



Masking in students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

What is masking?

Masking (also referred to as 'camouflaging') is when a person uses strategies and behaviours to hide ADHD (or autism) characteristics or related challenges. Masking is often used to cope with everyday life, and to 'fit' in with others. Some students may not be aware that they are masking, while others may be aware of the ways they mask. Masking is very common for people with ADHD, but may be seen more often in girls due to social expectations about how girls typically behave. This often leads to girls receiving a diagnosis at a later age than boys.

What does masking look like?

Masking tends to involve suppressing, hiding, or compensating for ADHD characteristics or related challenges.

For example, suppression or hiding may involve students:

- sitting on top of their hands to suppress movement.
- avoiding expressing their emotions.
- pretending not to care about criticism or negative feedback.
- mimicking or mirroring other students in social situations.

And compensating may involve students:

- completing extra work at home to catch up on work they couldn't finish during the day.
- being overly organised and perfectionistic.

Why is it important to understand masking?

Research has shown that masking may lead to:

- exhaustion
- anxiety
- identity uncertainty
- not wanting to connect with others socially
- missed opportunities for receiving support.

Best practice tips

Increase school staff's awareness of masking

- Increasing school staff awareness of masking can increase their understanding of ADHD and how it presents. This leads to a more accepting culture for students with ADHD, making them feel less like they need to mask their characteristics.

Provide sensory breaks throughout the school day

- Sensory breaks can help students who are masking throughout the school day to feel less overwhelmed.
- This can include time with sensory toys or a movement break to release energy.



Check in with students

- When a student is masking it can be difficult to observe how they are feeling. Regular check-ins provide an opportunity to become aware of how they are feeling or what they may need.
- Visual resources, such as [Emotions cards](#), can be helpful for check-ins.