

PDA Parent Support Resources

Parent-friendly links and practical guidance for understanding and supporting demand avoidance

These resources may be helpful when supporting a child or young person who appears to experience PDA-style demand avoidance. PDA-style demand avoidance is often understood through an anxiety, autonomy and nervous-system lens. When a child feels pressured, rushed, corrected or controlled, the demand itself can feel overwhelming, even when the task seems small to others.

Helpful starting point Traditional approaches such as repeated instructions, consequences or increased pressure can sometimes increase distress. Many PDA-informed approaches focus on reducing pressure, offering choices, building trust, using collaboration, and supporting regulation before expecting problem-solving.

Useful PDA links

Click any link below to open the resource online.

1. PDA Society - Parenting a PDAer

A parent-focused introduction to PDA-informed parenting, including why flexibility, patience, low-demand approaches and trust-building can be helpful.

<https://www.pdasociety.org.uk/what-helps-guides/parenting-a-pdaer/>

2. PDA Society - PDA Approaches

Practical guidance on low-arousal approaches, collaboration, understanding anxiety and adapting support to reduce escalation.

<https://www.pdasociety.org.uk/what-helps-guides/pda-approaches/>

3. PDA Society - PANDA as a Way In

A simple framework: Prioritise and compromise, Anxiety management, Negotiation and collaboration, Disguise and manage demands, Adaptation.

<https://www.pdasociety.org.uk/what-helps-guides/pda-approaches/panda-as-a-way-in/>

4. PDA Society - Childhood Guides

Guides for supporting PDA children, including education, family life, friendships, siblings, routines and explaining PDA to others.

<https://www.pdasociety.org.uk/what-helps-guides/childhood/>

5. PDA Society - PDA and Emotionally Based School Avoidance

Useful when school attendance, school-based distress, unmet needs or EHCP conversations are part of the picture.

<https://www.pdasociety.org.uk/what-helps-guides/pda-and-emotionally-based-school-avoidance-ebesa/>

6. National Autistic Society - Demand Avoidance

A clear overview of demand avoidance and the need for personalised, supportive approaches.

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/behaviour/demand-avoidance>

7. National Autistic Society - Letter for Schools and Local Authorities

A helpful advocacy resource for parents when school or local authority support is being questioned, reduced or refused.

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/behaviour/demand-avoidance/support-letter>

8. Action for Children - Supporting a Child with PDA

Parent-friendly information that explains demand avoidance through an anxiety and support-needs lens.

<https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/neurodiversity/autism/support-pda/>

9. Just One Norfolk NHS - Pathological Demand Avoidance

NHS resource explaining PDA, demand types and how children or young people may respond when overwhelmed.

<https://www.justonenorfolk.nhs.uk/nd-digital-library/understanding-neurodiversity/pathological-demand-avoidance-pda/>

10. Sheffield Children's NHS - Strategies for Demand Avoidance at Home and School

Practical ideas for predictability, communication, social coaching, collaboration and reducing pressure around demands.

<https://library.sheffieldchildrens.nhs.uk/strategies-to-help-with-demand-avoidance-at-home-and-school/>

11. PDA Society - Support and Training

Training, webinars and support options for parents, carers, schools and professionals.

<https://www.pdasociety.org.uk/support-and-training/>

12. PAST - Positive Assessments Support and Training

Support, advice, training and consultations for families of neurodivergent children and teenagers, including PDA.

<https://p-ast.co.uk/>

13. Steph's Two Girls - Parent Blog

A lived-experience parent blog about PDA, autism and family life. This may feel validating for parents navigating similar challenges.

<https://www.stephstwogirls.co.uk/>

Practical reminders for parents and schools

Look underneath the behaviour

Ask: What demand, uncertainty, sensory input, transition or anxiety may be sitting behind this response?

Reduce pressure where possible

Use softer language, indirect invitations, humour, curiosity and options rather than repeated direct instructions.

Prioritise relationship and regulation

Connection, safety and calm often need to come before learning, discussion, consequences or problem-solving.

Use collaboration

Where possible, involve the child in creating plans, routines and choices so they feel some control.

Keep demands small and flexible

Break things down and offer ways to start without making the child feel trapped or watched.

Support school communication

When school is part of the challenge, written examples can help the SENCO, EHCP team or local authority understand patterns and support needs.

Questions that may help parents reflect

- What tends to happen before the demand refusal or escalation?
- Is the child being asked to move quickly from one activity, space or expectation to another?
- Is there a sensory issue, fear of failure, uncertainty or loss of control involved?
- Would choice, humour, extra time, a visual prompt or a lower-demand option reduce pressure?
- What has helped the child feel safe, calm or more in control in the past?

Important note

These resources do not replace professional, safeguarding or medical advice. If a child or young person is at risk of harm, families should seek urgent support from appropriate services. For education concerns, parents may wish to speak with the school SENCO, EHCP caseworker or SENDIASS.