



What PDA Girls Want Their Teachers to Know

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This resource is designed to share with teachers, school leaders, and wellbeing staff. It comes from the experiences of PDA girls and women — what they wish their teachers had understood.

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Share this: Give this to teachers, aides, and school leadership teams. It takes less than five minutes to read. It might change how a PDA girl is seen and supported at your school.

1. 'Fine at school' is not the whole story.

I look fine. I hold it together. I follow the rules, complete the work, and appear socially competent. But I'm managing an enormous amount of internal experience that you can't see. By the time I get home, I am completely depleted. The meltdown my parents describe isn't manipulation — it's the cost of the day.

2. The effort of appearing normal is exhausting.

Every social interaction, every classroom task, every transition requires deliberate effort. I'm watching other students to understand the rules. I'm managing my reactions. I'm calculating what is safe to say or do. This is not automatic. It is work. Please don't assume that because it looks effortless, it is.

3. When I say I can't do something, I mean it.

I know you might think I'm choosing not to. I understand how it looks. But when I am at my threshold — when the demand or the sensory environment or the anxiety gets too high — I genuinely cannot do the thing being asked. Pushing harder doesn't help. It escalates.

4. Criticism in front of the class is devastating.

I care enormously about how others see me — partly because I've worked so hard to appear competent. Public correction, public comparison, any feedback in front of peers causes shame that can derail my entire day. Please give me feedback privately.

5. I need to feel in control of something.

When I try to take over group activities or redirect assignments, I'm managing anxiety — not trying to be difficult. Offering me genuine choice within tasks, or some control over how I demonstrate my learning, reduces the demand load significantly. It doesn't require big changes — small choices matter a lot.

6. I need an adult I can trust.

Having one adult at school who I know is on my side — who won't embarrass me, who will listen without judgment, who I can go to when things are hard — is more protective than almost anything else. I don't need a therapist at school. I need a safe person.



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7. Lunch and recess are often harder than lessons.

Unstructured social time is some of the most demanding time in my day. I may look like I'm managing fine in the playground — but navigating social dynamics without the structure of the classroom is genuinely difficult. Please don't assume that because I have friends, everything is fine.

8. The sensory environment affects me more than you know.

Noise, smell, lighting, temperature — these aren't minor inconveniences. They use up regulation capacity I need for learning and social interaction. Simple adjustments (quieter space for exams, permission to use headphones, an alternative to the cafeteria) make a significant difference without costing very much.

9. My anxiety is real, not attention-seeking.

The physical complaints — the stomachaches, the headaches — are real. Anxiety generates genuine physiological responses. I'm not making them up to avoid class. Please treat them seriously, and please don't send me back to class immediately when I'm distressed. A few minutes to regulate is far more efficient than a full meltdown later.

10. I want to succeed. Please help me.

I am not trying to make your job difficult. I genuinely want to do well, to have friends, to learn, to feel good at school. When the environment works with my nervous system instead of against it, I can surprise everyone. Please don't give up on finding the right approach — it's worth it.

A Note for Teachers

Supporting a PDA girl well Supporting a PDA girl well doesn't require you to become a PDA specialist. It requires you to trust what her parents tell you, observe without jumping to conclusions, and be willing to make small adjustments. The impact of a teacher who 'gets it' on a PDA girl's school experience is profound.

Helpful Tip For classroom strategies, support plan templates, and the PDA Teacher Handbook, visit pdaaustralia.com.au/schools and pdaaustralia.com.au/shop