



HELP AN  
INFORMATION  
FOR FAMILIES  
WITH SPECIAL  
NEEDS AND  
DISABILITIES  
BRADFORD AND DISTRICT  
LOCAL OFFER

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## Masking in Educational Settings



## A One Minute Guide

### What is Masking?

By definition, masking is a survival strategy for neurodivergent people. It is used to hide neurodiverse traits and to mimic the neurotypical. For many neurodivergent individuals, masking is a way to avoid bringing attention to their neurodiverse behaviours and can help them feel like they can fit in better around people who have a limited understanding of neurodiversity.

Hiding these traits are often extremely exhausting and can exacerbate mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and harmful behaviours.

Masking can also lead to an increase in meltdowns. When a neurodiverse individual finally feels safe or comfortable enough to 'de-mask' (for example: being at home or around other individuals who are neurodiverse), the stresses of the day will build up and the smallest sensory issue or other problem can lead to a meltdown. This is because the neurodiverse person has been consistently dealing with situations they find difficult and forcing themselves to be in environments that create anxiety but haven't been able to regulate their emotions in an effective enough manner, leading to a meltdown.

### What to do if you think your child and/or young person is masking?

- It's important that the school is aware of what is happening at home. Share your concerns with the school SENCO.
- 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; Feeling Cards, Happy Starts and the [Incredible 5 Point Scale](#) can help children to show how they are feeling in the school setting.

### How School can help

As it is important for your child and/or young person to be in School, it is quite often helpful for children who mask to have additional support, such as; sensory breaks or someone to 'offload' throughout their school day, so they aren't so overwhelmed when they come home.

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

These should be discussed with the SENCO.

If you are finding it difficult to engage with school, the [Bradford Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service \(SENDIASS\)](#) offer advice around Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

### Where can I get further information, advice and support?

SEND Information Advice & Support Service ([SENDIASS](#)) – 01274 513300  
Other organisations – [PFBA](#) - [AWARE](#)