

Do you worry about going to school?



Information for young people

**Wiltshire Educational Psychology Service
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Wiltshire Council

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Are you feeling anxious about school?

Worrying or anxiety is a normal feeling that we all have from time to time. However, sometimes anxiety can be a problem especially if it stops us doing what we want or need to do.

Lots of young people worry about school. This is normal. Learning to cope with anxieties like this is a normal part of growing up. However, some young people feel so worried about school that they feel like they don't want to go.

If you feel like this, you might be experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA).



Which is true for you?

When I think about school I feel:



You are not alone. Lots of young people feel this way from time to time because of things happening at home or in school.

Some things in school might make you feel this way such as:

Exams

Struggling with
some work

Pressure to
achieve

Struggling with
noise or crowds

Changing for PE

Not getting
on with some
teachers

Feeling you don't
fit in

Bullying



Some things outside of school that might make you feel this way such as:

Feeling you're
not listened to or
understood

Someone close to you is
ill or needs looking after

Changes in who you live
with

New brother or sister

Someone at home is
worried, depressed or
very sad

Problems getting to
school

Arguments at home or
parents splitting up

The death of a pet

The death of someone
you care about

What happens when you don't go to school (negative cycle)

When you are feeling very anxious about school, it might feel best to avoid school altogether and stay at home. This will probably make you feel relieved and calmer at first. But then your anxiety will start to build again as you think about the things you are missing and start to worry about the next day.

The more you avoid school, the bigger the anxiety grows. The diagram below helps to show this pattern.



If you are feeling this way, the most important thing you can do is to talk to someone you trust. Let them know what is worrying you at home/ school so that they can help you. The sooner you ask for this help, the easier it will be to change.

The longer you avoid school, the more difficult it becomes to return.

What to do if I feel like this

The most important thing you can do is to talk to someone so that they can help. Think about what is worrying you so that you are able to explain this to adults at home and in school.

You could:

- Use colour coding on your school timetable to show which parts of your day you enjoy/ find difficult (green=enjoy, yellow=ok, red=difficult/ worries me)
- Make a list of the main things worrying you or the top three
- Draw a picture showing how you feel about school/ what's worrying you.

Most worried about



A vertical scale with a purple pen icon at the top and a sad face icon at the bottom. There are four horizontal lines for writing, indicating a scale from 'Most worried about' to 'Least worried about'.

Least worried about



What can school do to help?

Think about which adults in school you trust. Talk to them about how you are feeling. They can work with you and your parents or carers to make a plan to help. This might mean:

Changing your timetable

Giving you some support with some lessons or exams

Helping you with friendship issues

Finding you a 'safe space' in school

Identifying a trusted adult in school you can talk to about your worries



What can I do to get back to school?

Although it might feel impossible to you at the moment, many young people who have felt anxious or experience EBSA do return to school.

There are things you can do to help:

- Let adults know how you are feeling and what is worrying you.
- Get involved in making a plan with your parents/ carers and teachers to help you return to school. Let them know what does and doesn't feel manageable to you.
- Whilst you are at home, try to keep in touch with your friends.
- Do the work that school send home for you so that you don't miss too much learning.
- Take little steps to getting back into a routine. Don't expect that everything will go back to normal straight away. Give yourself time.
- Be kind to yourself. If you've had a success (however small), celebrate it. If you've had a difficult day, accept it and focus on tomorrow.
- Think about your goals for the future and really imagine yourself achieving these. Try to think about the steps you need to reach these, including the role of school.



When you are feeling worried your whole body reacts:

Scared

Breathless

Skin goes pale

Difficulties sleeping

Muscle aches, headaches

Thoughts race

Feel sick or 'butterflies' in your tummy

Feel tired/little energy

Your muscles tense

When you begin to feel worried try to take a moment to notice the way that your body feels. There are lots of different techniques that you can use to help stop the worry in its tracks and to begin to feel calm. You'll need to experiment with these to find the ones that work best for you:

To get started, try some of these:



Try calm breathing

1. Take a slow breath in through your nose for 4 seconds
2. Hold it for 1-2 seconds
3. Slowly let it out through your mouth for about 4 seconds
4. Wait 5-7 seconds before taking another breath
5. Repeat 5-10 times



Try relaxing your body

1. Sit or lie somewhere quiet and comfortable
2. Stretch out your arms and make a fist, then relax
3. Push your legs out, wiggle your toes, and then relax
4. Shut your eyes tight and pull a scrunched up face, and then relax



Try movement

Anything that increases your heart rate releases endorphins, which makes you feel better. Just do anything that you enjoy: a brisk walk, run, football, tennis, basketball, a swim. Find something you enjoy and try to build it into your routine.



Go outside

Just being outside and noticing nature around us can help us to feel better. Try going for a walk or just sitting outside in your garden. Look around and see what you notice. Pay attention to how you feel.



Think balanced thoughts

When we're feeling worried, we can become overwhelmed with negative thoughts e.g. 'I'll never catch up with school work' or 'no one likes me'. Each time you notice one of these thoughts, try to think of a more balanced one to replace it e.g. 'It will be hard but I will catch up with work eventually', 'Some people like me, some don't, that's ok'. Another approach is thinking what you'd say to reassure friend if they told you they were feeling this way.

Places to go for support

Barnardo's Health Minds Wiltshire

This website has lots of information, practical tips and advice about emotional wellbeing.

www.onyourmind.org.uk

Childline

Childline comforts, advises and protects children 24 hours a day and offers free confidentially counselling. Phone **0800 1111** (24 hours)

www.childline.org

Young Minds

Young Minds provides information guidance and advice for young people, including advice around problems in school, bullying, anxiety and exam stress.

Youngminds.org.uk

Shout 24

24/7 text service, free on all major mobile networks, for anyone in crisis any time. A place to go if you're struggling to cope and need immediate help. Text **85258**.

www.giveusashout.org

Useful Apps for young people available to download

Chill Panda:

An app to help you learn to relax, manage your worries and improve your wellbeing.

NHS GO:

NHS Go is a confidential health advice and information service for 16-25 year olds.

Headspace:

A meditation app to help you practice meditation and mindfulness.

For me:

A ChildLine App to get advice and support on a range of topics, including helping with anxiety

SAM App:

Designed to help you understand and manage anxiety

MindShift™ CBT:

Designed to help you to learn, relax, be more mindful and use active steps to take charge of your anxiety.

This leaflet was written by West Sussex Educational Psychology Service who kindly gave permission for Wiltshire to adapt it for our Local Authority.

All photography is stock photography posed by models.