



Oxfordshire Educational Psychology Service

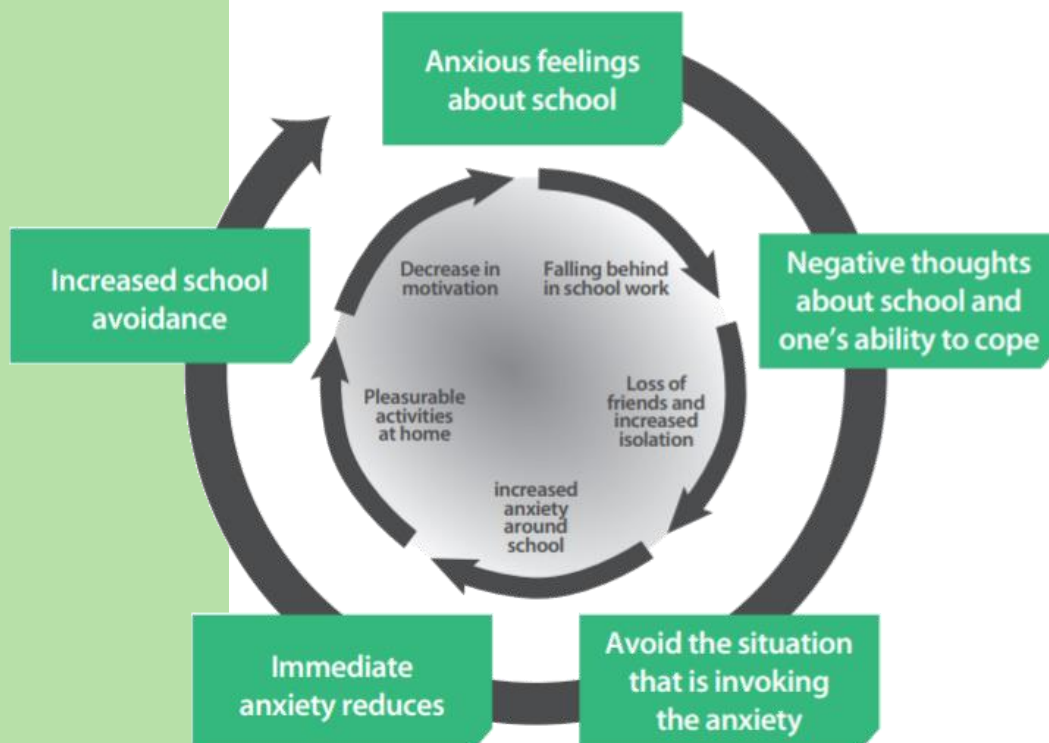
Supporting your child with anxiety about school

– *Parent/Carer Guide*

Many children and young people will be worried about things in school from time to time. For some, this can result in periods of absence from school which can impact learning, relationships and wellbeing. Schools may refer to this as EBSA (Emotional Based School Avoidance). It is important to work with school to find the right support for you and your child.

What can cause school anxiety and avoidance?

It is likely that there is more than one cause. It may be related to their school (e.g. bullying, transition, unmet learning needs) home (e.g. bereavement, separation anxiety, change at home), or individual factors (e.g. self-esteem, confidence). The diagram below shows how difficulties can increase over time:



When to seek support

Recognising the early warning signs and communicating these with school can help prevent attendance issues getting worse. It is likely that you will start to see issues developing at home before school staff are aware of a problem. You might notice things like:

- Anxiety and fearfulness around attending school (particularly on Sunday evenings or in the mornings before school)
- Negative feelings and behaviours such as refusal, hiding, running away, hitting out
- Complaints of stomach pain, headache or other feelings of being unwell without the physical sign of illness
- Difficulty getting your child to school in the mornings

How you can help

First Steps (where issues are starting to emerge)

It is important to establish good communication with a key person in school, so attendance can be accurately monitored and recorded. School may want to explore the factors which encourage your child to school and those which are challenging to plan with you to increase attendance and reduce anxiety.

You could try the following steps with your child:

- Ask them what is worrying them, take their worries seriously and make it clear you can work together to make things better. Sometimes children find it hard to tell you face to face, perhaps you could ask them to write it down, email or text you. Some children also find it easier to draw how they are feeling
- Focus on positives with your child: What are the three best things about school? Who are the adults that they feel supported by?
- Think with them about any changes that could be made at home or school that would help them feel less worried about school
- Talk to a class teacher, head of year or pastoral member of staff. Keep that person up to date
- Keep notes or a diary about when your child is getting upset and look for any patterns
- Perhaps think about the journey to school and how this can be made easier for them e.g. a lift to school
- Build in opportunities to relax during the evenings (particularly Sunday evening)
- Plan a fun, family activity on a weeknight to help shift their focus from the school week
- Help them feel part of the school community by encouraging them to join a club at school or take on a special role, such as a library helper

- Keep to a regular routine, including regular bedtimes, with some screen-free time before bed and keep phones downstairs

Next steps (where there are concerns around attendance)

- Keep a regular morning routine that includes getting up in the morning even if your child is not currently attending
- Keep in touch with your link person at school – there should be a meeting to discuss issues and plan the next steps. Schools will make reasonable adjustments for your child to support them
- Talk positively about school
- Ask for academic work from school to be completed at home, if they can't manage academic work ask for a project they could do instead
- Think with the school about who in school could provide a link with your child, and how this will happen e.g. phone call, email or postcard on a regular basis
- If your child is at home during the school day provide a balanced structure to the day; opportunities to engage in calming, relaxing activities alongside more education orientated activities e.g. online learning, homework, or project work following the interests of your child
- Exercise is helpful, even if it is for a short walk. Try and establish regular times when you leave the house to go for a walk, go to the playground or visit friends and family
- Try and keep hobbies, clubs and activities that happen out of the school day going
- Focus on developing their feelings of wellbeing, look at the NHS website for details [Five Ways to Wellbeing](#)

Looking after yourself

As a parent or carer of a child with anxiety it is important to look after yourself. You may feel anxious too. Make sure that you have someone to talk to too. This could be a friend, family member or an organisation such as those listed below.



Further sources of support

Young minds: (<https://youngminds.org.uk>) [Supporting your child at school](#)

Oxfordshire CAMHS:
(<https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/camhs/carers/>) [Information for parents and carers](#)

Action for Children: (<https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/>) [Parent Support Line](#)