



## Parental Guidance: Masking and Burnout in Neurodivergent Students

Some neurodivergent young people work very hard to appear as though they are coping in social or school environments. This is sometimes referred to as masking. Masking may involve consciously or unconsciously hiding differences in communication, behaviour or sensory needs in order to fit in with expectations around them.

While masking can help young people navigate certain situations, it can also be mentally and emotionally exhausting over time. This guide aims to help families recognise the signs of masking and burnout, and understand how to support recovery and wellbeing.

### Understanding masking

Masking can involve behaviours such as copying peers, suppressing natural responses, or trying to appear calm even when feeling overwhelmed. Some students may seem to cope well during the school day but experience significant exhaustion or emotional release once they return home.

Young people often mask because they want to fit in socially, avoid standing out, or meet expectations placed upon them.

### Recognising signs of burnout

When masking continues for long periods, it can lead to emotional or physical exhaustion. Signs of burnout may include:

- Increased fatigue after school
- Withdrawal from social activities or usual interests
- Heightened anxiety or emotional sensitivity
- Difficulty managing everyday tasks that previously felt manageable

Recognising these patterns early can help prevent longer-term stress.



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### Reducing pressure at home

Home can provide an important space for recovery and regulation. Families can support this by:

- Allowing time to decompress after school
- Reducing unnecessary demands during periods of exhaustion
- Maintaining predictable routines that feel manageable

A calm and supportive environment can help young people rebuild energy.

### Encouraging open communication

Young people may find it difficult to explain how much effort they are using to cope during the day. Encouraging open, non-judgemental conversations can help them feel safe sharing their experiences.

Listening without immediately trying to “fix” the situation can help young people feel understood and supported.

### Balancing support and independence

While reducing pressure is helpful during periods of burnout, maintaining appropriate structure is also important. Gradually rebuilding routines and responsibilities can help young people regain confidence without becoming overwhelmed.

The aim is to support recovery while maintaining a sense of independence and capability.

### Working in partnership with the Academy

If families notice signs of masking or burnout, it can be helpful to share these observations with the Academy. Working together allows staff to consider adjustments or supportive strategies that may reduce pressure and help students feel more comfortable in school.