

Demand Avoidance & Reducing Demands



Support guide for parents & carers

Demands are an integral, unavoidable part of everyday life. But for some children, young people and adults, demands of any kind can create overwhelming feelings of anxiety, distress and panic.

What are demands?

Demands are things that we are asked to do. Other people can create demands and we can place them on ourselves. Demands can relate to things we want to do, as well as those we have to do.

- Following instructions or directions
- Completing tasks, activities or chores
- Responding to physical sensations e.g. needing the toilet
- Following societal expectations e.g. saying 'please' and 'thank you'
- Carrying out daily routines e.g. brushing teeth
- Attending events or appointments
- Taking part in hobbies
- Meeting up with friends or family



Demand Avoidance



Demand avoidance describes a situation where an individual finds it difficult, or in some cases impossible, to meet the demands made of them, and, as a result, may engage in a range of anxious behaviours.

The degree of distress experienced by individuals can vary significantly depending on the nature of the demand, and the emotional state of the child, young person or adult.

Potential demand avoidant behaviours

Less intense

- Distraction or changing the subject
- Procrastination and delay
- Point-blank refusal
- Withdrawing from a conversation
- Retreating into a 'fantasy world', or engaging in role-play

More intense

- Attempting to take control of the situation
- Physical or verbal aggression
- Running away
- Completely shutting down
- Sudden and extreme mood swings
- Self-harm

Creating low-demand environments at home



Everyone is different so there is no one-size-fits-all solution to supporting individuals who struggle to meet demands. However, these 8 suggestions are a useful starting point for parents and carers, helping them create low-demand environments at home.

1

Reduce feelings of sensory overwhelm by creating a calm environment. This might include switching off bright lights or turning down the volume on the TV and other devices.

2

Be alert to signs of distress and intervene early. These can be subtle and may include skin picking, withdrawing, a change in body language, or an increase in usual behaviours.

3

Refer to an object rather than making a direct demand. For example, say, "The door is open," instead of, "Go inside now." The phrase, "I wonder..." can also be useful.

4

Reflect on whether the demand is necessary or not. By reducing the number of demands we make, we can help to alleviate feelings of stress, anxiety and overwhelm.

Creating low-demand environments at home



5

Prioritise self-care and make sure you are in the best position to offer support. Take care of your own emotional and physical health needs, reaching out for help if necessary,

6

Make sure you are keeping yourself and others safe. Remove any items that could be dangerous and ask people to move away, to give them space to calm down.

7

Give them physical and emotional space. Take a step back, relax your body language, reduce the amount you speak, and talk slowly and calmly to them.

8

After they have felt angry, reassure them that you still love them and you understand why they felt like that. Spend time together to repair and restore your relationship.

Please note: you may have come across the term PDA, or Pathological Demand Avoidance. As there is currently no formal diagnosis for PDA, it can be more helpful to talk about 'demand avoidance' or a 'demand avoidant profile'.