

Challenge: Mental Health Unmasked

What Is Masking?

In relation to mental health, masking is a process by which an individual changes or “masks” their true feelings to conform to social pressures or to shield themselves from inspection. A simple example of this might be smiling on the outside, whilst inside feeling very sad.

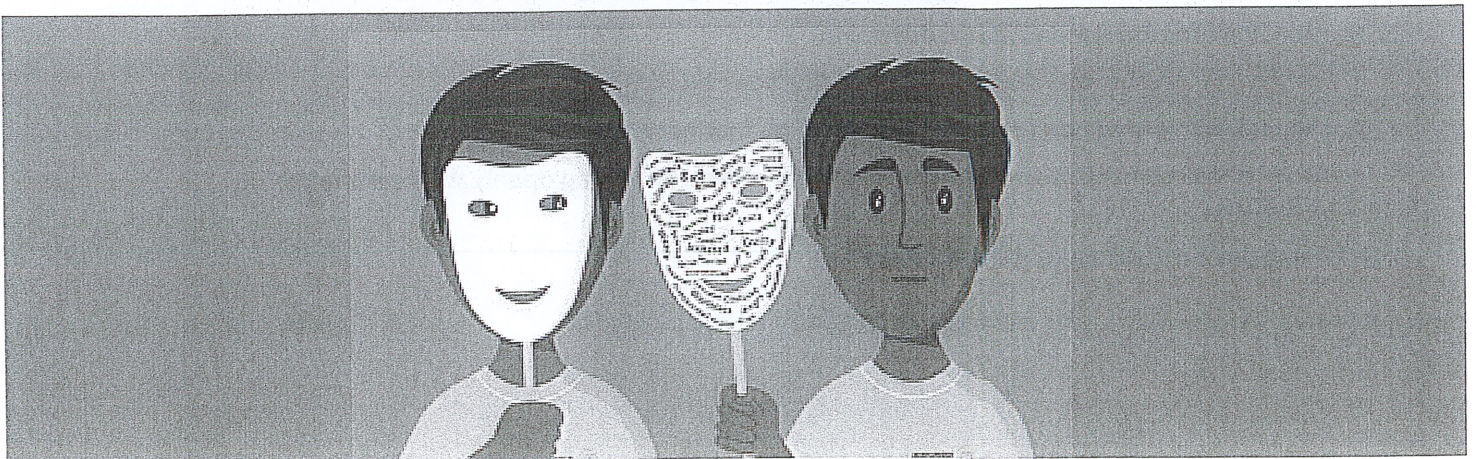
People mask their mental health for many reasons, including fear of discrimination, rejection and/or judgement caused by the stigma associated with mental ill-health. However, masking one’s struggles with mental health is more likely to exacerbate any problems the individual is experiencing and can therefore significantly damage wellbeing if masked for long periods of time.

The Mental Health Unmasked Challenge

The Everymind at Work Mental Health Unmasked Challenge is designed to make everyone think about what they might be masking in relation to their mental health. It is a tool to aid self-reflection and examine how we present ourselves externally versus how we feel internally. The mask represents the persona you display to others, but this activity aims to help you uncover what it is you may be hiding...what is truly behind the mask.

To do this challenge, you need to consider what emotions, thoughts or behaviours you may hide from other people. Here are some examples:

- **Emotions:** a strong feeling deriving from one’s circumstances, mood, or relationships with others. Examples of emotions that one might hide, include fear, guilt and anxiety.
- **Thoughts:** the act or process of thinking about an idea, plan, opinion or picture etc. Examples of thoughts that one might hide, include “I am not good enough”, “I am weak” and “It’s all my fault”.
- **Behaviours:** the way in which one acts or reacts in their environment. Examples of behaviours that one might hide, include addictions, aggression and negative self-talk.



Removing The Mask

Once you have identified what is hiding behind your mask, you can think about why you hide these things from other people and consider the toll it is having on your overall wellbeing. You can then establish proactive measures to help remove the mask and be yourself around your friends, family and colleagues.

Self-Reflection: Questions to Consider

Once you have identified the emotions, thoughts and behaviours that you hide from others, it is important to take a moment to reflect on what you have discovered. You might want to journal how you are feeling, using the following questions as prompts:

- Did you previously know you were hiding these things?
- When was the last time you were truly yourself in front of others?
- How did they react? Were they accepting?
- Who are you most yourself around?
- Are there certain people who you wear your mask more around?
- Why do you hide these things? What is it you are afraid of?

Proactive Measures to Remove The Mask

It can be hard to know where to start when it comes to removing the mask that you may have been wearing for long periods of time. Here are some ideas of things you can do to slowly peel back the mask and learn to be true to yourself again:

- Accept you are enough
- Share your pain with others
- Build your self-awareness through activities such as journaling and mindfulness practice
- Don't be afraid to let your guard down
- When a vulnerable moment approaches, don't put on your mask
- Accept that you can deal with the outcome, no matter what
- Remind yourself that masking enhances the problem, so talking openly will improve the situation
- Seek professional support if necessary

Unmasking YOUR Mental Health

1. Using the template below, or by creating your own, cut out a physical mask.
2. On the inside of the mask, write down any emotions, thoughts or behaviours that you typically hide from other people. Take your time with this step.
3. Take a moment to think about why you hide these from other people and consider the toll it is having on your overall wellbeing.
4. Decide which proactive measures you will take to remove the mask and be yourself around your friends, family and colleagues. Note down your plans for both the short and long-term.

