



A DEMAND-AVOIDANT PROFILE, USUALLY WITHIN AUTISM

Pathological Demand Avoidance

PDA describes a profile in which everyday demands and expectations are resisted or avoided to an extreme degree – even things the person wants to do – driven by high anxiety and a strong need for control and autonomy.

Info: Status: PDA is **not** a standalone diagnosis (not in ICD-11 / DSM-5) and is an emerging, debated description – most often understood as a profile *within* autism. Recognition varies between services. It is best used as a support-focused description, not a label of blame.

How it can present

- Resists and avoids ordinary demands – even activities they want or enjoy
- Uses social strategies to avoid: negotiation, distraction, humour or excuses
- Often appears sociable on the surface, which can mask the difficulty
- A strong, anxiety-driven need to feel in control
- Intense emotions and rapid mood changes
- Comfortable in role-play and imagination – ‘can’t’, not ‘won’t’

What helps – supportive approaches

- ✓ A low-demand, low-arousal approach – keep everyday pressure low
- ✓ Reduce, disguise or reframe demands (indirect, playful or shared phrasing)
- ✓ Offer genuine choice and control; use indirect language
- ✓ Flexibility and collaborative problem-solving together
- ✓ Prioritise reducing anxiety and protecting the relationship
- ✓ Conventional reward-and-consequence approaches often don't work

UK CONTEXT

Unknown

There is no reliable prevalence figure: because PDA is not a formal diagnosis and has no standardised assessment, it cannot be reliably counted.

PDA Society / National Autistic Society

Strengths often seen

- ✦ Imaginative and creative, often with a rich inner world
- ✦ Sociable, engaging and able to connect with people
- ✦ Strong sense of fairness, justice and equality
- ✦ Determined, persistent and resilient
- ✦ Original, ‘outside-the-box’ thinking

Finding assessment & support in the UK

- 1 Speak to your GP about an NHS autism assessment where appropriate (PDA is identified within it)
- 2 School SENCo / SEN Support – put graduated support in place
- 3 Request an EHC needs assessment / EHCP where needs meet the threshold
- 4 The PDA Society offers information and ‘what helps’ guides
- 5 The National Autistic Society offers information and a helpline

Please note – this sheet provides general information only. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not a substitute for individual assessment or professional advice. Every person is unique; if you have concerns about yourself or a child, please speak with a suitably qualified professional.

Sources & further information: PDA Society · National Autistic Society · British Psychological Society