



A guide to understanding

SFSS: Communication & Interaction Team

Welcome to this short presentation on 'autistic masking'

We will try to answer the following questions:

- What do we see in school?
- What do parents/carers report?
- What are the 4 areas of difference?
- How do these impact on our pupils?
- What is 'masking'?
- Why do pupils mask?
- When does the mask come down?
- What is the impact on the pupil and family?
- How can you help?



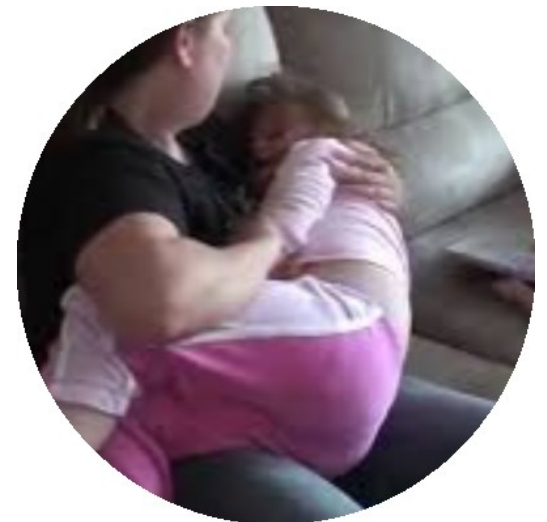


This is what you often see in school





This is what parents/carers often see



*But they're fine
in school....
There's nothing
wrong... schools
not the problem,
it's home!*

*You just need to be
firmer!*

*It's not our
problem...*

*If they were
struggling,
they'd tell us!*

*No one's
that good
an actor!*

*It's an attachment
issue!*



**Often our responses to
parents are...**

Autism Spectrum Conditions

Four key areas of difference

Every child on the autism spectrum will have a range of abilities within each of these areas. Many pupils on the spectrum have high levels of anxiety. Pupils on the autism spectrum have differences in:

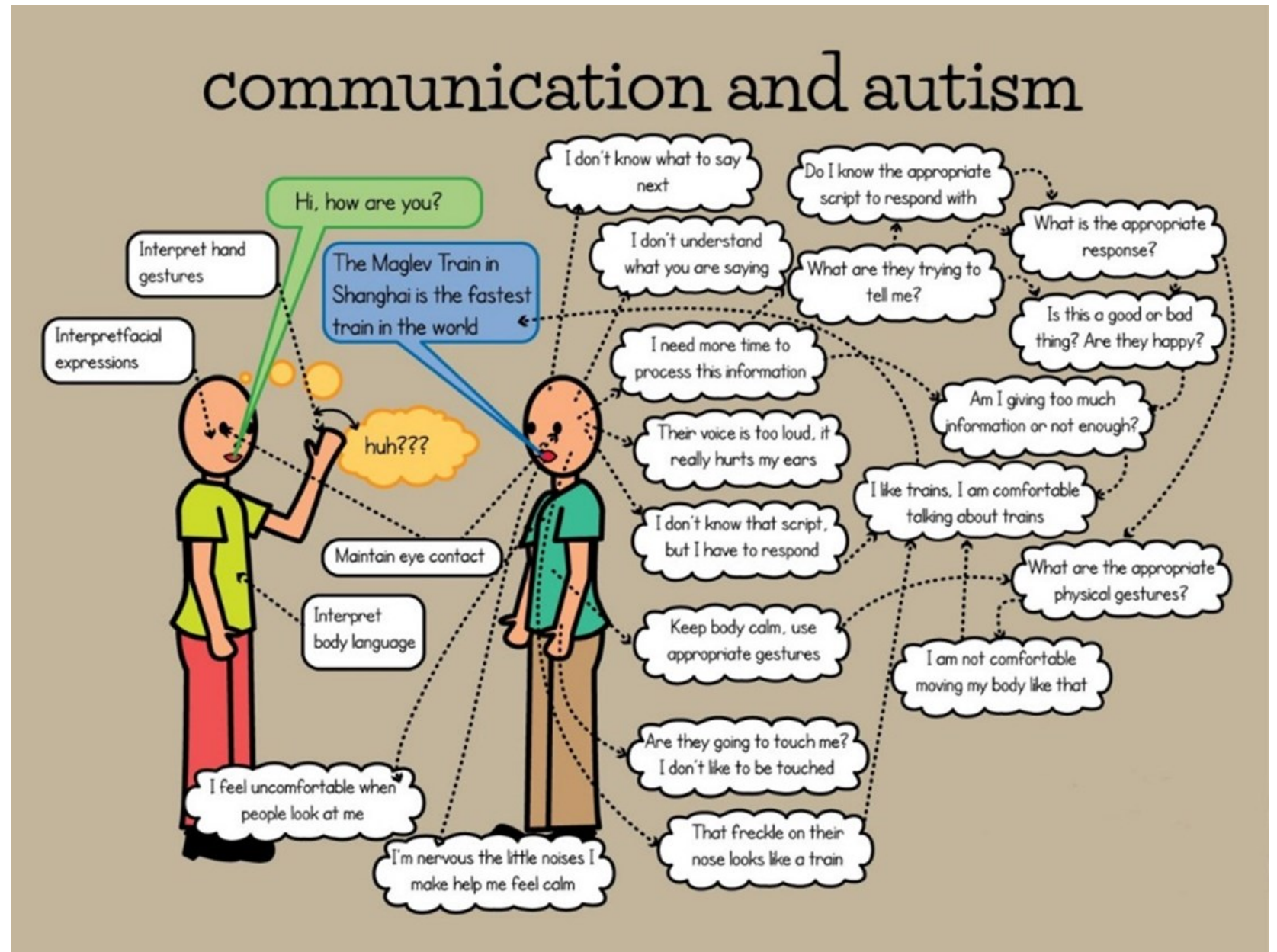


It important to remember....

- Autism is a complex spectrum, each individual will present their characteristics differently from one person to the next, as autism has many varying features.
- All will have differences within these 4 areas.

To understand 'autistic masking' we first need to understand the difficulties our pupils have with communication and language (both verbal and non verbal), particularly how they socialise and interact

Think about how much this happens throughout the school day



How do you know what to say?

What do you say if they respond?

What if I get it wrong & they don't want to talk to me?

Why don't you get anxious when you talk to new people?



The anxiety and stress produced by the struggles our young people have often prevent them from doing many things



The communication & interaction barriers prevent our CYP from engaging in many different activities





In order to 'fit in' many autistic people will **mask** or **camouflage** their autistic characteristics

WHAT IS 'MASKING'?

@21andsensory



Using a script to interact with people

Changing their image frequently

Copying or mimicking others

Slip under the radar

Autistic masking is a coping mechanism

Autistic people use masking as a means to manage how people perceive them in social situations

Autistic people use masking/camouflaging to hide their autistic behaviours

Autistic people hide their differences so they can function within society

Autistic people (especially girls) use masking to 'fit in' or be like everyone else



Why?
.....because



"Masking is like wearing a heavy cloak; the energy it takes to carry the social burden around all day can be exhausting" (Emma Kendra)

The Impact of Masking



SHUTDOWN



Masking can have a devastating impact on the young person.

It can also affect other family members



SELF HARM

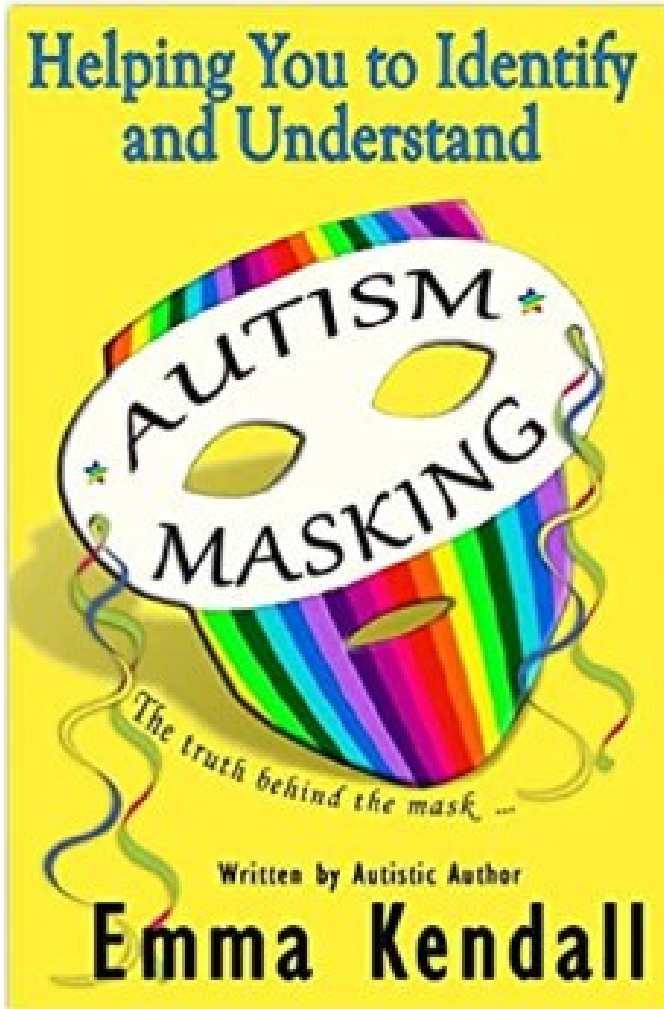


What you see is not
what is happening
inside for that
person



- Have a clear understanding of the person's differences and abilities (4 areas of need)
- Relationship - build a genuine connection, building trust and familiarity
- Be clear in your communication – Explain things and prepare them for changes however small
- Make adjustments where they are needed
- Allow the young person time – take a break
- Communicate with home – understand what happens when the mask comes down

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:



What is masking? Chatting to women with autism/ABC News

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juCiVsAcliM>

Autism and Masking: Purple Ella

<https://youtu.be/2gOZFK9H5dQ>