

Sensory & Masking Considerations at Assessment

TL;DR · QUICK SUMMARY

- Masking during an assessment can unintentionally make traits less visible to the assessor.
- It's okay to ask for sensory accommodations, like dimmed lights or a quieter room.
- Letting some masking drop, even briefly, can help the assessment reflect you accurately.
- A good assessor will understand and account for this; you can ask how they do so.

A Note Before You Read On

This resource offers general guidance and reflects common experience, not professional, legal, medical or financial advice. It is not a substitute for employment law, HR policy, occupational health guidance, or individual professional assessment. Every person's experience of neurodivergence is different, so please adapt anything here to your own situation. The Uniquely Wired Network does not accept liability for decisions, actions or outcomes arising from the use of this material. If you need advice specific to your circumstances, please consult a qualified professional (e.g. HR, legal, medical, or financial advisor).

Why This Matters

Many people (particularly those who mask heavily) worry they'll "perform well" in an assessment and not be believed. Understanding this risk in advance can help you counter it.

What This Might Look Like

- Sitting up straight, making eye contact and answering fluently, despite feeling completely overwhelmed inside.
- Feeling anxious that you'll be "too articulate" to be taken seriously.

- Struggling with a bright, echoey clinic room without saying anything.

Managing Sensory Needs

- Ask in advance if the room can be adjusted: lighting, noise, seating.
- Bring items that help you regulate: headphones, sunglasses, a fidget item, a drink.
- Ask for breaks if you need them; most assessors expect this to come up.

Managing Masking

- Mention explicitly that you mask, and how, if you're aware of it; this is valuable information for the assessor.
- Try to let go of “performing well”; the goal is an accurate picture, not a good impression.
- If you notice yourself masking mid-appointment, it's okay to name it: “I think I'm masking right now.”
- A trained assessor should ask about masking directly, especially for late-identified adults.

Helpful Phrases You Can Borrow

You don't have to use these exact words. Take what fits and leave the rest.

“I mask quite heavily, especially in situations like this. I might come across as more comfortable than I actually feel.”

“Would it be possible to dim the lights slightly, or take this somewhere quieter?”

Quick Tips

- Masking isn't lying; it's a learned survival strategy, and assessors should understand this.
- You're allowed to ask about the assessor's experience with masked or late-identified presentations.
- Bring sensory comfort items without needing to justify them.
- It's fine to feel exhausted after; this is a genuinely demanding appointment.
- If something feels dismissive during the assessment, you can say so or seek a second opinion.

- Trust your own account of your internal experience, even if it doesn't "show" outwardly.

Want to Know More?

- See our companion guide: "Signs of Neurodivergence in Adults (Including Masking)."
- Some clinics specialise in assessing masked or "high-masking" presentations; it's reasonable to ask about this when choosing a provider.

Before You Go

The fact that you've learned to cope well doesn't make your experience less real. A good assessment should see past the mask, not be fooled by it, and you're allowed to help it do that.