

# REDUCING DEMAND TO SUPPORT TASK ENGAGEMENT

## Using Different Types of Cues in Learning Tasks

A guide for parents and caregivers

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*This resource is intended for parent education and understanding.  
It does not replace individualised professional assessment.*

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### Task Avoidance: What It Often Looks Like

**Task avoidance** can show up as:

- **refusal**
- **distraction**
- **slowing down**
- **emotional escalation**
- **“I don’t want”**

In many cases, the child has the underlying skill, but the **task feels overwhelming** at that moment.

This can happen when:

- **too much language is used**
- **the task moves too quickly**
- **the child is unsure what comes next**
- **the child feels watched or tested**
- **working memory is overloaded**

When the **task feels safer and more predictable**, engagement often returns.

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## **What Is Meant by “Reducing Demand”**

**Reducing demand** does not mean removing challenges.

It means **adjusting how the task is presented and supported**, so the child can **stay regulated long enough to engage**.

This might involve:

- **fewer words**
- **slower pacing**
- **shared attention**
- **holding part of the task for the child**
- **offering cues instead of questions**

**Cues help reduce the load of the task, not the expectation.**

## What Are Cues?

**Cues** are **supports** offered during a task to help a child:

- stay oriented
- understand what to do next
- organise movement or thinking
- continue without shutting down

Cues are responsive and situational.

They change depending on the child, the task, and the moment.

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## Different Types of Cues

Children do not all respond to the same kind of support.

Below are **different cue types that may be used — often in combination.**

### Types of Cues:

- Visual Cues
  - Gestural Cues
  - Verbal Sequencing Cues
  - Verbal Motor Cues (Verbal hand-over-hand)
  - Paired/Multisensory Cues
  - Physical hand-over-hand Cues
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<b><u>Visual Cues</u></b>	<b><u>Gestural Cues</u></b>
<p>Visual cues reduce the need for verbal processing and allow the child to take information in at their own pace.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● pointing to the next item</li> <li>● highlighting or marking</li> <li>● aligning materials</li> <li>● reducing visual clutter</li> </ul>	<p>Gestures guide attention without adding verbal pressure.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● tapping near the target</li> <li>● hovering a finger</li> <li>● nodding</li> <li>● slowing adult movement</li> </ul>
<b><u>Verbal Sequencing Cues</u></b>	<b><u>Verbal Motor Cues (Verbal Hand-over-Hand)</u></b>
<p>This is different from quizzing. The language supports continuation rather than testing recall. Verbal sequencing cues are especially helpful when working memory drops under demand. These are short phrases that hold the sequence verbally while the child works.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “After 8 comes...”</li> <li>● “We just did 15...”</li> <li>● “Next one...”</li> </ul>	<p>This supports motor planning while allowing the child to remain in control of their body. Instead of physically guiding the child’s hand, the adult narrates the movement.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “Down... stop... lift.”</li> <li>● “Across... same dot.”</li> </ul>

<b><u>Paired / Multisensory Cues</u></b>	<b><u>Physical Hand-over-Hand</u></b>
<p>Sometimes cues are more effective when more than one sensory channel is used.</p> <p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• saying “after nineteen...”</li> <li>• while gently tapping rhythm or syllables on the child’s leg</li> </ul> <p>This pairs language with rhythm and body awareness, helping the child stay organised and attentive. Touch should always be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gentle</li> <li>• predictable</li> <li>• responsive to the child</li> </ul>	<p>Physical guidance may be used briefly when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• motor planning is not yet accessible</li> <li>• frustration is increasing but the child still wants to engage</li> <li>• safety is involved</li> </ul> <p>Support is offered, then released as soon as possible.</p>

## **Using Cues to Support Engagement**

**When cues are well-matched:**

- **the task feels clearer**
- **pressure decreases**
- **avoidance often reduces**
- **skills are more likely to appear**

If a child can continue once a cue is given, it suggests the difficulty was related to demand, not ability.

## **Fading Support**

**Cues are not fixed.**

Support may:

- increase during moments of stress
- decrease when the child stabilises
- return again if needed

**Fading happens gradually and responsively, based on how the child is coping in that moment.**

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## **A Final Note**

**Sometimes, small changes in how support is given can make a significant difference to how a child experiences a task.**

**Reducing demand is often about holding just enough so the child can keep going.**

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Because connection comes before  
education