PDA

AUSTRALIA

Late Diagnosis of PDA in Girls — A Resource Guide

pdaaustralia.com.au

Discovering a PDA profile late — in adolescence, adulthood, or after decades of misdiagnosis — can bring enormous relief and profound grief at the same time. This guide is for late-diagnosed PDA girls and women, and for those who support them.

If you've only recently discovered	If you've only recently discovered that PDA explains your experience, you're not alone. Many women receive this recognition in their 20s, 30s, 40s — or later. It's never too late.

Why Late Diagnosis Happens

- PDA profiles in girls are routinely overlooked by clinicians trained to recognise autism in boys
- Masking makes girls appear 'functional' — the internal cost is invisible until it isn't
- Girls are more likely to receive anxiety, depression, ODD, BPD, or ADHD diagnoses first
- The social motivation of many PDA girls makes the autistic profile less obvious
- Assessment tools and criteria were historically developed using male samples

The Emotional Impact of Late Diagnosis

Relief

For most women, the first response is relief. Suddenly, a lifetime of experiences makes sense. The exhaustion, the misunderstandings, the relationships that fell apart, the jobs that didn't work — there was a reason.

Grief

Grief follows closely. Grief for the years spent masking, for the support you didn't get, for the version of yourself that had to work so hard just to appear ordinary. This grief is legitimate and deserves space.

Anger

Many women feel angry — at the systems that missed them, at professionals who dismissed their concerns, at partners or family who didn't understand. This anger is also valid.

> **Helpful Tip**
> Give yourself permission to process all of it — in any order, for as long as you need. There is no right way to respond to late diagnosis.

What Late Diagnosis Changes — and What It Doesn't

What It Changes

- Your understanding of your own history and experience
- Access to formal supports — NDIS, workplace accommodations, healthcare adjustments
- How you can talk about yourself to others
- Your ability to find community with people who share your neurology
- Your relationship with the strategies and coping mechanisms you've built

What It Doesn't Change

- Who you are — your strengths, your values, your relationships
- The validity of your past experiences and responses
- Your capacity for growth and self-understanding
- The love of people in your life who know you well

Next Steps in the Australian Context

Seeking Formal Assessment

If you haven't yet received a formal assessment, this is your starting point. In Australia, autism assessments are typically conducted by psychologists or psychiatrists. For adults, look for a clinician who specifically mentions adult autism assessment — many clinicians primarily work with children.

- Ask your GP for a referral to a psychologist experienced in adult autism assessment
- Request someone with experience in autism in women specifically
- Prepare a written account of your experiences — the home presentation, the masking, the history of misdiagnosis
- You do not need a clinician's permission to suspect PDA — bring it up directly

Accessing NDIS as an Adult

A diagnosis may open NDIS access. This is worth pursuing — NDIS can fund therapy, support coordination, and daily living support. See our separate NDIS Adult Access Guide (FD39) for step-by-step guidance.

Finding Community

- Search Facebook for Australian PDA adult groups and late-diagnosed women communities
- The Autistic Self Advocacy Network Australia (ASAN Australia) has resources for late-diagnosed adults
- Look for PDA-aware therapists — a good therapeutic relationship requires the therapist to understand the PDA profile

Unmasking — and Why It Takes Time

Many late-diagnosed women begin a process of unmasking — learning to drop the performance of neurotypicality they've maintained for decades. This is a significant undertaking. It can affect relationships, careers, and your sense of self.

Unmasking is not about becoming a different person. It's about finding more sustainable ways to exist in the world — with more energy for the things that matter, and less energy spent performing.

You don't have to unmask

You don't have to unmask all at once, or in every context. Start where it feels safest. Give yourself time.

Key Takeaways

1. Late diagnosis is common for PDA women — it's a systemic failure, not yours
2. The emotional response to late diagnosis (relief, grief, anger) is normal and valid
3. Formal diagnosis in Australia can be accessed through your GP
4. NDIS access may be available following diagnosis
5. Community and connection with other PDA women is one of the most protective factors available

Helpful Tip

Visit pdaaustralia.com.au/girls for more resources for PDA girls and women in Australia.