

Core features of PDA  
As put forth by the PDA Society (PDASociety.org.uk)

The distinctive/core features of a PDA profile include:

1. **Resists and avoids the ordinary demands of life**, even really minor ones, even implied ones, even ones they themselves would like to participate in. Demand avoidance is solely due to their unusually high need for autonomy/equality, not because the demand itself is hard, boring, etc. Praise, reward, and punishment are not effective.
2. **Uses social strategies to regain autonomy/equality**. The word manipulative is often used – it's a negative word but really describes these kids – they do what it takes to regain autonomy, sometimes parents describe it as their greatest skill. I prefer the term *strategic*, since they are using their skills to meet their needs.
  - a. Distracting. "Look over there!" "You are so pretty!" "I'm thirsty!"
  - b. Acknowledging the demand but excusing self. "My mom said I can't." "I have to do this first."
  - c. Doing the task in their own way, e.g., putting clothes on inside out, writing but spelling all words wrong.
  - d. Physically incapacitation self. "I'm too hot to poop." "I can't see it." "My legs don't work." "I don't know where the kitchen is."
  - e. Withdrawing into fantasy. "But I'm a teacher/dog/baby." Growling, biting.
  - f. Reducing meaningful conversation. Making noise, humming, drowning out demands, mimicking, refusing to speak, bombarding with questions/comments.
  - g. Socially shocking behavior, e.g., pulling pants down.
  - h. Fight or flight. Eloping, melting down, outburst.
3. **May have typical surface social skills but there are differences in social understanding**. Surface sociability, with typical eye contact, timing, facial expressions. They can be confident and engaging when they feel secure and in control. BUT there is atypical social understanding, e.g., they often do not see/agree with the social hierarchy or their place in it.
4. **Excessive mood swings and impulsivity**. Volatile behavior towards adults and sometimes peers, related to the need for autonomy/equality. Can change moods because of a perceived demand or seemingly for no obvious reason. It can be so sudden and extreme that it can feel volitional or like an act.
5. **Fixations**. Often focused on other people. Can be "love" or "hate."
6. **Role play**. I see this one in about 50% of PDAers, not all of them. Adopting borrowed roles when interacting with others (e.g. relating to peers in the manner of a teacher) some appear to lose touch with reality. Typically takes on the role of an adult (teacher, coach, etc.) or a baby or animal.

Other common features that are less central to the phenotype:

1. Can be passive in the first year of life -doesn't reach, drops toys, just watches.
2. Have associated language delay because of passivity – usually a good degree of catch up, can be sudden.
3. Soft neurological involvement – late motor milestones, general clumsiness, physically awkward.
4. Constant need for co-regulation, may include separation anxiety.
5. May not be able to sustain special interests.
6. Hypervigilant.
7. Proprioception seeking.