

Children and Young People Masking their Needs in School

You may have a child who comes home from school feeling distressed and overwhelmed, however school are not seeing the same behaviours and report that your child is doing “fine” and they have no concerns. If this sounds familiar to your situation, your child may be masking their needs in school.

What is masking?

Masking and camouflaging are terms used to describe neurodiverse individuals who seek to hide or minimize their natural personality, anxieties, or autism traits to fit in with the world around them.



Masking is more common in girls, although many boys also present with this behaviour.

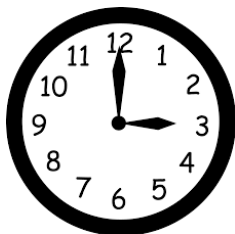


Children feel safest at home with their parents, so it makes sense that they feel more able to release their anxieties at home.



Many parents describe how their child is like a “shaken up coke bottle” when they return home from school.

What kinds of support can help at home?



Ensure your child has a period of downtime on their own when they come home from school. This will help them to process the day.



During this downtime, they may benefit from sensory activities, such as running around or punching a beanbag.



Or they may benefit from some time where they can focus on their special interest.

What kinds of support can help at school?

Starting with Simple Strategies

Even if your child's behaviours do not present in school, there are lots of simple strategies that the school can use to reduce anxiety, such as:

- keeping things as structured and predictable as possible
- using visuals to support instructions
- avoiding non-literal language
- giving clear warnings prior to change

Example Visual Timetable



Tools to communicate

It will be helpful for school to know what makes your child anxious, and to know that your child may be experiencing significant anxiety without outwardly demonstrating this. Tools such as the Incredible 5 Point Scale can help children to show how they are feeling in the school setting.



Sensory Breaks

It can sometimes be helpful for children who mask to have sensory breaks throughout their school day, so they aren't so overwhelmed when they come home.



How do I request this support from school?

Request a Meeting

It's important that the school is aware of what is happening at home. Share your concerns with the school SENCO. Request a meeting with them to go through all your concerns and agree on actions moving forward. Ask them to confirm in writing and book in a review meeting in a few weeks' time to review progress.



Be aware of School's Best Endeavours and Reasonable Adjustments legal duties

Schools **must** use its best endeavours to secure that the special educational provision called for by the child's special educational needs is made.

Section 66(2) Children and Families Act 2014

Schools **must** take reasonable steps to avoid putting disabled pupils at a substantial disadvantage, including provision of auxiliary aids and adjustments to policy and practice.

Section 20(1-3, 5) Equality Act 2010



Use SENDIASS Resources

If you are finding it difficult to engage with school, the Portsmouth Information Advice & Support Team offer legally based advice around Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Please also see our [factsheet](#) and [webinar](#) on **how to have a successful meeting**, available on our website.

