

On Autistic Masking and Unmasking



On Autistic Masking

Image Description: Words forming the shape of a head from the side saying "Why do you always have to be so sensitive?" "Stop making such a fuss over nothing." "Control yourself." "Take a joke." "Stop moving." "You need thicker skin." "It's not that loud." "Calm down." "Try to fit in." "Look me in the eye." "Overdramatic." "Sit still." "Man up." "Relax." "You're no fun." "Quiet hands." "You're so quiet." "Chin up." "Grow a pair." "Stop talking so much." "Nobody will hire you." "Stop overthinking." "Use your words." "You won't last a second in the real world." "You can't do that in public." "Use your manners." "Ridiculous." "Tattletale." "Drama queen." "People will think you're crazy." "If you loved me, you would..."

Growing up [#Autistic](#), maybe especially for those not diagnosed or self-identified until adulthood, is a life of constantly being sent the message that "you're doing it

wrong.”

Doing what wrong? Just about everything. You’re too loud, or too quiet. Your posture is wrong. You express joy with too much enthusiasm. You have an “attitude” or are “talking back” if you try to understand. You’re too “sensitive.”

Gender stereotypes, which most autistic people reject, are used to shame autistic children: man up, drama queen, grow a pair, that’s not lady-like, etc.

[#Masking](#) happens as a survival tactic. Autistic people are left with an eternal struggle to find themselves under layers and layers of masks.

These masks, in time, become emotional scar tissue that leaves us with an infinite struggle to find ourselves beneath the injuries sustained daily to our identity as society remediates and normalizes the individuality out of us and conditions us to live in masked silence and compliance, afraid to advocate for ourselves for fear of the social repercussions.

Cheyenne Thornton discusses ABA therapy and tackles the claim that Black and Brown autistic children need compliance training because they are at increased risk of police violence. Read the article [here](#).

Special thanks to autistic illustrator [Kate Jones Illustration](#) for this amazing artwork and to Matthew Rushin and [The Autistic OT](#) for creative input on the messages society sends autistics from early childhood.



On Autistic Unmasking

Image description: Image is on a black background and features a silhouette of a nonbinary person with curly hair and is made of rainbow text. The title reads, "on autistic unmasking." the image reads: "Stim freely." "Just be you." "I love the way you think." "Your difference is beautiful." "You can love what you love as much as you like." "I'll help you with that." "Seek out joy." "You can say no." "Tell me about your special interests." "You don't have to sing it right." "You can take up space." "Communicate injustice." "Enjoy your space." "Delight in your passions." "You can rest." "You are the rite of movement." "Stim all you like." "Your sensory needs are valid." "Spend time where you thrive." "Access your community." "Be all of you." "You can change your mind as many times as you need." "I hear you." "Let me know if it's too much." "Learn your way and what works you." "I will respect your 'no'." "I believe you." "You deserve mercy." "You're right." "It's okay to cry." "Enjoy with gusto." "Show me what you need." "I'm sorry." "You can grow." "You have a right to communication."

"You can rebel." "Dance because it doesn't matter who's watching." "There's no wrong way to move." "You put so much thought into things." "I've got your back." "I love you as you are."

The first graphic is a silhouette made of the phrases autistic people hear all the time – from therapists, teachers, parents, friends, employers, and partners – that push autistic people into a life of [#Masking](#) and living inauthentically.

The above graphic depicts which phrases and words are more conducive to a life lived with authenticity and emotional resilience.

Yes, there will always be people who will reject what is different, who believe children should be seen and not heard, who think that "normal" means superior– and that is why we will always have traumatized people trying to push the status quo into a more accepting and inclusive way of existing.

Accommodating for [#autistics](#), [#ADHDers](#), and all marginalized groups makes the world a safer, healthier, more vibrant place for ALL people. All people would benefit from an existence that is more concerned with what works and what is True over what is "popular" or "normal."

This is what acceptance looks like.

Special thanks to the talented [Dissent By Design](#) for this beautiful art.

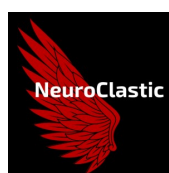


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