FREE WORKSHEET · NEURODIVERSITY

# The Cost of Masking

Notice where you hide how you are, and what it takes out of you

Masking, sometimes called camouflaging, means hiding or adjusting how you naturally are so that you fit in: copying other people's expressions, rehearsing conversations, forcing eye contact, holding still when you need to move, laughing at the right moment. Many autistic people and people with ADHD do it, often without realising, and often from a young age.

Masking can feel necessary, and sometimes it is. But it uses a great deal of energy. Over time many people find it leaves them exhausted, anxious or low, and some say it leaves them unsure who they really are. The aim here is not to stop masking everywhere. It is to notice it, and to choose.

IF YOU NEED HELP NOW

If there is an immediate risk to life, call **999**. The Samaritans are available free, 24 hours a day, on **116 123**. In England, NHS 111 (option 2) connects to an urgent mental health service.

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## Where you mask

**How much do I mask in each of these?**

0 = not at all, 1 = a little, 2 = a lot, 3 = all the time

| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| At work, or with clients | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| In meetings and calls | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| With friends | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| With family | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| With a partner | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Out in public | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Online | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

EXERCISE

What masking looks like for me

1. Things I do to fit in, or hide, that do not come naturally:

2. How I feel after a day of it:

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## Choosing where to let it slip

Most people find there are some places where it is safe to mask less: with certain people, in certain rooms, at certain times. Starting there gives you somewhere to recover, and practice at being yourself.

| WHERE I FEEL SAFEST TO BE MYSELF | ONE THING I COULD STOP HIDING THERE | WHAT I WOULD NEED FOR THAT TO FEEL OK |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

> REMEMBER
>
> Recovery time after masking is not self-indulgence. It is maintenance. Plan it in, the way you would plan rest after physical effort.

If masking has left you exhausted, low or anxious for a while, talk to your GP. Many people only recognise they may be autistic, or have ADHD, as adults, and an assessment can help make sense of a lifetime of effort.

### FURTHER READING

- Masking, National Autistic Society (https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/behaviour/masking)