

## Pathological demand avoidance

PDA, first described by Elizabeth Newson during the 1980s as a pervasive developmental disorder, and is recognised as part of the autism spectrum. It is a lifelong disability and, as with other autism spectrum conditions, children with PDA will require different amounts of support depending on how their condition affects them.

### The main features of PDA are:

- **obsessively resisting ordinary demands**  
*It is important to realise that the more anxious a person with PDA is, the less they will be able to tolerate demands. As a child, their avoidance of those making demands on them knows no boundaries and usually includes a level of social manipulation. Strategies range from simple refusal, distraction, giving excuses, delaying, arguing, suggesting alternatives and withdrawing into fantasy. They may also resist by becoming physically incapacitated (often accompanied by an explanation such as "my legs don't work" or "my hands are made of lava"). If pushed to comply, they may become verbally or physically aggressive, with severe behavioural outbursts, best described as a 'panic attack'.*
- **appearing sociable on the surface but lacking depth in their understanding (often recognised by parents early on)**
- **excessive mood swings, often switching suddenly**
- **comfortable (sometimes to an extreme extent) in role play and pretending**
- **language delay, seemingly as a result of passivity, but often with a good degree of 'catch-up'**
- **Obsessive behaviour, often focused on people rather than things.**



## Information leaflet

Does any of the following sound familiar, when your child is faced with an ordinary request....

*"I can't walk, my legs don't work"*

*"Look at this!"*

*"If you do it first"*

Does your child seem more sociable than others with ASD/Asperger's?

Could your child have P.D.A?  
(Pathological Demand Avoidance)

# When most parents find out about PDA, it creates a light bulb moment.

## Everything suddenly makes sense!

Children with PDA tend to be very comfortable in role play. Some take on whole different personas.

Just as in autism and Asperger syndrome, people with PDA can often experience over- or under-sensitivity in any of their senses: sight, smell, taste, touch or hearing

A large proportion of, but not all, people with PDA can have real problems controlling their temper. As children, this can take the form of prolonged tantrums and violent outbursts, as well as less dramatic avoidance strategies like distraction, giving excuses etc.

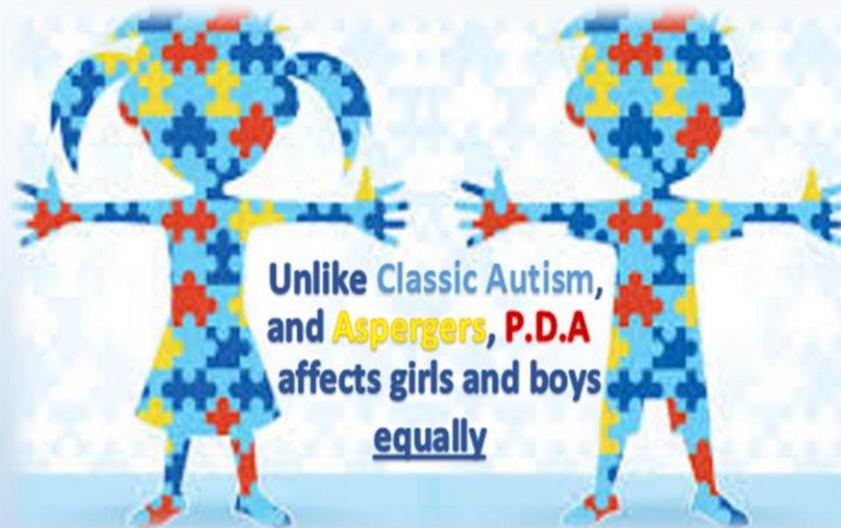
It is essential to see these outbursts as extreme anxiety or 'panic attacks'.

It is important to remember, that PDA is a form of autism and has its place on the spectrum, much like Asperger's syndrome

Some children with PDA can 'slip under the radar' by generally being passive at school and explosive at home

People with PDA can be controlling and dominating, especially when they feel anxious and are not in charge. They can however be enigmatic and charming when they feel secure and in control.

Children with PDA often understand rules, but don't feel they apply to themselves. This can lead to difficulties in school, with teachers as well as peers. Also it can be seen as oppositional behaviour, rather than a lack of understanding.



The triad of impairments for autism can be seen in children with PDA

### Social communication

They can find it difficult to use or understand:

- Facial expressions or tone of voice
- Jokes and sarcasm
- Common phrases and sayings

Often children with PDA have some form of speech and language difficulties.

### Social Imagination

(Not to be confused with actual imagination)

Children with PDA may not have such deep difficulties in this area as it takes an amount of social imagination to manipulate and control as well as they can BUT... they can also find it hard to predict what could happen next, understand the concept of danger, for example that running on to a busy road poses a threat to them, prepare for change and plan for the future, cope in new or unfamiliar situations.

### Social Interaction

They have difficulty with appropriate social interaction

While children with PDA can make friends, it normally doesn't take long before other children shy away from their controlling behaviour and lack of social interaction skills.