

Introduction to the Pathological Demand Avoidance Profile in Autism/ADHD

Program Description

This training will provide behavioral health practitioners and clinicians with advanced level information about a lesser known but highly important autistic/ADHD or otherwise neurodivergent identity called PDA – known as Pathological Demand Avoidance in the United Kingdom but often referred to as Pervasive Drive for Autonomy by those in the neurodivergent community. Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) is a term used to describe a profile within the autism spectrum characterized by an extreme avoidance of everyday demands and requests. It's not officially recognized as a separate diagnosis in diagnostic manuals like the DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) or the ICD-10 (International Classification of Diseases), but it's often discussed within the context of autism spectrum disorder. It's important to note that PDA is a controversial concept and not universally accepted by all professionals in the field. Some argue that the behaviors associated with PDA can be explained by existing diagnostic criteria for autism spectrum disorder, while others believe that PDA represents a distinct profile within the spectrum that requires different approaches to support and intervention. This profile is rarely if ever addressed in academic or clinical training programs or settings geared toward behavioral health practitioners. Thus, many practitioners are unaware that they are likely encountering clients struggling to live in the world with PDA, frequently.

The presenter will provide a general overview of PDA as well as information about differential diagnoses. Identifying characteristics of PDA and selected neurodiversity-affirming interventions that may benefit those with a PDA profile who have low support needs will be reviewed.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this workshop, participants should be able to:

1. Define PDA as it relates to Autism and ADHD.
2. Outline at least four PDA characteristics.
3. Describe differential diagnoses for PDA and other mental health diagnoses that may be mistaken for PDA.
4. Examine the ways in which physical pain is associated with PDA.
5. Demonstrate how PDA impacts family dynamics.
6. Explain the connection between selective mutism and PDA.
7. Analyze how specific issues such as shame and Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD) can impact those with a PDA profile.
8. Discuss the difference between internalizing and externalizing presentations of clients with a PDA profile.
9. Name some neurodiversity-affirming intervention strategies that can be helpful when working with clients who exhibit a PDA profile.

Target Audience

This presentation is intended for behavioral health-oriented counselors, psychologists, psychotherapists, and clinical counselors who already understand autistic and neurodivergent identities within the framework of neurodiversity-affirming practice that is not based in ableism (may not be suited for an ABA or behavioristic-oriented practitioner).

Contact Hours

2.0 contact hours

Program Agenda

9 AM to 10:00 AM	Overview of PDA Profile; Characteristics; Impact on Family Dynamics; PDA and Differential Diagnoses; Selective Mutism; Shame; RSD
10:00 AM to 10:15 AM	Break
10:15 AM to 11:15 AM	Neurodiversity-Affirming Intervention Strategies; How to Support Individuals with a PDA Profile (Low Support Needs)
11:15 AM	Adjourn

Faculty

Lydia Stellwag, MSW, LCSWA, is a graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill’s Master of Social Work program. She is currently a psychotherapist in private practice providing autistic and ADHD individuals with neurodiversity-affirming care. Lydia’s practice is informed by somatic and memory reconsolidation work that is trauma informed. Lydia is TF-CBT and EMDR trained. As a self-autistic and ADHD advocate, Lydia also leans on lived experience and the voices of the neurodivergent community to inform their clinical practice.