



# PDA in Adults — Self-Assessment and Support Guide

For adults exploring the PDA profile

Many adults discover PDA later in life — often after a child is diagnosed, or after years of feeling fundamentally different without a clear explanation. If you're exploring whether PDA fits your experience, this guide will help you understand what the profile looks like in adults and what to do next in Australia.

**You are not alone** Late identification of PDA in adults is common. The profile was only formally described in the 1980s, and recognition in adult presentations is still growing. Many adults who recognise themselves in PDA material have spent decades developing complex coping strategies — sometimes at great personal cost.

## What PDA Looks Like in Adults

The core feature of PDA — an anxiety-driven need to avoid and resist everyday demands — doesn't disappear in adulthood. It typically becomes more sophisticated. Adults with PDA have usually developed elaborate strategies to manage and conceal demand avoidance, which can make the profile less obvious but no less real.

### Common Adult PDA Experiences

- Difficulty maintaining conventional employment — the demand structure of most jobs is unsustainable
- Relationships that feel exhausting — the implicit demands of partnership, friendship, and family
- A history of being seen as unreliable, difficult, or resistant — without understanding why
- Intense interest and high capability in self-directed areas, alongside apparent inability to do demanded tasks
- A sense of performing or masking in most social situations
- Burnout cycles — periods of apparent high functioning followed by complete collapse
- Strong reactions to perceived unfairness, coercion, or control
- Difficulty with routine and time-based demands even when motivation is genuine

### The Internal Experience

Adults with PDA often describe the demand experience not as laziness or stubbornness, but as a physical impossibility — a wall that appears between intention and action when the task feels like a demand. The more they try to force through it, the higher the wall gets.

## Self-Assessment: Does This Fit?

The following questions are not diagnostic. They are a starting point for reflection. If many of these resonate strongly, exploring PDA further — including formal assessment — may be worthwhile.

### Demand Avoidance



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- Do you find tasks much harder to do when someone else asks you to do them than when you decide to yourself?
- Do you have significant difficulty completing tasks by external deadlines even when you want to?
- Do you avoid situations where others will have expectations of you, even when you want the outcome?
- Do you experience something like a physical resistance to demands — not just reluctance, but an inability to comply?

## Anxiety and Nervous System

- Is your underlying anxiety level high even in objectively safe situations?
- Do you experience burnout cycles — periods of apparent function followed by collapse?
- Do changes to plans or expectations cause a disproportionate stress response?
- Do you find the sensory environment (noise, crowds, light) significantly affects your regulation?

## Identity and Relationships

- Do you feel fundamentally different from most people in how you experience the world?
- Do you have a history of relationships that felt exhausting, confusing, or that broke down unexpectedly?
- Do you feel most yourself when you are self-directing — in your own projects, your own time?
- Have previous diagnoses (anxiety disorder, ADHD, BPD, ODD) felt partially but not fully accurate?

## What to Do Next in Australia

### Seeking Formal Assessment

Adult autism assessment in Australia can be expensive but is possible. Start with your GP and request a referral to a psychologist or psychiatrist with experience in adult autism assessment — specifically mentioning that you want someone familiar with PDA profiles and masking in adults.

- Medicare rebates may apply through certain pathways — discuss with your GP
- Private assessment typically costs \$1,500–\$3,000 in Australia
- Some community health centres and public hospitals offer adult autism assessment — wait times are long
- A diagnosis opens NDIS eligibility and other formal support pathways

### Community and Connection

Even without formal diagnosis, connecting with other PDA adults is valuable. Online communities exist specifically for PDA adults — Facebook groups, Reddit communities, and Discord servers where people share experiences and strategies.



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## Key Takeaways

1. PDA in adults is real and common — but often unrecognised until midlife
2. The core features are present in adulthood but often more concealed by coping strategies
3. Self-identification is a valid starting point — formal assessment opens additional pathways
4. NDIS, workplace adjustments, and PDA-aware therapy are all available in Australia
5. Finding community with other PDA adults is one of the most protective things available

### Helpful Tip

For more adult PDA resources in Australia, visit [pdaaustralia.com.au/adults](https://pdaaustralia.com.au/adults) — including downloads, community links, and NDIS guidance.