

# WHAT IS PATHOLOGICAL DEMAND AVOIDANCE?

Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) is becoming recognised as a type of autism involving the avoidance of everyday demands and the use of 'social' strategies as part of the avoidance. It can also be seen in people with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and this behaviour can appear in both adults and children.

It is not recognised in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR) and there is no consensus on whether it is a separate condition from autism or a set of related symptoms. However, it helps to think about this profile when supporting individuals who struggle with complying with demands as it may need different approaches to ones typically used to support individuals on the spectrum and because the avoidance can be attributed to elevated levels of anxiety.

For individuals with PDA some demands or requests can be overwhelming, and they will often go to extreme lengths to avoid complying with demands. This might mean avoiding instructions or demands from others, or even avoiding their favourite activities and hobbies once they become a demand.

## **Demands can be:**

**External:** a request or demand from someone such as a colleague or boss.

**Internal:** a deadline you have set yourself

**Explicit:** a direct demand for an action or responses

**Implicit:** a polite, indirect request or an unsaid expectation.

Although, it is not a diagnosable condition, the PDA Society have identified key features of PDA. Symptoms of PDA include:

- resisting and avoiding ordinary demands
- using social strategies to avoid demands
- obsessive behaviour, often focused on other people
- being superficially sociable but lacking depth in understanding
- impulsivity
- excessive mood swings

Some social strategies that are used might be excuses – “I can’t do it today, I’m too tired,” delays – “I’ll do it in 10 minutes” or distracting and changing the conversation. They might like to share long stories or talk for extended periods to avoid the focus on themselves and accountability. To best support someone with PDA it is important to acknowledge the anxiety behind the behaviours and take steps to reduce stresses such as emotional stress, sensory input, and fear of uncertainty/change.

Giving a person with PDA control over a situation, helps reduce the demand placed on them. Such as allowing a person to structure their day with the tasks that need completing as opposed to defining what needs to be done when.