

Successfully Managing Anxiety

Information for parents and carers

Understanding and managing fears and anxiety together

Introductory information about anxiety for parents and carers of young people

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- Somerset County Council - “Understanding Anxiety”

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Who is this document for?

This document highlights how parents and carers can play their part in managing and reducing anxiety in their children.

1. Understanding anxiety – A beginner's guide

Fear, anxiety and worry are such a normal part of the human experience that we rarely stop to think about them; When we hear a sudden noise we feel startled; If we face a major decision most of us will fret about it. With these temporary anxieties we usually just keep going and don't generally stop to analyse what is happening.

In fact, lower levels of anxiety (or higher levels that are temporary) are useful to us. They cause our bodies to release a quick burst of the chemical adrenalin that produces extra energy, more muscle power and speeds our brain up. That can help us in things like school tests or escaping from physical danger.

When anxiety interferes with everyday life, especially socialising or going to school, people give it various names like 'anxiety disorder', 'social phobia', 'agoraphobia', 'school phobia' or 'anxiety based school refusal'.

Whatever we call it, it all comes down to having high levels of anxiety lasting a long time that are unhelpful and interfere with everyday life. These difficulties with anxiety are surprisingly common. Local information from the South Gloucestershire Online Student Survey (OPS) questionnaire (2014) captured the responses of 2398 students in Secondary schools and Further Education and 3753 students in Primary Education. It included a range of questions pertaining to stress and anxiety.

In Primary schools, the survey responses suggest that in an average class of 30 primary school students, six worry about going to school and between six and seven feel worried by school work.

In Secondary schools, survey responses suggest that in an average class of 30 secondary/Further Education students, 14 feel stressed about school/course work and, more broadly, 5 in 30 worry about going to school/college.

When anxiety moves beyond short-lived experiences and begins to interfere with everyday life, we need tools to understand what is happening. Section 1 mentions some tools that may be useful in dealing with anxiety.

Anxiety can be seen as having four main parts.

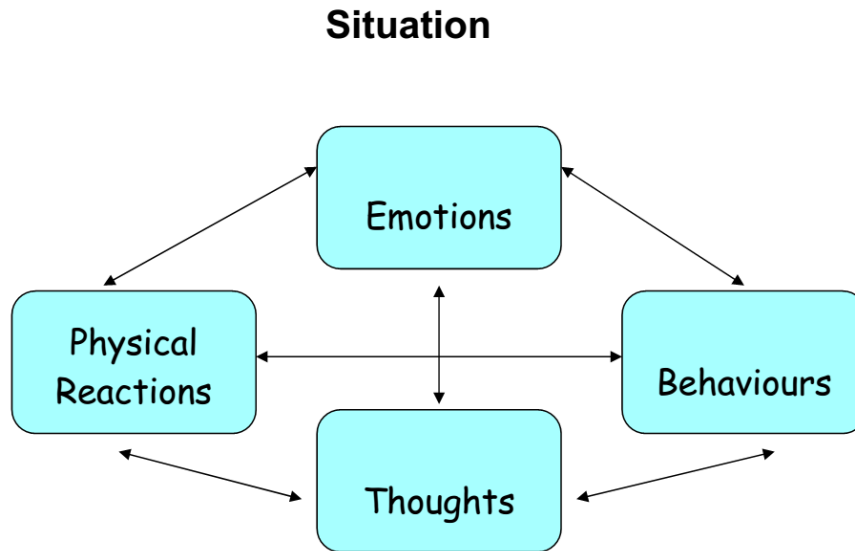
The first is **the emotional part**. This may be one of overwhelming fear. When dealing with anxiety it is also common to have feelings of anger, sadness, shame or guilt.

The second is the **physical part**. This includes feelings such as nausea, sweating, shaking, dry mouth and the need to go to the toilet.

The third is the **thinking part**: anxious thoughts. This may include detailed mental pictures of an awful event, or it may be a thought that the person cannot cope or isn't good enough.

What we do in response to these parts forms the fourth, the **behavioural part**. This includes everything from finding it difficult to speak to running away or self-harming.

When working with a young person who is anxious it is useful to see how these parts fit together.

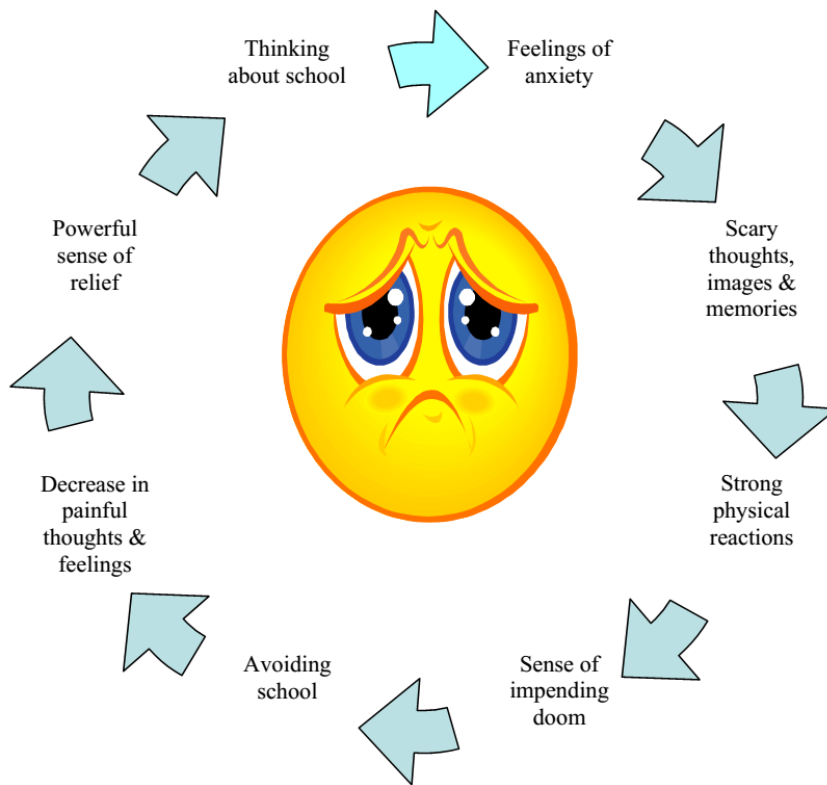


The thought of facing a situation, e.g. having to attend school, leads to feelings of fear (and possibly anger, sadness or shame). The young person experiences strong physical reactions, which could include very real physical pain. They may have lots of thoughts about all the awful things that could happen in school, often accompanied by an absolute conviction that they cannot handle it. This then leads to an active avoidance of the situation, e.g. school, or possibly even avoidance of any reminders of school.

Avoidance of the situation may reduce anxiety at that time, however, when faced with the same situation again, the anxiety will return and increase.

With a repeated pattern of anxiety these feelings often build up into a **vicious circle**. Parents and carers can also become increasingly anxious themselves as a result of the distress shown by their young person.

These patterns may vary somewhat from person to person, but it may look a little like this.



The vicious circle of

anxiety

Feelings of anxiety in a young person can be increased by things offered to demonstrate support for them. For example:

- **Parents/carers' own anxiety about their young person's situation**
- Other people around them minimising or dismissing the feelings relating to the anxiety
- Reassurance that inadvertently demonstrates that there really is something to be afraid of

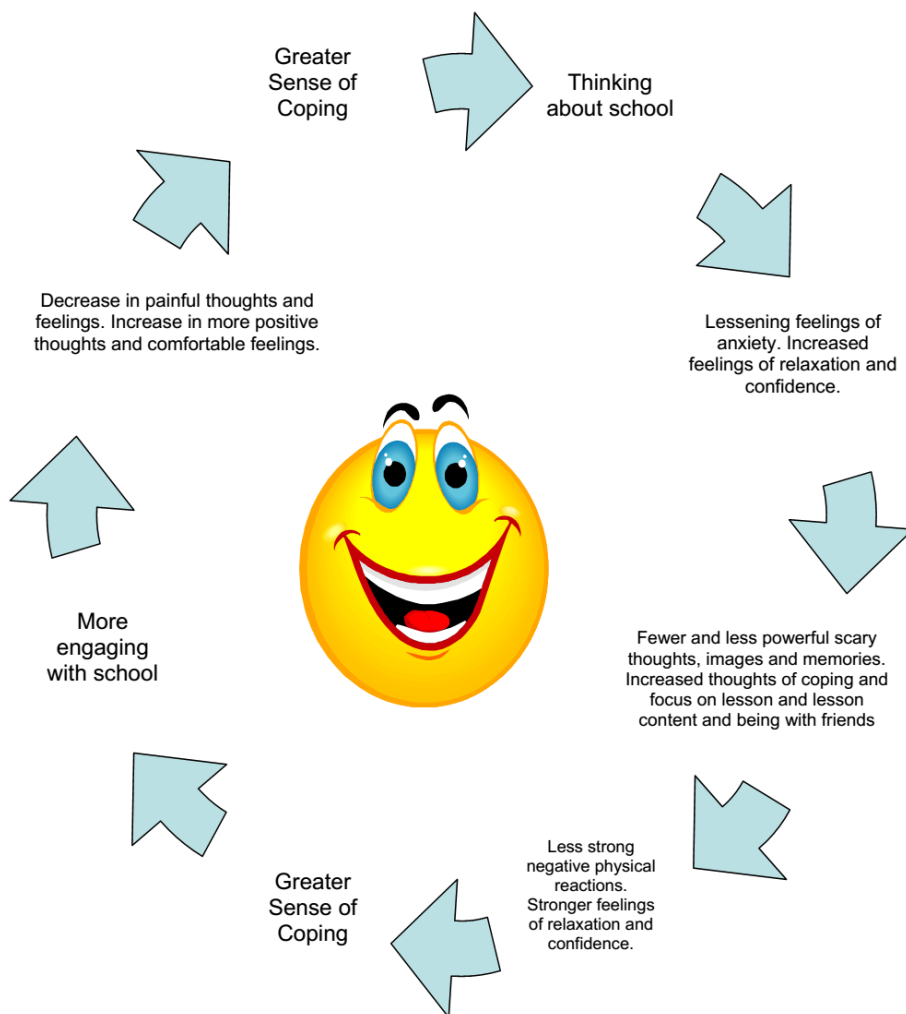
What is most important from this diagram is that **the sense of relief that comes from avoiding the situation** acts as a powerful re-enforcer for the avoidance of anxiety. The relief 'rewards' the avoidance behaviour while at the same time undermining the young person's belief in their ability to handle the situation. This can lead to a further vicious circle with anxiety increasing over time.

2. Addressing anxiety and worries

Successful work involves helping young people, their parents/carers, and others around them, to accurately investigate and assess the 'awfulness' of the situation. This means dealing with realistic concerns such as bullying, gently challenging fears that have grown out of proportion, and checking if the young person is over estimating the likelihood of the bad things happening.

It is also important to find ways to deal with these understandable anxieties. Furthermore, it is vital to ensure that strong feelings do not spill over into blaming the young person, parents/carers or the school for causing or maintaining the anxiety, as this will serve only to increase tensions and lead to the young person feeling more anxious.

Most important of all, it is vital to teach the young person and their parents/carers effective coping strategies to deal with any feared situations in school, or out. With these kinds of interventions and attitudes to anxiety, the previous vicious circle may be turned into the following preferred **cop**ing circle.



The coping circle

3. Dealing with worries and anxiety

This document highlights how parents and carers can play their part in managing and reducing anxiety in their children.

How you can help

To grow, your child *must* expect to feel anxious and worried from time to time

Anxiety is a normal part of life. Anxiety helps us to see threats, protects us from danger and helps us to reach important goals. Anxiety can be helpful in some situations, for example coping in an emergency or performing in an interview.

- Sometimes there is an obvious cause for anxiety and sometimes not
- It is natural to worry about your child and how you are as a parent.
- If you are over anxious your child may also become anxious.
- Finding the right support for your child may only be one part of the solution; you may also need help in your own right.

Anxiety is not dangerous. It is uncomfortable, but when managed will eventually decrease.

Does any of this sound like your child or teenager?

- Clinging, crying and/or tantrums when you separate
- Excessive shyness/avoiding social situations
- Constantly worrying
- Avoiding places or people because of fears
- Complaints of frequent stomach aches or headaches
- Becoming panicky

Children who are not well behaved may be suffering with high levels of anxiety and this can be missed.

Trying to eliminate anxiety from your child's life is impossible. In fact, avoiding the things that make your child anxious will increase anxiety. Your job as a parent is to help your child face what they are worried or anxious about, and to increase their confidence and skills in understanding and managing their anxiety successfully.

Anxiety can show itself in different ways:

- Excessive worry and negative thinking
- Feeling stressed/overwhelmed
- Difficulty sleeping
- Excessive sweating
- Heart pounding
- Butterflies in stomach
- Difficulty with concentration
- Low mood/depression
- Unable to enjoy things
- Getting cross with loved ones often
- Panic/anxiety attacks

- Headaches and stomach complaints
- Challenging behaviour

How to help your child

Talk to them about anxiety

Many children and young people don't know what they are feeling when they are anxious, and it can be very frightening and overwhelming. They might think they are very ill or that they are having a heart attack. Talk to them about what anxiety is and about what is happening in their body, and why. Understanding what is going on, what it is called, and why it happens can really help.

Helping your child to recognise their anxious feelings early on will help them to ask for help.

Scaling

In discussion, help your child to rate their anxious feelings, for example 0 representing very relaxed and 10 being the most anxious they could possibly be. Would you rate your child differently? Talk about this. Rating the anxious feelings over time will show that anxiety peaks and then falls away again. This is a normal process and can be reassuring for you and your child. Practicing techniques, like those mentioned below, will help you and your child understand and manage the anxiety successfully.

Techniques for when your child is very anxious

All of these ideas can help, however they work best with practice at times when anxiety is not too high.

Explain to your child that it will be ok, and that the anxiety will pass. It can be helpful to **describe the anxiety as a wave** and help them to 'ride' or 'surf' the wave and see that it gets smaller after it peaks.

Get your child to **breathe deeply and slowly**; in through their nose for three counts and out through their mouth for four counts. Practice this with them.

Recognise when anxiety is beginning and **distract them** by focusing on something else.

Teach your child to problem solve:

- Identify the problem
- List all possible solutions together
- Agree which solution will be tried and who can help with this
- Review how it went and discuss how they got through the anxious feelings

Give them a cuddle or hold their hand if they will let you, as touch can be soothing.

Practice and use relaxation techniques. The following website has some good ideas:

- [Introduction to relaxation techniques](#)

It can help to talk to the child or young person about finding a **'safe place'** in their mind i.e. somewhere that they feel relaxed and happy. It may be a grandparent's or friend's house or a holiday beside the sea etc. which they can picture when the negative thoughts come into their head or they are feeling anxious. Sometimes holding a memento like a seashell or pebble can help.

If the child or young person is feeling the need to check things or repeat certain actions, **counting up to 10** before doing the checking action can help to delay and therefore reduce the checking behaviours.

Longer term suggestions for managing anxiety

Encourage your child to **notice what things make them anxious**. Talking it through can help but they can also keep a **diary** or a **'worry book'** if they are old enough to do this.

Use a **'worry box'** where the child can write the worry down and post it into a tissue box so it is contained. (Some children will also enjoy decorating the box). They can post their worries every day if it helps, or leave the worries in there and take them out after a week to see if they were worth worrying about (if not they can be torn up).

Designate a specific **'worry time'** for around 10 or 20 minutes in the early evening (not when your child is in bed), so worries can be saved up for that time. This will give the message that the worries are not dangerous and can be contained.

You can try to help your child put their worries into perspective by re-labelling them according to who needs to worry about them. For example, worries about finances might be re-labelled as the parents' business.

Notice what things help them relax or feel better and work with your child to find strategies when they are anxious; they will often know best what works for them.

Show them how to think positively. **Name their 'worst case scenarios'** and discuss with them how to sort out the situation if it happens: 'I'm worried that we'll miss the bus'. 'What do you think we could do if that happens?' 'We could get the next bus'.

"After her grandma died my daughter was really scared that me and her mum were going to die too. We made a worry box with her and posting the worries in it every evening really seemed to help her."

General tips to help keep calm

- Encourage them to do some regular exercise as it can reduce the levels of stress hormones
- Learn relaxation techniques
- Encourage good sleeping habits – calm bedtime routines, and not too much screen or computer time in the evening.
- Try to help your child have a healthy diet and not eat too much sugar or additives, or drink caffeinated drinks

The importance of sleep

Sleep is a vital but often overlooked part of a healthy lifestyle. Lack of good quality sleep is often a key cause of low mood and irritability for both children and adults. However there are often quite obvious reasons for why people may be struggling to sleep and some simple solutions to improve the situation.

The increase in access to TV and smartphone/tablet in people's bedrooms is seen as a big factor in increased numbers of young people struggling to get enough sleep. Indeed South Gloucestershire's recent health survey looking at patterns across 6,000 students reported that 45% of students watch TV or use a smartphone before trying to sleep but by Year 10 this rose to 79%. This is both disruptive to sleep and often a point of conflict when parents try to enforce limits.

Parents and professionals alike need to give young people clear messages about how to promote sleep.

Some simple tips to help both adults and children sleep:

- **Avoid stimulants** such as [caffeine](#), nicotine, and excessive sugar too close to bedtime.
- **Regular exercise** can promote good sleep.
- **Food** can be disruptive right before sleep; stay away from large meals close to bedtime.
- Establish a regular relaxing **bedtime routine**.
- **Associate your bed with sleep.** It's not a good idea to use your bed to watch TV, listen to the radio, or look at your tablet/smart phone.
- **Make sure that the sleep environment is pleasant and relaxing.** The bed should be comfortable, the room should not be too hot or cold, or too bright.

Some useful weblinks:

- Insomnia treatment - <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Insomnia/Pages/Treatment.aspx>
- How to sleep better - <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/sleep/how-to-sleep-better.htm>
- [Sleep tips for teenagers - Live Well - NHS Choices](#)
- [Sleep Problems in Teens](#)

Managing your own anxiety

Parenting is a tough job. In today's world there may be little time for play and there are pressures to succeed and to be busy much of the time.

There may be no visible signs that we are anxious, however our thoughts are often scary thoughts about things that haven't even happened. These are known as '**awfulizing**' thoughts, e.g.

- I was bullied at school so my son will be
- I was not very good at maths so my son won't be
- He did not do well last year, I'm afraid this year will be worse

We think up the worst-case scenarios and then worry about them. The unknown can cause extreme thinking, stirring up fears, imaginations and projections.

- He will never...
- He is a loser ...
- She always gets picked on...

It is easy to end up spending our time directing, lecturing and nagging, instead of connecting positively with our children.

Examples of this are:

- Passing your own anxieties onto your child e.g. I was not good at maths so Johnny will not be
- Talking about an issue you are concerned about in front of your child
- Only talking about negative aspects of school e.g. children they are not getting on with, complaining about a teacher or aspects of work
- Over praise – causing anxiety, whereby your child feels they must always be perfect/the best
- Having unreasonable expectations of your child to achieve a level they are not capable of

What are the questions you ask your child after school?

The following are examples of probing questions that are likely to increase anxiety in your child:

- Were you on John's table?
- Did you get bullied today?
- Were you involved in..?
- Did you get a detention today?
- Why didn't you receive a sticker today?
- Did Jess let you play with her?
- Were they mean to you today?
- Did you sit by...?
- Have you been challenged?

- Where did you sit in the classroom?
- Did the teacher do... (*The teacher may not have had time to do what had been promised, or something may have happened that meant a change of plan in the class that day, and asking puts an immediate pressure on the child*).

Possible parenting styles that make sense but may increase / maintain anxiety:

- Constantly reassuring your child
- Comparing siblings unfavourably and/or encouraging competitive behaviour
- Identifying your child as a 'worrier'
- Shielding your child from what makes them anxious
- Allowing 'naughty' or challenging behaviour because it is part of the anxiety
- Becoming anxious about anxiety
- Pushing too hard such as asking too many questions, particularly about how they are achieving at school, and expecting top results in tests and exams
- Expressing your worries about your child's potential
- Not allowing enough unstructured time i.e. too many after school clubs and too much homework

Becoming a calmer parent/carer

1. **Accept your child's worry**, and how uncomfortable your child is feeling
2. **Notice aloud worry's presence**, and name how you think your child is feeling. This will help your child develop self-awareness.
3. **Know what you can and can't control.**
 - Control battles may, for example, include friends, school, or what food they eat
 - Put your efforts into what you have control over and let go of what you don't
 - Accepting that you cannot possibly control every outcome will help you feel calmer
4. **Know the difference between fear and fact.**

Are you parenting from fear? Is there evidence of what you are so worried about?

e.g. Your child might appear to be unhappy – write down the evidence that backs this up. If you find evidence to back your belief up, then determine useful steps to attend to the problem.

If you find no evidence from your awfulizing thoughts, then recognize this is about you. Try to understand what is being triggered in you.

5. **Ask yourself – what are you really anxious about?**

You might be seeing problems in your child that barely exist but become exaggerated in your mind.

6. **Focus on yourself.**

Take more care of yourself, your goals, hobbies, and aspirations. As your children see you taking

responsibility for managing your own life they will learn to manage their own responsibilities and feel free to develop.

7. **Stay in the present.**

How many times do you have a 'what if' scenario about your child. Ask yourself:

What are the facts suggesting my child will not do well?

Is my concern based on facts or fears?

What would be helpful to do now to help her do her best in the test?

Is my plan realistically taking into account of what I can control and what I can't?

8. **Consider the questions you ask your child** when they are going into and coming out of school. Below are some examples of positive questions:

What are you looking forward to today?

Tell me about the best part of your day

Did any of your classmates do anything funny; what was it?

What did you enjoy reading today in class?

Model sharing about your day. "I had a great day today. I spoke to... I went to the ... and met ..."

Model communication for them positively.

9. **Ask for help if you need it**

Most of us feel overwhelmed or that we can't cope with things at least once in our lives, and most people feel like that a lot more frequently. It is at times like this that you need to be able to talk to someone and not be afraid to ask for help.

Many of us don't like to ask for help. We don't like to burden other people, we are worried about what they will think about what we tell them, we don't want them to tell other people, or we are scared they will laugh at us. Yet most of us would want to help our friends and family if we thought they were having a hard time, so why would they feel any differently towards us?

There is the old saying 'A problem shared is a problem halved' and sometimes you can feel better just by talking to somebody about a problem. It may be that you are just having a bad day or it could be an ongoing mental health problem that you need support with, but the important thing is to not try to cope with everything on your own.

Who can you ask for help

- Family member

- Close family friends
- A mate
- A neighbour
- A colleague at college or work
- Consider asking your work manager to temporarily change your work hours.
- A professional such as a teacher, social worker, doctor or nurse
- A support group in the community
- A helpline
- See section 5 for more information about local resources.

Top tips about asking for help

Think about who would be the best person to talk to. Only you can decide who you feel most comfortable talking to. It may well be someone in your family or a friend, but if you don't feel comfortable talking to friends or family, there are online discussion forums, helplines, support groups and professionals that you can talk to instead.

1. **Choose a good time and place** for this discussion to take place so that you are not interrupted and don't feel uncomfortable in the surroundings.
2. **Think about the outcome that you want** from this discussion. Do you simply want to tell someone how you are feeling? Or would you like more practical or emotional support? Be clear what you want to achieve from the discussion.
3. **Write things down before you talk** to whoever you choose to talk to in case you forget exactly what you want to say and so it can act as pointers during the chat.
4. **Explain exactly how you are feeling** and the type of support you feel would help you.
5. **Remember**, however difficult it is to talk about your feelings, you will probably feel better just for talking about your problems and it is important that you are not on your own and struggling on your own when you are feeling low. People who care about you will want to help you.

4. When worry and anxiety affects school attendance

More extreme behaviours which affect school attendance can be associated with anxiety. Many names can be used to describe this behaviour, e.g. school refusal, school phobia, and emotionally based school refusal. They can all be misleading since the problem is not always a straightforward phobia of school. The term 'refusal' can also give the impression that the responsibility for the non-attendance is within the young person's control, taking the focus away from their environments which should not be ignored when planning suitable interventions to support a young person back to school.

Research has shown that it is the result of a combination of factors; searching for one main factor will not sufficiently explain the problem (Thambirajah et al, 2008). "School refusal occurs when stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience and when 'pull' factors that promote school non-attendance overcome the 'push' factors that encourage attendance" (Thambirajah et al, 2008:33).

There is only a small proportion of students whose experience of anxiety affects their attendance at school (approximately 2% of all school age young people (Thambirajah et al, 2008)).

Locally, the South Gloucestershire Online Pupil Survey (OPS) questionnaire (2014) indicated that 5% of students had missed 15 or more days of school (304 students) in the first 3 months of the school year. Approximately 7% of the 304 self-reported that they missed school because of bullying, and 8% because they did not want to go to school. Whilst we cannot attribute these missed school days specifically to anxiety, we need to be aware of the reasons why young people are staying at home and consider if there is a link to anxiety about attending school.

Despite the comparatively small numbers, it is vital that young people who are developing anxiety around school attendance are recognised at an early stage. This is particularly because there may be a number of young people who are anxious about attending school or leaving home, but who are managing to maintain some level of school attendance. School plays a key role in the recognition and management of this anxiety in collaboration with other agencies.

Once a young person is refusing to attend school, secondary difficulties may arise such as social isolation, loss of routine, preferred other activities, falling behind with school work and heightened anxiety as the non-school attendance becomes entrenched. Young people at secondary school have a poorer prognosis than those at primary school (Thambirajah et al, 2008). A poorer prognosis has also been found for students with prolonged school absence, severe symptoms of anxiety, or those whose commencement of symptoms was around the onset of adolescence.

School is central in prevention, early identification, and continuing management of anxiety provoked school refusal.

Early intervention is vital as the shorter the period of school attendance being affected, the more likely the young person is to return to school.

Possible TRIGGERS for anxiety affecting school attendance

There are various factors which may contribute towards, or trigger, a young person's vulnerability. These may include:

- School transfer (especially year 6/7)
- Anxiety about the journey to school and travel sickness
- Educational demands and pressures, e.g. unidentified learning needs, a young person's wish to do better, fear of failure in class or tests, fear of examinations, fear or dislike of a specific teacher or subject
- The unpredictability of teacher requests or young people's behaviour, e.g. noise levels in class, differing teachers' methods of controlling classroom behaviour, crowding in corridors or queues, break and lunch times, changes in routine (e.g. supply teachers.)
- Bullying or fear of being bullied, by young people and/or adults
- Social factors, e.g. lack of identifiable peer or friendship group, complicated teenage relationships, changes in student groups
- Traumatic events or illness within the family, e.g. bereavement, domestic violence, family history of anxiety affecting school attendance, adult mental health problems
 - A young person being worried about a parent/carer
 - A young person dealing with caring duties at home
- A young person's own long-term illness resulting in prolonged absence from school

Some young people may be more sensitive to the above triggers than others.

Depending on the presence and number of these factors, a young person may manage the anxiety and perceived threat of school, or fail to cope, such that it causes school refusal. In some cases, the young person may not excessively fear school but simply find life at home preferable, with extra attention and reinforcement in this context, or feel they are supporting their parent/carers more by being at home.

It is possible that a young person may be experiencing a number of these triggers, hence the complexity of anxiety provoked school refusal makes it difficult to understand for young people, parent/carers and professionals involved.

IDENTIFICATION

It is very **important to be proactive** in addressing anxiety provoked school refusal, before it becomes entrenched. Schools and parents need to be vigilant in monitoring attendance of young people where a pattern of non-attendance for minor ailments can become the norm. It is important that schools and parents work in partnership from the beginning when problems are first identified. A quick response is particularly appropriate where complex and acute problems are evident. Schools should take the initiative in making early contact with parent/carers to discuss the young person's non-attendance.

Anxiety induced school refusal can be identified by a number of factors, including:

- Severe difficulty attending school, with periods of prolonged absence
- Staying away from school with the knowledge of the parent/carer
- Patterns in absences, for example particular days and subjects
- A history of anxiety (including anxiety affecting school attendance) within the family
- Reluctance to attend school trips
- Frequent absences for minor illnesses (a pattern which may not be noticed by schools)
- Anxiety on separation and inappropriate dependence on family members
- Evidence of under-achievement of learning potential
- Poor personal hygiene
- Social isolation and avoidance of class mates or the peer group in general
- Regular absence without indication of anti-social behaviours
- Challenging behaviours, particularly related to specific situations within school
- The young person expressing a desire to attend classes, but being unable to do so
- Severe emotional upset with excessive fearfulness, outbursts of temper and complaints of feeling ill on school days
- Episodes of self-harm behaviours
- Depression and a sense of isolation, low self-esteem and lack of confidence
- Confusion or extreme absent-mindedness demonstrated in school work by a lack of concentration and lowering of attainments
- Physical changes – sweating, sickness, aching limbs, hyperventilation, panic attacks, abdominal pain, headaches, rapid weight loss or gain
- Disruption of day to day activities, affecting the family and often putting a great deal of pressure on parent/carers and siblings
- The fear is persistent and maintained in spite of reasoning.

KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS – Working together

It is vital that parent/carers and school staff work in partnership to ensure they have the whole picture of the young person's difficulties. Some young people who are anxious about school function very well socially in other aspects of their lives, e.g. mixing with certain friends, or going to specific sport and youth clubs of their choice. This can lead people to believe that perhaps the young person is not really anxious at school and maybe it is a case of the parent/carers not insisting that their son/daughter attends.

Equally, a parent/carer who has coped with mornings where their child vomits in fear of school, or has tempers severe enough to cause damage to the house, might feel the school is not taking their concerns seriously enough.

Open and continuous communication is key.

School is central in prevention, early identification, and continuing management of anxiety provoked school refusal. Try to work with parents, and try to avoid using formal responses such as school attendance letters at the beginning of the work. The best starting point may be mutual action plans and practical ideas that try to problem solve, together with parents and young people, how things can be achieved.

Where concerns about a child/young person are continuing, other strategies used by schools should include:

- **Putting in place an Early Help action plan listing the strategies currently being used**
- [Initiating a Single Assessment Framework early help \(SAFeh\)](#)
- **Holding TAC/F (Team Around the Child/Family) meetings and subsequent reviews**
- Requests for specific help to other services made through Access and Response Team (ART formerly First Point) Tel. 01454 866000
- [Using the behaviour handbook for schools in South Gloucestershire](#)
- [Using the handbooks for schools on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in South Gloucestershire](#)

How you can help

If after you and your child have tried the above general techniques and there are still anxieties that are affecting school attendance and achievement, there is more that can be tried.

The long term goal is for your child to understand and manage their anxiety effectively, to be in school full time and achieving to their potential.

This and other goals will probably be achieved by a series of small steps. At times it may feel like two steps forward and one step back.

Take heart that you are moving in the right direction.

Establish a routine for your child on school days:

Ensure that your child:

- gets to bed at a reasonable time
- has the necessary clothes and equipment ready for school the next day
- gets up in good time
- washes, dresses for school and eats breakfast
- is ready by the time they ought to leave home for school

Encourage your child to take responsibility for this routine, for example by giving your child an alarm clock.

If your child claims to be ill but you believe they are well enough to attend school:

- Be reassuring. Show that you understand how they might be feeling but remain firm about them needing to attend school every day
- If your child mentions a particular problem agree to look into it as soon as possible but continue to insist they go to school
- Remind them (don't nag!) that they are expected to go to school even though they may be late
- If necessary, escort your child to school. Make your parting uneventful, i.e. say goodbye and go. **DO NOT HANG AROUND**
- When your child goes to school always make a comment about how well they have done. Take every opportunity to praise their success no matter how small or obvious. Be careful to do this in a sincere and low-key way rather than a way that leads to a rise in your child's excitement level, which he or she may misinterpret as increased anxiety

If your child point blank refuses to attend, follow these guidelines:

- Expect your child to spend their time at home either on school related work or reading. If possible liaise with the school to ensure this work is marked
- Do not let them go out to visit friends or relatives
- Do not take them shopping

- Do not allow them to spend their time watching television, especially daytime soaps which can be addictive
- Do not allow them to play on their computer
- These conditions should last for the duration of the school day
- Review the situation the next day. If your child refuses school again, then the conditions apply again for the rest of the school day

If your child claims to feel ill and you decide they really are not well enough to go to school:

- Contact the school and try to speak to either the class teacher, form tutor, Head of Year or Special Educational Needs Coordinator
- Make a doctor's appointment (make sure your GP knows about your child's attendance difficulties). If the absence persists for longer than two weeks contact your GP again
- Follow the procedure already described for when a child stays at home (see previous section)
- It is crucial that your child does not develop a cosy, comfortable alternative lifestyle which will prevent them from wanting to attend school regularly

Remember...

- Any absence from school often makes the return difficult. If your child can possibly attend school, for example they have a cold or headache, encourage them to do so
- It may be extremely difficult but, whenever possible remain calm
- Try not to criticise (easier said than done when under pressure!)
- Try to praise and encourage your child
- Try to make positive helpful comments
- If it feels like it is all getting too much, don't suffer in silence

Speak to someone

You may wish to contact the school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator or other school staff member, a friend or someone on a help line (see list of support services at the end of this booklet).

If you are working parents you may also need to consider sorting something out with work so that you are not always letting work down. This may include reducing your working day, altering the times of your day or altering your work schedule.

Getting professional help: If you feel your child's anxiety is not getting any better or is getting worse, and efforts to sort it within the family have not worked, it is a good idea to ask for some professional help. Please see the section 4vii below on the roles and responsibilities of other professionals.

5. LOCAL resources

- [Resources for staff](#)
- [Resources for parents](#)
- [Resources for young people](#)
- [Physical effects of fear and anxiety](#)
- [South Gloucestershire Council website](#)
- [Local Offer | South Gloucestershire Council](#) - Services and provision we expect to be available for young people from 0 to 25 who have special educational needs and/or a disability

Access and Response Team ART (formerly First Point for South Gloucestershire Services for young person and young People) Tel: 01454 864680

South Gloucestershire Parents and Carers for parents and carers needing emotional support. SGPC exists because they want to improve services, outcomes and support for children and families living in South Gloucestershire. Get in contact by emailing parents@sglospc.org.uk , calling them on 01454 501009 (answerphone) or looking at their website www.sglospc.org.uk

[Where to get help \(locally\)](#) North Bristol NHS booklet

Time 4 Reading This year South Gloucestershire libraries are running a campaign to celebrate and promote reading. The campaign will involve libraries, schools and local businesses to encourage local residents of all ages to make time for reading. They are doing this because good literacy skills are key to success throughout life including relationships, education and employment. Reading helps us to understand the world and helps maintain our mental health and wellbeing <https://www.southglos.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/libraries/time-4-reading/>

Reading Well Books on Prescription South Gloucestershire Council are lending support to a national scheme which uses reading to help an estimated six million people in England who suffer from conditions such as depression and anxiety. There are 30 Reading Well Books on Prescription titles available to borrow from all of our libraries including topics such as anxiety, depression, phobias, panic attacks, bulimia and sleep problems. As part of the scheme, GPs and other health professionals working in the area can recommend people come to their library and borrow a book from the collection where appropriate <https://www.southglos.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/libraries/recommended-booklist/reading-well/>

6. Internet resources for children, young people and their parents/carers

ACE Education Advice & ACE Education Training

Provides independent advice and information for parents on education issues in England, based on current education law and guidance, as well as practical and tactical advice on how to work with their child's school to resolve any concerns.

<http://www.ace-ed.org.uk/advice-about-education-for-parents/attendance/>

Anxiety UK

National organisation working to relieve and support those living with anxiety disorders by providing information, support and understanding via an extensive range of services.

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

Association for Post-Natal Illness

National organisation offering support, education and information for women affected by Post-Natal illness.

<http://apni.org/>

Beat Eating Disorders

National charity supporting anyone affected by eating disorders or difficulties with food, weight and shape. They provide information and support through Helplines which people can call, text or email; online support including information, message boards and online support groups; and Helpfinder, an online directory of support services.

<https://www.b-eat.co.uk/>

CALM (Campaign against Living Miserably)

National charity which exists to prevent male suicide in the UK. Run a helpline for males aged 15+. Open 7 days a week (5pm-midnight)

www.thecalmzone.net

Child Line

Free national helpline for children and young people in the UK. Children and young people can call 24 hours a day, seven days a week to talk about any problem. Trained counsellors are always there to help.

<https://www.childline.org.uk/Explore/Anxiety/Pages/Managing-your-anxiety.aspx>

Cruse Bereavement Care

Helpline, information and advice to support you after the death of someone close.

<http://www.cruse.org.uk/>

Depression Alliance

National network bringing people together to end the loneliness and isolation of depression.

<http://www.depressionalliance.org/>

Education and Resources for Improving Childhood Continence (ERIC)

Provides information, support and resources to children, young people and their families and health professionals on bladder and bowel problems.

www.eric.org.uk/

Family Lives (formerly Parent Line Plus)

Information and advice about all aspects of family life that include all stages of a child's development, issues with schools and parenting/relationship support. Provide a 24 hour helpline, advice website, live chat and parenting/relationship support groups.

<http://www.familylives.org.uk/>

Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities

Easy Read version of 'The Easy Read Guide to Anxiety'

<http://learningdisabilities.org.uk/content/assets/pdf/publications/easy-read-guide-anxiety.pdf?view=Standard>

Get Connected

Get Connected is the UK's free, confidential helpline service for young people under 25 who need help, but don't know where to turn.

<http://www.getconnected.org.uk/>

Get Self Help

Website with information, resources and worksheets.

<http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/anxiety.htm>

Hands on Scotland

Resource for anybody working with or caring for children and young people. Gives practical information and tools to help you respond helpfully to troubling behaviours and to help children and young people to flourish.

http://www.handsonscotland.co.uk/topics/troubling_behaviours_topic_frameset_list.htm

Health Talk Online

Provides free, reliable information about health issues, by sharing people's real-life experiences.

<http://www.healthtalk.org/>

HelpGuide.org

Over 200 science-based articles and other resources to help you overcome mental and emotional challenges.

<http://www.helpguide.org/home-pages/anxiety.htm>

Hope Again

Cruse Bereavement Care's website for young people. Cruse is a national charity that provides support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone close to them dies.

<http://hopeagain.org.uk/>

IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies)

Local organisation offering free 1-1 and group work for people over the age of 16.

www.lift.awp.nhs.uk

Kidscape

We equip young people, parents and professionals with the skills to tackle bullying and safeguarding issues across the UK.

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

Kids Health

Provides families with perspective, advice, and comfort about a wide range of physical, emotional, and behavioural issues that affect children and teens.

<http://kidshealth.org/>

Local Offer – South Gloucestershire Council

Services and provision available for young people aged 0 to 25 who have Special Educational Needs and/or a Disability

<http://www.southglos.gov.uk/local-offer/>

Mood Juice

Internet site offering information and advice to those experiencing troublesome thoughts, feelings and actions.

<http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/>

Mental Health Foundation

UK charity helping people to access information about the steps they can take to look after their own mental health.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/a/anxiety>

Also produce a useful booklet '[Are you Anxiety Aware](#)'

MIND

Provide advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem.

<http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks>

National Family Mediation

Provider of family mediation in England and Wales. Works to help resolve conflict and reach agreement on all issues surrounding separation, divorce or dissolution of civil partnership in couple and family disputes.

<http://www.nfm.org.uk/>

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)

The NSPCC Child Protection Helpline offers advice and support to anyone concerned about the welfare of a child. The Helpline is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Calls are dealt with by NSPCC Helpline counsellors, who are all trained child protection officers. You can telephone, email or write to them for information and advice, or to report concerns about a child at risk of abuse.

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

NHS Choices

NHS website where you can find information about a range of mental health conditions and search for local services.

Children's Anxiety: <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/anxiety-children/pages/introduction.aspx>

Youth Mental Health:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/youth-mental-health/Pages/Youth-mental-health-help.aspx>

No Panic

Website of the National Organisation for Panic, Anxiety Neuroses, Information and Care; offering help and advice on a number of anxiety disorders.

<http://www.nopanic.org.uk/>

OCD Youth

OCD Youth aims to increase awareness and access to support for anyone under 25 affected by Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. OCD Youth is run by young people with OCD, for young people with OCD.

<http://ocdyouth.org/about/>

Papyrus – Prevention of Young Suicide

Run a national helpline, including text and email services providing practical help and advice to vulnerable young people and to those concerned about any young person who may be at risk of suicide

<https://www.papyrus-uk.org/>

ParentInfo

Tips for parents and carers to help children and young people suffering with anxiety.

<http://parentinfo.org/article/understanding-and-supporting-anxiety-in-your-child>

Reading Well – Books on Prescription

South Gloucestershire libraries offer a selection of NHS recommended books on common mental health problems, which are available to all library users.

<https://www.southglos.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/libraries/recommended-booklist/reading-well/>

Relate

National organisation offering a range of services in local areas to help you with your couple and family relationships, whether you're young or old, straight or gay, single or in a relationship.

<http://www.relate.org.uk/>

Rise Above

Help for 11 – 16 year olds to build emotional resilience by equipping them with the knowledge and skills to deal with pressures they may face. Inspiring and useful stories, videos, games and advice.

<http://riseabove.org.uk/>

Samaritans

Free national helpline that can be used at any time you like to discuss issues affecting you. You don't have to be suicidal. There is also a Bristol Branch available on 0117 9831000.

www.samaritans.org/branches/bristol-samaritans

SAM app

SAM is an application to help you understand and manage anxiety. The app has been developed in collaboration with a research team from UWE, Bristol.

<http://sam-app.org.uk/>

Young Sane

Young SANE is a virtual community that focuses on mental health for people aged under 25.

http://www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/young_sane/

Self Harm UK

Project dedicated to supporting young people impacted by self-harm, providing a safe space to talk, ask any questions and be honest about what's going on in your life.

<https://www.selfharm.co.uk/>

Student Health

Useful information on a variety of areas for adolescent students. Areas include, healthy eating,

sexual health, mental health-anorexia, anxiety and self-harm.

<http://www.studenthealth.co.uk/>

Supportive Parents

Local organisation that may be accessed directly by parents/carers or via professionals with parents/carers consent. They may support parents/carers of young people experiencing anxiety about attending school.

<http://www.supportiveparents.org.uk/>

The Rainbow Centre

Bristol centre providing free and professional support to children and their families affected by life threatening illness and bereavement.

<http://www.rainbowcentre.org.uk/>

The Site

Online guide to life for 16-25 year-olds in the UK. Provide non-judgmental support and information on everything from sex and exam stress to debt and drugs.

<http://www.thesite.org/>

Time to Change

Anti-stigma campaign run by mental health charities Mind and Rethink Mental Illness. Contains personal stories about experiences with anxiety.

<http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/category/blog/anxiety>

Time for Reading

Reading helps us to understand the world and helps maintain our mental health and wellbeing.

<https://www.southglos.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/libraries/time-4-reading/>

Triumph Over Phobia (TOP) UK

UK charity which aims to help sufferers of phobias, obsessive compulsive disorder and other related anxiety to overcome their fears and become ex-sufferers. Offer a network of self-help therapy groups locally.

<http://www.topuk.org/>

Winston's Wish

UK childhood bereavement charity offering practical support and guidance to bereaved children, their families and professionals.

<http://www.winstonswish.org.uk/>

Youth Access

Youth Access is the national membership organisation for young people's information, advice,

counselling and support services. Their website offers a directory of local youth information, advice and counselling services for young people aged 14 – 25.

<http://www.youthaccess.org.uk/>

Young Minds

UK charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people. Resources include a free confidential helpline for any adult who is concerned about emotional problems, behaviour or mental health of a child or young person up to the age of 25.

www.youngminds.org.uk

Youth Space

Birmingham-based organisation specialising in information, advice and support for young people aged 16-25. Website includes a link to their YouTube channel.

http://www.youthspace.me/help_and_advice/465_anxiety

7. Video resources for children, young people and their parents/carers

'Child Anxiety' video (10 mins) from www.kidsmentalhealth.ca

'Your Brain on Stress and Anxiety' video (5 mins) for older young people

Talking about anxiety – lots of people giving their experiences; vlogger [NinkComPoop](#) (KS3 upwards – 20 minutes)

8. Useful books and further reading

Anxiety in Children: The Anxiety Cure for Kids - A Guide for Parents by Elizabeth DuPont Spencer, Robert L. DuPont & Caroline DuPont, Wiley

ISBN 978-1118430668

Breaking the Cycle of Depression by Joe Griffin & Ivan Tyrell, Human Givens Publishing Ltd

ISBN 978-1899398010

Coping with an Anxious or Depressed Child by Sam Cartwright-Hatton, Oneworld Publications

ISBN 978-0787960407

Helping children who are anxious or obsessional by Margot Sunderland, Speechmark Publishing Ltd

ISBN 0863884547

Helping children with fear by Margot Sunderland, Speechmark Publishing Ltd

ISBN 978-0863884641

Helping your Anxious Child (2nd edition) - a step by step guide for parents by Rapee, Wignall, Spence, Cobham, Lyneham, New Harbinger Publications

ISBN 978-1572245754

How to master anxiety by Joe Griffin & Ivan Tyrell, HG Publishing

ISBN 1899398813

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish, Piccadilly Press

ISBN 978-1848123090

I Bet I Won't Fret: A Workbook to Help Children with Generalized Anxiety Disorder by Timothy A. Sisemore, Instant Help Books

ISBN 978-1572246003

Overcoming School Anxiety by Diane Peters Meyer, Amacom

ISBN 978-0814474464

School Phobia, Panic Attacks and Anxiety in Children by Marianna Csoti, Jessica Kingsley Publishers

ISBN 978-1843100911

Supporting pupils with emotional difficulties by Rob Long and Jonathan Fogell, David Fulton

ISBN 978-1853465956

The APET Model by Joe Griffin & Ivan Tyrell, HG Publishing

ISBN 1899398066

The "Which?" guide to managing stress by Mark Greener, Which? Books

ISBN 0852029268

The worry cure: seven steps to stop worry from worrying you by Dr Robert Leahy, Piatkus Books

ISBN 07499 26767

The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook for Kids: Help for Children to Cope with Stress, Anxiety and Transitions by Lawrence Shapiro & Robin K Sprague, Instant Help/New Harbinger Publications

ISBN 978-1572245822

Understanding and supporting depressed children and 978-1901485103 young people by Rob Long, NASEN Enterprises Ltd

ISBN 978-1901485103

Understanding School Refusal - A handbook for Professionals in Education, Health & Social Care by M.S. Thambirajah, Karen J. Grandison & Louise De-Hayes, Jessica Kingsley Publishers

ISBN 978-1843105671

What to do when your child hates school by Antonia Chitty, White Ladder Press

ISBN 978-1905410385

Your Anxious Child: How Parents and Teachers Can Relieve Anxiety in Children by John S. Dacey & Lisa B. Fiore, Jossey Bass

ISBN 978-0787960407