

## What is pathological demand avoidance (PDA)?

### What is demand avoidance?



'Demand avoidance' involves not being able to do certain things at certain times, either for yourself or others, and the use of techniques to avoid these things.

It's a natural human trait – avoiding demands is something we all do to different degrees and for different reasons.

When it occurs to an extreme extent, it may be that it relates to poor physical or mental health, personality development or developmental conditions. So, it's important to understand that a PDA profile of autism may not always be the explanation for demand

avoidant presentations.

To find out more about PDA;

<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/pda.aspx>

<https://www.pdasociety.org.uk/what-is-pda-menu/>


Much like those with Autism, children and young people with Demand Avoidant features may also avoid demands or situations that trigger anxiety or sensory overload, disrupt routines, involve transitioning from one activity to another, and activities/events that they don't see the point of or have any interest in.

They may refuse, withdraw, 'shutdown' or escape in order to avoid these things.

In addition, many everyday demands are avoided simply because they are demands. The very fact that there's an expectation that something should be done can result in an inability to do it. The expectation might be from other people or it may be something internal. Some people explain that it's the expectation which leads to a feeling of a lack of control (even though it may be something they want to do), then anxiety increases, and panic can set in.


Demands will be perceived differently by different individuals, and response to demands may also be variable but once you begin to look at life in terms of demands you can see how all pervasive they are and you can see how difficult things might be for someone with a PDA profile of autism.





**Helpful approaches for a PDA profile of autism**

Conventional support strategies, including those often recommended for ASD, are often ineffective and counter-productive with a PDA profile. In place of structure, routine, firm boundaries, praise, rewards/consequences, is a person-centred approach based on negotiation, collaboration and flexibility.



The PDA PANDA symbolises the need to tailor the environment to meet needs and our P A N D A mnemonic is a simple reminder of helpful approaches.

For more information please visit [www.pdasociety.org.uk](http://www.pdasociety.org.uk)


Pick battles  
Anxiety management  
Negotiation & collaboration  
Disguise & manage demands  
Adaptation

**Pick battles**

- Minimise rules
- Enable some choice & control
- Explain reasons
- Accept that some things can't be done

**Anxiety management**

- Reduce uncertainty
- Recognise underlying anxiety & social/sensory challenges
- Think ahead
- Treat meltdowns as panic attacks: support throughout & move on



**Adaptation**

- Try humour, distraction, novelty & roleplay
- Be flexible
- Have a Plan B
- Allow plenty of time

**Negotiation & collaboration**

- Keep calm
- Proactively collaborate & negotiate to solve challenges
- Fairness & trust are central

**Disguise & manage demands**

- Word & position requests indirectly
- Constantly monitor tolerance for demands & match demands accordingly
- Doing things together helps

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Many more generic autism resources and approaches – such as social stories, books, games, activities, computer games and apps – may also be helpful, but may require some creative adaption, or a more indirect form of implementation to be effective with a young person with a PDA profile of Autism.

Similarly, these approaches can be helpful with other presentations/conditions as well as with a PDA profile of autism – they may be beneficial for autistic and non-autistic people at times of heightened emotional states or extreme anxiety, or for times of extreme demand avoidance regardless of the underlying cause.

