

Behind the Mask

A workshop for parents and carers on supporting children who mask at school



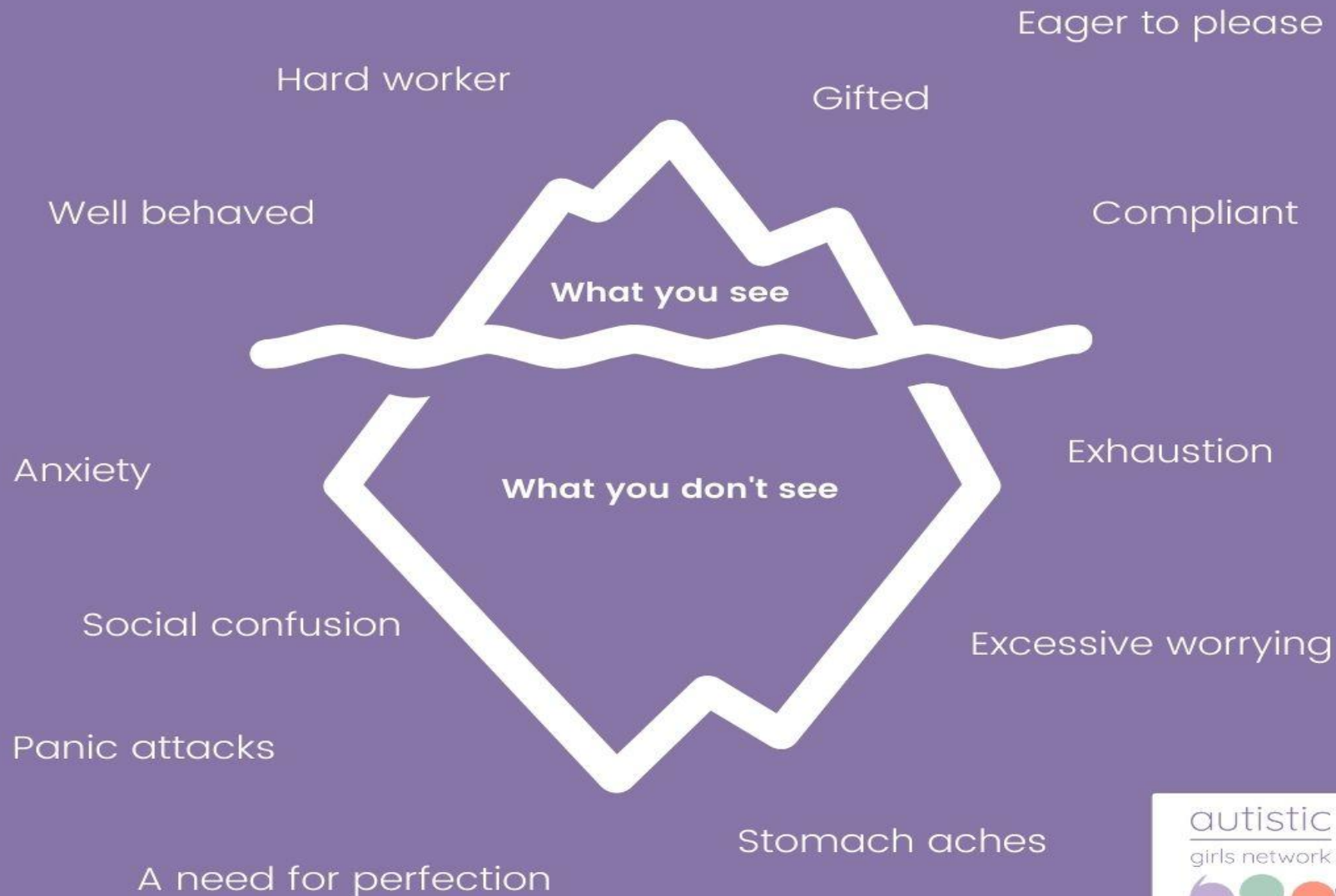
What is masking?

The National Autistic Society definition:

Masking is a strategy used by some autistic people, consciously or unconsciously, to appear non-autistic. While this strategy can help them get by at school, work and in social situations, it can have a devastating impact on mental health, sense of self and access to an autism diagnosis.

Masking is sometimes referred to as ‘camouflaging’, ‘social camouflaging’ and ‘compensatory strategies’. Research suggests autistic people learn how to mask by observing, analysing and mirroring the behaviours of others - in real life or on TV, in films, books, etc.

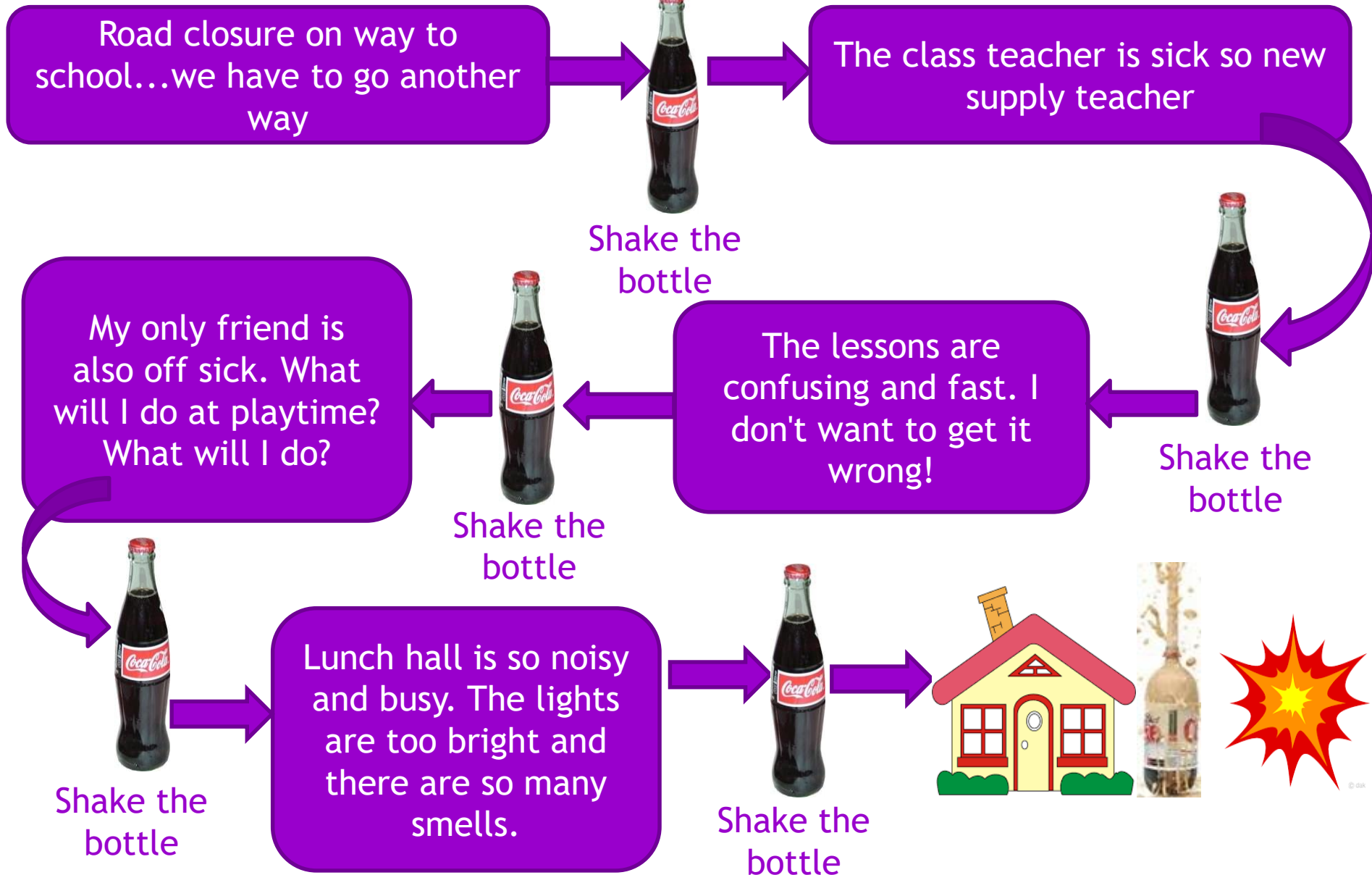
Autistic Masking at School



"My daughter says that when she walks in the school gate a cork goes in the top of her, she says that she feels fizzy and trying her best all day to be like the other girls and once she sees me she says it is like there is a little ant inside her and it pushes that cork out and she explodes."

Parent of a 7 year old

Coke Bottle Effect...NB the coke bottle can start fizzing up at home too





A child
who is
masking
is **NOT**
'fine in
school'.

SEND SUPPORT SERVICES


What's worked at school from parent carers...

"My daughter is now at junior school. They listen to me and want to help, they ask my advice and also give me theirs. It is a team effort of them and me to get it right for my daughter."

"If my daughter is really struggling one morning, I only have to email one word, which we have chosen, so they know she will be late. It removes the pressure to get her there, and since this has been set up, we get there every day as it is not so pressured."

"My daughter's school have put lots of strategies in place - Sensory circuits, brain breaks, ear defenders, a den at lunchtime which is a space that children with her struggles can go, so not to be overwhelmed by the playground."

"A teacher at my daughters Primary School provided a 'homely' safe space where children could do craft activities and get support for when they were struggling. The lady never judged parents but tried to understand how to support the child"



Ways you can support
your child who is masking
at school...

Decompress



Following the school day many children who mask will be burnt out from things like sensory and social overload.

Finding ways to support your child to decompress can really help to reduce meltdowns and support them to regulate.

Ways to support your child decompress

Have a simple and consistent routine after school

Prepare them in advance for any changes to the after school routine where possible

An expected snack that you know they like - this is particularly important if you have a child who eats little at school

Create peace and quiet allow and respect alone time if they need it

Allow time for moving around - jumping, running etc

Screen time - many children need this to decompress

Routine -regular club can be useful on a certain day- pizza night



What else can help...



Using a Worry Monster - this can be really useful for children to communicate their worries. They can write down their worries and the monster 'eats' them up.


Sensory activities - bouncy gym balls, trampolines

Dens - small tents or blankets draped with fairy lights

Weighted blankets or toys

Toys to chew or fiddle with

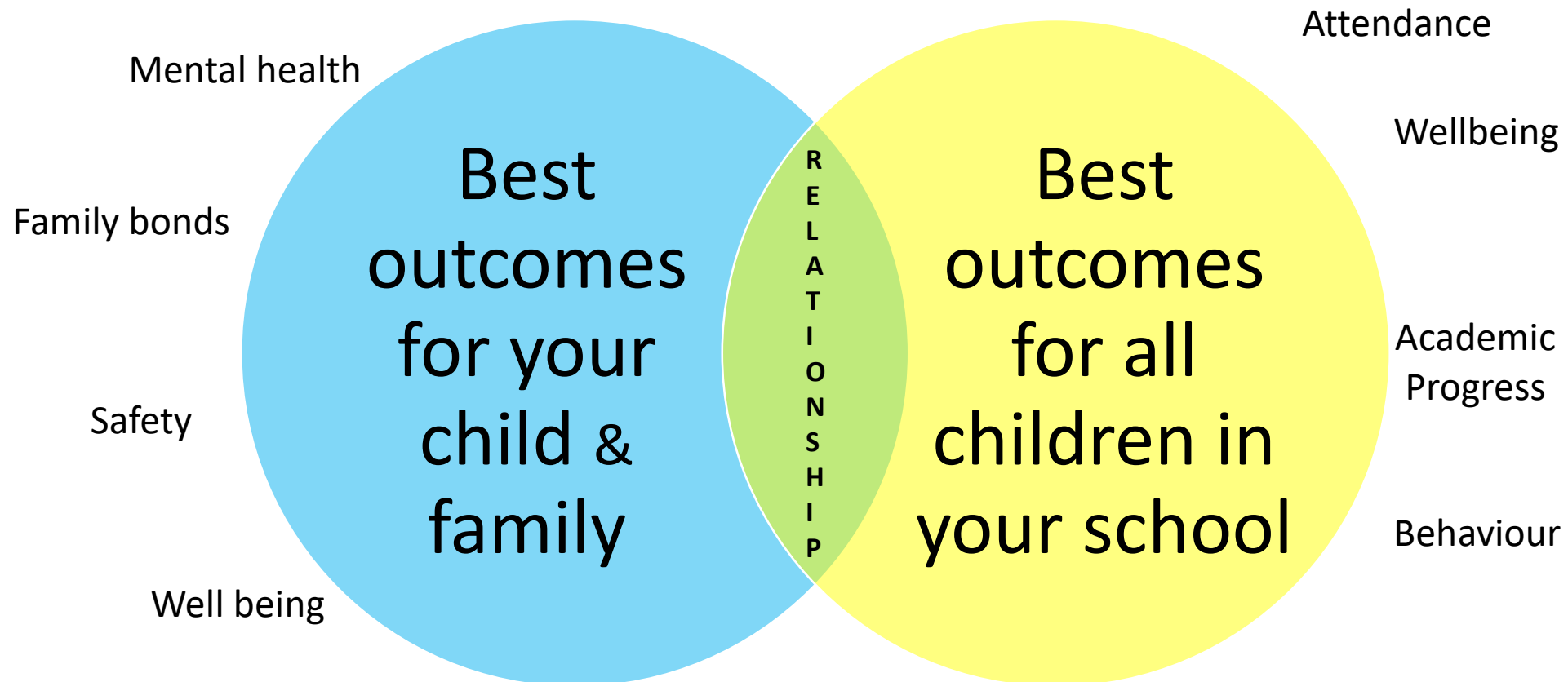
Find social groups where children can meet with other autistic children - finding their tribe can be so helpful in helping them feel less isolated



How can you work together with
your child's school to support
your child in the best way?



What outcomes are important
for your child and family?



Mental health

Family bonds

Safety

Well being

**Best
outcomes
for your
child &
family**

R
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P

**Best
outcomes
for all
children in
your school**

Attendance

Wellbeing

Academic
Progress

Behaviour

Building effective relationships with schools



Communication



Understanding



Collaboration

What would be helpful when
thinking about

Communication



Communication



What parents can do...	What Schools can do...
Tell the school what is happening, be honest about how you are feeling.	Listen to parents and believe them when they tell you that their child is really struggling.
Tell the school what works at home and what doesn't and explain why. Listen to how your child's day is at school.	Take time to really understand and hear what is happening for that family.
Insist on communication being away from the child if you know this is something they find difficult – suggest solutions such as emails / phone calls etc.	Have conversations away from the child – on the phone or when the child is in class.
Ask the school to look out for triggers but also tell the school if something has happened at home. Consider triggers at home too.	Regular home to school communication – Share this with all relevant staff, including Break / Lunch time - consider emailing this rather than giving to the child.
Ask if you are not sure about something.	Look out for triggers / tell parents - they need to know what has happened in the day to understand how to best support their child at home.
Don't be afraid to say if something isn't working but also celebrate positive achievements for your child.	Ask parents - If you don't know the answer to a question or challenge.
Respect the schools opinion but always trust your gut instinct – you know your child best. Treat staff with respect.	Respectful - treat parents as equals and with respect.

What would be helpful when
thinking about creating a
shared



Understanding



Understanding

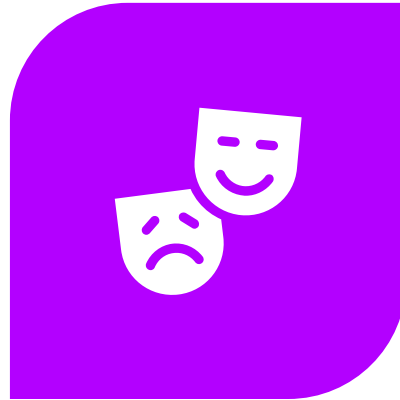


What parents can do...	What Schools can do...
Engage with any professional support that is offered.	Seek professional advice to support the child and their family.
Emphasise the need for time and share any progress or challenges.	Understanding that it takes time to enable a child to feel safe and supported.
Identify triggers and patterns of behaviour and share this regularly with the school.	Take time to understand triggers and patterns identified at home, and then identify these at school as well – share these with families.
Do some training to get some deeper understanding of masking and what that means for your family.	Participate in training to get a deeper understanding of masking and share this with the wider team.
Work closely with the school but don't be afraid to say if you feel something is not working. Understand the school professionals have likely seen this before.	Parents know their child best and this needs to be acknowledged in order to work towards the same goal.
Understand the schools outcomes and share what your best outcomes are to try and gain a shared understanding.	Parents may have a different idea of the 'best' outcome this needs to be heard and understood.
Be honest with the school to allow them to support you and your child in the best possible way.	If there is a ND child in a family, consider, the parents may well be too. There may be parental masking.
Don't be disheartened if the support isn't working. There are always other options and other things to consider.	Sometimes despite support being put in school is just too difficult for some children that mask and acceptance of this is vital in order for the child to access the right environment.

Identifying Triggers & Patterns



Identifying triggers and patterns can be very useful to begin to preempt potential challenges and put support in place prior to it happening.

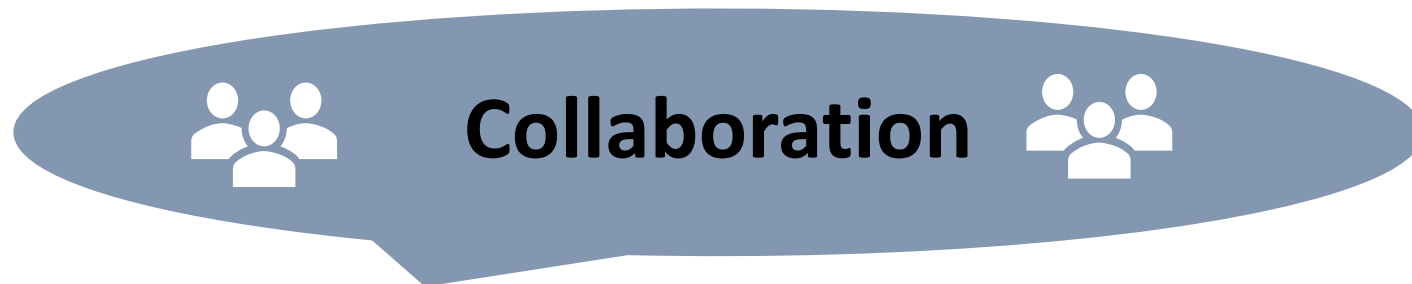


Collaboration of school and home allows both parties to build up a picture and understand what is really going on for that child who is masking.



Using a simple tool such as a frequency:severity chart can help identify patterns or ABCC charts.

What would be helpful to
ensure there is true



Collaboration



What parents can do...	What Schools can do...
<p>Be honest about your expectations and why you need things to be done in a certain way – trust and relationships are the key.</p> <p>Always follow through with agreements made.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Trust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Always follow through with any agreements made - Never promise something you can't deliver - Ensure what you say to a parent is then delivered/offered to the child
<p>Share challenges with the school and suggest solutions that may need some flexibility. It may not always be actioned but by sharing you are highlighting the need.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Arrival times / Leaving times -Clothing -Lunch location / packed lunch -Continuous provision / Task flexibility - Reduced timetable - PE - Lining up
<p>Work with the school in creating plans. Be honest about how you are feeling and what you think will and won't work.</p> <p>Don't be disheartened if something doesn't work there will be other options to consider.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Plan</p> <p>Create plans in collaboration which take into account:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Parents feelings & suggestions -Child's feelings & wishes -Identify triggers & suggest solutions -Review plan regularly -Acknowledge that it may not work, and different approaches may be needed
<p>Encourage the school to create opportunities for parent carers to meet and get peer to peer support. Allow all parents to share & be respectful.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Build a community -SEND parent support group -Coffee Mornings / WhatsApp groups

What has worked well / not so well for your child in terms of a trusted person?

Safe

Mutual respect

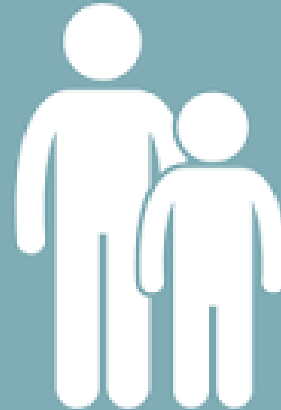
Connection

Consistent

TRUSTED ADULT

Trust

Honesty



Reliable

Time

Relationship

Understanding

Non hierarchical

Communication

Foundation of support



Looking after yourself...

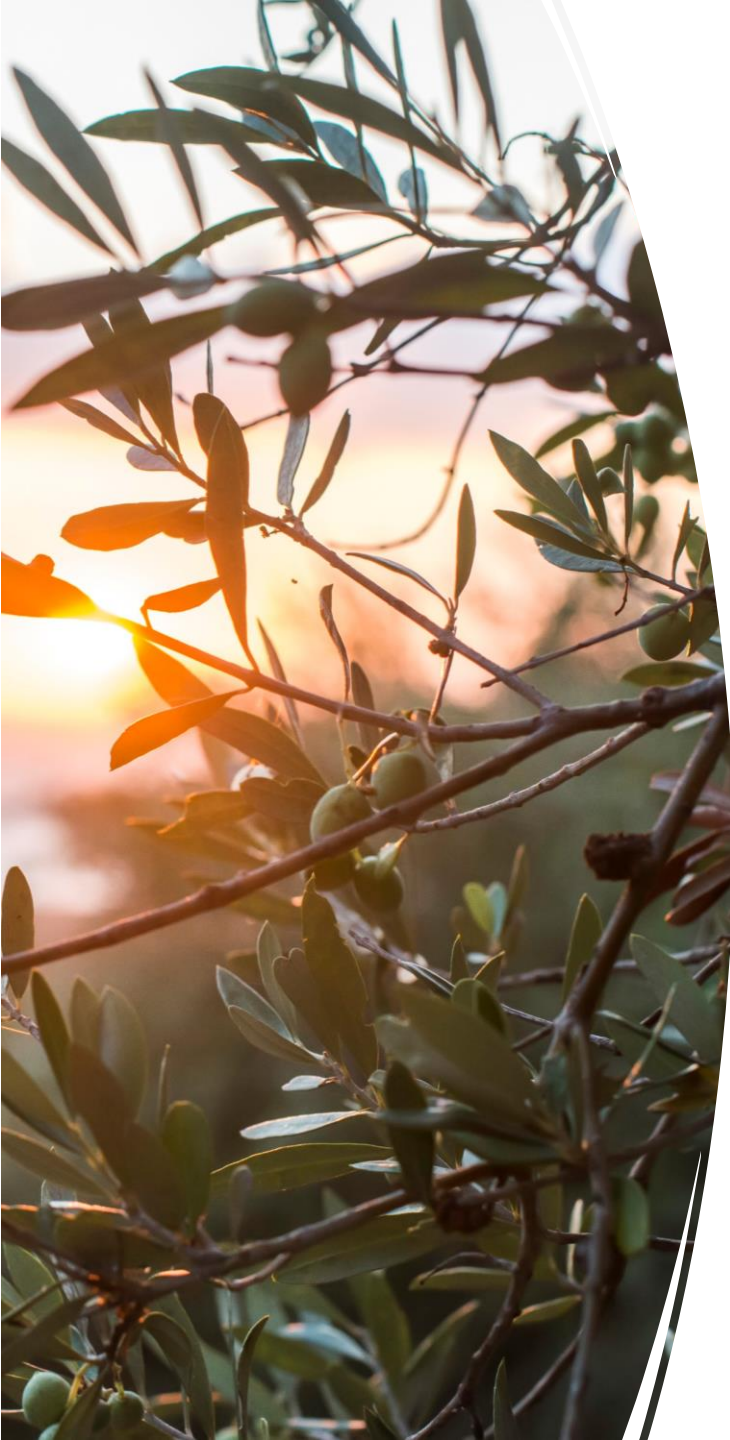
Self Care

Looking after a child who is masking at school and exploding at home is extremely stressful and distressing.

It can put a huge strain on the whole family. It is vital that you look after your own mental wellbeing.

Don't be afraid to reach out. Join Family Voice Surrey.





Time for you...

- Going for a walk
- Breathwork
- Yoga
- Gardening
- Listening to some music
- A bath
- Reading a book
- Watching a movie

Whatever it is it is so important that you look after yourself, and its ok to acknowledge that things feel difficult.

What one thing will you take
away from today?



Questions?

Useful Websites / Groups

Family Voice Surrey - <https://familyvoicesurrey.org/>

APPEER - <https://www.appeer.org.uk/>

National Autistic Society <https://nassurreybranch.org/>

Action for Carers - <https://www.actionforcarers.org.uk/>

PDA Society - <https://www.pdasociety.org.uk/>

Missing the Mark - <https://missingthemark.co.uk/>

Dr Naomi Fisher - <https://naomifisher.co.uk/>

Autistic Girls Network <https://autisticgirlsnetwork.org/>