



Erasmus+



Erasmus + KA 122

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**INCLUSION Means Peace Empathy Acceptance
Cooperation Equality**

I.M.P.E.A.C.E.



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Understanding and Supporting Students with ASD and ADHD

Florence, Italy, 04th-09th December 2023

Mini guide of our course

- The growing prevalence of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and/or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) poses challenges for all teachers.
- The tasks these students find the most difficult- e.g. concentrating, coping with change, understanding multiple perspectives, sustaining attention to tasks-are the ones they are required to do all day long in every classroom environment.
- Students with ASD may need support making sense of the world and how to participate in it while students with ADHD can be energetic, creative, innovative problem solvers that need support in managing hyper activity, impulsivity and inattention.

Learning outcomes

- Recognize and understand the traits and learning styles of students with ASD and/or ADHD;
- Apply specific teaching methods, classroom strategies and techniques for ASD and ADHD in the classroom (e.g. task analysis, visual prompts, social stories);
- Become familiar with the fundamental core strategies of the TEACCH approach , the basic principles of PECS and Makaton signs and symbols;
- Create meaningful and individualized visual structures/ supports for students with ASD;
- Develop school-based interventions (e.g. classroom management techniques and accommodations) for students with ASD and/or ADHD;
- Collaborate with parents and build home-school partnerships.

What we would have liked to hear as children...

- I love you, I'm happy to have you, let's talk a little about you, find some time for us, how do you feel? , are you sad?, are you afraid?, you are soft and fluffy, tell me, what did you feel?, are you happy?, I like it when you laugh, you can cry if you want, what made you angry, I trust you, I like you when you don't like me, I listen to you, what do you think?, I like being with you, I want to talk to you, I want to listen to you, I like you as you are, it's nice to be together...(Elena Gianini Belotti, *On the side of the children*)

Supporting children with pathological demand avoidance at school



About pathological demand avoidance

Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) was first described by Professor Elizabeth Newson in the 1980s as a pervasive developmental disorder. In some regions PDA does not yet have formal diagnostic status.

Limited research has meant that a very vulnerable and highly complex group of children often diagnosed with ASD or other related conditions have been misunderstood as naughty or disruptive.

At school these children often struggle to reach their potential because of their need to be in control. The invisible barrier of anxiety and avoidance is often forgotten and the child appears to be choosing not to engage when in fact they don't know how to overcome these feelings on their own.



About pathological demand avoidance

Children with PDA may appear to be verbally competent, but may understand less than we think. Although they may be highly sociable, they usually struggle to understand where they fit in the social hierarchy (e.g. that adults have more authority than children), and their need to be in control can mean that their peer relationships run into trouble.

The other key area of difference is that children with PDA are often highly skilled when it comes to pretend play. They may become easily engrossed in fantasy to the point where they 'become' certain characters and confuse pretending with reality. Some research has described this as a coping mechanism because it is a barrier to outside demands.

What's different about PDA?

It's vital to understand how PDA differs from more typical autism spectrum conditions. This is because strategies which work well for children with autism can make things worse for children with PDA.

AVOIDANCE of ordinary demands is the primary and most debilitating characteristic of PDA. It's driven by the child's uncontrolled ANXIETY which can feel like a PANIC ATTACK. Children will often respond by saying 'No' to what they're asked or told to do, even if it's something they actually enjoy.



Tactics used by children to avoid learning at school

DELAYING

Resisting by delaying the moment of completing ordinary demands.





DISTRACTING

Creating a situation that needs more attention, giving affection or compliments, changing the subject

NEGOTIATING

Using language to control their environment and to prevent anything happening by choosing what is secure for them.



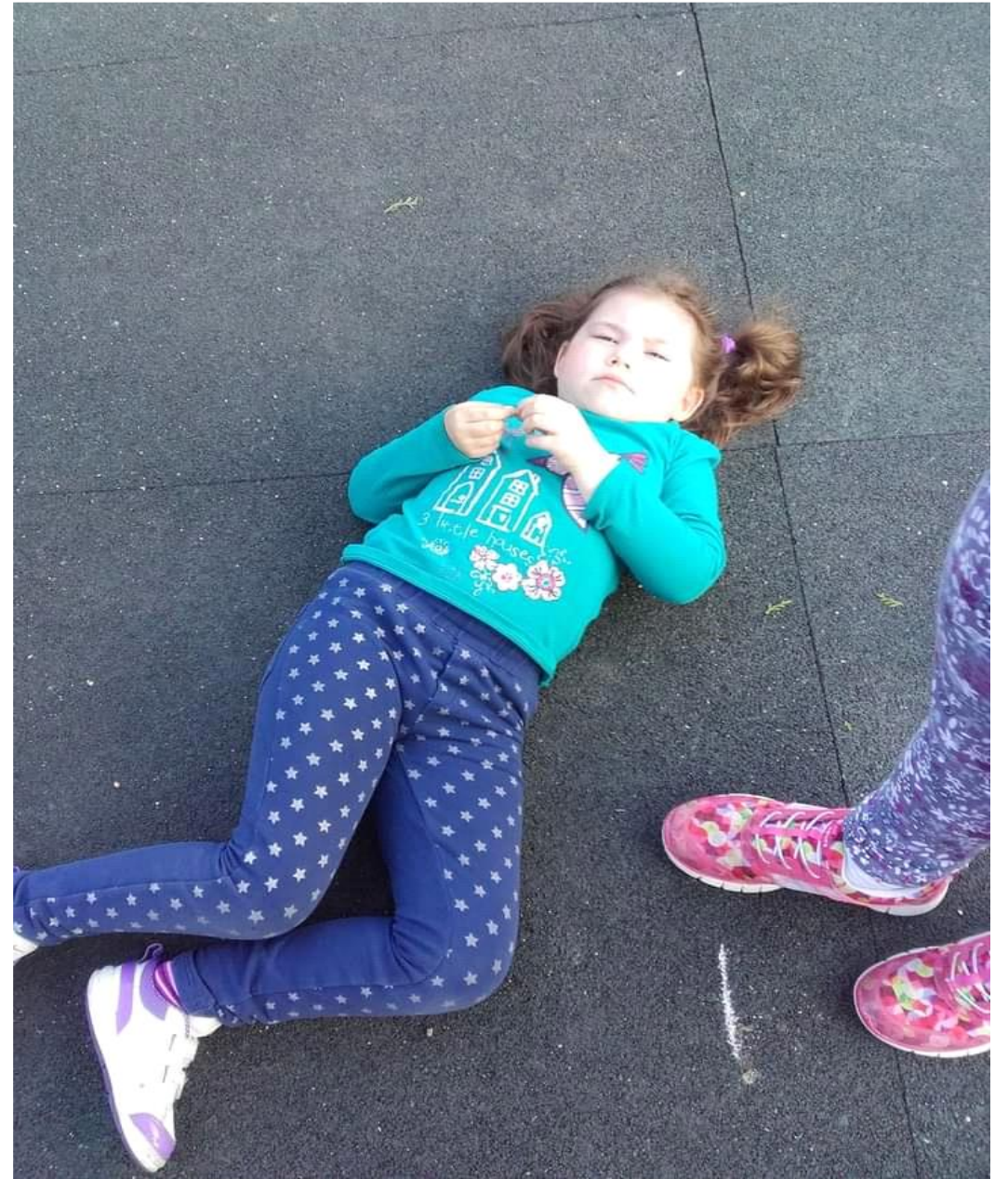


MAKING EXCUSES

Making elaborate
excuses to avoid
participating

FALLING TO THE GROUND

Becoming floppy, curling up into a ball, walking/running away





SHOUTING

Screaming, yelling
when other forms of
resistance have failed

EXPLOSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Using frank (and sometimes hurtful) language, pushing someone or throwing something away, hitting or kicking, biting.





A different set of strategies to support children with PDA

THINK AHEAD

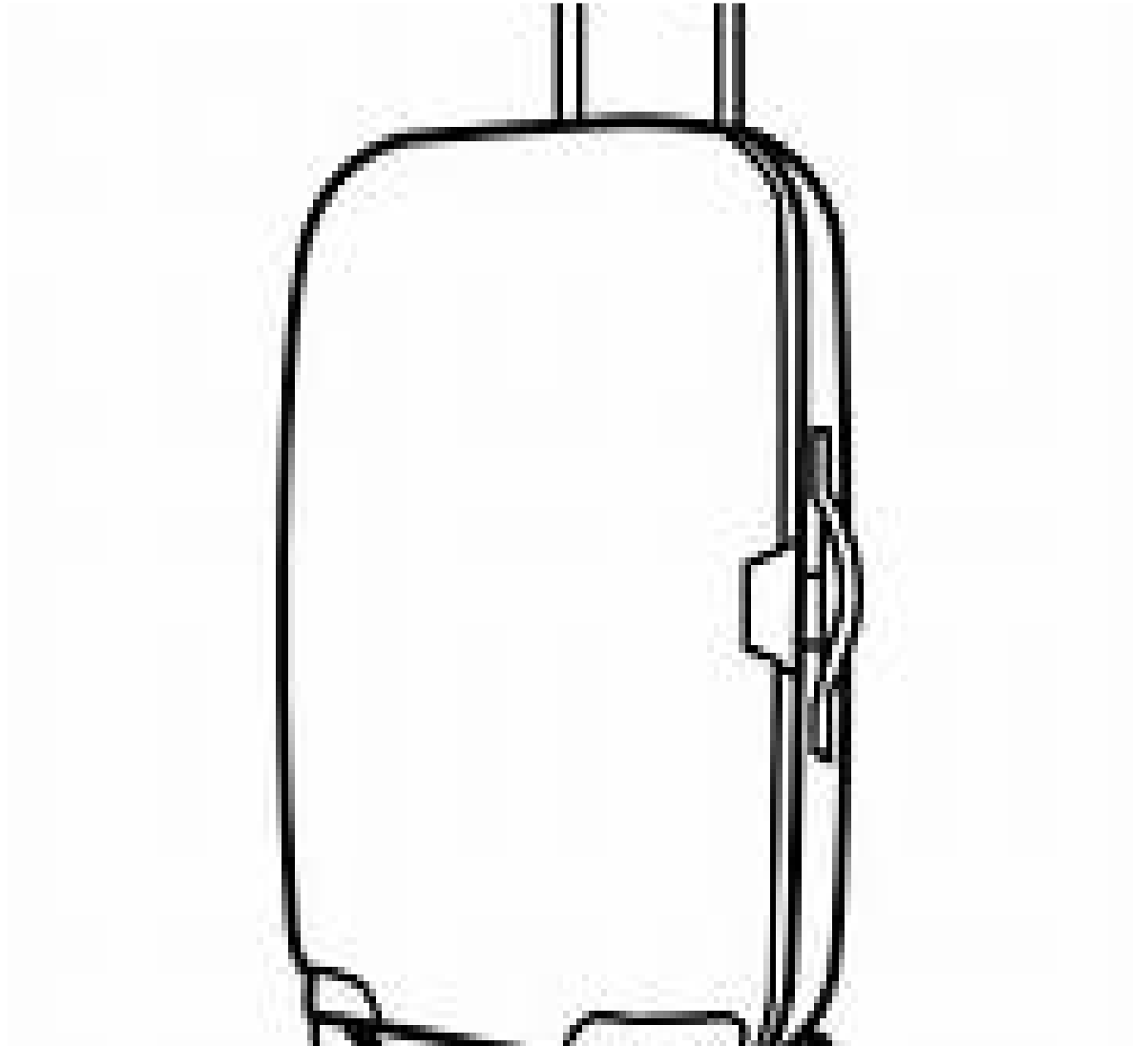
Look at the day and week ahead, to anticipate what might be tricky for the child. Identifying the predictable triggers will mean you can plan strategies in advance.

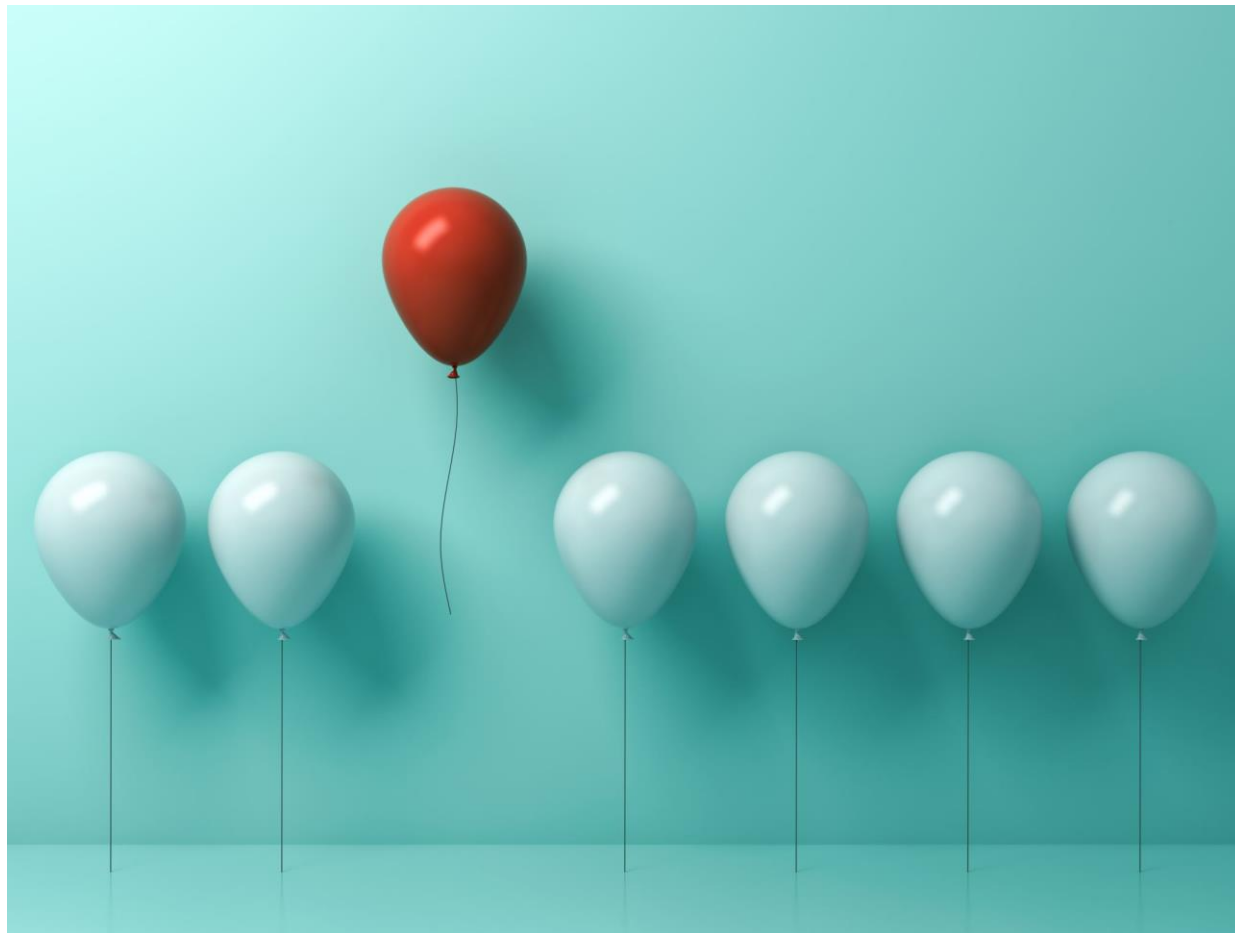


STRATEGY

It is important to develop a strong relationship with a child who has high anxiety. Spend time with the child filling a suitcase with their favourite characters and activities. What you are actually doing is getting to know the child and their interests. The more you understand them the easier it will be to distract them from potential crisis and you will feel confident in how to diffuse a situation.

The teacher can fill their own suitcase with strategies and reminders of how best to help a specific child to reduce their anxiety and access learning.
















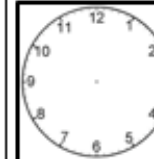




GIVE THE CHILD NOTICE IN ADVANCE

Children with PDA find it helpful to know what is going to happen, as this gives them a sense of being in control, as well as allowing them processing time.

For some children, displaying information in a visual format can create a sense of independence and choice which reduces anxiety e.g. visual timetables can be made with the child and used to help the child understand what is happening. It is important to use these in a flexible and non-confrontational way, and that they are created and referred to with the child, rather than being done ‘to’ the child.

FRIDAY								
Activity	 Assembly	 Science	 English	 Break	 PE	 Lunch	 Maths	 Art
Minutes	 10	 60	 60	 20	 60	 50	 60	 60
Time	8:40am to 8:50am	8:50am to 9:50am	9:50am to 10:50am	10:50am to 11:10am	11:10am to 12:10pm	12:10pm to 1:00pm	1:00pm to 2:00pm	2:00pm to 3:00pm

MONITOR THE CHILD'S STRESS LEVELS & SCALE BACK DEMANDS

The mood and behaviour of children with PDA can change very quickly. It is important to look out for signs of increased anxiety, which can be reduced by decreasing demands.

Speak to parents for clues about the first tell-tale signs that the child is struggling. It's best if all staff (e.g. playground supervisors, other teachers) are aware of these signs, so they can feed back to the child's key person. Teaching assistants can be particularly helpful as they can step back when the child is coping well, but be available nearby to intervene if the child becomes anxious. At the first signs of stress, it's a good idea to scale back the demands on the child.





CREATE SPACE

Children with PDA find it hard to regulate their feelings. Make sure there's space in the classroom or school where they can go to feel calm. A quiet place in the classroom with personal things, toys, paintings, other tools for doing favourite activities can be created for the children with PDA, in order to calm down themselves.

- Keep calm!

When children with PDA panic, they need the adults around them to stay calm. We must regulate ourselves first, so that we can then help the child to regulate their anxiety.

- Use indirect language!

Handy sentence starters:

“I wonder if we can...”

“Let’s see if we can make something...”

“I can’t see how to make this work...”

“Shall we see if we can beat the clock...”

“Maybe we could investigate...”

“Who do you want to help us today...”

Try to avoid saying:

“It’s time for you to...”

“You’ve got to...”

“You need to...” “

You must...”

- Allow take up time!

Plant the seed of what you would like to happen at the start of the session, but don’t expect it to happen straight away.

- Use the child’s interest!

Using characters of interest can help loosen up demands, as you are not personally asking them to do something.

For example, if the child loves Thomas the Tank Engine or Star Wars, try to find a character voice you can use to make requests. Or you could find a toy or puppet to represent the character, saying:

“The Fat Controller says these are the station rules”

“Luke Skywalker would like us to try to work this out to save the galaxy!”





ANXIETY BUSTERS

1. Be prepared

Have a range of choices available to the child, and think through how you will present them.

2. Be flexible

Be ready to scale back demands or change your approach if the child begins to panic.

3. Be indirect

Follow the indirect route from A to B, finding ways to 'ask without asking'.

4. Pick your battles

What's really important for the child, and for you? What should you hold firm, and what can you be flexible about?

5. Tune in to the anxiety and panic which underlies the child's behaviour

We don't stimulate more the children who are having panic attacks, we support them to calm down.

EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK FOR STUDENTS

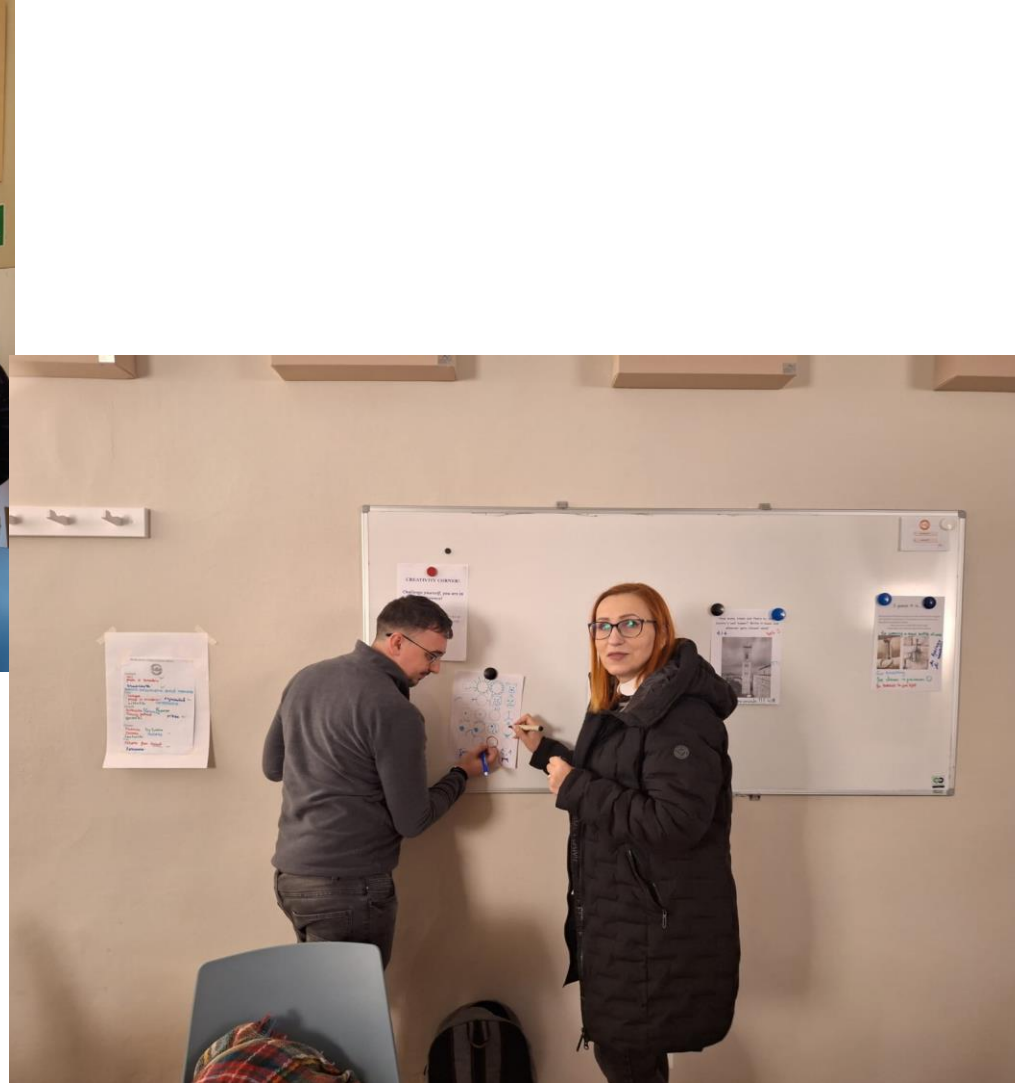
- Eye contact, little smile, a nod of the head show them that they are seen and heard. Little sound like “Mmmm” offer some vocal encouragement without actually interrupting;
- Increase mastery-oriented feedback that encourages perseverance and focuses on development rather than a fixed notion of performance;
- Provide feedback that is frequent , timely, specific and detailed;
- Correction – and often praise- work best when they are private and specific. Great attention to details says more than ‘great job’





Encourage self reflection by asking them what THEY think about their work, what they would like to change and improve , instead of YOU telling them:

- How was it ?
- What happened?
- What worked?
- What would you change next time?
- What surprised you?



More information about our project at:

<https://liceulmaxineni.ro/proiect-erasmus/>