ADDITUDE
Strategies & Support for ADHD and Beyond

Don’t Tell Me What to Do:

Pathological Demand Avoidance in Neurodivergent Kids

December 16, 2025
Podcast #590

ADHD expert webinars
additu.de/webinar
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Meet today's expert speaker:

Diane Gould, LCSW

ADDITUDE
Strategies & Support for ADHD and Beyond



Diane Gould, LCSW, is a licensed clinical social worker and the founder and executive director of PDA North America. She co-authored the book *Navigating PDA in America* with Ruth Fidler, which was published in June 2024. In April 2024, Diane was diagnosed as autistic. She has a private practice in the Chicago area, where she serves neurodivergent children, adults and their families. For the last 40 plus years, she has worked for both private agencies and school systems.

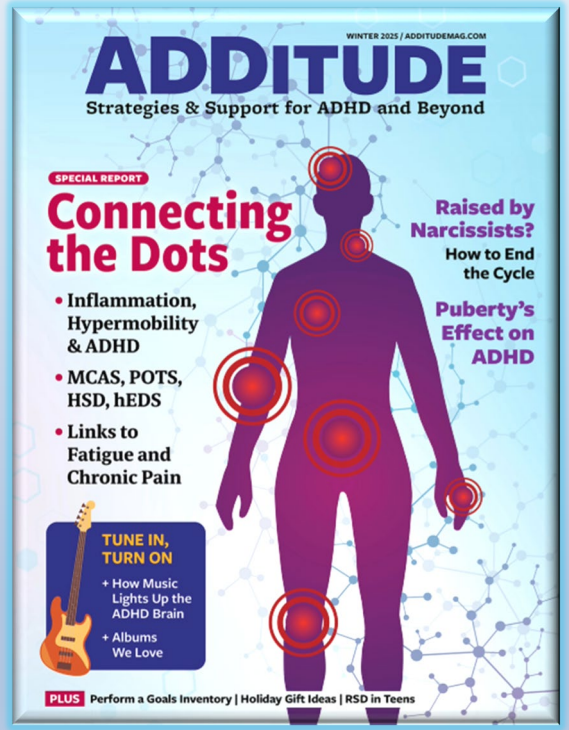
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

SUBSCRIBE TO

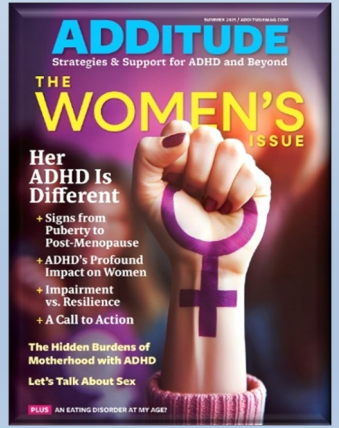
ADDITUDE

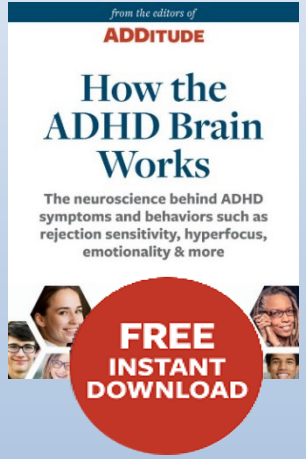
Get 15% Off Your Subscription + a Free eBook!

👉 additu.de/15off

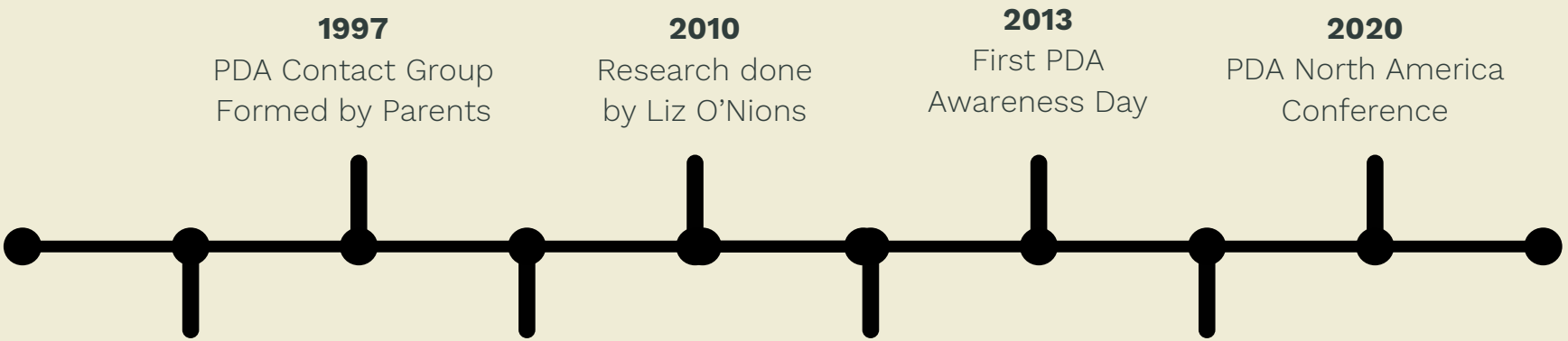








History of PDA



Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

PDA North America



- Established in **March 2020** at first conference held in the US
- **501(c)3 Non-profit** status in 2023
- **2 Websites**: PDA North America, PDA Learning Lab
- **Annual Conference**: Annual PDA North America Conference
- **Trainings**: Level 1 for Professionals & Parents, PDA & Education Training for Educators, I just found PDA, Now What?!
- **Virtual:** PDA Learning Lab (10% off today!), Monthly LIVE webinars, Peer Support Groups
- **Resources**: PDA-Affirming Provider Directories, PDA Insights, & Community Connection List
- **My Book**: "*Navigating PDA In America*" by Ruth Fidler and Diane Gould

Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Not all Demand Avoidance is PDA

There are many causes of demand avoidance:

- Extreme demand avoidance by neurodivergent people
- Executive functioning challenges
- Anxiety
- OCD
- Past experiences
- Perfectionism
- Sensory sensitivities



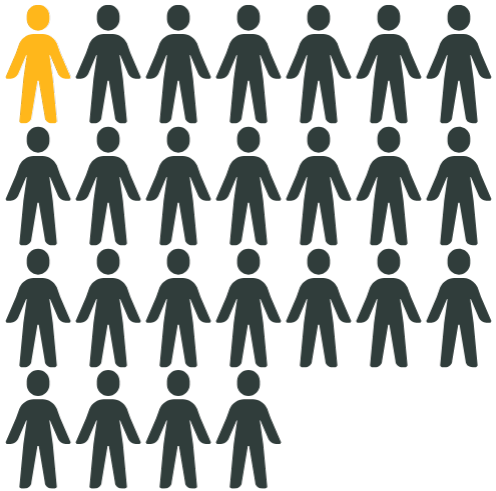
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

PDA in Numbers

- Christopher Gillberg's population study in the UK (2015) estimated that PDA features show up in autistic people at a rate of **1 in 25 so out of 100 autistic people, 4 would be PDA**. But it is only an **estimate**.

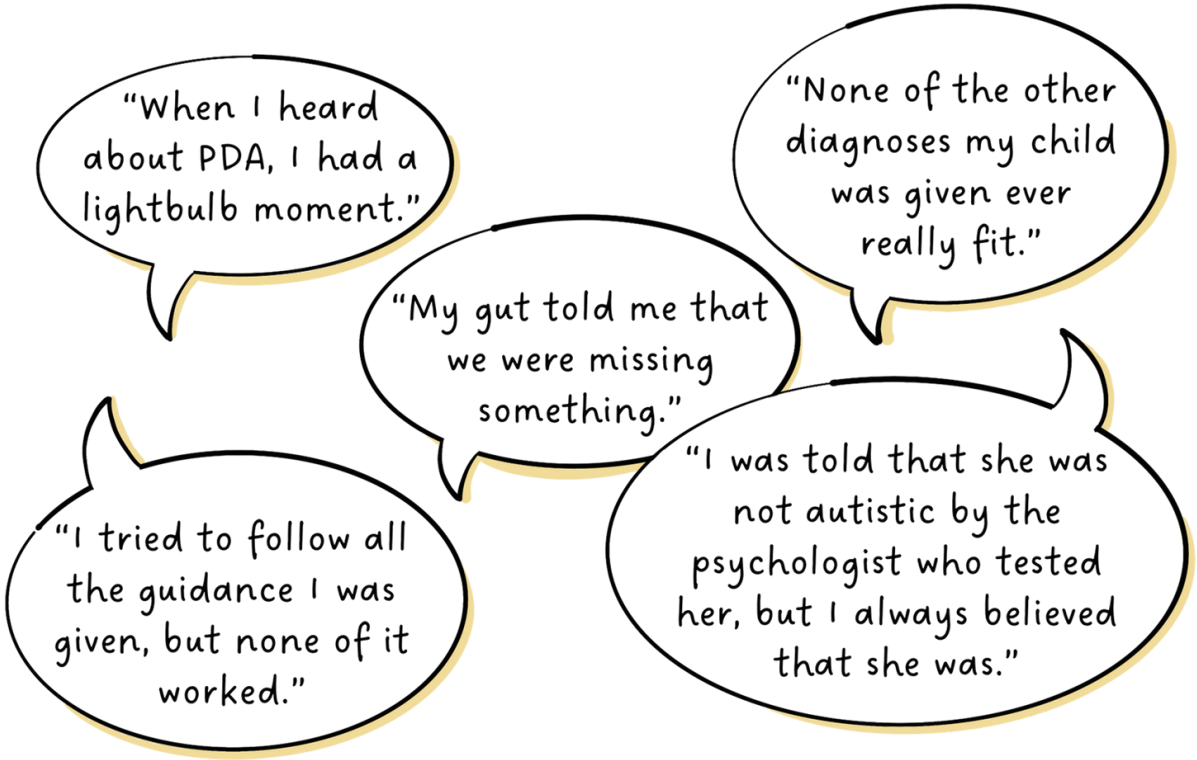
- Many **PDA individuals are undiagnosed or misdiagnosed bi-polar, borderline personality disorder, ODD, etc.** Black and Brown individuals are less likely to have their neurodivergence explored and are more likely to be diagnosed as having conduct disorders and oppositional defiance disorder.

- Don't forget that for some PDAers who hold multiple marginalized identities, **it is not just difficultly getting professional diagnosis and appropriate support.**



Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

What I hear from Parents



Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

SO WHAT'S IN A NAME?

To understand PDA– you must understand autism

Dr. Devon Price, author of "Unmasking Autism":

- We are hyper-reactive to even small stimuli in our environment
- We have trouble distinguishing between information and sensory data that should be ignored versus data that should be carefully considered
- We are highly focused on details rather than "big picture" concepts
- We are deeply and deliberately analytical
- Processing a situation takes us more time and energy than it does a neurotypical person (P.22 Unmasking Autism)



Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Being autistic at it's core means having a different kind of nervous system.

People who have this kind of nervous system experience, process, and respond to the world differently then non-autistics.

-Dr. Donna Henderson

Psy.D. Licensed Psychologist/Clinical Neuropsychologist

ADHD expert webinars
additu.de/webinar
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Stereotypical Perception of Autism

- Concrete and pragmatic
- Likes routine
- Social differences more noticeable
- Hypo-empathy
- Externalized
- High anxiety
- Fight, flight & freeze



ADHD expert webinars
additu.de/webinar
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Non-Stereotypical Features of Autism

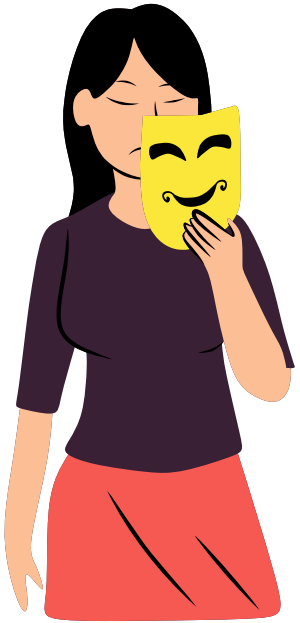
- Deeply existential
- High camouflaging/masking
- Special interests blend in socially/culturally
- Hyper-empathy
- Internalized
- High anxiety
- Fight, Flight, Fawn & Freeze



Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Thinking differently about Autism

- Moving away from the traditional view of autism
- It's a way of experiencing the world - not a list of behaviors
- More inclusive - especially of girls and women
- Peter Vermeulen- "Prediction differences and context blindness"



Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

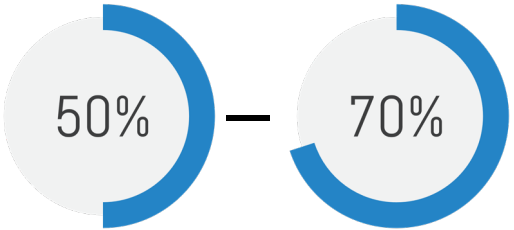
Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways.

There is no one "right" way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and **differences are not viewed as deficits**.

Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Autism & ADHD



50–70% of autistic people also have ADHD



Symptoms of one condition can overlap or mask the other
(e.g., impulsivity in ADHD vs. sensory overwhelm in autism).

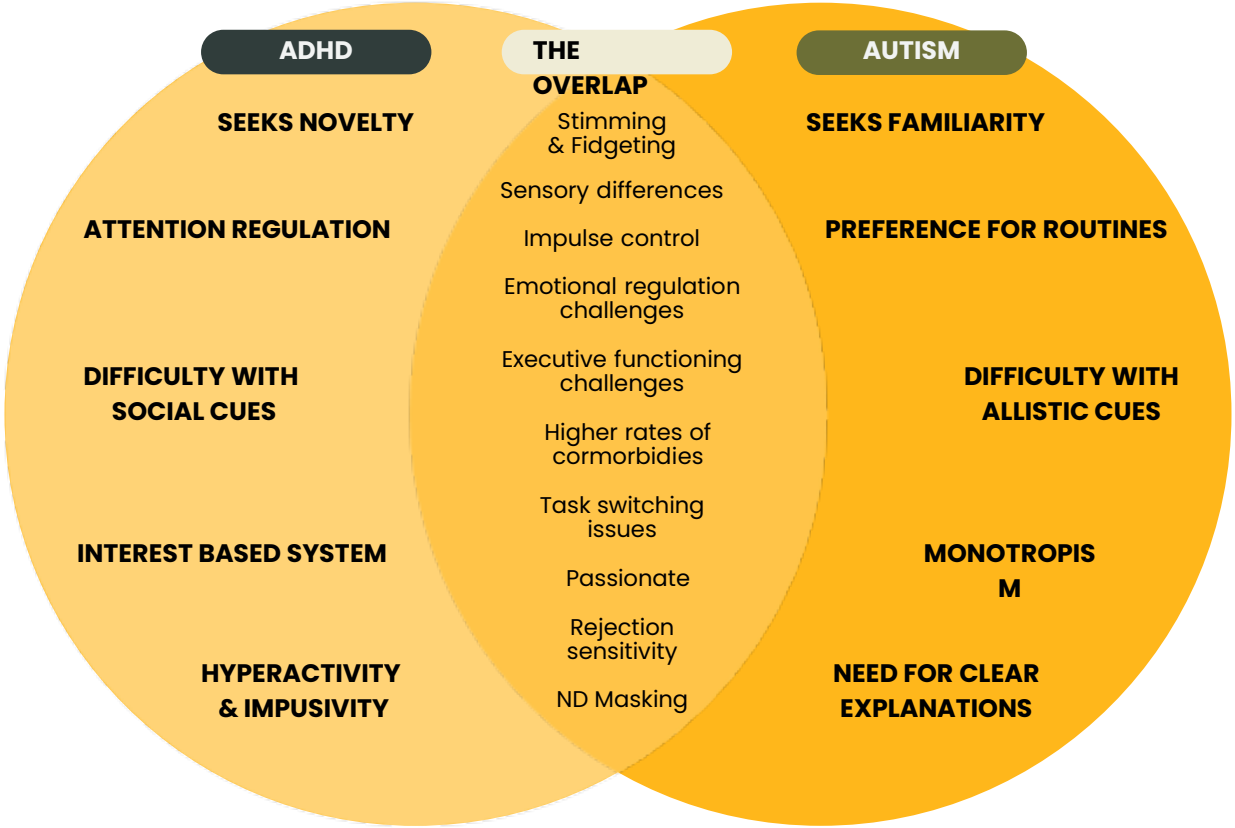


Until 2013, a provider could not diagnose both ADHD & Autism

Ref: Sokolova et al., 2017, National Institutes of Health (NIH), Taurines et al., 2012.)

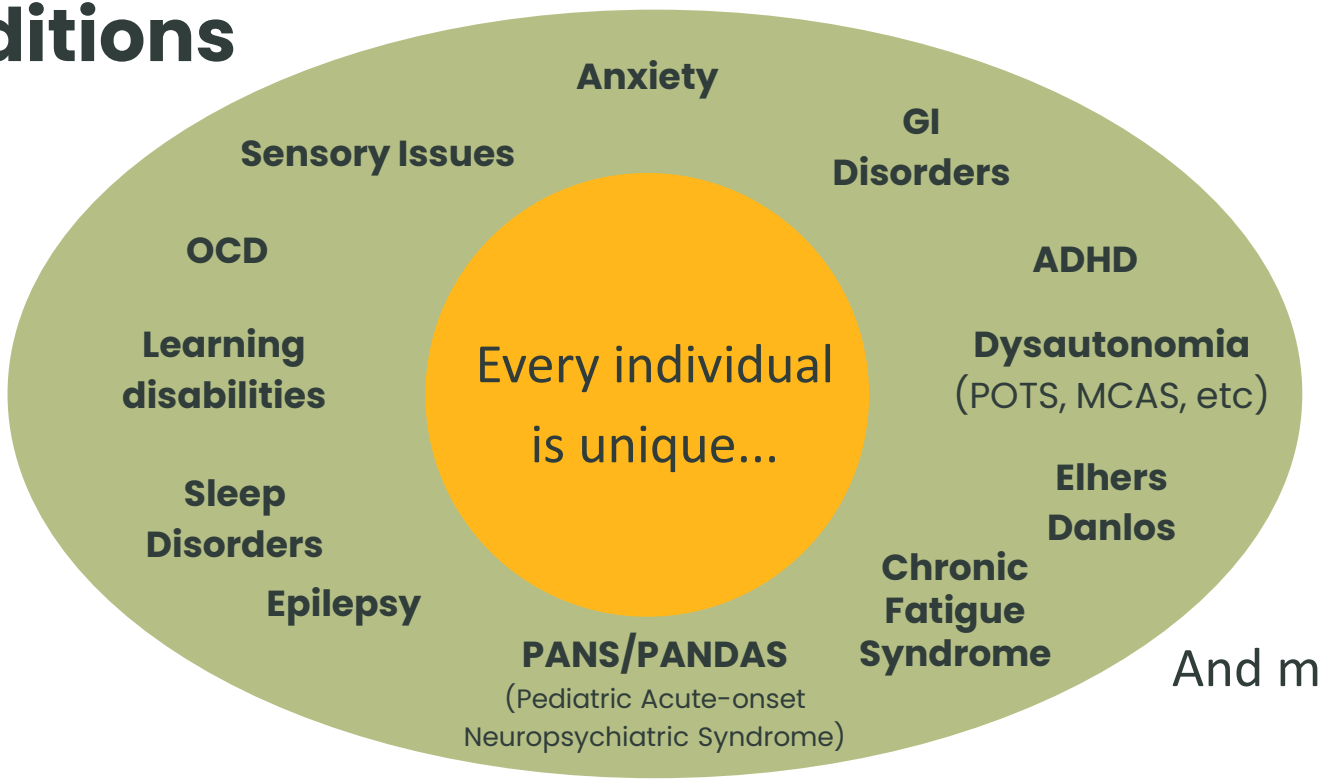
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Autism & ADHD Overlap



ADHD expert webinars
additu.de/webinar
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Co-Occuring Conditions



And many more...

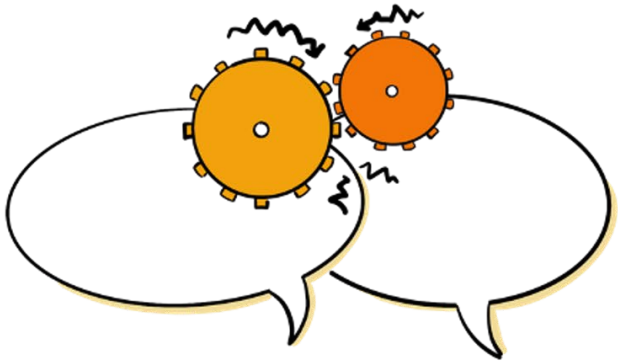
ADHD expert webinars
additu.de/webinar
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Features of a PDA Profile

People with a PDA profile can appear to have better social understanding and communication skills than some other autistic people and are often able to use this to their advantage. However, these apparent social abilities can often mask difficulty with processing and understanding communication and social situations.

It's important to acknowledge that these people have a hidden disability.

People with a PDA profile are likely to **need a lot of support.** The earlier the recognition of PDA, the sooner appropriate support can be put in place.



Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Features of a PDA Profile

- Resists and avoids the ordinary demands of life
- Uses social strategies as part of avoidance, for example, distracting, giving excuses
- Appears sociable but lacks understanding or skills in navigating situations and relationships
- Experiences changes in mood and impulsivity (may be due to hyper-vigilance, sensitivity, and intensity of emotions)
- Can act very differently in different settings
- Able to do a specific task one day, but not the next



ADHD expert webinars
additu.de/webinar
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Features of a PDA Profile

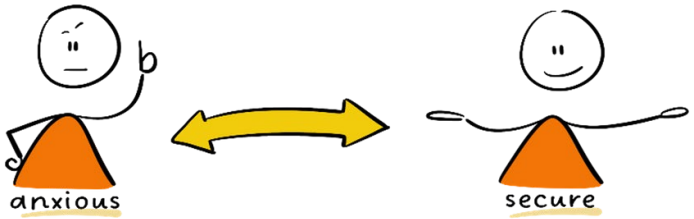
- Difficulty complying with the requests of others
- Unable to follow rules set by others
- Sometimes can't even make themselves do the things they want to do
- A fundamental need for control
- May not appreciate hierarchy or age differences



Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Features of a PDA Profile

- Appears comfortable in role play and pretend
- Displays obsessive behavior that is often focused on other people
- People with this profile can appear dominating and controlling, especially when they feel anxious
- Can often feel confident and engaging when they feel secure and in control
- May absorb the emotions around them
- May seem callous but feel deeply. They may be too anxious to worry about the impact of their behavior on others and seem oblivious.



Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

The Meltdowns

- View them as panic attacks
- Can include physical aggression, or look like shutting down
- In the moment - PDA individuals may be unable to process language, use reason, or problem solve (even when they appear to be able to)



Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

What is a “Demand”?

Direct Demands

- “Wash your hands”
- “Put away your laundry”
- “Stand up”
- “Start your homework”



Casual Demands

- “Let’s watch a movie”
- “We need to stop and pick something up for dinner”
- “Let’s go get ice cream now”
- “We need to hurry and leave”

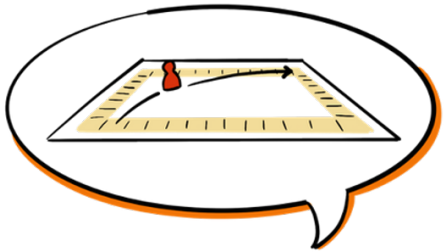


Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

What is a “Demand”?

Demands Based on Expectation

- Going on a family outing
- Following the rules of games, sports etc.
- Leaving the house for an appointment, school, etc.



Self-imposed demands or internal demands

Wanting to do a task or activity but not being able to start or complete it. This can be from taking a shower, eating a meal, brushing teeth, reading a book, answering a text or talking

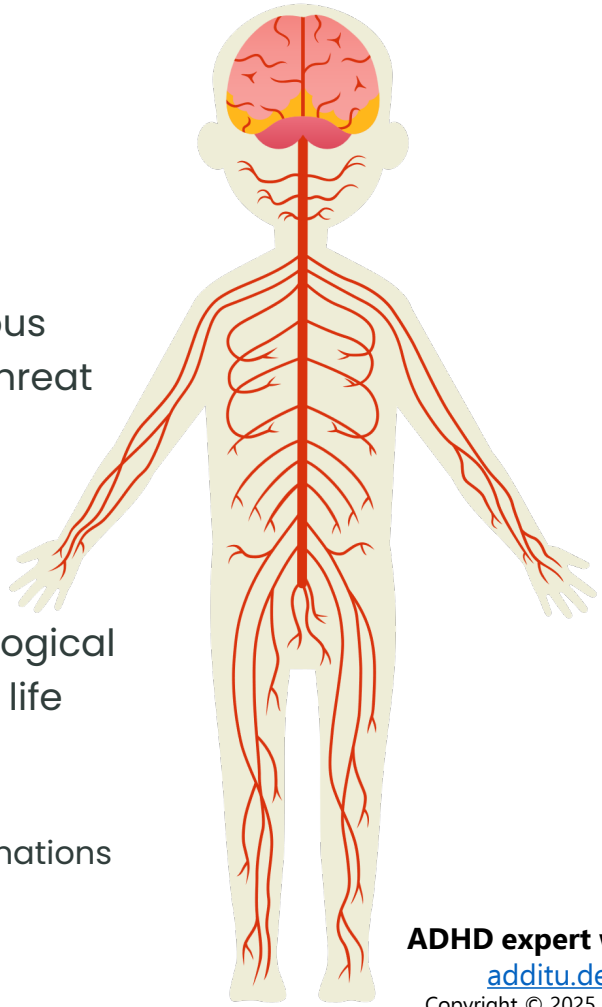


ADHD expert webinars
additu.de/webinar
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Polyvagal Theory

- By Dr. Stephen Porges
- Behavioral responses represent how a person's nervous system constantly regulates the body's response to threat
- Challenging behavior can be viewed as part of the evolutional process to survive and thrive
- Survival instincts live in three underlying neurophysiological states: social engagement, defense (flight or fight) or life threat (shut down or freeze)

See Mona Delahooke & The Trauma Geek for more affirming explanations

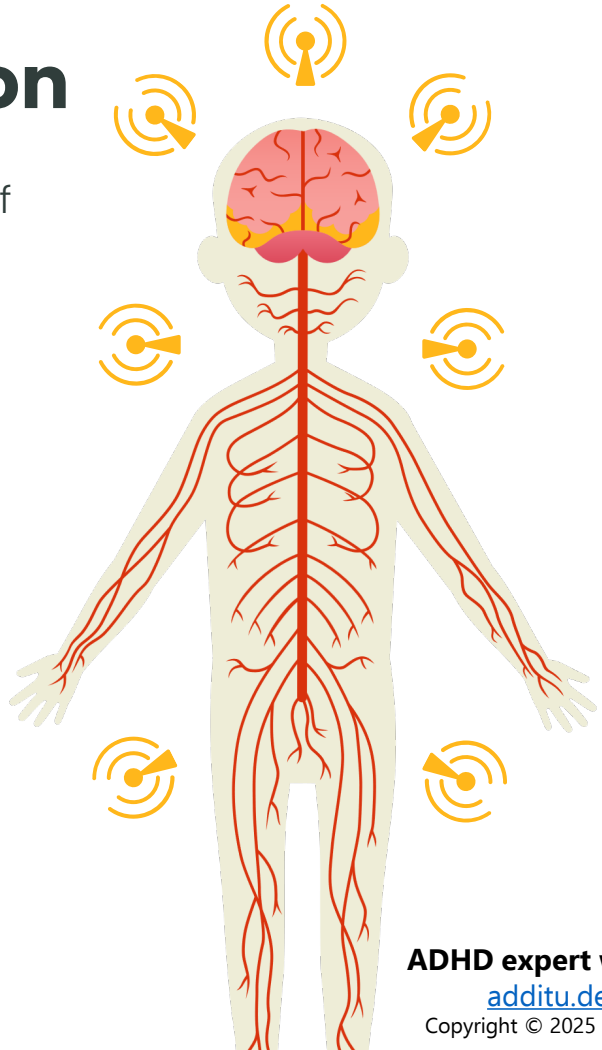


ADHD expert webinars
additu.de/webinar
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Highly Sensitive Neuroception

- Neuroception is the body's subconscious surveillance of safety and threat in the environment
- Highly sensitive neuroception can react when the body perceives threat when it is not present
- PDA people have more sensitive neuroception
- Humans are wired for connection
- Fight, Flight and Freeze are generally underneath challenging behaviors

Both concepts are better explained by Dr. Porges or Mona Delahooke



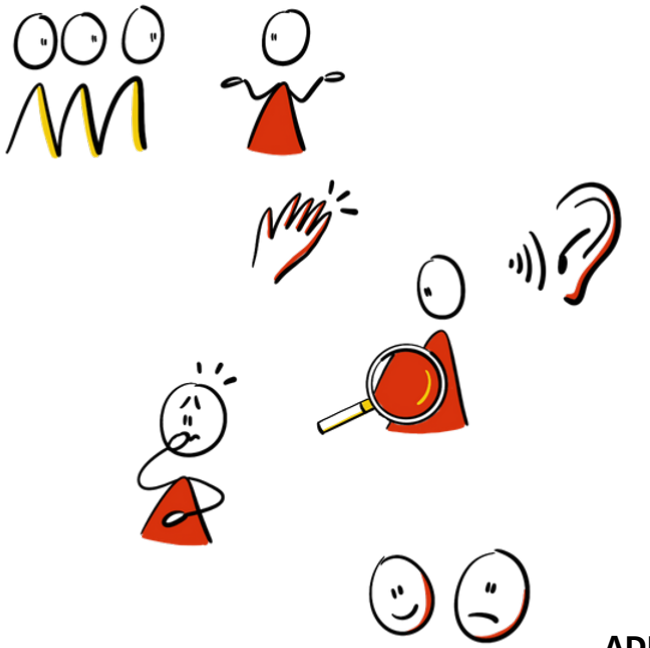
ADHD expert webinars
additu.de/webinar
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Shared traits with autism

PDAers experience many of the same challenges as autistic individuals

These areas include:

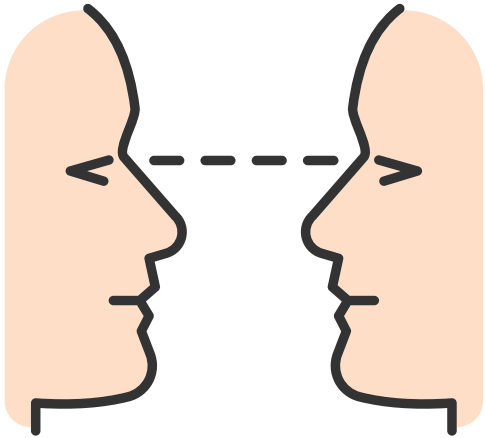
- Social
- Sensory differences
- Interoception
- Anxiety
- Emotional Regulation



Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

PDA Traits that are not shared with autism

- More frequent eye contact
- More fluid social skills (with blind spots)
- Can favor spontaneity
- Dislike most routine
- Rewards, including praise, are triggering
- Unorthodox and imaginative
- More expressive empathy



ADHD expert webinars
additu.de/webinar
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Supporting a PDA Profile

Respect & Connection

- It is a **mindset** not a strategy
- Choose priorities
- Use indirect language, including thinking aloud
- Have PDAers plan their schedule and routines
- Be spontaneous & flexible
- Use humor
- Allow recovery time
- Listen to understand
- Focus on a genuine relationship

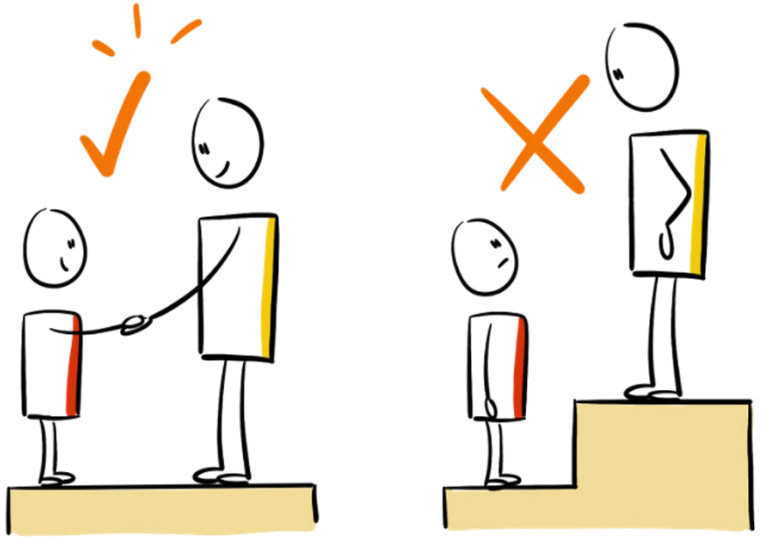


ADHD expert webinars
additu.de/webinar
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Supporting a PDA Profile

Collaboration

- **Earn Trust**
- Partnerships
- Sharing tasks
- Show them you're equals
- Realize that stress is cumulative- you're not looking for the immediate antecedent/trigger
- Understand that emotions are contagious
- Empathy but be careful



ADHD expert webinars
additu.de/webinar
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Supporting a PDA Profile

- Allow them to behave in ways they feel most comfortable (don't push to mask or unmask)
- Help tasks make sense- they may not be able to act unless it makes sense
- It has to be worth the energy and stress
- Model how to understand ourselves, especially how their bodies respond, processing feelings and thoughts
- Teach how to communicate about themselves and their needs to others
- Don't pressure
- Don't push
- Don't ignore

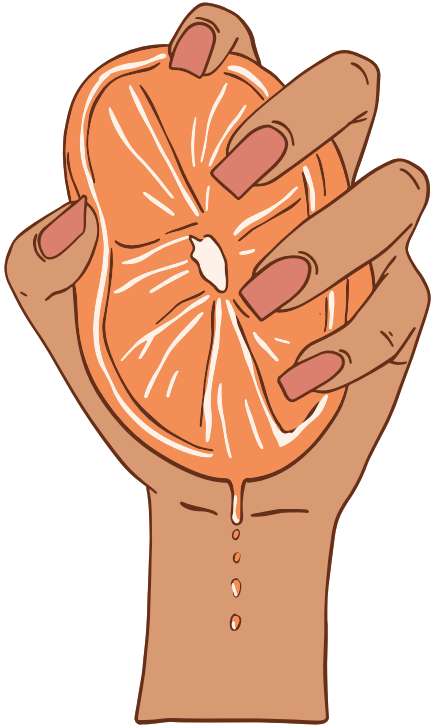




ADHD expert webinars
additu.de/webinar
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Supporting a PDA Profile

- Challenging behavior is only a sign or signal that there is a problem. **It is not the problem.** *(Ross Greene)*
- Behavioral approaches including looking for antecedents doesn't work.
- PDA Individuals go from 0 to 60 in a minute because their **baseline is 50.**
- So many times, concerning behavior is caused by their trying to meet our needs and comply such as negotiating
- Every task has to be worth the stress and energy-individuals need to calculate this-it has a cost. **Is the juice worth the squeeze**?!
- We can't always make things better, but we can avoid making things worse



ADHD expert webinars
additu.de/webinar
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Resist the urge to…

- Give consequences or threaten them
- Worry about holding them accountable
- Lecture or talk too much
- Dismiss their reality
- Try to convince them otherwise
- Remind of rules and expectations
- Express disappointment
- To process it at all
- Don’t get stuck on that you are letting them “get away with it”



Importance

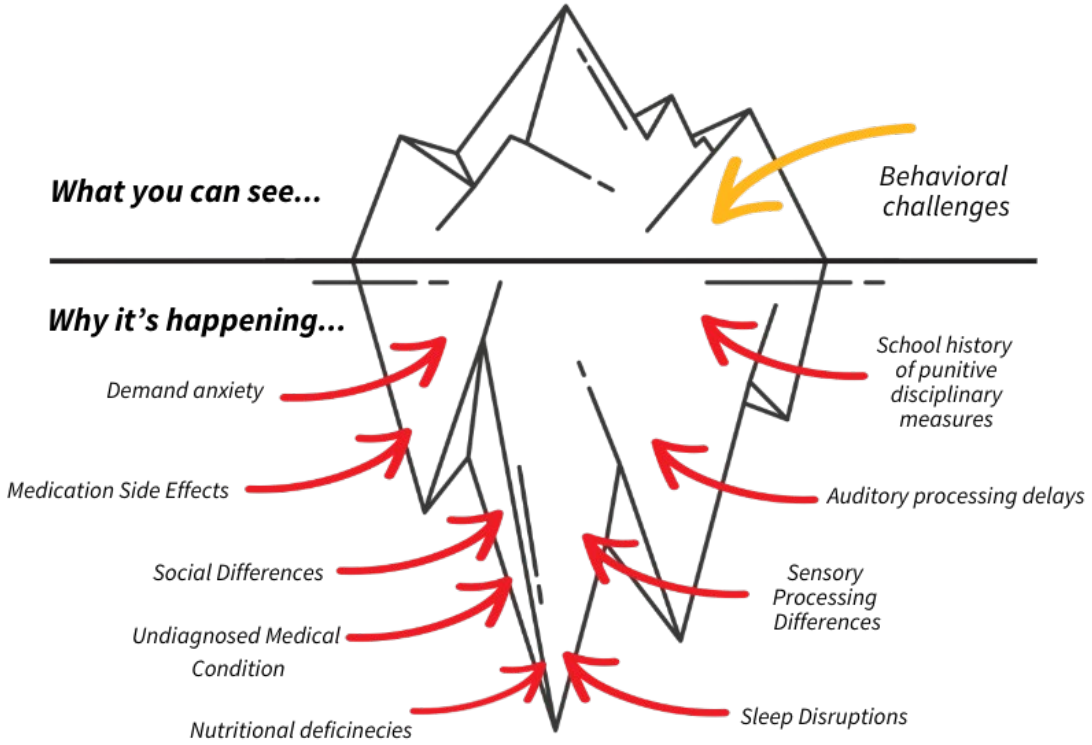


Anxiety/Tolerance

Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Behavior

Look under the iceberg



Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude



Burnout

Many people come to know PDA through burnout

Impacts

Capacity

Personality

Intensity of emotions

Everything

Requires

Lowest demands possible

Long recovery time

Low-pressure reintroduction to life

Keeping Cool

- The hardest part of all of this but necessary!
- PDA individuals can't regulate their emotions if we are not emotionally regulated.
- Fight the punitive part of ourselves!
- Practice *(realistic)* self care.
- Use honesty when we struggle.



Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

PDA North America

Our Mission is to provide advocacy, education, and resources to autistic PDA individuals, others who identify as PDA and their families along with the professionals who support them.

Our Vision is bold. We want to spread awareness of PDA to parents, individuals, educators and therapists throughout the US and Canada. We want to create resources for families to have a place to turn for support and guidance, we want professionals to be able to receive training and information in order to effectively work with. PDAers, and we want PDAers to know that they are understood and supported. In short, to build a strong and vibrant community for this underserved population.



Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

What's next?

Resources from PDA North America

- **Contact:** info@pdanorthamerica.org
- **PDA North America website**: www.pdanorthamerica.org
- **PDA Learning Lab**: Learn.pdanorthamerica.org – free PDFs, over 50 self-paced webinars & trainings
- **PDA North America Annual Conference in March** - in-person & virtual conference
- **PDA-Affirming Provider List:** Link – providers listed by state/province
- **Upcoming Events & Webinars**: Link – weekly webinars & trainings by various experts
- **PDA Insights** - articles by PDA experts & PDA adults
- **Free Peer Support Groups**: Signup Here – free support groups that meet on a regular basis
- **Community Connection List** - Link (email contacts of other parents/caregivers, PDAers seeking connection)
- **Outside Resource List:** Link - list of books and other resources compiled by PDA North America of amazing resources for people looking to learn more about PDA

Follow PDA North America on Social Media for updates:

- **Instagram**: @pdanorthamerica
- **Facebook:** www.facebook.com/pdanorthamerica

Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Q&A

ADDITUDE
Strategies & Support for ADHD and Beyond

Enter your questions in the box below the video player

Resources from ADDitude

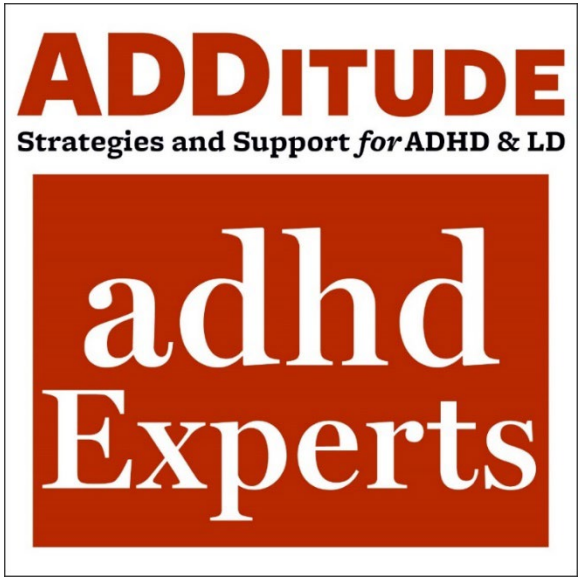
- ❑ **Free Download:** Why Is My Child So Defiant?
- ❑ **Read:** "A Day in the Life of My Defiant Child"
- ❑ **Read:** When Angry Kids Lash Out: How to Defuse Explosive Reactions
- ❑ **Read:** How to Tame Outsized Reactions to Disappointment

---

Get 15% Off Your Subscription + a Free eBook!

👉 **additu.de/15off**

ADHD Experts Podcast | *Episode #590*



Browse all the episodes and follow *ADDitude*'s full ADHD Experts Podcast in your podcasts app:

Apple Podcasts | Amazon Music | Spotify | Pocket Casts | iHeartRADIO | Audacy | Radio Public

ADHD expert webinars
additu.de/webinar
Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

ADDITUDE
Strategies & Support for ADHD and Beyond

Upcoming Webinars

- **Wednesday January 7, 2026, at 1:00 PM ET**

How to Accomplish Your 2026 Goals — One Day at a Time
with Caren Magill
https://www.additudemag.com/webinar/adhd-proof-2026-goals-productivity/

- **Tuesday January 13, 2026, at 1:00 PM ET**

New Year, New Systems: Home Organization Help to Clear ADHD Clutter & Shame
with Jennifer Snyder
https://www.additudemag.com/webinar/organized-home-adhd-clutter-shame-perfectionism

Visit additu.de/webinar to view the webinar replay library.

Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude

Thank You!

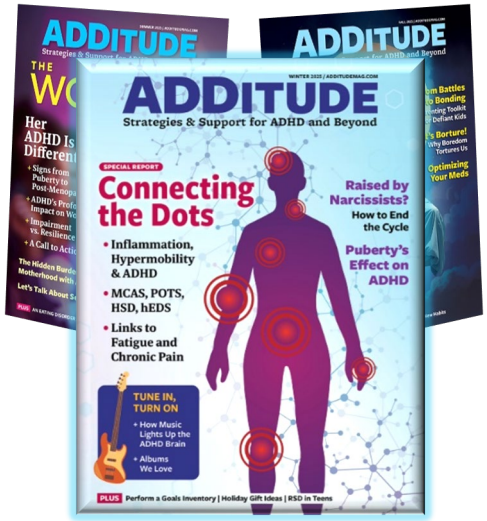
If you missed any part of today's webinar, a recording will be available for replay at additu.de/webinar

Follow Us

- Facebook.com/ADDitudeMag
- @ADDitudeMag
- Pinterest.com/ADDitudeMag
- ADDitude Magazine
- @ADDitudeMag

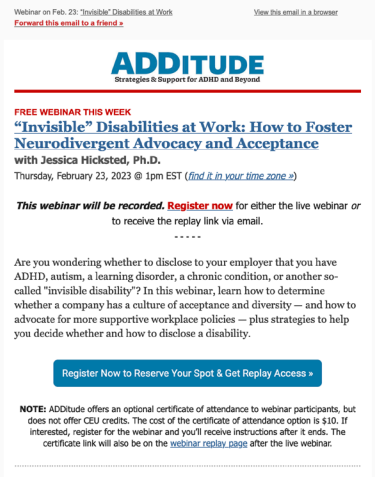
Subscribe

additu.de/subscribe



Webinar Announcements

additu.de/newsletters



Webinar on Feb. 23: "Invisible" Disabilities at Work View this email in a browser
Forward this email to a friend »

ADDITUDE
Strategies & Support for ADHD and Beyond

FREE WEBINAR THIS WEEK

"Invisible" Disabilities at Work: How to Foster Neurodivergent Advocacy and Acceptance

with Jessica Hicksted, Ph.D.

Thursday, February 23, 2023 @ 1pm EST (find it in your time zone »)

This webinar will be recorded. Register now for either the live webinar *or* to receive the replay link via email.

Are you wondering whether to disclose to your employer that you have ADHD, autism, a learning disorder, a chronic condition, or another so-called "invisible disability"? In this webinar, learn how to determine whether a company has a culture of acceptance and diversity — and how to advocate for more supportive workplace policies — plus strategies to help you decide whether and how to disclose a disability.

Register Now to Reserve Your Spot & Get Replay Access »

NOTE: ADDitude offers an optional certificate of attendance to webinar participants, but does not offer CEU credits. The cost of the certificate of attendance option is $10. If interested, register for the webinar and you'll receive instructions after it ends. The certificate link will also be on the webinar replay page after the live webinar.

ADHD expert webinars
additu.de/webinar

Copyright © 2025 by ADDitude