



Autism Outreach
for Schools

Masking and Sensory Regulation

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What is 'masking'?

Masking is often also referred to as 'camouflaging'. It is a strategy used by some autistic people, consciously or unconsciously, to hide their true identity and appear non-autistic in order to blend in and be more accepted in society. Masking can happen in formal situations such as at school or work and in informal situations such as at home with family or socialising with friends.



Types of Masking



Compensation

Strategies used (e.g. learning social scripts) to actively compensate for social difficulties



Masking

Strategies used to hide autistic characteristics, or the portrayal of a non-autistic persona



Assimilation

Strategies used to try to fit in with others in social situations and avoid social exclusion

Why do autistic people mask?

- to be accepted by their peers / in society
- to avoid prejudice, stigma, bullying and discrimination
- to “blend in” in a neurotypical world
- to meet social expectations and avoid social rejection
- to hide discomfort in environments that are not autism-friendly
- to cope at school
- to avoid negative attention or punishment (for example for moving around or stimming)
- to make and maintain friendships and relationships
- because it has become routine or subconscious

The impact of masking

- distressed behaviour, including meltdowns and/or shutdowns
- mental and physical exhaustion
- mental health difficulties
- increased likelihood of self-harm and suicidality
- isolation and/or feeling disconnected from other people
- being more vulnerable to abuse
- a loss of sense of self
- low self-esteem

School might see the perfect student, but at home you might see...



Controlling

Tummy aches

Avoidance

Mutism



Trashing

Stealing

Kicking

Restricting food

Running away

Crying

Refusal

Lashing out

EBSNA

Suicidal talk



Swearing

Hiding

Head aches

Self harm

Hitting

Low mood

Bargaining





The Vestibular Sense

The sense that detects movement through sensory receptors in the inner ear.



The Proprioceptive Sense



Proprioception is the **body awareness sense**. It helps with:

Knowing where our body parts are



Scratching an itch and knowing where to scratch without looking



Touching hands to feet, also known as "finding your feet"

Understanding how much force to use



Using a pencil with the proper amount of force



Holding a delicate item without breaking it

Coordination between body parts and senses



Riding a bike and coordinating the movements to stay on track



Using hand-eye coordination to catch a ball



The Interoceptive Sense

What is Interoception?

Interoception is the **internal sense**. It helps with:

Understanding our body's needs



Recognizing feelings of hunger



During potty training, knowing when to use the bathroom

Knowing how to appropriately address needs



Sensing pain and looking for ways to relieve it



Scratching an itch with the proper amount of force

Regulating emotions and controlling behavior



Feeling sensations of anxiety and calming self



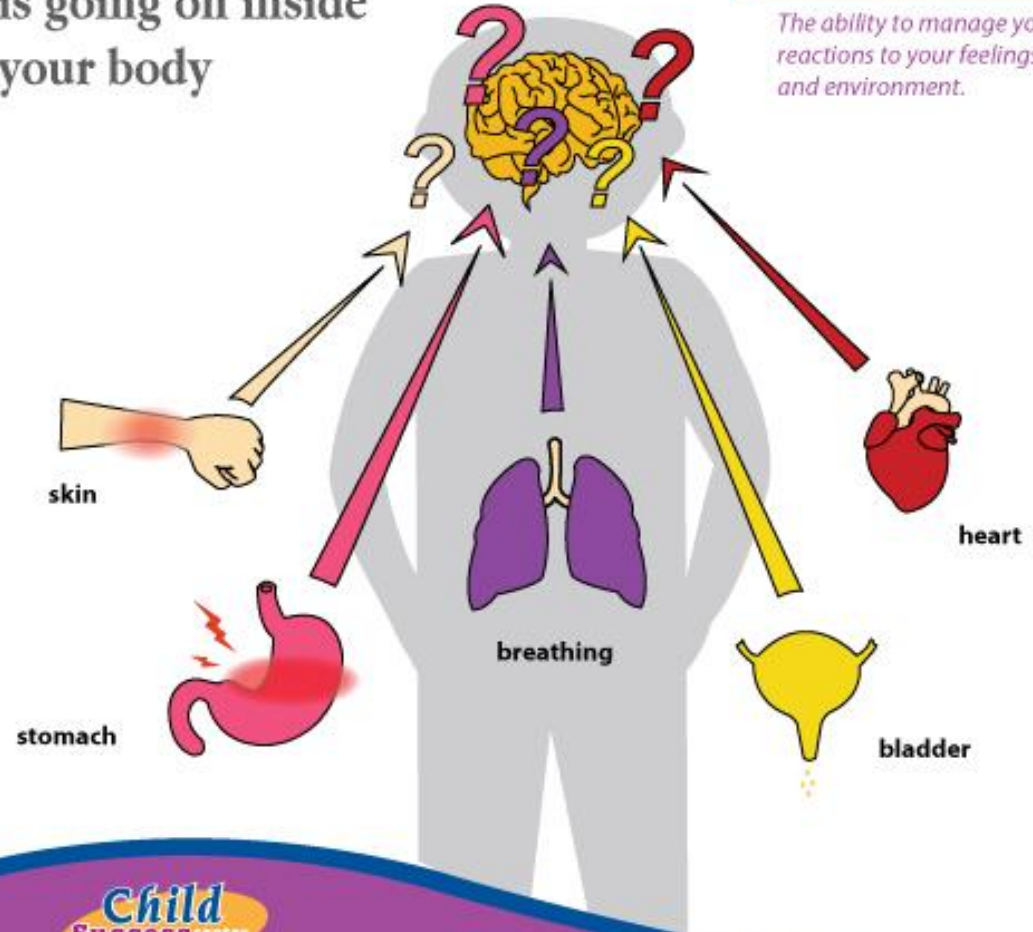
Avoiding temper tantrums by meeting basic needs

INTEROCEPTION

the 8th SENSE that helps you *feel* what is going on inside your body

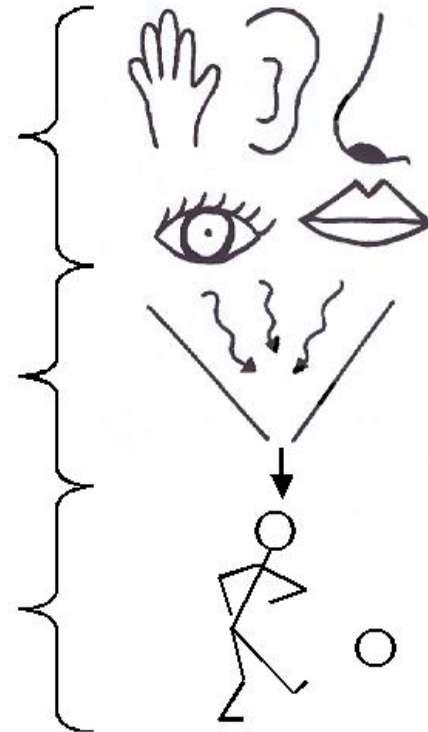
Self-regulation

The ability to manage your reactions to your feelings and environment.



Sensory Processing

1. The body receives sensation.
2. The brain works out what it is.
3. Message sent to respond.






Sensation is everywhere!

- The way that we experience sensation is unique.
- We experience life through our senses.
- The world is a sensory place.

Sensory Processing

- Sensation is the fuel that makes the brain work.
- The brain needs sensory information to function.
- Each of us needs a different amount of sensory input to operate best.
- Neurodivergent students often process sensory information differently.

Sensory Sensitivities

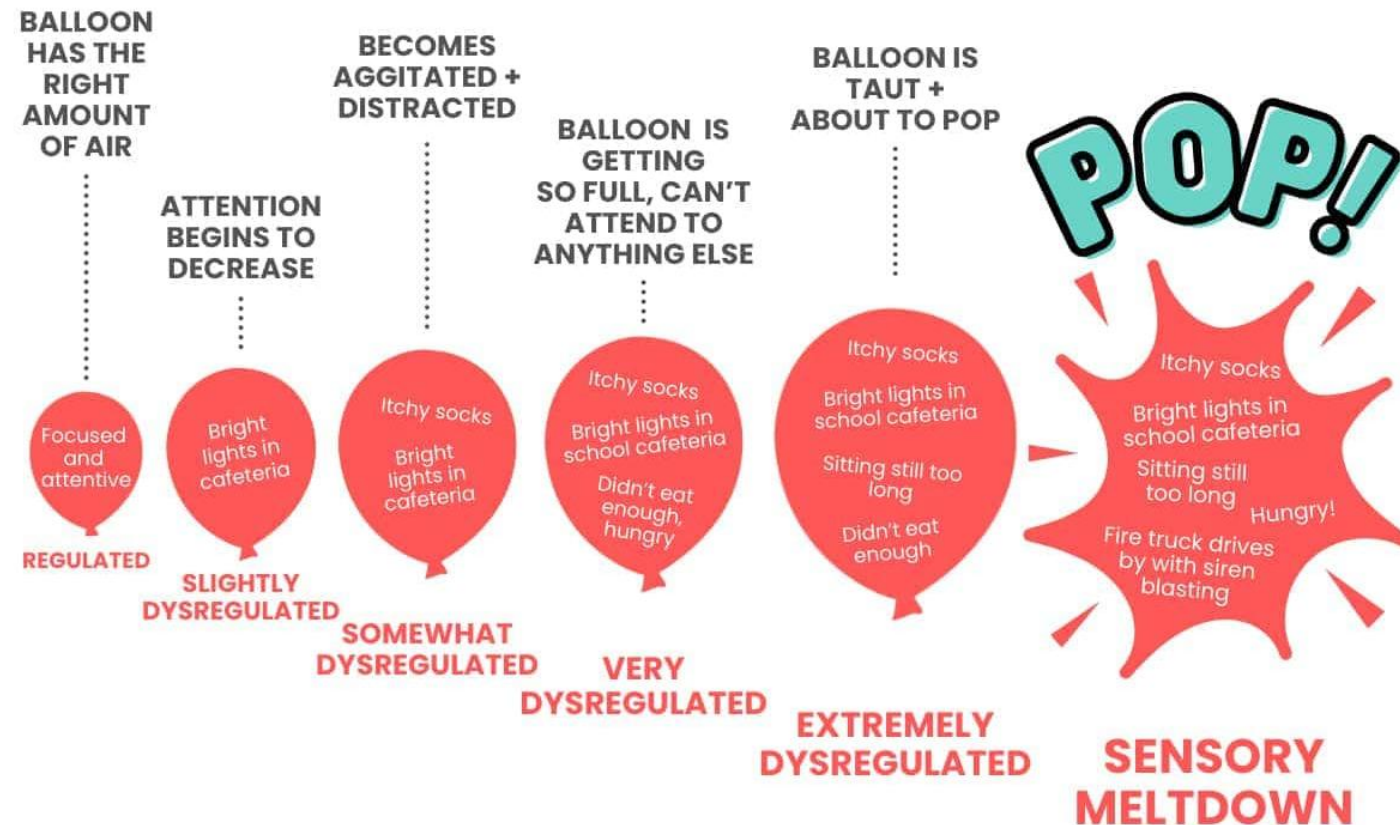
Hypersensitivity	 Hyposensitivity
<i>Heightened sensitivity to input</i>	Seeks out sensory input
AVOIDS:	SEEKS:
Loud Noises	Jumping
Crowded spaces	Tight squeezes or hugs
Smells	Loud, repetitive noises
Bright or flashing lights	Swinging or crashing into objects
Textures of clothes or food	Lack of pain response

Sensory Dysregulation

Sensory dysregulation occurs when the body's sensory processing system struggles to manage and respond to sensory stimuli effectively.



When dysregulation begins and is left unchecked it will get bigger, which makes it more difficult to regulate. This can lead to “meltdowns”.



Why is sensory regulation important?

Sensory regulation is fundamental to all other forms of self-regulation. Without sensory regulation:



- Our ability to manage and regulate our emotions is reduced.



- Our capacity to regulate our actions and behaviour is hindered.



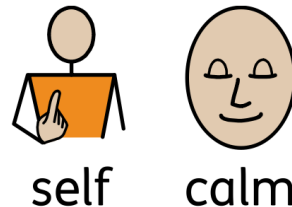
- Regulating our focus, attention and executive functioning becomes difficult.

Sensory Regulation

- Co-regulation is the ability to regulate emotions and behaviours, manage stress (internal or external), and return to a calm state, with the support and direction of a connecting person

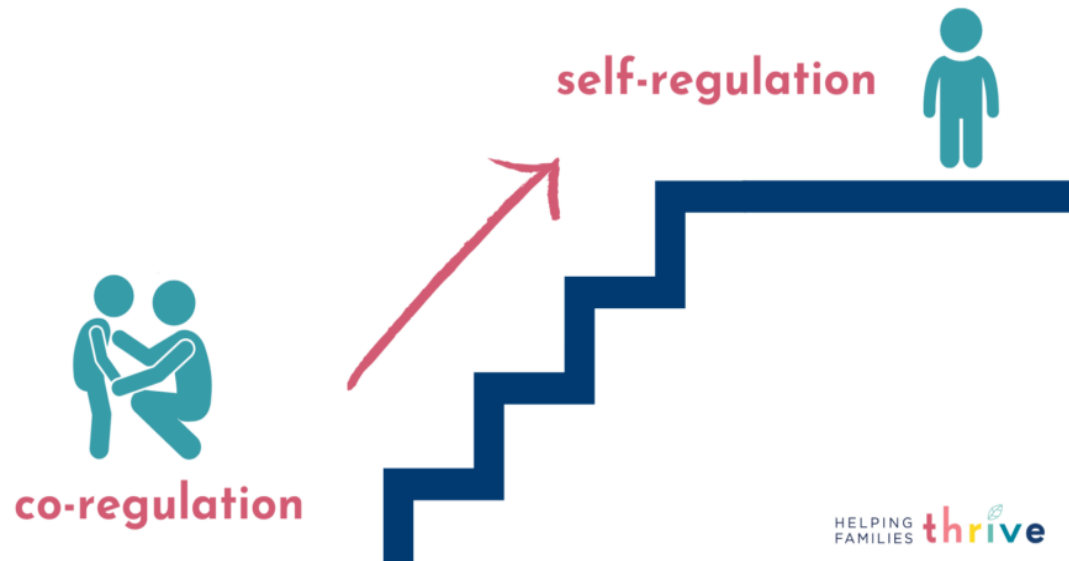


- Self-regulation is the ability to
 - recognise, manage, and respond to our own emotions
 - monitor and control our thoughts, feelings and behaviours
 - use personal strategies to return to a calm state



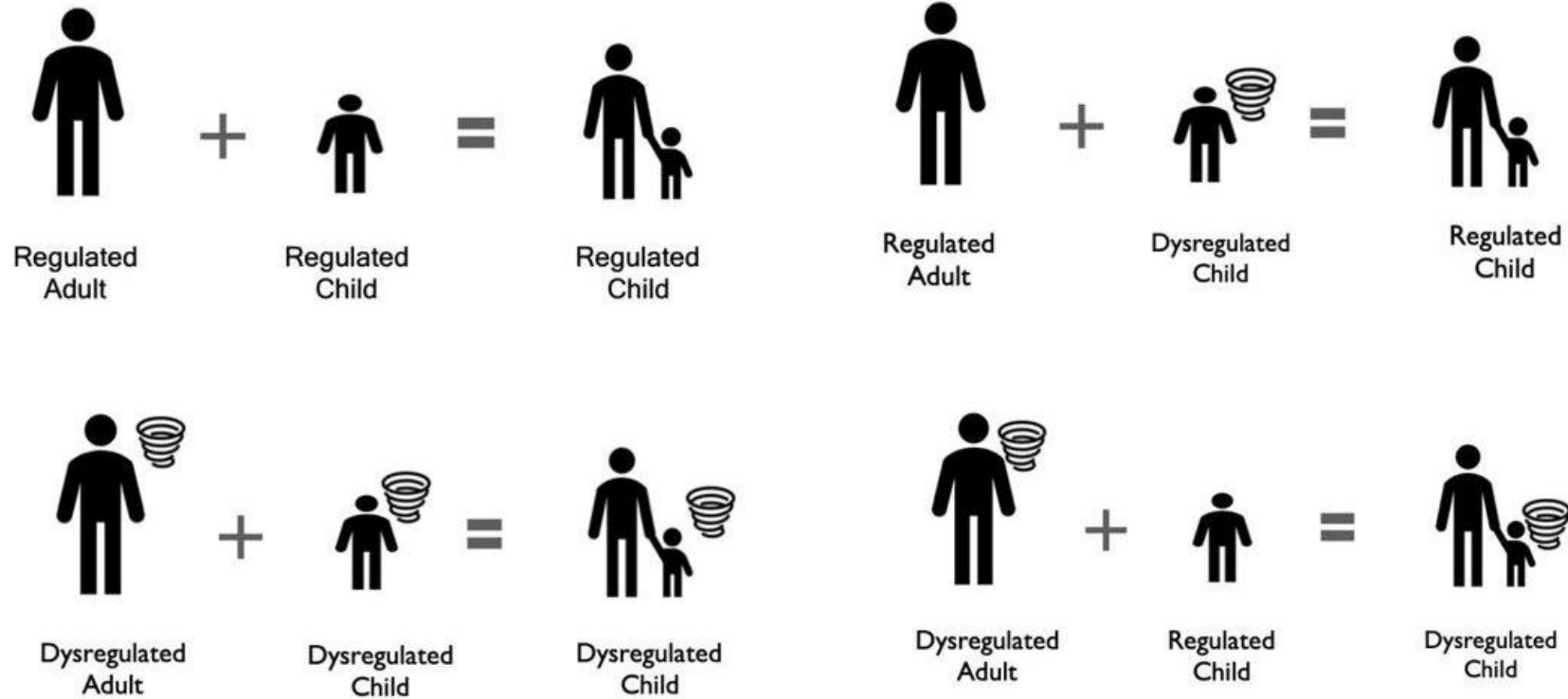
Sensory Regulation

- Self-regulation skills develop through interactions with others; children first learn to regulate with support from others and then they become gradually more able to use these tools independently as they experience them.
- **Even as adults we can still benefit from co-regulation from others when we become overwhelmed!**



Co-regulation

The importance of regulated adults...



Ways to co-regulate with your child



Lower your
body position



Lower your
voice



Soften your facial
expression



Model deep
breathing



Do heavy
work together



Walk outside



Offer deep
pressure



Model a preferred
sensory activity



Move your
body together



Dim the lights



Stop
talking



Change your
proximity

Regulating Activities



Jump, run, roll on the trampoline



Snuggle up in a weighted blanket



Get involved in outdoor play



Listen to Music to block extended noise



Rewind and relax in a bath



Do some Yoga for muscle relaxing

Regulating Movements



Jam Sandwich

Lay on a pillow belly facing down. Get your teacher to put another pillow on your back and squeeze you gently.



Stretchy Band

Pull and release at least 10 times then take a break.



Steamroller

Get on the floor belly down and ask your teacher to roll a big stability ball over you.

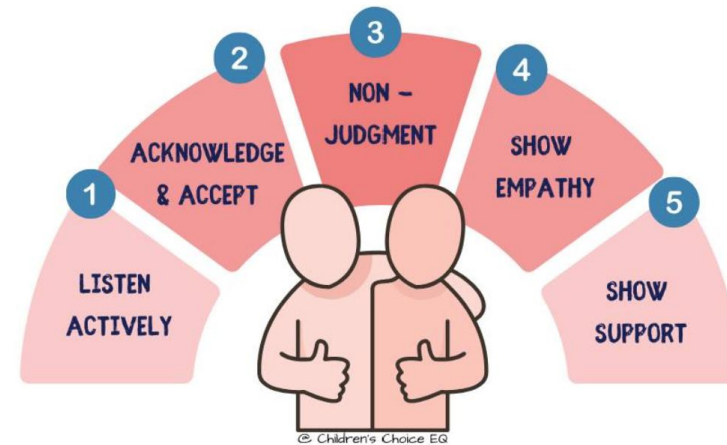
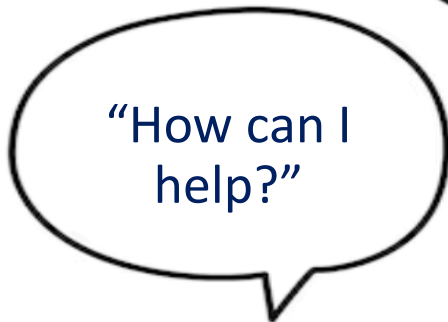
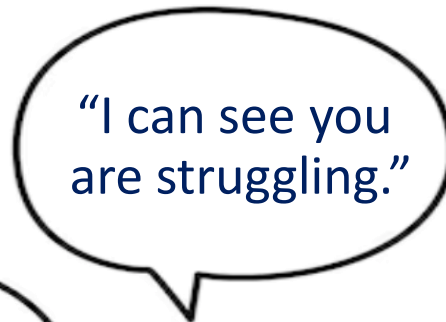


Chair Push Ups

Place hands palms down on each side of chair seat under your legs. Straighten arms to lift yourself off the chair. Repeat 10 times.

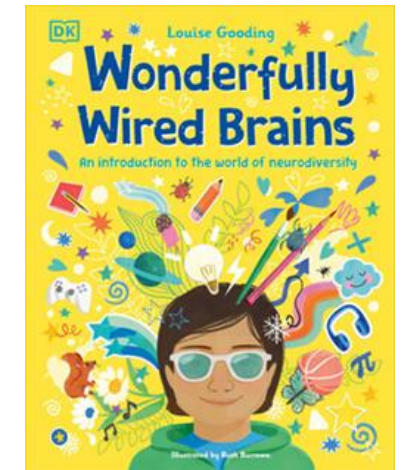
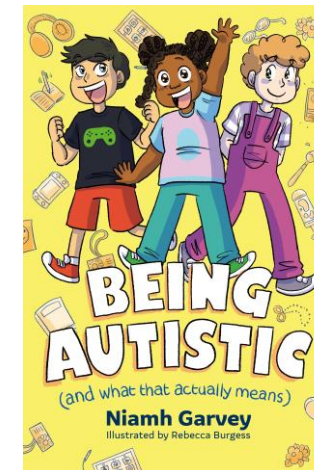
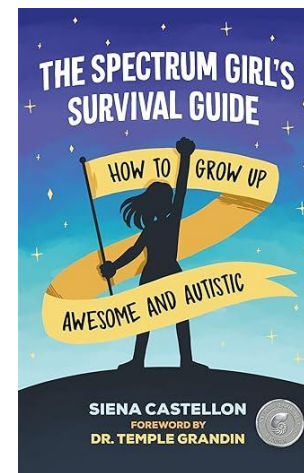
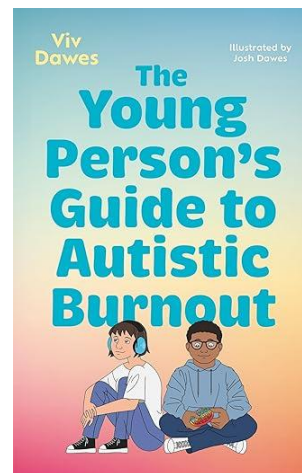
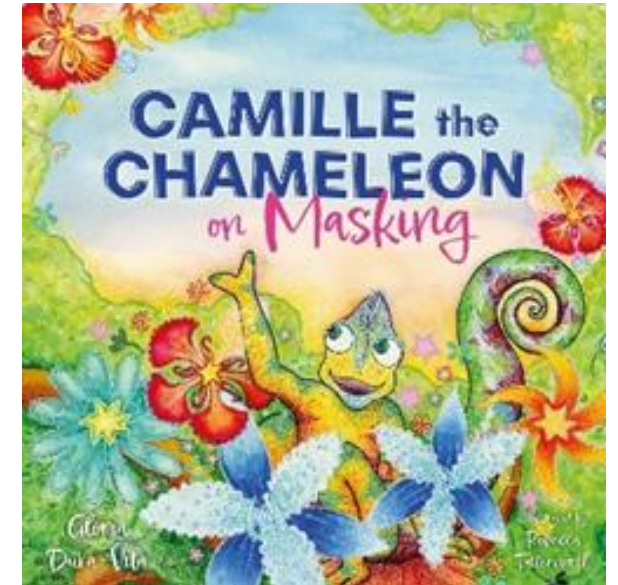
Validation & Support

Recognise the difficulties and work with the young person to find strategies to overcome these



**STEPS TO
EMOTIONAL VALIDATION**

Talk about masking



Look after yourself



Don't be afraid to ask for support

- Surrey Branch of the National Autistic Society: www.nassurreybranch.org
- BRAAIN (Be ready ADHD ASD Information Network): www.braain.co.uk
- APPEER (Support for autistic girls): <https://www.appeer.org.uk/>
- Send Advice Surrey: <https://www.sendadvice.surrey.org.uk/>
- Family Voice Surrey: <https://www.familyvoicesurrey.org/>
- Autism Outreach for Schools: <https://www.autismoutreachforschools.uk/>
- Mindworks: <https://www.mindworks-surrey.org/>
- YMCA East Surrey: <https://www.ymcaeastsurrey.org.uk/>



Find help sheets, FAQs, videos
and more at:
www.autismoutreachforschools.uk

