



PDA Adults Parenting PDA Children

Protecting both nervous systems

When a PDA adult is parenting a PDA child, the nervous system dynamics are layered in a way that requires a specific approach. This guide is for that situation — and for the partners, professionals, and support people around those families.

You are not failing

This is one of the most demanding parenting situations that exists. Two demand-sensitive nervous systems, sharing a home, both needing regulation support. The strategies that work elsewhere may not work here. That is not a reflection of your parenting — it is a reflection of the complexity.

The Specific Challenges

Your Child's Demand Avoidance Triggers Yours

When your child resists your requests, your own PDA nervous system may experience this as a demand — the demand to manage the situation calmly and effectively, right now. This creates a cascade: child dysregulates, parent's demand load spikes, parent dysregulates, child escalates. Breaking this cycle requires understanding it first.

The Co-Regulation Paradox

PDA children need a regulated adult to co-regulate against. PDA adults have a regulation capacity that depletes faster and refills slower than average. Being asked to provide consistent co-regulation while managing your own demand load is genuinely very hard.

The Demand of Parenting Itself

Parenting involves relentless demands — from children, schools, health systems, and social expectations. For a PDA parent, this demand load alone can exceed capacity. Adding a child with high support needs makes it more complex again.

Strategies That Help

Protect Your Own Recovery First

You cannot pour from an empty nervous system. Building non-negotiable recovery time into your day is not selfishness — it is the prerequisite for everything else. An hour of genuine low-demand time for the parent protects the child's co-regulation environment.

Manage Demand Stacking

Demand stacking — where multiple demands arrive in close succession — is the fastest route to dysregulation for both PDA nervous systems. Build space between demands. Don't initiate one request until the previous interaction is fully resolved and both parties are regulated.



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Accept the Repair Model

In a PDA parent-PDA child household, ruptures will happen. Both nervous systems will sometimes exceed threshold. The goal is not perfect regulation — it is reliable, genuine repair. Modelling repair is also the most powerful thing you can teach a PDA child.

Design the Environment to Do the Work

Environmental design reduces demands for both of you simultaneously. Routines that feel like choices rather than impositions, sensory environments that don't require constant management, household structures that reduce required decisions — all of these reduce demand on both nervous systems.

NDIS for Both Parent and Child

If both parent and child have autism or PDA diagnoses, both may be eligible for NDIS in their own right. Pursuing NDIS for both — even if it feels overwhelming — creates access to supports that directly reduce the demand on the family system.

- Your child's NDIS plan may fund therapy that also benefits family functioning
- Your own NDIS plan may fund your therapy and support coordination
- Respite — funded through the child's plan or via Carer Gateway — directly reduces your demand load
- Support coordination can manage the administrative demands of both plans, reducing your load

Getting Support for Yourself

- Carer Gateway: 1800 422 737 — free services for unpaid carers
- Look for a therapist with experience in both autism and parenting — ideally with PDA knowledge
- PDA parent communities — particularly those for autistic parents — are invaluable
- Your GP is the entry point for formal mental health support if you are in burnout

Key Takeaways

1. PDA parent + PDA child is a specific, complex dynamic that needs its own framework
2. Your regulation is the foundation — it is not optional and is not selfish
3. Repair is more realistic than perfect regulation — and equally valuable
4. NDIS and Carer Gateway supports exist for both you and your child
5. Community with other PDA parents is one of the most protective things available



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Helpful Tip

Carer Gateway: 1800 422 737 | NDIS: 1800 800 110

For more resources: pdaaustralia.com.au/adults