

What is Masking?

Masking is when an individual engages in behaviours or compensation techniques whereby, they attempt to control impulses, mimic or mirror the behaviours of others or rehearse answers to questions or conversations.

This is usually done in an effort to fit in or facilitate or maintain connections with others. Masking can also be referred to as camouflaging. Many autistic individuals feel as though they must engage in masking in order to be accepted by others.

Why can Masking be problematic?

Masking can be detrimental to an individual as it can delay diagnosis, because the individual does not present to others or seem like they are autistic. Masking can take a toll on the autistic individual as they may be expending a lot of time, energy and other internal resources on masking. When masking, an autistic person may attempt to hide or suppress their stims which in turn can lead to sensory overwhelm and even a possible meltdown. Individuals who engage in masking can also lose their sense of identity.

What is meant by the term Sensory Overwhelm?

Sensory Processing refers to how the nervous system receives information from the senses and converts them into responses within the body. Sensory overwhelm occurs when one or more of the senses becomes overloaded and regulating them becomes problematic or impossible.

What is a Stim?

A stim is an action or behaviour that serves as a calming mechanism. It can be repetitive or habitual. It is usually done when a person is experiencing sensory overwhelm, or alternatively to reduce or avoid experiencing sensory overwhelm. E.g., chewing when anxious or flapping hands when excited.

What is a meltdown?

A meltdown is an intense reaction to sensory overwhelm. It is a loss of behavioural control, appearing as outward distress like crying, screaming and/or stomping.

What is a shutdown?

A shutdown is similar to a meltdown but presents as severe withdrawal (zoning out, blank expression, no response and/or rocking back and forth).