



Anxiety Based School Avoidance

Guidance for School Staff



STOCKPORT
METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

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This booklet has been adapted for Stockport from resources developed by the West Sussex Education Psychology Service. Stockport Family and Stockport Education Psychology Service are grateful to the West Sussex team for allowing us to use their resources.



Introduction

This guidance sets out procedures for schools to use when responding to children and young people who experience high levels of anxiety and have severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences from school.

Whilst there are many different emotional factors which may contribute to school avoidance and absence, this document refers to this broad range of factors as “Anxiety Based School Avoidance.”

Recent research shows that 1 in 8 children and young people aged 5-19 are likely to be experiencing a diagnosable mental health condition at any one time. This increases in frequency as young people get older (from 6% of pre-school aged children to 17% of 17-19 year olds). Emotional disorders – which include anxiety – are the most common group of mental health disorders experienced by children and young people.

In primary school aged children, we see similar levels of both behavioural and emotional disorders. Whilst behavioural disorders are more common in boys, emotional disorders affect boys and girls equally.

Amongst high school age pupils, emotional disorders are the most common type of mental health disorder – and girls are more likely to be affected than boys.

Anxiety disorders that begin in childhood and adolescence frequently persist into later life and can negatively impact quality of life. Similarly, childhood depression can threaten growth and development, school and social functioning, and has been shown to reoccur in adulthood. Depression has also been identified as the third largest contributor to the global burden of disease (WHO, 2008).

1.5% of all 5-19 year olds have a diagnosis of generalised anxiety disorder and research suggests that between 1% and 2% of the school population are affected by anxiety based school avoidance. This is much higher amongst certain groups of young people. For example, 18% of young people with special educational needs have a diagnosed anxiety disorder. The impact of this school avoidance is far reaching – it can impact academic attainment, social opportunities, employment opportunities and can be linked to poor mental health in adulthood.

This guidance is based on the current evidence base of the factors which are associated with positive outcomes. These include:

- intervening early.
- working with parents and school staff as well as the young person.
- working in a flexible manner paying attention to the individual case and function served by non-attendance.
- emphasising the need for rapid return to school alongside good support and adaptations within the school environment.



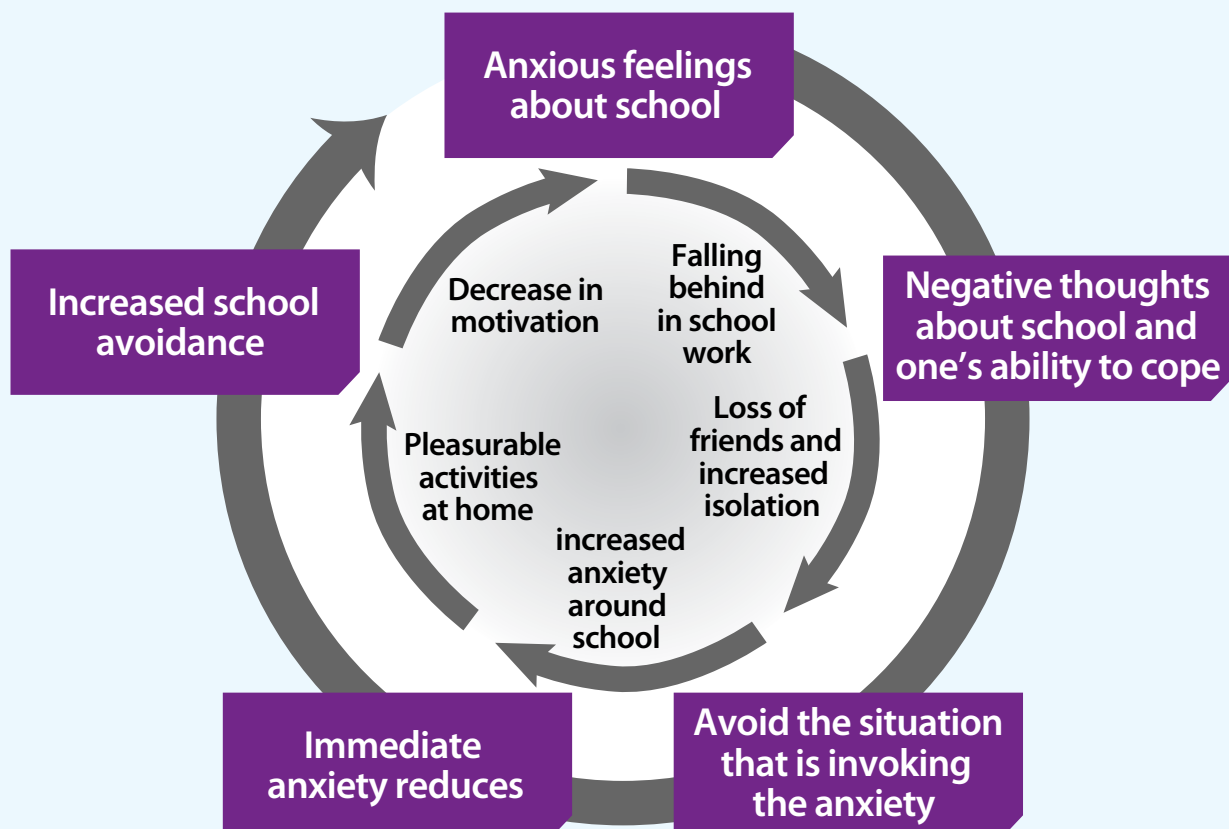
Anxiety and School Avoidance

Anxiety has been identified as a key feature of school avoidance. Although a certain level of anxiety is a normal and natural part of growing up, some young people may experience heightened levels of anxiety which impacts on their functioning and school experiences.

When the anxiety is linked to school avoidance, the young person may experience anxious and fearful thoughts around attending school and their ability to cope with school. These feelings may also be accompanied by physiological symptoms of anxiety such as nausea, vomiting, shaking, sweating etc, and may start the night before, or even a few days before school.

In order to avoid these overwhelming emotions and the fear associated with school attendance the young person may withdraw from the situation, refusing to get ready for school or to leave the house or enter the school. The young person may also turn to hostile behaviours as a means to avoid the threatening situation and to try to control what feels like a very 'out-of-control' situation.

These behaviours, and the avoidance of school, may then contribute to the maintenance of school avoidance over time. It is crucial to consider the child's perceptions of their ability to cope, including perceived social and academic competence, as negative thoughts about one's ability to cope can lead to further feelings of worry and if left unaddressed, may undermine attempts to improve attendance.



The impact of risk and resilience on school avoidance

School avoidance can be caused by many different factors. Different children will be hesitant to attend school for different reasons and it is usually caused by a combination of various factors and their interaction rather than one single factor.

Risk

Just as with general mental health, there are certain factors that place children at greater risk of anxiety and resulting school avoidance. Usually, there is a combination of predisposing factors, which interact with a change in circumstances, leading to school avoidant behaviour. The predisposing factors may be present in the nature of the school, the child's family or the child themselves.

The exact nature of these vulnerabilities and events will vary from child to child. However, we can identify factors and potential triggers that may lead to school anxiety and avoidance. Being aware of these factors in relation to a child's absence from school can act as an early warning system, enabling the school and family to take preventative action.

Risk factors linked to school anxiety and avoidance

School Factors	Family Factors	Child Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bullying (the most common school factor)• Difficulties in specific subjects• Transition to secondary school, key stage or change of school• Structure of the school day• Academic demands / high levels of pressure and performance orientated classrooms• Transport or journey to school• Exams• Peer or staff relationship difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Separation and divorce or change in family dynamic• Parental physical and / or mental health problems• Overprotective parenting style• Dysfunctional family interactions• Being the youngest child in the family• Loss and Bereavement• High levels of family stress and / or family history of school anxiety and avoidance• Young carer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Temperament• Reluctance to interact and withdrawal from unfamiliar settings, people or objects• Fear of failure and poor self confidence• Physical illness• Age• Learning Difficulties, developmental problems or Autism Spectrum Condition if unidentified or unsupported• Separation Anxiety from parent• Traumatic events



Protective Factors / Areas of Resilience

It is important to identify and build areas of strength or resilience of the child, family and in the school that may help to protect the child and promote school attendance.

This may include:

- Developing ambition, aspiration and motivation.
- Increasing confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, value in themselves.
- Developing feelings of safety, security and a sense of belonging.
- Having positive experiences where they can succeed.
- Holding positive relationships with peers or staff.
- Feeling listened to and understood.
- Understanding the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviour.
- Willingness to work in partnership between school, family and external professionals.
- Developing parenting skills and understanding.
- Flexibility of approaches within school.
- Person-centred listening to the voice of the child.

Not all children exposed to risks develop mental health difficulties. Resilience is the ability to cope and thrive despite facing setbacks in life. Some children are naturally more resilient than others, but it is a skill that can be taught. For example, having the ability to stay calm can be particularly 'protective' when children are faced with difficulties.

Children are not on a level playing field when it comes to exposure to risk, and resilience is not infinitely elastic. It can be tested when children face multiple 'snowballing' stresses and risks in their lives.

For this reason, the ability to cope and thrive is not just about children learning skills, but is also about how the adults in children's lives - in their schools and communities - take action to offset the family and environmental factors and barriers that can undermine children's ability to flourish.



Potential indicators of anxiety related school avoidance

It is important to be proactive with anxiety related school avoidance. The longer the problems remain unaddressed the poorer the outcome, as the difficulties and behaviours become entrenched. Schools need to be vigilant in monitoring attendance of young people noticing any patterns in non-attendance or changes to behaviours.

Possible indicators include:

- Difficulty attending school with frequent short and sporadic or prolonged absences.
- Child reluctant to leave home and stays away from school with the knowledge of the parent / carer.
- For younger children, reluctance to leave parents or get out of the car.
- Regular absence without indication of anti-social behaviours.
- Frequent absences for minor illnesses.
- Patterns in absences, for example, particular days and / or subjects, after weekends and holidays.
- Reluctance to attend school trips.
- The young person expresses a desire to attend classes but is unable to do so.
- Anxiety on separation and inappropriate dependence on family members e.g. worry expressed about the safety of those at home.
- Evidence of under-achievement of learning potential.
- Social isolation and avoidance of class mates or peer group.
- Challenging behaviours, particularly in relation to specific situations at school.
- Severe emotional upset with excessive fearfulness, outbursts of temper and complaints of feeling ill on school days.
- Depression and sense of isolation resulting in, low self-esteem and lack of confidence.
- Physical changes i.e. sweating, sickness, aching limbs, headaches, panic attacks, abdominal pain, rapid weight loss or gain.

Where significant risks are identified, the school should gather further information from the young person, parent and school staff involved with the young person and put into place strategies to support the young person as soon as possible.

Swift action can prevent school anxiety and avoidance from becoming entrenched and result in much better outcomes. School should use the Improving Attendance Plan documentation (see Appendix 4), placing the young person at the heart of the planning and interventions.

A list of contributory factors to anxiety related school avoidance can be found in Appendix 1. This can help practitioners identify key areas of risk. This checklist is for use alongside the usual attendance monitoring systems in school, to screen for possible school anxiety in relation to non-attendance.



Responding to the issue – steps for schools to take

Once a difficulty has been identified there should be a prompt investigation into the reasons for the difficulties. In order for any intervention to be successful it is essential to understand the various aspects causing and maintaining the school avoidant behaviours.

The main aims of this process are to:

- Confirm that the child is displaying anxiety related school avoidance as opposed to truancy or parentally condoned absence.
- Assess the extent and severity of (a) school absence, (b) anxiety and (c) ascertain the types of anxiety.
- Gather information regarding the various child, family and school factors that may be contributing to the school anxiety and avoidance in a given child.
- Integrate the available information so that the school can plan and implement effective solutions.

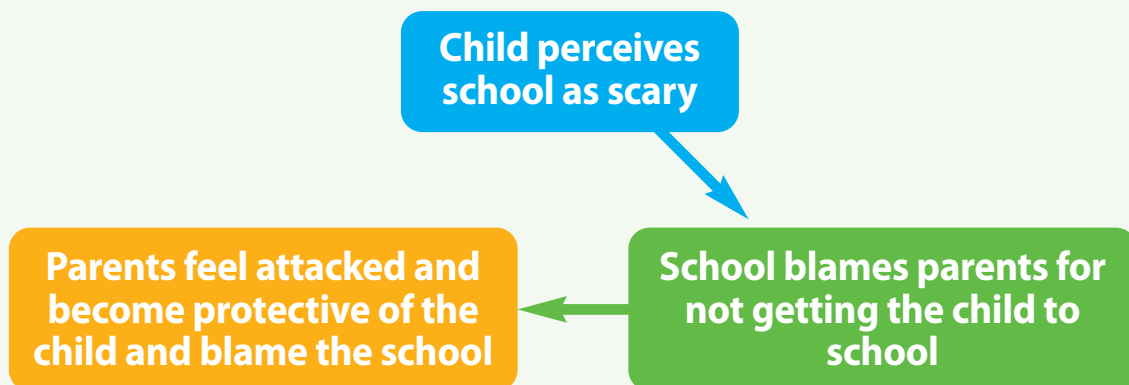
It is often tempting to try to locate a simple reason and simple solution for the behaviour.

School staff may feel that a referral to Healthy Young Minds, or a tougher parental attitude is all that is needed.

A parent may feel that the school needs to provide more support.

A young person may feel that changing class or school will be the solution.

However, school anxiety and avoidance is often caused by a number of factors interacting together and may require a variety of measures to improve the situation. Trying to find a simple cause often encourages blaming, which can then make individuals become anxious and defensive. Parents may feel blamed for the absences, feel that their parenting skills are being criticised and they may be fearful that they will get into trouble or even prosecuted for nonattendance. Children may feel guilty, or feel scared that they will be forced to attend school.



Each person involved may have a different perspective and have a different story to tell. It is essential that people's views are respected and differences in views are acknowledged. When there is a difference of views it is often more helpful to focus on *how* the behaviour is occurring rather than *why*.



Step One – Understanding the child's view

Any child currently avoiding school will become anxious when asked to discuss returning. They currently manage feelings of anxiety by employing the avoidant behaviour of not going to school, so any talk about going back to school is going to raise their anxiety as you are proposing to take away their way of coping with their fears.

A good place to start any assessment with a young person is to acknowledge it may be difficult but you would like to know what they think and feel. It is important that the adult does not dismiss anxieties or worries the child has. Empathise with the young person but do not collude or promote school avoidance.

The approaches taken will depend on the child's age, level of understanding and language.

Even if they are able, often children find it difficult to verbalise what they are thinking and feeling and they may prefer to draw what they are feeling or have visual prompts.

Some example activities or questions could include:

Think about your thoughts and feelings about school and what these would look like if they could be drawn?

It also helps to externalise the anxiety:

- What name would you give the feeling that you experience when you think about going to school?
- If it was a thing, what would it look like? What would it say?
- How does the get in the way of you attending school? When is in charge and when are you in charge?

Ask them to draw how their body feels when they are worried.

Use an anxiety thermometer or a scale to ask the child what aspects of school they find difficult.

Some areas to consider include:

- The physical environment e.g. toilets, corridors, assembly hall.
- Times of the day or social interactions e.g. arriving at school, play and break-times, lining up to go into school or classroom, lunchtimes, going home, changing for PE.
- Particular lessons or activities within lessons e.g. writing, working as part of a group, reading aloud, verbally answering a question.

This guidance is accompanied by booklets for young people and for parents / carers which may help prompt discussion on these issues.



Step Two – Understanding the parents’ or carers’ views

Parents may find it difficult to talk about the concerns they have and the difficulties they experience in trying to get their child into school. It is important that the school takes time to build a collaborative partnership working together in the best interest of the child. Sometimes parents may have had similar experiences to their child and may experience their own anxiety, making it especially difficult for them.

During the initial stages, it is important to gather background information, establish the current situation and the parents’ or carers’ views. Questions should be sensitive and the person asking should employ active listening skills and use a restorative approach. The school should keep in regular contact with the parent / carer and should identify a key member of school staff who will do this.

Working with parents is essential to successful outcomes. While the focus is on the child, it is also important to remember that parents may need their own support. It may be advisable to discuss the family at your regular Team Around the School meeting if you think that the family may benefit from additional support. More information about local support and services can be found in the Resources section of this document.

Areas to cover

Developmental and educational history	What was s/he like as a young child? Can you tell me about their early experiences at school? The primary school, at the start of secondary school?
Strengths, interests and aspirations	What is s/he good at? What do they like doing? Do they have any hopes for the future? Do they know what they want their life to be like when they are an adult?
Any potential changes or losses within the family or child’s life	Can you tell me about your family? Who is in it, who is like whom? Who is s/he closest to? Have there been any changes within the family recently? (You could ask them to draw a family tree / genogram).
Relationships	Does s/he talk about any other children? What does s/he say? Does s/he talk about any adults within school? What does s/he say? Who does s/he get on with...who doesn’t s/he get on with?
Academic progress	School should be aware if the young person has identified SEN needs and should ask about these needs and the support in place. If there is no identified SEN school should ask if they have any concerns, or if the child has spoken about difficulties.
The child’s view: what are their specific fears / worries	Has s/he spoken to you about what s/he finds difficult about school? What do they say?



The child's views: what is going well in school?	Has s/he mentioned anything that is going well in school? (e.g. teachers, lessons, friends)
Behaviour and symptoms of anxiety	When s/he is worried what does it look like? What do they say they are feeling?
Typical day – when they go to school and when they don't go to school	Please describe a typical day from getting up in the morning until going to bed – on a school day and on a day when the child does not go to school. What do other family members do?
Impact on various members of the family	How does their non-attendance impact on you? And on other family members? Who is better at dealing with the situation? Why?
Parental views on the reasons for the school anxiety and avoidance	Why do you think s/he has difficulty attending school? (ask each parent separately) If (other parent / sibling / grandparent) were here what would they say? Are there any differences of views about the reasons and what should be done within the family?
Exceptions to the problem	Have there been times when s/he managed to get into school? What was different about those times?
Previous attempts to address the problem	What has been the most helpful thing that someone else has done in dealing with the problem so far? What has helped in the past when things have been difficult? What strategies have been most helpful so far in managing their anxiety?



Step Three – Gathering additional information from other professionals

It is essential that representatives from schools seek information from members of staff who work most closely with the child or young person. We all respond differently according to the environment, situations or task and with different people. Each member of staff may have valuable information to help identify triggers for anxiety and strategies the young person responds positively to.

In particular it is important to seek out the views of any members of staff the young person speaks positively about and any member of staff where relationships may be more difficult.

If other professionals are working with the young person (such as school nurses, Jigsaw or Behaviour Support staff), the member of school staff leading on this process should liaise with them to gather relevant information.

Key information to gather includes:

- The young person's strengths.
- What is going well.
- Any difficulties they have noticed.
- Peer relationships.
- Relationships with adults.
- Response to academic tasks.
- If they have witnessed emotional distress, what did this look like and what caused it?
- What support or differentiation is put in place and how the young person responds to this.
- Any ideas for further support.

It is also essential to consider whether the child has unidentified special educational needs, medical needs or a disability. If they are not already involved, school staff should consult with the school's special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and School Nurse.

Appendix 2 provides a template form for use in gathering relevant information from other relevant professionals.



Step Four - Interpreting the information and planning a way forward

Once the school has gathered together information from the child, family, school and any other relevant professional, the school needs to interpret the information gained. This will give an overview of the situation, show which factors are involved and should suggest a way forward. This information will then inform the development of the Improving Attendance Plan.

The form below is designed to help you integrate the information gathered from the young person, school and family. It is not a questionnaire but a tool to be completed after the information gathering to help you collate, integrate and analyse the information gathered from a variety of sources.

Where required, schools may find it helpful to discuss the way forward with their Educational Psychologist.

Description of behaviour

- What is the current rate of attendance?
- Are there any patterns to non-attendance? Particular days or lessons?
- History of behaviour: when did it first occur, have there been similar difficulties?
- Behaviour and symptoms of anxiety – what does it look like?
- What does the child say about any specific fears and difficulties?

Risk factors – school, child and family

- Developmental and educational history (health, medical, sensory or social factors)
- Any changes in family dynamic? (Separation, loss, birth of a sibling, health issues of other family members)
- Any other needs within the family?

Strengths and protective factors

- What strengths do they have?
- Do they have any aspirations or ambitions?
- What positive relationships do they have at home and at school (peers and staff)?
- What positive experiences have they had at school?
- What was different about the times when the young person was able to get into school?
- What has been helpful in the past?

Formulation and integration of factors

- What is people's understanding of why the young person is demonstrating these behaviours?
- Are there any differences of views?
- What risk factors have been identified (child, school and family)?
- What strengths have been identified that can be built upon?



What is the function of the behaviour – is it:

- To avoid something or situations that elicit negative feelings or high levels of stress (e.g. fear of the toilets; the noise in the playground; lots of people moving all together in the corridors between classes, tests / exams).
- To escape difficult social situations (e.g. feeling left out at playtime; reading out loud in class or other public speaking / group task; working as part of a group).
- To get attention from or spend more time with significant others (e.g. change in family dynamic, concerned about the wellbeing of parent).
- To spend more time out of school as it is more fun or stimulating (go shopping, play computer games, hang out with friends).
- Are there any maintaining factors?



Step Five - Action Planning using the Improving Attendance Plan documents

After the information gathering and analysis has taken place, an Improving Attendance Plan and a Pupil Support Plan should be made. See Appendix 4 and 5 for sample versions of these plans.

All plans need to be co-produced with parents, the child and any other appropriate agencies.

Each plan will be different according to the actions indicated by the assessment. What worked with one child will not necessarily work with another.

The plans should always be realistic and achievable with the aim of reintegrating the young person. An overly ambitious plan is likely to fail. The return should be gradual and graded and needs recognition by all that a 'quick fix' is not always possible.

A part time timetable may be necessary as part of this process but this should always be temporary and not seen as a long-term option as all children are entitled to a full time education. All part time timetables should be completed in partnership with the parent / carer(s) and pupil, have a clear review date and be reported to the Local Authority via the Education Welfare Team.

Everyone involved should be aware that there may be difficulties implementing the plan and these should be anticipated and solutions found. An optimistic approach should be taken. If the child fails to attend school on one day, start again the next day. Parents and school should anticipate that there is likely to be more difficulty after a school holiday, period of illness or after the weekend.

At the start of the plan the child is likely to show more distress and all should be aware of this. School staff and parents need to work together to agree a firm and consistent approach. Any concerns about the process should not be shared with the child and a 'united front' is recommended. Any concerns should be communicated away from the child.

Schools should take an individual and flexible approach to the young person's needs. All school staff who will come into contact with the young person should be aware of the return to school plan and any adaptations to normal routines or expectations that are in place to support the child.

Once actions on a support plan are agreed with a young person, e.g. returning to school in very finely graded steps, stick to what has been agreed for that week, even if things seem to be going really well, as pushing things further than agreed can heighten anxiety, reduce trust and backfire overall.

There are key elements of support that should be in place in order for the Improving Attendance Plan to be successful. These are:

- Direct telephone contact between parent / carers and key workers in school. Agree expectations regarding frequency of contact and set realistic response times.
- Early home visits, if appropriate, to discuss the young person's reluctance to attend school.
- All parties to agree to actions and keep to them until the next review period.
- A personalised programme for each young person. (E.g. flexible timetable, arrangements for transport, buddying and provision of a safe haven).
- Ensuring the young person has access to an identified member of staff to check in with and who can be approached if anxiety becomes temporarily overwhelming in school (i.e. a key worker).
- Ensuring all staff (including supply staff) are informed about the young person's difficulties, particularly during changes of classes / key stages.



- Identifying a safe place or base in school that the young person can go to if needed.
- Considering whether the Improving Attendance Plan should be escalated to an Early Help Assessment and discussed at the Team Around the School.



Strategies schools can use to respond to anxiety based school avoidance

There are many strategies schools can use to support young people in overcoming their anxieties. The strategies you use should reflect the reason(s) behind the school avoidant behaviour. Schools can, of course, (and should) adopt these strategies as early as possible when a young person is struggling with anxiety.

Reason One: *I stay away from school to avoid situations that elicit negative feelings or high levels of stress (e.g. fear of the toilets; the noise in the playground; lots of people moving all together in the corridors between classes, tests / exams)*

Strategy One for dealing with negative feelings – Using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy tools

Any response designed to support a young person with anxiety should include learning about anxiety and worrying, how it affects our thinking, feeling and behaviour and how avoidance of the feared situation makes things worse.

Strategy Two for dealing with negative feelings – Using Anxiety Management techniques

The child should be taught anxiety management techniques such as relaxation and deep breathing. More information on relevant resources can be found in the Resource section of this document. The 'Mighty Moe' resource and 'Moodjuice Anxiety' resources will be of particular use here.

Strategy Three for dealing with negative feelings – Using Safe Spaces

School should consider the provision of safe spaces that pupils can go to, such as the pastoral zone or library, these may be less stigmatising for some pupils than learning support areas for some pupils.

Strategy Four for dealing with negative feelings – Using Graded Exposure (the Step Ladder approach)

There should be a gradual re-exposure to the school setting using an avoidance hierarchy created with the young person from least feared school situations to most feared. To create an anxiety / avoidance hierarchy, the young person can be asked to name situations (or shown cards representing possible fears) and asked to rank them in terms of how they feel about that situation or object from least worried about to most worried about. When thinking about next steps it is important to start with the item that causes the least amount of anxiety, helping them think about how they will cope with this situation and what support they will need.

When they have overcome this fear and consolidated this a number of times then they can begin to work their way up the hierarchy.

Examples of the Step Ladder approach can be seen in the Parents' booklet which accompanies this guidance and tips on using it can be found in the Avoiding School and Social Isolation online training course, detailed in the resource section.



Reason Two: *I stay away from school to escape difficult social situations (e.g. feeling left out at playtime; reading out loud in class or other public speaking / group task; working as part of a group)*

Strategy One for coping with social situations – Using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy tools

As above, interventions should include learning about anxiety and worrying, how it affects our thinking, feeling and behaviour and how avoidance of the feared situation makes things worse.

Strategy Two for coping with social situations – Using Anxiety Management techniques

The child should be taught anxiety management techniques such as relaxation and deep breathing. In addition the child should be taught social skills and given opportunities to practice coping skills in real-life social and evaluative situations, starting small and building up to most challenging.

Strategy Three for coping with social situations – Providing additional support in school

There could be additional teaching of key work missed, buddying, peer-mentoring and role-playing what they are going to say when peers ask about their absence from school.

Reason Three: *I stay away from school to get attention from or spend more time with significant others (e.g. change in family dynamic, concerned about the wellbeing of parent).*

Strategies for use where absence is motivated by a desire to stay at home

In this situation, interventions would usually include work with care-givers supporting them to develop skills and techniques to:

- Manage the school avoidance behaviours such as tantrums or physical / somatic complaints.
- Establish morning routines.
- Use problem solving techniques.
- Establish positive and individual time to spend with the child outside school hours.
- Focus on positive behaviours.
- Limit the attention the child receives when they do not attend school.
- Establish rewards for when they attend school and, where appropriate, consequences if they do not.



Reason Four: *I stay away from school to spend more time out of school as it is more fun or stimulating (watch tv, go shopping, play computer games, hang out with friends).*

Strategies for use where absence is motivated by a preference for being out of school

In this situation, interventions would usually include:

- Increasing “rewards” for attendance and disincentives for nonattendance i.e. laptop time, access to internet, phone credit, time with friends in town etc.
- Limit the attention a child receives during non-attendance.
- If possible take away the more stimulating activity.
- Support their travel to and from school.
- Teach them how to refuse offers from peers.
- Make school as stimulating as possible, find out the child or young person’s interests and if possible apply this to the work completed in school.

Reviewing the use of these strategies

It is essential that any plan is regularly reviewed. There should be set dates for reviewing how any support plan is progressing and key personnel to attend should be identified. It is essential that the young people and parents are actively involved in the review.

The aim of the review is to identify and celebrate any progress made and consider whether further information has come to light to help inform clear next steps. These next steps can include:

- Consolidating and maintaining the current support plan.
- Setting new outcomes and or actions for the young person, school and parents.
- Identifying that further consultation with other agencies needs to occur which may, if necessary, lead to a referral to other services.

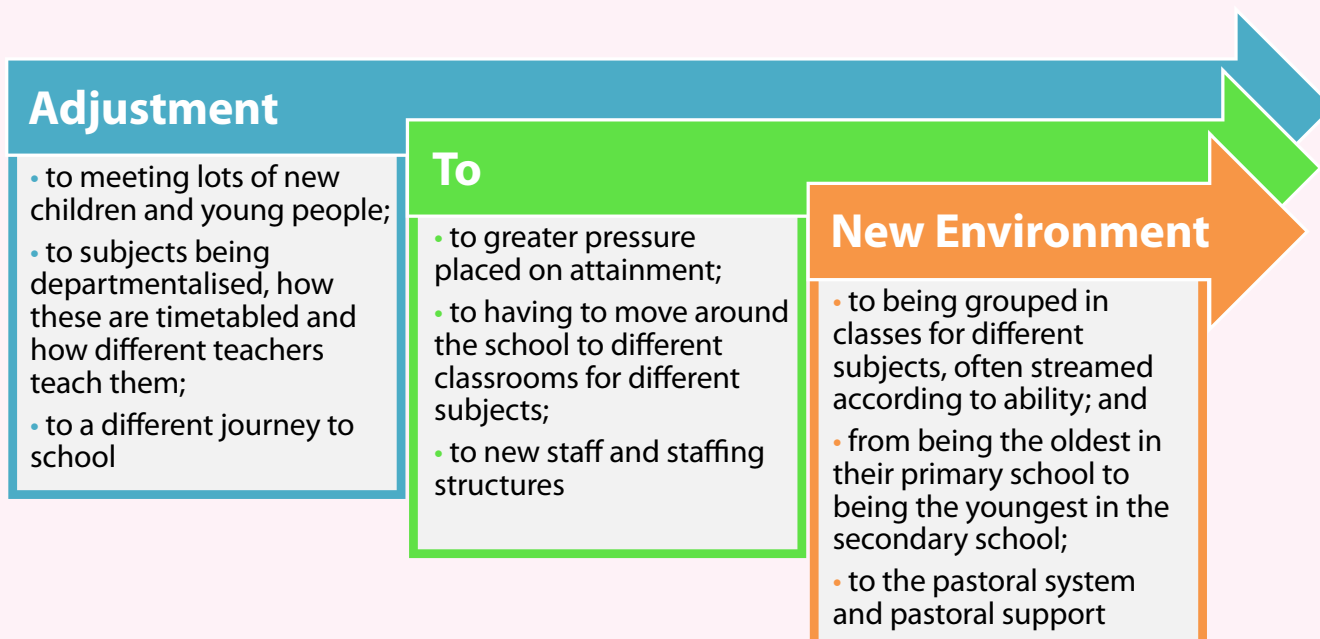


Anxiety, School Avoidance and Transition

School anxiety and avoidance often peaks at points of transition. This is not surprising as these transition phases are points of significant change for children and young people.



Successful transition involves the young person being supported to be able to make adjustments to fit in with their new environment.



Most children adjust to these changes over time. However young people who experience higher levels of anxiety or who have experienced loss and separation may be vulnerable to developing or experience an exacerbation of anxiety related school avoidant behaviours.

It is important that schools and parents provide appropriate support, that any vulnerable young people are flagged up early by the feeder school and that an individual approach is taken.

Good transition practice involves effective exchange of both pastoral and academic information from primary to secondary school. It is important for feeder schools to flag up any early separation difficulties and past school avoidance, even if the issues were mild and attendance is now fine.

We advise that secondary schools ask about this in their transition information gathering process.

Good transition also involves good communication with the young person and their parents. Key to this is giving young people and their parents practical information they will need to support the transition process.



Key information required		Practical support
The journey to school – how will he / she get there?	➔	Practice the journey to school and identify people who can accompany the child on the journey
Who are the key people in the new school?	➔	Give a simple structure chart, provide photos and identify a key person
School environment	➔	Layout of school – map, tour, quiz, colour code subjects to building areas
Structure of the day	➔	Provide timetables and explain how break and lunchtime work
Social time	➔	Identify how pupils will be helped to make new friendships and access supported social activities
Academic demands in lessons and for homework	➔	Give information about how lessons are structured and what homework expectations there are
Support systems	➔	Set out how pupils will be supported – create one page pupil profiles
Equipment needed	➔	Provide a checklist for each day

School staff should discuss with young people and their parents what they are looking forward to and what they are worried about. These concerns should be addressed individually. One way of doing this is to create 'What If' lists with young people.

For example:

What If I don't know where my classroom is:

- I will get my plan from my student planner and see if I can work it out
- I will try and ask someone in my class
- I will ask my teacher

What If someone calls me an unkind name:

- I will try and walk away and not shout or swear
- I will tell a teacher why I feel upset
- My teacher will help me and talk to that person

What If I have nothing to do at break-time:

- I could go to the library
- I could buy a snack and eat it in the dining hall
- I could find my buddy



Anxiety, School Avoidance and Autism Spectrum Disorders

Children with autism are more likely than their peers to experience anxiety and have poor stress management skills. Anxiety often worsens in adolescence as young people face complex social interactions and become more aware of their differences and interpersonal difficulties.

Schools will be aware that they are complex social environments that can be exhausting for children with autism. The energy taken to manage the social experience that is the school day can be overwhelming and lead to high anxiety levels.

Given the increased risk of children with ASD experiencing high anxiety that may lead to school avoidance, it is vital that they are given support to develop social skills, emotional literacy, resilience and self-regulation skills.

Anxiety levels for children with ASD can be reduced by adopting good practice and individualised support plans. Further details of good practice strategies can be found in Appendix 6.

All adults working with the child should:

- **Use the child's name before** delivering any instructions so that they cue into you speaking to them and recognise the instructions applies to them.
- Allow additional time for the child to process verbal information and instructions (at least **10 seconds**) and avoid repeating verbally within this time.
- If repetition of the information / instruction is necessary **use exactly the same wording** as initially used.
- Use **explicit, concise language** when addressing the child as this is likely to enable them to process the information correctly.
- Use **short simple instructions**. Give them in order that they are to be completed. Check for understanding. Ask the child to repeat them back to you.

Steps to Reduce Anxiety amongst Children with ASD

Step One

Ensure that all adults working with the child have an understanding of ASD and communicate appropriately and that adults have implemented general autism 'good practice' strategies e.g. the child uses and is engaged with a visual timetable, relevant visual supports, calm space etc.

Step Two

Key to the effectiveness of any intervention is having a sound understanding of the child's needs and how ASD specifically affects the child. Consider referral to the Autism team if this has not already happened.

Step Three

Plan and implement individualised, strategies to develop the emotional and social skills identified in step two. These may include those identified for children in previous chapters of the guidance or more specific strategies such as those included in the resources section.



Step Four

Review the impact of the interventions. It may be that, despite the good practice and interventions, the child's anxiety continues to increase placing them at risk of school avoidance, meaning that additional interventions are required.

Please note that the advice in previous chapters regarding Action Planning are also relevant here and should be followed.

If there are indications that the child is at risk of anxiety related school avoidance it will be important to build up a clear picture of exactly what elements of attending school are increasing their anxiety in order that best endeavours can be made to alleviate the anxiety.

Working with Parents of Children with ASD

Many parents of children with autism report that they notice their own emotions have an impact on their child's emotions and vice versa. Therefore, it is important to emphasise the need for school to build a collaborative partnership with parents in the best interest of the child.

In addition, the transactional nature of anxiety highlights the need for parents and carers to pay attention to their own mental health needs.



Anxiety Based School Avoidance, school attendance and the law

The Education Act 1996 places a legal duty on all parents to ensure that their child has an education. When this education is provided in a school setting parents must ensure their child attends regularly.

If the parent is unable to ensure this they can be held accountable for an offence under S.444 Education Act 1996; failure to secure the regular school attendance of a child. The term regular has recently been defined to mean 'as prescribed by the school'. For the majority of pupils, this means attending school full time. Any unauthorised absence is therefore irregular attendance.

As with any law, the parameters are firm and the Education Act 1996 goes further as the principle school attendance offence under section 444(1) Education Act 1996 is one of strict liability. This means there are only certain permitted defences the parent can use for their child missing school. One such defence is the child was unfit to attend school due to ill health. The parent must prove this to be the case. Only a Head Teacher can authorise absence from school. They may request supporting medical evidence from the parent which shows the pupil is unfit to attend school.

This request is often made to avoid the matter moving into a legal process. Medical evidence can include appointment cards; prescriptions, reports from medical professionals etc. The weight and value of the evidence is one for the Head Teacher to consider in their decision making of whether an absence is to be authorised or not.

When unauthorised absence occurs persistently, dependent on the length and reason for the absence, the school has the option to make an enforcement referral to the Local Authority via Education Welfare. This team discharges the Local Authority's statutory duties associated with school attendance.

On receiving the referral, Education Welfare will consider the background circumstances of the case in order to decide whether enforcement is appropriate or whether some other type of intervention by the school or a different local authority service should be attempted. If enforcement is felt to be appropriate consideration is given as to whether this should take place via the Education Penalty Notice route, or whether the case should be allocated to an officer for face-to-face work via the Parent Contract process.

If the case is felt suitable for the Education Penalty Notice route, the parent(s) is sent a Formal Warning which gives them an opportunity to improve the attendance over a 15 school day period. If there are any unauthorised absences in the 15 day period a fine of £60 will be issued. This process is suitable for less complex cases where the barriers to improved attendance are not thought to be significant.

For more complex cases, or where there is a long-standing history of attendance problems in the family, it is likely that the case will be allocated to a member of the Education Welfare team to undertake the Parent Contract process. This process provides a framework for case-working via a series of formal meetings and agreements involving the parent, the Education Welfare team member, representatives of the school and in some cases the child themselves. Where attendance does not improve during this process, it is likely that the case will proceed to prosecution, particularly where it is felt that the parent has not fully engaged with the process. The decision to prosecute is taken at a Legal Planning Meeting at which the casework is reviewed and consideration given to any possible defences or other background issues which might affect whether prosecution is in the public interest. Consideration is also given to whether an application for an Education Supervision Order should be made.



Where the parent has been prosecuted previously, consideration will be given as to whether the parent should now be prosecuted for the more serious, potentially imprisonable, aggravated offence under section 444(1A) Education Act 1996.

A prosecution will also be commenced where an Education Penalty Notice has been issued but has not been paid, subject to consideration of any potential defences and public interest issues.

For schools with young people experiencing school anxiety and struggling with attendance, it is the Head Teacher's decision whether to authorise absence or not. If a school decides to refer a student to Education Welfare, the expectation would be that the school will have tried an array of strategies to encourage and support the young person's attendance such as those as outlined in this document as well as requesting any supporting information from medical professionals.



Anxiety Based School Avoidance and Requests for Education Health Care Needs Assessments

Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) are for children and young people who have a special educational need or disability that cannot be met by the support that is available from within the school or college setting's own resources. Most children and young people with special educational needs will have help given to them without the need for an EHC Plan at the SEN support level.

In some cases children who display school avoidant behaviours may have underlying special educational needs and require support above the SEN support level. In this case it may be considered appropriate for an application for an EHCP to be made.

In order to be able to decide whether an assessment should occur the Local Authority will need to see evidence that the school or college have taken appropriate action and there is evidence that the child or young person has not made adequate progress or has only made progress because of a very high level of support.

We expect that all schools will be aware of and adhere to the Stockport Entitlement Framework for Special Educational Needs.



Resources

Books to use with young children

- The Goodnight Caterpillar: A Relaxation Story For Kids by Lori Lite
- Huge Bag Of Worries by Virginia Ironside
- The Koala Who Could by Rachel Bright
- Silly Billy by Anthony Browne
- Owl Babies by Martin Wadell
- How To Catch A Star by Oliver Jeffers
- A Boy And A Bear: The Children’s Relaxation Book by Lori Lite
- Starting School by Janet and Allan Ahlberg
- Halibut Jackson by David Lucas
- Giraffes Can’t Dance by Giles Andreae

Online Resources to use with children and young people

- Mighty Moe - an anxiety workbook for children aged 5-11.
<http://www.cw.bc.ca/library/pdf/pamphlets/Mighty%20Moe1.pdf>
- Worksheets for children, parents and teachers on tackling anxiety.
<https://www.anxietybc.com/parenting/worksheets>
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Skills Training Workbook, produced by Hertfordshire Partnership NHS.
<http://inabook.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/CBT-workbook-good-to-use.pdf>
- Worksheets and activities for young people (from the book Anxiety, by Paul Stallard).
http://documents.routledge-interactive.s3.amazonaws.com/9780415372558/stallard_web_pages.pdf
- Anxiety workbook for young people and adults.
<https://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/anxiety.asp>

Websites and resources to support school staff

- Free online training is available on the Mind Ed website – the courses “The Worried Child” and “Avoiding School and Social Isolation” are particularly relevant. The Avoiding School and Social Isolation course includes sections on relaxation and breathing exercise and on using graded exposure – strategies that are recommended in this guidance.
www.minded.org.uk
- The MIND guide to anxiety and panic attacks – this details the different types of anxiety disorders and looks at treatment options.
https://www.mind.org.uk/media/1892482/mind_anxiety_panic_web.pdf
- Mentally Healthy Schools brings together quality-assured information, advice and resources to help primary schools understand and promote children’s mental health and wellbeing.



<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/>

- Schools in Mind is a free network for school staff and allied professionals which shares practical, academic and clinical expertise regarding the wellbeing and mental health issues that affect schools.

<https://www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/schools-in-mind/>

- The Academic Resilience Approach Resources Directory provides free, practical resources to help the school community support pupils in developing academic resilience.

<https://www.boingboing.org.uk/academic-resilience-resources-directory/>

Support for Young People

- Top tips for building confidence and developing self-esteem.

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/feelings-emotions/building-confidence-self-esteem/>

- On My Mind aims to empower young people to make informed choices about their mental health and wellbeing. The website has been co-produced by young people to help other young people.

<https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/>

Stockport Services

School Nursing

The School Nursing team use protective screening and provide effective support for young people who are struggling with poor emotional health. School nurses run clinics twice a week in Stockport's secondary schools and provide support as required in primary schools.

Where anxiety is suspected or identified, schools can refer young people to the school nursing service for screening and support.

Behaviour Support Service (BSS)

BSS work with mainstream schools to: support schools in identifying pupils' specific needs, assist in managing children who present with a range of emotional and behavioural difficulties, support school leaders in adopting restorative approaches and effective whole school policies, provide training to school staff and parents and support parents and carers in working with their children.

Primary Jigsaw

Primary Jigsaw is a multi-agency mental health team working alongside Stockport's mainstream primary schools, Healthy Young Minds and other Stockport services. It sits within the BSS and its aim is to improve the emotional health and wellbeing of children experiencing difficulties in school, by offering support to the child, school and family.

Secondary Jigsaw and the Pendlebury Centre

Secondary Jigsaw is a multi-agency mental health team that provides 1:1 and small group interventions in Stockport's mainstream secondary schools. The service provides a range of training opportunities around social, emotional and mental health difficulties.

The Pendlebury Centre Pupil Referral Unit is a secondary provision for students with social, emotional and mental health difficulties.



The centre provides a Key Stage 3 and 4 therapeutic and assessment provision known as Cedars for those with high tier mental health difficulties. The centre is also responsible for the education of sick children with both physical and mental health problems aged 4 – 19 years and who are either too ill to attend school or are admitted into a hospital environment. KS3 referrals can be made direct from school. KS4 referrals require Educational Psychology or HYMS consultant endorsement.

Educational Psychology Service

Working alongside schools, families and any other agencies involved, the Education Psychology service can provide assessment in relation to possible underlying issues alongside advice regarding the best way forward. The Educational Psychology Service has a statutory role in the assessment and identification of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Schools can contact their named worker for advice and support.

Healthy Young Minds

Healthy Young Minds Stockport (HYMS) is the name given to the Specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in Stockport. HYMS is part of Pennine Care NHS foundation Trust and based at Stepping Hill Hospital. Referrals are currently accepted from General Practitioners, Children's Services, schools and school nurses. The team offer consultation, assessment and treatment for 5 to 16 year olds with significant and complex mental health difficulties who are registered with a Stockport GP. These include; moderate to severe depression, anxiety that is significantly impacting on their daily functioning, eating disorders, persistent self-harm, psychosis and neurodevelopmental disorders such as ADHD and ASD.

Speech & Language Therapy Selective Mutism Team

The Selective Mutism team work with children and young people (0-16) who are unable to speak in certain situations due to extreme anxiety around talking. Selective Mutism is a specific diagnosis which typically presents as speaking freely at home but being unable to speak at school or when out in the community. This service provides assessment, training and support for small-steps therapy programmes aimed at reducing anxiety and working towards communication in schools. Schools can make referrals by completing the developmental needs form and sending this to cypdisp@nhs.net

Stockport Self Help Services

They offer one-to-one support and structured courses for anyone experiencing common mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. It is available to Stockport residents aged 16 years and above. They also run a computerized CBT group for young people aged 11-18 – Living Life to the Full. Referrals and self-referrals can be made online.

<https://www.selfhelpservices.org.uk/service/stockport-psychological-wellbeing-service/>

Additionally, many Stockport schools have been trained to run the Living Life to the Full programme, Beacon Counselling can run groups and people can access the course for free online by going to www.stockport.lltff4.com and entering the code: Stockportph2015

Stockport Family

Stockport Family provides a range of services from Early Help to social care intervention.



Early Help

For access to Early Help, all schools in Stockport have a School Age Plus Worker and a school link social worker who can support schools in the co-ordination of the Team Around the School (TAS). The TAS can support schools in assessing need and allocating appropriate support to vulnerable pupils and families.

If immediate advice and support is needed on Early Help you can also contact the Early Help Assessment Co-Ordinator based at the Multi-Agency Safeguarding and Support Hub (MASSH).

Social Care

If you are concerned that a case has escalated and there are now safeguarding/child protection concerns you should complete a MASSH referral form, selecting the appropriate level of need. Go to: <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/contacting-the-massh>

Once received, this referral will be looked at by the First Response team manager and a decision made on how to proceed.

Prolonged School Absence

Where a pupil fails to attend school for 10 consecutive days (and where this absence is unauthorised) the school must complete a Stockport "Child Missing from School form" This is a digital form and once submitted will be assessed by an Education Welfare specialist in the MASSH.



Appendix 1

Possible Contributory Factors for Anxiety Based School Avoidance

There are five key areas that may be influencing an emotionally based attendance difficulty and these should be considered for each young person.

1) Loss and change	4) Social or Personal issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death of a parent, relative or friend • Death of a pet • Sudden traumatic event • Sudden separation from a parent • Moving house, school or area • Loss of a classmate • Illness of parent, relative or friend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being bullied • Seems to have few friends / friendship issues • English as a second language • Dislikes play / break times • Few leisure interests
2) Family Dynamic	5) Psychological Wellbeing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent parenting • Birth of new child • Parental separation • Parents arguing / fighting • Practical difficulties bringing the child to school • Jealous of sibling at home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often seems tired • Low self-esteem • Feels 'low' • Appears anxious • Keeps feelings to themselves • Has a pessimistic nature
3) Curriculum / Learning Issues	Other issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low levels of literacy • PE and / or games issues • General learning difficulties • Specific subject difficulties • Exam or test anxiety • Difficulties with a particular teacher / adult • Problems keeping up in lessons 	



Appendix 2

Template for Gathering Information from School Staff

[Name] is currently experiencing difficulties attending school which we feel may be due to emotional distress. We would like to gain a picture of how they are in school. As an adult who works with [Name] please complete the questionnaire below and return to:

[insert contact details here]

Your Name

Lesson / activity where you interact with [Name]

Please describe [Name]

What are [Name's] strengths?

What is going well for [Name]?

What does [Name] find difficult?

How does [Name] get on with their peers?

How does [Name] get on with you and other adults?



Is [Name] engaged and motivated with their learning. Are they making progress?
If not why not?

Have you observed any emotional difficulties at school, what have these been, when did / do they occur?

What is your understanding of [Name's] attendance problems?

What do you think would help [Name] in school?



Appendix 3

Summary from Information Gathering Process

Name	School Year / Class
Name of Key School Staff	
Other professionals involved	
Might this pupil have any additional or special educational needs that have not been identified?	
Current attendance and attainment level:	
Description of behaviour	
Risk factors – school, child and family	
Strengths and protective factors	
Formulation and integration of factors	
What is the function of the behaviour?	



Appendix 4

Improving Attendance Plan Documentation

The aim of the Improving Attendance Plan (IAP) is to reduce anxiety about school and improve attendance.

Before the meeting, draw together all relevant data gained during the information gathering process. You should also obtain a current print out of attendance and attainment data along with a reference copy of the young person's timetable.

This meeting is an opportunity to gather information about the young person; what support the young person needs; what is working and not working in their life at school and what can be done to support the young person in order for change to happen. The aim is to encourage the young person, their parents / carers and professionals to participate throughout the meeting.

1) Who should be invited?

- The young person.
- Parents / carers.
- Important people in the young person's life.
- Professionals who need to be there.

2) Before the meeting:

Complete the stages set out in the Anxiety Based School Avoidance guidance – consider all the possible contributory factors, seek information from the young person, parents / carers and relevant school staff.

3) At the meeting:

Flip chart paper should be put up on the walls with headings. Everyone should be asked to write their thoughts on the flip chart paper during the first part of the meeting. There should be someone there to help those who do not want to write things up themselves.

4) What are the headings?

- Who is here?
- What are 's strengths; qualities; achievements
- What is working well?
- What is not working well?
- What changes might be made and what support will be needed?
- Questions to answer and issues to resolve.
- Action plan.

5) What is the meeting format?

- Welcome and introductions.
- The process should be explained so that everyone understands what is happening.
- Ground rules should be agreed.
- Everyone should get up and write their comments on the flip chart paper.
- The group will look at the information and agree actions, detailing what, by when, by whom and where.
- A date and time for a review meeting and a list of invitees should be agreed.



Improving Attendance Plan

Meeting template

The aim of the Improving Attendance Plan (IAP) is to reduce anxiety about school and improve attendance.

At the meeting, have a current print out of attendance data and attainment data, a reference copy of the young person's timetable and a copy of all relevant data gained during the information gathering process.

School Name:	Meeting One – Date:
Name of pupil:	
Names of all attendees at this meeting	

What do you each feel you want to happen for this meeting to be worthwhile?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupil
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents / Carers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School

Refer to preparation papers and highlight any key points
Brief background and issues that may be affecting current attendance
Pupil achievements, academic strengths, personal qualities and attributes
Do you think the child has any additional or special educational needs?



1) Looking for underlying issues

To be completed by the young person (with a trusted adult if needed)

On a scale of 1 – 10, where would you rate the seriousness of the problem?

1 – not a problem or worry for me 10 – makes me very anxious

Knowing it is a school day, waking up, saying goodbye and leaving home

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Making the journey into school and / or being at the school entrance

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Sitting in lessons, understanding and completing the class work

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Sitting in lessons and seeing the behaviour of other children in the class

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Having free time at breaks and lunch times and playing with other children

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Going to assemblies and / or into the dining hall and / or going to the toilet

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Teachers: do they make you feel welcome and supported or anxious

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Use this space to write or draw any other school based worries you have:



2) Summary of student's views

- What works well for you in school?
- What is working less well for you in school?
- What changes could make a positive difference?

3) Summary of parent / carer views

- What works well for you in school?
- What is working less well for you in school?
- What changes could make a positive difference?

4) Summary of school's views

- What works well for the child in school?
- What is working less well for the child in school?
- What changes could make a positive difference?



5) What additional support is needed?

Could any of the following help?

- What could be done to make the journey into school feel better?
- Look together at the child's timetable - child may use red, amber and green to highlight difficult, OK and comfortable times in school day
- Could a 'buddy system' give some extra support?
- Can there be a 'safe haven' / special place to go in school?
- Is it possible for the child to have an 'exit card'?
- Who is the key member of school staff who will support the child / family?
- Could the child keep a daily log to track feelings for two weeks?
- What else might help, for example, mentoring sessions? Relaxation exercises?
- Which seating place is most comfortable for the child in each lesson?
- Is there a nurture group in school that could help?
- Would the child like the teacher to speak to the class before the return? If so, what will be said?
- How will the child answer questions about their absence?
- How will parents and school acknowledge and praise improving attendance?
- Ensure that work is prepared for times when the child is unable to be in class (to do in a quiet area / library)
- Do you need to refer on to another agency for support / advice?
- Would a reduced timetable or a later start / earlier finish be helpful?



6) Actions	By whom?	By when?
<p><i>Any agreed actions should be written up for the young person in the form of a support plan – see Appendix 5 for a template</i></p>		

7) Other notes:



Improving Attendance Plan

Review Meeting template

The aim of the Improving Attendance Plan (IAP) is to reduce anxiety about school and improve attendance.

At the review meeting, have a current print out of attendance data and attainment data, a reference copy of the young person's timetable, a copy of all relevant data gained during the information gathering process and a copy of the actions from the previous meeting.

Meeting number

Date of meeting

School

Name of pupil

Names of all attendees at this meeting

Looking at attendance patterns since initial plan was agreed – has there been a change?

Summary of progress, issues and points arising from initial Improving Attendance Plan:



1) Looking for underlying issues

To be completed by the young person (with a trusted adult if needed)

On a scale of 1 – 10, where would you rate the seriousness of the problem?

1 – not a problem or worry for me 10 – makes me very anxious

Knowing it is a school day, waking up, saying goodbye and leaving home

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Making the journey into school and / or being at the school entrance

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Sitting in lessons, understanding and completing the class work

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Sitting in lessons and seeing the behaviour of other children in the class

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Having free time at breaks and lunch times and playing with other children

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Going to assemblies and / or into the dining hall and / or going to the toilet

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Teachers: do they make you feel welcome and supported or anxious

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Use this space to write or draw any other school based worries you have:



2) Summary of student's views

- Where has there been some improvement?
- What has stayed the same?
- Where does there need to be more change or improvement?

3) Summary of parent / carer views

- Where has there been some improvement?
- What has stayed the same?
- Where does there need to be more change or improvement?

4) Summary of school's views

- Where has there been some improvement?
- What has stayed the same?
- Where does there need to be more change or improvement?



5) What additional support is needed?		
Which working well actions should continue from IAP number ___	By whom?	By when?
New actions	By whom?	By when?

6) What are the next steps?

- Consider whether an Early Help Assessment would be helpful to create a professional Team Around the Child and to signpost to other relevant agencies if appropriate.
-

7) Key recommendations	
	Exit process and monitor with school and home based actions
	School to complete an EHA and set up TAC meeting
	Other actions:



Appendix 5

Template Pupil Support Plan

Name	Year Group / Class
At school, these things can make me feel upset:	
My key adult(s) in school is / are	
When I can speak to my key adult: Where I can speak to my key adult:	
Until [date] my return to school plan includes the following changes to my attendance: <i>(identify any changes to days or time they come in)</i>	
Changes to my timetable include: <i>(identify any changes needs and what should happen / where they should go instead)</i>	
Any other changes include: <i>(identify any other changes to routines (e.g. break, lunch, changes between lessons etc.), classroom expectations (not expected to read aloud, work in pairs etc.) or homework)</i>	
When I start to get upset, I notice these things about myself:	



When I start to get upset, other people notice these things about me:

Things I can do to make myself feel better when I'm at school:

Things that other people (staff and friends) can do to help me feel better when I'm at school:

Things my family can do to support me to attend school:

Places in the school I can go where I feel safe and supported:

This plan will be reviewed regularly so that it remains helpful.
Review date:

My signature:

Key Adult's signature

Parent / Carer signature

Other people who can access this plan are:



Appendix 6

Strategies for Supporting Young People with Additional Needs, including Autism Spectrum Disorders

All adults working with student should be made aware of the following:

- Use student's name before delivering any instructions so that they cue into you speaking to them and recognise the instructions applies to them.
- Allow additional time for the student to process verbal information and instructions (at least 10 seconds) and avoid repeating verbally within this time.
- If repetition of the information / instruction is necessary, use exactly the same wording as initially used.
- Use explicit, concise language when addressing the student as this is likely to enable them to process the information correctly.
- Use short simple instructions. Give them in order that they are to be completed. Check for understanding. Ask the student to repeat them back to you.
- Do not insist on eye contact, for many students with autism this can be uncomfortable and in extreme cases even painful. Instead, consider agreeing a strategy with the student and all staff to enable them to indicate that they are listening.
- Be aware that direct answers from the student are often related to their literal understanding and lack of social awareness rather than due to rudeness.
- Ideally consider developing a pupil profile to share with all staff, including office staff and midday supervisors to ensure awareness of the above.

Classroom Strategies to consider:

- Ensure the student understands how to use their planner. Colour code information in the planner - including a map of the classrooms. This will lower the anxiety levels associated with ASD and enable the student to predict what is coming next.
- Be aware that clear explanation needs to be provided and supported visually where possible, to explain any unplanned changes of routine to the student in advance.
- Before transition points, e.g. starting a new subject, a new teacher or a new school year, prepare the young person for this using visual support such as pictures, visiting the classroom in advance, meeting the new teacher before a lesson etc.
- Ensure all information is passed on to new staff about how the young person communicates / what helps them specifically i.e. photos, symbols, written information etc.
- Use visuals, social stories and comic strip conversations to remind students of expected behaviours, classroom rules and routines for example and to help them communicate.
- Provide students with a set of symbol cue cards to help them quickly express distress / that the noise level is too high / the work is too hard etc.



- Provide an area of classroom free from busy displays and distractions. Try to keep the area around the whiteboard / IWB 'clutter free'.
- Wherever possible provide the student with a visual set of simple step-by-step instructions that they can use as a tick list. This will also support independence.
- It is common for young people with ASD to be resistant to writing. There are numerous skills involved in writing from retrieving ideas / memories to fine motor skills. Therefore, consider providing opportunities to complete learning objectives using alternative means of recording e.g. scribe, keyboard, audial recording etc.
- Consider the use of mind mapping software to support students through visual learning. Various packages are available. E.g. Inspiration 9 from Inspiration Software Inc.
- Consider allowing the student to achieve the learning objective through writing about their own interest instead of the topic under consideration.
- The student will benefit from being given a clear indication of the expected outcome of a task before they start i.e. what finished will look like. Set tasks with clear goals e.g. "Write 'x' number of sentences on" rather than "Write about..."; or the use of a green dot to indicate where the writing will start and a red dot where it will end or state the number of calculations etc.
- Prevent repetitive questioning or commenting during class discussion by giving the students a set number of cards (talk tokens) to give you each time they wish to contribute to discussion – when cards are gone, no more questions. Alternatively, use them to encourage participation from students who are reluctant to contribute.

Developing Social Understanding

- A small step target approach should be taken.
- Link any social target to a reward system that is personally motivating to the student.
- Develop the student's understanding of social rules and situations using Comic Strip.
- Conversations and Social Stories. These will help the student to begin to understand how other people feel in different situations and provide them with strategies to use.
- Consider including the student in a social skills group that uses explicit teaching of the skills required to achieve their social target e.g. Lego Therapy.

Managing sensory processing difficulties

Students with sensory processing difficulties often struggle with the basic skills of managing their responses to ordinary sensations, of planning and organising their actions and of regulating their attention and activity levels. They may present sensory-seeking or sensory-avoiding behaviour.

- Sensory activities should be timetabled into the student's day reflecting the needs identified in the sensory checklist.
- Timetable movement breaks during the day.
- Allow time out in a quiet area.
- Diminish background noise / use ear plugs.
- Use green and red cards for the student to show 'feeling ok' / 'leave me alone'.



- Provide handouts of what will be taught during the lesson and avoid unpredictability by setting out the lesson plan in writing or using symbols.
- Set clear time plans and expectations.
- Allow the use of fidget toys.
- Use deep pressure strategies – e.g. wear sportswear ‘skins’ under school uniform.
- Enable the student to leave the lesson five minutes early.

Self-regulation

- The student who has difficulties with self-regulation may have difficulty managing / moderating their behaviour, their emotions, their sensory reactions or the focus of their attention (cognitive self-regulation).
- It is important to observe students who have difficulties in self-regulation then begin working with them to develop strategies to manage their difficulty including traffic lights, scaling and self-advocacy.

Motivating the Student

- Use incentives based on an activity that is personally motivating to the student / their interests e.g. I.T. based activities / games, Dr Who, Lego.
- Use individualised reward systems e.g. collecting a number of points or ticks that achieve a personally motivating reward. Earned points / ticks should not be removed for poor behaviour. The collection of point / ticks should not be linked to specific periods of the day.



NOTES

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NOTES

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Anxiety Based School Avoidance

Guidance for School Staff

If you would like this information in an alternative format, please email communications@stockport.gov.uk

This booklet was produced by Stockport Family, part of Stockport Council.
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