

Successfully Managing Anxiety Information for schools

Understanding and managing fears and anxiety together
Introductory information about anxiety for schools

Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Who is this document for?	2
1. Understanding anxiety – A beginner’s guide	3
2. Addressing anxiety and worries	6
3. How can school staff help?	7
4. When worry and anxiety affects school attendance	11
<i>Possible TRIGGERS for anxiety affecting school attendance</i>	12
IDENTIFICATION	13
KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS – Working together	14
<i>How you can help</i>	15
5. Summary of suggested steps for schools in dealing with anxiety	18
6. Other professional roles and responsibilities for helping to tackle anxiety	19
7. Publications that offer support and guidance to schools on developing wellbeing and positive mental health	22
References	24
8. Internet resources for schools	25

Acknowledgements

With thanks to the following councils for allowing the use of their booklets:

- Northamptonshire County Council - “Anxiety – Tackling it together”
- North Somerset Council - “Emotionally Based School refusal”
- Somerset County Council - “Understanding Anxiety”

Thanks also to the authors of the many other electronic sites and resources mentioned in the text of this guidance.

Special thanks to the multi-agency anxiety project group that dedicated time and effort to its development. It included CAMHS workers, preventative services workers, public health and wellbeing staff and head teachers.

Who is this document for?

This document provides information on anxiety and school phobia for teachers and other professionals

1. Understanding anxiety – A beginner's guide

Fear, anxiety and worry are such a normal part of the human experience that we rarely stop to think about them; When we hear a sudden noise we feel startled; If we face a major decision most of us will fret about it. With these temporary anxieties we usually just keep going and don't generally stop to analyse what is happening.

In fact, lower levels of anxiety (or higher levels that are temporary) are useful to us. They cause our bodies to release a quick burst of the chemical adrenalin that produces extra energy, more muscle power and speeds our brain up. That can help us in things like school tests or escaping from physical danger.

When anxiety interferes with everyday life, especially socialising or going to school, people give it various names like 'anxiety disorder', 'social phobia', 'agoraphobia', 'school phobia' or 'anxiety based school refusal'.

Whatever we call it, it all comes down to having high levels of anxiety lasting a long time that are unhelpful and interfere with everyday life. These difficulties with anxiety are surprisingly common. Local information from the South Gloucestershire Online Student Survey (OPS) questionnaire (2014) captured the responses of 2398 students in Secondary schools and Further Education and 3753 students in Primary Education. It included a range of questions pertaining to stress and anxiety.

In Primary schools, the survey responses suggest that in an average class of 30 primary school students, six worry about going to school and between six and seven feel worried by school work.

In Secondary schools, survey responses suggest that in an average class of 30 secondary/Further Education students, 14 feel stressed about school/course work and, more broadly, 5 in 30 worry about going to school/college.

When anxiety moves beyond short-lived experiences and begins to interfere with everyday life, we need tools to understand what is happening. Section 1 mentions some tools that may be useful in dealing with anxiety.

Anxiety can be seen as having four main parts.

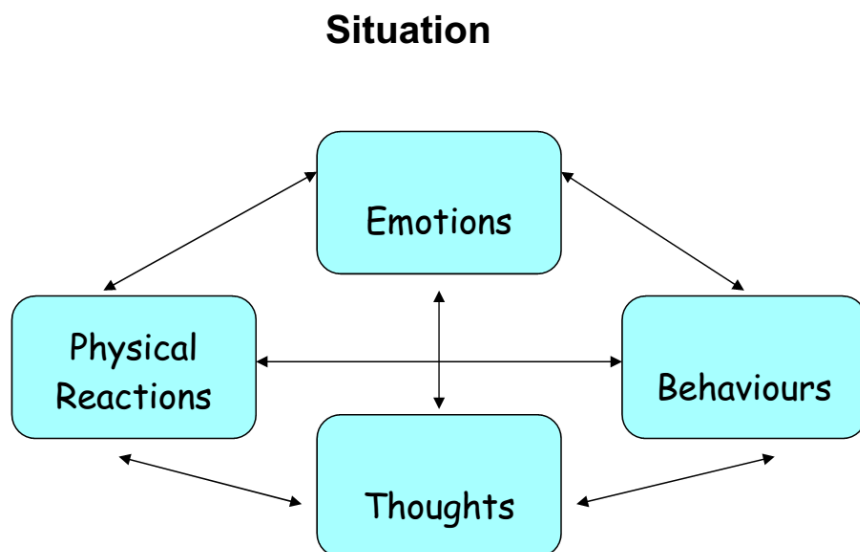
The first is **the emotional part**. This may be one of overwhelming fear. When dealing with anxiety it is also common to have feelings of anger, sadness, shame or guilt.

The second is the **physical part**. This includes feelings such as nausea, sweating, shaking, dry mouth and the need to go to the toilet.

The third is the **thinking part**: anxious thoughts. This may include detailed mental pictures of an awful event, or it may be a thought that the person cannot cope or isn't good enough.

What we do in response to these parts forms the fourth, the **behavioural part**. This includes everything from finding it difficult to speak to running away or self-harming.

When working with a young person who is anxious it is useful to see how these parts fit together.

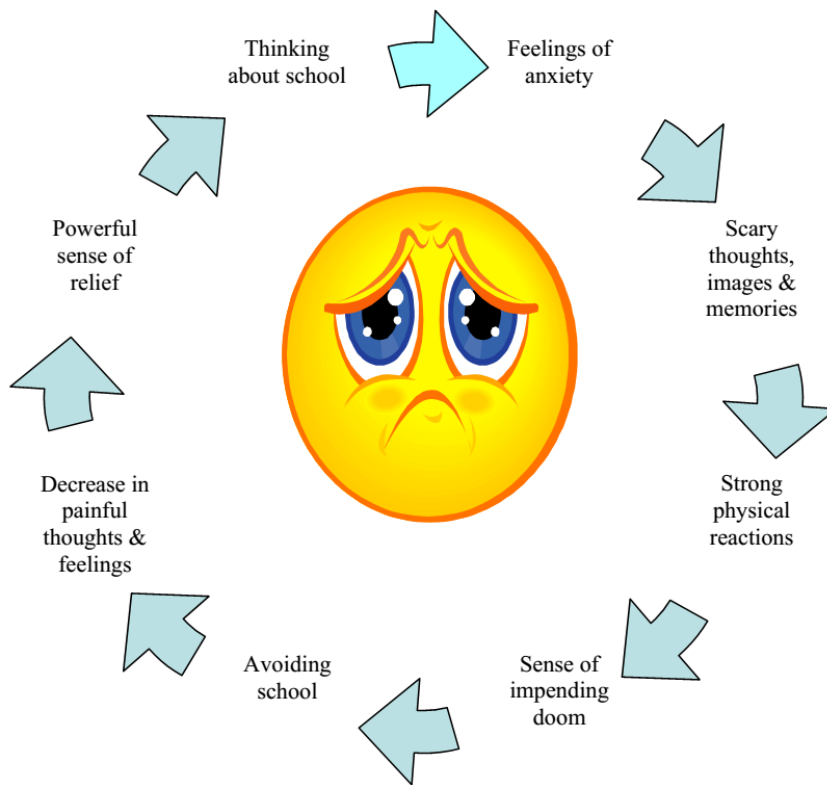


The thought of facing a situation, e.g. having to attend school, leads to feelings of fear (and possibly anger, sadness or shame). The young person experiences strong physical reactions, which could include very real physical pain. They may have lots of thoughts about all the awful things that could happen in school, often accompanied by an absolute conviction that they cannot handle it. This then leads to an active avoidance of the situation, e.g. school, or possibly even avoidance of any reminders of school.

Avoidance of the situation may reduce anxiety at that time, however, when faced with the same situation again, the anxiety will return and increase.

With a repeated pattern of anxiety these feelings often build up into a **vicious circle**. Parents and carers can also become increasingly anxious themselves as a result of the distress shown by their young person.

These patterns may vary somewhat from person to person, but it may look a little like this.



The vicious circle of

anxiety

Feelings of anxiety in a young person can be increased by things offered to demonstrate support for them. For example:

- **Parents/carers' own anxiety about their young person's situation**
- Other people around them minimising or dismissing the feelings relating to the anxiety
- Reassurance that inadvertently demonstrates that there really is something to be afraid of

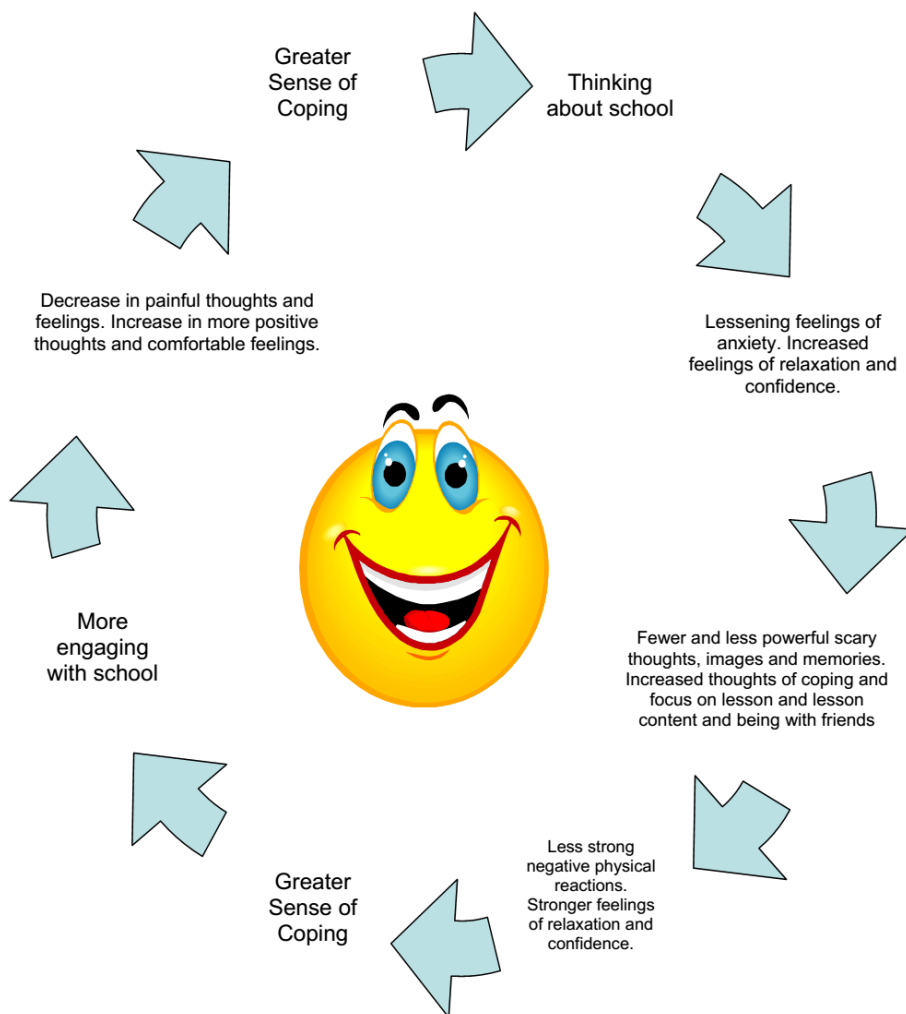
What is most important from this diagram is that **the sense of relief that comes from avoiding the situation** acts as a powerful re-enforcer for the avoidance of anxiety. The relief 'rewards' the avoidance behaviour while at the same time undermining the young person's belief in their ability to handle the situation. This can lead to a further vicious circle with anxiety increasing over time.

2. Addressing anxiety and worries

Successful work involves helping young people, their parents/carers, and others around them, to accurately investigate and assess the 'awfulness' of the situation. This means dealing with realistic concerns such as bullying, gently challenging fears that have grown out of proportion, and checking if the young person is over estimating the likelihood of the bad things happening.

It is also important to find ways to deal with these understandable anxieties. Furthermore, it is vital to ensure that strong feelings do not spill over into blaming the young person, parents/carers or the school for causing or maintaining the anxiety, as this will serve only to increase tensions and lead to the young person feeling more anxious.

Most important of all, it is vital to teach the young person and their parents/carers effective coping strategies to deal with any feared situations in school, or out. With these kinds of interventions and attitudes to anxiety, the previous vicious circle may be turned into the following preferred **coping circle**.



3. How can school staff help?

Children who are anxious may attempt to keep their discomfort hidden from view. They may be quiet and obedient in class and can therefore be easily overlooked. Nevertheless, they may be anxious about doing the wrong thing, about their schoolwork not being perfect and about social relationships. Worries about issues that arise outside of school may also interfere with their ability to concentrate in class or relate to others. The toll their worry takes in terms of physical and emotional costs, as well as interfering with social and academic functioning, is one that teachers cannot overlook.

Take the child's concerns seriously

Explore with the child, if they are able to, how are they managing, what they might be finding difficult and what they might need some extra help with. Try to be aware of how your own thoughts and feelings about the child and situation might be unintentionally communicated through your body language and what you say. Reassure and express confidence in the child's ability to overcome anxious feelings with the help of home and school. If it seems that they are overwhelmed, discuss and decide on some ways to reduce expectations for a defined period of time. However, maintain regular routines because these are often helpful.

Create a positive classroom environment

Children feel safest when they sense that their needs are being met, or at a minimum that their needs are respected and understood. Children who are anxious perform best in a calm, supportive, but organised classroom. Change and uncertainty can be unsettling, so a structured, calmly disciplined classroom will let children feel safe and know what to expect. A classroom management style which emphasises positive recognition, reason and respect is ideal.

Prepare for changes in routine / supply teacher

Anxious children try very hard to please and predict what is required in a situation, so changes of any sort may be experienced as very stressful. When possible, send a note home the day before to alert the child/family to a change in routine; this will allow the child to process the change in his or her comfort zone and will make the transitions go more smoothly the next day.

Prepare for a child's return after illness

Children who are anxious may be very worried about the work they have missed while they were out. Assign a responsible buddy to copy notes and share handouts. If tests are being given the day of the child's return, give them the option to take the test at another time and use the test-time to make up any other missing work.

Consider seating within classroom

Children who are anxious can struggle with fear about the unlikely event that they will get in trouble. Seating them away from more boisterous classmates will be less distracting and may help them focus on their work, rather than feeling responsible for the class.

Provide clear directions

Concerns about getting the directions wrong, either because of distraction or misunderstanding,

are common. Giving clear, unambiguous directions, and where possible having directions written on the board or elsewhere, may reassure children who are anxious that they have understood.

Discourage avoidance / encourage 'having a go'

The tendency to avoid difficult situations or tasks stops a child learning how to manage in spite of feeling anxious. Encouraging students to participate and 'have a go' helps them get over doubts about their ability to manage. Where necessary, the task or situation can be modified to provide more manageable steps, e.g. larger tasks, such as projects, can be broken down into individual steps. The child can be encouraged by setting intermediate deadlines, with more regular checking and positive reinforcement from the teacher to maintain progress. Anxious children often have perfectionist standards, which results in completed work being "not good enough" to hand in. Encourage submission of any part of a completed task.

However, encouragement can feel like unhelpful pressure for some children, so do not force a child to take on something that is too overwhelming.

Set realistic expectations

Feeling pressure to be perfect is common for children who are anxious. Setting realistic expectations for academic work is important to help them learn to better manage their anxiety.

Modify and monitor stressful activities

- **Class participation**

Fears of getting the answer wrong, saying something embarrassing, or simply having other kids look at them may be concerns for an anxious child. Determine the child's comfort with either closed questions (requiring a yes or no response) or with opinion questions; start with whichever is easiest. Use a signal to let the child know that his turn is coming. Provide opportunities for the child to share knowledge on topics in which he or she is most confident. Avoid asking the child to go up to the board to answer questions, or approach that situation by eliminating the risk of being wrong, e.g. by asking the child to write up a pre-agreed response.

- **Class presentations**

Children who are anxious may have difficulty with oral reports and presentations. Consider having the child present to a smaller group, the teacher alone or have the child audiotape or videotape the presentation at home.

- **Testing conditions**

Test situations may be particularly stressful for children with anxiety difficulties. Teachers may be able to modify assessment tasks to relieve some of the pressure. Short answer, multiple choice and match type testing may be easier for anxious teenagers than producing essays and longer answers, which require a lot of thinking and planning and may be overwhelming. It can be helpful to provide breaks during, or extra time, for tests; just knowing that the time is available may obviate the need to use it. Sometimes anxious children become distracted when they see other children working on their tests or turning them in; they may inaccurately assume that they don't know the material as well. Testing in an alternative, quiet location may be preferable for some children. Consider the use of word banks and equation sheets,

to cue children whose anxiety may make them "blank out" on rote material.

Develop independence

Provide opportunities for children with anxiety to take on special responsibilities that help them support their view of themselves as capable. Developing a sense of independence reduces their need for reassurance and builds confidence.

Consider assemblies / large group activities

Children who worry are likely to feel more anxious in larger crowds. Until a child feels secure in the assembly hall, allow them to sit where they feel most comfortable e.g. at the end of the row at the back. Gradually see if they can re-join their class.

Consider break and lunchtimes / unstructured activities

Free choice times can be a welcome and necessary break from the pressures of school for most children, but fears of rejection in the dinner hall or on the playground can take the fun out of free time. Bridge the gap socially by creating ties with small "buddy" groups of children, with the provision of more structured activities, perhaps in a specially designated room. These can create a shared experience which children can then draw on later. Rather than allowing the other children to select the buddy groupings themselves, alternate this with a "counting off" technique or drawing straws to allow variability in the groupings.

Teach coping skills

Learning about feelings and how they can be managed can really help. All schools should be providing a personal, social and health education curriculum that emphasises life-skills, focusing on self-awareness, motivation, managing feelings, empathy, social skills, relationships and problem solving. However, children who are anxious may require a more individualised programme of social and emotional learning that emphasises coping skills. These may include deep breathing techniques, using distraction techniques and practicing positive self-talk.

Provide a cool down / "time out" pass

Pressures build for anxious children, so being able to leave a situation briefly to get a drink of water or wash their face can allow them to clear their heads and return to class on a less anxious track. Since anxious children may be hesitant to ask for this and risk being the centre of attention, use an agreed exit card which the child simply places on his or the teachers desk (or other agreed exit strategy), which signals they are leaving for a break. Many children prefer to sit in the desk nearest the exit door to allow an unobtrusive exit. Sometimes it is helpful to have a nominated safe place in the school building that they can retreat to.

Prepare for emotional meltdowns

While the hallmark of anxiety is avoidance (and a running or "flight" response from a situation), if an anxious child perceives a situation as highly threatening, they may respond with a "fight" response, i.e. by becoming quite agitated or even occasionally aggressive. The child is typically hugely remorseful after an outburst and regrets responding in this manner. If this occurs and you cannot ignore the behaviour, staying calm, talking quietly and being reassuring is more helpful than challenging the child. Try to avoid physically intervening, because this may escalate the behaviour.

Provide a safe person

Having one person at school who understands the child's worries and anxieties can really make a difference for a child who is anxious. A teacher, teaching assistant, learning mentor or other member of staff can be identified as a person for the child to "check-in" with briefly (5-10 minutes) to help dispel worrying thoughts, problem solve any immediate difficulties, to get reassurance and return to class.

Modify homework expectations

If children are spending inordinate amounts of time on homework because of excessive redoing, rechecking, rereading, or simply worrying that the task wasn't done thoroughly enough, the teacher can set a reasonable amount of time for homework and then reduce the homework load to fit into that time frame. Teachers can also provide time estimates for each assignment (this could be helpful to the entire class), so that the anxious child can attempt to stay within 10% of the estimated time. Eliminate repetition by having the child do every other mathematics question. Reduce reading and writing assignments; perhaps consider books on tape if a child is unable to read without repetition. For a child with writing difficulties, consider having a parent, teacher or another child "scribe" for the child while he or she dictates the answers.

Plan for school trips

Compounding the normal worries for an anxious child, school trips include the factors of being away from home and parents, and a change in routine. Accommodate the child's level of readiness so that he or she can participate as fully as possible. Consider having the child in the "teacher's group" or having parents accompany the group until the child is ready to handle an excursion without these supports in place.

Access help when needed

Anxiety can be caused by a range of factors. When children's anxiety symptoms are severe or persistent it is important to share this with others in the school to get further advice and support. Good practice that should be in place in school will include:

- a proactive pastoral care system for monitoring, promoting and supporting the mental health and emotional well-being of young people;
- clear policies for behaviour, discipline, tackling bullying and promoting attendance which are implemented consistently across the school;
- maintaining active, supportive links with parents/carers and a positive, joint-problem solving approach; and
- the adoption of a staged approach of assessment and intervention for young people who appear anxious and/or reluctant to come to school in line with Single Assessment Framework early help ([SAFeh Toolkit](#)) procedures and the SEND Code of Practice.

4. When worry and anxiety affects school attendance

School is central in prevention, early identification, and continuing management of anxiety provoked school refusal.

Early intervention is vital as the shorter the period of school attendance being affected, the more likely the young person is to return to school.

Possible TRIGGERS for anxiety affecting school attendance

There are various factors which may contribute towards, or trigger, a young person's vulnerability. These may include:

- School transfer (especially year 6/7)
- Anxiety about the journey to school and travel sickness
- Educational demands and pressures, e.g. unidentified learning needs, a young person's wish to do better, fear of failure in class or tests, fear of examinations, fear or dislike of a specific teacher or subject
- The unpredictability of teacher requests or young people's behaviour, e.g. noise levels in class, differing teachers' methods of controlling classroom behaviour, crowding in corridors or queues, break and lunch times, changes in routine (e.g. supply teachers.)
- Bullying or fear of being bullied, by young people and/or adults
- Social factors, e.g. lack of identifiable peer or friendship group, complicated teenage relationships, changes in student groups
- Traumatic events or illness within the family, e.g. bereavement, domestic violence, family history of anxiety affecting school attendance, adult mental health problems
- A young person being worried about a parent/carer
- A young person dealing with caring duties at home
- A young person's own long-term illness resulting in prolonged absence from school

Some young people may be more sensitive to the above triggers than others.

Depending upon the presence and number of these factors, a young person may manage the anxiety and perceived threat of school, or fail to cope, such that it causes school refusal. In some cases, the young person may not excessively fear school but simply find life at home preferable, with extra attention and reinforcement in this context, or feel they are supporting their parent/carers more by being at home.

It is possible that a young person may be experiencing a number of these triggers, hence the multiplicity and complexity of anxiety provoked school refusal makes it difficult to understand for young people, parent/carers and professionals involved.

IDENTIFICATION

It is very **important to be proactive** in addressing anxiety provoked school refusal, before it becomes entrenched. Schools and parents need to be vigilant in monitoring attendance of young people where a pattern of non-attendance for minor ailments can become the norm. It is important that schools and parents work in partnership from the beginning when problems are first identified. A quick response is particularly appropriate where complex and acute problems are evident. Schools should take the initiative in making early contact with parent/carers to discuss the young person's non-attendance.

Anxiety induced school refusal can be identified by a number of factors, including:

- Severe difficulty attending school, with periods of prolonged absence
- Staying away from school with the knowledge of the parent/carers
- Patterns in absences, for example particular days and subjects
- A history of anxiety (including anxiety affecting school attendance) within the family
- Reluctance to attend school trips
- Frequent absences for minor illnesses (a pattern which may not be noticed by schools)
- Anxiety on separation and inappropriate dependence on family members
- Evidence of under-achievement of learning potential
- Poor personal hygiene
- Social isolation and avoidance of class mates or the peer group in general
- Regular absence without indication of anti-social behaviours
- Challenging behaviours, particularly related to specific situations within school
- The young person expressing a desire to attend classes, but being unable to do so
- Severe emotional upset with excessive fearfulness, outbursts of temper and complaints of feeling ill on school days
- Episodes of self-harm behaviours
- Depression and a sense of isolation, low self-esteem and lack of confidence
- Confusion or extreme absent-mindedness demonstrated in school work by a lack of concentration and lowering of attainments
- Physical changes - sweating, sickness, aching limbs, hyperventilation, panic attacks, abdominal pain, headaches, rapid weight loss or gain
- Disruption of day to day activities, affecting the family and often putting a great deal of pressure on parent/carers and siblings
- The fear is persistent and maintained in spite of reasoning

KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS – Working together

It is vital that parent/carers and school staff work in partnership to ensure they have the whole picture of the young person's difficulties. Some young people who are anxious about school function very well socially in other aspects of their lives, e.g. mixing with certain friends or going to specific sport and youth clubs of their choice. This can lead people to believe that perhaps the young person is not really anxious at school and maybe it is a case of the parent/carers not insisting that their son/daughter attends.

Equally, a parent/carer who has coped with mornings where their child vomits in fear of school, or has tempers severe enough to cause damage to the house, might feel the school is not taking their concerns seriously enough.

Open and continuous communication is key.

School is central in prevention, early identification, and continuing management of anxiety provoked school refusal. Try to work with parents, and try to avoid using formal responses such as school attendance letters at the beginning of the work. The best starting point may be mutual action plans and practical ideas that try to problem solve together with parents and young people how things can be achieved.

Where concerns about a child/young person are continuing, other strategies used by schools should include:

- [Putting in place an Early Help action plan listing the strategies currently being used](#)
- [Initiating a Single Assessment Framework early help \(SAFeh\)](#)
- [Holding TAC/F \(Team Around the Child/Family\) meetings and subsequent reviews.](#)
- Requests for specific help to other services made through Access and Response Team (ART formerly First Point) Tel. 01454 866000
- [Using the behaviour handbook for schools in South Gloucestershire. LINK](#)
- [Using the handbooks for schools on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in South Gloucestershire LINK](#)

How you can help

Strategies for schools to support the family

Where a young person avoids or refuses to attend school, the picture at home may be one of unhappiness for all concerned. Parent/carers are frequently despairing and they may feel guilty or blame themselves for their young person's anxiety and reluctance to attend school.

- Positive and constructive **involvement from within the family** is a key factor in overcoming anxiety induced school refusal
- **Early contact** with the family to discuss the young person's reluctance to attend and any contributory factors as perceived by the family
- Develop knowledge of **support and resources** that family members could use to help resolve issues relevant to young person's anxiety
- Being prepared to meet with the family on **neutral territory**, or at home where there are family issues with school
- **A key person** should be identified within school that the family can contact. It is important that this person is someone who knows the young person and is able to respond to phone calls relatively quickly
- **Regular telephone contact** between school and home for monitoring purposes, to provide updates, and to exchange positive information about the young person
- Communicating specific **needs and concerns of the young person**, e.g. placement in certain classes, seating arrangements, anxieties about specific lessons or teachers
- **Persisting with agreed targets** despite any setbacks, rather than continually seeking 'new solutions'
- Being **prepared for difficulties** or recurrence of the problem following natural breaks, e.g. holidays and genuine illnesses
- Help parents/carers plan days/times when their child does not attend school
- Clearly identify needs of all family members and consider a SAFeh as the best way to do this
- Consider any possible safeguarding concerns, and use the neglect toolkit if required to support this identification. [Neglect toolkit link](#)
- Focus on **positive aspects of school life** and encourage all small steps towards positive progress
- Encourage parent/carers to ask **what has gone well** rather than what has gone badly in school each day
- Parent/carers should be encouraged to **allow school to deal with issues** arising in school
- Parent/carers and staff need to **remember** that some young people can have specific fears about the school environment that do not occur in other areas of their lives
- Encourage parent/carers to **make use of other support** they may have in the community, e.g. other family members, friends, neighbours etc.
- **Reintegration programmes** should be flexible, creative and individualised to suit each particular young person
- Reintegration should be **at an appropriate pace**; it is important not to expect too much too soon

- Everyone working with the young person must offer a **consistent and united** approach

Simple interventions, which may help alleviate anxieties, include:

- identifying friends who can walk to and from school with the young person
- identifying a safe area or sanctuary in school where the young person can go if he/she is upset or finds something too difficult
- asking an older young person to act as a mentor in the playground/dining area
- Identifying any in-school issues that are worrying the young person and find ways to help the young person deal with them
- speaking to other staff as necessary and involving existing school systems to help e.g. pastoral support
- It is important that all staff either welcome the young person back to school or help integrate them in a consistent way

If a young person has been away from school for more than a week, the following should be considered:

- arrange for appropriate work to be sent home with clear and reasonable expectations, so that there are fewer issues about 'missed work'
- arrange for marked work to be returned to the young person with constructive comments
- reassure the young person that arrangements for external examinations and coursework submission can be arranged
- set up a return to school programme which may involve a part-time timetable
- talk with the young person about what he/she is comfortable saying to friends on returning to school after a period of absence
- tell other staff about the return to school programme and make sure that arrangements will work (small details really matter e.g. seating plans)
- help staff to greet the young person with warmth but without undue fuss
- other approaches which might be used to help e.g. Protective Behaviours

Some young people need extra support to reintegrate to school. In such cases, it may be useful to consider a request for help from other professionals.

Ensure that a Team Around the Child is in place (TAC)

Whenever additional needs are identified in a young person it is important that a holistic assessment of need that is proportionate to the difficulties has been carried out. This could be an internal assessment, the Single Assessment Framework early help (SAFeh), or under an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), depending on the individual circumstances. In all it is important that the young person is aware of and involved in agreeing with the support in place.

In all of the examples below it will be important to be clear on how you are going to know actions have been completed and outcomes successfully met. Clear SMART targets/outcomes should be set, and success measures agreed by everyone. This should be in small steps rather than an unrealistic or unachievable big target e.g. young person to complete one lesson in English with the whole class every day in week one, rather than young person to fully attend school.

In the case of an internal assessment and action plan, the young person needs to be aware of the team in place from the school and family, and involved in developing actions that everyone agrees may help, including achievable actions for themselves.

In the case of a SAFeh, it is important that the young person and family are aware of all the professionals in the team supporting the family, involved in developing and agreeing actions together, and aware of what actions are being carried out by whom.

Under an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) frequent meetings between key people, at least school, young people and parents, should be held to develop action plans that everyone can carry out to support school attendance. This small action plan should be reviewed as part of monitoring the EHCP agreed outcomes.

If you require more guidance on early help or the SAFeh process please contact the Access and Response team. (01454 866000 Accessandresponse@southglos.gov.uk)

5. Summary of suggested steps for schools in dealing with anxiety

Preparation:

1. Whole school awareness raising on effects of anxiety for staff, pupils and parents
2. Whole school training on anxiety / causes / symptoms / effects / school refusal / triggers
3. Clear policies and processes for staff to follow:
 - Graduated assessment and action planning for all additional needs of pupils
 - Clear SEND policy and provision maps of available support
 - Pastoral support systems
 - Clear expectations of what each member of the staff team is expected to do
 - Identified members of staff responsible e.g. pastoral support, tutor etc
 - Mechanisms in place to support staff experiencing work place anxiety/stress
 - Curriculum support for all pupils in PSHE
4. Prioritising good relationships with parents and carers
5. Pupil support available in school (e.g. Learning Mentor, Parent Support, counsellor).
6. Staff access to anxiety support tools (South Glos. Guidance booklet and toolkit)
7. Regular scrutiny of attendance patterns
8. Early identification of non-attendance patterns.
9. Internal action planning for all pupils requiring additional support

Steps for schools to take in dealing with anxiety provoked school refusal

- The young person remains on roll and school staff are key to managing it
- Parents are involved immediately
- Use worries and strengths checklist to identify full picture
- Work in partnership with parents and establish an early help action plan
- Review action plan and progress regularly
- Have clear and graduated expectations for young person, parents and staff
- Ensure preventative support takes place (e.g. promoting self-esteem, resilience, transition preparation, etc.)
- Utilise support within school
- Where concerns continue, consider initiating and implementing a SAFeh and Team around the family approach
- Consider involving other professionals (e.g. school health nurse, GP, Education Welfare service, behaviour support services, educational psychology service, CAMHS)
- Consider request for help from Access and Response Team (formerly First Point) using assessments and action plans as evidence of what support has been tried

6. Other professional roles and responsibilities for helping to tackle anxiety

It is usually the school that is able to request support from other services, but sometimes the family will need to do this directly, which makes partnership working important.

Access and Response Team – South Gloucestershire young people’s services (ART requests from schools or parents)

A team of professionals who accept requests for help for young people’s services in the council. They will consider all requests, gather further information and make decisions about which services may be able to offer further support. Some of the services they refer to are below. [Tel:01454 866000](tel:01454866000) email: Accessandresponse@southglos.gov.uk

Educational Psychologists may provide: (request from schools only)

- A consultation approach when working with schools and families to help them to address concerns about a young person
- Observation and other assessments in order to gain valuable insights
- An approach that draws on principles of solution focused therapy when working with individual young people, school staff and family members
- Work at the whole school level, such as training, to help schools develop an ethos which focuses on emotional wellbeing and positive mental health
- An approach that draws on psychological research and techniques to support the delivery of interventions, including therapeutic interventions
- Signposting for school staff and family members to other relevant professionals
- Liaison with various relevant agencies and professional groups

Hospital and Outreach Education PRU: (request from schools only)

- Take request for involvement from school.
- Liaise with school and health professionals about the nature of difficulty
- Attend a set up meeting in school to discuss arrangements and set integration targets. Arrange support.
- Review arrangements every 6 weeks in school and set new targets. Continue to liaise with health colleagues.
- Support young person back into school
- Monitor when young person returns to school

Family and Young People Support FYPS (request from schools or parents via ART for support in SAFeh / early help action plan)

Working with families, children and young people where there is evidence of more complex needs that have been difficult to address and would lead to poor outcomes if not resolved. Focus is on building skills and resilience within families and young people themselves.

Education Welfare Services (request from schools only)

Used by some schools that invest in this traded service, or employ their own, depending on a young person's individual circumstances:

- Accept a request for involvement from school
- Monitor attendance and agree targets
- Liaise with/visit family as appropriate as part of casework
- Request evidence of health needs from appropriate agencies
- Support a request to Hospital and Outreach
- Monitor progress with school
- Refer to other agencies as appropriate
- Initiate a parenting contract
- Convene a network meeting or other multi-agency planning meeting
- Liaise with a range of other professionals

Integra (formerly traded support services)

- Behaviour support
- Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS)
- Inclusion support services

Supportive parents may be accessed directly by parents/carers or via professionals with parents/carers consent. **(request from parents only)**

They may support parents/carers of young people experiencing anxiety about attending school by:

- Providing parents/carers with impartial information and advice.
- Helping parents/carers express their views about their Young person's situation.
- Helping to clarify letters from the School and Local Education Authority.
- Attempting to resolve disagreements about their Young person's special educational needs.
- Attending meetings with parents/carers if they wish.
- Liaising with other relevant agencies and services (with parents/carers consent and agreement).
- Sign posting parents/carers to other relevant agencies and services that may be needed.

Health

Family Doctor (GP): (request from parents only) Parents/carers can talk to their doctor on their own, or with their Young person, or they can have an appointment without parents if they are able to do that. The doctor should listen to the concerns and may offer some advice about what to do next.

Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services: (usually request from GP, and schools only where guidance has been sought first): Where mental health difficulties are severe, complex, enduring and other interventions have been tried the doctor can also refer to a specialist service where the workers are trained to help young people with problems. This might be at a local

service called the **Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)**. Professionals who work in CAMHS services include psychologists, psychiatrists and psychotherapists. CAMHS should offer help and support to parents and carers as well as the young person.

Others: Sometimes young people are anxious about school because of medical problems, for example bowel problems or chronic pain. These young people may be assessed by a health professional, such as a **school health nurse** or a **paediatrician**.

Parents/Carers

- Contact school to advise on any Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) or health issues and to ask for help re non-attendance
- Provide information on GP/CAMHS/Community Paediatrician
- Encourage young person to return to school
- Work with Education Welfare Service, school and other professionals to ensure full time attendance

7. Publications that offer support and guidance to schools on developing wellbeing and positive mental health

Wellbeing in four policy areas

This document is aimed at policy makers. It raises issues on the need for an overarching wellbeing strategy.

http://b.3cdn.net/nefoundation/ccdf9782b6d8700f7c_lcm6i2ed7.pdf

What works in promoting social and emotional well-being and responding to mental health problems in schools?

This advice covers two overlapping areas of school practice: promoting positive social and emotional wellbeing for all in schools, and tackling the mental health problems of pupils in more serious difficulty. It is designed to support schools, in particular, school leaders, in the delivery of their work on these two areas and complements other recent guidance from the Department for Education and from Public Health England. It has a useful reference list at the back.

http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1197143/ncb_framework_for_promoting_well-being_and_responding_to_mental_health_in_schools.pdf

The link between pupil health and wellbeing and attainment

This briefing offers head teachers, governors and school staff a summary of the key evidence that highlights the link between health and wellbeing and educational attainment. It underlines the value for schools of promoting health and wellbeing as an integral part of a school effectiveness strategy, and highlights the important contribution of a whole-school approach. Useful resources and links on page 11

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-link-between-pupil-health-and-wellbeing-and-attainment>

Promoting children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing

This document sets out key actions that head teachers and college principals can take to embed a whole-school approach to promoting emotional health and wellbeing. There are interesting and practical case stories are provided at the end of each section. It also references examples how support from school health nurse team, for example, is working.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-children-and-young-peoples-emotional-h>

Preparing to teach about mental health and emotional wellbeing

This guidance, along with companion lesson plans to be released during the summer term 2015, aims to help schools to prepare to teach about mental health and emotional health safely and sensitively. It covers all key stages. There is specific reference to anxiety on page 30.

Suite of lesson plans: <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/search/node/mental%20health>

Where to get help - Information for children, young people and their families in South Gloucestershire

This is a locally produced directory of support that is available on a range of subjects. The first section is on anxiety

[SAFeh Toolkit](#)

Understanding anxiety

This self help guide from Anxiety UK looks at how anxiety develops and explains the physical, psychological and behavioural symptoms associated with anxiety. There is guidance on the management and treatment of anxiety and crucially details on where you can get support.

<http://www.teachersupport.info/get-support/practical-guides/anxiety?gclid=CNK8r4uvksgCFUS4Gwod82olQw>

References

Brandibas, G, Jeunier, B, Clanet, C and Fouraste, R (2004); Truancy, School Refusal and Anxiety; School Psychology International 25; pp117-126

Ollendick, T and Mayer, J (1984); 'School Phobia'; in Turner, S (Ed.) Behavioral Theories and Treatment of Anxiety; New York: Plenum

Thambirajah, M S, Grandison, K J & De-Hawes, L (2008); Understanding school refusal

A Handbook for Professionals in Education, Health and Social Care; Jessica Kingsley Publishers

West Sussex County Council (2004); Emotionally based school refusal – Guidance for schools and support agencies

Emotionally Based School Refusal - Guidance for educational settings and support service's in North Somerset – North Somerset County Council

8. Internet resources for schools

In addition to the above, professionals working with children, young people and their families in settings such as schools may find the following resources useful.

- [Behaviour Handbook](#)
- [SEN Handbook](#)

Integra (South Gloucestershire Council Traded Services)

<http://www.integra.co.uk/>

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

Published evidence-based guidance to improve outcomes for people using the NHS and other public health and social care services.

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

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children School Service

The Schools Service enables NSPCC staff to reach out to those younger children helping them to understand and recognise what is and isn't normal behaviour.

<http://www.nspcc.org.uk/services-and-resources/services-for-children-and-families/childline-school-service/>

Neglect Toolkit

Information and documents to aid professionals to identify and tackle cases of neglect.

<http://sites.southglos.gov.uk/safeguarding/children/i-am-a-professional/safeguarding-guidance-policies-and-plans>

Promoting children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing

Public Health England guidance for head teachers and college principals on the 8 principles for promoting emotional health and wellbeing in schools and colleges

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-children-and-young-peoples-emotional-health-and-wellbeing>

Royal College of Psychiatrists

Parents and Youth Information index from The Royal College of Psychiatrists - an independent professional membership organisation and registered charity. Contains leaflets and factsheets relating to anxiety.

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/parentsandyouthinfo.aspx>

SAFeh Toolkit

Information and documents on the Single Assessment for Early Help in South Gloucestershire.

<http://sites.southglos.gov.uk/safeguarding/children/i-am-a-professional/single-assessment-for-early-help-safeh-toolkit/>

Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) material

From the National Archives.

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110809101133/nsonline.org.uk/node/87009>

Teacher Guidance: Preparing to Teach about Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

<https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/search/node/association%20guidance>

The link between pupil health and wellbeing and attainment

This 2014 Public Health England briefing offers head teachers, governors and school staff a summary of the key evidence that highlights the link between health and wellbeing and educational attainment.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-link-between-pupil-health-and-wellbeing-and-attainment>

Wellbeing in Four Policy Areas

2014 report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Wellbeing Economics (includes mindfulness in health and education, Page 30)

http://b3cdn.net/nefoundation/ccdf9782b6d8700f7c_lcm6i2ed7.pdf

What works in promoting social and emotional well-being and responding to mental health problems in schools?

2015 advice for schools and framework document by the Partnership for Well-being and Mental Health in Schools

http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1197143/ncb_framework_for_promoting_well-being_and_responding_to_mental_health_in_schools.pdf