

WHAT IS PATHOLOGICAL DEMAND AVOIDANCE ?

{ P D A }

Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) is a sub-type of autism, described as an anxiety-driven need for control. Individuals with PDA resist the everyday demands of life. Their brains are wired to perceive demands as a threat which triggers extreme anxiety.

COMMON TRAITS OF PDA

- Using social strategies to avoid demands (distracting, negotiating, giving excuses)
- Appearing social on the surface but lacking depth of understanding
- Experiencing intense emotions and mood swings
- Being comfortable in role play, pretend & fantasy – sometimes to an extreme extent
- Focusing intently on other people – often loving or loathing them
- Having a default answer of “No”
- Typically does not respond well to traditional parenting and teaching styles
- Extreme meltdowns or panic attacks
- Lacks understanding of social hierarchy – see themselves as an equal

TYPES OF DEMANDS

DIRECT

Requests or demands from others
“Put on your shoes”
“Say Please”
“Time to go to bed”

SELF IMPOSED

Personal
hygiene
Eating
Speaking
Taking
medication

SILENT DEMANDS

Participating in holidays and
celebrations
Following rules
Observing manners

INDIRECT

Praise has the expectation of
future performance
uncertainty – not knowing what to
expect

INTERNAL

Thirst
Using the
restroom
Wishes
Thoughts

DEMANDS WITHIN DEMANDS

Smaller implied demands
Example: Attending a birthday
party include demands of being
around unknown people,
possibility of loud noises,
unfamiliar food, expectation to
wait patiently



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SUPPORTING PDA INDIVIDUALS

Individuals with PDA do not respond well to the typical supports put in place for individuals with “classic” autism. Avoid rewards and consequences and trying to “fix” or eliminate behaviors. Building a trusting relationship and lowering demands are key to success for individuals with PDA.

TRY

- Being flexible
- Allowing for wait time
- Keeping a calm demeanor
- Being patient
- Showing, rather than tell
- Choosing your battles
- Minimizing rules
- Providing choice
- Providing opportunities for control
- Explaining reason for rule or decision
- Reducing uncertainty Planning ahead
- Building trust
- Lowering demands
- Viewing meltdown as panic attack
- Treating individual as an equal

AVOID

- Using rewards and consequences
- Giving ultimatums
- Giving direct demands
- Praising directly
- Expecting to follow societal norms •
- Placing pressure on individual
- Having a strict routine
- Meeting their anxiety with your anxiety
- Demonstrating authority
- Ignoring signs of stress

USE DECLARATIVE LANGUAGE

A declarative is a comment or a statement. It is usually a statement that observes. Individuals with PDA find declarative statements far less threatening than an imperative sentence or question that demands a response. Imperative sentences can be turned into non-threatening declarative sentences: Get in line becomes I notice it's time for lunch. Put your coat on becomes I wonder what the weather is like today? Questions can easily be turned into a declarative by taking out the question word (what, why, where) and replacing it with “I wonder...”



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