

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS

Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA)

Pathological Demand avoidance is a part of autism that is often misunderstood the most in the workplace.

Adults with PDA can be misunderstood, and often seen as non-compliant, non-team players and argumentative. This is if you do not understand the condition and how best to work with your employees.

If you provide the right support and understanding adults with PDA can be extremely reliable, hardworking and persistent employees that will always strive for perfection and go above and beyond to achieve their goal.

Some of the ways in which PDA may present in the workplace can include:

- Resists and avoids the ordinary demands of life
- Experiences excessive mood swings and impulsivity
- Obsessive behaviour, often focused on other people and how others act and whether this is right or not
- Strong sense of justice for the following of rules and procedures and struggle to sit back
- May avoid following tasks that are directed at them
- May appear to not be a team player as they will pull up other colleagues who appear to slack off or break rules
- May appear argumentative against management or supervisors

The key rule when working with adults with PDA is taking time to understand their reactions before making assumptions. Consider if they are reporting other people because a clear rule has been broken, is the rule logical and written down therefore breaking this is something the person sees as wrong and has a compulsion to report it.

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Below are some key suggestions on how to effectively work with colleagues with PDA:

- Involve them rather than direct them – if several tasks need completing be less prescriptive and give the colleague control over how the tasks are completed rather than dictating to them
- Think about your processes – do they make sense? If you have a door that says Entry Only but you use this door to exit too – then remove the sign. Colleagues with PDA may find it difficult to understand the logic with having the sign if no one is going to pay attention to it and may complain about this often
- Understand that if they are continually raising an issue then they are not doing this to be problematic but because it is something that they are struggling with. Take time to listen and understand why this is an issue and work together to resolve this
- Do not dismiss concerns – an adult with PDA will strive for justice and fairness, if you dismiss concerns and just tell them not to worry about it, do not be surprised if this is escalated to the next line of management until there is a resolution. Take time to hear their point and give logical reasons why something is not of concern
- Understand that the person may experience extreme emotional reactions if they disagree with a point or if something does not go the way they hoped. This is not aggression or concerning behaviour but more the individual struggling to regulate their emotions and having intense passion towards succeeding. Give them a safe space to go to where they can calm down and take time out.

The key to success is listening to your colleague, hearing their point and giving full logical reasons why something is or is not happening. Respect, listen and take time and you will have a colleague that will go above and beyond and achieve perfection in their role through sheer passion and determination that comes with PDA.

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