



3 Thoughts About Unhelpful Advice for Parents of PDA Children

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1 - LET THEM ENTERTAIN THEMSELVES!

I don't disagree that independent play is healthy for kids. But what about when your child falls outside the "norm" and **no one understands?**

I'll tell ya what happens. You become the helicopter parent who looks like they're constantly micromanaging their child's day and **causing** the issues you're actually trying to mitigate.

I just want to say that **it's ok** if your kid needs you nearby while they play. Or sleep. Or use the bathroom. And I know friends, family, and professionals alike are going to have feelings about it. But **nobody** knows your kid like you do.

And because you're such an in-tune and capable parent, you know that **regulation is the goal** and that nervous system activation is cumulative.

2 - JUST IGNORE BAD BEHAVIOR AND IT WILL STOP

I don't know if you've tried this, but before I knew anything about the nervous system and PDA I did. **Shocker: it didn't work.** And it escalated my child to a state of panic every time.

This idea is rooted in behaviorism and assumes that any bad behavior is just an **attempt at attention**. And if attention isn't granted, then the behavior goes away.

When C was 3 or 4, he wanted Oreos before dinner and I **gently held the boundary of "no"** several times. After that, I did what our child psychiatrist recommended and started ignoring him. (Ugh.) Instead of wandering off to find something to play, he calmly walked upstairs and threw **a large framed picture** over our balcony.

I walked into her office the next week and said, "You don't understand. He will take it to a level where he **cannot be ignored**. This advice does not work, not matter how long you say we need to stick with it." She was baffled, and now I know why.

When you have a kid with a nervous system disability, **they need another person to signal safety** to them since they don't have the capacity to find it themselves. (Heck, I'd argue that neurotypical kids need this and that ignoring isn't helpful.) We're humans, not robots and **we don't need to do this perfectly**. But removing attention as a teaching tool only leads to anxiety and panic.

3 - THEY NEED TO LEARN HOW THE WORLD WORKS

I **hate** having to admit that I used to buy into this one, especially when it came to school or activities outside of our home. Sure, I can accommodate my kid... **but the world isn't going to**.

The problem? **You can't build skills through brute force**. And oppressing kids to prepare them for being oppressed by the world is just **so damn bleak and defeatist**. I only wish I'd seen it sooner.

The world at large may not accommodate my child. But plenty of individual people and places will. **And those are the environments I want him to find as he grows**.

Instead of an attitude of "toughen up, the world sucks," I hope I'm instilling in him the ability to **advocate** for himself, develop **healthy** coping skills, and build relationships that will be **supportive** and not destructive. I know it's hard to trust that time and brain maturity will fill in a lot of the other gaps. **But I truly believe they will**.