

HAVE YOU HEARD OF PATHOLOGICAL DEMAND AVOIDANCE (PDA) ?

Practitioners in Australia and New Zealand have begun including PDA when describing the behavioural profiles of Autism Spectrum Disorder. It is important to be familiar with the differences between this profile and others, as it requires a specific approach to provide appropriate therapy and support.



Individuals who present with this particular diagnostic profile are driven to avoid everyday demands and expectations to an extreme extent. This is rooted in an anxiety-based need to be in control. PDA is dimensional and affects individuals to a varying extent. Individuals with PDA share difficulties with other people on the autism spectrum in terms of social aspects of interaction and communication, together with some repetitive patterns of behaviour. People with PDA often seem to have better social understanding than others on the spectrum, which means some of their difficulties may be less obvious at first.

The main features of PDA :

- resists and avoids the ordinary demands of life, which might include getting up, joining a family activity or other day to day suggestions. This may be the case even when the person seems to want to do what has been suggested
- using social strategies as part of the avoidance eg. distracting, giving excuses
- appearing sociable on the surface, but lacking depth in their understanding
- excessive mood swings and impulsivity
- being comfortable in role play and pretend, sometimes to an extreme extent
- 'obsessive' behaviour that is often focussed on other people.

Key features to supporting someone with PDA :

It is often the case that some of the strategies that are typically found to be effective for people with autism (such as the use of routine, predictability and structure) need considerable adaptation. Individuals with PDA respond better to less direct and more negotiative approaches, which may include the following :

- Choosing priorities; which demands are necessary and which can be avoided for now?
- Reduction of demands where possible: eg. certain requests and expectations
- Being very flexible and creative
- Giving choice and using negotiation
- De-personalising of requests eg. using written suggestions, attributing reasons for a request to other factors such as health and safety
- Using indirect language, humour and games to obscure demands
- Use of indirect praise and affirmation

For more information :

<http://www.autism.org.uk/pda>

<http://www.pdasociety.org.uk/>

<http://www.pdasociety.org.uk/resources/awareness-matters-booklet>

<http://www.thepdaresource.com/>

In Australia and New Zealand, there are Facebook support groups for families :

"PDA Australia (Pathological Demand Avoidance)" and "PDA New Zealand (Pathological Demand Avoidance)" Members of both groups have recently launched an awareness campaign to ensure that families get appropriate support. For more information about this campaign contact Anne Rhodes : rhodes55@optusnet.com.au

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