

Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) Autism Profile

WHAT IS PDA?

PDA individuals share autistic characteristics in addition to PDA characteristics that make up the PDA profile. The main characteristic of PDA is to avoid everyday demands & expectations to an extreme extent. The root of PDA is anxiety. The feeling of control helps to soothe the anxiety. The more autonomy they have the less their overall anxiety level will be. Think of it as "Pervasive Drive for Autonomy".

PDA & THE BRAIN

In a PDAers brain, and those with extreme anxiety, trauma, etc. there is a miscommunication or "miss wiring" between the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex. In this brain, the sensory information taken in by the amygdala is unable to make it to the prefrontal cortex where it can be processed to determine whether the threat is real or not.

Don't confuse: "I can't" with "I won't".

PDA CHARACTERISTICS

- Resists & avoids the ordinary demands of life
- Appears sociable, but lacks depth in understanding
- Excessive mood swings and impulsivity
- Will use role play to avoid demands. ie. becomes an animal or TV character
- Able to make more frequent / direct eye contact
- Bossy & controlling

PDA CHARACTERISTICS

- Obsessive behavior often focused on people- either loving or hating them
- Can be domineering & overbearing
- Often more comfortable with adults or younger children than peers
- Autistic traits: sensory processing, executive functioning, communication difficulties

TYPES OF DEMANDS

- Direct- Direct requests, ie "put on your shoes"
- Subtle- "let's ..."
- Silent- Answering questions, following manners, ie "say please first"
- Self Imposed- Perfectionism, sleeping, hobbies

LOWERING DEMANDS

By decreasing the demands placed on the child you are able to lower overall anxiety. This can lead to the child being able to feel more safe and calm. Keep focused on building connection and trust. And support autonomy not necessarily Independence. When overall anxiety levels are lower the child is able to engage in life easier. This also allows them to tolerate & process tasks.

PDA SUPPORTS

- Don't engage in the fight / choose your battles
- Let it go!
- Declarative language
- Executive Functioning Support
- Recognize and support sensory differences
- Novelty
- Humor
- Flexibility

PERSPECTIVE CHANGE

View challenging behaviors as a way of communicating anxiety. Recognize that meltdowns are the body's response to nervous system overload. View this as a panic attack. Approach them with empathy and compassion. Not with correction and discipline.

OTHER CHALLENGES

- Screen time
- bedtime
- showering/ hygiene
- school
- siblings