An Introduction to Pathological Demand Avoidance

Clare Truman

Sally Cat's guide to PDA

My PDA Anatomy

- Very imaginative & creative
- Offbeat sense of humour
- Love of wordplay
- Easily overloaded
- Needs a lot of quiet space
- Need for (personal) control
- High anxiety hidden behind smiling mask
- Doesn't conform to social norms
- Stressed by orders & expectations
- Likes to help others
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.
The main features of PDA are...

- 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
- obsessive behaviour, often focussed on people.
Is PDA really a thing?

There is individual difference within every diagnosis including autism. There is no need for justification for a separate diagnosis.

The characteristics and strategies are sufficiently different from other people with autism and sufficiently similar to each other to constitute a separate diagnosis within the Autism Spectrum.
Spot the Demands

Direct Demands: “Brush your hair”
Subtle Demands: “We need to leave for school”
Silent Demands: Responding to a question
Self Imposed Demands: Wanting to do a task or activity but not being able to start/complete it.
Strategies

P - Prioritising Demands/Picking Battles
A – Anxiety Management
N – Negotiation and Collaboration
D – Disguise and Manage Demands
A – Adaptation
Strategies
Phil Christie, Margaret Duncan, Zara Healy and Ruth Fiddler

Sally Cat’s guide to PDA

Positive PDA strategies
- Collaboration and respect
- Look beyond surface level behaviour
  - Don’t take it personally
- Every day - a fresh start
  - Adapt when demand avoidance increases/decreases
- Pick your battles
  - Give clear reasons for non-negotiable boundaries
- Natural rewards and consequences
- Minimise busy/social times
- Keep PDAers informed
  - Reduce & disguise demands
- Indirect commands
  - Give space for PDAers to be useful
    - Ask them to teach/show you
      - Calm, even tone of voice
- Indirect praise
  - Role play and props
- Model desirable behaviour

Click to LOOK INSIDE!
Prioritising Demands

At Spectrum Space...

We keep everyone safe.

We help each other enjoy activities.

We don't make people do things they don't want to do.

We follow the legal rules: no hurting, no threats, no damaging other people's things.
# Prioritising Demands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Comments or context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attends football club</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not a priority at the moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t hurt siblings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Non-negotiable, will be prevented from doing so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a hobby</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Provide art and craft materials in a demand free way for her to engage with if she wants to.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Christie et al, 2012
Tolerance Dial

Anxious Behaviours
Very Anxious - Crisis Behaviours

Calm-ish
Calm and ready for new learning.

Kindness
Wise choices

Follow legal roles
Stay safe

Challenge Time!

Demand Dial
Anxiety Management
Stress Bucket

• Learn the child’s triggers
• Balance the day so they don’t contain too many triggers at once.
• Allow time for relaxing activities to “empty the bucket”

Idea: Brabban and Turkington – 2002
Image: www.mentalhealth-uk.org
Negotiation and Collaboration

Can the child help you solve a problem?
Can the child help you write the schedule for the day?
Can the child choose from two options for the next task?
“I wonder if…”
Dear Mother In Law - Thanks for your recent visit. Your unwanted and unsolicited advice on how to run my own home is always appreciated.

your ecards
someecards.com
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATEMENT</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
<th>DEMAND AVOIDANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Command</td>
<td>You must go out</td>
<td>Ultra high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive command</td>
<td>Move it!</td>
<td>Ultra high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressuring</td>
<td>I'd like you to go out</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumption</td>
<td>You'll love going here</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisive suggestion</td>
<td>Let's go out!</td>
<td>Medium/High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polite request</td>
<td>Please do come too</td>
<td>Medium/High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpressed suggestion</td>
<td>Maybe we could go out?</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpushy opinion</td>
<td>I'd quite like to go out</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>Where's good for you?</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unassuming Forbidding</td>
<td>You're welcome to come</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You can't come</td>
<td>Inverted!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Adaptation

• Can we make this task more appealing?
• Can we involve humour?
• Can we involve a challenge?
• Can we link it to the child’s interests?
• Can we make it more flexible?
• Can they help us complete it?
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