

# Intro to PDA in Schools

Pathological Demand Avoidance

Presented by

**Christina Keeble**



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# Christina Keeble

- Who am I?
  - Mum of 2, teacher, speaker & consultant, diagnosed at 37, founder of Christina Keeble Consulting & co-founder of National PEKE Centre
- Pieces of Paper
  - BS Psychology, BA Hons Psychology, PGDipEd Early Childhood & Primary Teaching, Masters in Special Education
  - Been in Spec Ed/Disability since 2002: ECE □ High School



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# Pervasive Drive for Autonomy

Coined by Tomlin Wilding, 2019



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# What is demand avoidance?

'Demand avoidance' involves not being able to do certain things at certain times, either for yourself or others, and also refers to the things we do in order to avoid demands. (PDA Society Website, 2021)



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## Not All Demand Avoidance is PDA

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- Everyone experiences demand avoidance
- We see it naturally occurring in development
  - 3yo
  - Adolescence
- An increase in demand avoidance is a characteristic of Autism
- Situational demand avoidance



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**However, we should support *all* instances of demand avoidance in the same way regardless if it meets a diagnostic threshold.**

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Relational safety, flexibility, responsiveness, collaboration, autonomy, & self determination



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# Key Points of PDA

- PDA is a recognised profile of stand-alone it is not a stand-alone diagnosis
- Driven to avoid the demands & expectations of everyday life
  - Including things they love to do / passions / SPINs
- **The demand avoidance is an autonomic response to a threat the brain/nervous system detected**
  - The demand is the threat
  - Heightened nervous system
  - Triggers fight, flight, freeze response
- **The ‘oppositional behaviour’ displayed is NOT a choice for PDAers.**
  - It is NOT within their control
- Need for control (anxiety based / autonomic threat response)
- Early cues of demand avoidance
  - Charm, distraction, imagination, shock



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# How a PDAer May Present in School

- Not present like your “typical” Autistic student
- Typical, well-known strategies to support Autistic students are triggers, seem to not work or make it worse
- Dr Jekyll, Ms. Hyde presentation between home and school
- Challenges with attendance - UK stats – 70% of PDAers are not in school or regularly struggle to attend
- Arrive late most days - Can have trouble separating from parent/carer
- Have attended several schools – Possibly been suspended multiple times or expelled from schools
- Have challenges maintaining friendships



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# How a PDAer May Present in School Contd.

See through the social hierarchies and consider themselves equals with adults

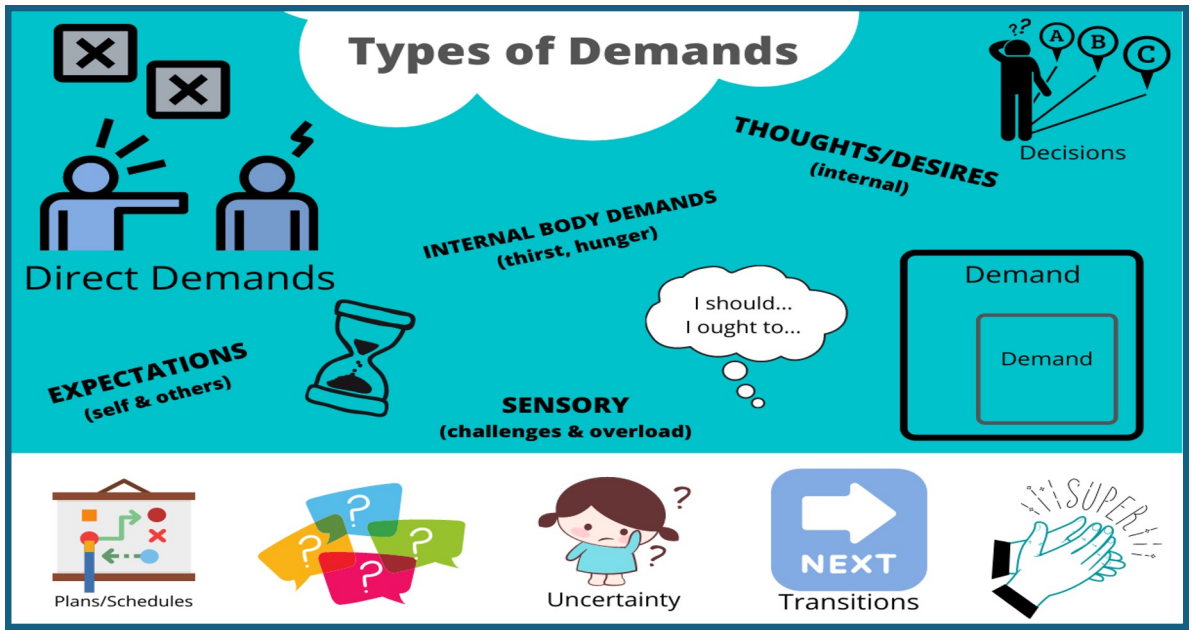
- They will see through disingenuous people, pick up on any hint of manipulation, engagement must be genuine and authentic
- Their brain will detect that as a threat/ not safe/ break trust

Struggle with emotional regulation, sudden/extreme mood swings

Poor self esteem (not always obvious)

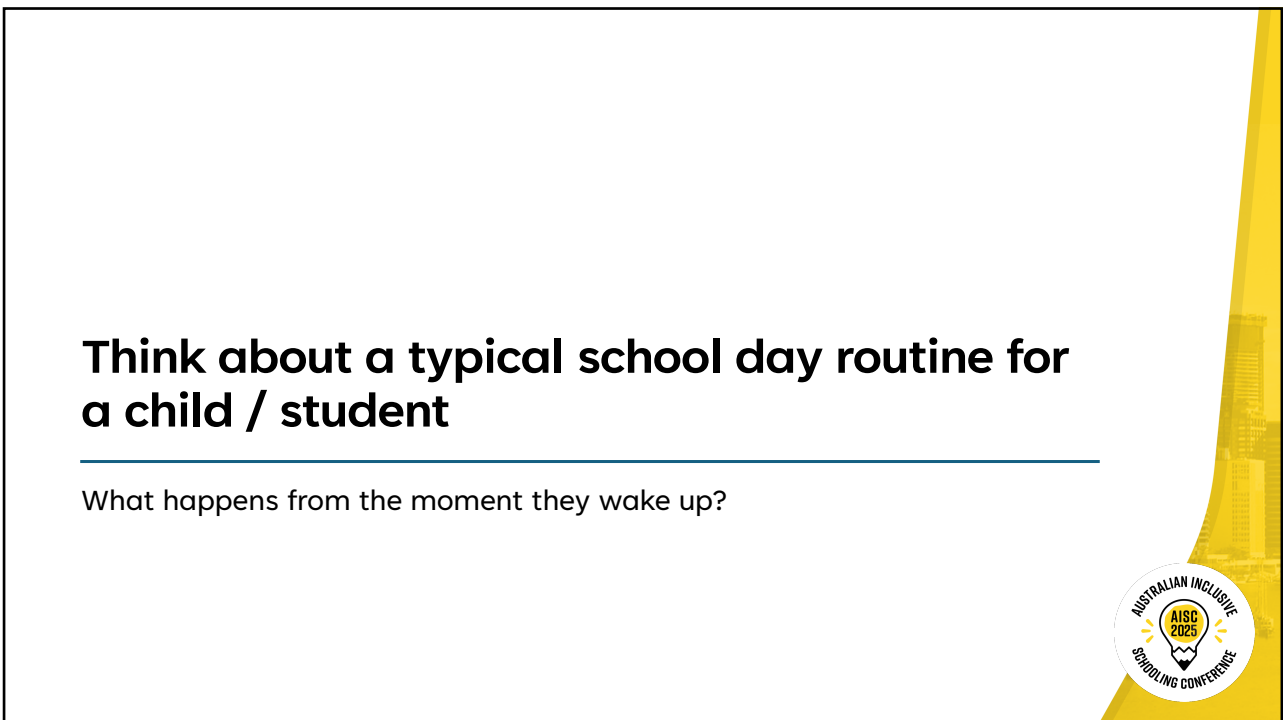
Extensive involvement in role play/fantasy

A lack of permanence and transfer of learning and experience; sudden/dramatic setbacks after periods of settled behaviour and progress





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## After School Restraint Collapse

Coined by Anthea Nair,  
Psychotherapist



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## Contact Me

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