

Are you feeling anxious about school?

Worrying or anxiety is a normal feeling that we all experience from time to time. It can even keep us safe from harm or help us perform in difficult situations. However, sometimes anxiety or excessive worrying can become a problem especially when it stops us doing what we want or need to do.

Many children and young people worry about school. This is normal. Anxieties are part of life and learning to deal with them is part of growing up. However sometimes our feelings can make us not want to attend school. If you have high levels of anxiety and worry about attending school you may be experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA).

When you think about school are you?



You are not on your own. We all feel like this from time to time because of things that happen in our life at home, at school or elsewhere.

There may be some things at school that can make you feel this way, such as:

- Problems with friendships
- Changing school
- Bullying
- Feeling too different to other people
- Worried about your appearance
- Pressure to achieve your target grades
- Don't like the noise in school
- Not understanding or coping with school work
- Not being good at sports
- Worried about getting changed for PE or games
- Not getting on with some teachers
- Anxious about exams and tests



There may also be some things outside of school that can make you feel this way, such as:

- Death of somebody important to you
- Parents arguing or splitting up
- A parent who is ill
- Members of your family feeling worried, depressed or sad
- Death or loss of a pet
- Birth of a new brother or sister
- New people moving into your home
- Difficulties in getting to school
- Parents not understanding your feelings



What happens when you don't attend school?

It is very important to try to overcome these difficulties as soon as possible. Sometimes you might feel that staying at home is the best thing to do as it makes you feel better.

However, the more time you spend out of school the more you miss out on lessons and the learning gets harder. You also miss out on seeing friends which means keeping friendships becomes more difficult. This can be seen in the diagram.



It is important to let an adult know if you are worried about anything in school or home and get the help to make it better rather than let things get worse and get stuck.

What do I do if I feel like this?

Most importantly, talk to somebody. This could be your parents, an adult at school, other family members or a friend.

Think about the things that are worrying you, write a list or draw them then order them from most worried about to least worried about.

Most worried	
Least worried about	

What can your school do to help you?

Find an adult at school you trust and talk to them, they should listen and believe you. They can work with you and your parents to help find out what things are worrying you and what you and they can do to help you. Things they could do include:

These actions could be written up into a support plan so that you, your parents and school know what actions have been agreed to help support you.

- Key person to talk to
- Find a safe space for you to go to
- Help with school work or friendships
- Alter your timetable

What can I do to get back to school?

If your worries are so great that you are not attending school it is important that you work with your school and your parents to help you get back to attending school as soon as possible. Things you can do to help include:

- Take part in the planning of how you will go back to school. Work with your parents and teachers to think of things that will help you.
- Think about a time that you did cope with a worry. What did you do then?
- Keep in contact with your friends and what is happening at school.
- Catch up on some of the work that you may have missed before you go back.
- Take little steps to get back into the routine – don't expect that everything will get back to normal or will be okay immediately.
- Take that chance! Once you are at school, it may not seem as bad.
- Acknowledge the steps you have taken and celebrate the small successes!

When you are feeling worried...

Your whole body reacts when you are anxious.

Muscle aches
or head-aches

Scared

Thoughts
racing, difficulty
sleeping

Dry throat
or mouth

Skin goes pale

Your muscles
tense

Your heart
beats faster

Poor digestion,
stomach
aches, bowel
problems

Shortness of breath

Feeling tired,
little energy



Try to notice when you start to feel any of the signs above and stop take a moment. There are many different strategies to help you feel relaxed and calm when you are feeling stressed or anxious and you will need to find the ones that work for you.

To get you started, try some of these...

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 calm breathing

1. Take a slow breath in through your nose for about 4 seconds
2. Hold it for 1 or 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 visualisation

1. Close your eyes
2. Take slow deep breaths in and out
3. Think of your favourite place, maybe somewhere that you go on holiday
4. Focus on the place and picture yourself there
5. What can you see? What can you smell? What can you feel?



Try physical exercise

This increases your heart rate and releases endorphins that make you feel good. Running, going to the gym, cycling, skateboarding, surfing, horse-riding, swimming or team sports such as cricket or netball are all great exercise. Choose one you love and build your exercise routine around that.



Think balanced thoughts

If you find yourself thinking a negative thought or worry a lot of the time e.g. 'I will fail all my exams because I am stupid'. Try thinking of a more balanced or positive thought instead e.g. 'If I work hard, I'll do ok in my exam'. Every time you notice your self thinking the negative thought – stop and tell yourself the positive thought.

