



Breaking the Silence: Culturally Sensitive Questions to Understand Masking

Diane Miller Psy.D., M.Ed

When working with Black women, it's important to recognize the unique cultural pressures and societal expectations that may influence how they navigate their ADHD and other personal challenges. Many Black women feel the need to mask—both their neurodivergent traits and aspects of their cultural identity—in order to fit into professional, social, or familial environments. As clinicians and coaches, it's essential to approach these conversations with empathy, understanding, and cultural sensitivity. The following questions are designed to help you explore the emotional and mental impact of masking, while creating a safe space for your clients to express their experiences without fear of judgment. These questions are crafted to foster a deeper understanding of the challenges your clients face, especially regarding the dual burden of masking ADHD symptoms and meeting cultural expectations.

Do you ever feel like you have to show up as a different version of yourself in certain spaces, like at work or around certain people?

- Follow-up: What are some things you feel you have to keep hidden in those moments?
- Purpose: This allows space for the client to reflect on how they present themselves, without judgment. It gently opens the door to discussing how they might be concealing parts of themselves.

Do you sometimes feel like you need to downplay your struggles or keep quiet about what you're going through so others don't judge you?

- Follow-up: What kind of reactions do you worry about if you were more open about what's really happening?
- Purpose: This validates the fear of judgment and creates a non-threatening environment to discuss their emotional or ADHD-related challenges.

When you're in public or professional settings, do you feel like you need to be extra 'together'—like you can't afford to make mistakes or show any struggles?

- Purpose: This question acknowledges the pressure Black women often face to appear competent, allowing them to reflect on the effort it takes to maintain this facade.





How much do you feel the pressure to always be strong and ‘have it all together’? Do you find it hard to let people see your vulnerable side?

- Follow-up: Where do you think that pressure comes from, and how do you feel it affects how much you share with others?”
- Purpose: This question allows the client to unpack the cultural expectation of the ‘strong Black woman’ and how that impacts their willingness to express vulnerability.

Do you ever find yourself changing the way you speak or act depending on who you’re around? How do you feel when you have to do that?

- Purpose: This taps into the reality of code-switching and encourages the client to express the emotional weight of having to navigate different environments while hiding parts of their true self.

Do you feel like your success is not just about you but also about representing your family or community? How does that make it harder for you to show when you’re struggling?

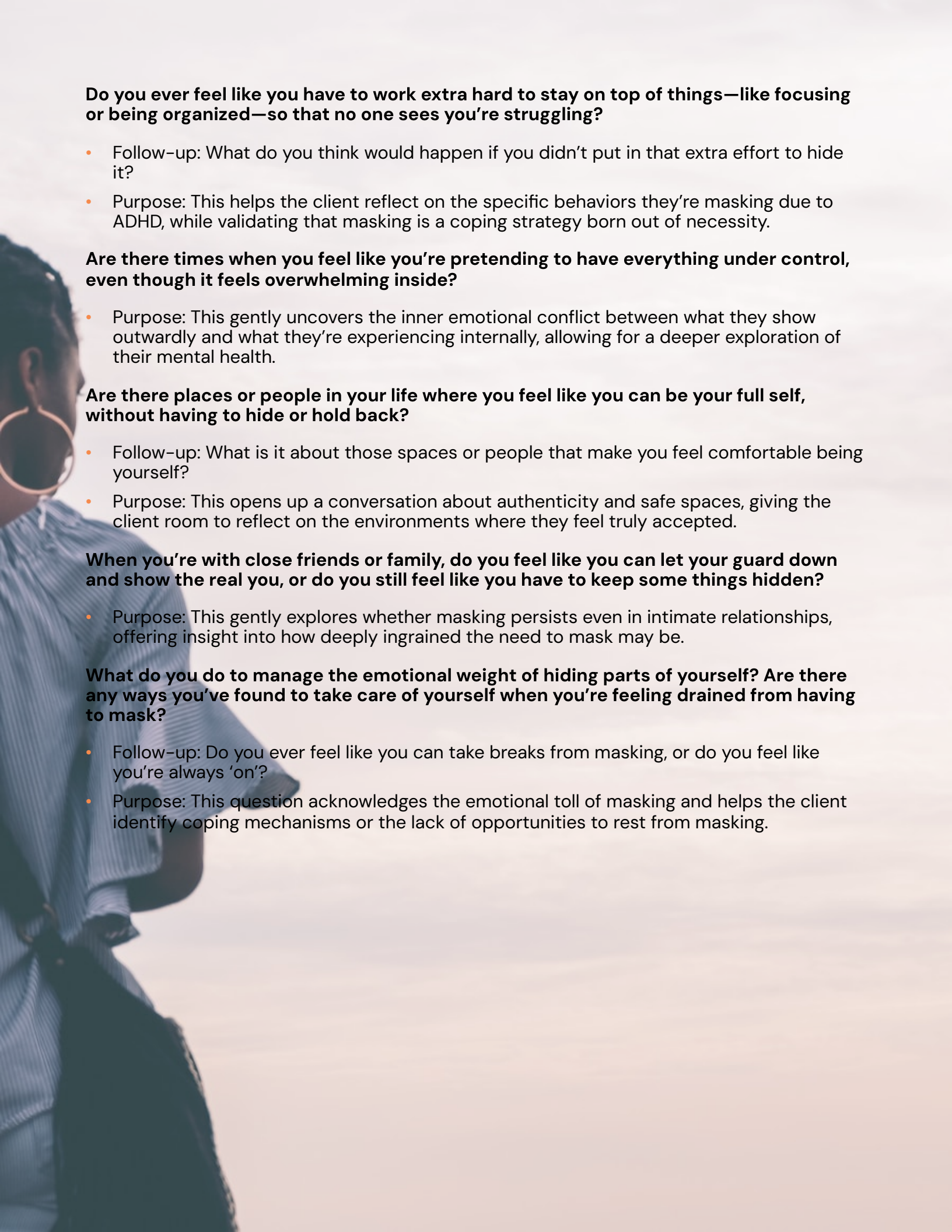
- Purpose: This explores the pressure to succeed for the community, acknowledging the cultural significance of achievement and the added burden it can place on Black women.

When you’re in spaces where you have to hold back or hide parts of yourself, how do you feel afterward? Does it leave you feeling drained or exhausted?

- Follow-up: What do you think would change if you didn’t feel the need to hide those parts of yourself?
- Purpose: This question gives the client permission to discuss how masking impacts their emotional well-being, creating a safe space to explore exhaustion or burnout.

How does it feel to keep your ADHD challenges under wraps? Do you think it affects how you see yourself or how much stress you carry?

- Purpose: This creates an opportunity to discuss how hiding ADHD symptoms specifically can affect mental health and self-esteem, validating the strain it causes.



Do you ever feel like you have to work extra hard to stay on top of things—like focusing or being organized—so that no one sees you're struggling?

- Follow-up: What do you think would happen if you didn't put in that extra effort to hide it?
- Purpose: This helps the client reflect on the specific behaviors they're masking due to ADHD, while validating that masking is a coping strategy born out of necessity.

Are there times when you feel like you're pretending to have everything under control, even though it feels overwhelming inside?

- Purpose: This gently uncovers the inner emotional conflict between what they show outwardly and what they're experiencing internally, allowing for a deeper exploration of their mental health.

Are there places or people in your life where you feel like you can be your full self, without having to hide or hold back?

- Follow-up: What is it about those spaces or people that make you feel comfortable being yourself?
- Purpose: This opens up a conversation about authenticity and safe spaces, giving the client room to reflect on the environments where they feel truly accepted.

When you're with close friends or family, do you feel like you can let your guard down and show the real you, or do you still feel like you have to keep some things hidden?

- Purpose: This gently explores whether masking persists even in intimate relationships, offering insight into how deeply ingrained the need to mask may be.

What do you do to manage the emotional weight of hiding parts of yourself? Are there any ways you've found to take care of yourself when you're feeling drained from having to mask?

- Follow-up: Do you ever feel like you can take breaks from masking, or do you feel like you're always 'on'?
- Purpose: This question acknowledges the emotional toll of masking and helps the client identify coping mechanisms or the lack of opportunities to rest from masking.

If you didn't have to mask as much, how do you think that would change your day-to-day life or how you feel about yourself?

- Purpose: This encourages the client to envision what life could be like without the burden of masking, promoting hope for a more authentic and emotionally healthy future.

These questions are intended to help you uncover the complex layers of masking that many Black women experience as they navigate ADHD and cultural expectations. By asking these questions with empathy and cultural sensitivity, you create a safe environment for your clients to explore the emotional toll of masking and identify areas where they can begin to unmask and embrace their authentic selves. The goal is to support your clients in finding balance, reducing emotional exhaustion, and fostering self-compassion as they navigate the unique challenges of being both Black and neurodivergent.

