

ANM SUPPORT PACK

PDA

A calm, dignity-led guide to demand avoidance, distress and collaborative support.

This is general information, not a diagnosis or individual medical advice. Local services and pathways vary.

Start here

PDA is a term some people use for a pattern of intense demand avoidance, often when expectations feel overwhelming or threaten a sense of autonomy. People use different language for this experience, and PDA is not a stand-alone diagnosis in major diagnostic manuals. The useful question is not *why* will they not comply? but what is making this feel unsafe, impossible or too much right now?

Signs to notice - not a checklist

- Strong distress or avoidance in response to direct, indirect or internally felt demands.
- Difficulty when expectations are rushed, unclear, public, inflexible or stacked too high.
- Avoidance that may be obvious, quiet, delayed or masked - and may change with anxiety, health, energy and environment.
- A greater ability to engage when choice, connection, flexibility and a sense of control are present.

What can help today

- Reduce urgency where possible and separate safety-critical needs from demands that can wait.
- Use collaborative language: offer choices, explain the reason and invite a different route to the same goal.
- Lower the pressure before trying to solve the problem. Regulation comes before reasoning.
- Review what happened later, when everyone is calmer, without framing distress as deliberate defiance.

Demand avoidance can have many causes. A qualified professional can help explore the person's development, wellbeing, environment and support needs. Seek urgent local help if someone is at immediate risk of harm.

Sources and further reading

Norfolk and Waveney NHS. Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA).

<https://www.justonenorfolk.nhs.uk/nd-digital-library/understanding-neurodiversity/pathological-demand-avoidance-pda/>

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