



The NOODLE

Open up and say AHHHH!!!



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Welcome to the September, 2024 edition of *The Noodle*, written and published by members of The Florida Youth Council! For this issue of *The Noodle*, members of the FYC wrote about “masking” our disabilities. We hope you enjoy learning about our experiences and our thoughts and opinions in this edition of *The Noodle*!

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From The Advisors' Desk





The Drawbacks of Masking

by Viv Banks



Socialization is a huge aspect of society. Notably, everybody has experienced a time when they met someone new. However, it could be possible that the other person is masking: the act of hiding one's disability. Although masking can be beneficial in some situations, it can have major drawbacks.

First, masking allows someone to fit in for the wrong reasons. In other words, masking can weaken the disability movement: the right to be seen as equal. By masking, it causes non-disabled peers to believe, 'Why can't you mask all of the time?' Therefore, masking creates an expectation that disabled individuals should act 'normal.' Additionally, this contributes to the erasure of those living with disabilities.

Secondly, masking causes long-term problems, including self-hate. Furthermore, it can turn into a vicious cycle of appeasing others. For instance, it can make somebody overthink the aspects of a conversation. Particularly, autistic individuals tend to have a special interest, a passion for a specific topic. If someone with autism is masking, they will be worried about oversharing their special interest. For example, if somebody has a special interest in cats, they will hesitate to discuss their interest. Without a doubt, masking can discourage someone from being authentic.

Masking causes negative effects for the disability community. Although masking can indeed make someone appear 'normal,' it should be used sparingly. But regardless of whether someone has a disability or not, people are judged daily. It's important to remember that everyone is human. Nobody is perfect. Therefore, it's unjust to resent someone with differences. At the same time, being open-minded can influence one's societal views.



To Mask or not to Mask

by JJ Humphrey

Masking is where one hides their disability or feelings. There are both pros and cons to masking. As a person with hidden disabilities it is easy for me to do both. When I was younger I masked often. But as I get older, I do it less or not at all.

When I was younger, having dyslexia made reading very difficult. I didn't want my peers to know I was struggling with reading. This made cold reads at the theatre a big challenge. Some directors wouldn't accommodate my disability, and sometimes I was too embarrassed to tell them I had dyslexia. I masked my disability by quickly memorizing the lines and holding the script as if I was reading it. I never told my peers I was autistic until 2020 when I started talking about it and decided to become an advocate. Much of my youth was spent "faking it to make it." I didn't share feelings such as frustration or anxiety. I didn't share that I didn't understand the jokes or sarcasm. Or that I had to take time to think if someone was being literal or figuratively speaking. Now that I'm older and more mature, I'm able to advocate for myself. I don't need to mask. I don't want to mask. I'm confident just being me.





To Mask, or Not to Mask, That is the Question

by Serena Wetmore

Have you ever tried to hide your disability from non-disabled people? This is called masking. Some people are able to do it quite easily. For others it is more difficult or even impossible. Those of us with physical disabilities cannot really accomplish it.

You might think I would say that masking is always a bad thing, but I do not actually think that. In some cases, it can be bad. For example, if you do it too often, people might not offer you the assistance you need for a job or school. In other cases, it might be more advantageous to mask. Some situations where it might be helpful are initial contact with people you want to get to know. Once they know you, and you are more comfortable with them, it might be more appropriate to reveal information about your disability.



The real challenge is deciding when to mask and when not to mask. If you are a client or a patient in a professional setting, hiding your disability is probably not a good move. It would be extremely difficult to accomplish your goals if you aren't open and honest. On the other hand, if you are a professional, such as a doctor, therapist, lawyer, customer service professional or in any business that works with people, keeping your own disabilities private is more appropriate.

Probably the best way to think of this is what is personal private information. Is it essential to reveal or not essential to reveal? Clearly this will be a personal decision for each of us in every situation we encounter, so just think about what the reason is to disclose. That should give you the answer.



Why Masking is not Beneficial?

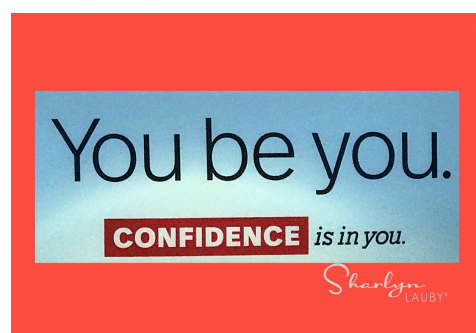
by Jakel Baker

Is masking bad? I believe it is 100%. Let me tell you why. In the Florida Youth Council, we talk a lot about being real to yourself and mental health. However, in society there is this pressure to act in a certain way. To try to fit in or impress people who don't really care about you. From my experience, pretending to be someone else just adds more stress. It's way better to be yourself and find people who accept you for who you really are. Masking can make you come off fake, causes you to chase the wrong crowd, and being real shows who you are! Personally, for me it can be hard to do this because of how nervous I can get, but when you do find the people who care about you don't let go of them easily.

When you're masking, you're basically hiding your true self. You spend so much time pretending to be what other people want, and it's exhausting. I tried it all through middle and high school, and honestly, it just left me feeling empty. Instead of embracing who I am, I was stuck trying to be someone I'm not, and it wasn't worth it, so I tried just being to myself and personally that helped me. If you're out here trying to impress people who don't even care about you, you're playing yourself. Masking to fit into someone else's standards is pointless. If others can't accept the real you, then they aren't the people you should be hanging with. It's so much better to be around people who care about who you really are.

One thing I've learned from being part of the Florida Youth Council is that when you're yourself, you attract real friends. Masking keeps you stuck in bad relationships. The moment you start being yourself, you find the people who genuinely have your back, and that's when the real connections happen.

Masking might seem like the easy way out, but it's not. In the long run, it's draining and harmful. I've learned that being yourself is the only way to find people who truly accept and love you. At the Florida Youth Council, we're all about keeping it real because that's how you start really living your life.





Is Masking Good or Bad?

by Morgan Griffin

I believe that masking a disability can be beneficial. Masking your disability can be a good thing if it can help you fit in with others. Sometimes we want to come off as someone who is “normal.” The trouble with this behavior is usually “masking” can only work for a specific time period. Eventually you will be forced to be yourself.

As people we have to understand that even those of us who have the same disability are the same but only medically. We differ physically, emotionally and mentally. We are different people after all.

It’s also harder to mask when you have a physical disability vs an “invisible” disability. When you have a physical disability people can see it right away. When you have an invisible disability you have to grant others the privilege of learning about your who you are. This sometimes creates a bit of a war between disabilities. However, it’s good to remember overall we are people with disabilities. Whether we chose to mask or not we can all still encourage each other. Masking or not be who you want to be!





What I Don't See You Don't See Either

by Josue Tapia

Disabilities come in all shapes and sizes. Its something that doesn't care about your culture, or social and financial status. To be part of a community that has so many ideologies of what independence means to them to what being a man in America is? This is one of the scariest facts of life to walk. Now, try doing it while you're blind.



Being blind or visually impaired isn't the end of the world, honestly. Yes, certain wonders are missed, but I can truly say I feel like I miss less because I'm forced to pay attention more.

I'll paint the picture for you. I, as an adult, have to research and memorize menus of the places I want to visit before I go on a date. Not because I'm afraid to ask for help, but because what I want you to notice about me when we first meet is me, not the inability to read the menu myself. It may seem small to the average person, but to me it means the world. It's one step closer to feeling in control of my disability.

The term "masking" is used in our community to hide our shortcomings through all factors of our daily lives. It's something we try hard at every day to make sure we believe we are just like everyone else.



How Do I Become Part of The Florida Youth Council?

The Florida Youth Council is a group of youth (between the ages of 15 and 17) and emerging leaders (between the ages of 18 and 30) with disabilities or special health care needs that live in Florida.

The Florida Youth Council is all about getting youth and emerging leaders involved in self-advocacy, peer mentoring, and other activities that will improve the quality of life for youth and emerging leaders with disabilities in Florida. The program empowers youth and emerging leaders to decide what issues are important to their generation, to discuss those issues in their state and local communities, and to develop strategies to address them.

We are seeking a group of enthusiastic, motivated youth and emerging leaders to participate. If you would like to take a leadership role in advocating for youth and emerging leaders in Florida, please visit The Florida Youth Council website at FloridaYouthCouncil.com. The program is open to application year round.

We hope to hear from you soon!



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