

Parent/Carer Fact Sheet: Understanding School Avoidance

What is School Avoidance, school can't or school phobia?

School avoidance occurs when a young person experiences significant emotional distress about attending school. It is often linked to anxiety, stress, social difficulties, learning challenges, bullying, mental health concerns, or feeling overwhelmed.

School avoidance is different from truancy. Young people experiencing school avoidance generally want to succeed but find attending school emotionally difficult.

Signs to Look For

- Frequent complaints of headaches, stomach aches, or feeling unwell
- Increased anxiety before school
- Difficulty sleeping
- Emotional outbursts or distress on school mornings
- Frequent lateness or requests to come home early
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Ongoing absences from school

What Can Parents Do?

- ✓ Stay calm and supportive
- ✓ Listen to understand your child's concerns
- ✓ Validate their feelings while maintaining expectations around attendance
- ✓ Communicate early with the school
- ✓ Focus on small, achievable attendance goals
- ✓ Celebrate progress

What Doesn't Help?

- X Punishment or criticism
- X Lengthy arguments about attending school
- X Assuming the behaviour is simply defiance or laziness

X Allowing prolonged avoidance without support

When to Seek Additional Support

Consider seeking support if attendance difficulties continue for more than a week, distress is increasing, or your child's wellbeing is being significantly impacted.

Remember: Early support often leads to better outcomes.

Parent/Carer Fact Sheet: Helping Your Teen Manage Anxiety About School

What Anxiety Can Look Like

Teenagers experiencing anxiety may:

- Overthink situations
- Avoid activities they previously enjoyed
- Seek reassurance frequently
- Experience physical symptoms such as nausea, headaches, or fatigue
- Become irritable or withdrawn

Helpful Responses

Listen First

Try:

"I can see this feels really difficult for you."

Avoid:

"There's nothing to worry about."

Focus on the Next Step

Large problems can feel overwhelming.

Ask:

- What's the hardest part?
- What's one small thing we can do today?

Encourage Gradual Exposure

Avoidance often strengthens anxiety.

Support your child to take manageable steps towards situations they are finding difficult.

Model Calm Behaviour

Young people often take cues from the adults around them. Remaining calm helps communicate safety and confidence.

When to Seek Support

If anxiety is affecting attendance, friendships, sleep, learning, or daily functioning, consider speaking with your GP, school wellbeing staff, or a mental health professional.

Parent/Carer Fact Sheet: Making School Mornings Easier

Why Routines Matter

Predictable routines help reduce stress and decision-making demands, particularly for young people experiencing anxiety or overwhelm.

The Night Before

- ✓ Pack school bag
- ✓ Charge devices
- ✓ Prepare uniform or clothing
- ✓ Discuss plans for the next day
- ✓ Aim for a consistent bedtime

In the Morning

- ✓ Wake at the same time each day
- ✓ Allow enough time to prepare
- ✓ Keep conversations calm and brief
- ✓ Focus on encouragement rather than negotiation

If Your Teen Is Distressed

Try:

"I know this is hard."

"I believe you can get through today."

"We'll work through this together."

Focus on helping them take the next step rather than solving the entire problem.

Remember

Perfection isn't the goal. Consistency and small improvements over time make the biggest difference.

Parent/Carer Fact Sheet: Supporting Your Teen's Mental Health

Signs Your Teen May Need Extra Support

- Significant changes in mood
- Increased irritability
- Withdrawal from family or friends
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Changes in appetite
- Reduced motivation
- Declining school attendance
- Loss of interest in activities they previously enjoyed

Protective Factors for Teen Wellbeing

- Supportive relationships
- Healthy sleep habits
- Regular physical activity
- Participation in hobbies and interests
- Positive school connections
- Opportunities to feel successful and valued

How to Start a Conversation

Choose a calm moment and try:

"I've noticed things seem a bit harder lately. How have you been feeling?"

Keep the focus on listening rather than immediately finding solutions.

Getting Help

Support may be available through:

- Your GP
- School wellbeing services
- Counsellors or psychologists
- Youth mental health services

Seeking support early can help prevent concerns from becoming more significant.

Parent/Carer Fact Sheet: When Your Child Doesn't Want to Go to School

Most young people occasionally have days when they don't want to attend school. However, repeated reluctance may indicate an underlying concern.

Questions to Consider

- Is there a friendship issue?
- Are they worried about academic performance?
- Have there been changes at home or school?
- Are they feeling anxious or overwhelmed?
- Are there concerns about bullying?
- Is fatigue or poor sleep affecting their ability to cope?

Helpful Questions to Ask

"What feels hardest about school at the moment?"

"Is there a particular class, time, or situation that worries you?"

"What would make tomorrow feel a little easier?"

Partner With the School

Schools can often provide:

- Wellbeing support
- Learning adjustments
- Attendance plans
- Check-ins with trusted staff
- Assistance with social or academic concerns

The earlier concerns are identified, the easier they are often to address.

You don't need to manage attendance difficulties alone.