

[Type here]



Unmasking In Friendship: Making Friends as Your Authentic Self as an Adult With ADHD

Caroline Maguire ([00:03](#)):

Hello, And welcome to TADD Talks with ADDA. I'm Caroline Maguire and I'm here to talk about unmasking friendship. I'm joining you from Concord, Massachusetts, and I'm excited ADDA invited me to speak today and about this topic. Over the past few years, adults with ADHD have come together in communities online, and we've become to realize that over time we learned to fit in to be chameleon rather than finding our people and making friends as our authentic selves. We were asked to mask, we were asked to hide our preferences and our needs and our neurodivergent traits. We didn't want to make waves or maybe we just didn't want to say we didn't understand a joke or that we didn't want to say no, because friendship is tough for us, and we didn't feel like we could say no, or we could ask people for certain things. And here's the truth. As an adult with ADHD or AUDHD, chances are you felt this way.

Caroline Maguire ([01:04](#)):

If you mask to navigate relationships or to get through the day, it's completely understandable. And in the back of our minds, there was always this question, how do I make friends as myself? How do I show people who I really am? How do I enjoy myself or stop masking because I've masked for so long. Over the past three years, I have been doing a lot of thinking about masking. I've been doing research, I've been talking to ADHD and AUDHD adults. I've been talking to my clients who also have been recovering from masking. I've been writing my next book, Friendship Skills for Neurodivergent Adults. And as I did this, I came to see that we cannot talk about friendship and ADHD talking about masking. To make this less overwhelming, I'm going to talk about one aspect of the unmasking process. And then in my book that comes out next spring, I will have an entire chapter on this, but I want to talk about this.

Caroline Maguire ([02:08](#)):

I want to talk about what masking really is. First and foremost, masking is more than just being polite. It's not really being flexible. It's the process of suppressing parts of yourself to avoid judgment, because you want to make other people more comfortable. Masking means hiding camouflaging, and pushing down those neurodivergent ADHD Traits. When you speak of masking, I generally mean that suppression to your own physical and mental detriment. And if you've done this for years, it's really hard sometime to understand where the mask ends and where you begin. It usually starts in childhood. People told us to stop fidgeting, be quieter,

[Type here]



Caroline Maguire ([02:56](#)):

To act Normal. And maybe you tried to do that. Maybe you adapted, maybe you were trying to make sure that you receive less criticism. But here's the thing, masking costs us. There's real mental health effects. And then you don't really know who you are because you've been shape shifting. You've been a chameleon for so long, and you're adjusting to match your surroundings. And that leaves everyone wondering who the real you is and not knowing yourself, not knowing what makes you have fun. What are your preferences? Is the hidden cost of masking. And to me, it's all about choice. Making friends while trying to maybe work on things and be a friend who is able to connect with people really can mean shedding this mask. But first, you have to know your values, your preferences, your needs. What situations do you tend to mask in? Where do you feel safe?

Caroline Maguire ([04:04](#)):

Part of the unmasking process might be a longer journey where you explore your values, your beliefs, values are like a flashlight. They tell you who you are and they can be followed in your daily choices so that you can figure out what do I want? And the biggest thing about this journey that I've uncovered is it begins with small steps. Unmasking on some level means knowing your needs and being able to express them to make friends as your authentic self and and my authentic self. I mean your true self, your feelings, your beliefs, your thoughts, your values, not values and beliefs you have because of societal expectations and pressures, but ones that are your core, your unique traits, your experiences, your strengths, your humor, and your best self. And by knowing that you can make choices, we all want to belong. We don't wanna fit in.

Caroline Maguire ([05:06](#)):

Emotional connection is that magic spark of mutual interest and energy and compatibility with people. That deep connection, unmasking is a vulnerable thing and it is a process. And one of the things that I have really uncovered is that you have to do it in a place of support and safety. There are different levels of friendship and there are different levels of support. And not every environment is going to work for you or make you feel that you are safe. So here's my first step. Identify where you feel safe, where you feel supported. Maybe it's a community, maybe it's at ADDA, pick places and environments to unmask where you feel safe and surrounded by people who get you and will not ask you to suppress your neurodivergent traits. The other thing is have a date with yourself. See what's fun for you. What are your preferences? Where do you want to engage in friendship?

Caroline Maguire ([06:15](#)):

What kind of friend are you? And then share those realizations with those safe people in that safe community. And then finally, start small. This is a journey. This is a process, and when we think about large sweeping actions, it feels so overwhelming. Pick small ways to unmask showing your enthusiasm for something, wearing clothes that you like rather than mimicking others, going into fandoms and

[Type here]



spaces with special interests that support you where you can see signs of approval and you can feel that you can really display and express who you really are. This is a journey and it takes time. And part of what the gift of unmasking is, is that you're going to be able to really connect to people in an authentic way. When we're masked, we're not able to connect as much because people don't get to know the real you, and they don't get to know your real struggles, and they don't really get to connect with you as well.

Caroline Maguire ([07:26](#)):

That's sort of the part of the downside, and the more that we are able to show our true selves, the more we're likely to find our people and to find that belonging. One of my biggest suggestions is to start. ADDA has so many support groups and places where I bet you could feel really, really supported. I am so glad you joined me today on this talk about unmasking friendship. This is just a tiny bit of the journey, but I hope this helps get you started and that you are able to find the kind of belonging that you deserve because I know you can. My gift to you today is a piece of that unmasking process to look at your own vulnerability. So please engage in this journey. It really is worth it. I know it's scary. I'm glad you joined me today for this talk on unmasking friendship and drop me a dm. I'd love to know how things went. Thank you.