

Emotionally Based School Avoidance

Information booklet for
parents and caregivers

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Introduction

This booklet is designed to help you understand more about emotionally based school avoidance, how to support your child with this, and how important it is to look after yourself during these difficult times. In addition to the suggestions of how to support your child to access their education in school, there are also suggestions for alternative options. There is advice on where to go for further support, as well as details of how to connect with other parents and caregivers facing similar challenges.

It is important to remember that there is no single answer to helping a child overcome school avoidance. It is about understanding your child as an individual, the experiences they have had and the situation they are in, and using this knowledge as a base from which to inform your choice of the options available, that seem best suited to your child. If something works, keep it, if not, try something else. What matters most, is that your child's sense of self-worth, and the relationships around them, are nurtured and supported. As parents, this is often where we have the greatest influence, even when it may not feel like it.

What is EBSA?

EBSA stands for Emotionally Based School Avoidance, and is a broad term, which covers a range of reasons why young people find it difficult to attend school. The estimate is that around 1-2% of young people experience EBSA, although post Covid, that figure is likely to be higher. Avoiding school tends to fulfil a particular function for young people, and although circumstances are often complex, the motivation for avoiding school tends to fall into four categories:

1. To avoid uncomfortable feelings such as anxiety or low mood.
2. To avoid uncomfortable situations, such as speaking in class, bullying, noisy corridors, etc.
3. To spend more time with a family member, this might be because of separation anxiety, being a young carer, new sibling, divorce, etc.
4. To spend more time doing what they enjoy, like staying in bed, playing computer games, watching videos, etc.

Your child's school avoidance may serve one or more of these functions, and understanding which of these are motivating factors for your young person, can help when it comes to creating an appropriate plan of action and support.

Different functions = Different support

Understanding the function your child's school avoidance plays can help guide you to the most appropriate ways to support them. Some of these interventions can be actioned by the school, some at home, and some by your child. It can be useful for you as parents and caregivers, to be aware of the different types of support so that you can speak to school about these, discuss ideas with your child, or learn a bit more for yourself. See the table below for a brief outline of interventions that are recommended, depending on the function of the school avoidance.

Function of the school avoidance	Recommended support/intervention
1 To avoid uncomfortable feelings such as anxiety or low mood.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psycho-education around anxiety • Anxiety management techniques • Cognitive behavioural therapy • Trusted adult and safe place at school • Avoidance hierarchy
2 To avoid uncomfortable situations, such as speaking in class, bullying, noisy corridors, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above, • Additional focus on social skills development
3 To spend more time with a family member, this might be because	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psycho-education around anxiety • Anxiety management techniques • Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

<p>of separation anxiety, being a young carer, new sibling, divorce, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use school hours for school-work • Schedule quality time for after school hours • Arrange support for family members your child may worry about • Establish clear morning routines • Focus on any attempt towards positive behaviour to build self-esteem and confidence • Reward attendance/attempts to attend
<p>4 To spend more time doing what they enjoy, like staying in bed, playing computer games, watching videos, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where possible, remove the activity they have avoided school for, giving, access only after school hours. • Discuss rewards around getting back to school – i.e. doing their favourite activity together, film night, etc. • Teach them how to be assertive and refuse offers from peers • Support travel to and from school

As children often have more than one reason for avoiding school, you may need to combine interventions and ideas from more than one of the functions of the avoidance behaviours listed above.

Anxiety and EBSA

One of the key features of EBSA is anxiety. It can often be about people, places, academic pressure, or the noise of shared spaces, although it can also be about other things that may be going on in their life, such as a family break-up, a bereavement, or difficulty with their friendships. Once negative thoughts are experienced around attending school, this can trigger a cycle of worry that manifests as physical symptoms such as headaches, tummy aches, nausea, racing heart, heavy breathing and sweaty palms. In order to manage the physical and emotional discomfort, anxiety drives them to avoid what they perceive as causing these symptoms – namely, school. If they don't end up going to school, and perceive that the threat of school has been removed, symptoms then tend to recede, and this sense of relief acts as a reinforcer of the belief that they were indeed at risk from going to school.



When there is a real threat through things like bullying, then of course, this needs tackling head on, with the school actively involved. However, when the fear relates to a situation in which we know they will come to no harm, the task is to prove the fear wrong. This requires manageable, graduated steps, with the right level of support. An avoidance hierarchy can be useful for planning how to face the fear.

An example avoidance hierarchy is shown on the following page. The ultimate aim in this example is to help the young person feel able to eat lunch at school but any aim is valid here. No more than ten steps is advisable, but each of the steps can be repeated as many times as needed to build confidence. It is important for the hierarchy to remain flexible in case additional steps need to be added.

Step	Aim	Coping Strategy
10	Meet a friend, buy lunch and eat it in the lunch hall	Trusted friend, positive affirmation
9	Meet a friend, buy lunch and eat it somewhere quiet	Trusted friend, grounding exercise
8	Meet a friend, walk down a corridor at break time	Trusted friend, box breathing
7	Meet a friend by the trusted staff members office, walk round school for fifteen minutes	Trusted friend, grounding exercise
6	Meet the trusted staff member in their office, with a friend, for ten minutes	Trusted friend, positive affirmation
5	Meet the trusted staff member in reception, go to their office for five minutes	Box breathing, trusted member of staff
4	Meet same staff member for a five minute walk in the school grounds	Trusted member of staff
3	Walk to school gates and arrange to meet a trusted staff member for five minutes	Trusted member of staff
2	Walk to school gates and stand outside them for one minute	Breathing strategy – box breathing
1	Walk past school gates	Walk with a parent

Avoidance Hierarchy Tips

- 1 Let your young person decide on the change they want to see.
- 2 Set a realistic goal as the top step, or most feared scenario.
- 3 Break the overall goal into smaller steps, but no more than 10 in total.
- 4 Add a coping strategy they are familiar with, for each level.
- 5 Predict obstacles and build solutions for overcoming these into the plan.
- 6 Begin the hierarchy at step 1. When they have overcome this fear and consolidated the level, move on to step 2. Each step can be completed as many times as required before moving to the next step. If a step is difficult to achieve, break it down further.
- 7 Celebrate each achievement and attempt, even if a goal was not achieved.
- 8 Keep all completed hierarchies as evidence of their effort and achievement. If progress is still needed, begin a new hierarchy once the initial one has been completed.
- 9 Consider rewards for each step such as:
 - Do their favourite activity together
 - Go for a walk together
 - Have a family film night
 - Cook their favourite dinner, have a BBQ or bake a cake together
 - Go to the beach for an ice cream
 - Do a puzzle together or play a board game
 - Foot massage
 - Bubble bath with candles
 - Kitchen disco
 - Go to see a friend or family
 - Desert Island Discs – share your favourite music with each other
 - Murder mystery night – second hand set from internet/charity shop

Tools for managing anxiety

Evidence based recommendations for treating anxiety are:

- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)** – unhealthy thinking patterns are identified, challenged and replaced with more helpful, or realistic thinking patterns. CBT has the same success rate as medication in relieving symptoms, and the skills can be used throughout life.
- **Relaxation Skills** – techniques such as deep breathing, grounding, progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness and guided meditation, can help to manage anxiety in the moment, as well as to unwind more effectively after a period of high anxiety.
- **Exposure Therapy** –this can be achieved through developing an avoidance hierarchy, where a plan is created between the young person and the adults involved, that gradually exposes the young person to the feared situation.
- **Exercise** – People who exercise regularly are more resistant to mental health problems such as anxiety and low mood. It helps to process adrenalin, relieve tension, release endorphins, aid sleep and raise self-esteem. A 30-minute walk three times a week can be enough.
- **Medication** – this can be a solution for many, although it does not deal with the underlying reasons for the anxiety, so should be a last resort, or used in conjunction with other approaches, particularly when it comes to young people.

Relaxation Skills: Deep breathing

Deep breathing is an evidence-based technique to help with managing emotions. Not only is deep breathing proven to stimulate the bodies rest and digest system

(acting to reverse the fight or flight response), it is also discreet and easy to use at any time or place.

Box breathing

- **Breathe in for 3**, draw or visualize your finger drawing up one side of a box
- **Hold for 3**, draw or visualize your finger drawing across the top of a box
- **Exhale for 3**, draw or visualize your finger drawing down the side of a box
- **Hold for 3**, draw or visualize your finger drawing across the bottom of a box
- **Repeat** three times or more

Hot chocolate breathing

- Hold your hands in a triangle shape, thumbs meeting and fingertips meeting, as if cradling a mug of hot chocolate
- Lean into your imaginary mug of hot chocolate, slowly breathe in and imagine you can smell the chocolate and feel the steam warming your face
- Slowly blow out through your mouth, as if you are cooling down the hot chocolate
- Repeat three times or more

Finger breathing

- Slowly, take the forefinger of one hand, and trace around the fingers of your other hand, breathing in as you trace your way to the fingertip, and out as you move down between the fingers
- When you have completed one hand, switch over and repeat with the alternate hand

Relaxation Skills: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

By tensing and relaxing the muscles throughout your body, you can achieve a feeling of relaxation. This will also help you spot anxiety in your body, by teaching you to recognize the feeling of muscle tension.

Find a comfortable position. For each body area listed below, tense your muscles tightly, but don't strain. Hold for 10 seconds, and pay close attention to how it feels. Then release the hold, and notice how the feeling of relaxation differs from the feeling of tension.

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| Feet | Curl your toes into your feet, then release them. |
| Calves | Point or flex your feet, then let them relax. |
| Thighs | Squeeze your thighs together tightly, then let them relax. |
| Torso | Suck in your abdomen, then release the tension and let it fall. |
| Back | Squeeze your shoulder blades together, then release them. |
| Shoulders | Lift and squeeze your shoulders toward your ears, then let them drop. |
| Arms | Make fists and squeeze them toward your shoulders, then let them drop. |

- Hands** Make a fist by curling your fingers into your palm, then relax your fingers.
- Face** Scrunch your facial features to the center of your face, then relax.
- Full Body** Squeeze all muscles together, then release all tension.

Relaxation Skills: Grounding

Grounding helps to bring us back into the present moment, rather than getting lost in future worry. The 5-4-3-2-1 technique will help you focus on the details of your surroundings using each of your senses. Try to be aware of details that you would not usually notice, such as distant sounds, or the texture of an ordinary object.

- **What are 5 things you can see?** Such as a pattern on the ceiling, the way light reflects off a surface, or an object you never noticed.
- **What are 4 things you can feel?** Notice the sensation of clothes on your body, sun on your skin, the feeling of the chair you are sitting in.
- **What are 3 things you can hear?** Such as a ticking clock, distant traffic, trees blowing in the wind.
- **What are 2 things you can smell?** Air freshener, freshly mown grass, candle.
- **What is 1 thing you can taste?** Toothpaste, what you had for lunch, perhaps a sweet you have with you.

Relaxation Skills: Mindfulness

Mindfulness is about being present in the moment, whatever that may be. The skill improves emotional awareness and helps to reduce stress, as you become less focused on past or future moments. Here are some ideas for how to use it.

- **Journal:** Use it to offload and explore emotions, but then move on to thinking about what you are grateful for, even if it is a small thing, and try and highlight something positive that you tried, or that you are proud of
- **Body scan:** Starting from your toes and working your way up to the top of your head notice the sensations in each part of your body. How do your clothes feel resting on your legs, is there any tension in your muscles, can you feel different temperatures around your body
- **Walk:** Notice your surroundings, what can you see and hear, how does the environment make you feel, how does walking up a hill change your breathing?
- **Dance:** Choose your favourite song and dance as if no-one can see you
- **Colour a picture:** Notice if using different colours changes how you feel
- **Have a hot drink:** Taste each mouthful and be aware of the temperature and how it makes you feel
- **Look after a pet:** Notice how they react to what you do, can you tell what they like and what they don't like? How do they make you feel to stroke them, or hold them
- **Do some yoga:** There are lots of online platforms with free videos to follow
- **Write a positive affirmation:** Create a short, positive, 'I' statement that helps you to feel good about yourself (I am learning to be strong, I can do this)

- **Meditation:** Our thoughts have the power to change how we feel. If you think of something sad, it's likely you'll start to feel sad. When you think of something positive and calming, you are likely to feel more relaxed. You can find a range of guided meditations online

Am I being manipulated? What about tough love?

Many parents wonder whether they are being manipulated by their child, as the severe anxiety can often seem to abate very quickly once the threat of going to school has passed. A certain amount of experimentation with their own power is a normal part of adolescent development, however, when the fight or flight response is triggered, anxiety is driving their behaviour. During the fight or flight response, the thinking and reasoning part of the brain shuts down, and the instinctual part of the brain takes over, sending adrenaline through the body to prepare either to fight or run away from, the threat. Using the relaxation techniques previously suggested can help to manage these physical and emotional symptoms.

People often wonder whether they need to show some ‘tough love’ and make their child face the situations they fear. While a degree of controlled exposure is helpful, as seen from the avoidance hierarchy, if the level of anxiety provoked is overwhelming, and not something they feel ready to handle, this can lead to a traumatic experience. Once a child become traumatised from the experiences around school, the job of helping them find their confidence becomes much harder. Encouraging them to decide the level of challenge they can face, and supporting them to do this, may take more time, but is more likely to lead to solid progress, and a growth in confidence to tackle future challenges around school.

My child is neurodiverse, how does this affect things?

Despite the fact that 1 in 6 children between the ages of 3 and 17 are considered neurodiverse, there is currently, little research into school avoidance and neurodiversity. However, it is clear that young people on the autistic spectrum are thought to be at an increased risk of developing EBSA. This may be for a number of reasons to do with anxiety triggered through sensory processing overload. Schools are complex, social environments, which are often more stressful, confusing and exhausting to manage, particularly if you find it challenging to process multiple stimuli at any one time. During secondary school, young people also become more aware of themselves in comparison to their peer group. When young people identify themselves as being different from their peers, this can lead to a sense of being out of place, exposed, and under threat whilst at school.

Supporting your neurodiverse child means finding out what works best for them as individuals. Here are some tips for supporting your child at home:

- Validate their problems and emotions - what they are feeling is very real to them and acknowledging their feelings will offer some relief.
- Listen and try empathizing rather than giving your opinion as this can overstimulate your neurodiverse child.
- Give them outlets for any sensory sensitivities they have to help them with triggers or reduce stress.
- Develop a routine through the day and week, as structure can help to reduce stress.

- Encourage your child's strengths, giving them opportunities to feel good at something, and label any positive qualities they demonstrate, such as determination when something goes wrong.
- Break down tasks into smaller tasks as this will help it seem less overwhelming.
- Use positive praise and rewards, rather than negative punishments to encourage the behaviour you would like to see. Going out of their comfort zone may be hard for them and they will need encouragement to do so.
- Be patient with your child, change can take time.
- If your child suffers from anxiety in social situations, consider making script cards to help them when they need to speak to other people.
- Give them portable sensory items, such as fidget spinners, to reduce anxiety or increase concentration.

What can I do when my child is being bullied?

The term bullying covers a broad variety of actions and situations, but the key point to consider is the impact these have on your child. If your child does not want to attend school because of bullying, the following resources from the Welsh Government set out your rights, what you can expect from your child's school, and a course of action you may want to consider taking.

[Bullying at school: guidance for parents and carers | GOV.WALES](#)

[Anti-bullying Guidance parents and carers \(gov.wales\)](#)

Once you are clear on your rights, you can also help your child by exploring how to be assertive. This is a form of communication that encourages young people to express their own thoughts and needs, whilst also respecting someone else's. Here are some tips for being assertive:

- Start sentences with 'I'
 - *'I would prefer to eat pizza this evening but I know you don't like pizza. How about jacket potato? We both like that'*
- As demonstrated above, state your feelings or opinion clearly, whilst also asking what the other person feels or thinks, and be willing to compromise.
- Be prepared to use the broken record technique by repeating your stance
 - *'I don't like fish fingers. I would prefer to eat pizza this evening but I know you don't like pizza. How about jacket potato? We both like that'*
- Make eye contact with the person you are speaking to

- Consider your body language and tone of voice, stand tall, shoulders back, smile and project your voice clearly

Role playing situations your child is likely to meet but feels intimidated by, can help them to feel more confident in managing the situation if it occurs. This can often be quite funny, particularly if you play them and they play the bully! Laughing about a situation can also help them to feel more positive, and even inspired to use humour themselves.

Below is a clip of someone demonstrating how to create a different response from a verbal bully, by doing the opposite of what you might think.

[VT - How to stop bullying | Facebook](#)

Supporting your child to make friendships in and out of school can also help to build their coping strategies. Joining special interest groups can help them to connect with other young people who have similar interests and help build their self-esteem.

Finally, it is important not to forget the basic skill of active listening. This is hugely powerful for the person being listened to, even though it can be more difficult for the listener, as the urge to problem solve has to be resisted in order for your child to feel seen, and their experience validated. A more detailed explanation of active listening is given on page 23-24.

My child won't talk to me. What can I do?

As parents and caregivers, we love our children and want the best for them. When we can see that our children are suffering and that choices they make may be harmful for their future, we can become very anxious and frustrated ourselves. This can lead to an increase in stress, tension and strained relationships at home, which can all play a part in triggering anxiety and low mood in our young person. While this is a normal response to a difficult situation, it is also understandable that a young person who may already feel vulnerable, seeks to withdraw from this additional source of stress. Here are a few tips to help you reduce stress and turn the home into a judgement free, accepting environment, where your child feels safe to express themselves.

Fire the manager, hire the consultant

This will depend upon the age of your child, but can be very useful for young people who are of secondary school age. When your child was little, you had to be their manager, however, on their journey to becoming an adult, our children need to learn how to manage themselves. Like a child learning to ride a bike, there are usually wobbles to start with, however, in time, and with a bit of stabilising from behind, they are able to take control and steer their course safely.

Sometimes, during adolescence, when parents or caregivers continue to act like their child's manager, this can cause tension, as the young person needs space to make their own decisions and learn how to deal with their mistakes. When a parent or caregiver does not give this space, the child effectively fires the manager by refusing to listen. This can be very difficult for a parent or caregiver to take and can

go one of two ways. Either you fight to get rehired as the manager, which leads to more arguments and less real communication, or you accept the situation, respect your child's need to grow, allow yourself to feel sad, then try to get yourself hired as their consultant. The role of the consultant differs from the manager. Rather than walking in front and telling them what to do, the consultant aims to walk beside the young person, and half a step back, just like riding the bike when they were little, except you're not holding on this time. The way this works in conversation, is not to judge their ideas or decisions, but to explore their own thoughts and feelings about them, sometimes offering a question for them to consider, but allowing them the space to make the decision that feels right for them, and supporting them through the process.

This does not mean you cannot express your own opinion, only that this be done calmly, without judgement, and with respect to your young persons thoughts and feelings.

When not to respect their privacy

Privacy is very important for young people, and demonstrates that we trust and respect them. However, if you are worried about their safety because of self-harm, suicidal feelings, or online friendships, you have the right to take away this privacy, in order to keep them safe. Explaining this is important, so they understand your actions. It is important to signal to them that you will return their privacy when they are able to demonstrate they can use it responsibly.

Take care of your own needs

It is common that parents and caregivers feel isolated, depleted or under-valued because the needs of others have come first. This can create a feeling of resentment, low mood and hopelessness, which is often picked up by young people. Looking after your own needs, interests, hopes and dreams is not selfish, it is part of the way you become a whole, happy person, who is better able to be present for their child, model self-respect, and be someone their child wants to spend time with.

Do activities they used to love

If your child used to like baking, playing sport, taking the dog for a walk, doing craft, seeing their best friend, etc., make time to do these things again. They may or may not join you initially, but if they don't feel too much pressure and judgement for not joining in, they may, over time, join in on their own terms. This is a really good way to reconnect when neither of you have enjoyed spending time together for a while.

Stop, drop and breathe

Taking their behaviour personally is not going to help either you or your child to reconnect, talk openly, or make any positive progress with how they feel about themselves. As best you can, STOP when you feel like you might react in anger rather than from a place of insight, DROP whatever it is that triggered you to feel this way, and BREATHE deeply and slowly for three cycles of breath. Then have a think about what just happened, why it might have happened, how they might be feeling, and what they might actually need from you in this moment. If you can, go to them and reflect what you think they may be feeling, (*"I noticed that you went*

really quiet when I asked if you wanted to go for a walk earlier, I'm wondering if it made you feel worried about seeing other people from school?"). This can often be a really good way to open up the discussion and allow them to help you understand what they are feeling and thinking. This will help build trust, which will allow them to connect with you more often. If they tell you to go away, respect their wishes, but make it clear that you are available if they want to talk.

Key Skill: Active Listening

The power of active listening skills to allow you to build trust with your child cannot be underestimated. You may already use many of these approaches, but if some are new to you, give one a try and see what happens:

Praise the young person for having the courage to open-up about how they are feeling and what is going on for them.

"You're doing so well to tell me about these difficult feelings"

"It's ok to have the thoughts and feelings that you do"

Empathise with the young person about their experiences. Encourage them to explore their feelings and how they are affected by them.

"How did you feel when that happened?"

"That must have been really difficult for you. How did you cope?"

"The way you're feeling may be scary but I'm here for you"

Explore the young person's world by asking open-ended questions, listening to their answers, and accepting their world view.

"What else was going on for you when this happened?"

"There are people who love and care about you. Who are those people for you right now?"

Reflect back what the young person has told you. This shows them you are actively listening and trying to understand things from their point of view. It also ensures you haven't misunderstood something they said.

"You said ... Can you tell me more about that?"

"So when ... happened, you felt ..."

Building confidence and self-esteem

Virtually all young people and adults experience an internal voice which can be quite critical at certain times in life. For some, this voice is constant, for others, it is only occasional. For young people who experience this voice often, it can mean they develop a negative view about themselves, their abilities, and their self-worth, which can affect how confident they are to deal with challenges. We often refer to this voice as the ‘inner critic’, and although the effects of this voice can be to damage our self-esteem, it is actually our minds way of trying to protect us from failure or pain. By persuading us not to try something because ‘I’ll never be any good anyway’, our minds can deter us from a potential threat. However, when this voice dominates, it can mean that young people are unable to see their positive qualities or talents.

It is our job as parents and caregivers, to help them notice the positive qualities and various talents that they possess. By helping draw their attention to the good things they are doing and the positive traits they are showing, we are helping them to identify and strengthen the voice of the ‘inner mentor’. This voice brings wisdom and strength, and can balance out the fear tactics of the critic. Here are some tips for how to do this:

Praise effort, not outcome

This is important because it can take an incredible amount of strength and bravery for young people experiencing EBSA, to make even the smallest attempts to get out of their comfort zone. If they fail, and all they get is criticism for trying, then there is no incentive to try again. The best thing you can do as their parent or

caregiver, is not to show your disappointment, but to celebrate and praise the fact they made a try. Attempts to face your fears in any way shows courage, resilience and determination, although young people often need help to identify this.

Build their positive vocabulary

Young people experiencing EBSA often have low self-esteem and lack confidence in their abilities. Part of our job as parents and caregivers is to help them build a vocabulary about themselves that is positive, rather than critical. Find ways to praise them using specific descriptive words such as honest, brave, resilient, compassionate, so that they start to see themselves as these things. Sometimes it can help to talk through efforts they have made previously, to illustrate how you think they demonstrated these qualities. Ask them what they think, and how it feels to explore the idea that maybe, all these wonderful qualities are just as much a part of who they are, as the parts they are not so proud of.

Start afresh each day

Try not to add up the behaviour of past days, but give them a fresh start each day. This will help them not to feel burdened by what they may see as past failures, and feel more positive that people and situations can change and develop positively.

Teach them to be self-compassionate

It is ok to be scared, sad, disappointed, it is ok to fail. These are all a normal part of being human. The important thing is to allow them to feel what they feel, reflect and explore this, and to be kind to themselves. This will do far more to encourage them to try again, than harsh words or criticism. Try talking to them about people

who they might see as successful, but who have overcome huge amounts of failure to get where they are. Resilience is about finding a way to adapt to a situation, learn from your experiences, grow, and move forward, not sailing through life without experiencing difficulty.

What young people need to hear from their parents and caregivers

Like anyone, young people will react differently depending on what language and approach we use with them. While parents and caregivers can't get it right every time, here are some things that young people have told us help or hinder how safe they feel to communicate with their parents and caregivers.

Don't

- make assumptions
- compare me to others
- judge me
- dismiss my feelings

Please don't say:

"You're over-reacting"

"It's just a phase"

"Why are you like this?"

"It's nothing to worry about"

Do

- Help me to see that I am not alone in what I am feeling

- Demonstrate an open mind, being sensitive to my attempts to start a conversation
- Listen to me

Please tell me:

“It’s ok to have the thoughts and feelings that you do”

“The way you’re feeling may be scary but I’m here for you”

“You’re not alone in what you’re going through”

“There are people who love and care about you”

How to build a collaborative relationship with school

Ideally, it is helpful to build a partnership with your child's school built on good communication and trust, although if you have received communication that lacks understanding and feels more about pressure than support, this can make a constructive relationship more difficult.

Below is a suggestion for an email or letter, which will enable you to arrange a meeting with school so that everyone can fully understand the current situation, and explore the options going forward. It can often be useful for your child to be with you at this meeting, so that they are able to express their preferences for support. School may ask the Education Welfare Service to attend, who should be amenable to a flexible solution as long as you are engaging with them to find a way for your child to access their education. You may also invite any external agency who may be supporting your family, to attend as well.

Dear.....

I am experiencing difficulty getting my child to attend school in the morning because they are experiencing considerable anxiety around..... Their main concerns are:

- This
- And this
- And this

I would like to meet with you in order to come up with a practical plan for how to support them to access their education. I would be free to meet at this time on this day. Please let me know if that is convenient for you.

Kind regards

Me.....

Once you have a meeting set up, it is a good idea to draw up a list of the issues that need discussing, and you and your child's set of suggestions for how to address each issue.

What are the alternative options?

Your child has the right to an education, and if you and your child are convinced that they cannot access their education on the terms the school are offering, it may be worth exploring alternative options such as a different school, alternative education provider, home tutor, online school or home schooling. Your child's school should be able to discuss these options with you, and advise you as to how to access these.

How to access further support

If you feel like a referral for support from external agencies is necessary, there are three ways to do this.

1. Ask your GP to make a referral. Depending on your child, they may need mental health support or support from the Children with Additional Needs Team. The GP will likely do a SPACE (Single Point of Access to Children's Emotional Wellbeing) referral, where a range of organisations discuss who is best suited to match the needs of the young person. Alternatively, the GP may refer directly to the required service.
2. Complete a SPACE referral yourself – details for how to access the form are here...

[Urgent advice/self-referral to SPACE Wellbeing :: Healthier Together \(cymru.nhs.uk\)](https://www.cymru.nhs.uk/urgent-advice/self-referral-to-space-wellbeing)

3. Make a direct referral to the service you feel you or your child most need. Charities such as Newport Mind have their own referral form which can be accessed at the bottom of the following webpage:

[Children, Young People and Family Services - Newport Mind](#)

Signposting

For your child:

- GP
- SPACE Wellbeing Panel
 - [Urgent advice/self-referral to SPACE Wellbeing :: Healthier Together \(cymru.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/healthier-together)
- Newport Mind Children, Young People and Families services
 - [Children, Young People and Family Services - Newport Mind](#)
- Childline
 - 0800 1111
 - www.childline.org.uk
- Young Minds
 - www.youngminds.org.uk
- Meic
 - www.meiccymru.org
 - 080880 23456
 - Text 84001

For you as a parent

- Anna Freud
 - [Parents and Careers | Advice and Guidance | Anna Freud Centre](#)
- GAVO
 - [GAVO Newport Parent Network](#)
 - Detailed resource developed by parents and caregivers of neurodiverse children

- [Supporting Your Neurodiverse Child](#)
[\(sendtherightmessage.co.uk\)](#)

For your own mental health

- GP
- Newport Mind
 - 01633 258741
 - [www.newportmind.org](#)
 - [Our Services - Newport Mind](#)
- Samaritans
 - 116 123
 - [www.samaritans.org](#)