

# PDA Support Strategies to Try @School

*(try them all, just one at a time, then try it again, or try a different one, another day)*

by Heidi Brandis (PDA parent | OT | Author WA Autism Parent Handbook | Admin Autism & PDA FB groups)

- \* **Quality of relationship** between adult and child is absolutely fundamental
- \* Child needs to **be in control** as much as possible - issue is an **incapacity**, NOT wilful disobedience or naughtiness - **anxiety-based need for control**
- \* Critical to **choose priorities** and **reduce demands**
- \* Constantly **adjust demands to suit tolerance** level (changes often) - two dials in parallel
- \* Use of **humour** and **distraction**
- \* **Depersonalise** and **disguise** demands - "I wonder what they're doing over there" or "that looks like fun" rather than saying "go and see what the others are doing" or "go do x"
- \* **Offer choices** as much as possible - BUT NOT when agitated or highly anxious
- \* Best when **invited to participate**, but not pressured to
- \* **Heavy work** for sensory and emotional regulation - push, pull, carry, dig, lift
- \* **Notify ahead of time** of big changes to usual program, plan ahead - anticipate **potential triggers**.
- \* **Reduced schedule** can be helpful (contact SSEND for assistance)
- \* **Collaborate** with parents - regular communication can make huge difference
- \* Avoid directive language - use **declarative** or **indirect language** (book by Linda K. Murphy)
- \* May need **extra time** and **support** for processing and transitions between lessons/rooms
- \* Use of **drama** and **role play** (characters, animals) especially if liked by child
- \* Without isolating, allow to be on fringes, gives opportunity to **learn by osmosis**
- \* Lots of opportunities for **relaxation**, physical **exercise**, fidget toys, soothing music, yoga, gym balls, nature nature nature, more ideas from OT/parents
- \* **Love them even when they're hard to like!** That's when they need it most
- \* Throw your **expectations out the window**
- \* Verbal/auditory **comprehension** can be very different from their verbal **expression** ability
- \* **Interest-driven tasks** best whenever possible. **Sensory breaks** can be useful.
- \* Avoid power struggles at ALL TIMES; use **neutral posture, voice and facial expression**
- \* **Don't take things personally** - especially anger or aggressive behaviour - child is communicating to you that they aren't coping - need thick skin!
- \* Safe, **calm space** and safe, **calm mentor** or nominated person for time away
- \* Easier for parents than teachers as we have more opportunities to trial these and see what works (and this changes frequently!)
- \* **Flexibility** and **adaptability** are critical
- \* Overriding feeling for child with PDA towards school is **MASSIVE ANXIETY** - once the anxiety is reduced adequately, only THEN you can increase their engagement and participation in learning **but not until then**
- \* Parents **cope** by getting educated, exercising, counselling with a psychologist (EAP), antidepressants, reading, Netflix, chocolate, wine, music, journals, yoga, meditation, part-time work, autism parent groups, Facebook support groups and respite when possible.
- \* Need to **look after yourself well first**, then you can support the child well/better.



**THANK YOU for all you do to support our children;**

**we really do appreciate it & they really do need it!** 

For more info, ideas and support, please join us on Facebook at

**PDA Perth WA Interest Group for Educators and Health Professionals** or see [pdasociety.org.uk](http://pdasociety.org.uk)