

HOW TO:

PATHOLOGICAL DEMAND AVOIDANCE SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN

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Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) is characterized by extreme distress when presented with demands and expectations (including things the person wants to do or enjoy). Demand avoidance can be a manifestation of anxiety and can be heightened with uncertainty, ambiguity, and loss of autonomy. This internal struggle can impact essential needs like eating and sleeping and greatly impact expectations such as attending school and doing homework. While PDA is often talked about in association with autism, many believe that PDA is unique and that both autistic and allistic people can experience it. This is important because sometimes strategies that work well for supporting autistic children do not work well for PDAers. Personalized and flexible support, especially from their loved ones, can make a big difference for those who experience PDA.

LANGUAGE AND PHRASING

- Many things can be perceived as demands (including the suggestions on this sheet) and it's important to be conscious of language phrasing and its impact.
- Demands can include almost everything! Feeling like something is not in our control can be a demand. Since this is the case, it's important to consider helpful strategies.
- Phrasing things as invitations without expectations can go a long way!
- Shift your language away from the child and towards yourself using "I" statements.
- Straightforward communication is helpful when communicated with kindness and love.

SENSORY REGULATION AND DEMAND FREE TIME

- One of the most impactful variables in a PDAers life involves sensory processing.
- An environment that honors our sensory system's needs can make a world of difference!
- Scheduling "Demand Free Time" can help reduce anxiety and allow our systems to reset.

ANXIETY SUPPORT

- Look at the day and week ahead, to anticipate what might be activating for the child and plan strategies in advance.
- Give the child time to process what to expect.
- Many PDAers thrive with reassurance and being kept in the loop!
- Co-regulation is important! Consider how to stay calm when the child's emotional experience gets amplified.

FLEXIBLE OPTIONS

- Scale back demands on higher stress days.
- Consider being open to experiences with your child without focusing on an outcome.
- By adapting to and responding positively to the evolving needs of your child you can help them feel supported and loved.
- While many PDAers love their freedom and space, they may also be closely attached to one specific person and find them to be the ultimate co-regulator.

EMBRACE PLAY!

- Imagination, creativity, and humor are strengths of many PDAers and help them overcome obstacles!
- Play lowers our anxiety and improves our relationships!