

Understanding My PDA Brain Worksheet

Profile and Worksheet created by
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Overview

Hi there! Remember when we teamed up as **brain detectives** to figure out how your brain works best?

Well, you did an awesome job! Together we discovered some amazing things! We learned that your **brain is super unique**.

For example, one thing we learned is that **your brain likes to be in control** and **not get too overwhelmed** by people, demands, or things around you.

With this new understanding about your brain, we hope you can use this guide to **learn more about how your amazing brain works best!**



What do I mean by PDA brain? PDA stands for **Pathological Demand Avoidance**. Some people prefer the name Pervasive Drive for Autonomy or simply saying Neurodivergent. PDA is most commonly thought of as a type of autism.

A PDA brain is a brain that feels best when we have autonomy (independence) and when we are not overwhelmed by social or sensory things around us. Each PDA individual is different, though, so your job now is to figure out how your brain works best!

Sometimes, it can be confusing to know how your brain works best and it might feel like you need a guide to understand your brain better. So that's exactly what this guide is for!

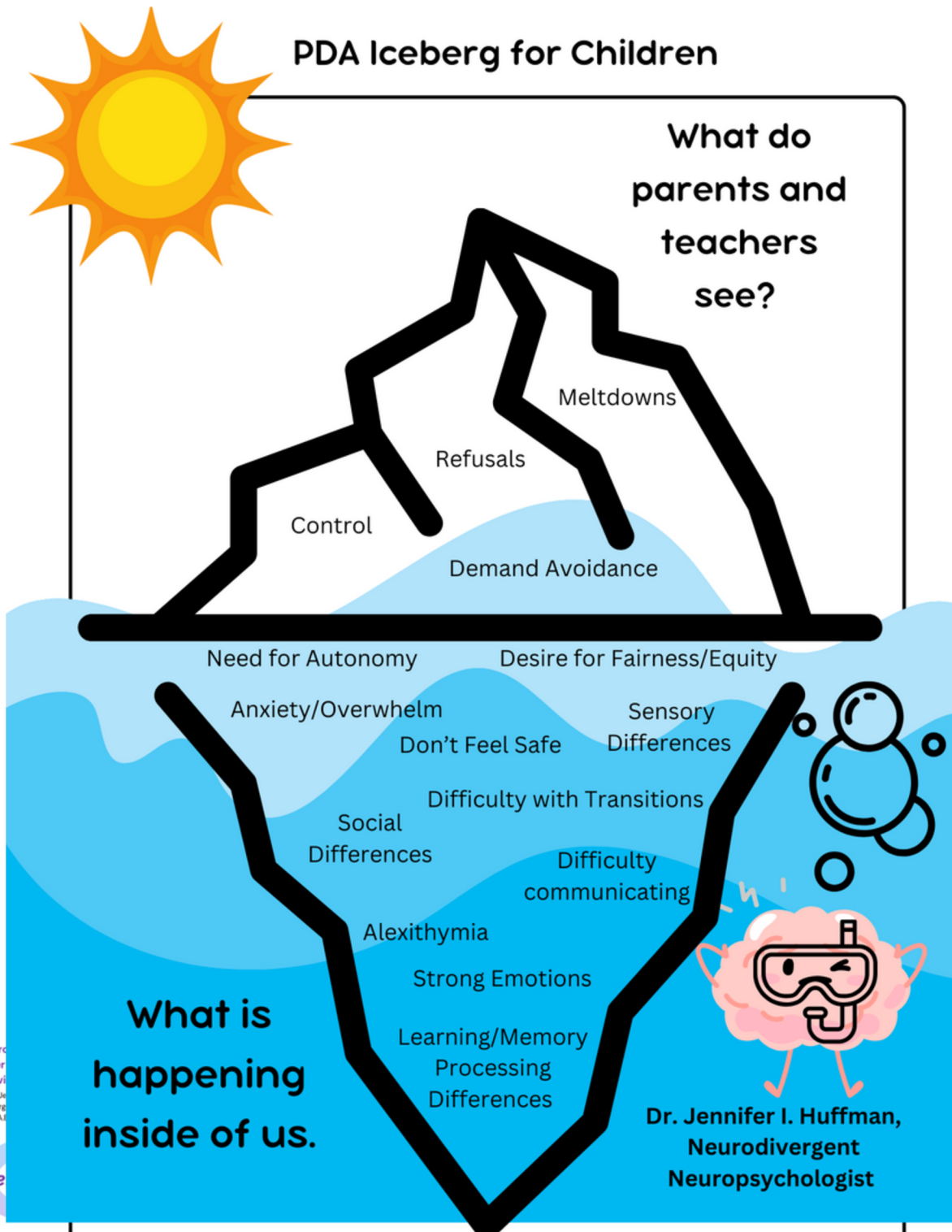
Did you know that Dr. Jennifer has a PDA brain, too, so she knows a thing or two about how they work. So, you are not alone.



PDA Iceberg for Children

When we have a PDA brain, what parents and teachers see on the outside of us does not always tell the story of what is happening on the inside. So, we need to help our parents and teachers understand how we feel and what is happening on the inside.

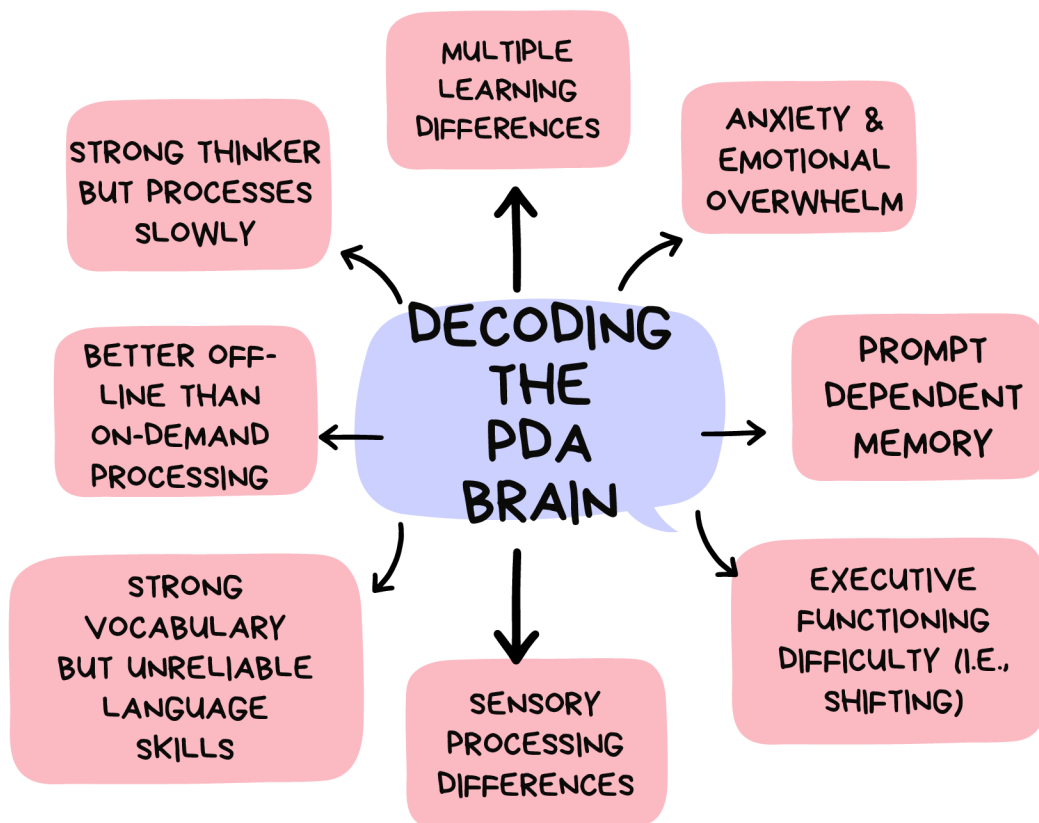
Take a look at the words under the iceberg and see if any of those happen to you. You can circle the ones that do.



What is Unique About PDA Brains?

Next, we are going to do our brain detective work and figure out how **your** brain works best. Even though everyone's brain is different, many PDA brains have some things in common. Take a look and see if any of these things happens to you at home or school.

We are still learning about PDA brains, but Dr. Jennifer has found some common ways our brains might work.



WE WILL FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THESE ON OUR JOURNEY!

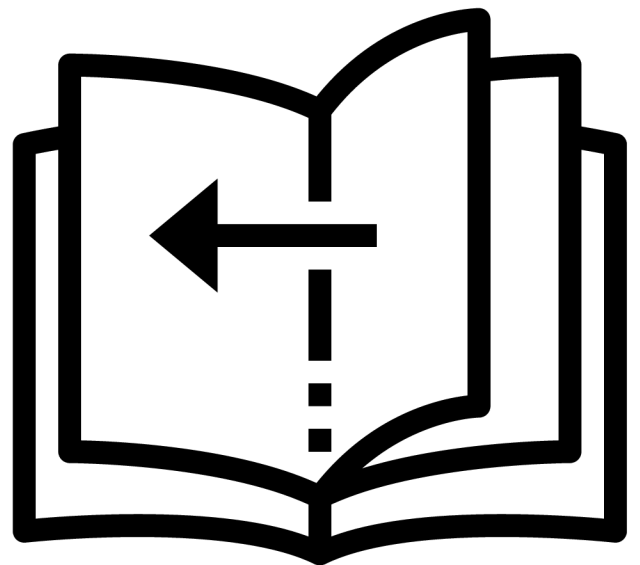
How is My Brain Special?

Ask your parents or teacher if they can help you with the activity on the next page.

See all the areas that make us unique? In each area there might be some things that are easier for you and some things that are much harder.

You can use the chart to help understand how your PDA brain works and to communicate it with others, like another parent, grandparent, or teacher.

Remember, it is OK that our brains work in a unique way, that is what makes us special.



What I am good at? What is hard for me?

MY THINKING SKILLS
WHEN UNDER PRESSURE
OR RELAXED

MY BIG BRAIN BOSS/
EXECUTIVE FUNCTION
SKILLS

MY ABILITY TO
COMMUNICATE

MY ABILITY TO PAY
ATTENTION

MY ABILITY TO
REMEMBER

MY READING, WRITING,
AND MATH SKILLS

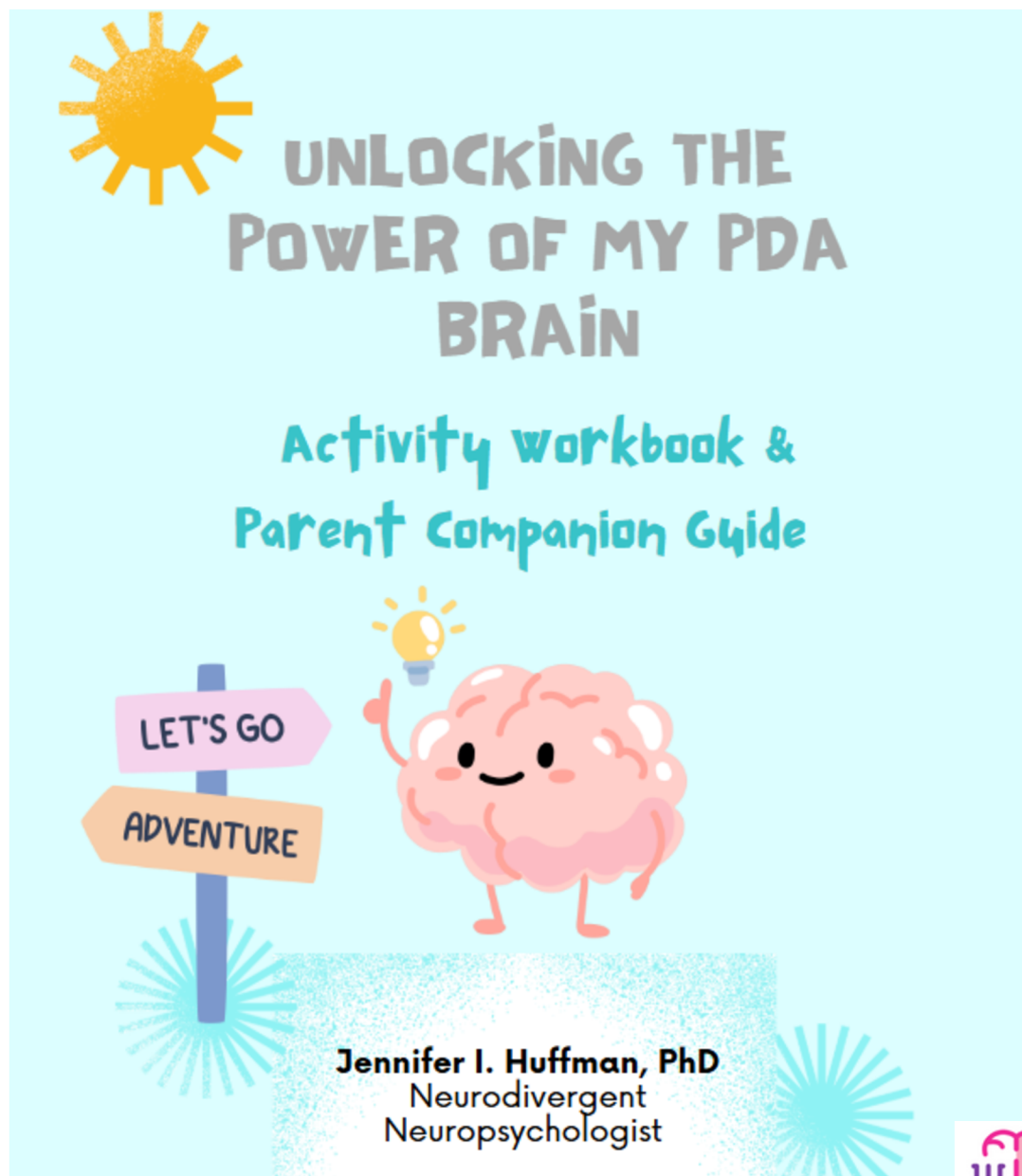
MY ABILITY TO MAKE
AND KEEP FRIENDS

MY ABILITY TO
UNDERSTAND
MY EMOTIONS


MY ABILITY TO ASK
FOR WHAT I NEED

Unlocking the Power of My PDA Brain!

Dr. Jennifer recently wrote a book called **Unlocking the Power of My PDA Brain**. She included some of the images from the book on the next pages so that you and your parents or teacher can learn more about it.



UNLOCKING THE POWER OF MY PDA
BRAIN BY DR. HUFFMAN IS AVAILABLE
ON AMAZON

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 Thrive Authentically

INTRODUCTION

WHAT MAKES PDA BRAINS SO SPECIAL:

CELEBRATING OUR UNIQUE SELVES

1. Super Strong Feelings: Having a PDA brain means we can feel emotions really strongly. Sometimes, our feelings can be as big and wild as a rollercoaster, and that's perfectly okay! It's like having a powerful radar that lets us experience happiness, excitement, and even sadness more intensely than others.



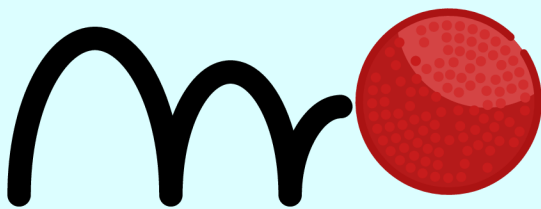
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2. Overflowing Brain Buckets: For PDA brains, even small demands can feel really big and overwhelming. Imagine our brains are big buckets. When there are too many demands, it can feel like our buckets are going to overflow. It is important for us to recognize when our bucket is getting too full and to find ways to gently empty it, like taking breaks or asking for help.



3. The Demand Dodgeball Arena: Imagine you're playing dodgeball, but with everyday tasks like brushing your teeth or doing homework. For PDA brains, these tasks can feel like big, scary dodgeballs coming at you. You might want to dodge and avoid them because they make you super anxious. Sometimes the demands come from inside of us and we might want to avoid those as well.



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4. Autonomy Adventure:

Autonomy means having the freedom to make our own choices and do things our way. It's like being the captain of our own ship. For our PDA brains, having control over what we do and how we do it is super important.



5. Inclusivity Champions (Equalizing Behaviors):

Fairness and inclusivity are important to our PDA brains. When we believe that things are not fair, we may try to make things equal. Sometimes the way we try to make things equal gets misunderstood as bad behaviors, things we did on purpose, or things we did to be mean (like not doing or work, leaving the room without asking or screaming a bad word). It is important for the grownups around us to understand that we are not doing these things on purpose to be hurtful. It is just the way our brain tries to make things fair.

Sometimes we equalize and our parents and teachers don't even notice (making up new rules to a game). Other times we equalize and we attempt to make things fair in a "not-so-good-way" (hitting someone or throwing something).

When we struggle with making positive and safe equalizing choices, we need our safe person to be patient with us, to help us communicate our anxiety, to help us regain our autonomy, and to help us feel safe again.



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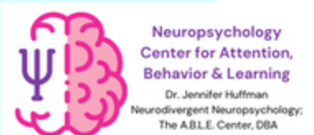
6. Sensory Sensations: We might be extra sensitive to sounds, lights, or textures. It's like hearing a whisper in a noisy room or having super touch sense. We may be very picky about clothing and foods.

7. Safe Brain Zones: Feeling safe and secure is super important for us, especially with PDA. When we feel safe, our brains can work better. But if we feel scared or stressed, our brains focus on keeping us safe instead of helping us to learn or think.

8. Different Operating Systems/Celebrating Different Brains: Everyone's brain works in its own special way, and that's called neurodiversity. Here is the symbol to represent neurodiversity:



For those of us with PDA brains, it's important to understand how our brains work best. We might need different kinds of help to learn and think in a way that feels good for us. Many times, having a PDA brain means we may pay attention, problem solve, and learn differently. Some things may come very easily to us and others may be super hard. On our journey to understanding our PDA brains, we have to discover how we learn best.



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Here are more ways our brains are unique:

Memory Magic!: Our PDA brains are like treasure chests filled with amazing memories, but sometimes we need a little nudge to find the treasure. For example, a hint to help us recognize the information. Dr. Jennifer calls this having a "prompt-dependent memory."

The Mighty Planning Power: Planning or organizing can be tricky for us. Imagine trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle where some pieces just won't fit. That's how it feels when we have executive functioning obstacles and difficulty shifting from one activity to the next.

Brainy Ninja Skills: We have strong THINKING SKILLS, which means we're pretty smart! But our brains might work a bit slower, making us like brainy ninjas who take their time to make the right move. It is especially hard for us to think under pressure!



Off-line Genius: We perform better when we can think things through at our own pace, just like reading a book at home instead of doing a surprise quiz in class.

Word Wonders: Our vocabulary is fantastic! We know a lot of cool words but sometimes it's hard to use them when talking or writing, especially when we feel scared or overwhelmed.

Understanding Myself: Putting it All Together!

Now that you have learned about PDA brains and how amazing your brain is, the next questions will help you to think about how your brain works and how it impacts you at home and school.

Think about the following questions. You can write them down or just discuss them with your parent or teacher.

Finding Your Safe Person and Place is Important

Who are the important people in my life (family, friends, teachers)?

How do these people support me?

Who are my safe people at home or school?

What do I need to feel comfortable at home?

Who is my safe person, the one that almost always understands me?

Where is my safe place, a place where I can go to help calm myself down?

How do other family members support me?

Who is my safe person at school and where is my safe place?

What accommodations or supports do I need to succeed at school?

How can other teachers and classmates help me?

Sometimes Communicating is Hard

Do I struggle with communicating at times, such as when I am stressed, nervous, or tired? What helps?

Is there a person who understands me best, who knows what I am trying to say even if my words are not working?

What strategies do I use to communicate? Do I need to find more ways to communicate when stressed at home or school?

It Helps to Find and Focus on Your Passions!

What are my interests or passions?

How do these interests help me feel in control and manage my feeling of anxiety or of feeling unsafe?

If you don't know what to talk about, talk about your interests! This is a great way to connect with others who like the same thing as you!



Sometimes our Capacity for Demands Changes

How do I experience a need for autonomy and demand avoidance?

What are some common demands I find challenging?

What does this look like at home or school.

We May Have to Figure Out Different Ways to Help Ourselves

How do I manage my desire to be independent and autonomous and/or avoid demands that others (or my own body) put on me?

Do these strategies help me?

Do they sometimes get me in trouble because people do not understand what is happening inside?

How are we impacted in different environments, such as home versus school?

Everyone has Strengths and Obstacles

Current Strengths: What are my greatest strengths--what helps me feel joy, confidence, or connection at home or school?

Current Obstacles: What are my greatest challenges-- what causes me to feel stressed, helpless, or alone at home or school?

What are my goals for the near future? What steps can I take to achieve these goals?

Sometimes just knowing about yourself and sharing this with others will help at home and school.

Other times, we need helpers, like a therapist to help us. There is nothing wrong with that, think of them as guides to help us along our way.



THANK YOU FOR EXPLORING WITH ME!

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