

Children or Young People who mask or camouflage their needs

A guide for parents of children and young people with Autism

People with Autism can sometimes 'mask' their differences and anxieties in order to try and fit in with those around them.



Masking is more common in girls, although many boys also present with this behaviour.



Children feel safest at home with their parents, so it makes sense that they feel more able to release their anxieties at home.



Many parents describe how their child is like a "shaken up coke bottle" when they return home from school.



What kinds of support can help?

Ensure your child has a period of downtime on their own when they come home from school. This will help them to process the day.



During this downtime, they may benefit from sensory activities, such as running around or punching a beanbag.



Or they may benefit from some time where they can focus on their special interest.



It's important that the school is aware of what is happening at home. Share your concerns with the school SENCO.



It will be helpful for school to know what makes your child anxious, and to know that your child may be experiencing significant anxiety without outwardly demonstrating this. Tools such as the Incredible 5 Point Scale can help children to show how they are feeling in the school setting.



Even if your child's behaviours do not present in school, there are lots of simple strategies that the school can use to reduce anxiety, such as:

- keeping things as structured and predictable as possible
- using visuals to support instructions
- avoiding non-literal language
- giving clear warnings prior to change



It can sometimes be helpful for children who mask to have sensory breaks throughout their school day, so they aren't so overwhelmed when they come home.



If you are finding it difficult to engage with school, the Devon Information Advice & Support Team (DIAS) offer legally-based advice around Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). They also offer training on getting the most out of school meetings.

www.devonias.org.uk