

HOW TO SUPPORT A PDA-ER IN ADULT RELATIONSHIPS



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Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) often focuses on children and little resources focus on adulthood. Throughout the lifespan, PDA is characterized by extreme distress when presented with demands and expectations (including things that the person wants to do or enjoy). Demand avoidance can be a manifestation of anxiety and can be heightened with uncertainty and ambiguity. This internal struggle can impact essential needs like eating and sleeping, and expectations such as going to work and maintaining relationships. Demand avoidance can be subtly and not so subtly present in relationship struggles. PDAers report that conventional support strategies are often unhelpful but personalized and flexible support, especially from their loved ones, can make a big difference.

RECOGNIZING DEMANDS AND UNDERSTANDING AVOIDANCE

- Many things can be perceived as demands, and it's important to be conscious of language phrasing and its impact on our loved ones.
- Demands can include almost everything! A sense of feeling like something is not in our control can feel like a demand. Since this is the case, it's important to know the strategies that can help!
- Friendships and romantic relationships can bring both uncertainty and both spoken and unspoken expectations, which can cause the PDAer to engage in avoidant behavior.

SENSORY REGULATION AND DEMAND FREE TIME

- One of the most impactful variables in a PDAers life involves sensory processing.
- Our environment can make social interactions more difficult depending on how our sensory system is taking it in.
- Understanding your PDAers sensory needs is a neurodivergent "Love Map" (knowledge of your partner's inner world) and is foundational to a stable relationship
- Scheduling "Demand Free Time" can help reduce anxiety and allow our systems to reset.

BUILDING FLEXIBILITY INTO THE RELATIONSHIP

- Phrasing things as invitations without expectations can go a long way!
- Loved ones can be open to experiences with their PDAer without focusing on an outcome.
- Being able to adapt to changes, negotiate differences and respond positively to the evolving needs of oneself and one's partner is a huge asset in a PDA relationship

AUTONOMY, INDEPENDENCE, AND INFORMATION

- Many PDAers thrive with reassurance and being kept in the loop!
- Straightforward communication is helpful when communicated with kindness and love.
- Expecting and not communicating why something is needed can feel like a form of control, even if that's not the case!
- While many PDAers love their freedom and space, they may also be closely attached to their significant other and find them to be the ultimate co-regulator.

REMEMBERING TO PLAY

- Imagination, creativity and humor are strengths of many PDAers and help them overcome obstacles!
- Regardless of age, play lowers our anxiety and improves our relationships!