

What is Autistic Masking?

In the context of autism, masking is when an autistic person works to behave more like a neurotypical person or in ways that meet neurotypical standards. A person can mask intentionally or unintentionally. Masking is sometimes called camouflaging.

Why do people mask?

There are many reasons people might mask. Underlying most of them is an attempt to blend in, be more accepted, or stay safe. Here are some common reasons people mask:

- To stay safe
- To avoid mistreatment, bullying, stigma, or discrimination
- To be more successful at work or school
- To meet friends or romantic partners
- To fit in
- Ableism or beliefs that acting autistic is bad or wrong

It's important to remember that masking is a survival strategy. Sometimes it isn't safe for a person (especially someone from a marginalized group) to act openly autistic. Masking can be necessary in certain contexts.

Impacts of Masking

Although there are times and places where a person may feel it's necessary to mask, research has found that masking for long periods of time has negative consequences like:

- Mental health impacts, including anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation
- Burnout, fatigue, and limited energy for anything else
- Feeling disconnected from yourself
- Sensory suppression
- Difficulty developing a sense of identity
- Loneliness and isolation
- Delayed diagnoses
- Fewer services and supports