



Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA)

Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) is a profile that falls under the autism spectrum. People with PDA present as avoiding everyday demands and requests. Everyday requests cause stress and anxiety for the individual with PDA. This stress can be observed through behaviours such as: being uncooperative, defiance, inflexibility, controlling behaviour, anxiety, shutting down, refusing to participate, emotionally reactive. It is important to remember that demand avoidance isn't a choice!

As adults, we tend to deliver instructions and requests in a directive way, for example:

- Come to the table! It's bath time! Get ready! Get dressed!
- Pack your bag! Pack up!
- It's time to go! Hurry up!
- How many times do I have to tell you?!

This approach leads to stress and anxiety for individuals with PDA and leads to demand avoidance.

The following ideas are helpful:

- Re-framing behaviour, curiosity, and compassionate understanding of demand avoidance.
- Reducing stress is vital.
- Working in partnership and creating a foundation of trust.
- Be flexible, pick battles, collaborate, use language carefully and balance demands.
- Try to be patient and remain calm – this allows you to co-regulate with your child. In other words, lend them your calm – to help them remain calm.
- Giving too much attention to cooperation and excessive praise can lead to increased stress – as it highlights that a request has been followed.
- Be creative! The same approach is likely to lose effectiveness – you need to think on your feet and use novelty to support engagement.
- If you have a pet – incorporate them into activities. Pets are non-demanding and are great co-regulating partners.
- Be aware of that even internal demands such as needing to go to the toilet can increase stress for the individual with PDA.

This summary has been prepared to provide ideas for ways to disguise and manage demands and requests. The key ideas are:

- Phrase requests non-directively
- Use novelty, playfulness, and humour
- Incorporate special interests
- Invitations to work together



Non-Directive Requests: Ideas and Examples

Shower / Bath Time:

You have an appointment at the luxury spa!

Which bubble bath would you like? The pink or the green bottle?

Let's go light a candle in the bathroom.

What music do you want in the bathroom?

Are you having a bath or shower tonight?

....(special toy) is waiting for you in the bath!

Let's play with.... (special toy) in the bath

Let's pretend ...(special toy) is in a flood and we need to save him /her!

Let's race to the bathroom...

Let's pretend we are(insert animal, favourite character, funny idea) as we go to the bathroom

Can you tell me about (insert special interest)

Let's talk about ...(insert special interest)

Incorporate:

- *Special interests*
- *Novelty – bath / shower crayons, bubbles, water play, bath toys*
- *Set up environment – e.g. candles, music, diffuser*

Dinner Time

Where will people sit tonight? Can you lay out the place cards? (place cards offer choice, flexibility and control)

Are you sitting on the wooden chair or stool tonight?

Which bowl / plate do you want?

You are DJ tonight – what music will we listen to?

Who is joining us at the dinner table tonight (e.g. special toy)

What game shall we play after dinner?

Incorporate:

- *Special interests and toys*
- *Novelty – set up a restaurant, place cards, special plates / cups,*
- *Set up environment – menu planner developed in partnership, music as a timer to come to the table (child can choose the song)*

Bedtime

Teddy / special toy needs a cuddle!

Can you tuck ...(special toy) into bed?

Can you choose some music?

What book are we going to read in bed?

Would you like a massage or a big bear hug in bed?

I love bedtime cuddles with you...



*Can I tell you a story about me when I was little?
Let's get your room all cosy!
Let's pretend we are (insert favourite animal)...and it is hibernation time!
Let's go hide under the covers and get cosy!*

Incorporate:

- *Special interests and toys*
- *Set up environment – make bedroom a haven for the child, e.g. special blanket, bed tent or mosquito net, night light, fairy lights.*

Getting ready for school / Going out

*What music are we going to listen to in the car?
Which toy is coming with us today?
Can you give this note to your teacher?
After school we have a special walk / outing / activity planned...
Which seat are you travelling in today?
We have a secret mission to complete on our way to...
Let's play eye spy / game in the car!
Let's count how many (car type / car colour / animals) we see on the way....
Let's pretend we are
Can I tell you a story about ...*

Incorporate:

- *Special interests and toys*
- *Novelty and humour*

For more information: <https://www.pdasociety.org.uk/>