

CHARACTERISTICS

Coping with Extreme Anxiety: PDA children often experience exceptionally high levels of anxiety. Demands and expectations, even seemingly simple ones, can trigger intense anxiety responses.

Avoiding Overwhelm: When PDA children feel overwhelmed, their avoidance behaviours serve as a way to regain a feeling of control over their situation. Avoiding demands is a strategy to prevent themselves from becoming overwhelmed by anxiety.

Maintaining Autonomy: A sense of autonomy and control is essential in reducing anxiety. This empowerment helps lower the PDA child's perception of threats and improves emotional regulation.

Unconscious Avoidance: Understanding that avoidance behaviours are often not intentional is crucial for supporting PDA kids. The internal conflict between the desire to participate and the need to avoid can be emotionally distressing.

Balancing Power: PDA children tend to seek a sense of control and autonomy in their interactions, aiming to balance power dynamics. They may actively negotiate demands or seek a more collaborative approach to avoid overwhelming anxiety.

Resistance to Authority: When confronted with power dynamics, PDA children may challenge or question authority figures, negotiate demands, or even ignore instructions, not out of defiance but as a means to cope with overwhelming demands.

Fluctuating Capacity: Students with a PDA profile may exhibit inconsistent capacity to complete tasks. One day, they might excel at a certain subject, while the next day, they may resist any form of learning, making it difficult to predict their performance.

MELTDOWNS

A meltdown is the culmination of extreme stress and emotional dysregulation. When a PDA child experiences a meltdown, it typically signifies that the demands and stressors at school are currently unmanageable for the child. This is a sign for the team to re-evaluate their approach to supporting the child.

Meltdowns in PDA children can vary but often involve intense emotional outbursts. They may include crying, shouting, physical actions, or challenging behaviours. These meltdowns occur when the child is overwhelmed by anxiety, demands, or sensory triggers.

Meltdowns in masking PDA children can be less overt and more internalized. They may appear calm on the surface but experience extreme anxiety, leading to shutdowns, self-isolation, self-harming behaviours, or other signs of distress. These children may struggle to express their emotional turmoil outwardly due to their masking abilities.

PDA AT SCHOOL

PDA, or Pathological Demand Avoidance, is an autism profile characterized by heightened anxiety and a strong need for autonomy and control.

APPROACHES

Reduced Demands: Minimize the number and complexity of demands placed on the student, especially during stressful times.

Authentic Choices: Offer authentic choices which can reduce anxiety by providing control and autonomy, foster respect, and enhance cooperation and the learning experience.

Interest-Driven Learning: Harness engagement by exploring topics the PDA child is passionate about, which can lower anxiety and increase intrinsic motivation, making them more actively involved in their learning.

Collaboration & Negotiation: Actively involve the PDA child in decision-making, which empowers and reduces anxiety. This approach respects the need for control, decreasing resistance, and creating a positive learning environment.

Relational Safety with Adults: Provide opportunities for one-on-one interactions to establish a safe and supportive adult-student relationship. Ensure that communication is clear, non-confrontational, and validating to reduce anxiety and enhance the student's sense of safety and security in the school environment.

Declarative Language: Use declarative language to narrate or comment on what you observe. Declarative language involves making statements that provide information, offer choices, or suggest actions, rather than giving direct commands.

Logical Explanations: Use logic to explain the reasons behind demands or expectations. This helps reduce anxiety by making the demands appear less arbitrary and more reasonable.

COMMON AVOIDANCE STRATEGIES

Negotiation	Control of Interactions
Distraction	Physical Symptoms
Procrastination	Social Withdrawal
Humour/Sarcasm	Selective Participation
Eloquence/Persuasion	Stalling
Fantasy/Role Play	Leaving the Situation