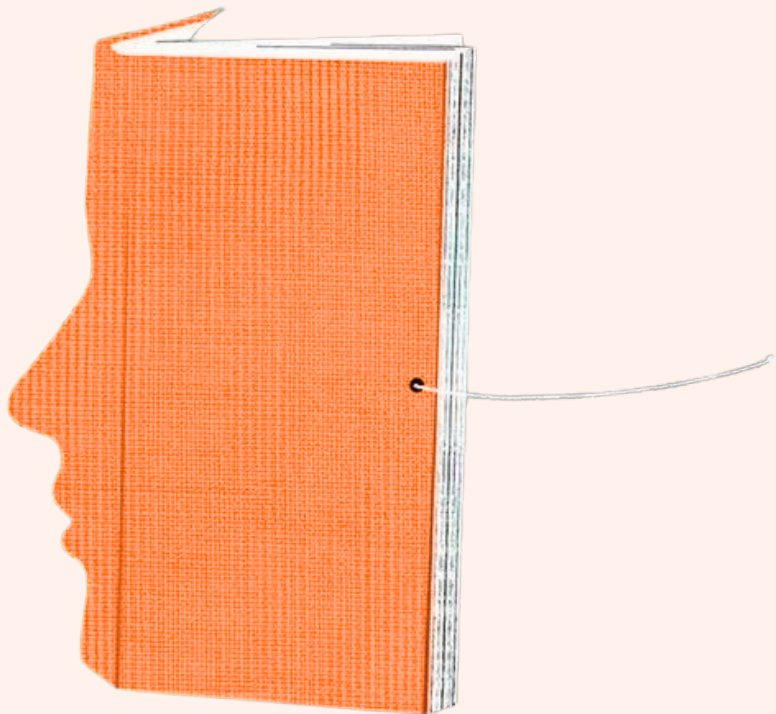


# MASKING & UNMASKING Reflection



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## Masking is survival

But it's exhausting as hell. It separates you from your true sense of self, right up until it becomes too much to bear.

This guide helps you:

- Understand what masking and camouflaging really are
- Recognise when you're doing it and what it costs you
- Reflect on when you feel safe to unmask
- Explore small, safe steps toward showing up more authentically

## What Masking & Camouflaging Look Like

Masking is when neurodivergent people hide or suppress their natural behaviours to fit in. Camouflaging is when we actively perform or imitate "neurotypical" behaviours to blend in.

### Examples:

- Forcing eye contact even when it's uncomfortable
- Rehearsing conversations before speaking
- Copying others' tone, body language, or expressions
- Suppressing stimming (rocking, flapping, tapping)
- Over-preparing emails or texts so they sound "professional enough"
- Smiling, laughing, or nodding even when confused or overwhelmed

### Why We Mask

People don't mask because they want to be fake.

They mask to survive.

- **Safety:** To avoid bullying, discrimination, or even violence.
- **Belonging:** To fit in at school, work, or within families.
- **Opportunity:** To get hired, promoted, or just not written off.
- **Protection:** Especially for BIPOC, trans, and other marginalised folks — masking can literally be about staying safe in a world that is less forgiving of difference.

Masking is adaptive. It keeps us alive.

But it also comes at a cost.

## The Cost of Masking

- Chronic exhaustion and burnout
- Loss of identity (not knowing who you really are without the mask)
- Anxiety and depression from constant performance
- Strained relationships from always being “on”
- Missing out on authentic connections

## Reflection Prompts

Reading about the cost of masking is one thing.  
Feeling it in your own body and story is another.

Take a few minutes with these prompts. Don't overthink it, just write what comes up.

### Prompts:

- When do I feel most drained after masking? (work, social events, family gatherings, online, etc.)
- What parts of myself do I lose track of when I'm masking for too long?
- How has masking impacted my mental health (anxiety, depression, burnout, identity)?
- What does my body feel like after a full day of masking? (tension, pain, shutdown, exhaustion)
- Have I ever had a moment where I realised: *I don't know who I am without the mask*? What did that feel like?
- What relationships in my life feel built on the mask, and which ones feel built on the real me?

You don't need to have neat answers. The goal isn't fixing, it's noticing. Awareness is the first step toward choosing when and where you want to unmask.







*Don't be afraid to just be YOU.*

*Life is too short to worry*

*about what everyone else*

*thinks and feels.*

***Doubt Yourself Do It Anyway— Patrick***

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