

# Masking In Schools: How To Spot The Signs

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# Welcome

Me - talking to teachers about ADHD and Autism as a dual diagnosis at the Autism and ADHD show 2024. Check out the 2026 dates!

- Stephanie Batey
  - Ex secondary English Teacher 13 years
  - Educational Leadership
  - PhD starting 2026
  - ADHD diagnosis - lived experience
  - **@InclusiveTeacherCo** - give me a follow



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# Outcomes

- Define **masking** - including the **social, behavioural & physical** impacts of it.
- Explore the sign of masking and what it might look like in the classroom.
- Self-reflect on anything that might inadvertently encourage masking.
- Pastoral supports to help those masking.



# Masking

- Hiding or camouflaging
- Attempting to 'fit in'
- Conscious or subconscious
- 1/3 with ADHD mask
- 94% of autistic adults masked at some point
- In childhood - girls mask more frequently and effectively (this leads to missed or mis-diagnosis)
- Coping / self preservation strategy



# The Impact of Masking

- Mental health issues
- Autistic burnout
- Identity confusion
- Low self-esteem
- Social isolation



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# Social and Behavioural Impacts

- Meltdowns and shutdowns
- Difficulty being understood
- Vulnerable to abuse
- Delay/prevention of diagnosis



# Physical Impacts of Masking

- Chronic stress
- Weakened immune system
- General ill health



# What might encourage masking?

- Enforcing or expecting social 'norms' such as eye contact.
- Building a tolerance to sensory experiences they find hard.
- Criticising or shaming natural behaviours (stimming, for example).
- Dismissing or invalidating feelings.
- Creating environments of high social pressure.



# So we must ask ourselves...

- Will our expectation of this child encourage masking?
- Is this the right expectation of them?
- If it is – is there a better way to help them meet the expectation?
- If the expectation is not right - is there an alternative approach I could consider?



# Spotting it early is crucial

Staying quiet or  
appearing withdrawm

Classroom

Social

- Won't read aloud or put hand up
- May not work in groups
- Zone out

- Nods along rather than adds ideas
- Watches first then joins late
- Sits at the edge of groups or trails the crowd
- Smiles or laughs on cue then goes quiet



# Spotting it early is crucial

## Perfectionism

## Classroom

## Social

- Neatly presented work.
- Hours spent revising before a test.
- Obsessive-compulsive, checking and rechecking their back pack
- Hides mistakes or starts over rather than ask for help

- Over prepares for small tasks or tests
- May withdraw from friends
- Hides mistakes outside of school.



# Spotting it early is crucial

Hyper sociable

Classroom

Social

- Will work in groups – might distract, make people laugh (RSD)
- Avoids doing the work (barriers to learning) so reaches out to distract those around them.

- Jokes or entertains to steer attention away from tasks
- Flits between groups without deeper connection
- Mirrors slang or tone to blend in
- Overshare



# Spotting it early is crucial

Obsessively writing everything down

Classroom

Social

- Might ask you to go back a slide
- Might copy person next to them
- Links to obsessive worried about organisation

- Writes scripts for small talk or answers
- Records lists to manage anxiety about missing out



# Spotting it early is crucial

Irritable/suppressing  
physical movement

Classroom

Social

- Might ask to go the toilet
- Might ask if you need help / give books out / materials
- Might want to sharpen pencils more

- Might like to be around others who are active (sports)
- Snappy responses when movement is restricted



# Spotting it early is crucial

Mimicking copying  
others

Classroom

Social

- Copying body language, gestures, or how they sit.
- Imitating a tone of voice, using a specific phrase they heard in class or even copying others' work for fear of failing.

- Adopting a specific style of dress or hairstyle to align with popular trends among peers.
- Learning about and engaging with topics or hobbies of others to participate in conversations, even if it's not something they're naturally interested in.



# Spotting it early is crucial

Obsessive about  
organisation

Classroom

Social

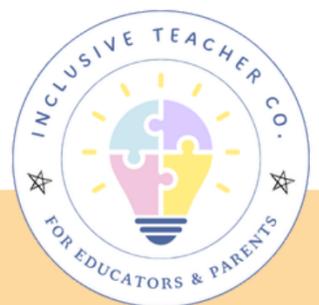
- Lines up items to look “right” before starting
- Wants to know the exact steps before starting

- Fixates on exact order of steps not the social goal
- Packs and repacks repeatedly before transitions
- Relies on strict routines to join group activities safely



# Supporting Students to Unmask!

Build a safe  
culture



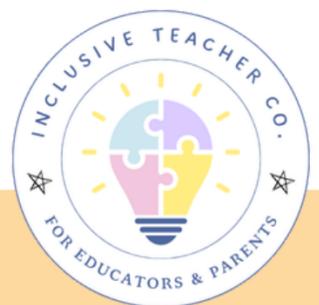
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# Supporting Students to Unmask!

Build a safe  
culture

Spot it early then  
reduce demands



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# Supporting Students to Unmask!

Build a safe  
culture

Spot it early then  
reduce demands

Adjust the  
environment



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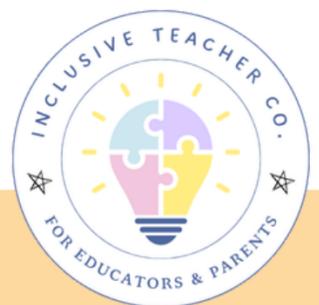
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Adjust the  
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Make  
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simpler



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# Supporting Students to Unmask!

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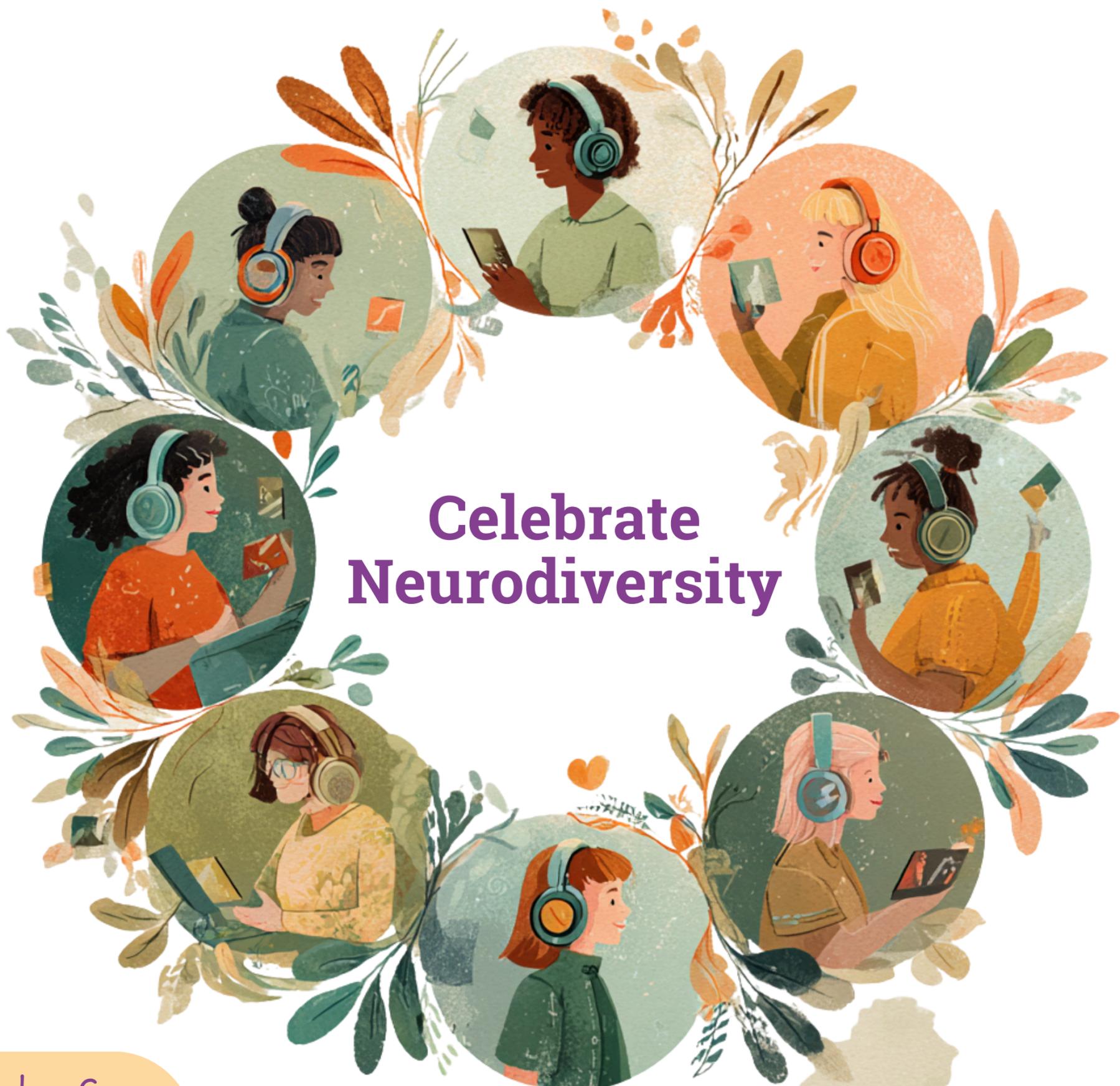
Spot it early then  
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Adjust the  
environment

Make  
communication  
simpler

Plan with the child  
and family





# Celebrate Neurodiversity



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**If a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows - not the flower.**

**Thank you.  
Questions?**



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