

Behind the Mask



A workshop for parents and carers on supporting children who mask at school

What is masking?

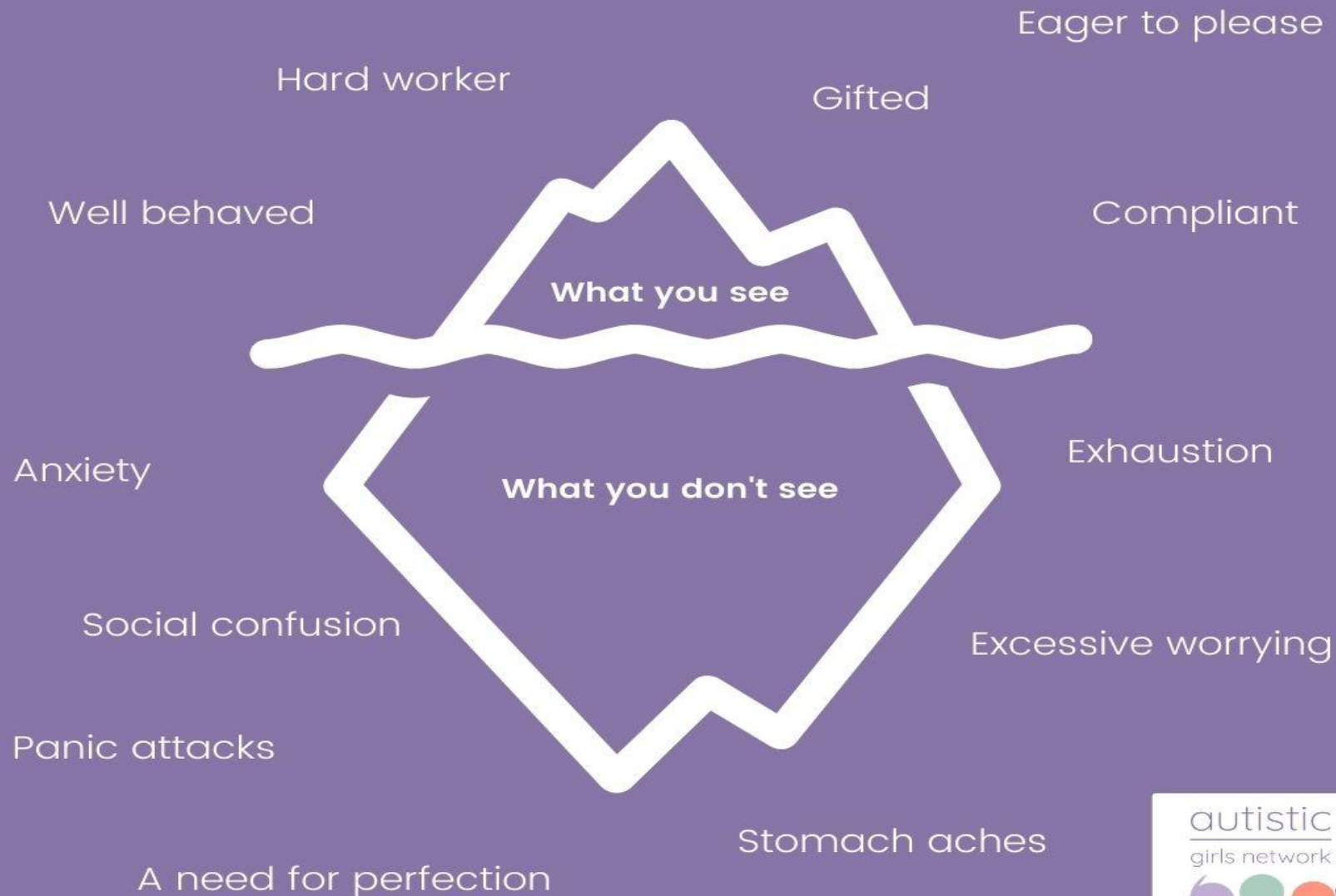
The Autism Service

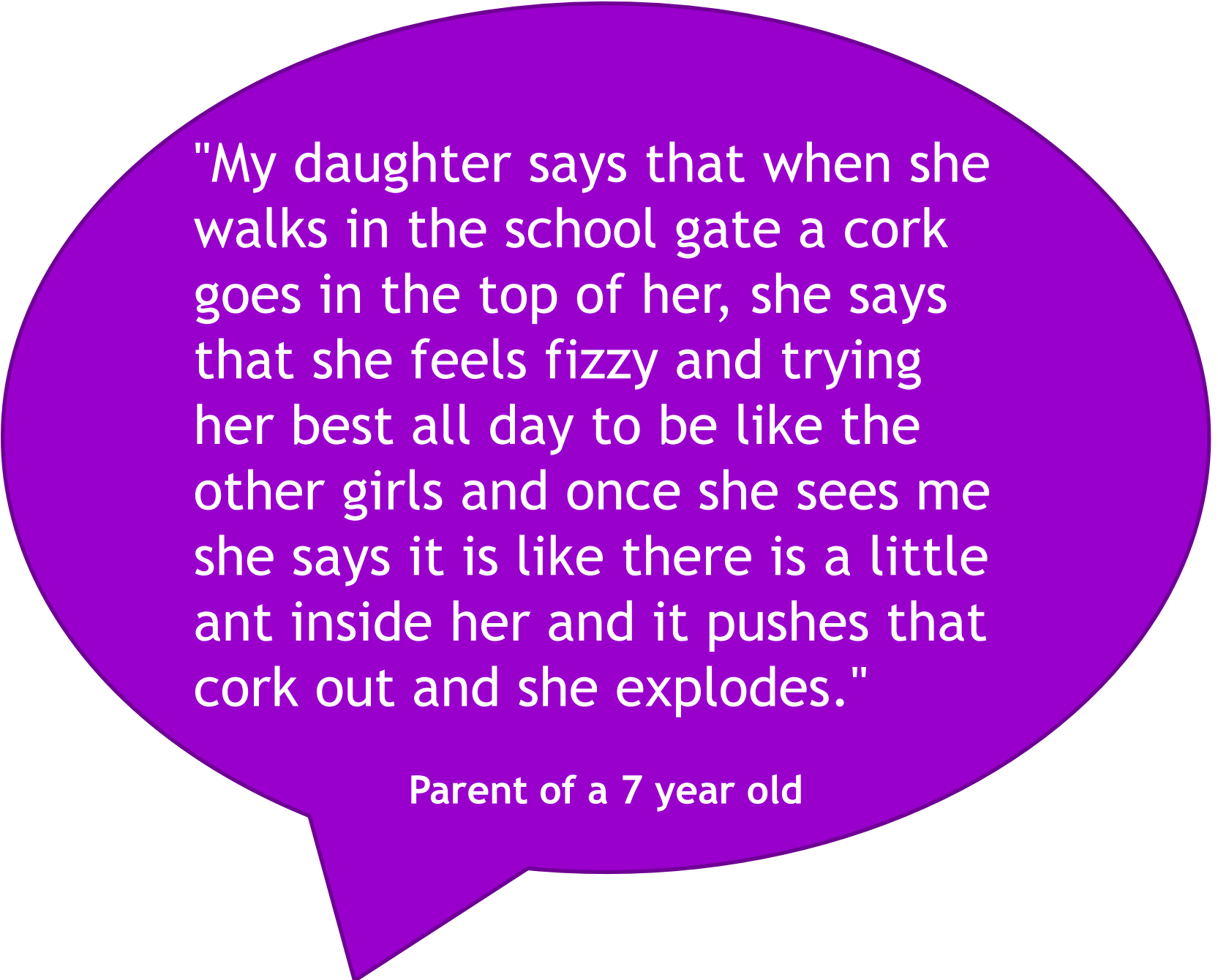
Masking refers to an individual's ability to hide their ASD symptoms to effectively blend in with society.

When a person camouflages their natural behaviour, they make an explicit effort to mask their autistic traits to fit in.

For Autistic people masking can often lead to feelings of confusion particularly around their identity and personality. Masking can cause them to feel anxious, depressed, and have low self-esteem and confidence.

Autistic Masking at School

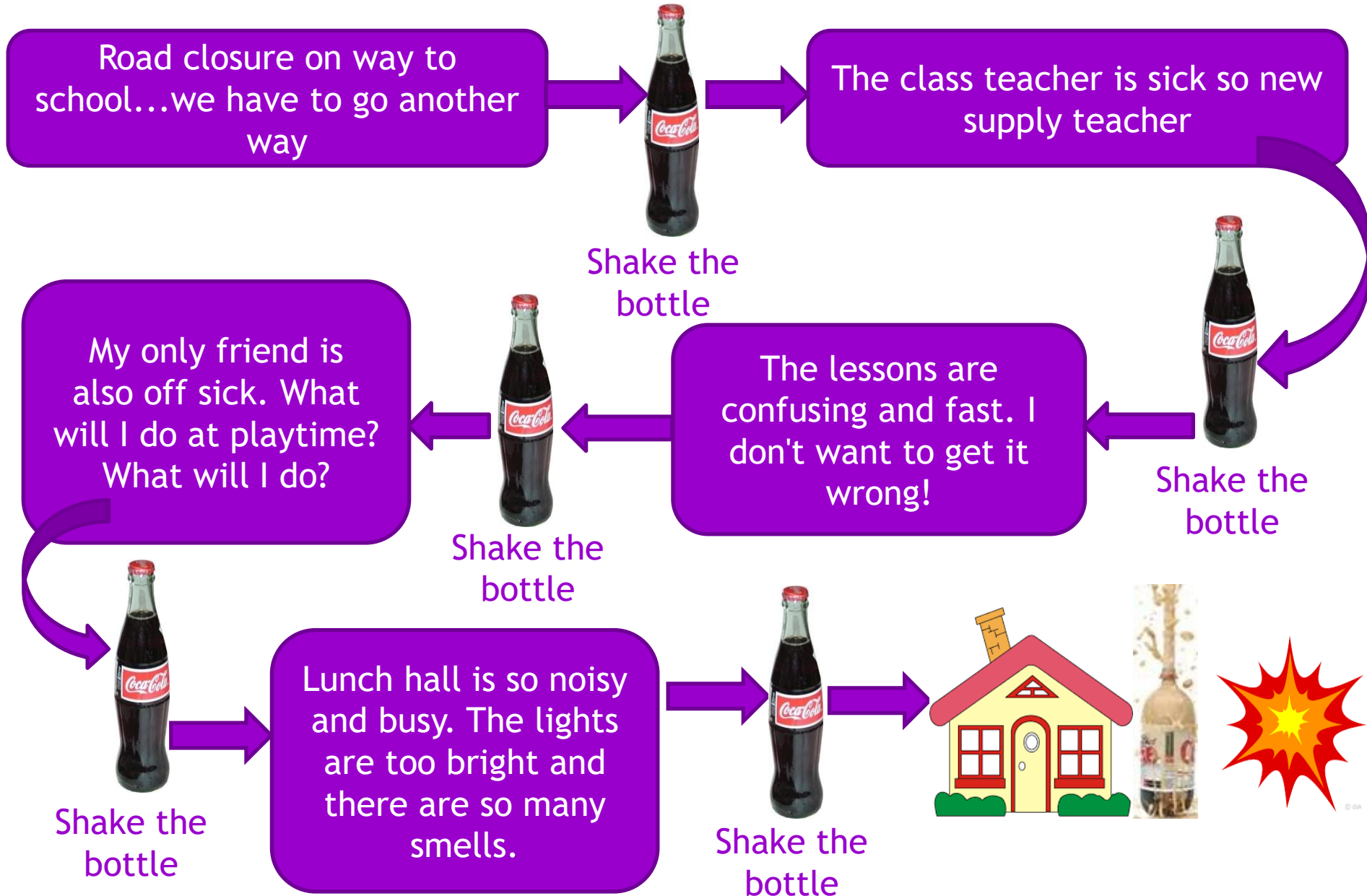




"My daughter says that when she walks in the school gate a cork goes in the top of her, she says that she feels fizzy and trying her best all day to be like the other girls and once she sees me she says it is like there is a little ant inside her and it pushes that cork out and she explodes."

Parent of a 7 year old

Coke Bottle Effect...



What's worked at school from parent carers...

"My daughter is now at junior school. They listen to me and want to help, they ask my advice and also give me theirs. It is a team effort of them and me to get it right for my daughter."

"If my daughter is really struggling one morning, I only have to email one word, which we have chosen, so they know she will be late. It removes the pressure to get her there, and since this has been set up, we get there every day as it is not so pressured."

"My daughter's school have put lots of strategies in place - Sensory circuits, brain breaks, ear defenders, a den at lunchtime which is a space that children with her struggles can go, so not to be overwhelmed by the playground."

"A teacher at my daughters Primary School provided a 'homely' safe space where children could do craft activities and get support for when they were struggling. The lady never judged parents but tried to understand how to support the child"

Ways you can support your child who is masking at school...

Decompress



Following the school day many children who mask will be burnt out from things like sensory and social overload.

Finding ways to support your child to decompress can really help to reduce meltdowns and support them to regulate.

Ways to support your child decompress

Have a simple and consistent routine after school

Prepare them in advance for any changes to the after school routine where possible

An expected snack that you know they like - this is particularly important if you have a child who eats little at school

Create peace and quiet allow and respect alone time if they need it

Allow time for moving around - jumping, running etc

Screen time - many children need this to decompress

Routine -regular club can be useful on a certain day- pizza night



What else can help...



Using a Worry Monster - this can be really useful for children to communicate their worries. They can write down their worries and the monster 'eats' them up.


Sensory activities - bouncy gym balls, trampolines

Dens - small tents or blankets draped with fairy lights

Weighted blankets or toys

Toys to chew or fiddle with

Find social groups where children can meet with other autistic children - finding their tribe can be so helpful in helping them feel less isolated

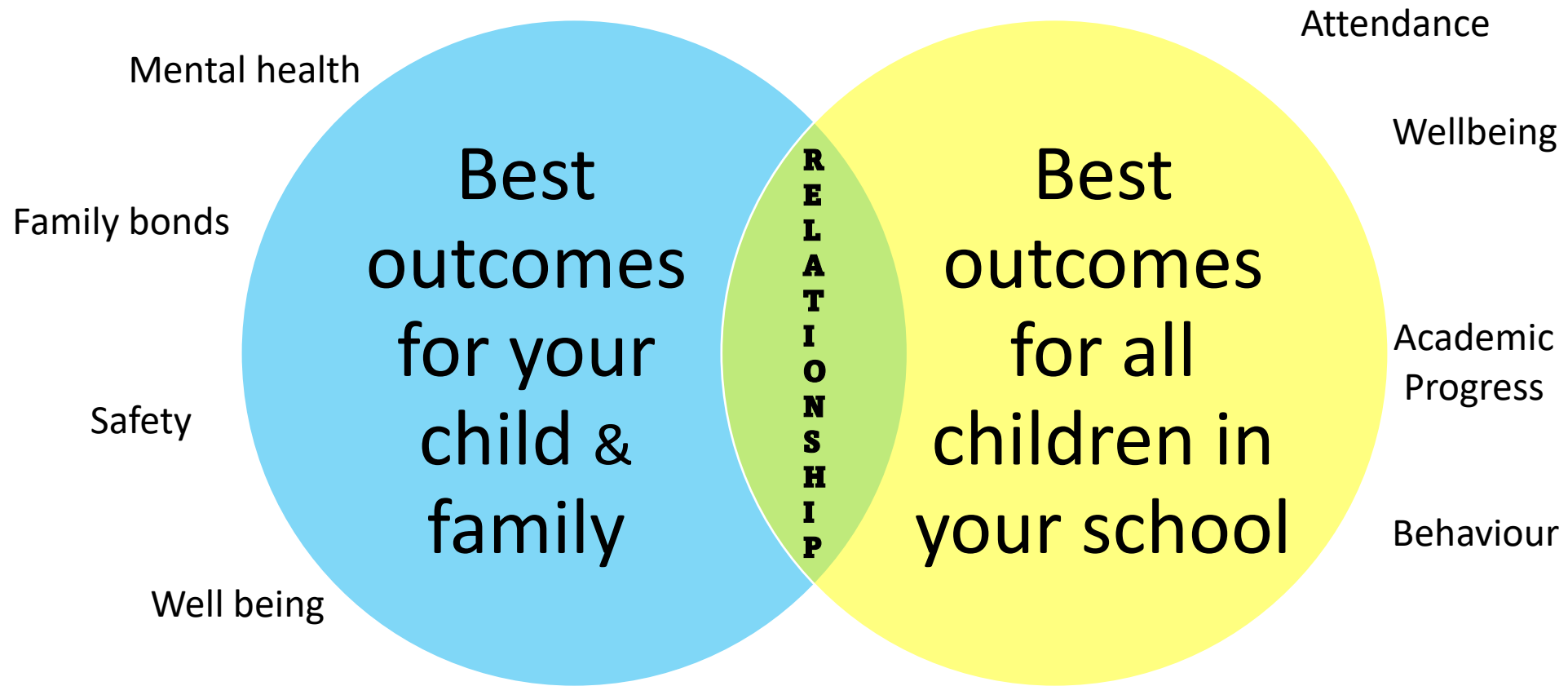


How can you work together with
your child's school to support
your child in the best way?



What outcomes are important
for your child and family?





Building effective relationships with schools



Communication



Understanding



Collaboration

What would be helpful when
thinking about

Communication



Communication



What parents can do...

Tell the school what is happening, be **honest** about how you are feeling

Tell the school what works and what doesn't and explain why

Communicate if anything at home may trigger something

Ask if you are not sure about something

Don't be afraid to say if something isn't working

What would be helpful when
thinking about creating a
shared



Understanding



Understanding



What parents can do...

Engage with any professional support that is offered

Emphasise the need for time and share progress or challenges with the school

Identify **triggers** and **patterns** of behaviour and share this regularly

Do some training to get some deeper understanding of masking and what that means for your family

Understand how hard it is for the school when they don't see what you see. They DO believe you!

Be honest with the school to allow them to support you and your child in the best possible way

Don't be disheartened if the support isn't working. There are always other options and other things to consider

Identifying Triggers & Patterns



Identifying triggers and patterns can be very useful to begin to preempt potential challenges and put support in place prior to it happening.



Collaboration of school and home allows both parties to build up a picture and understand what is really going on for that child who is masking.



Using a simple tool such as a frequency:severity chart can help identify patterns.

What would be helpful to
ensure there is true



Collaboration



What parents can do...	
Build a relationship with your child's teacher	Have realistic expectations
Share challenges with the school and suggest solutions that may need some flexibility	Speak to the new teacher at beginning of term about what works well to minimize post school meltdowns for example
	Community -Build a community -SEND parent support group -Coffee Mornings / WhatsApp groups - Family Voice Surrey



Looking after yourself...

Self Care

Looking after a child who is masking at school and exploding at home is extremely stressful and distressing.

It can put a huge strain on the whole family. It is vital that you look after your own mental wellbeing.

Don't be afraid to reach out. Join Family Voice Surrey.





Time for you...

- Going for a walk
- Breathwork
- Yoga
- Gardening
- Listening to some music
- A bath
- Reading a book
- Watching a movie

Whatever it is it is so important that you look after yourself, and its ok to acknowledge that things feel difficult.



What one thing will you take
away from today?





Questions?

Useful Websites / Groups

Family Voice Surrey - <https://familyvoicesurrey.org/>

APPEER - <https://www.appeer.org.uk/>

National Autistic Society <https://nassurreybranch.org/>

Action for Carers - <https://www.actionforcarers.org.uk/>

PDA Society - <https://www.pdasociety.org.uk/>

Missing the Mark - <https://missingthemark.co.uk/>

Dr Naomi Fisher - <https://naomifisher.co.uk/>

Autistic Girls Network <https://autisticgirlsnetwork.org/>