

Experiences of Autistic girls at SCHOOL



Despite their desire for social connections, Autistic girls may struggle to form and maintain friendships in a school setting.

Cook et al. (2018) conducted semi-structured interviews with eleven Autistic youth referred to as girls (ages 11-17) and their parent or guardian to share their experiences of bullying and friendship.

CHALLENGES AT SCHOOL:



Social isolation and peer rejection



Social confusion



Bullying



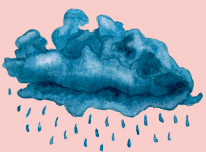
Instability in friend groups



Sensory sensitivity to daily stimuli

WHICH OFTEN LEAD TO...

STRESS + ANXIETY



Facing these social challenges on a regular basis can have a detrimental impact on one's emotional well-being.

This stress and anxiety can serve as an additional barrier, making it difficult to navigate and succeed in social environments.

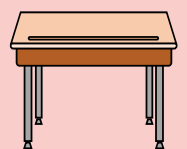
MASKING



Masking is a way that Autistic girls may cope with these challenges at school and can reduce peer victimization.

However, alongside increased stress and anxiety, masking can lead to outcomes such as a late Autism diagnosis (or misdiagnosis) and uncertainty of one's identity.

SCHOOL ABSENCE



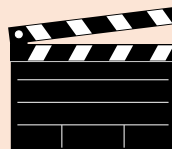
Dealing with the strain of masking, in addition to these social challenges, may discourage school-aged girls from attending school.

Regular school absence was described to cause conflicts and stress in their families.

MASKING CAN LOOK LIKE...



Memorizing social scripts



Acting like your peers



Concealing Autistic traits

FRIENDSHIP SUCCESS IN SCHOOL:

Autistic participants shared that some of their best friendships occurred with neurodivergent peers:

"Well they were kind of just free and didn't really care too much what other people thought, which is a lot like what I am."

Quote from Sophie, an Autistic participant, discussing her experiences with neurodivergent peers [1] (pg. 319).

These relationships provide social connection without the need to mask or normalize their so called 'odd' behaviours.

Derworiz, E., Gagnon, A., Kinsmen, M. Kapoor, S., Brown, H. M., 2023

[1] Cook, A., Ogden, J., & Winstone, N. (2018). Friendship motivations, challenges and the role of masking for girls with autism in contrasting school settings. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 33(3), 302–315.