

Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) in the Classroom

Understanding and Teaching Strategies for Educators

Sue Larkey Presents

Laura Kerbey
Illustrated by Eliza Fricker

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Course Content.

Lesson 1: Introduction and Understanding of Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA)

Lesson 2: What are Demands and How to Avoid

Lesson 3: PDA & Anxiety: Key Strategies

Lesson 4: Difference between PDD, ODD, and ASD

Lesson 5: Practical Approaches and Strategies to Support Learning

Lesson 6: Supporting and Understanding Behaviour

Lesson 7: PDA and Education: How to Make it Work

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ACRONYMS / ABBREVIATIONS

ABA	Applied Behavior Analysis	GDD	Global Development Delay
AAC	Augmentative Alternative Communication	HFA	High Functioning Autism
ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder	RLD	Receptive Language Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	IEP	Individualised Education Plan
ASD	Autism Spectrum disorder	IED	Intermittent Explosive Disorder
AS	Asperger's Syndrome	LD	Learning Disabled
APD	Auditory Processing Disorder	LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
ARFID	Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder	NT	Neurologically Typical
BIP	Behaviour Intervention Plan	OCD	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
CARS	Childhood Autism Rating Scale	ODD	Oppositional Defiance Disorder
CD	Conduct Disorder	OT	Occupational Therapy
CDD	Childhood Disintegrative Disorder	PDA	Pathological Demand Avoidance
DCD	Developmental Coordination Disorder	PDD	Pervasive Developmental Disorder
DD	Developmental Disability	PECS	Picture Exchange Communication System
Dx	Diagnosis	PT	Physical Therapy
ELD	Expressive Language Disorder	SIB	Serious Injurious Behavior
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan	SLP	Speech Language Pathologist
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education	SPED	Special Education
FBA	Functional Behavior Assessment	TS	Tourette's Syndrome
GAD	Generalised Anxiety Disorder		

Notes to Remember!

1. Diagnostic terms change or get outdated, but it depends what year a person got a formal diagnosis which terms were used.
2. It can depend which country you are in which acronyms and diagnosis are used.



THE
SUE LARKEY
PODCAST

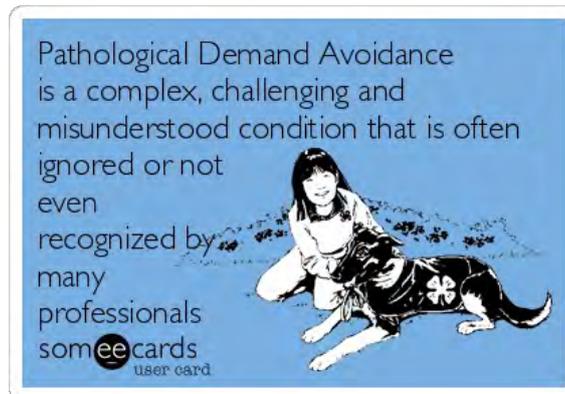
OVER 1
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Notes



Armed with the tools of understanding and confidence much can be achieved.



Understand the meaning of Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA).

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What is PDA?

A profile of autism characterised by high anxiety and a need to avoid demands and remain in control.

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Everyone with PDA is unique and different

autistic
SENSORY
CHARISMATIC
WHAT IS PDA?
AUTONOMOUS
COMMUNICATION
ANXIOUS
STRONG INTERESTS
HUMOUR

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The Main Characteristics of PDA include:

- Resists and avoids the ordinary demands of life, which might include getting up, joining a family activity or other day to day suggestions. This may be the case even when the person seems to want to do what has been suggested
- Using social strategies as part of the avoidance e.g. distracting, giving excuses, flattery etc
- Appearing sociable on the surface, but lacking depth in their understanding
- Excessive mood swings and impulsivity
- Being comfortable in role play and pretend, sometimes to an extreme extent
- 'Obsessive' behaviour that is often focused on other people.

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Other Key characteristics of PDA

Not recognising status or authority

Require equality and reciprocity within relationships

Highly creative and imaginative

Highly empathetic

Enjoy spontaneity and novelty

Self reflective

Truth seekers and speakers

Impulsive and thrill seeking – often “overstepping the mark”

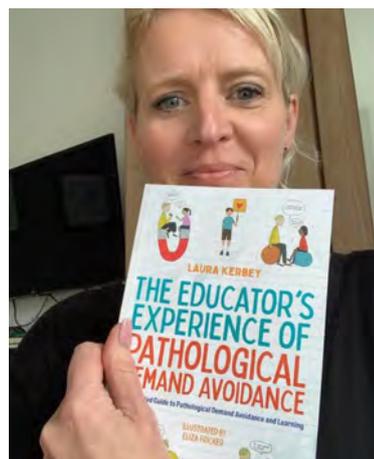
Highly sensitive to other people's feelings and emotions

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“Adults, trapped in children’s bodies.”



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PDA is NOT just about Demand Avoidance

- Avoiding demands is something we all do at times.
- People avoid demands which are boring, frightening, painful etc.
- This is known as “rational” demand avoidance.
- Demand Avoidance’ is listed as a sign or symptom to be considered in an autism assessment under NICE (*National Association for Health and Care Excellence*) guidance. Demand Avoidance is commonly seen with ADHD.
- With PDA – demand avoidance is often “irrational” and individuals will avoid the things they **want** to do, as well as the things that they **DON’T** want to do.
- In the UK most places will diagnose “Autism with Demand Avoidance” or “Autism with a PDA Profile” or similar.
- Remember “Reasonable Adjustments” should be based on **NEED** not diagnosis.

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The PDA Society’s statement on diagnostic terminology concludes:

“PDA is not a diagnosis in its own right, however the PDA profile can be identified during an autism assessment and, where appropriate, should be included as a clear signpost to the support strategies that will be helpful. The research to date means that PDA would not be diagnosed as a standalone condition, but that formulations such as ‘Autism with a PDA profile’ or ‘ASD with demand avoidant traits’ or similar can be, and are being, used.”

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A slide with a teal background on the left side. The text 'Lesson 2' is written in white on the teal background. To the right, the title 'What are Demands and How to Avoid' is written in black. At the bottom center, there is a copyright notice. On the right side, there are some faint, dashed lines.

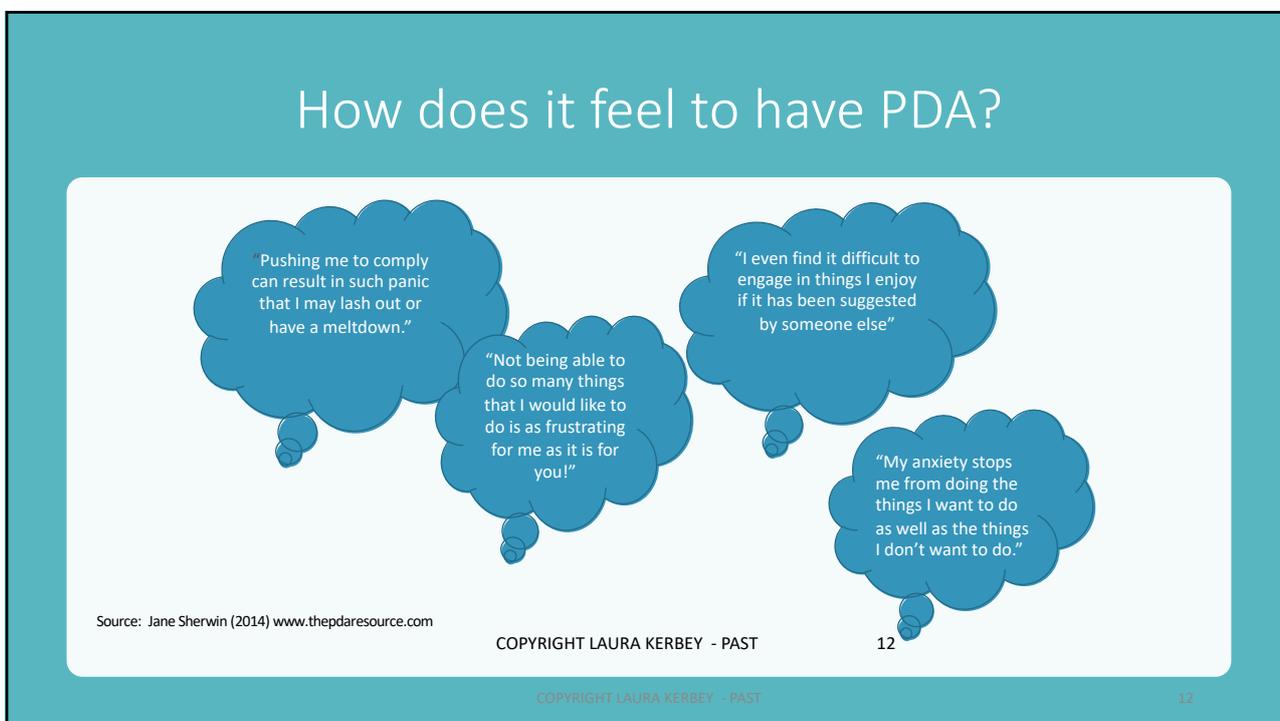
Lesson 2

What are Demands and How to Avoid

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A slide with a teal background. The title 'How does it feel to have PDA?' is at the top. Below it, four blue thought bubbles contain quotes about PDA. At the bottom left is a source citation, and at the bottom center is a copyright notice.

How does it feel to have PDA?

"Pushing me to comply can result in such panic that I may lash out or have a meltdown."

"Not being able to do so many things that I would like to do is as frustrating for me as it is for you!"

"I even find it difficult to engage in things I enjoy if it has been suggested by someone else"

"My anxiety stops me from doing the things I want to do as well as the things I don't want to do."

Source: Jane Sherwin (2014) www.thepdaresource.com

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Be aware of the demands you are placing on your learners

- **Direct Demands:** “Start your work now.” “This is what you are doing today.”
- **Subtle Demands:** “It’s time for you to start your work now.” “Let’s have a look at this work.” “You need to complete this work before the end of the lesson.”
- **Silent Demands and expectations:** Visual Timetables, Tapping your watch, Placing work in front of a student, Timers, Manners, Rules etc.
- **Self imposed or Internal Demands:** Perfectionism, time keeping, expectations, sleep, personal hygiene, deadlines etc.

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How are demands avoided?

Individuals with PDA will use a wide range of avoidance strategies:

- Manipulating social situations to remain in control.
- Refusal: “I can’t”, “I won’t”
- Making excuses: “My legs don’t work!”
- Distraction – “Oh look outside – a squirrel!”
- Arguing
- Delaying
- Suggesting alternatives
- Withdrawing into fantasy

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Lesson 3

PDA & Anxiety: Key Strategies

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What is Anxiety?



COGNITIVELY



PHYSIOLOGICALLY



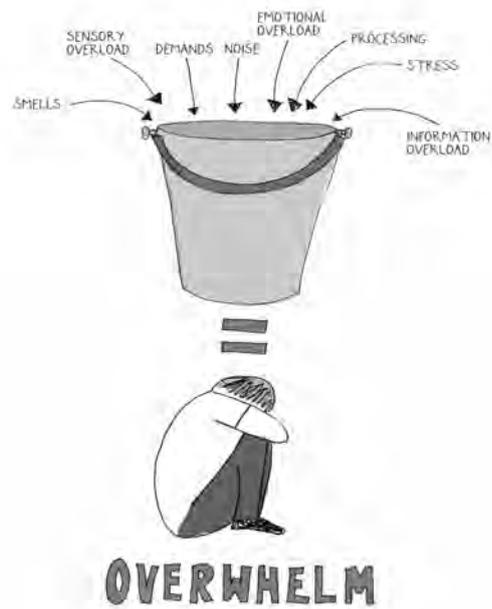
BEHAVIOUR

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Remember the Anxiety Bucket Analogy:

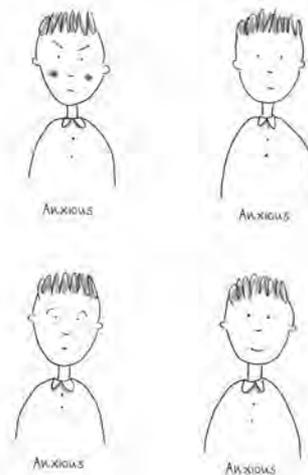


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Remember that anxiety can take many different guises



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Think about what you need when you are anxious?

- Empathy
- Validation
- Time
- Space
- Understanding



EMPATHISE

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Think of it as a PANIC ATTACK!!

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Tolerance V Demands



Anxiety / Tolerance



Importance of the Demand

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Pick your battles!

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT?



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The Importance of Autonomy

- PDA is also known as a “Pervasive Drive for Autonomy” (Tomlin Wilding)
- Or a “Persistent Drive for Autonomy” (Dr Wenn Lawson)
- Demands are threats to autonomy
- Offer choices – but be aware that decision making can be a demand
- Involve the individual with PDA as much as you can in decision making and planning – do not impose these things upon them
- Many individuals with PDA are autodidactic and can thrive with a learner lead approach

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Lesson 4

Difference between PDD, ODD, and ASD

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How does PDA differ from other Autism Spectrum Conditions?

- Individuals with PDA and ASC may both experience difficulties with:

Social Difficulties

Relationships

Imagination

Remember - Children, teenagers and young adults with PDA, ASC or ODD should always be treated as individuals. No two people are the same!

Sensory Difficulties

Emotional Regulation

Anxiety

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Individuals with PDA:

- Have better eye contact than autistic individuals
- May “learn” to socialise, or are comfortable socialising in small and familiar groups
- Like spontaneity and dislike routine
- May not respond well to rewards / rigid behaviour management plans
- Are imaginative
- Show empathy
- May communicate differently to non PDA autistic individuals
- 50% male / female
- Pathologically avoid demands

Autistic Individuals:

- May find eye contact difficult – physically painful
- Can prefer their own company at times
- Like routine and structure. Find spontaneity hard to cope with
- May respond well to rewards and motivators
- Experiences empathy and imagination in a different way to NT children
- May find reciprocal conversations more difficult
- Are 75% more likely to be diagnosed if male
- Do not “pathologically” avoid demands

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PDA v ODD (Oppositional Defiance Disorder)

<h3 style="text-align: center; color: red;">PDA</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individuals with PDA have difficulties with social interaction, communication, obsessions• Individuals with PDA will go to extreme levels to avoid demands – even if the demand is something that they want• Children with PDA appear to consider themselves adults• Individuals with PDA seem to experience higher levels of stress than those with ODD• Individuals with PDA display behaviours which appear “odd” or socially unacceptable	<h3 style="text-align: center; color: green;">ODD</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individuals with ODD do not have significant difficulties with social interactions, communication, obsessions etc. ODD is not an Autism Spectrum Condition• Individuals with ODD do not show the same level of demand avoidance• Individuals with ODD seem to understand their pecking order in society• Individuals with ODD seem to respond to behaviour strategies and rewards. Individuals with PDA do not• Individuals with ODD reject demands that come from those they consider to be in positions of authority –rather than the demand itself
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Lesson 5

Practical Approaches and Strategies to Support Learning

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Why the right approach is vital (And LIFE CHANGING!)

“Identifying PDA is crucial as I’ve been told on many occasions by parents and teachers that the approaches used with children with a more typical presentation of autism often don’t work and can be counterproductive with those with PDA. Conversely, I have been told on many occasions how the application of ‘PDA friendly strategies’ was, quoting a father I worked with, ‘life transforming’ for his daughter and the whole family. Moreover, developing a detailed description of your child’s ASD will help them develop self-awareness, and understanding their PDA symptoms is part of this.”

Dr Gloria Dura-Vila

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How to support an individual with PDA.

- Focus on connection and relationships first!
- Reward systems are ineffective as the individual with PDA feels out of control. Planned rewards are perceived as a demand “It’s great you have done your work as we have time to play X together now!”
- Show empathy and talk about what helps, “I know you hate writing, I used to find writing really hard too – shall I do it for you / use the iPad etc?”
- Use challenges, “I bet you can’t.....” “ I will race you.....”
- Join in activities to “share the demand” , build rapport and support reciprocity and equality in relationships



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Other ways to support.....

- Offer a choice “Do you want to write your name first, or the date?” “Do you want to start with X or Y?” “Use the ipad or books.”
- Praise indirectly rather than directly “I really love that idea / colour / etc” or let them overhear you talking about how much you have enjoyed the time with them. Talk about how YOU feel.
- Reduce pressures – i.e allow extra time, pick your battles!!! (Ask yourself if it “really matters.”
- Give individuals the chance to help you, demonstrate what they are good at, responsibilities etc



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Helping to remove barriers to learning

- Let them lead
- Always look outside the box and look for “natural” learning opportunities
- Mold the curriculum around the learner (not the other way around)
- Have an exit strategy
- Check in and Check out
- Help other learners to be supportive
- The type of school is not important – the nature and ethos of the school is
- Support each other and back each other up!!



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More ways to support

- Offer choices like sensible or silly answers
- Don't worry about finishing / planning etc
- Have an exit strategy or code word for when anxiety gets too much. Always be on the look for anxiety and stop as soon as you see it rising.
- Let individuals plan their own routines for the day
- Remove the demand of writing
- Just enjoy chatting about areas of interests
- Think of yourself as a learning facilitator – not a teacher or TA.



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Lesson 6

Supporting and Understanding Behaviour

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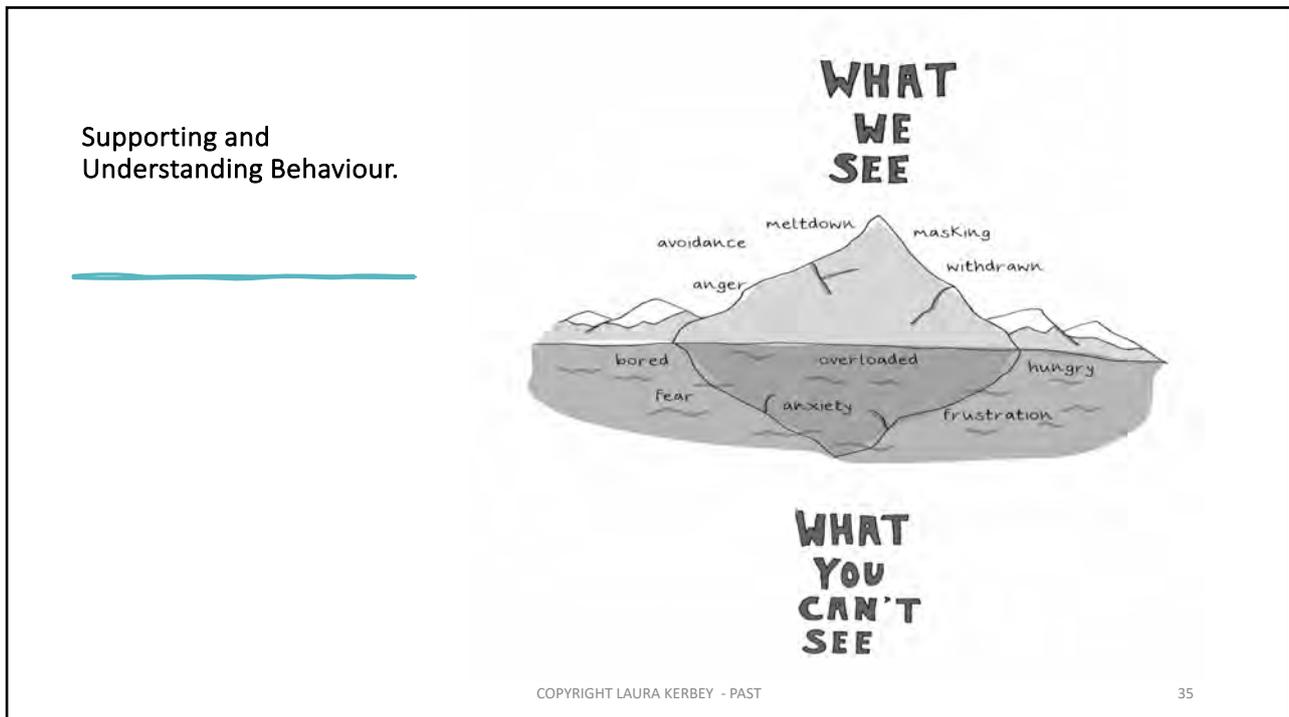
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Notes



Armed with the tools of understanding and confidence much can be achieved.



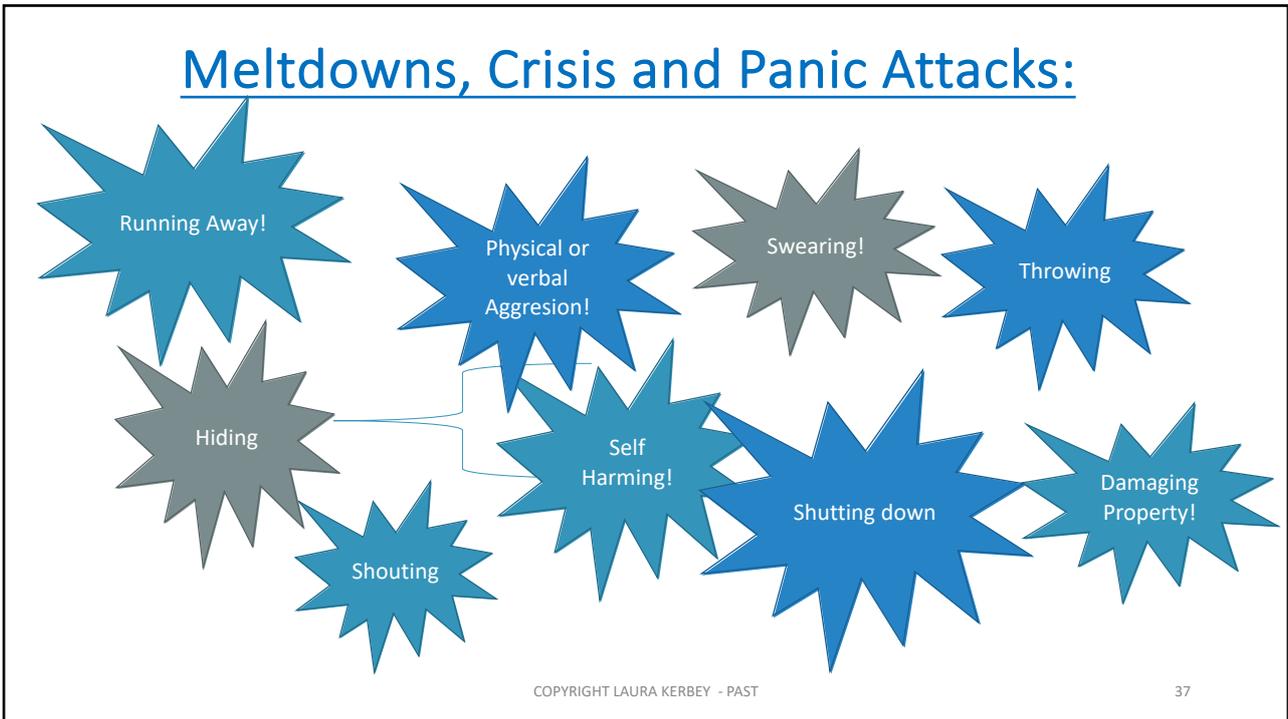
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The following have been described as effective in managing the behaviour of children, teenagers and young adults with PDA.....by children, teenagers and young adults with PDA... (Jane Sherwin 2014)

Don't:	Do:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speak down to me or patronise me• Don't give me direct demands• Don't give me ultimatums• Do not state the obvious• Do not bombard me with questions• Do not insist that I respond or answer you	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Try to build a relationship with me and talk about the things I chose to talk about• Do speak to me as an equal• Do offer me choices• Do empathise with me• Do understand that I want to do things, but my anxiety stops me• Do recognise the signs of my anxiety and pull back when you see them

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Remember the Boiled Kettle Analogy Too!



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Lesson 7

PDA and Education: How to Make it Work

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PDA AND EDUCATION

- 70% of 969 young people were not able to tolerate their school environment or were home educated.
- (PDA Society - Being Misunderstood Report 2018)
- There is no such thing as “school refusal.”



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Why is school so hard for children with PDA?

- Demands are everywhere!!
- Social / Communication Difficulties
- Sensory needs
- Anxiety
- Attachment difficulties
- Processing difficulties
- Friendship issues
- Fear of failure
- Masking

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Tap into Special Interests

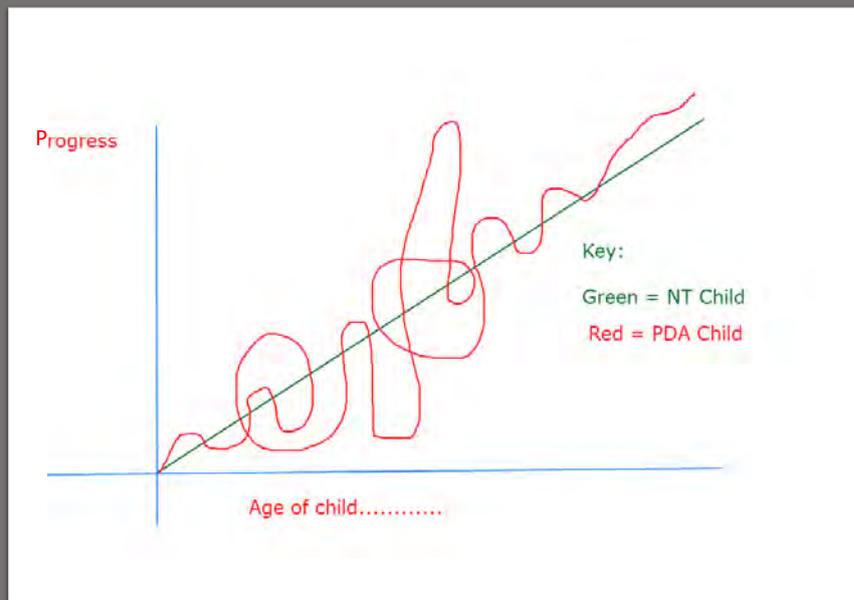
- But be wary of “hijacking” special interests.



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The PDAer's Learning Progress

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Characteristics of the ideal person to work with children, teenagers and young adults with PDA.

- Good sense of humour
- Flexible
- Creative
- Resilient
- Able to think on their feet
- Calm
- Able to work with parents and other professionals
- Any others????



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Positive about PDA!!

- Sophie – Diagnosed with Autism when 8
- Severe mental health issues
- Violent and aggressive at home
- Parents “discovered” PDA at 14
- School was tough
- Opted for a “different path” to peers
- Recently awarded “Highly Commended Apprentice” at London Business Awards



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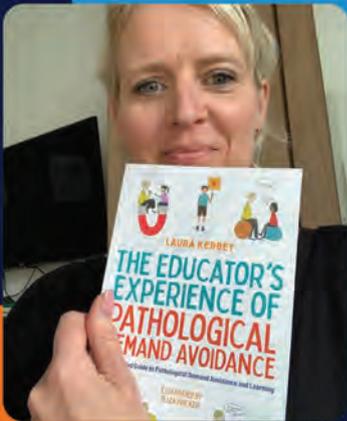
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Laura Kerbey's

10 TOP TIPS FOR SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH

Pathological Demand Avoidance

- 1 Build a relationship
- 2 Have an exit strategy or code word for when anxiety gets too much.
- 3 Let individuals plan their own routines for the day
- 4 Remove the demand of writing
- 5 Connect by chatting about areas of interests
- 6 Let them lead
- 7 Think of yourself as a learning facilitator – not a teacher or TA.
- 8 Always look outside the box and look for “natural” learning opportunities
- 9 Mold the curriculum around the learner (not the other way around)
- 10 Recognise the signs of anxiety and pull back when you see them rising



Best Selling Book

"The Educator's Experience of PDA"

[AVAILABLE HERE](#)

Listen to Podcast Episode 214:

The Educator's Guide to Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) with Laura Kerbey

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Online Course

Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) in the Classroom

Understanding and Teaching Strategies for Educators

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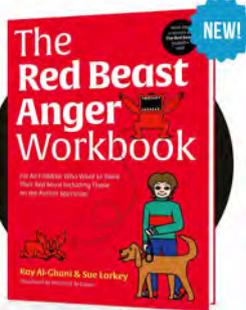
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References and Useful Reading:

- www.pdasociety.org.uk
- www.p-ast.org
- Facebook: PAST – Positive Assessments Support and Training
- Me and My PDA – A Guide To Pathological Demand Avoidance –Dr Gloria Dura-Vila and Tamar Levi
- Pathological Demand Avoidance Syndrome – My Daughter is not Naughty. (Jane Sherwin 2015)
- Can I tell you About Pathological Demand Avoidance Syndrome? A Guide for friends, family and professionals. (Ruth Fidler and Phil Christie)
- The Family Experience of PDA – Eliza Fricker
- The Educator’s Experience of PDA – Laura Kerbey (2023)
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Behaviour Books



The Red Beast Anger Workbook



The Red Beast

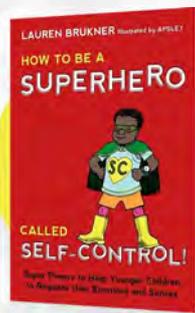


The Mindful Magician and the trip to Feelings Town

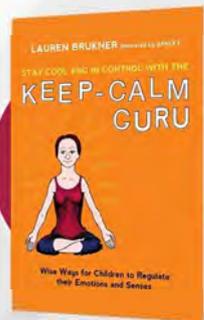
HELPING CHILDREN RECOGNISE AND REGULATE THEIR EMOTIONS



The kid's guide to staying Awesome and in control



How to be a Superhero called Self-Control

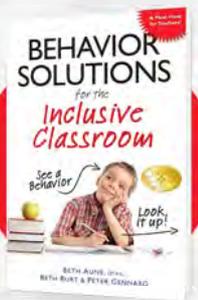


Stay cool and in control with the Keep-Calm Guru

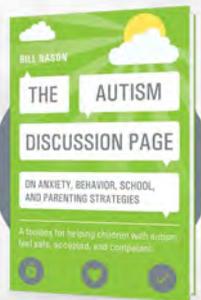


Self-Control to the Rescue!

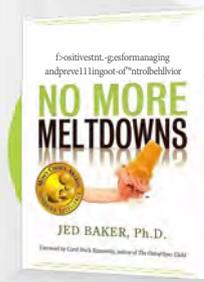
MUST HAVE BOOKS TO UNDERSTAND BEHAVIOUR



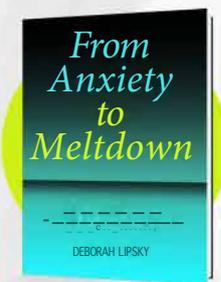
Behavior Solutions for the Inclusive Classroom



The Autism Discussion Page



No More Meltdowns: Positive strategies for managing and preventing out-of-control behavior



From Anxiety to Meltdown

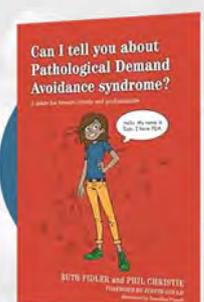
PATHOLOGICAL DEMAND AVOIDANCE (PDA)



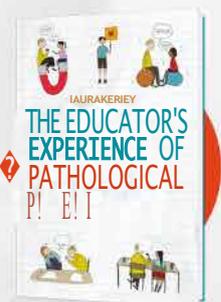
Can't Not Won't: A story about a child who couldn't go to school



Super Shamlal

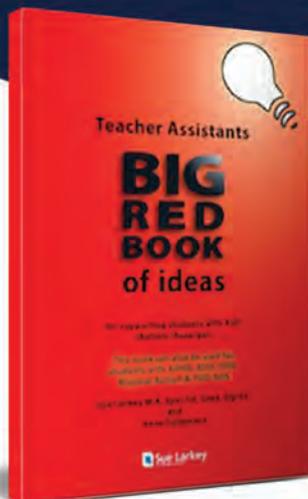


Can I tell you about Pathological Demand Avoidance Syndrome?



The Educator's Experience of Pathological Demand Avoidance: An Illustrated Guide to Pathological Demand Avoidance and Learning

OTHER BOOKS BY SUE LARKEY AND ANNA TULLEMANS



TEACHER'S ASSISTANT'S BIG RED BOOK OF IDEAS

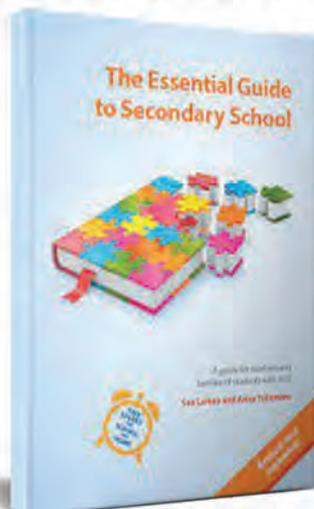
...COMPANION TO THE BIG BLUE BOOK OF IDEAS

Hundreds of ideas to try. Setting up classroom, role of teacher assistant, behaviour in classroom and playground, stages of anxiety, transition, sensory tools and activities. Includes frequently asked questions and MORE!

TEACHER ASSISTANTS BIG BLUE BOOK OF IDEAS

...COMPANION TO THE BIG RED BOOK OF IDEAS

Hundreds of new strategies to try. Social skills: playgrounds, friendships, building self-esteem, bullying. In the classroom: getting on task, adapting tasks and exams, building independence. Managing anxiety and behaviour.



THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

Practical guide to secondary school This book has over 100 pages of proven ideas and strategies. Includes Proformas to photocopy and save you time. Keeping on task, motivation, exams, assignments, sports days and more. Ideas from homework, excursions, curriculum ideas and 100s of strategies to use!

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO SCHOOL AND HOME

This book provides key strategies for all ages and stages. It offers over 500 practical strategies and time savers for school and home. Everything from setting up a classroom, developing friendships, engaging disengaged students; to moving house, choosing a school and applying for a job. It is the ultimate guide for teachers, parents and all professionals supporting children with autism spectrum disorder, including Asperger's, ADD, ADHD, ODD and other developmental delays.

