



PDA & masking with James transcript

Hi, I'm James and I'm 14 years old.

I was diagnosed with PDA at the age of 12 and would like to share some information about masking.

A lot of people with PDA such as myself often use what is known as a mask to hide emotions and avoid demands.

I usually mask without even thinking about it since I do it so often and I'm so used to it.

Many people without PDA mask too, but not nearly to the extent as a PDAer.

Masking can make PDAers appear socially advanced and comfortable, but under the surface they do lack some understanding.

Understandably masking for hours every day can be extremely draining and make PDAers such as myself depressed as we are not showing our true selves.

Therefore, despite masking having its benefits, I sometimes find it mentally painful and it can lead to downward spirals and meltdowns.

Due to the confusion masking causes, neurotypical people will believe the masker is coping and will usually see meltdowns coming without warning and out of nowhere.

Often there may not be one particular reason for a PDAer becoming overwhelmed and it may simply be the constant mask they put on just becoming too much for them.

This is why I find I need daily calming time where I can be myself and not have to deal with social situations and their stresses.

Furthermore, I cannot overstate how believable PDAers' masks can be.

My parents and I genuinely feel like it's impossible to tell what a PDAer such as myself is thinking and whether they are okay or not.

This is why it is so important for PDAers to trust people so they can openly speak about their feelings without masking.

If you know somebody with PDA, I would recommend acting consistently and just being yourself with them despite how they appear on the surface.

This will help the PDAer to feel more comfortable when not masking around you.

If they only act sympathetically to the PDAer when they are not masking and behaving 'strangely', they may feel frustrated and like they always should mask around you.

This is not good for building trust for a PDAer as they should feel like they are not demanded to mask around you.

Another reason being yourself and not changing too much depending on the PDAer's apparent mood is because PDAers find changes uncomfortable.

Without a doubt, the place I mask most is at school.

Most people with PDA do not attend school, which I believe is because of the social demands and feeling like they have to mask everywhere.

School is an extremely hard environment for PDAers to cope with as there is often no escape or a safe place to go to when they are feeling overwhelmed.

This means there is a constant demand to mask to avoid looking 'strange' or falling victim to bullying or being made fun of.

Masking can also lead to difficult social situations. For example, some of the time I mask so effectively people can end up thinking I'm absolutely fine and can end up saying things that make me feel worse.

To try to get school to understand me better, my mum has gone in multiple times and spoken to the head of special needs.

However, whenever the teacher my mum talks to sees me, I am masking. This means she thinks my mum is exaggerating when speaking about my difficulties as I appear like I am coping well on the surface.

This is different to many other special requirements because the teacher will be able to easily spot when most non PDAer students are feeling overwhelmed.

I feel frustrated when teachers do not understand and simply assume I am happy just because that is what they see on the surface.

I would like to help these teachers understand that how PDAers feel inside their heads and why we are not exaggerating and actually need support instead of them questioning if there's anything actually wrong with us at all.

I feel like quite a few of my teachers, more distant family and friends that know about my PDA may even believe I am mad when my mum or I try to explain my differences to them.

This is particularly annoying since if a professional has explained it to them, they will listen and take my demand avoidance seriously. Whereas, when me or the people

closest to me try to explain, to teachers in particular, I am not treated like other autistic people who do not mask like I do. They simply think I'll be fine and they don't need to worry or do anything to make me feel better.

Masking is extremely tiring and can have a negative effect on PDAers' mental health.

I tend to overthink everything and there is often a lot going on inside my head at the same time. In addition to masking 24/7, school work, homework, social situations and more, I just sometimes need to relax and turn off my brain for a while.

I feel like everybody could do with some daily calming time, but this is especially essential for PDAers to lower their masks and think things through slowly with minimum stress.

Lastly, I felt I should address the demand of writing and reading this piece as I believe it is a good example of how I cope with demands.

Actually, now I think about it, this was not a demand at all, more a request or idea. However, my PDA brain automatically processes it as a demand.

I am glad this idea was suggested to me because I do enjoy writing and educating others about the PDA brain and I'm certainly not saying you shouldn't suggest ideas to people with PDA.

Life is full of demands which makes it difficult people with PDA, so it is good to find ways of coping with it.

Personally, I find writing a list on my phone of things to do and just picking one and getting on with it before my brain can oppose is an excellent way of getting demands such as homework done.

I find this method helpful because once I have actually started, my brain is focusing on the task rather than the demand.

Furthermore, I can end up enjoying demands, which may be surprising, but once I am focused on the task at hand, rather the 'big scary idea', it's not actually that bad.

Obviously, everybody has a different way of coping, and this is just a suggestion of one of them.

Thank you for listening.
Bye.