



# What is PDA? (Pathological Demand Avoidance)

PDA (Pathological Demand Avoidance) is widely understood to be a profile on the autism spectrum, involving the avoidance of everyday demands and the use of 'social' strategies as part of this avoidance. PDA individuals share autistic characteristics and in addition have many of the 'key features' of a PDA profile:

- resisting and avoiding the **ordinary demands** of life
- using **social strategies** as part of the avoidance
- appearing '**socially able**' but this may **mask** underlying differences/difficulties in social interaction and communication
- experiencing intense **emotions** and **mood swings**
- appearing comfortable in **role play**, **pretence** and **fantasy**
- intense **focus**, often on other **people** (real or fictional)
- a **need for control**, often driven by **anxiety** or an **automatic 'threat response'**
- conventional approaches in support, parenting or teaching are **ineffective**

Autism is dimensional, this means that it varies a lot from one person to another. A PDA profile describes one way in which autism can present.



Demand avoidance in PDA is a question of can't not won't: PDAers often describe it as a neurological tug of war between brain, heart and body.

can't  
not  
won't



With PDA, demands of all types, including lots of things that you might not think of as a demand, can trigger an automatic threat or anxiety response and a feeling of panic can rapidly set in.



Also the approaches that help can seem a bit unconventional: a partnership based on trust, flexibility, collaboration, careful use of language and balancing of demands works best.

- Pick battles
- Anxiety management
- Negotiation & collaboration
- Disguise & manage demands
- Adaptation



Because PDA is often missed, misunderstood or misdiagnosed, it's important for us all to have PDA on our radar.

To find out more, please see our website:

- Information, resources and research
- Helpful approaches and best practice
- Training courses and free webinars
- Enquiry line support
- Newsletters

[www.pdasociety.org.uk](http://www.pdasociety.org.uk)