

Supporting a Child with PDA: A Support Snippet for Parents

What is PDA?

Pathological demand avoidance (PDA) is a profile found within some Autistic people. If your child has PDA, they might:

- Find everyday demands **overwhelming** and go to extreme lengths to avoid them.
- **Avoid** all kinds of demands, including simple instructions (e.g. 'brush your teeth'), answers to questions or internal bodily demands (e.g. needing to go to the toilet).
- **Struggle** with transitions, relying on rigid routines to maintain a sense of **control**.
- Find it hard to understand **social cues** when communicating with others.
- Struggle to regulate their emotions, often experiencing **meltdowns** or **shutdowns**.

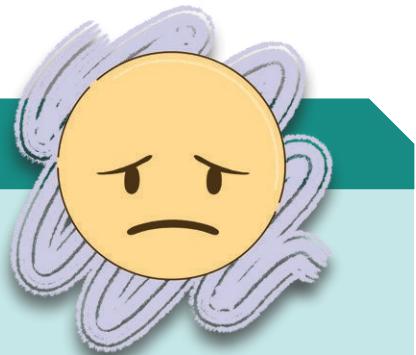
It's important to remember that PDA is **not bad behaviour** – children with PDA often experience **intense feelings of distress**. Their extreme responses are **anxiety-driven** and not signs of defiance.



Signs your child has PDA:

Your child may respond to demands by:

- creating distractions, e.g. by changing the topic to avoid answering a question
- making excuses
- attempting to negotiate, e.g. by suggesting they complete a task later
- saying 'no' and refusing to negotiate
- becoming extremely anxious
- engaging in role-play, e.g. 'I can't tidy my room because I'm a snake, and snakes have no hands.'
- experiencing an emotional outburst
- becoming withdrawn and unresponsive
- freezing in place
- running away
- becoming aggressive, e.g. by kicking, hitting or biting

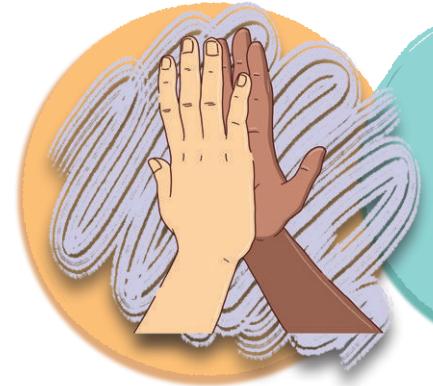


Supporting your child with PDA:

Reduce or eliminate demands when it is appropriate.

Rephrase demands, e.g. instead of saying "Put your shoes on", you could say "I'm putting my shoes on", and model putting on your shoes.

Offer your child **choices** so that they feel more in control. Limit the choices so your child doesn't become overwhelmed. For example, for an after-dinner treat, instead of asking "What pudding do you want?" which could have many responses, and leaves you stuck if they ask for something that isn't available. Try saying, "Would you like yoghurt or fruit?" So you control the choices, but your child feels like they have control.



Use **positive body language** when you want your child to do something (e.g. don't look directly at them if they find eye contact uncomfortable).

Keep a diary and **identify potential triggers** that unsettle your child.



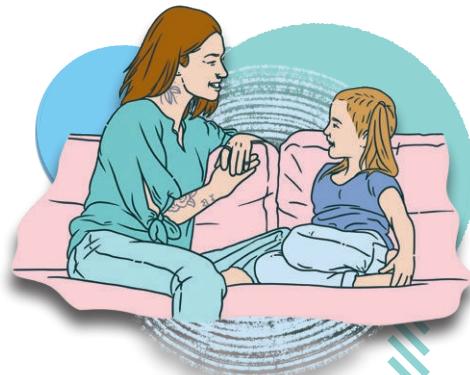
Consider their **sensory needs** (e.g. if they struggle with noise or visual clutter) and create a home environment that helps your child feel calm.

Engage in **role-play** to make demands less daunting, e.g. if you want your child to have their breakfast, sit their favourite soft toy at the table with a bowl of cereal too.

Explain why certain tasks need to be completed to deepen your child's understanding, e.g. they might not know why they need to brush their teeth.

Enjoy plenty of **bonding time** with your child to build a happy, trusting relationship.

Encourage your child to try **calming activities** such as deep breathing exercises or a mindfulness craft to help reduce feelings of anxiety.



Be **flexible** and try different strategies – it will become too 'routine' if you try to reduce demands the same way each time.

Encourage **independence** by allowing your child time to do things on their own. Sometimes, the more you ask and respond, the more your child will resist. Try presenting the task or instruction and then walking away and busying yourself. Sometimes, when the attention is taken away, your child can feel more confident to do something.

Be there to **calmly support** and comfort your child during times of distress, if certain demands feel too overwhelming for them.

Avoid rewards as a way to encourage your child to carry out a task – in the long-term, rewards can increase anxiety and make your child worry about completing that task 'just as well' in the future.

Accept that some demands are simply too much for your child, so take the time to learn which boundaries can and can't be crossed.

Work 'as a team' by supporting your child to complete a task.

Make reasonable **compromises** if it means that your child can still complete a task in their own way.



Reach out for **professional support**, e.g. by talking to your child's GP, teacher or educational psychologist.

We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. PDA is widely, but not universally, understood to be a profile on the Autism spectrum. Understanding of PDA is still evolving and the information on this website represents our current understanding. We have consulted with our partners in producing these resources, to ensure they are representative of the PDA community. However, every learner's needs are different and so these resources may not be suitable for your learner. It is for you to consider whether it is appropriate to use these resources with your learner; you will find editable alternatives on all of our Autism and PDA specific resources to enable you to edit and amend them for individual needs and preferences. Twinkl is an international company and therefore some resources may feature terminology that is appropriate in some countries but not others - in such cases, you are able to request an alternative version specific to the UK's inclusive approach.

This resource includes information generally found to benefit educators/parents learning more about Autism, and features content to support Autistic learners. Our resources follow guidance created after consultations with representatives from the Autistic community. Our resources use 'identity first' language. It is important to acknowledge that every learner's needs are different. Some elements of these resources may not be applicable in relation to specific Autistic learners; you will find editable alternatives on all of our Autism specific resources to enable you to edit and amend them for individual needs and preferences. Twinkl is an international company and therefore some resources may feature terminology that is appropriate in some countries but not others - in such cases, you are able to request an alternative version specific to your country's approach.

These resources are those which we have generally found to be of benefit to learners with SEND. However, every learner's needs are different and so these resources may not be suitable for your learner. It is for you to consider whether it is appropriate to use these resources with your learner.

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