

Lesson Plan 2: Understanding Masking & Sensory Experiences (Neuro-Affirming)

Theme: *Steadying the Storm – Exploring Autism, Masking & Neurodiversity*

Duration: 60 minutes

Age Group: Upper KS2

Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson, pupils will be able to:

- **Explain what neurodiversity means** and recognise that all brains think and feel in different ways.
- **Understand the concept of masking** in a simple, child friendly way.
- **Show empathy** for autistic experiences and understand why it's important to feel like to you be yourself.
- **Identify ways to create a classroom where everyone feels comfortable being themselves.**

Resources

- The poem verse (printed or displayed).
- A3 paper each
- Colouring pens or pencils

Starter Activity

Recap: **All Brains Are Different – Talk to your partner, then feed back**

Ask pupils:

- *“What are some ways people can be different on the outside?”*
- *“What about the inside — how we think, feel, learn or communicate?”*
- *What is Masking?*
- *What does Neurodiversity mean?*

Recap:

- Neurodiversity means all brains work differently, and that's normal and wonderful.
- Autism is one way a brain can work — not wrong, just different.
- Masking means pretending to feel OK or trying to hide your natural feelings or reactions.

Main Learning Session – Whole Class Discussion

Read the Poem Verse

Read the poem aloud slowly, or have volunteers read parts:

When noises grow too loud
 or the world feels too fast,
 I reach for the strategies
 that help calm things at last.
“I grab a fidget to settle my hands...”
“...or sit in a corner when I need to land.”
“Sometimes I watch calming videos instead,

*or drink water,
or think of nice thoughts in my head.”*

These aren’t escapes — they’re tools that I use
To steady the storm
and help me regroup.

Discussion: What are Sensory Differences?

Ask:

- *What are our senses?*
- *How are the sensory experiences being described in the verse?*
- *When their senses feel overwhelmed what helps them? (can you suggest any other things that might help?)*

Examples:

- Offer quiet spaces.
- Let people take movement breaks.
- Don’t force eye contact.
- Let people use fidgets if they help focus.
- Celebrate special interests.
- Use kind language about differences.

Take the classroom environment and consider what might cause sensory overload.

Examples:

- Bright lights
- Loud sounds
- Scratchy clothing
- Canteen smells

Everyone has sensory preferences. Autistic people may feel these more strongly — and that’s part of how their brain works.

Independent/Group Learning: Building a Neuro-Affirming Classroom

Give pupils a sheet of paper

Consider - What can we do to help everyone feel safe being themselves in our classroom?
Design with a partner or in a small group a Neuro-Affirming Classroom – use the example previously discussed and any new ideas they have.

Plenary

Revisit the two poem verses.

Ask:

- *“What message do you think the poem is giving us?”*
- *“How can we make sure no one feels they need to hide who they are?”*

Emphasise: Being yourself is safe, welcome, and valued here.

Share their classroom designs.



Teacher Notes (Important)

- Avoid deficit language (e.g., “symptoms,” “disorder,” “normal/not normal”).
- Ensure no child is pressured to self-identify as autistic.
- Focus on empathy, acceptance, and celebrating diverse brains.
- Use identity-affirming phrases like “autistic person” only if that matches your school’s preference; many autistic people prefer identity-first language.