

A general information leaflet on PDA can be obtained from the National Autistic Society website: www.nas.org.uk

More comprehensive education and handling guidelines are available, which can help you better understand and manage a child with PDA in the classroom environment. Visit the PDA contact forum to download a copy:

www.pdacontact.org.uk/

The Elizabeth Newson centre (NORSACA) provides a range of conferences and events for both professionals and parents. It also has a publications list that has a number of papers on PDA. Details of these are available via their website:

www.sutherlandhouse.org.uk

The centre can also provide training for schools and other organisations across the UK.

Fiona Speirs is the former Assistant Head teacher of Rosehill School (a school which caters for Autism Spectrum Disorders in Nottingham) and is experienced in working with and handling children with PDA in the classroom environment.

www.fionaspeirs.co.uk

A parent has also developed some excellent you-tube videos which may be used for teaching staff

www.youtube.com/user/bluemillicent

Is there a child in your class / school who has recently been diagnosed with PDA?

Do you need information and handling guidelines to help with managing a child with PDA in the school environment?

The PDA Contact Group website and forum are a source of help, support and information.

There is an area of the PDA support group which is specifically for professionals and is not accessible to parents. We encourage all professionals to use this resource to share ideas, thoughts and tips about PDA.



PDA contact Group website and forum

www.pdacontact.org.uk

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A Teacher's Guide to Understanding Pathological Demand Avoidance Syndrome (PDA)

Some facts about PDA

PDA is a neurodevelopmental disorder which is increasingly being recognised as being part of the autism spectrum but requires very different management.

PDA is a lifelong disability characterised by obsessively resisting the everyday demands of life. They often spend longer working to avoid the demand than they would have done by just accepting it!

Extreme mood swings are a common feature and they are often described as a 'Jekyll and Hyde' character.

When they feel in control they are often enigmatic and charming, but when they feel they are not in control, they experience high anxiety levels which often leads to extreme and challenging behaviour.

Children with PDA often appear to have better social, interaction and communication skills than other children on the autism spectrum but lack depth in their understanding and are led by their need to control.

Children with PDA can have highly developed role play and social mimicry. They may adopt different personas and often use this as a strategy to avoid demands.

Children with PDA can show obsessive behaviour which may be focussed on a person eg another child or on objects.

Language delay is often another feature of the child with PDA but often children 'catch up' later. They have more fluent use of eye contact and better conversational timing than other children on the autism spectrum.

Things to remember

These children are not naughty or overtly malicious although they are manipulative in the way they avoid demands. It is important to remember that underneath their robust exterior lies a very fragile and vulnerable ego.

Pushing a child with PDA to obey demands will likely lead to high anxiety and 'meltdown' behaviour best seen as a panic attack. At this stage the child needs REASSURANCE and not blame or be made to feel ashamed as the child cannot help this behaviour.

Children with PDA may be compliant and tolerant at school then behave much worse at home. It is important for teachers and parents to realise that this is not due to less competent handling, but simply because they have reached their tolerance limits and need to 'let their hair down'.

It is important to communicate well with parents.

Tips for Managing in Class

A classroom is filled with DEMANDS which often leads to high ANXIETY levels for children with PDA.

Instructions should be given in a NON CONFRONTATIONAL style and you may need to practice 'asking without asking' eg "I wonder if someone might be able to help me do this....."

Try to present CHOICES, so the child feels in control of the situation.

Use a neutral tone and body language, giving the child space.

Have a SAFE space with nothing in it. Have areas where the child can go to himself. Restraint should always be a LAST RESORT.

When a child 'melts down' use quiet tones, give lots of REASSURANCE even if they are swearing obscenities at you and lashing out. Try to think of it as a PANIC ATTACK.

Children with PDA will have poor spells when demands must be decreased accordingly and VICEVERSA.

Some children with PDA avoid by using more subtle techniques and if not recognised will be an obstacle to their learning.