keep the peace, or avoid judgement.

Masking can help in the short term, but it often comes at a high personal cost.



## What Masking at Work Can Look Like

- ♥ Forcing polite small talk or social interaction
- ♥ Rehearsing meetings or conversations in advance
- ♥ Copying colleagues' communication style
- ♥ Suppressing stimming or self-regulation
- ♥ Pretending to understand instructions
- ♥ Hiding sensory overwhelm or discomfort
- ♥ Overworking or over-preparing to compensate
- ♥ People-pleasing and saying "yes" too often
- ♥ Monitoring tone, facial expressions and body language constantly
- ♥ Hiding exhaustion, anxiety or stress
- ♥ Staying late to recover or catch up
- ♥ Appearing "fine" professionally while struggling internally

♥ You might look like you're coping well, but masking can be incredibly draining.



## Why Autistic People May Mask at Work

- ♥ Fear of judgement or negative assumptions
- ♥ Pressure to appear professional
- ♥ Wanting to keep your job
- ♥ Avoiding discrimination or stigma
- ♥ Trying to fit workplace culture
- ♥ Previous negative experiences
- ♥ Not feeling safe to be yourself
- ♥ Believing you have to "earn" acceptance
- ♥ Worrying accommodations will be misunderstood
- ♥ Wanting to be seen as capable and competent

♥ Masking is a strategy for safety, not a lack of professionalism or effort.



## The Hidden Impact of Masking

- ♥ Chronic exhaustion and physical fatigue
- ♥ Burnout and loss of skills
- ♥ Shutdowns after work or at home
- ♥ Increased anxiety and stress
- ♥ Sensory overload
- ♥ Loss of identity and feeling disconnected
- ♥ Difficulty maintaining work-life balance
- ♥ Emotional exhaustion
- ♥ Feeling unable to ask for help
- ♥ Higher risk of long-term mental and physical health difficulties

♥ You are not "too sensitive". You are responding to an environment that may not be built for you.



## Helpful Workplace Supports

Small changes can make a big difference. Every person has unique needs.



**Clear Communication**  
Clear instructions, written information and clear expectations.



**Flexible Working**  
Hybrid or remote options and flexibility where possible.



**Sensory Support**  
Quiet spaces, noise-reducing headphones or lighting adjustments.



**Time & Breaks**  
Regular breaks, processing time and reasonable adjustments.



**Supportive Management**  
Managers who listen, trust and focus on strengths.



**Communication Access**  
Different ways to communicate (email, chat, written).



**Predictability**  
Notice of changes, routine where possible and clear planning.



**Autonomy**  
Choice in how tasks are approached and independence.



**Understanding Culture**  
A culture that values inclusion, differences and neurodiversity.



**Focus on Strengths**  
Recognise skills, contributions and potential.

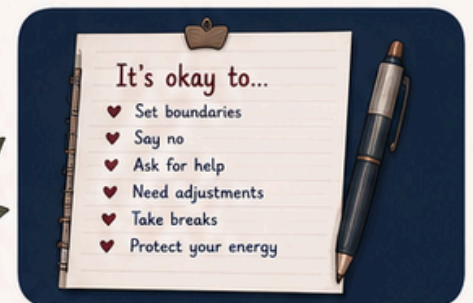
♥ Support is not about lowering expectations—it's about removing unnecessary barriers.

## Gentle Reminders ♥

- ♥ You don't have to earn the right to be yourself.
- ♥ Masking is not a requirement of professionalism.
- ♥ Your wellbeing matters as much as your productivity.
- ♥ It's okay to unmask in safe environments.
- ♥ You are allowed to take up space.
- ♥ You are enough—just as you are.

## You Deserve a Workplace Where You Can:

- ✓ Use your strengths
- ✓ Be yourself
- ✓ Ask for what you need
- ✓ Have your needs respected
- ✓ Feel safe and included
- ✓ Do meaningful work
- ✓ Thrive, not just survive



♥ A supportive workplace doesn't ask you to change who you are. It makes space for you to do your best work.

You belong. You matter. You bring value.

