

# What Is Autism Masking?



Autism masking is when an autistic person consciously or unconsciously hides, suppresses, or changes parts of themselves in order to appear more "socially acceptable" or to fit into the expectations around them.



For many autistic people, masking develops as a way to feel safer, avoid judgement, reduce bullying, gain acceptance, or cope in environments that may not feel understanding or supportive.



## What Can Masking Look Like?

Masking can look different for everyone, but examples may include:

- ♥ forcing eye contact even when uncomfortable
- ♥ copying facial expressions, gestures, or social behaviours
- ♥ rehearsing conversations beforehand
- ♥ carefully monitoring tone of voice or body language
- ♥ pretending to understand social situations
- ♥ suppressing stimming or self-soothing behaviours
- ♥ hiding sensory overwhelm or discomfort
- ♥ forcing participation in social situations
- ♥ laughing or smiling to fit in
- ♥ staying very quiet to avoid making mistakes
- ♥ people-pleasing or trying to appear "easy-going"
- ♥ constantly analysing interactions afterwards

Some autistic people may not realise they are masking because these behaviours can become automatic over time.



## Why Do People Mask?

Masking is often connected to safety, acceptance, and belonging. Many autistic people learn from a young age that being themselves can sometimes lead to:

- ♥ bullying
- ♥ exclusion
- ♥ misunderstanding
- ♥ criticism
- ♥ punishment
- ♥ feeling "different"
- ♥ pressure to behave in certain ways



Masking can sometimes help someone: feel safer socially, avoid attention, cope in overwhelming environments, meet expectations at school or work, or protect themselves emotionally.



## The Hidden Impact of Masking

Although masking may help someone cope in the moment, it can also be emotionally, mentally, and physically exhausting over time.

Constantly monitoring behaviour, expressions, communication, and reactions can place a huge demand on the nervous system.

Some autistic people may experience:

- ♥ exhaustion or burnout
- ♥ anxiety
- ♥ shutdowns or meltdowns
- ♥ feeling disconnected from themselves
- ♥ difficulty understanding their own needs
- ♥ low self-esteem
- ♥ chronic stress
- ♥ identity confusion
- ♥ increased sensory overwhelm after masking for long periods



Someone may appear to be coping well externally while struggling significantly internally.



## Masking Does Not Mean Someone Is "Less Autistic"

A person may still be autistic even if they:

- ♥ make eye contact
- ♥ have friends
- ♥ appear sociable
- ♥ perform well academically or professionally
- ♥ hide their struggles
- ♥ seem confident in some situations



Masking can sometimes make autism less visible to others, but this does not make someone's experiences any less real or valid.



## What Helps?

Supportive environments can reduce the pressure to mask. Helpful approaches may include:



## Gentle Reminder

There is no "right" way to be autistic.

Many autistic people have spent years trying to fit into environments that were not designed with their needs in mind. Learning more about masking can help people better understand themselves, reduce shame, and build safer, more supportive environments.

