

# ASD Family Help

Registered Charity No. 1135718

## 5 Top Tips

### Pathological Demand Avoidance

Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) is a profile of autism where people avoid daily demands, (not always by choice) often using social strategies to do this. The underlying cause for this avoidance is said to be high level of anxiety, usually from expectations of demands being placed on them, which can lead to feeling of not being in control of a situation. Often you will also hear it called “Extreme Demand Avoidance” or just “Demand Avoidant” however the profile is the same.

Typical demands of life, can be small: saying “hello” putting on their shoes, to bigger demands - going to school or brushing their teeth. They will try and use some type of social distraction. This can range from making excuses, changing the subject, and procrastinating, to running away or aggression. The reaction can quickly escalate if the person is pushed rather than being allowed to avoid the demand. They can often come across having more social skills, however they can lack social identity and can have difficulty with processing information.

The **PDA Society** has a great website for parents/professionals to learn from. They use the term **PANDA** – **P** = Pick Battles **A**= Anxiety Management **N**= Negotiation and Collaboration **D**= Disguise and Manage Demands **A**=Adaptation. This is a good place to start.

- 1. Pick your Battles** - Try at times to let some things go and other times go with the flow, be flexible. Try to focus on the positive qualities in your child rather than on the unwanted behavior. Explaining why something is happening gives the child some perspective, and if possible, allow for choices or some control of the situation.
- 2. Anxiety Management** - Heighten anxiety can lead the person to have difficulties managing their emotions (anger, crying etc.) and they can become overwhelmed and frightened. Try and teach them as much as you can about these emotions, how they feel and look and what helps them feel safe. Plan ahead if and take a flexible approach if you know it could be problematic. Structure can help, but with the opportunity to make it flexible for the young person
- 3. Negotiation and Collaboration** – trust is important, building a positive relationship is key. Try and take a positive approach and work with your child’s strengths. It is important for a parent to show empathy and to let them know you are on their side, while working together with your child to overcome challenges and negotiating an agreement in a fair way.
- 4. Disguise and Manage Demands** - – This might be as simple as making a game out of an everyday event or working alongside your child to do a task. Using a puppet to make the demand or pretending to be someone else can really help at times. The art of supporting children with PDA is to know how many demands you can place that day, without causing them to become overwhelmed
- 5. Adaptation** - Adaptation and flexibility is the key. Allow for extra time, have an alternative plan, including a way out i.e. having a quiet place you can retreat to. Using a distraction, changing your language, bringing in humor (being silly) can all help low tension. Sometimes asking ‘How do I do this?’ can make a demand less overwhelming. There is lot more information on the PDA website. [www.pdasociety.org.uk](http://www.pdasociety.org.uk)

**Do call our Help Line if you need to talk things through. 07384 733658 or email**

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