



HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD WITH SCHOOL ATTENDANCE



It can be difficult to know where to begin when your child starts to refuse to attend school, and as a parent, seeing your child in distress at the prospect of attending school can often trigger distress and frustration in yourself.

In relation to your child's mental health, although the thought of attending school may trigger distress, allowing your child to get into a pattern of avoidance could lead to further difficulties down the line. Avoidance makes the prospect of going back to school more difficult as time goes on.

Hopefully this resource gives you some top tips for supporting your child to attend school regularly.



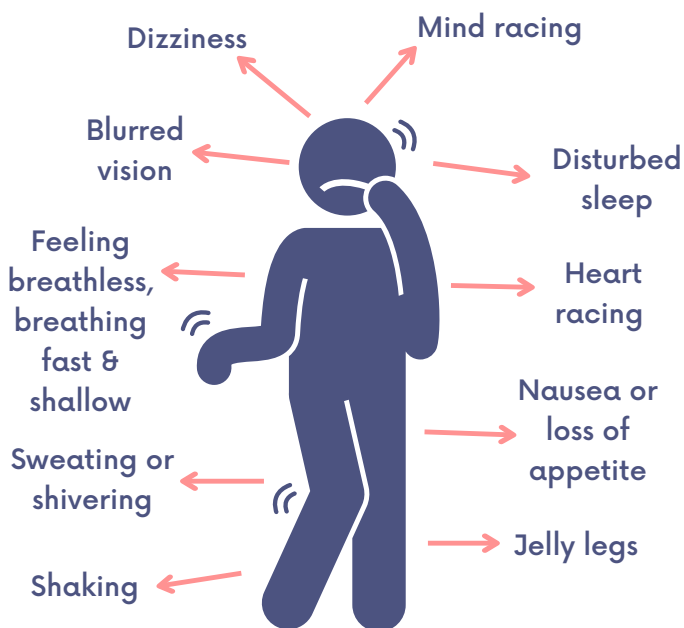
IS YOUR CHILD WORRYING ABOUT GOING TO SCHOOL?



Anxiety is a normal feeling that we all experience from time to time. Some anxiety is helpful, as it can keep us safe from harm or help us reach our potential. We actually perform better when we experience some challenge, as it makes us more alert and task-focused. Anxiety or excessive worrying can become a problem especially when it stops people doing what they want or need to do.

Many children and young people worry about school, and this is normal. Anxieties are part of life and learning to deal with them is part of growing up. However, when the challenge outweighs our coping, and the anxiety builds to the point that we are feeling overwhelmed, this impairs our rational thinking and our ability to cope with the challenges that life throws at us.

HOW ANXIETY AFFECTS OUR BODIES



HOW ANXIETY AFFECTS OUR BEHAVIOURS

Trying to control events by overplanning and asking questions

Having high expectations of ourselves

Becoming defiant and showing challenging behaviour

Avoiding activities, situations, and events

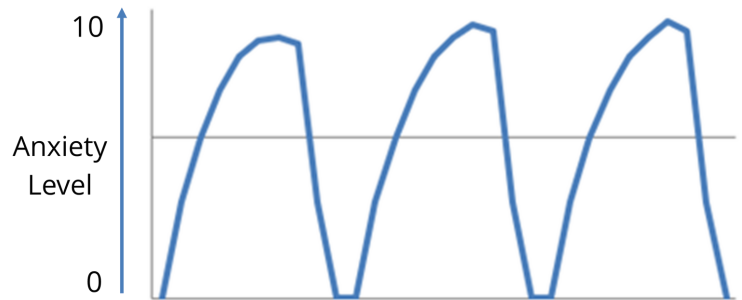


HOW DOES AVOIDANCE AFFECT OUR ANXIETY?



AVOIDANCE:

When we feel worried or scared about a situation, our anxiety starts to build. If we avoid that situation, understandably our anxiety level comes straight back down again, giving us instant relief.



However, when we are faced with that same situation again, we feel just as worried or scared. We are encouraged to avoid the situation, given the relief we felt last time. Nothing will ever change, as we haven't had the opportunity to learn whether the situation is going to be as bad as we fear, or if we can learn how to cope with it.

FACING THE SITUATION:

Familiar things get boring. Have you ever been swimming in a pool or in the sea, and at first it is really cold? What happens the longer you stay in the water?



Our body can't physically stay at this high level of anxiety, so by exposing ourselves to the situation, our anxiety naturally reduces. This happens at a slower rate than if we were to avoid the situation, so the unpleasant feelings can last a while, but each time we face the situation our peak anxiety level will be less and less until we no longer feel worried or scared.



THE STRESS BUCKET



An analogy which is often used is 'The Stress Bucket'. Imagine there's a bucket you carry with you, which slowly fills up when you experience different types of worry and stress. Different stressors add together and can lead to someone feeling overwhelmed - their bucket overflows! We can think of people as all having different sized buckets; some of us will get overwhelmed by things much more quickly than others.



COMMON STRESSORS:

School
stress

Home life

Illness

Friendship
issues

To stop our child feeling overwhelmed, we need to either reduce their stressors or increase their ability to cope. The holes in the bucket represent coping strategies which help to release stress, and let water out of our bucket.

Supporting them to view situations differently or manage the stressors that are within their control will help, while increasing their coping strategies if the stressor isn't within their control.

IDEAS FOR COPING STRATEGIES

Sport and
exercise

Art and craft
activities

Enjoying
a hobby

Writing in
a journal

Music
/ TV

It is important to remember that what works for one person will not necessarily work for another, and so it might take time to figure out what works for your child.



WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MY CHILD ATTEND SCHOOL?



KEEP IN CONTACT WITH THE SCHOOL

- Liaise with school staff every day and inform them of your concerns and efforts to get your child into school.
- Are there any concerns that school are aware of that may be impacting your child's school attendance? Think together about what changes can be made to make it easier for your child to attend.
- Request a meeting to discuss how school can support in helping your child get back into school. It would be beneficial for your child to be involved with this meeting and be in agreement with any plans suggested.
- Ask school if they can identify a link / named person in school that the young person can build a relationship with, and is able to access in situations of distress.

SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS FOR YOUR CHILD

- Each day, set a clear expectation that your child should be attending school. This message should be consistent from all adults supporting the young person.
- Ensure that the morning routine stays the same, even if your child isn't going to school. Get them to wake up at the same time and eat breakfast. Where possible, make the mornings feel normal.
- If your child is not successful in getting into school that day, the home should be made as 'uncomfortable' as possible. For example, remove access to computer consoles, television, going out with friends etc in school hours. This behavioural approach is aimed at making home less appealing than going to school!



WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MY CHILD ATTEND SCHOOL?



VALIDATE THEIR EMOTIONS

- Validation communicates to your child that their feelings, thoughts and actions make sense and are understandable to you in a particular situation. (Validation does not necessarily mean that you agree with what the other person is doing, saying or feeling. It simply means that you understand where they are coming from).
- It can be challenging to contain our own emotions in these situations, however, try show tolerance even if you don't agree with the emotion and behaviour.

Try some of the phrases below:

Thank you for being honest and sharing your feelings with me

I can see that this situation is causing you to feel frustrated

I understand that you are feeling upset about...

It's ok to feel sad / anxious / angry sometimes

Would you like to talk / have a hug / try to problem solve?

That sounds really difficult!





WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MY CHILD ATTEND SCHOOL?



OFFER ENCOURAGEMENT, REWARD AND PRAISE

- Encourage your child to engage in activities outside of school so they do not become socially isolated.
- Maximise on their success; think with them about how they managed to contain their emotions when doing something.
- Empower your child, highlight that they do have skills to manage their emotions and encourage them to utilise those skills and build upon them.
- Praise can go a long way! If you notice that your child has made a significant effort to get back into school, let them know that you recognise that.

"Well done for leaving the house this morning and walking to the bus stop, I could see that was really challenging for you and you were feeling anxious. How did you manage that?"



When you are feeling worried, what do you do that helps?

KEEP
going

I am so proud of you for facing your worries, let's do something nice together this evening

YOU
GOT
THIS!



WHERE CAN I GET MORE RESOURCES AND SUPPORT?



If you are seeing this resource digitally, click the links below to be directed to the resource. If not, type the links into your search browser.

YOUNG MINDS PARENT GUIDE

www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/school-anxiety-and-refusal

HELPING CHILDREN OVERCOME SCHOOL REFUSAL

www.scribd.com/document/386880123/Helping-Children-Overcome-School-Refusal

TACKLING ANXIOUS FEELINGS

www.parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/education/school-university/coping-school-refusal

PORTSMOUTH PARENT VOICE

www.portsmouthparentvoice.org/

... is for parents / carers of a child or young person with an additional needs aged from 0 – 25 years old, to voice your opinions on what you would like for your child or young person. PPV will assist you to find the right support or service you need.

02394 350257

SENDIASS

www.portsmouthsendiass.info

The Special Educational Needs & Disability Information Advice & Support Service (SENDIASS) can listen, and support with any queries. They can be an advocate in meetings, and signpost to helpful services. SENDIASS empower parents to make informed decisions.

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