

SEND Bulletin NO.10



PDA (pathological demand avoidance syndrome)

Pathological demand avoidance is a pervasive developmental disorder. Pupils with PDA are obsessively concerned with avoiding the demands of everyday life. They have superficial social skills and these can mask their manipulative efforts to avoid the demands made on them within the home and school environment. Pupils with PDA usually underachieve at school and try to keep a low profile. However, they can become disruptive if they feel they cannot cope and often scream and lash out in their anxiety. It is important to remember that this kind of behaviour does not stem from aggression but rather from panic.

Key characteristics

A pupil with pathological demand avoidance syndrome may:

- appear to be listening and taking part in activities but may have switched off
- have social obsessions (strongly like or dislike someone - adult or child)
- change moods instantly depending on reactions to different situations
- imitate inappropriate behaviours
- try to dominate during social interactions
- try to ensure that everything is done on their terms
- have a poor sense of social identity
- feel happier when involved in role play

- have a language delay
- make slow academic progress despite ability level.

Support strategies

You may need to:

- appoint a key worker to develop flexible strategies to help the pupil cope with everyday demands
- train key workers in counselling skills to support the pupil in stressful situations, particularly at the beginning and end of the school day
- ensure that the pupil's knowledge and understanding is regularly checked and monitored (PDA pupils tend to switch off from the learning process)
- ensure repetition of learning, using word and language games for enjoyment
- arrange for educational psychologist or behavioural support input to develop the 'circle of friends' technique where appropriate
- make use of role play in some learning situations
- give the pupil a choice of activity so that they feel more in control of a learning situation
- avoid direct confrontation
- use humour and negotiation to encourage them to co-operate.

Support agencies

- PDA Support Group: <https://www.pdasociety.org.uk/resources/resource-category/local-pda-support-groups/>
- National Autistic Society: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/behaviour/demand-avoidance>

If you have any interesting information or resources which you would like to share with your colleagues via this fortnightly bulletin, please e-mail them to me:

ari@st-peters.bournemouth.sch.uk

Many thanks
Anne