

## Building Relationships

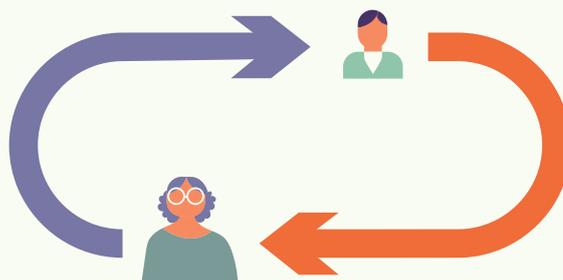
- 1 An individual with PDA may present differently across settings and may face challenges or barriers as a consequence of their presentation.
- 2 Allow time to build a relationship with the pupil with PDA. It is important to get to know them by discovering their interests, likes and dislikes and use positive tools such as the Vermeulen Good Feeling Questionnaire:  
<https://petervermeulenblog.files.wordpress.com/2019/04/autism-good-feeling-questionnaire-peter-vermeulen-english.pdf>
- 3 It is important for the pupil with PDA to form trusting relationships with adults. Identify One Good Adult in school who understands and is knowledgeable about demand avoidance, and whom the student can link with to provide the guidance, support and advice needed when unexpected situations arise.
- 4 Use this trusted person to act as a bridge to aiding and supporting school engagement, and to help them access their school environment, their peers, and other adults in school. Be open to adults outside of school acting as an advocate or bridge maker to support transition and integration.
- 5 Collaborative and safe relationships that involve connection and negotiation may take a significant amount of time to build. Follow the lead of the student.
- 6 Once a profile is established, it can be used to inform an individual plan for accessing the curriculum through the Student Support Plan (SSP). This needs to be developed with parents and should incorporate recommendations from the appropriate professionals as available. The voice of the student should be integral to this plan.



## School Environment

- 7 Careful planning of transition or re-transition into school after periods of absence, with needs accommodated, for example, the facility to begin class / school later than peers.

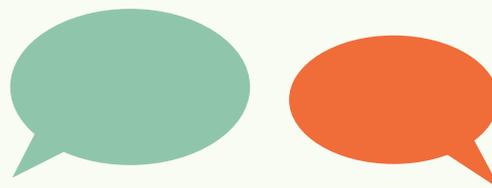
- 8 The Learning Environment Checklist within the NEPS Resource Pack for Teachers (Post Primary) may be useful documents to support planning, download from from:  
[https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps\\_post\\_primary\\_continuum\\_resource\\_pack.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_post_primary_continuum_resource_pack.pdf)
- 9 Conduct a sensory audit – find out what things can be upsetting for the pupil / trigger behaviour such as sounds in the environment, smells in the school environment, lighting. Consult recommendations on sensory needs and a sensory diet or plan provided by professionals in reports; consider how these can be accommodated in the school environment e.g. Morewood:  
<http://www.gdmorewood.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Sensory-Checklist-Child-Friendly-Version.doc>
- 10 Provide access to a quiet, calm, and private space where the student feels safe and can decompress. This space should enable the student to engage self-regulating strategies.
- 11 Identify lunch time activities for students who might otherwise be isolated or vulnerable. Alternative spaces for eating meals such as supervised classroom may be necessary, as cafeteria / dining room areas may be overwhelming.
- 12 Peer buddy or mentor systems can provide opportunities for building peer relationships and provide reassurance within the school environment.
- 13 Assign a locker in a quieter or smaller location away from the general locker areas.
- 14 Permit uniform options that consider sensory difficulties with texture, for example, more comfortable material, trousers rather than skirts, hoodies rather than sweaters, all black trainers rather than shoes.
- 15 Review sounds, alarms and public announcement or address systems used in school, and smells, colours, textures and range of tastes in school-supplied food.
- 16 Provide visual graphics around the school to explain processes.



## Working with a pupil with PDA

- 17 Use a problem-solving approach to identify the pupil's needs. Such an approach should be collaborative, flexible and creative. Work within the context of the child's development level.
- 18 Guidance Counselling staff with experience and training in supporting students with ASD and students with a PDA presentation, can support students to prepare for and pre-empt potential hurdles to be faced. This can be

- 19 provided through role-play opportunities in conflict resolution and managing relationships.
- 20 De-personalise requests and directions and use indirect and informal approaches for example: "We all need to get going now."
- 21 Differentiate between essential and non-essential tasks and activities, identify priorities and prepare to be flexible.
- 22 Be aware of 'masking' strategies that may conceal high levels of stress, anxiety and sensory overload. Such strategies will be different for every child. What is the message behind the behaviour?
- 23 The pupil should be offered flexibility and the opportunity to negotiate choices for tasks in school. Choices that are offered should be attainable and of interest to the pupil and chosen in collaboration with the pupil.
- 24 Allow the pupil to arrange their work schedule, letting them prioritise the order in which these are completed. The use of visuals or checklists of choices can be beneficial depending on the profile of the pupil.
- 25 Acknowledge the need for movement or sensory breaks – this could mean leaving their seat or leaving the classroom for a short period. This will help with the pupils' ability to regulate themselves as well as emotional and mental fatigue.
- 26 Flexibility in the method of delivering the curriculum is important – this may include individual support or small group teaching as appropriate to identified needs. Identify key learning goals that need to be achieved and focus on these. This should be documented in the SSP.
- 27 Flexibility within curriculum content, for example in Physical Education - provide access to separate changing facilities if necessary, and flexibility around participation in individual or group activities.
- 28 Agree a maximum time period for completion of homework tasks.



## Communication

- 29 Use and maintain a low tone of voice when communicating with a pupil with PDA. Use affirming language, and a calm, positive approach.
- 30 The meaning of the communication should be in the words that you say, rather than the way in which they are delivered.
- 31 Any changes to the pupils' routine should be communicated in advance, where possible, giving them time to understand the changes and process the information. A contingency plan will need to be prepared.
- 32 Pupils with PDA can be very anxious and may seek to control the context. When the pupil has no control over sensory issues or is having difficulty communicating, this can be displayed as behaviour that can be challenging. It is important to remain calm and reduce sensory demands.
- 33 It is important to have a good communication pathway between school and home, that documents learning experiences and social engagement.
- 34 Communication amongst staff in the school is essential. It is important that there is an understanding of PDA within the school community so that the pupil - and staff working with the pupil with PDA - feel understood, supported and included. Staff should be regularly updated with changes to a student's schedule, needs, circumstances and arrangements. Regular team meetings to discuss these are essential.
- 35 Explore the strategies for supporting children with PDA in school at:

<https://www.pdasociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Positive-PDA-booklet.pdf>