



# Supporting PDA Young People Through Puberty

A guide for parents and carers

Puberty adds a significant layer of complexity to PDA. Hormonal changes directly affect anxiety, emotional regulation, and sensory sensitivity — all of which are already heightened in PDA. This guide offers low-demand approaches to supporting your child through this period.

## How Puberty Amplifies PDA

- Oestrogen and testosterone directly affect anxiety levels
- Emotional dysregulation intensifies, sometimes dramatically
- Sensory sensitivities can shift or intensify
- Body changes create new sensory demands (bras, hygiene routines)
- Social landscape becomes more complex and anxiety-provoking
- The demand load of secondary school increases significantly

## Hygiene and Personal Care

Personal care demands (showering, deodorant, changing clothes) can become significant battlegrounds during puberty. The approach needs to remain low-demand even as the stakes increase.

### Low-demand approaches to hygiene

- Offer genuine choice: "Would you prefer a shower now or in an hour?"
- Remove the audience — don't comment publicly on hygiene choices
- Problem-solve together: "I've noticed deodorant feels uncomfortable — want to try some different ones?"
- Unscented or minimal products may help with sensory issues
- Accept compromise: a shower every 2 days is better than a daily battle

## Talking About Puberty

PDA teenagers often do better with written information than verbal conversations — it removes the demand of responding in real time. Consider books, reliable websites, or brief written notes over sit-down talks.

### Conversation starters that tend to work

- "I noticed this book about puberty — want me to leave it in your room?"
- "I know this is a weird time physically — is there anything you're wondering about?"
- "I'm not going to give you a big talk — just wanted you to know I'm here if you have questions."



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## For Girls — Menstruation

Menstruation can significantly disrupt regulation in PDA girls. The hormonal fluctuation throughout the cycle affects anxiety, sensory tolerance, and demand capacity — sometimes dramatically. Tracking the cycle can help predict and prepare for difficult periods (see FD58).

## For All — Emotional Intensity

Puberty intensifies emotions. Meltdowns may become more frequent or more severe temporarily. This is neurological — not deterioration. Hold the long view: this phase passes.

<b>Keep the relationship central</b>	Puberty is when many PDA families feel the relationship coming under the most strain. Maintaining warmth and connection — even when everything else is difficult — is the most protective thing you can do.
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