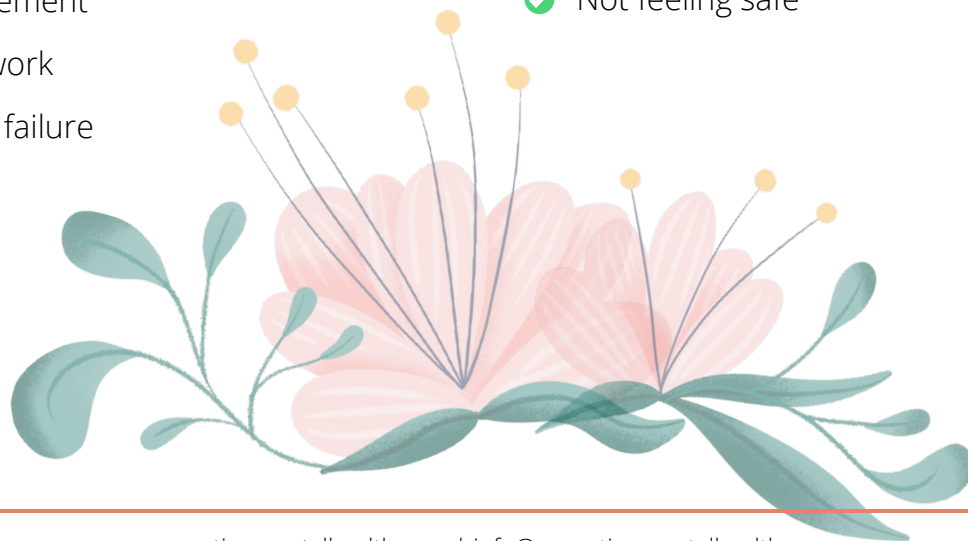


My child can't go to school. What can I do?

Many parents find themselves in this situation and it can feel frightening, frustrating and hopeless at times. This is often referred to as "school refusal". However, we recognise that this isn't often a choice for young people as they are most likely experiencing distress. The most common times for young people to experience this is during transition to a new school or as the result of a mental health disorder or significant life trauma such as bullying.

COMMON TRIGGERS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO FIND THEMSELVES UNABLE TO ATTEND SCHOOL

- ✓ Bullying
- ✓ Struggling with anxiety
- ✓ Feeling unable to keep up with the workload
- ✓ Divorce
- ✓ Exam stress
- ✓ Peer pressure
- ✓ Bereavement
- ✓ Homework
- ✓ Fear of failure
- ✓ Breakdown in friendships
- ✓ Perfectionism
- ✓ Autism Spectrum Conditions
- ✓ Social media trolling
- ✓ Eating disorders
- ✓ Self-Harm
- ✓ School environment itself
- ✓ Not feeling safe



www.parentingmentalhealth.com | info@parentingmentalhealth.com



HELP YOUR CHILD TO TALK ABOUT THEIR FEELINGS

Your child's emotional and physical wellbeing is the most important factor to consider. This may be a very distressing time for your child so being patient and taking your time can help.

The most important source of information that you can get to help your child is how they are feeling and experiencing this situation. Create a "life in the day of me" one pager to help express what its like to walk in your child's shoes for a day. This is a great way to make sense of what feels distressing about school.

- How does your child feel going to bed at night? Can they sleep? How do they feel waking up?
- On a scale of 1-10 how anxious, sick, afraid or ill do they feel about going to school?
- What happens when they get to school?
- Who do they spend time with?
- What subjects do they like and why?
- Is it the teacher or the content?
- What subjects do they hate and why?
- What happens at lunch time?
- How do they feel in the afternoon?
- What's it like to come home?

- Is it the fear of something happening rather than actual events?

Seek the help of a counsellor if you feel that your child needs to talk to someone impartial. Sometimes a child can find it hard to talk to a loved one or parent. This is normal. Young people often find it easier to talk to a counsellor about how they are feeling as it's confidential and time just for them.

MAKING SENSE OF THE EMOTIONAL FACTORS.

When supporting your child to talk, use open questioning and avoid trying to fix the problem from your own perspective. Questions like "can you tell me more?" or "what was that like for you?" are empowering questions which help your child to keep talking.

MAKING SENSE OF THE PHYSICAL FACTORS

Create a body map by drawing a stick man with your child and encourage them to share what it's like to be in their body during school. Exploring physical symptoms like – my hands are sweaty, my head hurts, I feel sick in my stomach, I have weak knees, my heart is pumping fast, I want to cry, I can't eat, I feel tired.

Making sense of the environmental factors – Explore where in school your child feels most safe and at ease. Explore why this might be? Explore where in





school a child feels most distressed and why this could be?

Making sense of the relationships

factor – Explore who is in your child's circle of trust in school and who isn't. Explore their reasons why.

Take your time to create this. Go at your child's pace. Be really gentle. You may find that your child is ready to talk about how they feel or they may not be ready to go there just yet. Pushing too hard often feeds in to your child's sense of a loss of control and can create more anxiety.

Involve your child in the process

Try to be as transparent as you can with your child. Involve them in the process of finding a solution to their problems. When young people are more involved in the process, they are more likely to develop resilience and recover. They often share feeling heard, validated and safe.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO GET THE RIGHT SUPPORT FOR YOUR CHILD?

Many parents experience significant pressure to "get" their kids back to school. This approach can be harmful if your child is distressed and needs additional support to feel well enough to do so safely. Don't be afraid to choose your child's wellbeing over the advice of other professionals.

SENCO

Talk to the SENCO or mental health lead at school and work with them around the issue. If you can support them to understand your child's needs, they may be able to agree on things that could help your child.

Anti-Bullying Policy

If you have concerns about bullying, ask to see the schools anti-bullying policy to understand how they should be helping your child.

SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)

You can also ask your school to arrange an assessment if you feel that your child's needs aren't being met due to a SEND. An education, health and care (EHC) plan is for children and young people aged up to 25 in the UK who need more support than is available through special educational needs support. EHC plans identify educational, health and social needs and set out the additional support to meet those needs.

In the USA, a 504 plan or IEP can provide support to your child. A 504 plan is a blueprint for how a school will support a student and remove barriers to learning. The individualised education program (IEP) describes the goals the school sets for a child during the school year as well as any special support needed to help achieve them.



In Australia, government support can help teachers to create individual education and health care plans to support students.

Doctor

Speak to your GP or family doctor for support if you feel that your child needs specialist mental health support from a professional.

Education Welfare Officers (EWO)

Many parents are fearful of Education Welfare Officers, however it is their job to meet with both the parents and the school to find a solution to your child not attending school. It can be useful to make the first contact directly with them to ask for help and they often have some good advice and contacts for support.

ESMA

[The Education Support for Medical Absence \(ESMA\)](#) team supports pupils who need time off school due to a physical or mental health condition. Their main aim is to help children continue their education around their needs and work towards getting them back into school life whether this is via a mixed learning environment or alternative provision. They can be useful to contact for support and advice.

Educational Psychologists

Educational Psychologists provide support to schools to help them to meet the needs of children and young

people. Parents can contact them directly although this is usually arranged through the school.

SENDIASS

Provide impartial and confidential information, advice and support to parents and carers of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Education Otherwise

If you are looking into the choice of home educating your child, then Education Otherwise is a charity which supports families to understand their rights to home educate. They also offer useful getting started resources and advice. They share that “the choice of how to educate a child is that of the parent, provided that the education is suitable to the child’s ‘age, ability, aptitude and to any special educational needs (the child) may have’. In law this is catered for by s7 of the Education Act 1996”.

Virtual School

Local authorities can offer a mix of online virtual home schooling and attending school. They can also offer to fund virtual school for your child to attend from home. Many virtual schools now replicate the classroom environment with social time, live teaching and testing.





You have a right to choose an environment that supports your child to be emotionally well if school can't meet their needs. Many parents are finding alternative solutions that support their young people while they are recovering. Although this can feel challenging at times, recovery is possible, and many parents share that they were able to find the right solution to meet their child's needs. Make sure to take the time that you need to also take care of your own mental and physical health.

More UK resources:

www.notfineinschool.co.uk

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

Search SENDIASS and your area (UK) for your local branch



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