

# Please share with your colleagues

**June 2023**

## Demand Anxiety

We often talk about demand anxiety in relation to autism, but it is important to remember that demand anxiety is a normal human response: we all experience anxiety when we are overwhelmed. Many autistic people experience a much higher level of 'demand' from their everyday sensory, emotional, social and/or academic environments, and therefore it makes sense that they often experience higher levels of demand anxiety and stress when responses are required.

When trying to address demand anxiety, it is important to consider the overall demand that the young person may be experiencing, rather than focusing on just getting them to comply with a demand. If we can monitor and make adjustments for all the demands over a day, week, term, etc, rather than considering each demand independently, we can reduce the overload that a person is experiencing through appropriate adjustments which in turn can free up cognitive and emotional resources with the result that engagement in activities is more likely. For example, if a young person has unmet sensory needs, working to identify and meet these needs can reduce the stress that they are experiencing. Other young people may be experiencing a high level of challenge from their social environment and will benefit from support to better understand and navigate the social world. Taking time to listen to the parents is crucial. Children with demand anxiety may present very differently at home than in school. Try to communicate this in your conversations with parents so that, even if the child responds very differently in school, they feel that you have acknowledged and understood their concerns.

Some young people will be more highly sensitive to demands, due to repeated exposure to high levels of stress that they have been unable to manage. These young people may benefit from approaches that reduce the perception of demand. For example:

- Use visuals to 'depersonalise' expectations, for example, to suggest that 'the timetable' is making the demand rather than you.
- Building on what motivates the child and what they will be successful at. It is easier to say yes to something if you already know that you will enjoy it.
- Using declarative language, or indirect phrasing. For example, 'We're going to be writing soon. Here's your pen'. Or, 'What do we need to write?' is less demanding than 'Get our your pen now.'
- Include an element of choice where possible, so that the young person has a sense of urgency. For example, 'Shall we do the writing or the reading first?'
- Enabling the young person to retain some control over the order and sequence of tasks.
- Making something fun or turning it into a game. Sometimes a young person may be able to 'role play' completing an activity that they are unable to do as themselves.
- Asking a youngster to 'help' you to do something, or pretending that you don't know what to do so that they retain a sense of agency and feel in control.

**For further information and helpful resources, please see:**

[www.pda.org.uk](http://www.pda.org.uk), *Collaborative Approaches for Children with PDA* by Ruth Fidler and Phil Christie, *The Declarative Language Handbook* by Linda Murphy, *The Explosive Child Handbook* by Ross Greene.

## CPD Offer 2023-24

In the new academic year, we will be offering courses on Anxiety, Communications in School, Masking, Demand Anxiety AND Sensory Needs. More info will be shared in the Autumn Term.

Supported by:



Department for Education



**For more information and free resources,  
visit: [www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk)**



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Free  
CPD

DCC Children's Services Inclusion Support Services are offering schools the opportunity to train a member of your staff to deliver the Autism Education Trust training within your setting for free, meaning that your workforce will be able to be up to date with good practice, strategies and support for autistic children. They will also become part of the supportive Autism Advocates network in Derbyshire where they will have access to additional CPD and information.

We welcome applications from maintained mainstream, Enhanced Resource and specialist settings. If you are a small school and wish to partner with local schools to train collaboratively, please get in touch.

Autism Advocates Cohort 3 training will take place in Autumn 2023. Please contact [Autism.Outreach@Derbyshire.gov.uk](mailto:Autism.Outreach@Derbyshire.gov.uk) for more information.

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Autism  
Advocates in  
47% Derbyshire  
Schools

They've helped  
to train almost 3000  
educators in  
Derbyshire  
Schools!



Developed by  
leading autism  
specialists



Up to date  
with the latest  
research



Enhances  
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Free resources  
and frameworks  
linked to Ofsted



Optional  
certification

Autism Central offers a wealth of resources for parents, carers and supporters of autistic people. The project is run by leading not-for-profit organisations commissioned by Health Education England. The resources have been developed with autistic people, carers and subject matter experts, and follow the most recent research and guidance.



**Autism  
Central**



The site includes:

**Services Directory** – to find services that are available nationally and in our local area.

**Online Community** – to meet like-minded people and share experiences.

**Get Involved** – share your knowledge and experience of being a parent or carer with others.

