

Behind the Mask

Presented by: Norfolk and Waveney Autism/ADHD Support Service



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Aims

- What is masking ?
- Why children/people mask?
- Forms of masking
- The impact
- What can I do to support as a parent?
- How can I support in the classroom?
- Know where to go for further support.



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What do we mean by masking?

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Hiding or camouflaging your neurodivergent traits to try to blend into what is predominately a neurotypical world.

A coping mechanism to reduce the stress of displaying your differences or to protect yourself from bullying, ridicule, shame or embarrassment.

This process can be conscious or subconscious and may have been happening from a very young age. And it can be a shock when at an older age, people realise they have been hiding themselves from others for most of their lives.

A key indicator is the level of emotional regulation in different settings. Children described as 'fine in school' will display significant distress at home

The Double Empathy Problem

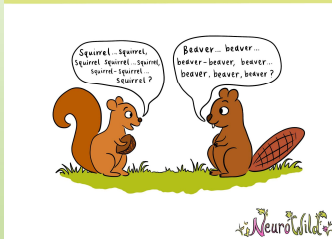
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The Double-Empathy Problem

SQUIRRELS have NO PROBLEM communicating and making friends with other **SQUIRRELS**.



BUT when **SQUIRRELS** and **BEAVERS** try to communicate...



Curiously, Society decided that it's **ONLY** the **SQUIRRELS'** job to repair any miscommunications.



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Not a deficit, but a mismatch of communication style.

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Examples of Masking



Saying and doing things to please others

Mimicking communication style of others

Rehearsing conversations

Using 'scripted' lines

Adopting the interests and hobbies of friends

Changing appearance or clothing to match others

Ignoring difficult or painful sensory exposure

Over-thinking conversations and social situations

Avoid giving opinions or showing emotions

Share eye contact despite finding this difficult

Suppressing stimming or meltdowns

Using phrases or ideas you seem to not understand

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Impact of Masking

- Stress, strain, exhaustion from the constant effort
- Neurodivergent burn-out
- After school meltdowns or shutdowns
- Anxiety
- Even greater communication problems
- Late or mis-diagnosis
- Loss of identity
- Emerging mental health issues.



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The After-School Effect

Meltdowns/
Shutdowns

Distress or
Dysregulation

Exhaustion

Fewer Words

Fewer Questions

Fewer Demands

Low
Arousal/Sensory
Strategies

Regulate in their
own way

Choose your battles

Encourage
unmasking

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Ideas for Schools

- Believe parents
- Observe behaviour
- Don't expect the child to voice solutions
- Think about general ND traits
- Think structure
- Think sensory
- Think processing time
- Think movement
- Think about demands
- Build trust

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Useful Resources

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/behaviour/masking>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otAcBF-fESI>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxQfe7RXo_U

YouTube

Websites

- [Norfolk & Waveney Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service \(justonenorfolk.nhs.uk\)](https://www.norfolk.nhs.uk/just-one-norfolk)
- <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/professional-practice/autistic-masking>
- <https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/autism-masking/>
- <https://www.neas.org.uk/Pages/Category/behind-the-mask>
- [What is after-school restraint collapse and how to manage it – BBC Bitesize](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-56888888)
- <https://www.adhdcentre.co.uk/can-a-child-mask-adhd-at-school/>

Further Reading



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Further Support

Supporting a child with a neurodevelopmental condition can be exhausting and sometimes isolating.

You are doing a great job!

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[Just One Norfolk](https://www.justonenorfolk.nhs.uk/) is a dedicated website providing information, resources and advice relating to children's and young people's health within the community. A new digital resource, [the ND Digital Library](https://www.nddigitallibrary.org.uk/), has been launched by Just One Norfolk to support families with their child or young person's neurodevelopmental needs.

Suffolk County Council has co-produced an excellent resource which we are happy to share with you. Access from the bottom of the page when you click here: [Supporting Your Neurodiverse Child](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/supporting-your-neurodiverse-child).

The [Autism Parent Padlet \(EPSS Norfolk\)](https://www.epssnorfolk.org.uk/) website is packed full of information, advice and guidance.

[Norfolk SEND partnership](https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/suffolk-sen-send-partnership) and [Suffolk SEND partnership](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/norfolk-sen-send-partnership) provides free and impartial information, advice and support about special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), for children, young people, parents and carers.

If you live in Norfolk and Waveney You can join our closed Facebook group, go to Facebook and search for [Family Action Norfolk and Waveney ASD/ADHD Support Service](https://www.facebook.com/familyactionnorfolk)

Also, on the Just One Norfolk website [Occupational Therapy for Parents and Carers](https://www.justonenorfolk.nhs.uk/occupational-therapy-for-parents-and-carers) which is full of interactive content, downloadable and clinically informed strategies and expert OT tips for issues including sleep, sensory processing, behaviour and emotional regulation.

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