

Understanding Demand Avoidant Profiles

What is a Demand Avoidant Profile?

Presentations of Demand Avoidance sit within an Autism profile and are driven by deep anxiety which perceives threat, seeks self-preservation, and strives for autonomy.

Within a diagnosis of Autism, a demand avoidant profile is sometimes referred to as Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA). The criteria for PDA is not yet fully recognised by medical professionals, because of this the term demand avoidance is used in this leaflet.

Other scenarios can lead to demand avoidant presentations. Children and Young People who have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and those with Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA)

We are increasingly seeing a small group of children who have limited experiences of demands and when they meet demands for the first time, experience feelings of intense discomfort.

Children and Young People who experience extreme and volatile behaviours around demands being placed on them may need a different support approach that enables them to reset the responses that they may have habituated.

Different communication Styles

Demand Avoidant behaviours can be the result of a clash in communication styles.

Adults often use imperative language, the language of orders and commands. These are often perceived as a threat even where none was intended.

Declarative Language is a low arousal communication style that invites the child to reflect and process. It offers more collaboration and leaves space for the child to take part.

How we can help.

- Build trusting relationships with the child.
- Use negotiation and collaboration to develop engagement.
- Describe what you are seeing or experiencing rather than giving commands.
- Think aloud. Share your perspective. Make comments rather than requests.
- Create shared reference points (menus, visual information) rather than creating spoken demands.
- Meet sensory and social overload needs with positive support and adaptations to the environment.
- Understand that meltdowns and refusals are rooted in perceived threat and underlying anxiety.
- Offer a place of refuge for when the child is beginning to struggle.
- Use the child's interests to build learning activities.
- Pick your battles and reduce the number of everyday demands that need to be complied with.

Links to further support.

A wealth of support materials for home and school - <https://www.pdasociety.org.uk>

2x 1hr podcasts from a teacher Clare Trueman with direct experience of teaching PDA profile pupils - <https://www.thesendcast.com/an-introduction-to-pda/>

East Sussex Healthcare Information booklet - <https://www.esht.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Demand-Avoidance-Vs-Pathological-Demand-Avoidance-PDA.pdf>

The Teachers Introduction to Pathological Demand Avoidance - Clare Truman (2021)

The Declarative Language Handbook – Linda K Murphy. (2020)