



Internalized PDA

What it is

Why it's important to recognize it

by Sally Cat: an internalizing adult PDA author, peer researcher and advocate

- 1. Hidden PDA.** Our meltdowns and adrenaline reactions are contained and/or diverted. Textbooks only describe externalized, freely-expressed PDA because our internalized version wasn't noticed by clinicians and theorists. This doesn't mean internalized PDA is lesser or milder.
- 2. Masking vulnerability.** Autistic masking is thought of as harmful and involuntary, but it feels natural for many of us and we can't "unmask" without massive pain and effort. Our instinct is to hide vulnerabilities, including social differences.
- 3. Fawning, fantasizing, fooling around & fibbing.** Our adrenaline reactions are diverted from fight or flight into lesser known responses which may give the impression that we're fine, lazy or naughty. However, enormous stress underlies our behavior.
- 4. Subtle signs.** Many internalizing PDA children and young adults experience situational/selective mutism. This can be thought of as an adrenaline response, but can be mistaken for shyness. Another subtle sign is "spare play" whereby a child skips about the schoolyard as if they're playing with others, but close observation reveals that they're solo.
- 5. Academic impact.** We may underachieve for many reasons. Instinctive masking stops us asking for help. Demand avoidance can alienate us from topics. Quiet school avoidance causes us to miss large chunks of curriculum. Fawning straight A students can suddenly break down and be unable to leave their bedrooms, or resume schoolwork, for years.
- 3. Health toll.** Our roller-coastering emotions are directed inwards. Failing to match expectations causes depression and low self-esteem. Many of us suffer intense, unrequited people obsessions. High rejection sensitivity makes things worse. We're prone to stress-related illnesses. We may self-harm and self-medicate, including using alcohol and drugs. Health professionals believe our masks and assume we're fine when we might be in agony. Our "pathological" avoidance of medical appointments can have severe consequences.

Internalized PDA is described in depth here: sallycatpda.co.uk/2022/11 and sallycatpda.co.uk/2022/04