

# COSY UP



A half termly newsletter for by the Autism Advisory Teacher Service for Peterborough's Autism community

## MASKING

**Rob Emery** (*Autism Advisory Teacher*)

We all wear masks. Weather it's your professional mask whilst you are at work, your social mask whilst you talk to friends or your parent mask whilst your screaming toddler throws another tantrum (just me!). But imagine if you felt as though you always had to keep your mask in place to blend in and avoid being judged or misunderstood all the time. This is the experience of many people with Autism and it can lead to feelings of isolation and depression if they are unable to express their true selves.

The effects of autism masking can be far-reaching and long-lasting, so it is important that those affected are able to have strategies to support their wellbeing and avoid autistic burnout. With awareness and support from family members, friends, and professionals, individuals with autism can be supported to reach their educational and personal goals. In this article, we will look at the signs of autism masking and some strategies that we can use to support those affected.

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### The Signs of Masking

Pupils that mask their autism effectively can sometimes go undiagnosed or the extent of their support needs might not be fully recognised by education and other professionals. Pupils often learn how to mask through replicating the behaviour of others. This makes them extremely good at learning through modelling as a primary teaching strategy. Sometimes pupils with autism will watch soaps on TV or read a lot of fiction to study the social behaviours of the characters. However, when presented with new situations this can cause a huge amount of anxiety and can cause the mask to slip. Pupils who mask often manage to maintain their mask during most of the school day, but families will sometimes report poor behaviour at home. This is as much a problem for school as it is at home as the wellbeing of the pupil may be affected, and in turn this will impact on educational outcomes.



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### Strategies to Support

Often our children and young people who are masking their autism don't want others to know they need support. It is important that the strategies that we use are sensitive to this. When your child/young person comes home from school don't ask them about their day as this can cause them to revisit the stressful situations that they have had to negotiate whilst masking and can cause increased stress. Instead have the things ready for them that they like to do when they get home. Allow them time to relax and regulate their emotions before making demands on them such as homework, chores or even asking them about their day. Energy Management (sometimes referred to as energy accounting) is a system that can help pupils to conceptualise their emotional level and identify strategies that can support their regulation. In this strategy, pupils conceptualise their emotions as a battery. Some events and activities decrease your emotional energy. Pupils might place a numerical value on their energy and how much specific activities decrease their energy. We can keep our energy topped up through activities that enable us to re-charge our battery such as listening to a favourite song, or spending time alone in a quiet place for example. In school we may need to recognise that during periods of increased stress due to exams, transitions to new year groups/settings or personal circumstances, that some pupils may need more time to engage in those activities that enable them to 're-charge'. Pupils may want to do this discretely without attracting the attention of peers and we need to find opportunities to provide this within their daily routines.

For more information on the Energy Management strategy [click here](#).

For a free webinar on Girls and Masking you can register [here](#).

# The Sensory Corner

## Oral Sensory Experiences

Most infants seek oral sensory experiences as part of their development. The mouth can offer a range of sensory experiences such as deep pressure with the clenching of the jaw, the feel of different textures in the mouth and different tastes. For pupils with sensory differences the fascination with oral sensory experiences can last longer than with typically developing infants. By providing safe oral sensory experiences, with a range of textures, we can support the development of these sensory systems.

- Cooked Spaghetti
- Breakfast Cereal
- Baked Beans (messy!)
- Edible Playdough
- Flavoured Ice Cubes
- Gloop (cornflour and water mix)
- Whipped Desert Mud



**pinpoint**

for parents by parents

Pinpoint Cambridgeshire have a range of webinars and talks from guest speakers that are free to access. Here are some of their upcoming events:

### Fostering a Positive Autistic Identity –

Dr Chloe Farahar

22nd February

### Preparing For Adulthood -

23rd February

### Parent Blame and Guilt when your Child has SEND Needs

Yvonne Newbold

1st March

You can also have your say in the Annual SEND Survey. For more, [click here](#).

## Out & About

### Nene Park

lots of activities over Half Term - try climbing, fire lighting, archery, bushcraft tools and holiday trail: [Click Here](#)

### Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery

See what's on: [Click here](#)

### Showcase Cinema

Autism Friendly Screening on the 2nd Sunday every month. [Click here](#) for more.

### Peterborough Cathedral:

Climb the narrow steps of the tower! Must book in advance and be 14+. [Click here](#) for more.

### VIVACITY

Short breaks for children and young people aged 7-19 with SEND.

[Click here](#).

### ANGLE GAMING LOUNGE

Enjoy a boardgame library, virtual reality headsets and games consoles for a £5 daily wristband. [Click here](#).

## Rainy Days

### Try these...



Breakfast Cereal Sensory Farm



Bubbly toy car wash

### Online Fun...

Intriguing clips of just about anything! [Click here](#).



### Online fun for curious minds...

Budding scientists will like this one. Join Peep in games and videos about the world around us. [Click here](#).

## NOTICE BOARD

### To do:

- Consider exam preparations - [Click here](#).
- Have your say in the Pinpoint annual survey. [Click here](#).

### Upcoming events:

- **Fostering a Positive Autistic Identity –** Dr Chloe Farahar, 22nd February
- **Preparing For Adulthood -** 23rd February

... And more! [Click here](#)

### FREE AUTISM, GIRLS AND MASKING WEBINAR

Date: Wednesday 1st March

Time: 10am - 11 am

During this webinar, Anne-Marie will cover topics such as -

- What is masking and why do girls mask?
- What are the signs a child is masking?
- Strategies to support and help your child find their path.

Even if you can't make it on the day of the webinar, you can still register, and a recording of the session will be emailed to you after the webinar has taken place.

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)