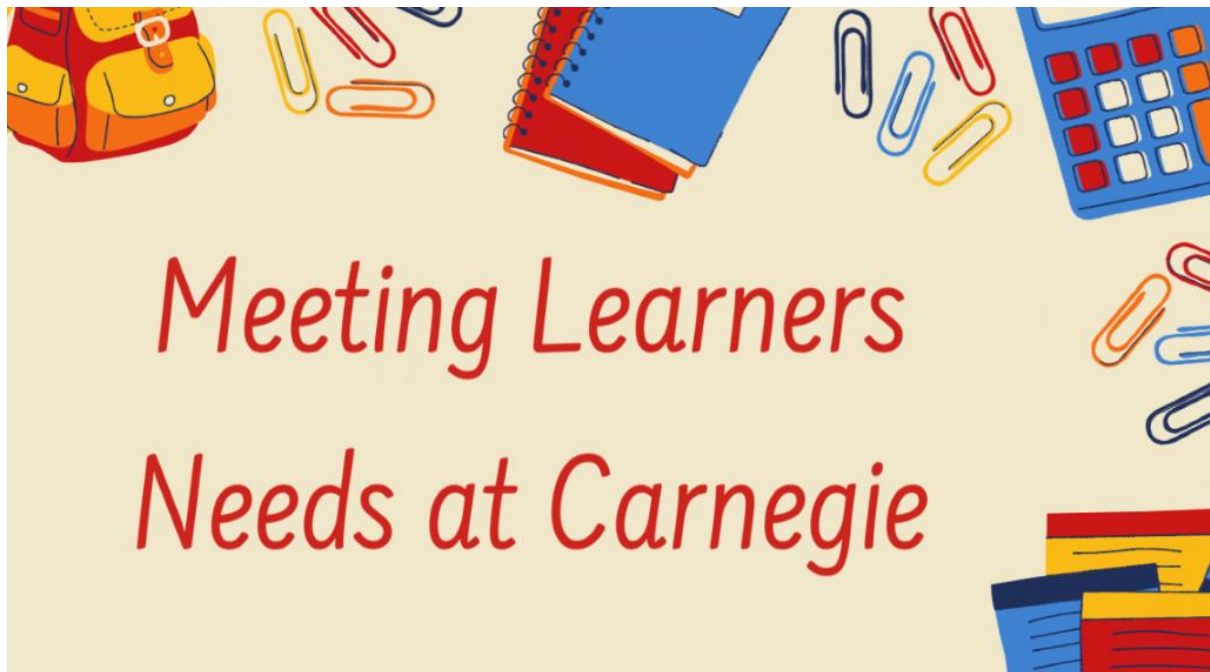


Carnegie Primary School



Supporting Demand Avoidance Behaviours Toolkit for
Home Learning

What is in this toolkit?

This toolkit provides a range of suggested supports to help children with Demand Avoidance Behaviours while learning at home.

The toolkit can be used for reference to support home learning.

If you have any further questions, please get in touch with our school Support for Learning team.



Things to remember:

Students with Demand Avoidant (DA) Behaviours experience high levels of anxiety and there is a strong need for them to feel in control in most situations. This anxiety is largely driven by:

- the perception of demands or potential demands,
- being faced with failure and
- not being in control.

Any demands or expectations can impact on anxiety: from direct and explicit instructions to more subtle, everyday demands. These then heighten anxiety and lead to compulsive and obsessive avoidance. Avoidance can lead to a 'panic attack' meltdown. Due to more sophisticated social interaction skills, students with DA Behaviours are often able to use these skills creatively and seek to avoid demands through negotiation, manipulation and distraction.

Main Features of Demand Avoidant Behaviour

- ❖ Poor sense of self-esteem
- ❖ Lack of confidence - 'can't help won't'
- ❖ Poor emotional regulation - excessive mood swings, often switching suddenly
- ❖ Resist ordinary/everyday demands
- ❖ A strong desire to have relationships with peers but often inadvertently sabotages them
- ❖ Obsessive behaviour, extremely fixed mindset
- ❖ High levels of anxiety
- ❖ Impulsive with a strong need to control
 - Will avoid or manipulate the situation to gain control



Strategies that may help

❖ Scripting

It may help to give instructions in an **INDIRECT, NON CONFRONTATIONAL** style - practice 'asking without asking' e.g. "I wonder if someone might be able to help me do this....." or "Wonder" out loud:

- ✓ "I wonder if we can..."
- ✓ "Let's see if we can ..."
- ✓ "I can't see how to make this work..."
- ✓ "Shall we see if we can beat the clock..."
- ✓ "Maybe we could investigate..."

Try to avoid saying:

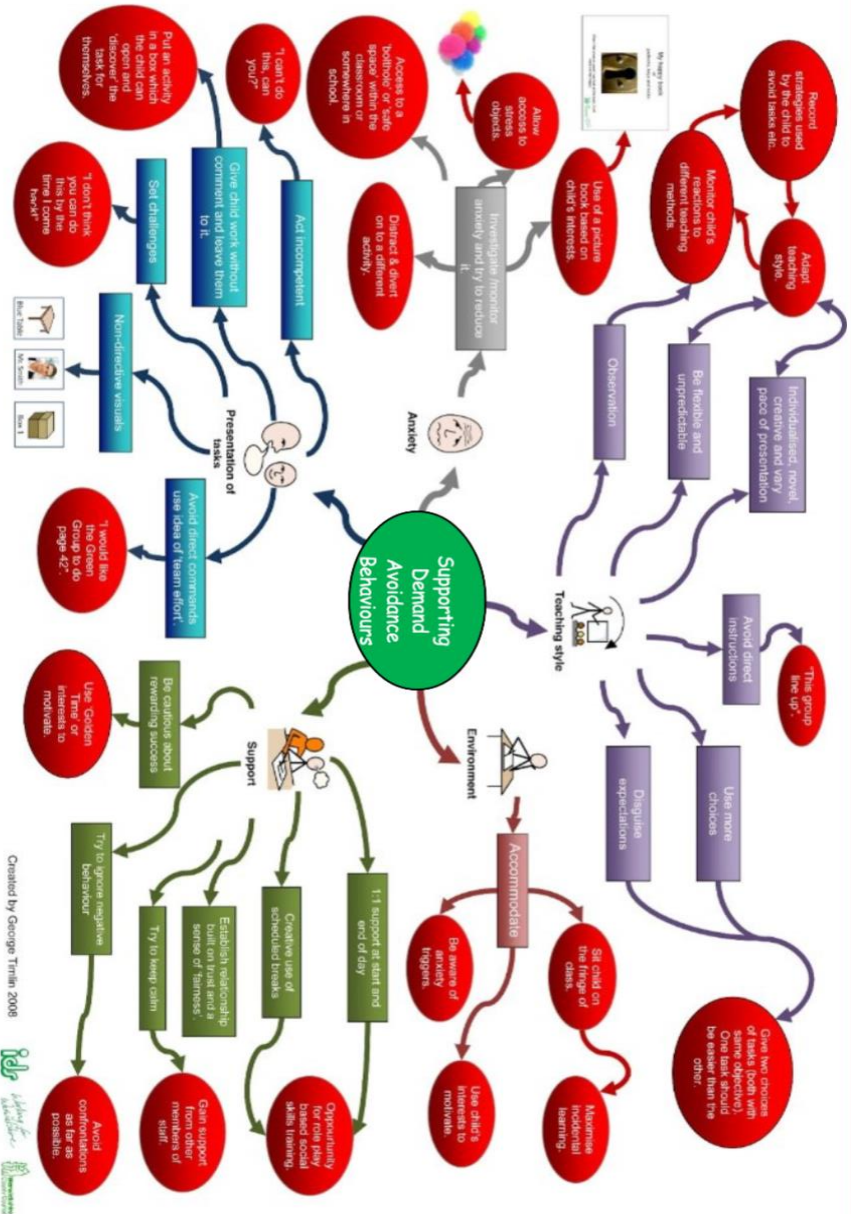
- × "It's time for you to..."

- × "You've got to..."
- × "You need to..."
- × "You must..."

- ❖ Using quite complex language can often be effective, feeling more negotiative and 'adult.
- ❖ Use visuals to cue your child in to a specific activity. Use visual timetables or activity checklists so that you child can ask what they have got to do before being told what to do.
- ❖ Introduce goals gradually, using a visual timeline. Always be flexible with the plan. Limit expectations in the short term to create positive learning experiences, setting your child up to succeed.
- ❖ Short rules or expectations for home learning need to be agreed and visual. Suggest that your child works out the possible reasons for the rules, so that they have agreed them but not been told them: this way, it is not a demand and they will not feel so anxious!
- ❖ Giving simple choices will help the day run smoothly. Direct demands cause students the most anxiety.... If phrased as a choice, it is easier to cope with.
- ❖ Learning that there are consequences for not achieving an expectation, with regard to making work up, etc. requires consequences to be clear, simple and visual so that they are non-negotiable.
- ❖ Plant the seed of what you would like to happen at the start of the learning, but don't expect it to happen straight away. Allow time.
- ❖ Have an 'escape plan' if demands are too high to reduce levels of anxiety. Visuals and scripts may help support your child, with demands then scaled back.
- ❖ Build in time during the day to encourage your child to talk about some of the difficulties they are facing to support their understanding and agree on next steps/solutions to make things better.
- ❖ Use of humour If you feel the tension rising, humour is a fantastic distraction. You could try making jokes, using physical humour (exaggerated facial expressions, or silly walks), being silly or feigning ignorance.
- ❖ Be cautious about rewarding success: although praise can be motivating, it may make students decide not to give in so easily next time and tear up work which has been praised. Young people with DA Behaviours are not generally motivated by rewards, as these can make them feel less in control because the adult has the balance of control with the carrot.

- ❖ Use distraction to temporarily press 'pause' and ease anxiety. Engage the left brain with a question which the student needs an answer (e.g. is it too hot in here?).
 - ❖ Use Social Stories/Comic Strip Conversations to enhance social understanding, particularly of the appropriate ways of being and behaving and how other people might see or 'read' their behaviour. These also encourage your child to see the big picture.
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- ❖ Have a SAFE space and/or several areas where your child can go to be alone and calm.
 - ❖ When the student 'melts down' use quiet tones, give lots of REASSURANCE even if they are swearing obscenities at you and lashing out. Try to think of it as a PANIC ATTACK.
 - ❖ Keep calm and level in your own emotions in the face of challenging or disruptive behaviour, or situations that you may find frustrating.
 - ❖ Novelty and variety is often effective because they will exploit routine and predictability. Variety in the pace of presentation and personal style will intrigue. Creating a sense of mystery and suspense can be helpful and building on strengths and interests such as football or sport.
 - ❖ Visual clarification methods (symbol strips, written messages on post-its or a white board, cartoon drawings etc) can be used to de-personalise demands.

Above all, Think Ahead - Advance Notice, and Plan ahead: daily, weekly, monthly, termly etc. A lack of control can lead to your child creating a 'worse-case scenario' in their head, and it will be this that will convince them that they do not want to, or are unable to participate. Not having control then brings a new anxiety: "If I don't have control then who does?" and "Who's going to keep me safe?" Try letting your child know that when they do not feel as if they have total control, you do, to reassure them. At some point, when your child is calm and more receptive to instruction, it will be key to work together to build their personal understanding and self- esteem, learn relaxation, identify anxiety and potential triggers and strategies they can use to deflect this. Your child could create a leaflet about Demand Avoidance Behaviours - include any coping strategies to manage stress and expectations. Increasing the amount of physical exercise can also be valuable.



Created by George Trlin, 2006



Useful websites:

- ❖ CAHMS
<https://www.camhs-resources.co.uk/>
- ❖ Cosmic Kids
<https://www.cosmickids.com/mindfulness-meditation-videos-kids/>
- ❖ Smiling Mind
<https://appsmilingmind.com.au/>