



Masking



Neurodivergent students may hide or refrain from behaviours to appear more neurotypical. This is referred to as **masking** or **camouflaging**). Students with ADHD may try to sit still when their bodies need to move. Autistic students may force eye contact despite it being painfully uncomfortable. A student with Tourette syndrome may hold their tics all day, only to fall apart when they get home from school. In all these examples, the students are facing barriers to engaging in their learning because so much energy is going toward masking.

Masking is known to have negative implications for mental health, as it can lead to exhaustion and interfere with the development of positive self-identity. However, as a temporary coping mechanism it may provide safety in situations where neurodiversity is not well understood. Being mindful of the impacts of masking on neurodivergent students can help them find balance between masking and not masking.



Strategies to support students

The following strategies can help dispel stereotypes and misconceptions about neurodiversity for all learners in the learning community. These strategies also strengthen neurodivergent students' ability to understand the impact of factors that perpetuate masking and contribute to negative self-image, while empowering them to make choices that support their well-being and foster a positive self-identity.

- ⚙️ Become familiar with the strengths of neurodivergent people and use strength-based, inclusive and current language and strategies to represent and support neurodiversity in the classroom.
- ⚙️ Represent neurodiverse perspectives and people through the literature, media and other resources you introduce to the class.
- ⚙️ Recognize neuro-affirming symbols that your students identify with (e.g., the rainbow or gold infinity symbol, and rainbow butterfly).
- ⚙️ Explicitly teach and model that we all learn, process and communicate in unique and valuable ways, and invite students to share how they best learn and communicate. Establish community agreements that honour everyone's learning needs.

⚙️ Teach students to recognize their emotions and engage in coping strategies to recognize and manage the effects of masking, including self-care and seeking support when needed.

⚙️ Advocate for and create neuro-affirming environments that reduce the need for masking.

⚙️ Engage in activities that help students recognize their own and others' strengths and provide opportunities to practise and highlight strengths.

