

YOU HAVE THE

BUT ONLY IF

POWER

YOU



TO TAKE CONTROL

CHOOSE TO USE IT!

**UNDERSTANDING AND
SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH
PATHOLOGICAL DEMAND
AVOIDANCE!**

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Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) is a type of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) that is characterised by an extreme avoidance of everyday demands and expectations.

Children with PDA may appear to be very oppositional or defiant, but their behaviour is not driven by a desire to be deliberately disobedient. Instead, they may feel a high level of anxiety when faced with demands or expectations, leading to avoidance, resistance, or even aggression.

Children with PDA often have difficulties with social communication, flexibility, and emotional regulation. They may also exhibit obsessive or compulsive behaviours, and have a strong need for control and predictability in their environment.

Because PDA is a relatively new diagnosis, it is not yet widely recognised or understood, which can make it challenging for families and professionals to provide appropriate support.

My own experience in schools working with children with PDA has ranged from highly supported to one school obviously trying to get a child removed!

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Children with Pathological Demand Avoidance often struggle with following instructions and may experience anxiety and distress when feeling pressured to comply. One way to frame instructions so that they feel more able to follow them is to offer choices and provide a sense of control. Here are some strategies:

USE POSITIVE LANGUAGE:

Start instructions with a positive tone and use language that is encouraging and supportive. For example, instead of saying "Don't do this," try "Let's do this instead."

OFFER CHOICES:

Provide the child with options for how they can complete a task or activity. This can help them feel more in control and reduce anxiety. For example, "Would you like to use the blue or red pencil?" or "Would you like to work on this task now or after lunch?"

USE VISUAL AIDS:

Use visual aids, such as pictures or diagrams, to help the child understand what is expected of them. This can make the instruction more concrete and easier to follow.

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BREAK DOWN INSTRUCTIONS:

Break instructions into smaller steps, so they are more manageable for the child. This can help them feel less overwhelmed and more able to follow through with the task.

BE FLEXIBLE:

Recognize that the child may need to approach tasks in their own way and be flexible in how you offer instructions. This can help build trust and reduce anxiety. For example, if a child struggles with writing, allow them to draw or use a different method to demonstrate their understanding.

Remember that each child with PDA is unique, so it is essential to work with them individually and adapt strategies to meet their needs.

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Let's look at each of the above points and dig a little deeper into how you can apply them...

USE POSITIVE LANGUAGE!

Using positive language is a powerful communication strategy that can help you when working with children with Pathological Demand Avoidance. Using positive, non-confrontational language can help reduce anxiety and defensiveness and make it easier for the child to follow instructions. Here are some ways to use positive language

- **Avoid direct orders or commands:** Avoid using direct orders or commands, which can be perceived as confrontational and may trigger resistance or anxiety. Instead, try to frame instructions in a way that is more open-ended and less threatening.
- **Use "I" statements:** Use "I" statements to express your needs or concerns. For example, instead of saying "You need to do this," try "I need your help with this."
- **Use positive reinforcement:** Use positive reinforcement to reward positive behaviors and efforts, rather than focusing on negative behaviors. This can help build confidence and self-esteem and motivate the child to continue making progress.

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- **Offer encouragement:** Offer encouragement and support, even in the face of challenging behaviours or setbacks. This can help build trust and make the child feel supported and understood.
- **Be respectful:** Be respectful and non-judgmental in your communication with the child. Avoid blaming or criticizing them for their behaviour, as this can make them feel defensive and less likely to comply.

Remember that using positive language is not about avoiding difficult conversations or ignoring problematic behaviours. Instead, it is about framing communication in a way that is less threatening and more supportive.

By avoiding direct orders or commands, using "I" statements, using positive reinforcement, offering encouragement, and being respectful, you can communicate more effectively with children with PDA and help reduce anxiety and defensiveness.

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OFFER CHOICES!

Providing choices is a powerful strategy for teaching assistants when working with children with Pathological Demand Avoidance. Offering choices and alternatives to the child can help them feel more in control of their environment, which can help reduce anxiety and increase compliance. Here are some ways to provide choices:

- **Offer structured choices:** Provide a set of structured choices that are appropriate for the task at hand. For example, you might offer a choice between working on a particular task now or after lunch, or using a pencil or a pen to complete a written task.
- **Use visuals:** Use visuals to help the child understand the choices available to them. For example, you might use pictures or symbols to represent the different options.
- **Be specific:** Be specific when offering choices, so the child understands what is expected of them. For example, you might say "Would you like to read a book or work on a puzzle?"
- **Be flexible:** Be prepared to offer alternative choices if the child is not comfortable with the options provided. This can help build trust and reduce anxiety.

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- **Involve the child in decision-making:** Involve the child in decision-making, where appropriate. For example, you might ask them for input on what type of activity they would like to do during a break or what they would like to learn in a particular lesson.

Remember that providing choices is not about giving the child complete control over their environment, but rather about empowering them to make decisions and feel more in control.

By offering structured choices, using visuals, being specific, being flexible, and involving the child in decision-making, you can help reduce anxiety and increase compliance.

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USE VISUAL AIDS!

Using visual aids is an effective strategy that teaching assistants can use to support children with PDA.

Children with PDA may have difficulties with language processing or understanding abstract concepts, and visual aids can help make instructions and expectations more concrete and easier to follow. Here are some ways to use visual aids:

- **Use pictures or diagrams:** Use pictures or diagrams to represent the different steps or components of a task or activity. This can help the child understand what is expected of them and stay on track.
- **Use symbols or icons:** Use symbols or icons to represent different choices or options, such as different activities or tasks. This can help the child make decisions and feel more in control of their environment.
- **Use schedules or timetables:** Use schedules or timetables to provide a visual representation of the child's daily routine or schedule. This can help the child feel more organised and prepared for the day ahead.

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- **Use cue cards or reminder strips:** Use cue cards or reminder strips to provide visual cues or prompts for specific behaviours or tasks. This can help the child stay focused and remember what they need to do.
- **Use colour-coding:** Use colour-coding to help the child differentiate between different tasks or components of a task. For example, you might use different colours to represent different subject areas or types of activities.

Remember that visual aids should be tailored to the child's needs and preferences, and should be used in conjunction with other strategies and approaches.

By using visual aids, you can help make instructions and expectations more concrete and easier to follow, which can help reduce anxiety and increase compliance.

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BREAK DOWN INSTRUCTIONS!

Breaking down instructions is an effective strategy that teaching assistants can use to support children with Pathological Demand Avoidance.

Children with PDA may struggle to understand and process complex instructions, or they may feel overwhelmed by the demands of a task, which can lead to anxiety, resistance, or avoidance. Breaking down instructions into smaller steps can help the child understand what is expected of them and make the task more manageable. Here are some ways to break down instructions:

- **Use simple language:** Use simple language and avoid using complex or technical terms that the child may not understand.
- **Use action words:** Use action words to describe what the child needs to do, such as "put away your books" or "line up at the door".
- **Use visual aids:** Use visual aids, such as pictures or diagrams, to represent each step of the task.
- **Model the behaviour:** Model the behaviour yourself or demonstrate each step of the task so the child can see what they need to do.

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- **Provide feedback:** Provide feedback and positive reinforcement for each step of the task the child completes. This can help build confidence and motivation.

Remember that breaking down instructions is not about making tasks overly simplistic or babyish. Instead, it is about making instructions more manageable and understandable for the child, so they can follow through with the task successfully.

By using simple language, action words, visual aids, modelling the behaviour, and providing feedback, you can break instructions into smaller steps and help the child feel less overwhelmed and more able to follow through with the task.

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BE FLEXIBLE!

Being flexible is an essential quality for teaching assistants when working with children with Pathological Demand Avoidance. Children with PDA often have unique needs and may require different strategies and approaches to support their learning and development. Here are some ways to be flexible:

- **Be open-minded:** Be open-minded and willing to try new strategies and approaches, even if they are different from what you have used before. This can help you find the best way to support the child.
- **Observe and listen:** Observe the child's behaviour and listen to their concerns and preferences. This can help you identify what is working and what is not, and adjust your approach accordingly.
- **Collaborate with others:** Collaborate with other professionals who work with the child, such as teachers, therapists, or psychologists. This can provide you with new ideas and strategies to try.
- **Use creativity:** Use creativity to develop new strategies and approaches that suit the child's needs. For example, you might try using art, music, or movement to engage the child and support their learning.

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- **Adapt your communication:** Adapt your communication style to suit the child's needs. For example, you might need to use simpler language, provide more structure, or use visual aids to help the child understand.

Remember that being flexible is not about compromising on your values or expectations. Instead, it is about finding new ways to support the child's learning and development that are tailored to their needs and preferences.

By being open-minded, observing and listening, collaborating with others, using creativity, and adapting your communication style, you can develop a flexible approach that works for the child you are supporting.

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ADDITIONAL TIPS...

CELEBRATE SUCCESS!

Celebrating success is a powerful strategy that teaching assistants can use to support children with Pathological Demand Avoidance. Celebrating the child's successes, no matter how small they may seem, can help build confidence and self-esteem and motivate the child to continue making progress. Here are some ways to celebrate success:

- **Use positive reinforcement:** Use positive reinforcement to reward positive behaviors and efforts, rather than focusing on negative behaviors. This can help build confidence and self-esteem and motivate the child to continue making progress.
- **Provide specific feedback:** Provide specific feedback that highlights the child's strengths and accomplishments. This can help the child feel valued and appreciated.
- **Set achievable goals:** Set achievable goals for the child and celebrate when they achieve them. This can help build confidence and self-esteem and motivate the child to continue making progress.

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- **Provide recognition:** Provide recognition for the child's accomplishments, such as certificates or awards. This can help the child feel proud of their achievements and motivated to continue working hard.
- **Celebrate as a team:** Celebrate the child's successes as a team, involving parents, teachers, and other professionals who work with the child. This can help build a positive and supportive environment that encourages the child to continue making progress.

Remember that celebrating success is not about ignoring problematic behaviours or overlooking areas where the child needs improvement. Instead, it is about highlighting the child's strengths and accomplishments and providing positive reinforcement to help build confidence and motivation.

By using positive reinforcement, providing specific feedback, setting achievable goals, providing recognition, and celebrating as a team, you can help support the child's learning and development and build a positive and supportive environment.

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BUILD A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP!

Building a positive and supportive relationship with a child with Pathological Demand Avoidance is essential as it can help reduce anxiety and challenging behaviours and make it easier to work with them.

Here are some strategies to help build a strong relationship with a child with PDA:

- **Show empathy:** Show empathy by putting yourself in the child's shoes and understanding how they feel. This can help build trust and make the child feel understood.
- **Use positive reinforcement:** Use positive reinforcement to reward positive behaviours and efforts, rather than focusing on negative behaviours. This can help build confidence and self-esteem.
- **Respect their boundaries:** Respect the child's boundaries and work with them to create a safe and supportive environment that meets their needs.
- **Be patient:** Be patient and allow the child to work at their own pace. Avoid pushing them too hard or expecting too much too soon, as this can cause anxiety and resistance.

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- **Use humour:** Use humour to help diffuse tension and create a positive and light-hearted atmosphere. This can help build a rapport and make the child feel more comfortable.
- **Find common ground:** Find common ground with the child, such as a shared interest or hobby. This can help create a connection and make it easier to engage with them.

Remember that building a positive and supportive relationship with a child with PDA takes time and patience.

By showing empathy, using positive reinforcement, respecting boundaries, being patient, using humour, and finding common ground, you can build a relationship based on trust and mutual respect that can help reduce anxiety and challenging behaviours and make it easier to work with them.

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GET TRAINING!

Seeking training and support is crucial when working with children with Pathological Demand Avoidance. Here are some ways you could do this:

- **Attend training:** Attend training courses or workshops that specifically focus on PDA. This will provide you with a better understanding of the condition and help you develop strategies to support the child.
- **Work with a mentor:** Work with a mentor who has experience working with children with PDA. This can be a teacher, therapist, or other professional who can provide guidance and support.
- **Collaborate with colleagues:** Collaborate with other teaching assistants and teachers who work with the child. Share experiences and strategies, and work together to develop a plan that works for everyone involved.
- **Seek guidance from specialists:** Seek guidance from specialists, such as educational psychologists, occupational therapists, or speech and language therapists, who have experience working with children with PDA.

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- **Join support groups:** Join support groups for parents and professionals who work with children with PDA. This can provide you with a supportive network of people who understand the challenges and can offer advice and support.
- **Read up on PDA:** Read books and articles about PDA to gain a deeper understanding of the condition and learn about different strategies and approaches.

Remember that every child with PDA is unique, and what works for one child may not work for another. Seeking training and support can help you develop a range of strategies to manage challenging behaviours and support the child's learning and development.

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YOUR ^{TO} DO'S INSPIRED BY WHAT YOU'VE READ
IN THIS VALUABLE FREE RESOURCE

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I HOPE YOU HAVE FOUND THIS RESOURCE USEFUL. USE IT AS A WAY TO KICK START YOUR RESOLVE TO LEARN AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ABOUT PDA TO HELP THE CHILD YOU ARE WORKING AND TO HELP YOURSELF!

PRINT THIS RESOURCE OUT AS MANY TIMES AS YOU NEED (CHOOSE GREYSCALE TO SAVE YOUR INK) AND SHARE IT WITH YOUR TA COLLEAGUES!

THANK YOU!

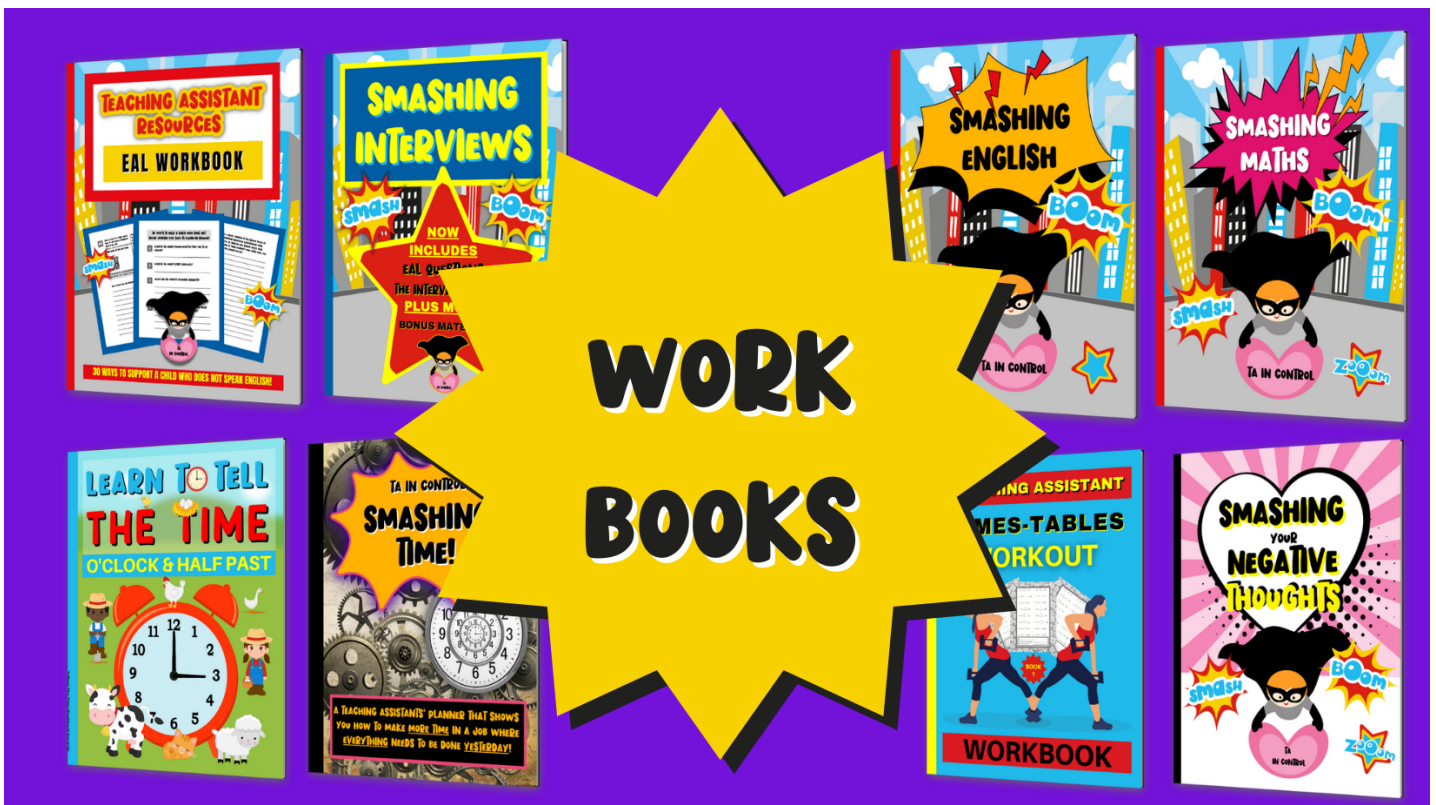
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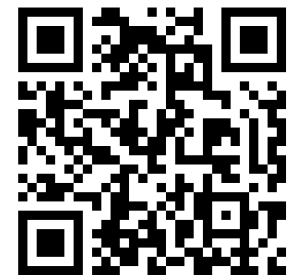
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