



Uncovering the Mask



A Parent/Carer Group Session 14.10.25
Glebe School & Social Eyes



**It's a tough job being a
parent!!!
You are amazing!!!**

Uncovering the Mask - A Workshop



Welcome to our family workshop session today. We will be exploring:

- ☐ What is Autistic Masking?
- ☐ What are the myths about Masking?
- ☐ What does Masking look like?
- ☐ Why is Masking more common in girls on the Spectrum?
- ☐ How can we help young people grow into themselves and achieve their unique potential as their 'Authentic' selves

Part 1: Identity, Masking and Autistic Spectrum

‘Research is in its infancy with regards to autistic masking, but it is thought that 94% of autistic adults have masked at some point in their lives’ (Sedgewick et al, 2022)



What do we mean by identity?

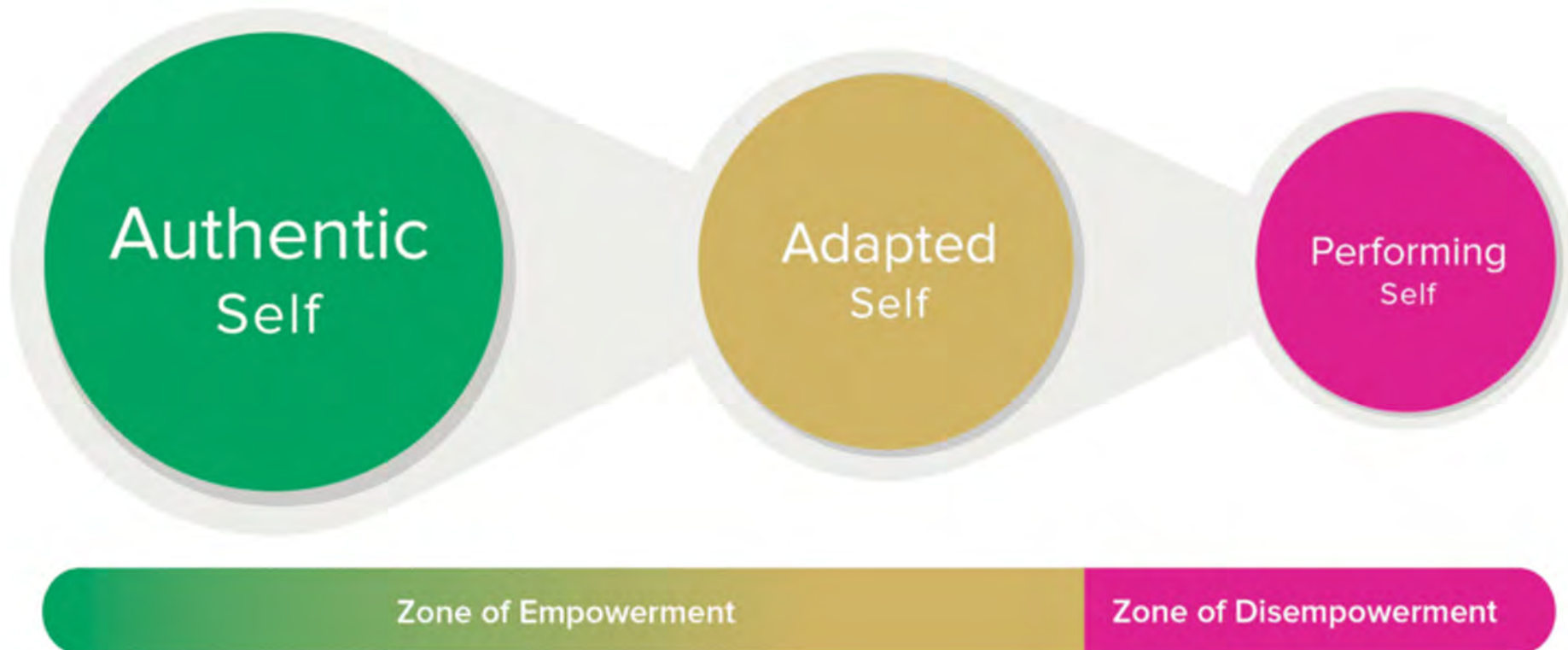


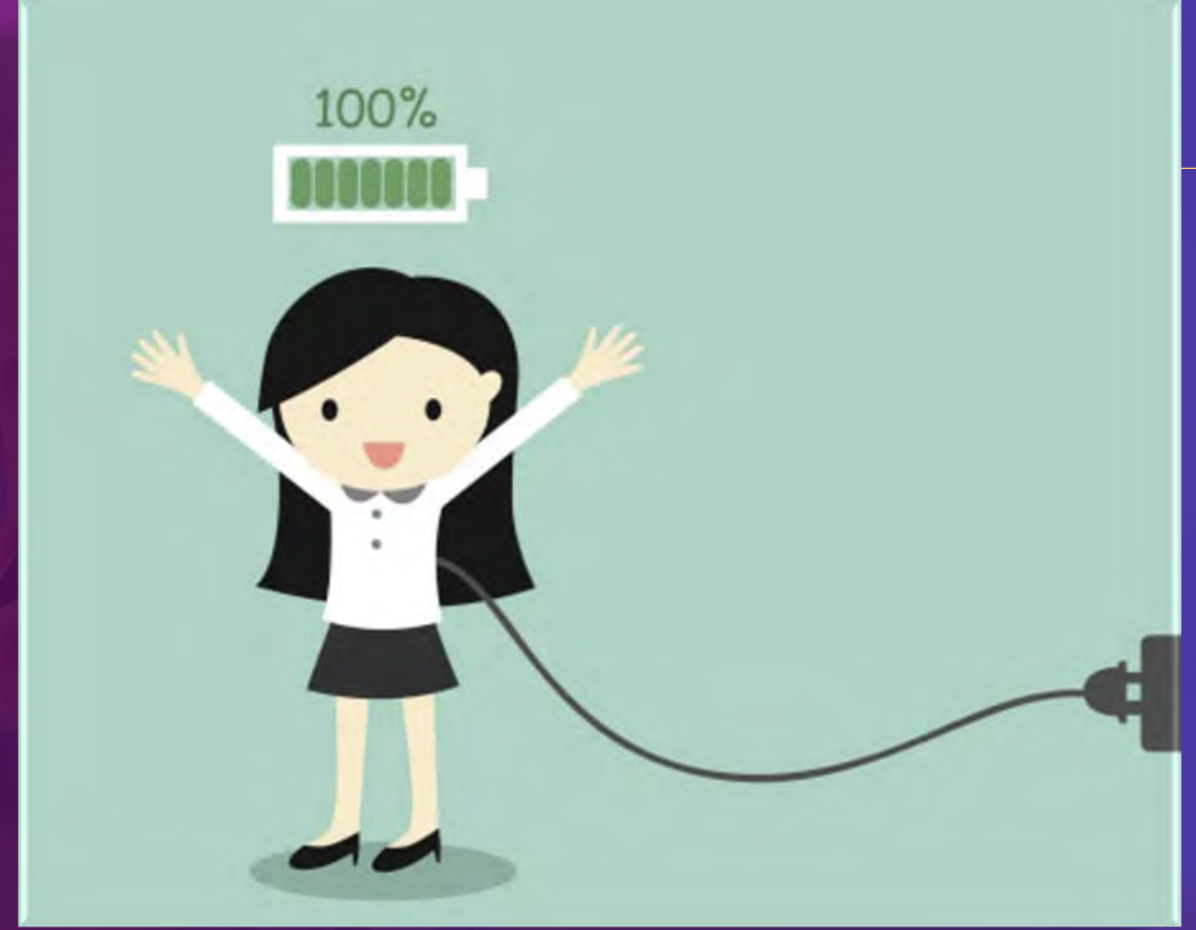
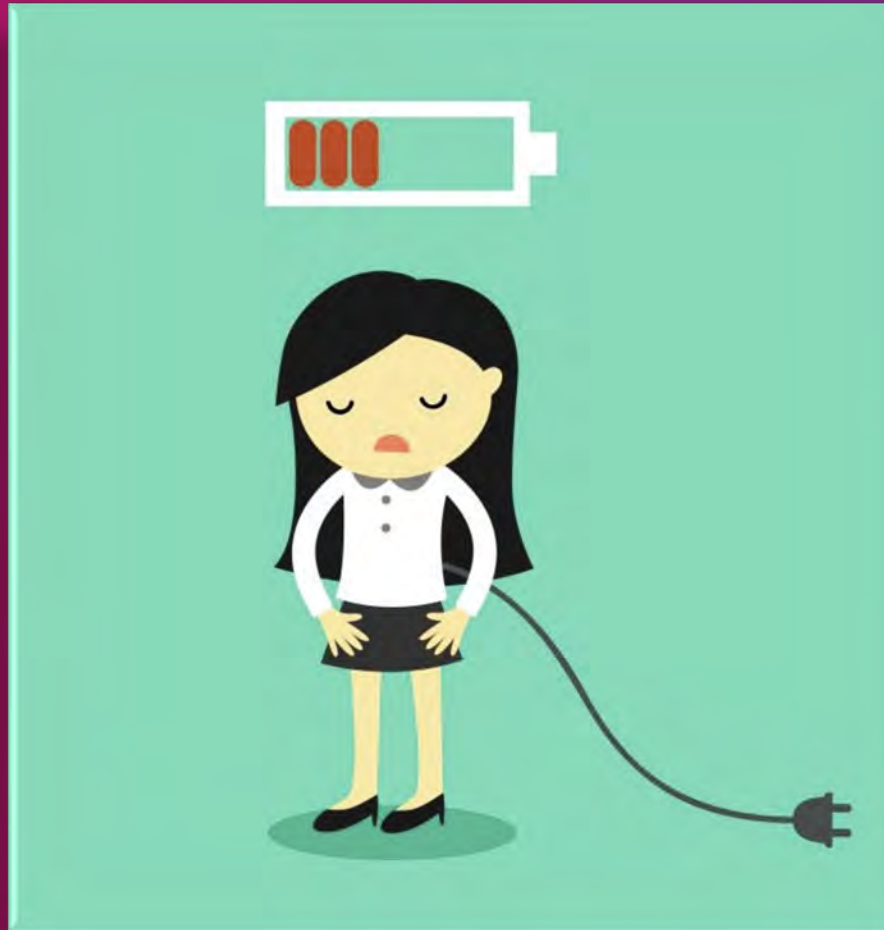
What we need to do is learn to respect and embrace our differences until our differences don't make a difference in how we are treated.

Yolanda King

quote fancy







Battery 'performance' running low...need a re-charge?

'Masking is a word used to describe something seen in many children with ASD – when they learn, practice, and perform certain behaviours and suppress others in order to be more like the people around them.

This is a common situation for children in schools who mask when they are in the classroom, meaning teachers do not see anything that would lead them to believe the child is autistic, but at home they can drop the mask and parents and carers notice behaviours not seen in school....'

www.theautismservice.co.uk

WHAT IS 'MASKING'?

@21and sensory



THIS CAN LEAD TO AUTISTIC BURNOUT + SENSORY HANGOVER.

Concealment can be to come out of hiding but to give up on truth...



Fear of abuse

Not to draw attention

To be accepted

To be 'good enough'

Expectations

Fear of isolation

At work...

Doesn't everyone 'Mask'?

Adapting to social
situations and people?

Feeling unwell

Putting others first?

Being a parent?





‘Autistic Masking is a trauma response to stigma, invalidation and marginalisation.’

‘Autistic Masking goes well beyond the normalised changes in behaviour that all humans engage in when they are around different groups of people with different social expectations.’

YOU CANNOT SEPARATE ME FROM MY AUTISM



AUTISM IS INTERTWINED INTO MY IDENTITY



IT IS WHO I AM

I AM AUTISTIC

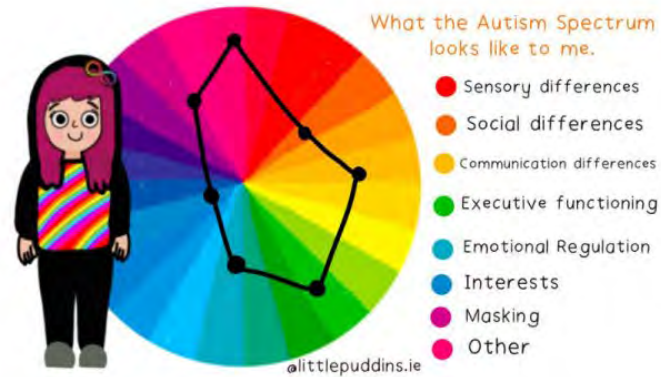
©BETH WILSON 2017 ☆

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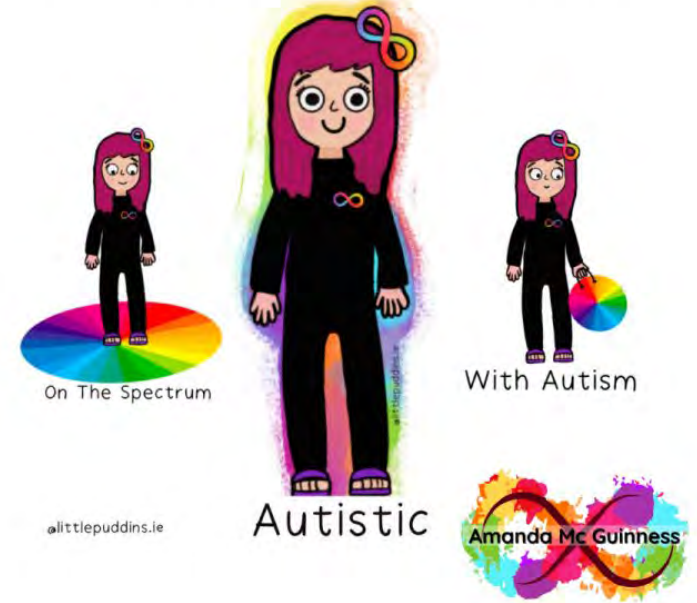
Respecting uniqueness

IDENTITY & CULTURE

Autism Spectrum



What I think when people say:





***"Autistic Masking and Autistic Burnout
are two major components of an
Autistic person's life and the ones
least understood."***

Misconceptions about Autistic Masking:

Misconceptions that masking in ASC occurs:

as a series of social strategies

that Masking doesn't exist/is imagined by parents

that the child is being manipulative

that only girls Mask

to fit in

to appear neuro-typical

as a conscious act implied by the terms:
MASKING
CAMOUFLAGING
ASSIMILATING



Masking often suppresses natural behaviours and self-identity

Can appear quiet and shy

Can appear as a people pleaser

Can be the 'clown' giving peers the behaviour they want to see



Defining Autistic Masking: A trauma-based response...

What can Masking look like?

Autistic Masking Can Look Like

Suppressing
Stims

Forcing
Eye Contact

Intensely
Self Monitoring

Rehearsed
Scripts

Intensely
Adapting
To Suit The Social
Environment

Exaggerated
Facial
Expressions

Ignoring
Sensory
Trauma

Ignoring
Spoon
Levels

Appearing to
know what's
happening, but
actually are lost

Ignoring Own
Social
Interactions
Capacity



@littlepuddins.ie

Not Everything You See is Real

Understanding **Autistic Traits** and **Autistic Masking**

Autistic trait is like having a **Superpower**

Embracing unique passions and interests with intensity and joy



Autistic masking is like wearing a **Costume**

Hiding or downplaying unique autistic traits to blend in socially



Autistic Trait (Superpower)

Prefers solo time

Has difficulty in understanding social cues and body language

Loves dinosaurs and knows everything about them

Prefers routine and predictability

Likes quiet spaces with soft lights

Prefers wearing comfortable clothes regardless of social norms

Repeats favorite phrases for comfort

May take things literally

Autistic Masking (Costume)

Forces smiles and small talk

Mirrors others' facial expressions and body language

Doesn't talk about dinosaurs for fear of being different

Adapts to changes in routine for social acceptance

Goes to loud parties because everyone else does

Wears uncomfortable clothing to conform to expectations

Stops stimming because it's "weird"

Explains jokes and sarcasm explicitly

Socializing

Interests

Sensory Stuff

Talking

Repeating
phrases exactly
as others have
said them



Creating scripts
to use in social
situations

COMMON SIGNS OF **AUTISTIC** MASKING

AT A GLANCE

Dr. Megan Anna Neff

Using behaviors
learned from
watching other
interactions



Practicing facial
expressions and
body language

Are there positives to Masking?

- ☐ Increased protection and safety (avoiding bullying, stigma and being ignored)
- ☐ Making and keeping friends and partners
- ☐ Getting on and being accepted at school and in work
- ☐ Preventing awkward social experiences
- ☐ Building confidence – ‘faking it’ until more confident



The price of Masking



What long term impact can Masking have on mental health?

The 'Mask' becomes an almost permanent presentation:

- ❖ Masking can divide a person's identity
- ❖ Emotionally impacts/is exhausting
- ❖ Potential for 'Burn out'
- ❖ Can result in 'self-injurious behaviours'
- ❖ Can impact on EBSA

What is *Autistic Burnout*?



Autistic burnout is defined as a syndrome of exhaustion, skill loss/regression, and sensory hypersensitivity or intensification of other autistic features.

Autistic people commonly say it is caused by prolonged overexertion of one's abilities to cope with life stressors, including lack of accommodations for one's support needs, which tax an autistic person's mental, emotional, physical, and/or social resources.

Five key areas of difference: Typical female ASC compared with males:

- ❖ **Mirroring** – girls are more likely to copy mannerisms/language and personas
- ❖ **Social awareness** – girls are more likely to maintain and adjust social behaviours in their relationships and adapt to different situations
- ❖ **Hyper-empathy** – may naturally have a greater sense of awareness of the other person's feelings and experience
- ❖ **Social withdrawal** - girls can have a more direct communication style and therefore more prone to making blunt comments albeit with good intentions and then withdraw to avoid being misunderstood
- ❖ **People pleasing behaviours** – girls are more likely to mask their true selves

Why might Masking be more common in ASC girls?



Secondary experience for girls :

- Complexity of female relationships can be overwhelming in adolescence
- Social differences, recognising peer social intent is more challenging, may appear quirky in their appearance
- Working on self-esteem and self-image is crucial to finding identity
- Gender Dysphoria – confusion over gender identity/sexuality
- Eating disorders – restricted/sensory, not eating/controlling food intake, Anorexia
- ‘Social hangover’ – over analysing interactions, realisation of difference
- Teaching social skills and situations is essential to understanding an adolescent environment
- Interests can now seem very young yet still seeking to belong to a social group
- Sensory environment can heighten processing and exhaustion during the day including puberty/managing periods
- Perfectionism = anxiety and burn out
- More prone to self-injurious behaviours
- Less into Social Networking than TD girls but can be highly vulnerable to virtual interaction

**We all have one aim for every
student at Glebe**



To be their 'authentic self'



10 AFFIRMATIONS FOR
BUILDING
TEEN SELF ESTEEM



Part 2: Practical approaches to Autistic Masking

Supporting your child to grow into themselves:



- ❑ Time for your child to process after social times, space to stim
- ❑ Helping your child to recognise and enjoy having breaks
- ❑ A diagnosis can help your child to grow into understanding themselves better and more confidently – giving answers/explanations for how they see/feel the world around them
- ❑ Helping your child to recognise their strengths and special interests and supporting these in their daily life

The most frequent phrases I hear:

From families:

'The **school** never sees what we do at **home**, it's almost like she/he's a different child'

From schools:

'The **family** never sees what we do at **school**, it's almost like she/he's a different child'

Autistic masking at school



Very often the presentation of many children, especially girls on the Spectrum, will not draw attention in school

What you may see at home may be very much more emotionally charged...

The mask 'drops' at home

The Coke Bottle Effect!



On the normal route to school there is a road closure...we have to go another way!

Shake the bottle

There is a substitute teacher in class today and I didn't know!

My best friend is off sick today. Who do I play with in the playground? How do I start a conversation with someone new?

Shake the bottle

Lunch time is here! The canteen is so noisy, the lights are bright and there are lots of smells...

Shake the bottle

Shake the bottle



Do you get the 'Coke bottle effect' at home?

Me, My Autism & I | Vanish & Ambitious about Autism | Hero Film



CLICK HERE TO WATCH

What might school and family see?

**What ideas might
help Ash have
better days?**

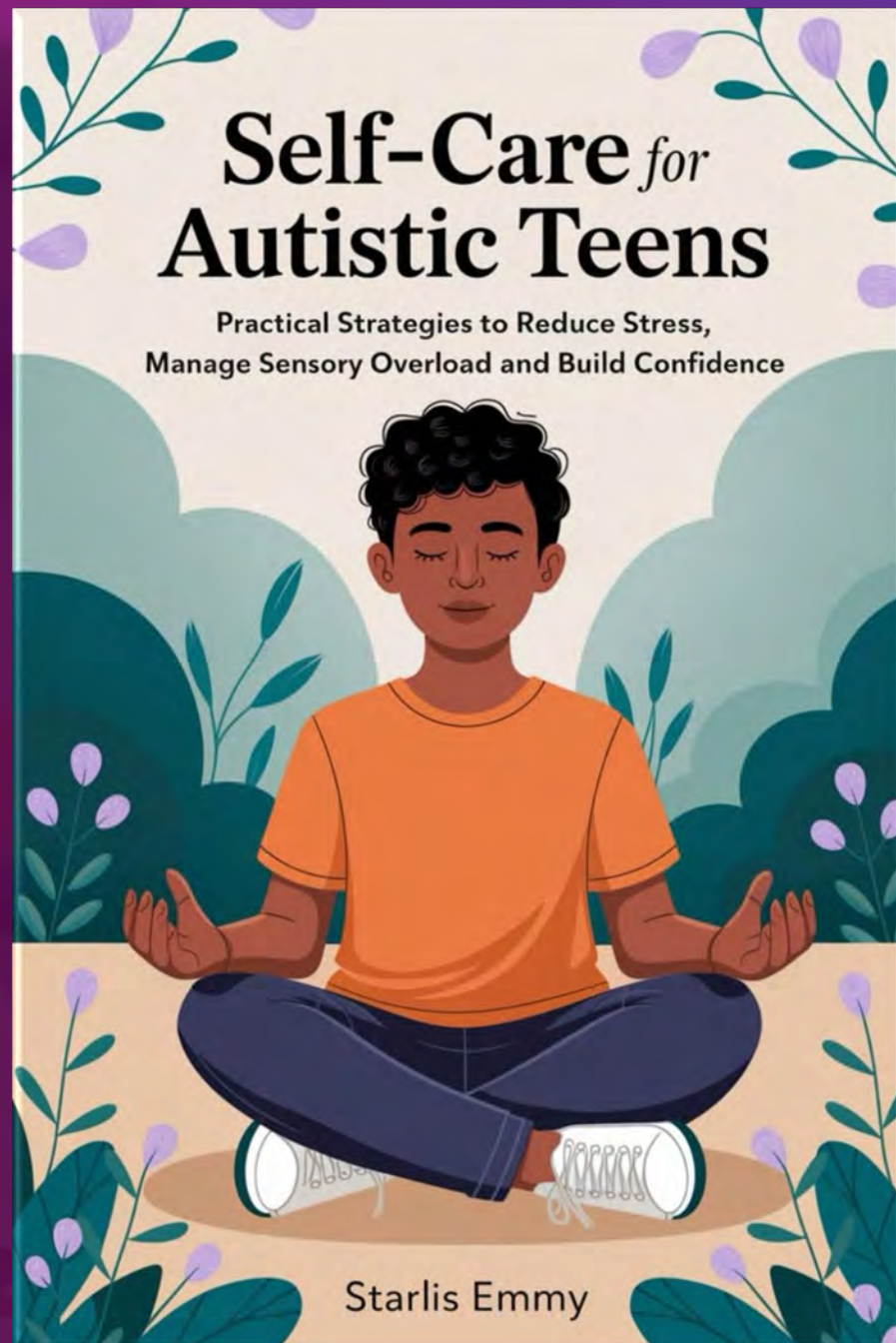


The key approaches for both families and schools

“Masking is the single biggest barrier to autism diagnosis there is. When autistic kids mask in school it creates a dichotomy between home and school behaviours and leads to parent blame in too many situations.”

– PDA Dad UK, Autism and masking





A place to
stim and a
sensory
soothing
place to be at
home and at
school

Favourite places: With family and at school



*Air Jump -
Orpington*



Minecraft



CASPA Bromley



Eco area at Glebe

COMMON AUTISTIC SPECIAL INTERESTS

Technology, e.g.,
gaming, programming,
software



Factual information,
e.g., history, science,
mathematics



Collecting, e.g.,
stamps, toys, crystals



Animals, e.g., specific
species, animal
behavior, conservation



Arts, e.g., drawing,
books, music, films



Transportation, e.g.,
trains, planes, cars



Special interests can be a way to
embrace their identity and self-
soothe in their day

Autistic Culture

@littlepuddins.ie



Music
on repeat



Headphones



Rewatching
shows/movies



Stimming



Comfy
clothes



Plain foods



Sensory
differences



Routines



Special
Interests



Stim/Fidget
Toys



Info dumping



Safe Place

Have a 'Down day' at the weekend

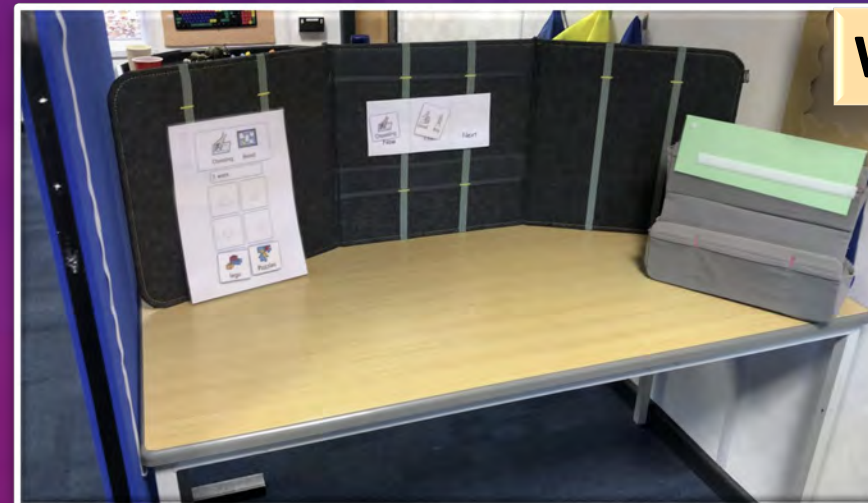
Time to share interests:



Show and tell sessions



Secondary school support/drop in hubs



Workstations



Digital use –
gaming and
networking

- ☐ How do you boundary/routine access?
- ☐ Do you have fixed safety rules?
- ☐ Does your child know the safe rules?
- ☐ Do you discuss their access as part of your daily routine?
- ☐ Do you have parental control over site access?
- ☐ Do you have 'digital switch off time'?

A young woman with long brown hair, wearing a light blue sleeveless top, is shown from the chest up. She has her hand resting on her chin in a thoughtful pose, looking upwards and to the right. The background is a soft-focus collage of various digital and social media-related icons and text elements. These include speech bubbles with the words "CHAT", "connect", "Share", and "DESIGN"; a laptop; a smartphone labeled "SOCIAL MEDIA"; a camera; a lightbulb; a clock; a location pin; a magnifying glass; a gear; a network diagram; and the letters "WWW". The overall theme is digital connectivity and creative thought.

- Check the privacy settings of every social networking account regularly and keep them as private as possible; this will make sure that your children are safe from people you don't know about.
- Keep an eye on whom your child follows and what they like/dislike online.
- Check your child's friends and followers on social media platforms.
- Keep an eye on their search history.
- Please do not allow your child to share photos on social platforms that can give away too much personal information or reveal personal details about them.
- Make sure that their social media profiles are not connected to any of the devices in your home (computers, tablets etc.)
- Teach them about social media safety and why it's important to be careful online; only let them use social networking websites with you sitting next to them so they can ask questions if needed.
- If you notice that your child has online drama or fights with someone, make sure to take action as soon as possible, before the situation gets out of control.
- Do not let them use social websites when they're alone, because then it will be too late for any kind of safety measures!
- You must talk to your children about social media and the consequences of using sensitive information online, such as losing a job, etc

Your child's Stress Bucket:

- ❑ How do you and Glebe staff help your child to empty their 'Bucket' and stop it from overflowing during the day?



Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____



MY STRESS BUCKET

All the things I feel stressed or worried about pour into my Stress Bucket.
(You can write or draw them if you want.)



To make sure your stress bucket doesn't get too full and overflow, you need to turn the tap and let some water (stress) out.

But how? 🤔

Look at the Healthy Coping Skills poster for lots of ideas!

Check Your Battery

How are you currently feeling?

Feeling great!

Keep meeting your needs and practicing self-care.

Feeling okay.

How can you make your day a tiny bit better?

Struggling.

Practice triage. What area of your life is suffering the most right now? Focus on that one area today.

BlessingManifesting



Feeling good!

How can you maintain the levels you're currently at?

Meh.

How can you love on your -self today? Be extra kind to yourself.

I'm empty.

Pinpoint what's draining you and try to create a boundary & then do one thing that fills you up.

For older children and teenagers...

REMINDERS FOR HARD DAYS

1. A bad day does not equal a bad life. *You are not this struggle.*
2. Not all thoughts are true. *Phew.*
3. Feelings are not facts. *But all your feelings are valid, real, and allowed.*
4. The only way out is through. *DARN IT.*
- 5. Your worth is not contingent on circumstances.
→ *You are LOVABLE and ENOUGH always.* →
6. Nothing stays the same. *Life guarantees this.*
7. You can't be everything to everyone. *But you can be true to yourself.*
8. Be gentle with yourself. And trust your inner voice, strength, and resilience.
9. You're not alone. It's okay to ask for help. *And be vulnerable.* ^
10. Focus on the things you can control.
Let go of the rest. *This is easier said than done.*



We have to help children recognise that they will have different emotions at times, but it is about recognising them and learning to self-manage



What Zone Are You In?

Blue Zone	Green Zone	Orange Zone	Red Zone
 SAD  HURT	 HAPPY  FOCUSED	 SURPRISED  CONFUSED	 ANGRY  RAGING
 SICK  TIRED	 CALM  EXCITED	 WORRIED  SILLY	 TERRIFIED  ANNOYED
What can I do?	What can I do?	What can I do?	What can I do?
REST	GO	SLOW DOWN	STOP
Take a break Ask for help Talk to someone Jump up and down 5 x I can also.....?	Think happy thoughts Finish my work Help others Share ideas I can also.....?	Take deep breaths Talk to someone Go for a short walk Count to ten I can also.....?	Take a time out Run a lap Squeeze a stress ball Drink water I can also.....?

Emotional Communication: *The Zones of Regulation enable children to better recognise their wellbeing and communicate their emotions*

My Feelings



What I Can Do:

- ★ I'm feeling good
- ★ I can play and learn
- ★ I can help a friend
- ★ I can try new things
- ★ I can practice my calming strategies for when I need them most

My Feelings



What I Can Do:

- ★ Count to 20
- ★ Take deep breaths
- ★ Go to a safe space
- ★ Push or squeeze something
- ★ Draw, write, or talk about it

My Feelings



What I Can Do:

- ★ Stretch
- ★ Go for a walk
- ★ Drink some water
- ★ Talk to someone you trust
- ★ Think happy thoughts

My Feelings



What I Can Do:

- ★ Walk Away
- ★ Stop what I'm doing
- ★ Be safe
- ★ Ask for a break
- ★ Get help

Many schools use the Zones, they are a great way to learn self-help skills

Zones of Regulation Poster

WHAT ZONE AM I IN?

BLUE ZONE



GREEN ZONE



YELLOW ZONE



RED ZONE



Tools to Help Me Get to the **GREEN** Zone.



's Toolbox

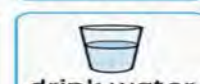
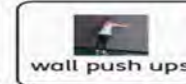
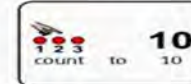
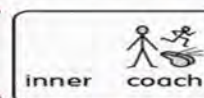
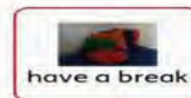
Blue Zone Tools

Green Zone Tools

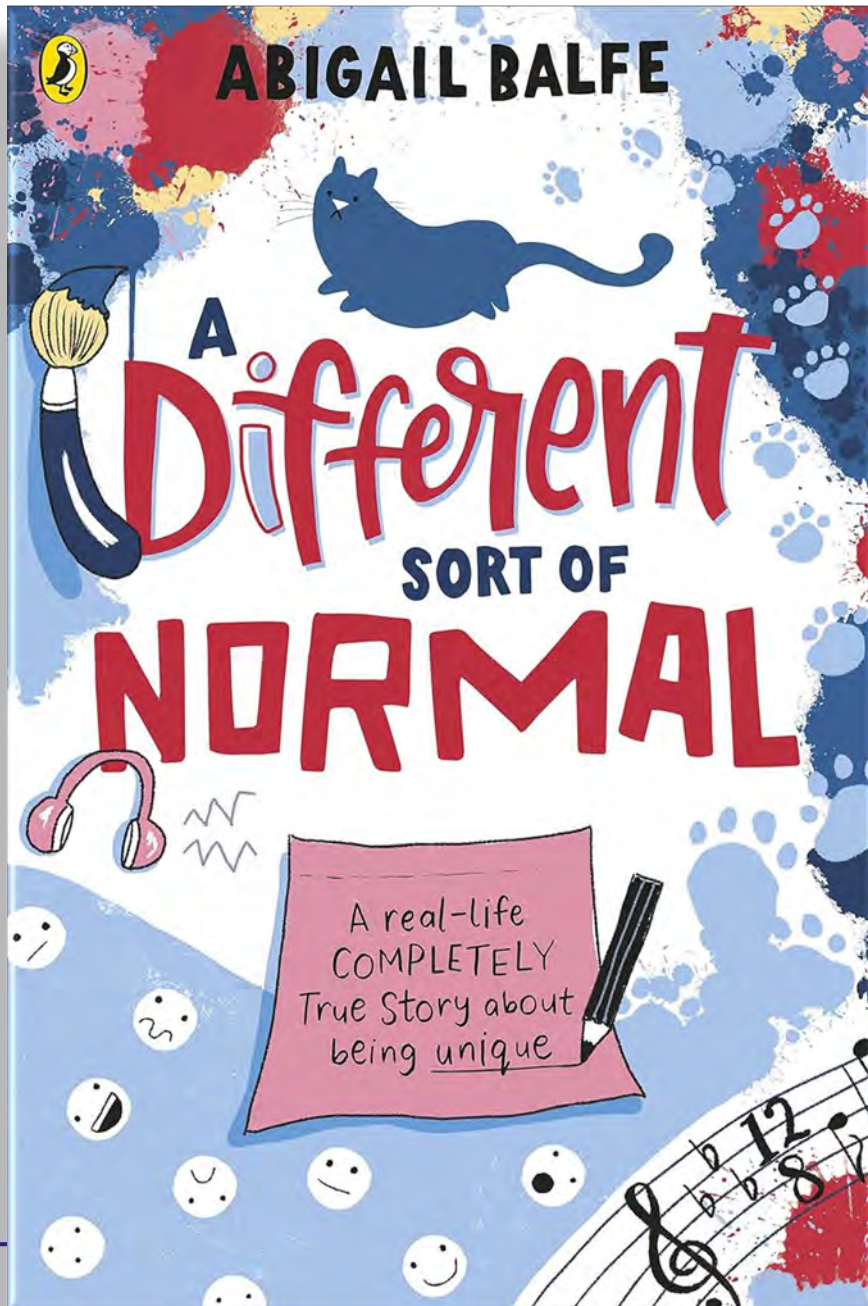
Yellow Zone Tools

Red Zone Tools

What tool should I use?



Templates for developing strategies at home...



Knowledge, acceptance and growth

- ☐ Talk to your child about what makes them unique, yet many others experience the world in the same way: **NORMALISE**
- ☐ Explain that we can **Mask** who we are/how and why
- ☐ Talk about their talents, abilities and interests
- ☐ Also, about what they are working on getting better at
- ☐ Focus on progress but not perfection
- ☐ That they don't have to be anyone else
- ☐ Encourage them to speak up about their needs and what helps them
- ☐ Help them to recognise 'the tricks' which help them to achieve
- ☐ Teach them through role play, how to negotiate
- ☐ Acceptance works both ways – accepting others' views but having the right to disagree!!



<https://youtu.be/Ezv85LMFx2E>

Amazing Things Happen by Alexander Amelines

A diagnosis in
common but still
unique...

Be yourself; everyone
else is already taken.

Oscar Wilde

quote fancy

Problem solve together...keep talking!!

- ❖ Use anecdotes from your own childhood/teenage years – keep it relevant
- ❖ Normalise but respect how they feel...
- ❖ Show social situations as being similar to a learning an instrument, game or sport – we have to seek help if needed and practice over time
- ❖ Don't say you have the answer but help lead your child's reasoning
- ❖ Help them to focus on the issue not the person or emotions
- ❖ Go through scenarios, actions and possible outcomes
- ❖ Act out the situation – sometimes acting out the situation in a functional way helps create solutions
- ❖ Be prepared to evaluate the outcomes and keep problem solving

Heading into adolescence
and beyond...



HELP YOUR CHILD UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY CAN AND CAN'T CONTROL

✓ Their attitude

✓ How they treat people

✓ The effort they put into things

✓ Their objectives

✓ Asking for help

THEY CAN CONTROL

✗ What has already happened

✗ Feeling sick

✗ What other people think or say

✗ How other people act

✗ Time or weather

Heading into adolescence and beyond...

Help your child to recognise what they can
and can't change is a key stress reducer
over time...

Useful resources, links and further reading:

'Girls and Autism': Carpenter, Happe et al, 2019

'The Spectrum Girl's Survival Guide: How to Grow Up Awesome and Autistic': Castellon and Grandin, 2020

NASEN: 'Flying Under the Radar'

<http://www.nasen.org.uk/resources/resources.girls-and-autism-flying-under-the-radar.html>

The National Autistic Society: -

<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/gender/stories.aspx>

Limpsfield Grange - <https://limpsfieldgrange.co.uk/>

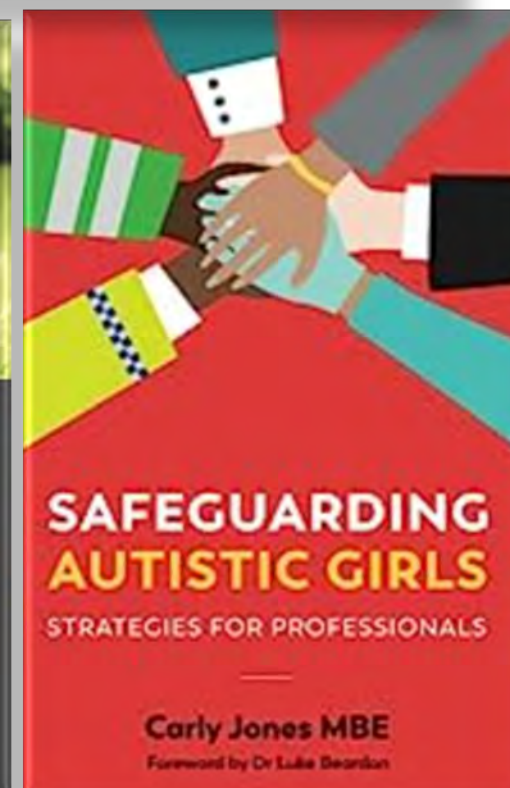
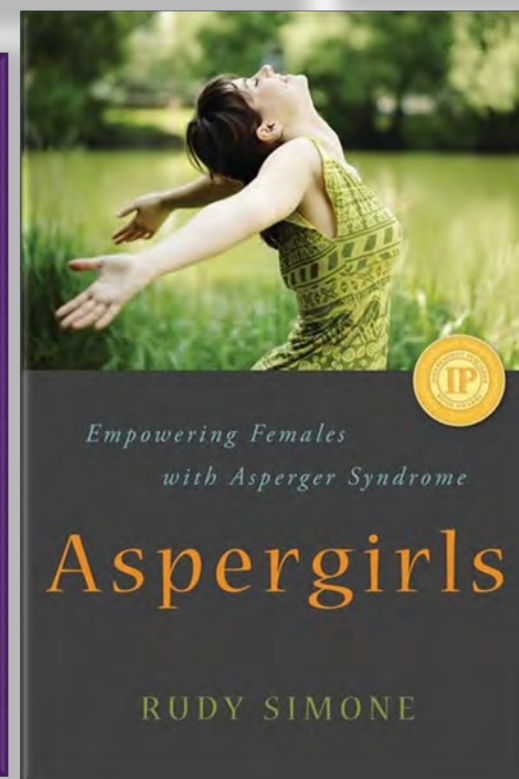
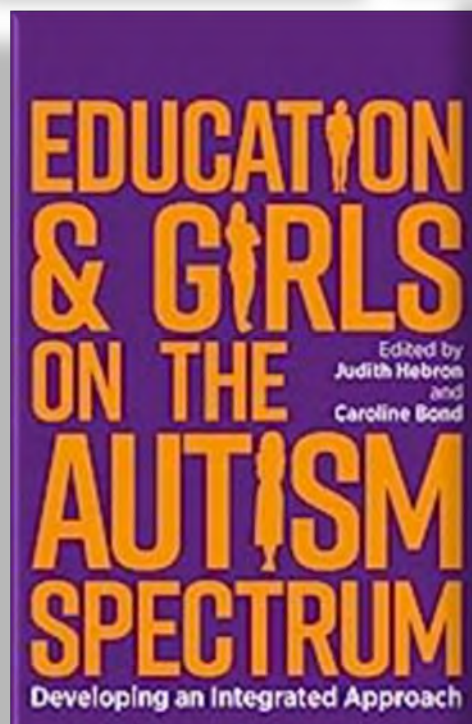
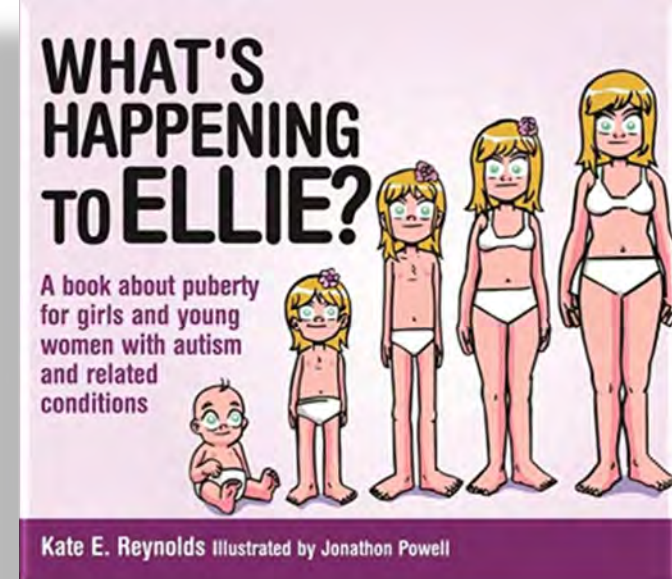
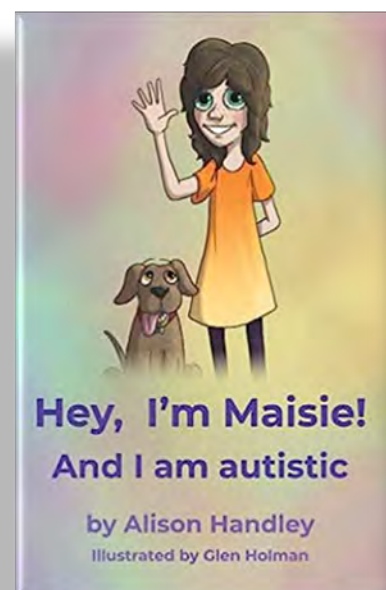
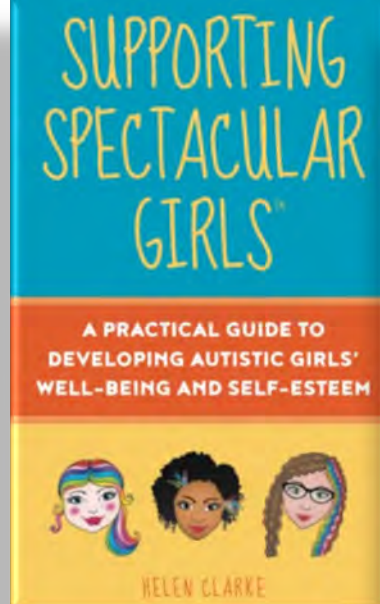
Jacqui Ashton-Smith and Judith Gould: 'The Diagnosis and Education of Girls and Women with Autism'

Tony Attwood and Temple Grandin: 'Asperger's and Girls'.

Video Clips:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZhZ0k1lyF8> (The Girls of Limpsfield Grange)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQ95xIZeHo8> (Rosie King Ted Talk).



Part 3: Taking the mask off: Conclusions...

Taking the mask off...

Final thoughts for families:

Help your child to be their 'authentic self' build on their uniqueness and talents

Teach 'social adaptability' but recognise that it may tire

Give space and time for interests and stims

Create and find 'mask free zones' for your child

Help friends and family understand what helps your child



Taking the mask off - Working with Glebe:

Acknowledge together that your child is different at home and at school

Share your home experiences but learn from what the school see

Help the school agree that you are both helping your child find their 'authentic self' and how...

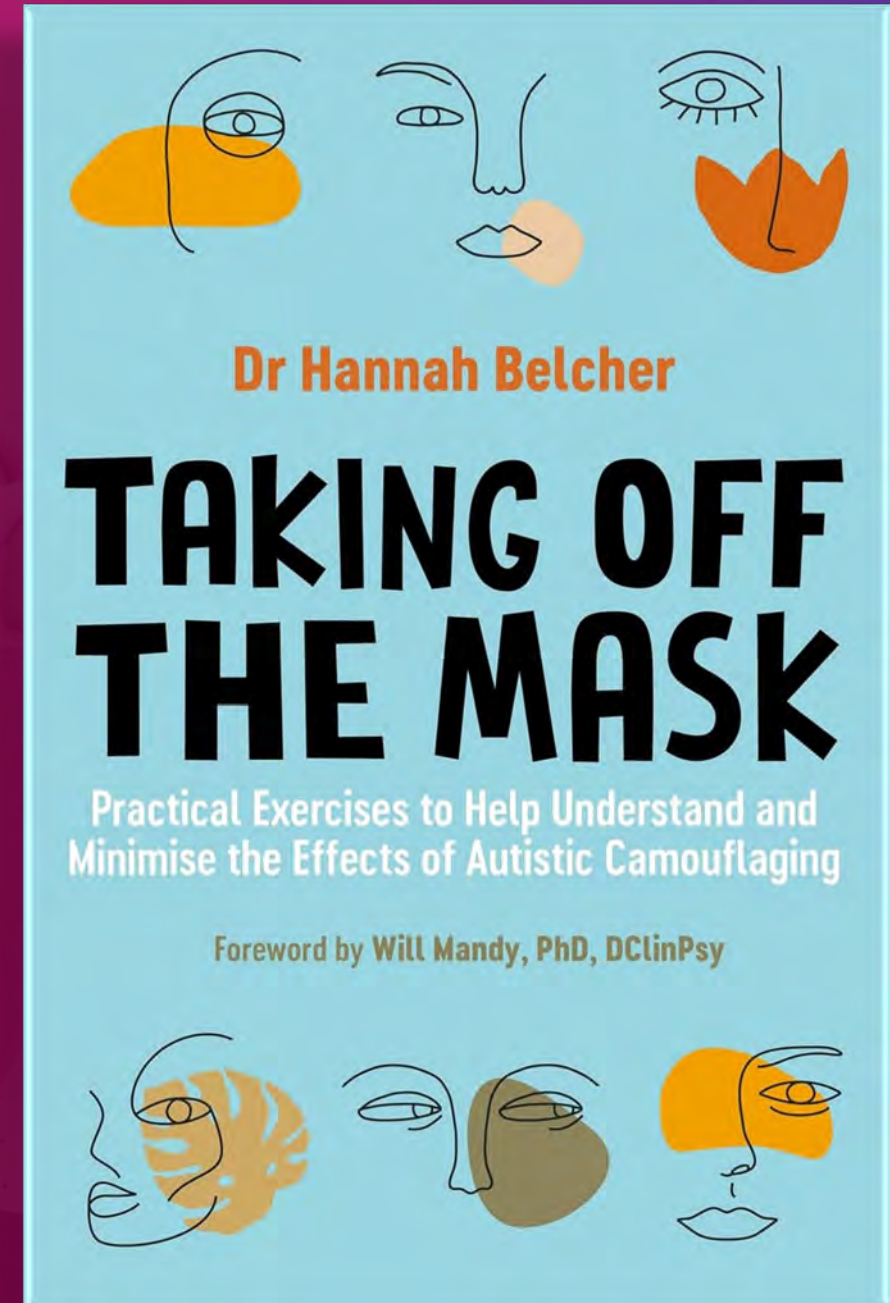
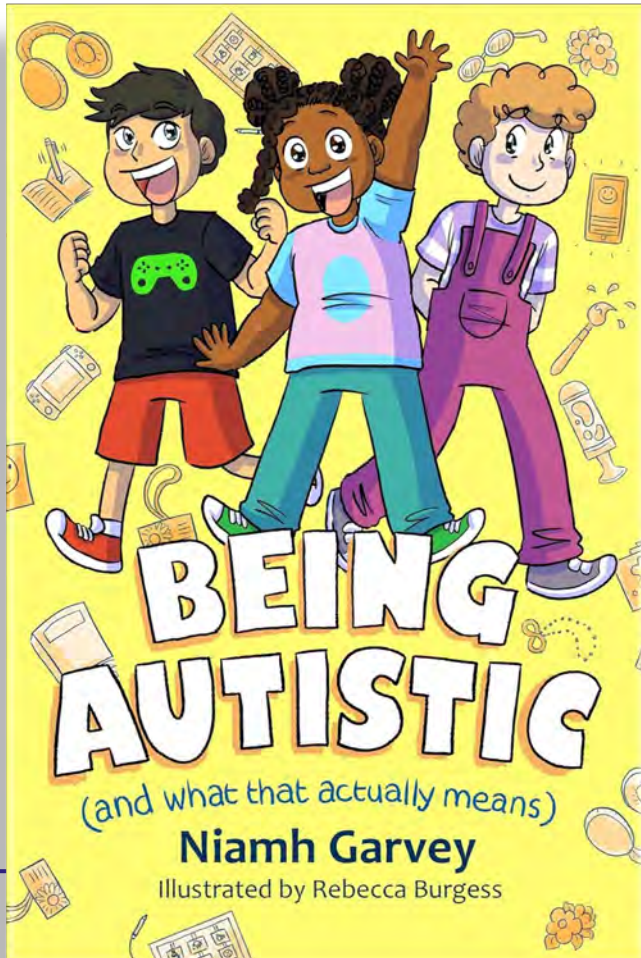


Write down and agree together the signs and times your child may be Masking

Share how you are both working on 'social adaptability' but acknowledge the effort that has on your child and what breaks and 'Mask free Zones' would benefit your child

Taking off the Mask: Practical Exercises to Help Understand and Minimise the Effects of Autistic Camouflaging

By Dr Hannah Belcher



When you
change the way
you look at
things, the
things you look
at change.

WAYNE DYER



Two thoughts to give your child
every day...

**WHAT MAKES
YOU DIFFERENT
IS WHAT MAKES YOU
BEAUTIFUL** 



Any Questions



Uncovering the Mask

Thank you for joining us today

