



Sarah Hill  
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## Masking Newsletter

### School Approach and reasoning

School is continuing to embed and drive the teaching of emotional regulation strategies as one of the priorities and life skills that our students need. Also in the current climate, where the importance of mental health is a regular feature on the news, it is imperative that our students know how they are feeling and can communicate this in a variety of settings, and to a range of people.

#### What is masking / camouflaging?

Masking involves trying to hide your true self so others will accept you. It is defined as 'the use of strategies by autistic people to minimise the visibility of their autism in social situations.' This means that children with any difficulties act in ways that other people will think are appropriate and to try and be accepted socially. Children will often 'pretend' they are OK and often disassociate with their internal body sensations (interoceptive processing) to cope.



Often referred to as the 'coke can or bottle effect' whereby an individual bottles things up all day.

#### Impact / things to look out for:

Due to neurological differences, often simple everyday sensations of sound, smell and touch (for example can cause fight, flight or freeze response). This can make environments feel unsafe and overwhelming to the nervous system.

Masking can have an extremely negative effect on a child's mental health over time. Girls in particular are very good at masking their worries and anxieties. They will often smile, laugh, and joke with other children, appearing to get on with school work and have many friends. As a result of masking, individuals feel that they are good not enough and do not fit in.

Masking is extremely demanding on individuals, putting themselves under enormous pressure to keep up. As a result, individuals who mask are more likely to have 'meltdowns' at home. More often than not, a child's parents are their safe people, and place where their need to mask is decreased.



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### Strategies:

- Keeping things as structured and predictable as possible
- Visuals to support instructions
- Avoid or minimise non-literal language (Eg: *It's raining cats and dogs*).
- Giving clear warnings prior to change It
- Showing kindness, respect and acceptance so they don't feel the need to mask or will reduce the amount of masking.
- Time to focus on their special interests.
- Talk about their worries.
- Find strategies to share worries. Eg: Talking to specific adults, writing feelings in a book, emailing specific people, build up trusting relationships.
- Regular sensory breaks. Eg: Movement breaks, proprioceptive input – heavy work, such as carrying heavy items, chair lifts etc. Heavy work will have a calming effect on the body.

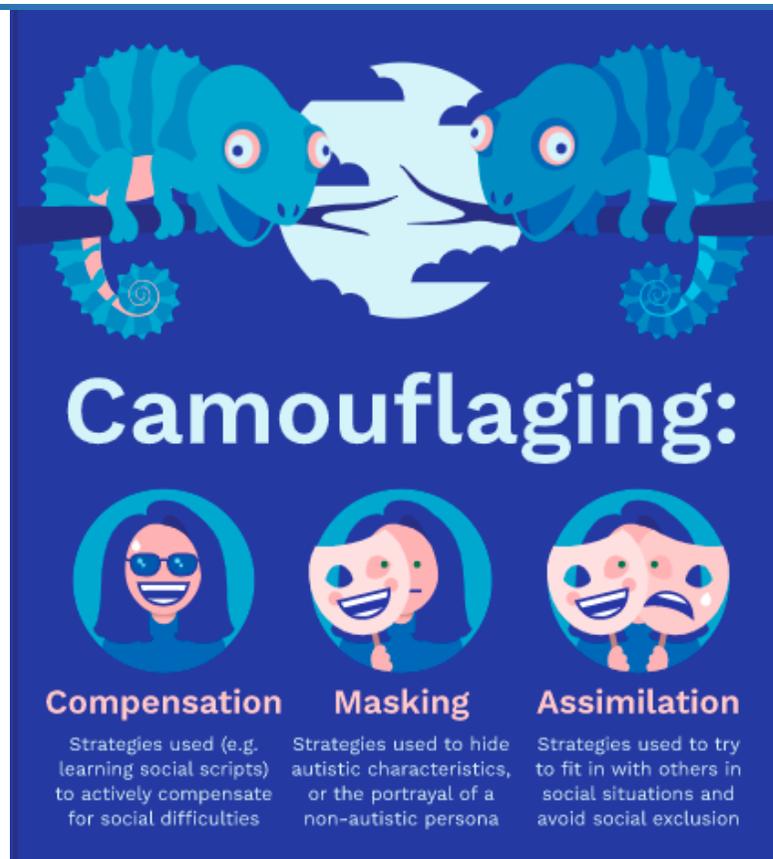


Image from:

[www.embrace-autism.com](http://www.embrace-autism.com)

More information on the 3 areas of masking / camouflaging available on their website.