

Talking to your child's school about... Autistic masking



Who is this guide for?

If your child is autistic or has related support needs and you answer yes to any of the following questions, this guide might be helpful.



Do you...

- notice differences between the ways that you and your child's school describe your child?
- sometimes feel like you and the school team are describing different children?
- wonder if your child might be masking or covering up how they really feel?
- worry that masking might lead to their support needs not being recognised and met?

This guide has been produced in partnership with the [National Autism Implementation Team](#). NAIT is a cross sector partnership working to support the delivery of Scottish Government priorities for people with neurodevelopmental differences.

Understanding autistic masking

Autistic masking involves a person covering up natural feelings, preferences, and reactions to the world around them. Masking can be useful but is also hugely tiring and can affect mental health and wellbeing. Often autistic children are working much harder than everyone else just to get through the day. Not all autistic children will be aware they are masking.

Why does masking happen?

Masking can feel like a way for the child or young person to:



- Avoid negative attention, stigma, bullying or discrimination
- Feel accepted or included in a friendship group
- Succeed in social settings of school and in their community

For more detailed info:
NAIT Understanding Autistic Masking:
A Guide for Parents and Carers

Often masking becomes an issue when a child appears to be coping in school but is upset or distressed at home. The pressure of holding it together or masking in school can result in the child or young person having a 'melt down' when they are in a safe space where they do not need to hide how they are feeling. NAIT have put together some handy tips for parents and carers to help when talking to their child's school about support that might help:

1

Autistic masking is a newly understood experience and your school team might not yet be familiar with it. You could start by asking if it is something they have heard of or know about. It might be something you learn about together.

2

Think about the 24-hour life of your child. Differences between actions and responses we see at home and at school are common and can be a sign of a problem building up.

3

Often families can be the first people to notice that their child might be masking. People around the child are often unaware that the child is masking – it is possible that they mask all of the time in some parts of their life and so they don't seem any different.

4

Make the school aware that your child might not be able to initiate, express their true feelings or ask for help. You can discuss things adults might do to check in and notice when your child might need assistance or a break.

5

Share what you see and hear at home but don't feel you have to talk to your child or ask them directly about masking. Many children will not know they are doing it or may not want to talk about it.

6

Adults can support your child's need to mask, whilst putting in place things that reduce this need. Plan together with your child's school to provide calming strategies that could be important to your child and that can be managed safely in the school environment. These will be very different for different children. Some feel calmer when they feel prepared for what to expect and have a very predictable visual timetable each day.

7

Discuss 'after school exhaustion' and reasonable adjustments to homework expectations, if needed.

8

Share successful strategies from home and what you have learned about what helps them to feel calm and well regulated. Writing this down might help you remember the important things to share in meetings and discussions.

9 It can be helpful for school staff to hear about the impact any distress your child is experiencing is having on you and your family.

10 On-going communication with the school will be important. Agree the best way to communicate with the school outside of planned meetings. Discuss how you and school staff can share information about things that may affect your child's routine. Communication works best when it is planned, regular, balanced, honest and empathetic.

11 Some autistic people tell us that masking is an important coping strategy. It can help individuals manage times that are difficult or stop them feeling as though they stand out. The goal should not be to stop children from masking but rather provide opportunities or times when they can have a break.



Additional resources for parents and carers:

- An Enquire and NAIT guide to handy tips for parents and carers to help when talking to the school about their child's anxiety: Talking to your child's school about anxiety related absence
- The Scottish Autism Right Click resources offer online information for parents and carers: <https://www.scottishautism.org/services-support/family-support/online-support-right-click>



NAIT resources for professionals:

- NAIT have guidance for professionals which can be found here: <https://www.thirdspace.scot/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/NAIT-Guide-to-Autistic-Masking-2022.pdf>
- NAIT produce a range of resources to support practitioners working with autistic children including guidance on Anxiety Related Absence and the return to school: www.thirdspace.scot/nait/

More information

For advice and information about additional support for learning contact Enquire on 0345 123 2303 or visit our website www.enquire.org.uk

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This infographic was written in collaboration with:

