



Supporting your child at school

School can be a source of support, belonging, learning and community for young people. It can provide roles and responsibilities that make them feel good about themselves, the opportunity to think about their own opinions, access to sport, drama, art, trips and other new things, a sense of progress and achievement, life-long friendships, and supportive relationships with teachers and other adults.

However, every child and young person will worry about things that happen at school from time to time – and it's a rare student who sails through without experiencing some sort of issue. For some young people, school can become challenging, stressful and distressing over a longer period of time.

If your child is struggling at school, the important thing is to recognise there's a problem to be solved, and to work with them and the school to find the right support as soon as you can.

Problems at school

Young people can feel worried, anxious or unmotivated about school for lots of different reasons. Some will be worried about something that's happening at school, while others may find school overwhelming because of difficulties in other parts of their life.

Young people tell us their worries about school can include:

- Finding the work difficult, or having problems concentrating
- Finding school exhausting, especially if they are dealing with mental health issues
- Feeling pressure to get good exam results
- Difficult relationships with friends and friendship groups
- Not feeling accepted or that they 'fit in'
- Not getting on with teachers
- Feeling pressured to be the same and learn like everyone else
- Experiencing or witnessing bullying
- Feeling unsupported and not seen as an individual
- Additional needs such as dyslexia not being recognised
- Feeling average or no good in a class of high-achieving peers
- Feeling overwhelmed by the environment
- Difficulties or changes at home, such as relationships with parents, siblings or other family members

Children and young people might show they're feeling anxious about school by:

- Not wanting to get up and get ready
- Being reluctant to go to school

- Getting very worried about relatively small issues, such as remembering the right equipment for a lesson
- Feeling sick or having stomach or headaches
- Not doing schoolwork, or getting lower marks
- Being angry or upset, or acting out
- 'Exploding' when they get home, even if they seem okay at school
- Withdrawing – seeming low, quiet or depressed
- Refusing to go to school at all
- Not going to school without you knowing (also known as 'truanting')
- Demonstrating 'out of control' behaviours such as lying, stealing and aggression

What can I do if my child's feeling anxious about school?

1. **Ask them about what's worrying them.** Focus on listening and providing emotional support, and reassure them that you can work together to make things better. You can find our tips on starting a conversation with your child here: www.youngminds.org.uk/starting-a-conversation-with-your-child.
2. **Think with your child about changes that could be made** at school, at home or in their daily routine to help them feel less worried. You can use some of the ideas we've listed later in this guide.
3. **Reach out to their school as early as you can to avoid things building up.** Work with their class teacher or form tutor, the pastoral team and other key staff to improve the situation.
4. **Talk with your child about strategies that help them to express and manage their anxiety.** This could be spending time with particular friends, listening to music, reading, playing sport, drawing, cooking or watching a favourite film.
5. **Plan a regular morning routine that can be followed each day** – from getting up to having breakfast, getting dressed, leaving the house and arriving at school. This will help to create a sense of security.
6. **Consider using a worry journal** if your child feels particularly anxious while they're at school. They can carry this with them and write down a worry when it comes into their head, helping to keep anxious thoughts from becoming overwhelming.
7. **Younger children might find it helpful to make a 'worry box'.** Decorate any kind of box such as a cereal or shoe box together, and designate a 'worry time' when your child will write down what they're anxious about. Then post it into the box, close the lid and agree not to give it anymore worry time that day. If your child would find it helpful, you can also choose a time to talk through worries together.
8. **Teenagers might find it helpful to make their own self soothe box,** which they can fill with all the things that help them when they're feeling worried. You can find a young person's guide to making one here: www.youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-to-make-a-self-soothe-box.

What can I do if my child doesn't want to go to school?

1. **Ask them what it is about school that makes them not want to go,** and validate their experience of finding these things difficult. Stay as calm as you can, taking your child's worries seriously and listening to how they're feeling.
2. Even though the situation may feel stressful, **don't shout, tell them off or physically force them to go to school.** This is likely to increase their anxiety.
3. **Speak to your child's teacher or form tutor as soon as possible.** Have they noticed any changes in their behaviour, or in their friendship group or class? Tackling the problem early can be really helpful, as the longer your child is out of school, the harder it can be to go back.
4. **Ask their teachers if there are particular moments when they seem to struggle.** For example, it

might be during the journey to school, lesson changeovers, break-times, particular subjects, or through the whole day. This can help you identify triggers.

5. **Keep in regular communication with key staff at the school**, and work with them to make changes that will help. You can use the tips below to help you.
6. **Make a log of the days when your child doesn't want to go to school**. This will give you a better sense of when and how often they feel like this, and can also help you raise it with the school.
7. **Be consistent with the strategies you try to help them get back to school**. Let your child get used to them and remember that it might take a while for something to work. Changing between lots of strategies quickly can be confusing, so only move on when you've tried something for a while without it helping.
8. **Try to stick to the same routine and praise your child for every small step they take**. This could be getting out of bed at the right time, eating breakfast, washing and brushing their teeth, getting dressed and eventually leaving the house.

If things are difficult and have already been going on for a while, you can also:

- Ask the school to arrange a reduced timetable, with only a few lessons each week – with the aim of building back up when it feels manageable for your child
- Discuss the possibility of changing forms, sets or tutors if your child thinks this would help
- Request a home visit from the school, where a staff member can check-in, show your child the school cares about them and discuss strategies for moving forward
- Think about small, achievable targets your child can work towards

What young people would like parents to know about school

- We're under high pressure and stress over our grades
- It feels like we have to be the same as our peers
- It's okay for us to do stuff that isn't school work – other interests are important
- We need space to breathe and unwind after school
- I'd like it if you made time to chat to me and ask me how my day was when I get home
- I need you to be on my side, and listen to me as well as my teachers
- You can support me better if you really get to know me and what I need
- Trust me, and don't assume you know what school is like

How can I work with the school to make things better?

1. **Organise a meeting with your child's teacher or form tutor as soon as you can**. Let them know how your child is feeling and raise any issues that are making school particularly difficult. It might help to write down a list of concerns beforehand, and to bring along a family member or friend to support you.
2. **Agree with the school which strategies you will try to make things better**, and arrange a time to check-in on how it's going. Depending on how difficult your child is finding school, strategies could include:
 - Linking them with a member of staff, for example from the pastoral team, who they can chat to
 - Linking them with a peer buddy or mentor
 - Finding a way for them to feel more part of the school community, for example by joining a club
 - Thinking of ways they can structure break-times if they are finding them difficult
 - Offering them a new role or responsibility, such as library or book-corner monitor, or learning mentor
 - Offering a flexible start-time or timetable
 - Referring them for additional support such as counselling

3. **It might help to use a home-school book**, in which you, teachers and your child can record important things that happen. This helps maintain regular communication – giving you a better sense of what things are like at school, and the school a better sense of what it's like for your child at home.
4. **If you are concerned about bullying**, read through the school's anti-bullying policy. This should set out how the school needs to respond and support your child. It is usually on the school's website but if not, ask to see it. You can read our advice for young people on bullying here: www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/bullying.
5. **Try to maintain a positive relationship with key school staff**, including by recognising the things that are being done to help your child. Ultimately, this will help you get more of the support you need.
6. **Record evidence of the action you and the school are taking**. After meetings, put your concerns and agreed actions in writing by sending an email or letter. This will help to keep things moving, for example you can ask the school to send you a follow-up email when they agree to do something.

If you are unhappy with the way a member of staff is responding to your concerns, escalate them to a more senior person – such as a more senior teacher, a deputy head, or the head teacher. If this doesn't work, you can contact the school governors (their contact details should be on the school's website), and lastly the Local Education Authority or the Academy Trust.

What will happen if my child doesn't go to school?

- If your child is regularly missing days of school, or not going at all, the school's first step will usually be to work with you to try to solve the problem.
- Letting the school know what's going on as early as possible, sharing information, attending meetings and being open to trying new strategies will encourage them to take a supportive approach.
- If the absence continues, the school may refer you to an Education Welfare Officer from the local council. This person will usually arrange a home visit to find out what's happening and work with you to try to resolve the problem.
- If needed, the school and other professionals may also refer your child for other support, including for their mental health.
- If your child cannot attend school for a period of time because they are not mentally well enough, it is likely that you will need to provide evidence from a GP or another professional.
- If the school is pressuring you to get your child back to school and the communication doesn't feel constructive, a good first step is to re-emphasise to them why your child isn't attending – for example because they do not feel mentally well enough. It may also help to get advice and support from your Local Education Authority.
- If the school or local council think your child is missing school without a good reason, you can face legal consequences such as fines.

Getting professional support

School counselling

A school counsellor or therapist can provide emotional support and help your child to express and make sense of their feelings. Therapists working with younger children will usually do this through play and arts activities such as painting, drawing and making things. Lots of primary and secondary schools offer this as a free service.

If this is offered by your school, talk to your child's teacher about making a referral. If your child's school does not offer counselling, or your child would not feel comfortable seeing a counsellor at school, you can ask for free counselling support through your GP. There may also be other free or subsidised counselling services in your area, which you can search for online. If it's an affordable option for you, you can find a private counsellor or therapist using the directories listed at the end of this guide.

GP and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

If you're worried about your child's mental health or wellbeing, you can speak to your GP (with or without your child) about next steps and finding support. Together you can discuss whether referral to CAMHS and/or an assessment by a mental health specialist is needed.

Your child's school can also refer your child to CAMHS. If you would like their support with a CAMHS referral, it might help to talk to the school nurse.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

If you think your child may have additional needs or learning difficulties, speak to their teacher or the school's SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) about whether they need to be referred for an assessment. They may then be able to access additional support through the school.

Children and young people under 25 who need more support than their school can provide are entitled to an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. EHC plans identify their needs and set out the support that will be provided. You, your GP and your child's school can ask your local authority to carry out an assessment for this. The process can take a long time, so it's often a good idea to try to get support through the school first.

Your local authority's 'Local Offer' also outlines how parents of children with SEND can access information and local services. You can search for this on your local authority's website.

Alternative Provision (AP)

Children and young people who can't attend mainstream school are entitled to alternative provision of education in a different setting. This could be a separate unit within or outside the school, an independent provider, home tuition or online tuition. Every local authority website should set out its Alternative Provision options.

How can I support myself?

Supporting your child when they're feeling anxious and don't want to go to school can be really difficult and stressful for you as a parent. It's important that you keep looking after yourself by talking to friends, family and anyone else in your support network. If you're struggling, you can also ask what the school can do to support you.

If your child is regularly not going to school, it may be having an impact on your work and other areas of your life. If this is the case, remember to ask for help so you can take time out. You can also speak to your employer about how they might be able to support you, such as by offering flexible work hours or letting you work from home sometimes.

Finding support

All resources listed on this sheet are for information only. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, YoungMinds cannot accept responsibility for changes to details made by other organisations.

Emotional support for your child	
The Mix www.themix.org.uk If you're under 25 you can talk to The Mix about anything that's troubling you over the phone, email or webchat. You can also use their phone or online counselling service. Helpline open daily 4-11pm: 0808 808 4994 Email: www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/email-us Webchat open daily 4-11pm: www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team Counselling service: www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/the-mix-counselling-service	Finding a counsellor or therapist School services Ask your child's school whether they have a free counselling service. For example, Place2Be provides emotional and therapeutic services in many primary and secondary schools: www.place2be.org.uk Free or low-cost services You can search online and use the Youth Wellbeing Directory to find services near you: www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/youth-wellbeing Private services If this is an affordable option, you can find accredited private child and adolescent therapists near you by searching the Counselling Directory: www.counselling-directory.org.uk, BACP website: www.bacp.co.uk/search/Therapists, and UKCP website: www.psychotherapy.org.uk/find-a-therapist
Childline www.childline.org.uk If you're under 19 you can confidentially call, chat online or email about any problem big or small. 24/7 helpline: 0800 1111 Chat 1:1 with an online counsellor: www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat Email: Sign up on the website, so you can send your message without needing to use your name or email address, at www.childline.org.uk/registration	Mee Two www.meettwo.co.uk A free app for teenagers providing peer support and resources. Young people can share what's going on for them and send supportive messages to others. All messages are fully moderated. Download from Google Play or App Store.
Information and advice	
Ace Education www.ace-ed.org.uk Independent advice and information for parents on education issues in England. Adviceline open Monday-Wednesday from 10am-1pm, term time only. Phone: 0300 0115 142 You can find information on exclusions, special educational needs, bullying and other issues at: www.ace-ed.org.uk/advice-about-education-for-parents	Contact www.contact.org.uk The national charity for families with children with disabilities. Provides online, printed and helpline advice on education, benefits and finances, childcare, social care, medical information and more. Helpline open Monday to Friday 9:30am-5pm. Phone: 0808 808 3555 Email: info@contact.org.uk
British Dyslexia Association www.bdadyslexia.org.uk Information, support and advice for people with dyslexia and those who support them. Helpline open Tuesdays from 10am-1pm, and Wednesdays and Thursdays from 10am-3pm. Phone: 0333 405 4567 Email: helpline@bdadyslexia.org.uk	Dyspraxia Foundation www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk Information and advice for people with dyspraxia and their parents, carers and families. Helpline open Monday-Friday from 9am-1pm. Phone: 01462 454986 Email: www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/helpline

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Child Law Advice (from Coram Children's Legal Centre) www.childlawadvice.org.uk Provides free legal advice and information on education, child and family law to parents, carers and young people. Phone support available Monday–Friday 8am–6pm. If you are calling about education law the number is 0300 330 5485. Email contact form: www.childlawadvice.org.uk/email-advice-education You can find information on a range of school related topics at www.childlawadvice.org.uk/education.	National Autistic Society (Education Rights Service) www.autism.org.uk Support for people with autism and their families. Their Education Rights Service can help with information about educational rights and entitlements, as well as with specific issues such as school, assessments and education plans. Phone: 0808 800 4102 Leave a message on the 24-hour answering service and someone will call you back, usually within 3-5 working days. Email: www.autism.org.uk/services/helplines/education-rights/education-rights-service-enquiry.aspx
Independent Parental Special Education Advice (IPSEA) www.ipsea.org.uk Free, independent and legally based advice to help families get the right education for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). You can book an appointment with their Advice Line or Tribunal Helpline, and/or request information at www.ipsea.org.uk/Pages/Category/service-overview	National Careers Service www.nationalcareers.service.gov.uk Information, advice and guidance to help young people make decisions about learning, training and work. Open 8am to 10pm, 7 days a week. Phone: 0800 100 900 Webchat: Select the 'use webchat' option on the homepage.
YoungMinds Starting a conversation www.youngminds.org.uk/starting-a-conversation-with-your-child Advice and activity ideas to help parents check-in with their child, start a conversation and provide emotional support. Parents Lounge www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-lounge Our Parents Helpline experts answer questions on school refusal, exam stress, anxiety and other topics. Supporting your child through a time of change www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-guide-to-support-a-z/parents-guide-to-support-transitions Tips to help you support your child through a time of change, transition or difficulty.	
 MindEd e-learning to support young healthy minds www.minded.org.uk/families/index.html MindEd for families is a website where you can hear about other parents' experiences and find clear, helpful guidance on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.	CRISIS TEXT LINE If you, or someone you are caring for, is experiencing a mental health crisis, you can text the YoungMinds Crisis Messenger for free, 24/7 support. Text YM to 85258. Texts are free from EE, O2, Vodafone, 3, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, GiffGaff, Tesco Mobile and Telecom Plus. This service is powered by our trusted partner, Crisis Text Line.

