

Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA)

Understanding the Anxiety-Driven Profile



What is PDA?

PDA is an anxiety-driven profile most often seen in autistic *individuals*.

The brain perceives everyday demands as *threats*, triggering a **fight, flight, or freeze** response—even to simple requests like “put your shoes on.”

PDA is:

- ✓ Neurological
- ✓ A survival response



Common Signs

- ✓ Avoids everyday demands and routines
- ✓ Uses social strategies (negotiating, distracting, excusing)
- ✓ Meltdowns that seem out of proportion
- ✓ Struggles with unpredictability
- ✓ Strong need for control
- ✓ Often appears socially flexible



✗ Defiance

✗ Laziness

✗ Bad parenting

✗ Bad parenting



The Nervous System is the Key

A child with PDA is often in *constant high alert*.

Demand → Brain reads “threat” → **Survival response**

They are **not choosing** the behavior—they are **overwhelmed**.

Increasing **pressure** = Increasing **anxiety**.

✓ What Helps

- ✓ Low-demand, flexible language
- ✓ Offering choices & autonomy
- ✓ Reducing urgency & pressure
- ✓ Building trust first
- ✓ Working with the child

✗ What Doesn't Help

- ✓ Reward & punishment systems
- ✓ Power struggles & ultimatums
- ✓ Forcing compliance
- ✓ Repeating demands firmly
- ✓ Blaming parenting



Mindmental

“A child who can comply, will comply. PDA children need support - not correction.”

mindmental.co