

Guide for Employers

This information sheet provides information about employing autistic people with a Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) profile. Please read in conjunction with Workplace Adjustments for PDA Adults www.pdasociety.org.uk/life-with-pda-menu/adult-life-landing/workplace-adjustments-for-pda/



What is PDA?

PDA is one way in which autism can present. With PDA, many characteristics are shared with others on the autism spectrum, such as differences in social interaction and communication, repetitive/restricted behaviours/interests and sensory sensitivities. In addition, PDAers have a need for control that is anxiety-related and use a variety of approaches to avoid everyday demands and expectations. Also many PDAers 'mask' so difficulties may not be immediately apparent. *For more information on Autism, please see the National Autistic Society website www.autism.org.uk and for more information on PDA, please see the PDA Society website www.pdasociety.org.uk For information on the Disability Discrimination Act please see www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010*

PDA in the workplace

Autistic people have a great deal to offer employers (*please see <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/employment/employing-autistic-people/employers> from the National Autistic Society and <https://www.employmentautism.org.uk/tools-and-resources> from Employment Autism*), and PDAers are also often highly talented, creative, passionate, charming and determined. Nonetheless, PDA can also present a challenge in the workplace, particularly around issues of autonomy, control, confinement and deadlines. Workplaces that encourage a culture of respect and inclusion, and enable individuals a degree of autonomy and creativity, can be a good match.

Reasonable workplace adjustments for PDA

The following suggestions may help employers to make reasonable adjustments in order to support a PDA employee:

- **Job ads** - Consider how clear and jargon free the job description and person specification is. Clarify what the expectations of the role are and explain how employees will be expected to communicate with colleagues and clients.
- **Application forms** - It is helpful to include a section for applicants to provide information about adjustments they may require to assist them through the recruitment process.
- **Interviews** - The interview process can be especially stressful for autistic people. If possible, it's worth considering alternatives to conventional 'question and answer style' interviews. Often a work trial might be just as informative. Before interviews are held, it is good practice to provide as much information as possible about the format of the interview, the interviewers themselves and the questions they will ask. An 'indirect' approach to questioning may be helpful. Unclear language and sarcasm can be misinterpreted. Keep an open mind about body language and eye contact. Many autistic people have **sensory processing difficulties** and might appreciate a quiet waiting area separate to other candidates and interviews being held in a quiet room with minimal disruptions.

The following checklist can be used as a basis for the employer and job applicant or employee to discuss together what may be helpful and to agree and review individualised workplace adjustments.

Workplace adjustments for PDA - Checklist

The role	
Clarify expectations of overall outcomes then allow some autonomy to complete task	
Mutually agree deadlines	
Allow novelty/variety where possible	
Allow choice/control where possible	
Flexible working hours with option of time off in lieu	
Flexible working places e.g. home or an alternative site	
Reduce amount of admin required to complete tasks	
Provide one to one training (rather than group training)	

Communication	
Communicate specifically and clearly - avoid ambiguity	
Make requests as 'indirect' as possible	
Be polite and respectful	
Give options for preferred communication methods	
Avoid apportioning blame – hold calm, fair discussions	
Adhere to precise timings for meetings/appointments	

Supervision	
Keep employee informed at all times, especially re. changes/delays	
Allow two-way mentoring schemes with open/constructive reviews between employer & employee	
Ensure understanding - explain the why as well as the what	
Avoid multi-step instructions, chunk tasks, allow freedom to resolve problems	

Colleagues	
With employee's agreement, share information & consider workforce training about autism & PDA,	
Agree boundaries for banter and sarcasm	
Encourage trust and honesty between peers	
Avoid assumptions about understanding of 'unwritten office rules'	
Avoid or make a plan for unstructured time	
Ensure attendance at social events is optional	

Sensory	
Allow regular sensory breaks throughout the day	
Consider noise levels, lighting, sources of smells	
Choice of work space, avoid 'hot-desking' Allow 'recovery days'	

Support	
Encourage coping strategies – eg. provide exit strategy, allow for postponement or recovery time	
Mentor/advocate to assist with communication or resolving misunderstandings	
Collaborate to solve problems	

Other adjustments which may help	