

# When You've Been Masking for So Long...

It's okay not to have all the answers yet.

You may not even realise you're doing it. A late autism diagnosis can bring relief, but it can also bring confusion.

♥ You may be beginning a journey of self-discovery, getting to know the real you.



## SOMETIMES MASKING BECOMES AUTOMATIC

Over time, masking can become so familiar that it feels like "just how I am". You might:

- ♥ Copy other people's behaviour, interests or communication styles
- ♥ Monitor yourself constantly to "get it right"
- ♥ Suppress your needs, preferences and discomfort
- ♥ Push through overwhelm to keep up appearances
- ♥ People-please or say "yes" to avoid letting others down
- ♥ Hide parts of yourself to feel accepted or safe
- ♥ Become disconnected from what feels good, bad, comfortable or overwhelming

Masking can help you survive in a world that doesn't always understand you, but it can also hide you from yourself.

## AFTER DIAGNOSIS, YOU MAY BEGIN NOTICING...

- Extreme exhaustion or burnout
- Sensory needs you ignored or suppressed
- Communication differences
- Interests, passions or parts of you you had to hide
- Grief, relief, confusion or feeling overwhelmed
- Uncertainty about who you are
- Realising how much energy masking takes
- Questioning old beliefs about yourself
- Struggling with change and identity shifts
- Not knowing what you actually like or need
- A deep need for authenticity and safety

These feelings are valid. You are not alone.

## IT'S OKAY NOT TO HAVE IMMEDIATE ANSWERS

You don't have to know who you are straight away. Identity is not something we find in a moment... it's something we gently reconnect with over time.

♥ You are not starting from zero. You are coming home to yourself.

## GENTLE WAYS TO REDISCOVER YOURSELF

There is no "right" way to do this. Small, gentle steps can help you get to know you.

- ♥ Notice what feels comfortable (or uncomfortable)
- ♥ Explore your sensory preferences
- ♥ Rest without guilt
- ♥ Reconnect with interests or hobbies that bring you joy
- ♥ Allow authentic communication at your own pace
- ♥ Spend time in safe environments where you can be yourself
- ♥ Ask yourself "What do I prefer?" "What do I need right now?"
- ♥ Give yourself permission to change your mind
- ♥ Let go of old expectations about who you "should" be
- ♥ Celebrate small moments of being more you

♥ Self-discovery is not about becoming someone new. It's about remembering who you've always been.

## .. YOUR JOURNEY IS UNIQUE

There is no timeline for this. Some days you may feel closer to yourself. Other days you may feel lost. Both are okay.

♥ Be patient with yourself. Be kind to yourself. You are allowed to take up space exactly as you are.

## GENTLE REMINDERS

♥ You are allowed to be a work in progress.

- ♥ You are more than your masking.
- ♥ You are enough, just as you are.
- ♥ Your needs matter.
- ♥ You deserve understanding, acceptance and support.
- ♥ You are allowed to be exactly yourself.

♥ You are not broken. You are not "too much". You are simply giving yourself permission to exist more comfortably, more safely, more you.

You are not losing yourself. You are finding your way home. ♥