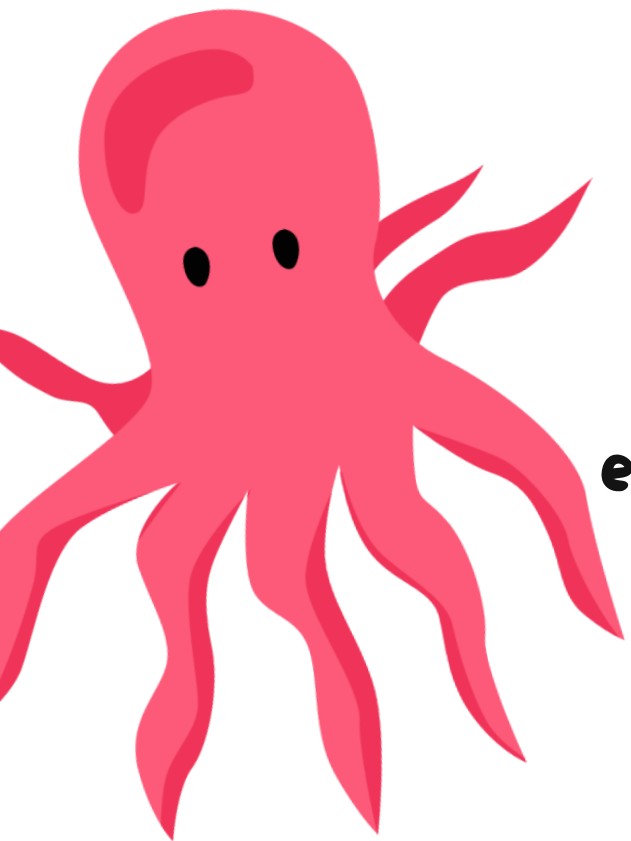


# AUTISM AND MASKING



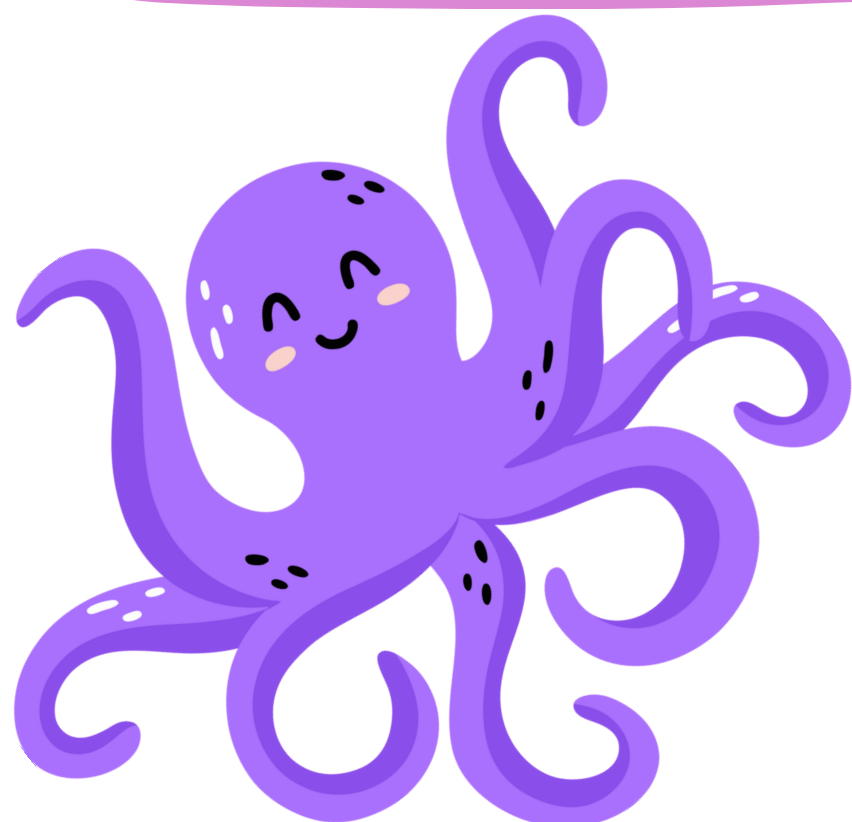
'Masking' or 'camouflaging' means to hide or disguise parts of oneself in order to better fit in with those around you. It is an unconscious strategy all humans develop whilst growing up in order to connect and form relationships with those around us.



However, for autistic people, the strategy is more unconscious and ingrained. Because we experience the world so differently to others, we often experience a greater pressure to hide the parts of ourselves that are deemed socially unacceptable and fit in with the societal norms and expectations that neurotypical people set. Especially as a teenager in high school, where our behaviours are examined by our neurotypical peers under a microscope, and we are at a point of our psycho-social development where fitting in is so important to us.



Masking can involve suppressing behaviours such as self-stimulating or soothing behaviours, and mimicking the behaviours of others around us, such as copying verbal and non-verbal behaviours and interests to better fit in with those around us and avoid the prejudice and judgement that comes with being different.



Masking however, can be extremely tiring and detrimental to our mental health. Constantly suppressing parts of ourselves, and being hyper-aware of who we're around and how we are expected to act, is incredibly draining. Constant masking can lead to burnout, and also lead to a lack of sense of self if we constantly mask rather than explore the things we actually like or want to do.

The best solution for reducing the need for autistic masking is awareness and acceptance. If the world was more understanding and accepting of autistic behaviours and thinking patterns, then autistic people may feel more comfortable being their authentic selves without feeling the need to mimic the behaviours of their allistic peers.

