

•• **Tool:** Unmasking Support Pack

- Am I Masking?
- Where Do You Mask the Most?
- Low-Risk Unmasking Experiments
- Recognizing Your Unmasked Self

Part 1: Am I Masking?

Masking can be so automatic that it's hard to recognize it in yourself. This checklist helps you explore whether you're masking in different situations by identifying common masking behaviors. It isn't about judging whether masking is "good" or "bad"—it's simply a tool to help you notice patterns.

Recognize how you adapt.

Check off any statements that feel familiar.

Speech & Communication:

- ☐ I rehearse what I want to say before speaking, even in casual conversations.
- ☐ I mimic other people's speech patterns, tone, or slang to fit in.
- ☐ I force myself to use small talk, even when I find it pointless or exhausting.
- ☐ I consciously modulate my voice (e.g., making it sound more expressive or avoiding monotone).
- ☐ I soften or filter my directness to avoid making others uncomfortable.

Body Language & Eye Contact:

- ☐ I force myself to make eye contact, even when it feels unnatural or uncomfortable.
- ☐ I monitor my facial expressions to match the expected reaction in conversations.

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- ☐ I suppress stimming (e.g., fidgeting, tapping, rocking) to appear more "normal."
- ☐ I consciously control my posture and gestures to seem more natural.
- ☐ I copy other people's body language as a way to blend in.

Social Expectations & Energy Management:

- ☐ I script or pre-plan responses to avoid awkward pauses.
- ☐ I laugh or smile when I don't actually find something funny, just to maintain the flow of conversation.
- ☐ I feel like I'm performing a role rather than just being myself in social settings.
- ☐ I mentally track social "rules" while interacting with people.
- ☐ I force myself to stay in social situations even when I'm drained, just to avoid seeming rude.

Emotional Expression & Regulation:

- ☐ I hold back excitement or enthusiasm about my interests to avoid seeming "too much."
- ☐ I mimic other people's emotions so they don't think I'm indifferent.
- ☐ I avoid talking about certain topics because I've learned people find them odd or uninteresting.
- ☐ I suppress my reactions to sensory discomfort (e.g., pretending bright lights or loud sounds don't bother me).
- ☐ I exaggerate my enthusiasm or expressions so people don't think I'm uninterested or rude.
- ☐ I feel like I have different "versions" of myself for different situations.

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Part 2: Where Do You Mask the Most?

Masking can look different in different settings. This reflection helps you notice where masking feels most automatic or effortful. Find a quiet moment to reflect on your daily interactions. Think about a typical day or a specific recent interaction and answer the following:

1. **Where was I?** (e.g., work, a social event, family gathering, online, etc.)

2. **Did I feel the need to adjust how I spoke, moved, or reacted? If so, in what ways?**

3. **What was my reason for masking?** (e.g., to fit in, to avoid conflict, to be polite, to stay safe, or another reason)

4. **How did it feel?** (e.g., *exhausting, neutral, helpful*)

5. **Would I want to adjust how much I mask in this situation next time?**

Part 3: Low-Risk Unmasking Experiments

Trying to unmask in all areas of life at once can feel impossible—but you don't have to. Start small. This tool helps you experiment with unmasking in low-risk ways, giving you space to reflect on what feels right for you.

Step 1: Choose an Area to Experiment In

Pick one small aspect of masking that you want to adjust. Some ideas:

- ☐ Letting yourself stim slightly instead of suppressing it
- ☐ Reducing eye contact when it feels uncomfortable
- ☐ Speaking in your natural cadence instead of mirroring others
- ☐ Allowing yourself a break from social scripting
- ☐ Letting your enthusiasm for a topic show

Step 2: Choose a Low-Stakes Setting

Try unmasking in a situation where you feel safe or where the stakes are minimal. Some examples:

- With a trusted friend who already understands you
- In a text conversation, where you have more control over responses
- At home, where you can practice in private before trying it socially
- In a casual setting, like a coffee shop or online forum
- In an environment where you're anonymous

Step 3: Reflect on the Experience

After your experiment, take a moment to process:

1. What did you try?

2. How did it feel while doing it? (e.g., awkward, freeing, exhausting, neutral)

3. How did others react? (Did they notice? Was it a non-issue?)

4. Would you want to try it again? Why or why not?

5. What's one other small change you'd like to try next time?

Regardless of the outcome, acknowledge that trying something different is a step forward. What did you learn about yourself in the process?

Part 4: Recognizing Your Unmasked Self

For many autistic people, masking becomes so automatic that the idea of unmasking feels vague or unfamiliar. If you've spent years adapting to social expectations, you might not even know what "unmasked" looks or feels like for you. This section helps you explore your natural traits and preferences.

Step 1: Reflect on When You Feel Most at Ease

Think about times when you feel most comfortable and unfiltered. This might be when you're alone, engaging in a favorite activity, or with people who accept you fully.

- When do I feel most relaxed and free to be myself?

- What activities bring me comfort and joy without effort?

- Are there people I feel completely at ease around? Who are they?

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- How does my body feel in these moments? (e.g., less tension, easier breathing, natural movement)
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Step 2: Notice What Feels Different

Compare these moments of ease to times when you're masking. Ask yourself:

- Do I communicate differently when I'm fully comfortable?
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- How does my voice, tone, or pacing change?
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- Do I stim more naturally when I'm alone or with trusted people?

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- Are my emotions or expressions different when I'm not monitoring myself?
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Step 3: Experiment with Small Moments of Unmasking

Unmasking doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing shift. Try noticing and embracing small moments where you naturally drop the mask:

- ☐ Letting yourself stim without suppressing it
- ☐ Speaking in your natural cadence instead of mirroring others
- ☐ Expressing excitement without filtering it down
- ☐ Giving yourself permission to pause instead of scripting responses
- ☐ Spending time alone to reconnect with your natural rhythms

Step 4: Trust That Self-Discovery Takes Time

You may be unsure of what your unmasked self feels like yet. Long-term masking can blur that awareness, and unlearning it isn't immediate. You don't have to force it—just observe what feels right.

Trying something different is a win. What did you learn about yourself in the process? What patterns or preferences did you notice? Were there any surprises?

Ask yourself: How can I optimize for more situations where I can unmask and be myself?