

Please share with your colleagues

May 2023

## Masking

In the Neurodivergent community, masking is viewed as a trauma response and may be undertaken for two reasons: 1) self protection and 2) presenting a socially acceptable version of yourself. Many autistic people describe masking as ‘putting on a character.’ The short term impact of masking can be autistic burnout, meltdown or shutdown; extreme fatigue; after school dysregulation; and anxiety. In the longer term there can be an impact on mental health, negative life experiences, delay in gaining a diagnosis and extreme vulnerability. Sometimes we ‘normalise’ masking behaviours because we perceive that everything is ok, e.g. the child is coming to school and getting on with their work, but at what internal cost?

You can't teach a person to unmask, but you can help them by using these strategies:

- **Good communication between home and school** is essential because an autistic child can present very differently at home and at school. Parents and carers will know their child best and will be able to tell you about the differences in behaviour at home and at school in order to build up the bigger picture. [1-minute-guide-masking.pdf \(childrenandfamilyhealthdevon.nhs.uk\)](#)
- Masking is a coping strategy to support an autistic person to manage the expectations of the day and an attempt to fit in. The child is working extremely hard to cope and their senses are likely to be overstimulated, this can lead to fatigue and exhaustion. **Lowering expectations (for a short period of time) and providing regular breaks** may be beneficial.
- Support the child to **develop an awareness so that they understand themselves but also create an environment which is safe and welcoming so that their behaviours, different communication styles and sensory requirements are understood their needs are met.** This helps reduce someone's ‘need’ to mask by reducing the perceived consequences of being ‘visibly’ autistic.
- Creating a sense of acceptance in the environment alongside supporting the child to understand themselves. There are many books which can be used to begin the conversation about autism. Engage in activities which support the child to understand their strengths and those areas they find more difficult. The Book Trust has a list of books that can help raise awareness and understanding for autistic children, their families and peers: [Autism | BookTrust](#).

Forthcoming CPD – Book via Behaviour Support on S4S

Understanding the Impact of Sensory Processing Needs on Behaviour – Wednesday  
21/06/23, 1-2pm, online - £30 per person

Regulation for Learning – Thursday 06/07/23, 2.30-3.30pm, online - £30 per person



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Derbyshire County Council Children's Services Inclusion Support Services are offering schools the opportunity to train a member of your staff to deliver the Autism Education Trust training within your setting for free. This will enable your setting to deliver the training to all staff, including new staff, meaning that your workforce will be able to be up to date with good practice, strategies and support for autistic children. They will also become part of the supportive Autism Advocates network in Derbyshire where they will have access to additional CPD, monthly bulletins and information.

We welcome applications from maintained mainstream, Enhanced Resource and specialist settings. If you are a small school and wish to partner with local schools to train collaboratively, please get in touch.

Free  
CPD



Developed by  
leading autism  
specialists



Up to date  
with the latest  
research



Enhances  
your CPD



Free resources  
and frameworks  
linked to Ofsted



Optional  
certification

Would you like to improve awareness,  
acceptance and understanding of Autism  
in your setting?

Autism Advocates Cohort 3 training will  
take place in Autumn 2023.

Please contact  
[Autism.outreach@derbyshire.gov.uk](mailto:Autism.outreach@derbyshire.gov.uk) for  
more information.

We have Autism  
Advocates in 47%  
of Derbyshire  
Schools

They've helped to  
train 2500+ adults  
in Derbyshire  
Schools!