

PDA PARENTING

Documents to support PDA families

TOP 5 SURVIVAL TIPS FOR MANAGING DISTRESSED BEHAVIOUR

Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) is a profile on the autism spectrum characterised by an individual's **extreme avoidance of everyday demands and expectations**, which is understood to be rooted in an anxiety-based need to be in control. Many individuals might heighten as a result and their presentation (or behaviour) can become very distressed. Here are some simple, actionable strategies to help your family thrive during those tough moments.

1

STAY CALM AND BREATHE

Your calm sets the tone. Take deep breaths, count to 10, or step away momentarily to reset.

A regulated parent or carer helps regulate the child.



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FUN FACT

For children who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), distressed behaviours often arise because they lack the tools to express their needs or feelings in more conventional ways. **Challenging behaviour is just a form of communication.**

2

VALIDATE THEIR FEELINGS

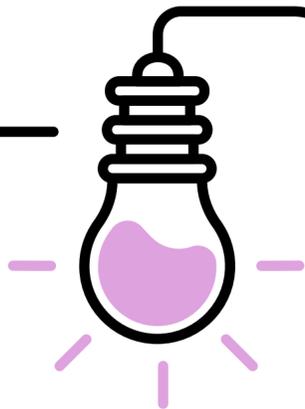
Using **empathy** to recognise how they feel is often a way to diffuse and **reduce the emotional overwhelm** that your child is in.

Using a non-emotive response (without discussing the external behaviour) such as "I can see you're upset right now and that's okay."

Validation helps your child feel understood and calms their nervous system.



Remembering that an individual **can't help that they won't** be able to comply is key.



Distressed behaviour in PDA often stems from an extreme anxiety about losing control, rather than defiance or deliberate misbehaviour.

IDENTIFY TRIGGERS



Look for patterns in your child's behaviour.

Are they tired, hungry, overstimulated, or struggling with transitions? Are they able to cope with the demands of their own interoceptive sensory system?

Maybe the frustration of 'wanting' to do something but not being able to is the root to their own dysregulation.

Awareness can prevent future meltdowns.

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3

Many children with SEND experience sensory processing difficulties, where everyday stimuli (e.g., noises, textures, or lights) can feel overwhelming. This sensory overload can trigger meltdowns or shutdowns.

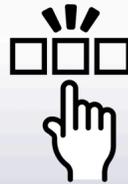
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It's worth noting that even choices can be a demand, so working out how or if they help is important.

OFFER CHOICES



Empower your child by giving them options. Even small choices-like what to wear or which plate to use-can reduce feelings of overwhelm.



Having autonomy over your own body and the choices you make is key to understanding the root of distressed behaviour.

It's important to understand that there is an **anxiety-led** need to be in control which dominates the areas of conflict leading to distressed behaviour.

STAY CONSISTENT

Predictability helps children feel safe. Stick to routines as much as possible and communicate changes early to reduce anxiety.



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Routine and predictability can often reduce distressed behaviours.

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