Hellingly School SEND Newsletter

Term 4

The Newsletter this term is all about **Autism Masking**

What does Autism masking or camouflaging mean?

A poem written by a parent taken from the website MyMind.

She seems alright to me

A Christmas concert, the music loud,
the children are happy the parents are proud,
I look at my daughter, stood there with her friends,
I can see in her eyes she hopes it will end,
I report to her teacher what I can see,
her reply is, "She seems alright to me!"

Coffee with friends at the local ball place,
anxiety I see in my daughter's face,
their children play, mine sits by my side,
until pressured by my friend to go on the slide,
fear in her face I can plainly see,
my friends reply, "She seems alright to me!"

A day at the zoo, grandparents in tow,
my daughter had really not wanted to go,
too much unknown, her anxiety high,
but she knows she must come, she knows she must try,
I know how hard for her all this will be,
her grandparents reply "She seems alright to me!"

I collect her from school, she looks tired and down,
as soon as we're home my smile turns to a frown,
as the melt down begins, my heart breaks in two,
I hug her and calm her, what else can I do?
next day I tell school of the problem we see
their standard reply "She seems alright to me!"

The act she puts on will take its toll,
her mental health strains under this role,
her energy burned out, her days are so tough,
the safety of home can't come quick enough,
so when a parent tells you what they can see,
please don't say "She seems alright to me!"

When you wear a mask you hide your actual face - the person you are - and often you take on the persona of the new face you are wearing.

When children wear a lion mask they roar - even if their usual personality is a shy one.

It is because when you are wearing a mask things can be easier….and it can also help you to fit in with others around you.

Autism masking, also known as Autism camouflaging, follows the same lines…..

Masking is a word used to describe something seen in many children with ASD - when they learn, practice, and perform certain behaviours and suppress others in order to be more like the people around them.

This is a common situation for children in schools who mask when they are in the classroom, meaning teachers do not see anything that would lead them to believe the child is autistic, but at home they can drop the mask and parents and carers notice behaviours not seen in school....

(The Autism Service February 2021)

- Masking is more common in girls, although many boys also present with this behaviour.
- Children feel safest at home with their parents, so it makes sense that they feel more able to release their anxieties at home.
- Many parents describe how their child is like a "shaken up coke bottle" when they return home from school.

What can we do to support?

- Listen to the parents about the behaviours being presented at home and concerns the children maybe expressing when at home about school
- Keep things as structured and predictable as possible e.g consistent use of the class visual timetable (please don't underestimate how important this can be for many children)
- Use visuals to support instructions (Communicate in Print is perfect for this)
- Avoid using non-literal language
- Give prior warning to any changes

- Regular check ins. The child may not have the confidence to ask for help. A regular check in at the start of a session can alleviate this anxiety or a simple card they can turn over to signal for help.
- Sensory breaks through the day - It can sometimes be helpful for children who mask to have sensory breaks throughout their school day, so they aren't so overwhelmed when they come home.
- Introduce children to The Zones of Regulation (We will be looking at this on the INSET day 1.4.21.)