



## Supporting your child with school anxiety and refusal

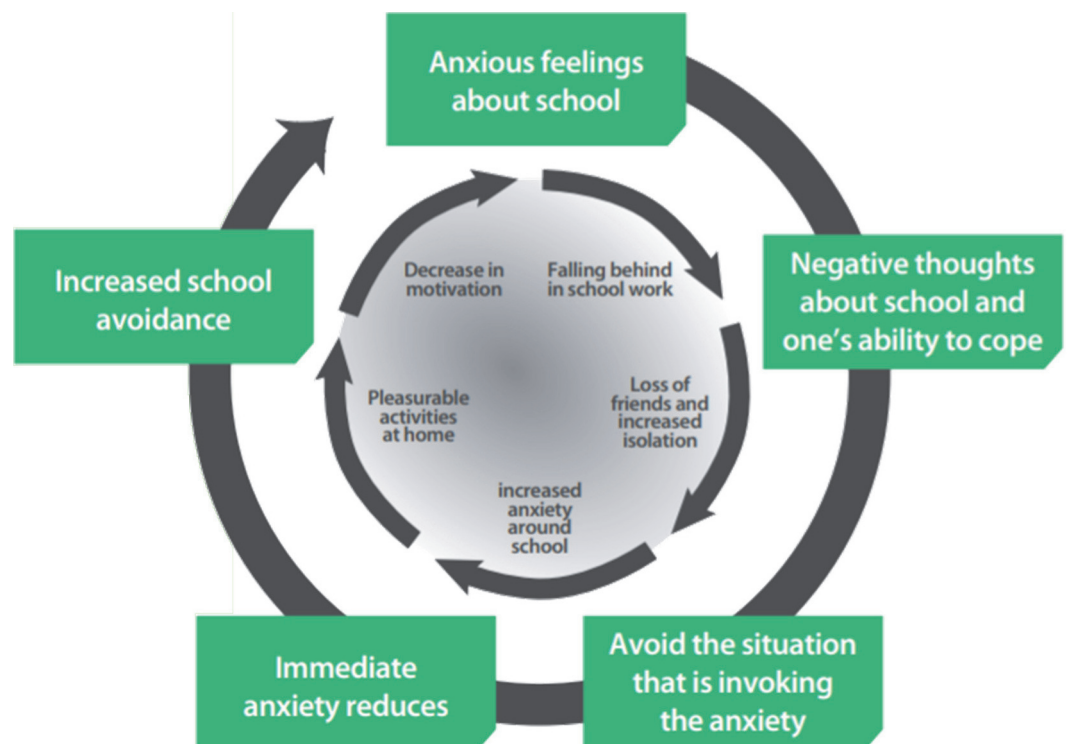
### Parent/Carer Guide

Many children and young people will be worried about things in school from time to time. For some, this can result in periods of absence from school which can impact learning, relationships and wellbeing. It is important to work with school to find the right support for you and your child.

### What can cause school anxiety and refusal?

It is likely that there is more than one cause. It may be related to their school (e.g. bullying, transition, unmet learning needs) home (e.g. bereavement, separation anxiety, change at home), or individual factors (e.g. self-esteem, confidence).

The diagram shows how difficulties can increase over time:



Adapted from West Sussex Educational Psychology Service

## When to seek support

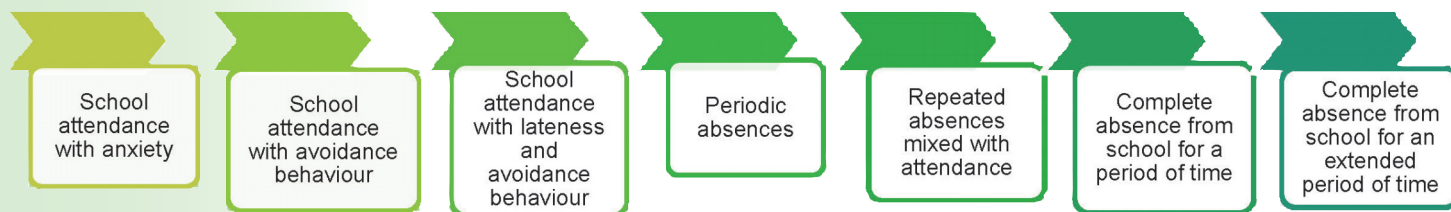
Recognising the early warning signs and communicating these with school can help prevent attendance issues getting worse.

It is likely that you will start to see issues developing at home before school staff are aware of a problem. You might notice things like:

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

It is helpful to think of attendance as a spectrum.

Getting help early is key: the picture below shows how concerns can develop into longer term attendance difficulties.



Adapted from Informed by Kearney, C & Albano, A. (2018) When Children Refuse School, Oxford University Press

## How you can help

### First Steps (where issues are starting to emerge)

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

- Ask them what is worrying them, take their worries seriously and make it clear you can work together to make things better
- Think with them about any changes that could be made at home or school that would help them feel less worried about school
- Talk to a class teacher, head of year or pastoral member of staff. Keep that person up to date.
- Keep notes or a diary about when your child is getting upset and look for any patterns
- Make it easier for them to get into school by problem-solving with them e.g. a lift to school if they hate using the bus
- Build in opportunities to relax during the evenings (particularly Sunday evening)
- Plan a fun, family activity on a weeknight to help shift their focus from the school week
- Help them feel part of the school community by encouraging them to join a club at school or take on a special role, such as a library helper
- Keep to a regular routine, including regular bedtimes, with some screen-free time before bed and keep phones downstairs





## Next steps

### (where there are concerns around attendance)

- Keep in touch with your link person at school – there should be a meeting to discuss issues and plan the next steps
- Keep a regular morning routine that includes getting ready for school (e.g. getting up at the same time, getting dressed) even if your child is not currently attending
- Ask for academic work from school to be completed at home
- Limit 'fun' activities during a school day at home
- Practice calming/ relaxation activities at home
- If difficulties continue, you or your school may wish to contact the **Oxfordshire Educational Psychology Service** for further support

## Further sources of support

### Young minds

<https://youngminds.org.uk> - Supporting your child at school.

### Oxfordshire CAMHS

<https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/camhs/carers/> - Information for parents and carers.

### Action for Children

<https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/> - Parent Support Line.

