



Adult PDA Assessment Guide

Preparing for autism assessment as an adult in Australia

Preparing well for an autism assessment as an adult increases the chance of an accurate outcome. This is especially true for PDA adults, where masking often means a standard assessment setting may not capture the full profile. This guide helps you prepare.

Finding the Right Clinician

Not all clinicians are equally experienced in adult autism assessment, and fewer are familiar with PDA presentations. This matters — the clinician's framework affects what they look for and how they interpret what they find.

What to Look For

- Explicitly mentions adult autism assessment on their website or intake materials
- Mentions autism in women, ADHD co-occurrence, or late diagnosis
- Does not require a referral for adults (though a GP letter helps)
- Offers a phone consultation before booking — a good indicator of flexibility
- Is open to hearing about PDA specifically, even if not using that terminology

Questions to Ask Before Booking

- "Do you have experience assessing adults who have masked their autism for decades?"
- "Are you familiar with the PDA profile within autism?"
- "What does your assessment process involve, and how long does it typically take?"
- "Do you accept and weight a written self-history from the person being assessed?"

What to Document Before Your Assessment

Your Developmental and School History

Assessors look for evidence that the profile was present in childhood — even if unrecognised. Try to recall:

- Difficulty with school demands — homework, tests, following rules
- Social difficulties or differences — friendships, peer dynamics
- Sensory sensitivities as a child — clothing, food, noise
- Meltdowns, shutdowns, or emotional dysregulation — what triggered them
- Any comments from teachers about being "difficult", "stubborn", or "a daydreamer"

Your Current Functional Experience

Describe how your neurology affects your current daily life — in the worst week of a typical month, not on your best day:



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- Employment difficulties — what has and hasn't worked, and why
- Relationship patterns — what becomes difficult and when
- Daily living — what tasks are genuinely hard, even when you want to do them
- Burnout history — when, how severe, what triggered it, how long recovery took
- Coping strategies you've developed — these are evidence of masking, not disproof of diagnosis

The Masking Documentation

This is the most important thing to document. Describe the gap between how you appear and what you experience internally. Describe what it costs you to appear functional — the recovery time, the private meltdowns, the after-social collapse.

Describe your worst days, not your best

Assessors often see people on good days in clinical settings. Document explicitly how you are during burnout, in your worst week, and in environments where masking is hardest.

During the Assessment

- Bring your written documentation — ask the assessor to read it as part of the assessment
- Be honest about your worst days, not your managed presentation
- Mention PDA specifically if it's not raised — "I've also been reading about PDA, which seems relevant to my experience"
- Bring a trusted person who can provide collateral information if possible
- If the process becomes overwhelming, it's okay to request a break or reschedule

After the Assessment

A post-assessment report should include a diagnosis (or differential diagnosis), a description of your functional profile, and recommendations. If PDA was part of the discussion, ask that it be noted explicitly in the report.

If the outcome doesn't feel accurate, you have the right to seek a second opinion. A single assessment is not the final word on your neurology.

Key Takeaways

1. Choosing the right clinician significantly affects the accuracy of the assessment
2. Written documentation of your history — prepared in advance — is essential for masked adults
3. Document your worst days and your masking cost, not your managed presentation
4. PDA can and should be raised explicitly during assessment



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5. A second opinion is always available if the outcome doesn't fit your experience

Helpful Tip

For more information on adult PDA in Australia, visit pdaaustralia.com.au/adults