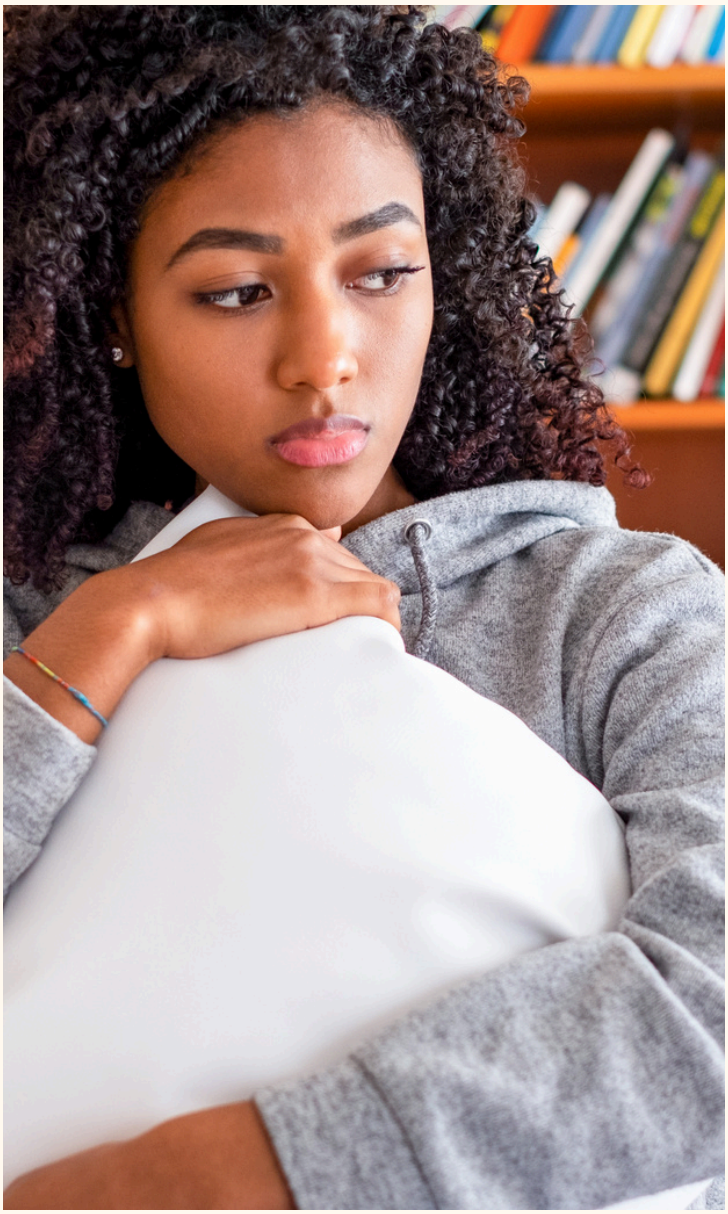
connections in mind

SUPPORTING STUDENTS TO SHOW UP AS THEMSELVES

Many students **"mask" in school, hiding confusion, copying others, or suppressing their needs to feel safe**. Masking is unconscious and exhausting. It uses up the same energy and executive function skills students need for learning. When we reduce the pressure to mask, we protect learning capacity.

This isn't about having no boundaries. It's about celebrating diversity in the human experience so pupils can meet expectations without sacrificing their wellbeing These tips can and should be used with all students regardless of diagnosis.



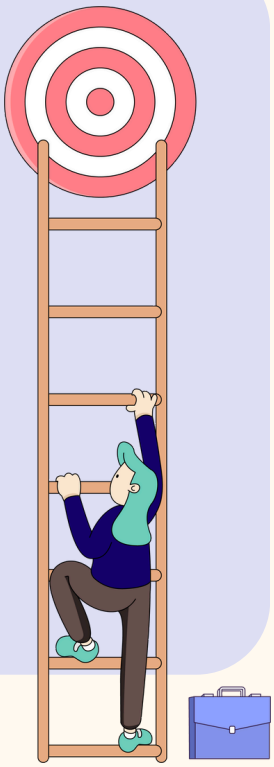
Red Flags a Pupil May Be Masking

Look for subtle indicators of internal strain:

- **Over-compliance or perfectionism** (doing everything "right," but with tension).
- **Always saying "I'm fine"** even when struggling or confused.
- **Quiet withdrawal or copying others** instead of showing their own ideas.

These pupils seem calm, but are working extremely hard to maintain it.

Use Language That Protects Energy for Learning



Small signals of **safety** reduce the pressure to mask:

- “You can do this in the way that works for you.”
- “Take your time, no rush.”
- “Tell me what would help your brain today.”

This frees up executive function capacity.



Small Adjustments That Reduce Masking Pressure

Simple **tweaks** help pupils feel safe enough to be themselves:

- Offer thinking time before expecting responses.
- Provide quieter, private options for asking for help.
- Normalise movement and sensory tools so pupils don’t have to hide their needs.
- These aren’t special allowances — they’re ways to ensure pupils have the energy and safety to learn.

connections in mind

VALIDATE DIFFERENT WAYS OF THINKING AND LEARNING



When pupils feel their thinking style is respected, they're less likely to mask. Try small affirmations like:

- "Your way makes sense."
- "Thank you for explaining your thinking."
- "There are lots of right ways to learn."

This helps pupils trust that it's safe to show their real selves.



Offer Communication Choices

Some pupils mask because speaking feels risky or overwhelming. **Offer alternatives:**

- Writing or drawing
- Using sentence starters
- Typing or using visuals

Communication choice removes the pressure to perform.

Build Predictability and Gentle Transitions

Predictability lowers nervous-system threat and reduces the need to mask. Simple supports include:

- Giving a heads-up before transitions
- Using visual steps or examples
- keeping routines clear and consistent

When pupils know what to expect, they can use their energy for learning - not scanning for danger.



A Final Note

Authenticity grows when pupils feel safe, understood, and un-judged.

Curiosity, rather than correction, helps us spot what a pupil might be carrying inside, even when they look calm.

Small relational moments, gentle language, and predictable routines create the conditions where pupils no longer feel they must mask to survive, and instead can learn, connect, and thrive as themselves.

Looking for more school resources, check out www. cim-brainhub.com