

# UNMASKING MENTAL HEALTH - A PURIM ART ACTIVITY

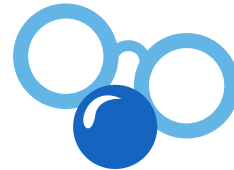
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**Purim is dedicated to discovering what is underneath the masks we all wear.** Each of us has a side, or multiple sides, we are willing to share with the world — much like a mask. When we look at the story of Purim, we can see themes of unmasking: stepping into our true identities, accepting that within ourselves what we have been unable to accept and, from that, making great change.

Just as Queen Esther has something she is ashamed of that she hides — her Jewish identity — there is a cone of silence and stigma around mental health. It is this identity, however, that allows her to be able to save her people.

We don't always know who in our community is struggling, because we may be seeing their mask. But given that one in five adults in the United States has struggled with their mental health ([nami.org](http://nami.org)), it is safe to assume someone within your circle of loved ones or within your larger community has. Although studies show therapy and treatment are incredibly effective, too many people do not get help because of the stigma.

We can use the story of Purim as a way to discuss mental health and express our truest selves as well as to create space where others feel safe to share and receive support.



**Why do we wear masks?** Masks are a normal part of life. We use them to cope. We might wear a mask to be socially acceptable, to hide feelings of fear or insecurity, to hide depression or pain, to make ourselves less vulnerable if we don't feel able to share or simply because we feel others will like us more.

Masks aren't a “bad thing” but merely a tool. Sometimes, though, we can lose ourselves in them, or we can feel obligated to hide our identities and lived experiences. **Having self awareness of when and why we are donning a mask, and feeling safe enough to take it off, is an important part of our mental health and having our needs met.**

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## Art Activity (Choose One or Both)

Mask making is a traditional part of expressive art therapy, a mental health treatment that uses visual arts, theater, music, movement and many other techniques in conjunction with clinical techniques. It can help people express those thoughts, feelings and experiences that may be difficult to speak about. Art therapy has been shown to help significantly with symptoms related to depression, anxiety and trauma, and to increase positive coping, self-esteem and cognition.

(Source: National Center for Biotechnology Center, [ncib.nlm.gov](http://ncib.nlm.gov))

**Please Print and Cut Out the Mask and Eyes Below for the Following Activity**



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**Mask number 1:** Be like Esther: Use the front of the mask to depict how you believe others see you. Decorate it with drawings, symbols and words. On the inside of the mask, depict how they see you, especially in ways that differ from the front of the mask. Again, you may illustrate your true self any way you like – with pictures, poetry, colors, words/slogans/phrases, etc.

**Mask number 2:** Create a Kavanah: A Kavanah is a deeply personal intention. On the back of the mask, draw or write your strengths – what is wonderful inside of you that perhaps the world has yet to see. Decorate the front of the mask with words or pictures depicting how you would like to live the next year.

## Questions for discussion

- What or who influences how you see yourself at any given time?
- Do you feel you ever wear anything (like a mask) to hide something?
- How do you feel when you are wearing one of those masks?
- How difficult is it to be yourself in your community?
- What makes it hard or easy?
- Just as Mordehi encourages Esther, are there people in your life who have encouraged you to express true self?

