



Most school-anxious/school refusing children do WANT to attend school however their difficulties and anxiety are overwhelming. They care about their education and want to succeed, however they need understanding and support at home and at school. They may need adjustments to their daily routines, timetables, or even their school environment. Pressures to focus on attendance rather than the child's needs can make things even harder to fix.

My Child is Struggling to Go to School - What can I do?

Unfortunately there are many children and young people struggling with school-based anxiety and other mental health and SEND difficulties that can lead to school attendance difficulties.

Such difficulties shouldn't be viewed as a behavioural or parenting problem as they are much more complicated than that. There are many different things that can trigger anxiety and attendance difficulties including bullying, academic pressure and sensorial issues in the school environment.

Fine or Not Fine?

Sometimes schools are aware of the difficulties children face, but unfortunately many parents report their child is described as 'fine in school', even if they are not in reality.

It is common for children to mask or hold in their distress until they get home from school. This leads to misunderstandings and differences in opinion between home & school.

Government good practice guidance acknowledges the importance of professionals working in partnership with parents and listening to the voices of children & young people.

Relevant Government Documents:

- ✦ Working together to improve school attendance (DfE)
- ✦ Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions (DfE)
- ✦ Summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance (DfE)
- ✦ SEND Code of Practice (2015)
- ✦ The Equality Act, (2010)

Believe your child's distress is real, listen to what they say and trust your instincts as a parent

Request Help

Schools should offer mental health support, counselling, and access to a School Nurse, they can also ask an Educational Psychologist to make an assessment of your child's difficulties. You should also speak to your child's GP and ask for a referral to a Paediatrician or CAMHS.

Ask the School to Assess Your Child for any Relevant SEND

An underlying Special Educational Need or Disability often contributes to anxiety levels; this can include Autistic Spectrum Conditions, ADHD, Sensory Processing Disorder or Dyslexia. Undiagnosed or unsupported these conditions and disabilities can make school a difficult place to be and can contribute to mental and physical health deterioration.

SEND includes Social, Emotional or Mental Health Difficulties

which can affect a child's ability to establish friendships, cope with strong emotions, and increase vulnerability to bullying. These are all barriers to learning requiring the use of SEND assess-plan-do-review cycles and possibly an EHCP. Severe anxiety is also classed as a disability and is therefore protected by the Equality Act 2010.

Apply for an EHCP Assessment of Needs

Some children will need an Education and Health Care Plan if a school does not have the expertise or funding to fully meet their needs, or offer the provision they require to access an education. SENCOs or parents can apply to the LA for an EHCP assessment.

Contact SENDIASS, IPSEA or SOS!SEN or other sources of advice about SEND and educational provision. Some offer local advice and support, and may be able to attend meetings with you at school.

If Bullying or Sexual Assault (by peers) are Factors Preventing

Attendance There are legal duties on schools and LAs to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, including preventing bullying and assault.

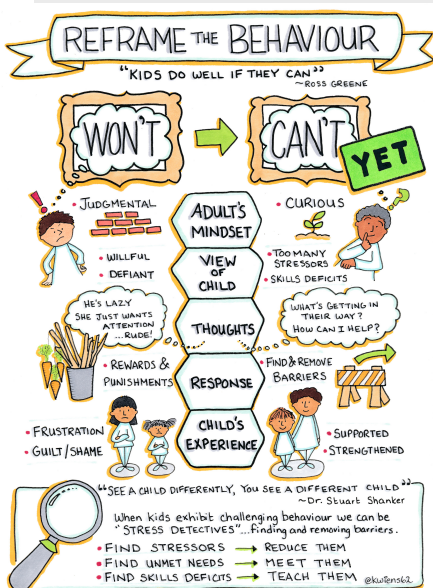
Read your school's policies and DfE statutory guidance for Attendance, SEND support, Supporting pupils with medical needs, Bullying & Behaviour
- Are they being followed?
If necessary follow the school's complaints policy

Record Keeping

- It is important to keep a diary of what happens day by day to build a picture of your child's difficulties and record the interventions and steps that have been taken.
- Keep a file of notes you take at meetings, during phone calls etc. and copies of ALL emails and letters.
- Check that minutes of meetings are accurate. Take someone with you to meetings, to take notes while you listen and to discuss the meeting with afterwards.
- Make a Subject Access Request (SAR) for a copy of all records held by your school. Check through them for accuracy and ask for errors to be corrected. (see the ICO website).
- When reporting absences use the phrase 'too unwell to attend' not 'refusing to attend'.
- Check attendance records are accurate and challenge any errors.
- This evidence will be crucial if any legal proceedings occur and/or if you apply for an EHCP.

Self-care and Support

- School attendance difficulties can impact the whole family. Remember to seek medical advice & support for your own health and wellbeing.
- Employment commitments can be



Mental & physical illness related absence should be authorised by schools

Extended absence can require medical evidence, so see a GP and request a referral to CAMHS or a Paediatrician. Schools must notify the Local Authority if children are absent due to illness for more than 15 days. Local Authorities have a duty (Section 19, Education Act 1996) to ensure that children receive alternative educational provision whilst absent for any reason, however medical evidence may be required to arrange this support.

Ask the School to Provide Work While Your Child is Absent

Ask for work if you feel your child can manage homework or online learning. Many schools will be reluctant to provide this, so explain that in not providing learning opportunities a student will get further behind, which adds to anxieties around returning to school. Look for additional resources related to their interests to inspire them & boost self-esteem.

Request Alternative Educational Provision Some children and young people will benefit from alternative provision through home tutors, online education, hospital school, or specialist units.

Elective Home Education It may be that the current school is the wrong school environment for your child so you need to research your options. Some parents decide to deregister their child from school to home educate. You should not be put under pressure from your school or LA to deregister, as you could find it harder to arrange the support your child is entitled to. Some children do benefit from time and space at home to recover, and flourish outside of mainstream education.

Work with Professionals to Create a Child-led Support Plan

- Try to maintain good relationships between your family and school so that you can work together to create an effective support plan
- Share your observations of your child's difficulties and responses then ask 'what can we learn from this information?' Expect people to be curious about what the barriers to education are for your child.
- Any plans must be communicated to all staff. Schools may also need to arrange further relevant staff awareness and training.
- Remind professionals in schools about the duty to use best endeavours and reasonable adjustments (SEND Code of Practice and the Equality Act 2010).
- Your Local Authority's Local Offer can also be an invaluable source of resources, information, advice and relevant support.
- Some families may benefit from early help support, although school attendance difficulties should not normally be treated as safeguarding or parenting problems.

Seek Peer Support

- Please look at our website www.notfineinschool.co.uk and Padlet <https://padlet.com/NFIS/nfis-what-i-wish-i-knew-topics-a-l-x2j1uzctdwd9fq4i> for sources of advice and support
- Look for online/social media peer support groups including the *Not Fine In School* family support group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NFISFamilySupport/>

Long term recovery needs a focus on support and encouragement for a child to enjoy other activities, develop interests and build friendships (not only those related to school). This will help rebuild their self-esteem, confidence and happiness, and give them hope for the future, all of which are integral aspects of recovery.