



# What PDA Teenagers Want Their Parents to Know

A shareable resource for families

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These insights are drawn from conversations with and accounts by PDA teenagers and young adults reflecting on their experiences. Share this with your partner, your child's school staff, grandparents, and other adults in their life.

## 1. My refusals are not about you.

When I say no, slam a door, or seem impossible — it is not about you personally. My nervous system is overwhelmed by something, and I can't always name what. I'm not trying to hurt you.

## 2. The more you push, the harder it gets.

Pressure makes the avoidance worse, not better. I know that doesn't make sense from the outside. But every time you increase the pressure, my anxiety increases — and I become less able to do the thing.

## 3. I'm exhausted in ways you can't see.

Getting through a school day, interacting with people, managing my responses — it costs me more than it costs other people. By the time I get home, I often have almost nothing left.

## 4. The screen time and gaming are not laziness.

Gaming is often where I feel in control, connected, and able to function without performing. For a lot of PDA teenagers, it is one of the only spaces where the demands are ones we chose.

## 5. I want connection — just on my terms.

I don't want to be alone. I want to feel close to you. I just can't always handle the format that connection usually takes. Side-by-side, interest-sharing, not face-to-face intensity.

## 6. Your calm matters more than you know.

When you stay calm when I can't, it genuinely helps. Not immediately — but it's the thing that helps me come back faster. When you match my panic, it takes longer.

## 7. I don't want to be like this.

Most of us don't enjoy the meltdowns, the refusals, the exhaustion. We're not choosing it. And the shame we feel about it is significant — even if it doesn't look that way.

## 8. Repair matters enormously.

When you come back after a hard moment and say something warm — "that was hard, I'm sorry" — it means more than you know. Those moments of repair are what keep the relationship strong.



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## 9. I need you to believe me.

When I tell you I can't — I mean it. When I tell you something hurt or scared me or overwhelmed me — I mean it. Being believed is one of the most healing things a parent can offer.

## 10. I love you. This is just hard.

Most PDA teenagers love their parents deeply. The relationship matters enormously. The hard parts are not the whole story.

**For parents** Share this with any adult who interacts with your teenager. Understanding shifts response. Response shifts relationship. Relationship is everything.