

NEW TERMS, OLD IDEAS

PDA/ RSD/ HSP

The Child & Adolescent Psychiatry Practical Review
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1

In this session:

- * Look at PDA (pathological demand avoidance); RSD (rejection sensitivity dysphoria); HSP (highly sensitive person) as descriptions of something that is (internal) and is happening (transactional).
- * Explore why these terms matter now (in the age of social media).
- * Explain to parents — to shift from labels to helpful insights.

2



PDA

And yet...
maybe this PDA (personal digital assistant) has something to offer.

3

Unpacking to the function

- * Pathological demand avoidance — what a terrible name.
- * To the child's brain, demand doesn't make sense/ doesn't compute, feels confusing.
- * The energy of the demand — coming from the outside— becomes overwhelming and feels endangering.
- * Avoidance —what to do when it is too much, too hard, too confusing= refuse.

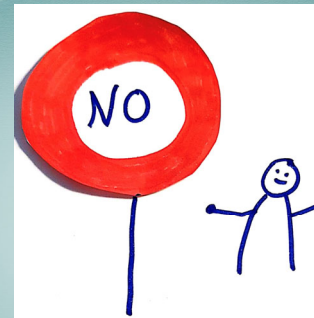
4

Theory of mind problem



- * The child mind doesn't get outside demands. The pieces don't fit.
- * Is that "pathological" — or self protective?
- * When does this term fit children without autism? Mindblindness.

5



RSD

It's a perception (mostly)...

6

Unpacking the function

- RSD is associated with ADHD.
- Children (especially with ADHD) are mixed up about in their feelings, thoughts and bodies/ and often feel everyone is mad at them.
- Anger can feel like rejection.
- And over time this becomes internalized as a sensitivity—an expectation that it will happen.
- Dysphoria = unhappy, uneasy, unsatisfied that IT can't work (it = relationships).
- Often coupled with oppositional behaviors to stay connected and fulfill the expectation.

7

Self fulfilling prophecy

How expectations “seal the deal” for kids...and sometimes parents. So change the interactions.



8



HSP

When sensory input feels TOO MUCH.

9

The dysfunction of HSP

- Being sensitive can be a blessing— and also a burden.
- Sensory stimuli needs regulation; when it FEELS too much, then person can experience overload that is both neurologically and psychologically “painful”.
- In children, pain is often experienced as happening to them—so they either collapse or explode.
- Functioning becomes difficult when they are so overcome.

10

Bring in the bubble wrap



- HSP needs extra protection—and needs to learn how to find this protection.
- When sensory overload lessens, then the body can relearn regulatory tolerance.
- Parents start as the co-regulators but eventually this must belong to the child.

11



Social media— and so much information
Sometimes helpful, sometimes confusing or overwhelming.

12



These experiences represent different ways the brain/body register information— none are “on purpose”.

SO  this may be a better image— to remind us that all children can change, adapt when they feel loved — and understood.

13


Advice for parents...and clinicians.

1. Children always need parents who are interested: *what is happening for you/inside you?* Children show distress when they are feeling distressed.
2. Parents also benefit from asking *how are we doing?* The transactional nature of these “maladies” is significant— the child perceives (sometimes with accuracy) that parents are distressed, frustrated—without clear pathway to repair.
3. Provide explanations AND practical ideas about what might reduce stress and confusion.
4. The goals are to feel their parents’ understanding and then help the child function— with these challenges.

14

For children...


- Explain what is happening — in simple language.
- Help them know this is how they perceive/ and why it is hard.
- Rebuild their connections with — often there is damage that must be addressed.
- Work for deals— ways they will try to manage better (mastery) if/when their parents help them.
- Parents need to be USEFUL.



15

A word about mental health on the web...

- Alphabet soup
- Descriptions tend to be broad, inclusive, engaging.
- Mental distress vs. disturbance vs. persistent disease// rarely delineated.
- Especially teens are self diagnosing—+ increased awareness but sometimes at cost.
- Always talk about functions— how your brain, mind is working. Keep it accessible. Think mastery.



16

Thanks

17