

PATHOLOGICAL DEMAND AVOIDANCE PDA CHECKLIST

Important:

This checklist **is not a diagnostic tool**.

It is intended only as an observational aid to help recognise patterns and plan supportive approaches.

If you suspect Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) or are concerned about behaviour patterns, consult a **qualified professional** or **get in touch with us** for assessment and guidance.

How to rate (past 6–8 weeks):

0 = Not observed · 1 = Occasionally · 2 = Often · 3 = Very often / pervasive
Score per item, sum each section, and note the **Top 5 highest-scoring items** as targets for support planning.

A. RESPONSE TO EVERYDAY DEMANDS

1. Avoids everyday demands, even in enjoyable activities.
2. Appears able to do a task but won't when directly asked.
3. Uses delay tactics (e.g., "later", "after...", lengthy preparation).
4. Distress or shutdown when pressured to comply.
5. Needs to set the terms before engaging.

B. RESPONSE TO EVERYDAY DEMANDS

6. Negotiates ("I will if...") or sets conditions.
7. Uses humour, distraction, role-play, or personas to defer demands.
8. Gives apparent agreement but doesn't follow through ("surface compliance").
9. Uses charm or flattery to redirect situations.

C. EMOTIONAL DRIVERS & REGULATION

- 10. Anxiety rises quickly with perceived loss of control.
- 11. Mood shifts linked to demands or expectations.
- 12. Escalation pattern: avoidance refusal distress meltdown/shutdown.
- 13. Needs extended recovery time after taxing events.

D. NEED FOR AUTONOMY & CONTROL

- 14. Strong preference to lead activities; resists adult-led structures.
- 15. Rejects rules seen as arbitrary; prefers co-created rules.
- 16. Strong reaction to time limits or abrupt transitions.

E. COMMUNICATION & INTERACTION

- 17. May appear socially confident yet struggles with demands.
- 18. Mirrors language/behaviour of others (masking).
- 19. Responds better to choices and collaborative phrasing.

F. FLEXIBILITY & INTERESTS

- 20. Loses interest in an activity once it becomes expected.
- 21. Interests are intense but wane if linked to targets.
- 22. Novelty reduces avoidance briefly, then dips as it feels like a demand.

G. SENSORY & ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

- 23. Avoidance increases in noisy, busy, or unfamiliar settings.
- 24. Sensory overwhelm or uncertainty triggers escalation.
- 25. Benefits from predictable, low-arousal, choice-rich environments.

H. SAFETY & RISK BEHAVIOURS

- 26. Attempts to escape or hide when demands persist.
- 27. Uses socially shocking language/behaviour in panic states.
- 28. Displays self-injurious or aggressive behaviour when cornered by demands.

CHILD/TEEN ADD-ON

- 29. School refusal or demand avoidance in mornings/homework.
- 30. Struggles with adult-led play or assessment despite ability.
- 31. Uses younger/older personas in role-play around demands.
- 32. Needs several low-demand days after big events.

ADULT ADD-ON

- 33. Avoids appointments/administrative tasks until urgent.
- 34. Work/education challenges linked to demand response.
- 35. Prefers roles with high autonomy.
- 36. Uses strategic task-swapping or “I can’t right now” to cope.



Pattern Interpretation (Not a Diagnosis)

- High scores in **A–C** with items **6–9 & 14–16** suggest a PDA-like demand profile.
- High sensory/environment scores (23–25) point to environmental triggers.
- Track totals weekly; aim for reductions through low-demand, collaborative support.

Always seek professional advice if unsure about behaviours or needs.



Sources:

- O’Nions et al. EDA-Q development/validation (child). <https://acamh.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/> ; <https://www.semanticscholar.org/>
- PDA Society: What is PDA? and EDA-8 overview (short form derived from EDA-Q). <https://www.pdasociety.org.uk/>
- Egan, Linenberg & O’Nions: EDA-QA (adult). <https://embrace-autism.com/>
- ESHT NHS leaflet: demand avoidance vs PDA, examples of strategies/behaviours. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>
- O’Nions et al. (2015): identifying PDA-like features (manipulative/shocking behaviour, co-operation issues) in high-scoring groups.
- National Autistic Society: demand avoidance overview and terminology. autism.org.uk