



Supporting Your PDA Teenager

A practical guide for parents

Parenting a PDA teenager is one of the most complex and exhausting parenting experiences there is. The challenges of adolescence — identity, autonomy, peer pressure, hormonal change — amplify the PDA profile significantly. This guide offers a realistic, compassionate framework for the teenage years.

Why Adolescence Is Harder with PDA

- Adolescence is fundamentally about claiming autonomy — which is already a core PDA driver
- Identity development involves pushing boundaries — which looks like extreme demand avoidance
- Peer relationships become more complex and the cost of social masking increases
- Hormonal changes directly affect anxiety and emotional regulation
- The school demands in secondary school are significantly higher

The Most Important Shift for the Teen Years

The approach that worked for a PDA child in primary school needs to evolve for the teen years. The teenager needs increasing genuine autonomy — not just the appearance of choice, but real agency over their life. Offering this willingly (rather than having it taken in conflict) is the key to navigating this period.

Communication in the Teen Years

What tends to work

- Shorter, lower-stakes conversations — not big sit-down talks
- Side-by-side conversations (walking, driving) rather than face-to-face
- Genuine curiosity about their interests — without evaluation or advice
- Expressing your own feelings without demands: "I've been worried about you lately"
- Letting silence be okay — not every pause needs filling

Communication approaches that backfire

Long, intense conversations about problems. "We need to talk." Advice they didn't ask for. "Back in my day..." comparisons. Making connection contingent on compliance.

School in the Teen Years

Secondary school attendance often becomes increasingly difficult for PDA teenagers. If your teen is struggling to attend, the priority is their mental health — not their attendance record. Work with the school on flexible options before the situation becomes a crisis.



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The Relationship First

The most protective factor

Research on adolescent outcomes consistently shows that the quality of the parent-child relationship is the strongest protective factor for teens in difficulty. Your relationship with your PDA teenager — maintained through the hardest moments — is the most important investment you can make.