

The Parenting Pandas Guide to PDA-Informed Approaches



A compassionate guide for parents and carers



SUPPORT • NAVIGATE • THRIVE

Parenting
PANDAS



Welcome I'm Becky



I am the founder of Parenting
Pandas UK.

These guides were created to help
families understand the psychology
behind behaviour, reduce
overwhelm and build connection
through compassionate, evidence-
informed support.
I'm so glad you're here.

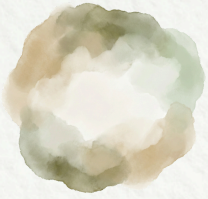


You are not alone in this

Small changes, made with understanding
and consistency, can make a big difference



What you will learn in this guide



Understanding anxiety and demand avoidance

Explore how anxiety influences behaviour, why everyday demands can feel overwhelming, and how understanding the psychology behind demand avoidance can change the way we respond.



Building collaboration

Learn gentle, relationship-based approaches that reduce conflict by working alongside your child rather than relying on control or compliance.



Supporting autonomy

Discover practical ways to offer meaningful choice, flexibility and shared problem-solving, helping your child feel safe while developing confidence and independence.



Reducing pressure

Understand how small changes in language, expectations and daily routines can reduce perceived threat, lower anxiety and encourage engagement.



Responding through connection

Explore how co-regulation, emotional safety and secure relationships support a child's ability to regulate their emotions and navigate everyday demands.

Understanding PDA



PDA (often described as Pathological Demand Avoidance) is widely understood as a profile where everyday demands can trigger significant anxiety.

A demand might be:

- Being asked to get dressed
- Answering a question
- Transitioning between activities
- Completing homework
- Even recognising internal needs such as hunger or tiredness.

When anxiety increases, the **nervous system** may respond with avoidance as a way of regaining a sense of safety or control.

Understanding this changes the question from:

"How do I stop this behaviour?"

to

"What is making this feel unsafe or overwhelming?"



The Psychology Behind It



Our brains are designed to protect us.

When something feels threatening, the nervous system prepares us to survive.

This can look like:



- Fight



- Flight



- Freeze



- Fawn



For children with a PDA profile, everyday demands can sometimes be experienced as psychological threats rather than simple requests.

This doesn't mean the demand is dangerous—it means the child's brain perceives it as overwhelming. When we reduce anxiety, we often reduce the need for avoidance.

Connection before Correction

Children are more able to engage when they feel:



Safe



Understood



Connected

Rather than asking,
"How can I gain compliance?"

Try asking,
"How can I reduce anxiety?"

Small shifts in our responses can have a significant impact on a child's ability to regulate and engage.

Reducing Perceived Demands



Practical ideas:

- Offer choices where possible.
- Work together rather than directing.
- Use collaborative language.
- Build flexibility into routines.
- Allow processing time.
- Pick your battles.

Remember:

Reducing demands isn't about lowering expectations forever.

It's about creating enough emotional safety for your child to succeed.



Co-Regulation



Children borrow our calm before they develop their own.

Co-regulation isn't about fixing emotions.

It's about being a **calm, supportive presence** while your child moves through them.

Sometimes the most helpful response isn't saying more.

It's slowing down.



Language Matters



Small changes in language can reduce perceived pressure.

Instead of:

"You need to..."

Try:

"I wonder if..."

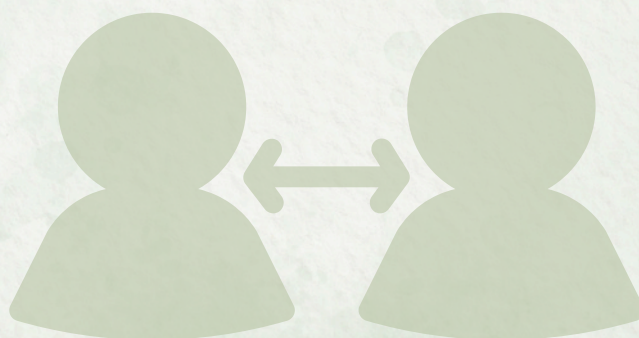
or

"Shall we..."

or

"What do you think about..."

Gentle, collaborative language often feels less threatening to an anxious nervous system.



When Things Don't Go to Plan



Some days none of the strategies will seem to work.

That doesn't mean you've failed.



Children's nervous systems change from day to day.

Supporting a child with a PDA profile isn't about
getting it perfect.

It's about staying curious, flexible and compassionate.



Reflection



Ask yourself:



- What situations seem to increase anxiety?

.....

.....



- When does my child appear most regulated?

.....

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- Which approaches help us feel more connected?

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- What small change could I try this week?

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Remember:
Progress is rarely linear.



Key Takeaways



Supporting a child with a PDA profile can feel exhausting at times.



You don't have to get everything right.



Small moments of understanding, flexibility and connection often have the greatest impact.



The goal isn't perfect behaviour.
The goal is helping your child feel safe enough to learn, grow and thrive.

Remember...



You know your child best.

Trust your instincts.

You are doing an incredible job.

With Love and Support,



Becky
Parenting Pandas UK