

SUPPORTING MASKING IN SCHOOL

SCHOOL RESOURCE



Behind the mask is a real person who deserves to be understood, not hidden.

Masking is when a pupil hides or suppresses their true self to fit in, cope or avoid negative reactions. It can be exhausting and impact wellbeing, learning and mental health.

Our role is to create safe spaces where pupils can be themselves.



REMEMBER

- ✓ You can't always see masking.
- ✓ It takes a lot of energy.
- ✓ Support reduces the need to hide.
- ✓ Belonging helps pupils thrive.

WHAT MASKING CAN LOOK LIKE



Trying to fit in with peers or copying others



Hiding stims, differences or special interests



Forcing eye contact or scripting conversations



Pretending to understand when they don't



Saying "I'm fine" even when they're not



Emotional exhaustion, meltdowns or shutdowns after school or at home

HOW WE CAN SUPPORT

- ✓ Build trusting relationships and show genuine acceptance.
- ✓ Give pupils permission to be themselves.
- ✓ Respect their communication style – no pressure to change.
- ✓ Provide quiet, safe spaces to take breaks.
- ✓ Allow time to process and respond – don't rush.
- ✓ Offer predictable routines and clear expectations.
- ✓ Celebrate strengths and individual differences.
- ✓ Encourage connection with understanding peers or adults.
- ✓ Notice signs of exhaustion and check in.
- ✓ Work with families to understand what helps.

POSSIBLE SIGNS OF EXHAUSTION



- Needing lots of time alone
- Withdrawal or irritability
- Mood changes after school
- Frequent headaches or stomach aches
- Difficulty concentrating
- Shutting down or meltdowns

CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE PUPILS DON'T NEED TO MASK



SAFE & ACCEPTING

Foster a culture of kindness, inclusion and respect for neurodiversity.



LISTEN & BELIEVE

Listen to pupils and take their experiences seriously.



VALUE AUTHENTICITY

Encourage and value each pupil's unique identity.



ALLOW DOWNTIME

Build in regular breaks and downtime into the day.



OPEN COMMUNICATION

Check in regularly and let pupils know they can talk anytime.



REMOVE BARRIERS

Reduce demands that force pupils to hide who they are.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ✓ Does this pupil feel safe being themselves here?
- ✓ Are there expectations that make them feel they need to hide?
- ✓ Do they have a trusted adult they can talk to?
- ✓ Do they have time and space to decompress?
- ✓ Have we asked them what helps?
- ✓ How can we reduce the need to mask in our classroom?



WHAT PUPILS HAVE SAID



"I mask so I don't get judged or bullied."



"It's hard work pretending all day."



"I just want somewhere I can be me."



"When I'm accepted, I can focus and learn."



When pupils don't have to mask, they can focus on learning, build confidence and be happier in school.



**ACCEPTANCE IS POWERFUL.
BELONGING CHANGES EVERYTHING.**



**Different, not less.
Every pupil. Every day.
Every opportunity.**



Inclusion is everyone's responsibility.



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