



Positive Autism Support and Training

Helping to put problems with Autism in the PAST

Supporting Children, Teenagers and Young Adults with Pathological Demand Avoidance

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Course Content.



By the end of the course you will be able to



1. Understand the meaning of Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA)



2. Understand the impact PDA has on a child, teenager or young adult and how they might be supported



3 Be able to support and communicate effectively with individuals who have PDA.



4. Understand the effects that PDA has on learning and how to reduce the impact of this

Behind the behaviour is a child suffering from anxiety, depression, social isolation and low self esteem caused by a misunderstood form of ASD called PDA

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Pathological Demand Avoidance is a complex, challenging and misunderstood condition that is often ignored or not even recognized by many professionals

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Understand the meaning of Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA).

What is PDA?

- Pathological: *“extreme in a way that is not normal or that shows an illness or mental problem”*
- Demand: *“a forceful statement in which you say that something must be done or given to you”*
“a strong need for something”
- Avoidance: *“the act of avoiding something”*
- PDA is *“an anxiety driven need to avoid demands and to remain in control at all times” (Jane Sherwin)*

The PDA Society's statement on diagnostic terminology concludes:

- *“PDA is not a diagnosis in its own right, however the PDA profile can be identified during an autism assessment and, where appropriate, should be included as a clear signpost to the support strategies that will be helpful. The research to date means that PDA would not be diagnosed as a standalone condition, but that formulations such as ‘Autism with a PDA profile’ or ‘ASD with demand avoidant traits’ or similar can be, and are being, used.”*

Characteristics of Behaviour Associated with PDA (Newson 1995, Revised 1998, Second Revision 2000, Third Revision 2001)

- Resists and avoids the ordinary demands of life
- Appearing sociable, but lacking depth in understanding
- Excessive mood swings and impulsivity
- Comfortable in role play and pretend, sometimes to an extreme extent
- Language delay, often with good degree of catch-up
- Obsessive behaviour, often focussed on people, either loving or loathing them
- Can be domineering and overbearing
- Parents often describe a “Jekyll and Hyde” personality
- Bossy and controlling
- Often more comfortable with adults than children

More Characteristics of Behaviour Associated with PDA

- Often hypersensitive to other's voices, facial expression etc (may absorb others emotions)
- Can be over familiar with adults and peers
- May take on the persona of others, i.e. teachers.
- May go into role in order to comply
- May have a panic attack or meltdown if highly anxious – these may result in aggression towards others
- Unconcerned about impact of behaviour on others
- Can behave very differently at school /college to home
- Unable to follow routines if set by others
- Often have sensory issues – noise, touch, brightness etc

How are demands avoided?

Individuals with PDA will use a wide range of avoidance strategies:

- Manipulating social situations to remain in control.
- Refusal: “I can’t”, “I won’t”
- Making excuses: “My legs don’t work!”
- Distraction – “Oh look outside – a squirrel!”
- Arguing
- Delaying
- Suggesting alternatives
- Withdrawing into fantasy
- Meltdown or Shutdown



Why the right
approach is
vital (And LIFE
CHANGING!)

- *Identifying PDA is crucial as I've been told on many occasions by parents and teachers that the approaches used with children with a more typical presentation of autism often don't work and can be counterproductive with those with PDA. Conversely, I have been told on many occasions how the application of 'PDA friendly strategies' was, quoting a father I worked with, 'life transforming' for his daughter and the whole family. Moreover, developing a detailed description of your child's ASD will help them develop self-awareness, and understanding their PDA symptoms is part of this."* Dr Gloria Dura-Vila

Helping to remove barriers to learning



- Build trust and rapport
- Let them lead
- Always look outside the box and look for “natural” learning opportunities
- Mold the curriculum around the learner (not the other way around)
- Have an exit strategy
- Check in and Check out
- Help other learners to be supportive
- The type of provision is not important – the nature and provision of the school is
- Support each other and back each other up!!

References and Useful Reading:

- www.thepdaresource.com
- www.autism.org.uk
- www.pdasociety.org.uk
- www.positiveautismsupportandtraining.co.uk
- Me and My PDA – A Guide To Pathological Demand Avoidance –Dr Glora Dura-Vila and Tamar Levi
- Pathological Demand Avoidance Syndrome – My Daughter is not Naughty. (Jane Sherwin 2015)
- Can I tell you About Pathological Demand Avoidance Syndrome? A Guide for friends, family and professionals. (Ruth Fidler and Phil Christie)