

ADHD MASKING

SCHOOLS GUIDE



What is masking?

Masking happens when a child hides or suppresses their ADHD traits to fit in, avoid negative attention or meet classroom expectations. It can be conscious (“I’ll try not to fidget”) or automatic (“I’ll copy what others do so I seem normal”).

Why children mask:

- Fear of being told off or standing out
- Desire to make friends and fit in
- Over-compensation to please adults or maintain control
- Avoid feelings of shame in relation to their ADHD behaviours.

Why understanding masking matters

Masking helps children survive school, but it drains emotional and mental energy. It can lead to:

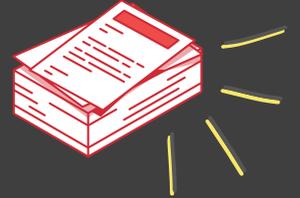
- Extreme tiredness after school (meltdowns at home, or even before reaching home)
- Anxiety or perfectionism
- Missed signs of support need (appears fine in class)
- Delayed diagnosis or misinterpretation of behaviour.

Signs a child may be masking

- Very quiet, compliant or overly helpful
- Appears focused but produces inconsistent work
- Follows routines rigidly or over-checks tasks
- Avoids group work
- Emotional outbursts once they leave a lesson or the school
- Reports of “two versions” of the child – one at school, one at home
- Seems over-reactive to situations, resulting in quickly defensive or aggressive behaviours.

ADHD MASKING

SCHOOLS GUIDE



What you can do

1. Use a warm, fun approach with high quality teaching
 - Notice the hidden effort
 - Connect with the pupil by showing an interest in them and engaging in fun, light-hearted moments
 - Check in privately: "You seem tired today – what might help?"
 - Praise persistence and honesty, not just outcomes
 - Use a calm tone and gentle transitions
 - Make your lessons engaging with plenty of practical activities
 - Relate lesson content to the child's special interests and/or be clear why studying this content is useful for them.
2. Adapt the school day and your expectations
 - Use predictable routines
 - Incorporate regular movement, sensory breaks and fidget tools
 - Accept independence skills are delayed and support as you would a child 3 years younger
 - Avoid criticism and comparing to peers
 - Expect movement and lack of focus, accommodate where possible and use brief, engaging cues to redirect: 'All eyes this way for this really interesting fact!'
3. Collaborate with parents and SENCOs
 - Compare home vs school presentation to spot masking
 - Record patterns in behaviour, energy and mood.
4. Support regulation and recovery
 - Build "low-demand" times in the day
 - Offer quiet, safe spaces when needed
 - Teach emotion language and self-advocacy.

Key Message

Flexible, engaging teaching reduces the need to mask. Children learn best and thrive when they can be themselves – focused, curious and safe to make mistakes.