

Pathological Demand Avoidance

What is PDA?

Pathological demand avoidance (PDA) is increasingly, but not universally, accepted as a behaviour profile that is seen in some individuals on the **autism spectrum**.

People with a demand avoidant profile share difficulties with others on the autism spectrum in social communication, social interaction and restricted and **repetitive patterns of behaviours**, activities or interests.

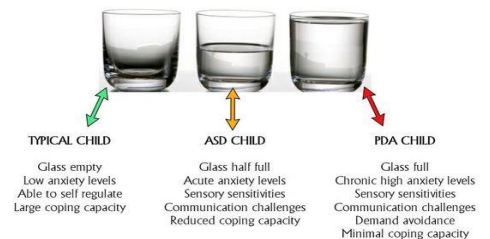
However, those who present with this particular diagnostic profile are driven to avoid everyday demands and expectations to an extreme extent. This demand avoidant behaviour is rooted in an anxiety-based need to be in control.

Characteristics of PDA

- The distinctive features of a demand avoidant profile include:
- **Resists and avoids** the ordinary demands of life.
- Uses social strategies as part of avoidance.
- **Appears sociable**, but lacks understanding.
- Experiences **excessive mood swings** and impulsivity
- Appears **comfortable in role play** and pretence
- Displays **obsessive behaviour** that is often focused on other people.



Baseline coping capacity of a child with Pathological Demand Avoidance



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Strategies to support a child with PDA

- Use **indirect** commands
- Give time for take up
- Use the child's interest/role play to give commands and engage the child.
- Give choices - visually or saying; this or this
- Use humour
- Use distraction
- Be flexible and spontaneous
- Give a command from something else; puppet, toy, higher authority, Alexa!
- Use sand timers/clock on phone/visuals to support transitions.
- Remember that these strategies won't work all the time!