Autistic Masking

Fact Sheet

what you should know

Autistic people ‘mask’ when they try to appear non-autistic. Masking is sometimes called ‘camouflaging’. Autistic masking can be necessary in some situations, but it can also be damaging to the autistic person.

Masking involves two main components: mimicry and suppression. An autistic child might observe other children closely and mimic what they do, so as not to stand out - even if they don’t understand what the other children are doing. An autistic child might also suppress their own natural responses to the world around them or to social situations, realising that those reactions would attract unwelcome attention. Masking is exhausting, and is associated with anxiety, low self-esteem and burnout.

things to try

Explain social rules

Explain which rules are important (like being careful around younger children) and which aren’t (like being nice to people who are rude to you), so that your child can focus their masking on the areas that matter most.

Build self-esteem

A danger of masking is that it makes autistic children feel like they won’t be accepted unless they hide their true selves. Look for opportunities to praise their core qualities, like honesty, focus or attention to detail.

Provide a safe space to unmask

If your child feels that they have to mask around other children, the best thing you can do is provide a safe space at home, where they can be themselves without having to pretend.

things to avoid

- Avoid giving praise for acting ‘normal’
- Avoid drawing attention to your child’s behaviour
- Avoid placing too many demands on an already exhausted child

Download the app for more information and tips from the experts.