

PDA Basics

What is PDA?

Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) is an autism profile. While there are separate or amplified traits that come with having PDA, it is part of the autism spectrum.

Most people don't like being told what to do - for someone with PDA, this is much more extreme. Having PDA means that demands can feel so overwhelming, uncomfortable, or anxiety-provoking that it may be intolerable or painful for the individual to comply. Someone with PDA may not have the ability to make themselves do whatever is being expected of them, even if they want to.

Demands can trigger someone with PDA to respond out of intense anger or what looks like aggression; it's important to understand that this isn't necessarily something that can be controlled, and it's not a deliberate attempt to defy or hurt anyone. Someone with PDA may also respond to a demand in more creative ways - by creating distractions, being passive aggressive, running away, doing the opposite of what's been asked, making threats, procrastinating, shutting down, or withdrawing. Responses to demands can include a wide variety of behaviour, all aimed at avoiding or escaping the demand, easing extreme overwhelm or anxiety, feeling safe, and regaining autonomy and control.

These difficulties can be minimised or helped by adjusting wording or approaches to demands, especially for things that are a necessary part of daily life - see our companion resource, PDA Strategies.

What are demands?

There may not always be a set rule for what qualifies as a demand in the mind of someone with PDA, and it can vary between individuals.

Demands can include (but are not limited to): instructions, rules, internal needs like hunger, choices or being required to make a choice, indirect or unspoken expectations, responsibilities like chores, homework, or hygiene, social rules and expectations, goals, and routines. Demands can be external (being asked to wear certain clothes or do homework) or self-imposed (wanting to participate in an activity or complete a project, or needing to eat).

This resource was written by an autistic author with lived experience of PDA.

For more information see our full PDA resource or visit www.pdasociety.org.uk