UNDERSTANDING PDA (PATHOLOGICAL / PERSISTENT DRIVE FOR AUTONOMY)

WHAT IS PDA?

- PDA is often referred to as Pathological Demand Avoidance.
- Many in the neurodivergent community prefer terms such as:
- Persistent Drive for Autonomy
- Pervasive Drive for Autonomy
- These terms highlight that the core difficulty isn't about being "oppositional" but about a fundamental need for autonomy and intense anxiety around perceived loss of control.
- PDA is increasingly understood as part of Autism though experiences may vary.



AUTONOMY. NOT OPPOSITION.

TOP 10 TIPS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WITH PDA



1. **Collaborate, don't command** – frame tasks as teamwork or shared goals.
2. **Offer choices** – small, genuine choices (when, where, how) reduce pressure.
3. **Use indirect language** – instead of "do this now," try "I wonder if we could..." or "let's see if..."
4. **Reduce unnecessary demands** – focus on priorities, let go of what's not essential.
5. **Build trust** – consistency, humour, and relationships matter more than rigid routines.
6. **Work with interests** – link tasks to passions and strengths to boost motivation.
7. **Use low-arousal approaches** – keep tone calm and avoid power struggles.
8. **Plan flexibility** – have backup options if one approach doesn't work.
9. **Support emotional regulation** – safe spaces, sensory tools, movement breaks.
10. **Celebrate autonomy** – praise creative problem-solving and self-advocacy.





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TIPS FOR ADULTS WITH PDA (SCHOOL, UNI, WORK)

1. **Self-advocacy phrases**: “I work best with flexibility,” “Deadlines feel easier if I can set the pace.”
2. **Flexible scheduling**: break work into chunks, negotiate realistic deadlines.
3. **Task reframing**: see demands as choices or opportunities instead of obligations.
4. **Environment design**: minimise sensory stress (quiet spaces, headphones, remote work where possible).
5. **Use interests as motivators**: link less enjoyable tasks to passions or rewards.
6. **Seek allies**: mentors, managers, or tutors who understand PDA can help reduce pressure.
7. **Practice scripts**: short, clear explanations of needs for teachers/employers (“I need some autonomy over how I approach tasks”).
8. **Compassionate breaks**: give yourself permission to pause without guilt.







Thank you for exploring this ADHD SLT resource! 🌈

Created by a qualified Speech and Language Therapist with a neurodiversity-affirming approach.

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Supporting communication, autonomy and well-being through creative, flexible activities. Scan the QR Code to explore!

