

Many young people worry about going to school for different reasons. Feeling anxious and worrying is part of life and learning how to deal with stress is a part of maturing. However, sometimes these feelings can get too much for us and make us not want to attend school. If you feel that you have high levels of anxiety about attending school, or that you are absent at times because of the anxiety, you may be experiencing something called Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA).

When you think about school, do you:

Worry?

Have trouble sleeping?

Feel low?

Feel afraid?



Feel bad tempered?

Worry about friends?

Feel ill or pretend to feel ill?

Feel unsure about yourself?

It is important for you to remember that you are not alone. We all feel like this from time to time because of things that happen in our lives whether at home, at school or somewhere else. Sometimes, you can't even say exactly what is causing you to feel this way.

Some things at school can make you feel this way, such as;

- Problems with friends
- Changing school
- Bullying
- Feeling different to other people
- Worrying about your appearance
- Pressure to reach your target grades
- Struggling with the the noise at school

- Not understanding or coping with school work.
- Feeling like you're no good at sports
- Worrying about changing for PE or games
- Not getting on with some teachers
- Worrying about exams and tests



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

- The death of someone important to you
- Parents arguing or separating
- A parent is ill
- Members of your family feeling anxious or depressed
- Death or loss of a pet
- The birth of a new sibling
- New people moving into your home
- Difficulties getting to school
- Parents not understanding your feelings

What happens when you don't attend school?

It is very important to try to address these factors as soon as possible.

Sometimes you may feel that staying home is the best thing to do when you feel like things are too much as you feel safer here, and it makes you feel better. However, the more time you spend outside of school, the more you miss out on lessons and learning becomes more tricky. You also miss out on seeing friends which means that maintaining friendships becomes difficult. While it is easy enough to see how staying at home and avoiding school would feel like the best choice in the short term, it creates additional worries and problems in the long term. This can be seen in the diagram.



It is important to let an adult know if you are worried about anything at school or at home and get help to improve it rather than letting things get worse and you get caught in the cycle. It is possible to get out of it!

What should I do if I feel like this?

Most importantly, you should talk to someone. This could be your parents, an adult at school, other family members or a friend. Think about the things that worry you, write a list (on paper or on your phone), or draw them, then sort them from the things that cause you the most anxiety to the things that cause less anxiety.



What can your school do to help you?

Can you think of a member of staff at your school who you feel you can trust and talk to? Or would you feel better to have someone go and talk to them on your behalf? The member of staff at the school should listen to you, spend time with you gathering information about the difficulties/concerns without dismissing them. The staff member/s can also work with your parents and other school staff to gather more information about the situation before starting a conversation about the most appropriate steps forward to help you.

These could include:

- Designate a key person for you to talk to
- Help with school work
- Help with friendships
- Find a safe/quiet place for you to go
- Make adjustments to your timetable

These steps should be written and noted on a one page profile or Individual Development Plan (IDP) so that the best actions and steps to help you are clear to you, your parents, and your school and so that they can be reviewed regularly. By creating a plan like this everyone will know what steps have been agreed to support you.

What could help you to return to school?

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

- Take part in the process of drawing up a support plan. Work with your parents and teachers to think/voice ideas about things that can help you.
- Think of a time when you coped with anxiety in the past. What did you do at that time to cope?
- Keep in touch with your friends and what is happening at school.
- Catch up on some of the work you have missed before you go back if you can.
- Take small steps to get back to normal - don't expect that everything will return to normal or that it will be fine straight away, bumps in the road are to be expected.
- Try to give yourself a chance! Acknowledge the steps you have taken and celebrate the small successes.

When you feel anxious your whole body tends to react to the anxiety...

Change in the skin e.g. become pale or blushed

Headaches

Tightness in the chest

Feeling tired, little energy

Your muscles are tense

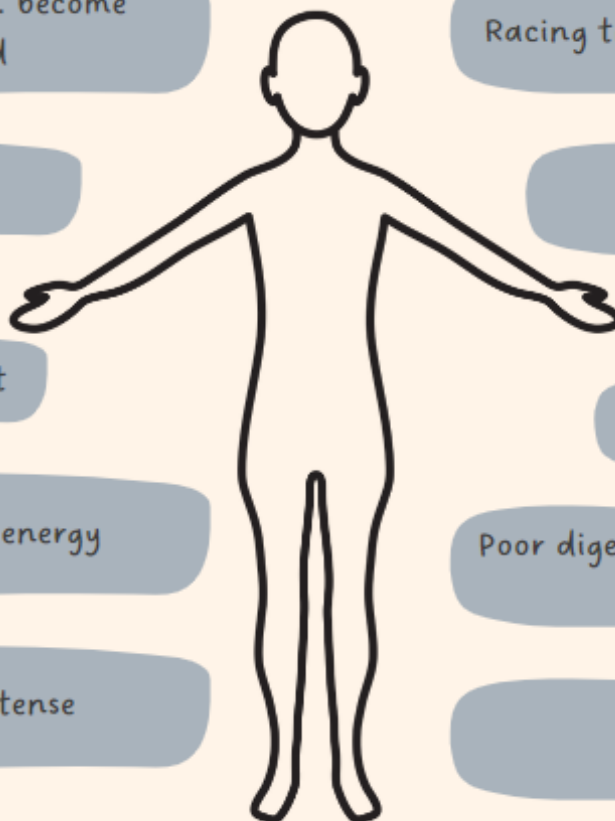
Racing thoughts, difficulty sleeping

Your heart beats faster

Shortness of breath

Poor digestion, stomach aches, bowel problems


Dry throat or mouth



CHECKLIST OF EMOJIS

Look at the emojis below, circle any emoji that matches how you feel to help start a conversation with an adult.

I am worried about coming to school in the mornings




I wish I had more friends at school



I worry about things that happen at home




I feel pressure to do well in important exams such as GCSEs



I feel pressure on social media to act a certain way




No one understands how I feel



I have many friends



I'd rather be at home than at school



I'm worried something bad will happen



I feel better in some lessons than others



I don't like change in routine




I enjoy learning new things



I feel like I don't fit in when it comes to my looks



I need a lot of help with my learning




Other pupils are being nasty to me




I'm worried about break time




I don't understand what the teachers are asking me to do




I want to go to school




I'm worried about changing for physical education



I don't know where to go/who to talk to when I feel overwhelmed




Going back after the holidays is difficult



Busy corridors scare me



I'm less worried after arriving at school



I learn things quickly



Try to notice when you start to feel any of the above signs and stop to take a moment. There are many different strategies to help you relax and calm down 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 breathing slowly

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

Try to relax your body



1. Sit or lie somewhere quiet and comfortable
2. Extend your arms and make a fist, then relax
3. Push your legs out, wiggle your toes, and then relax
4. Close your eyes tightly and scrunch your face, then relax

Try visualization



1. Close your eyes
2. Take slow deep breaths in and out
3. Think of your favorite place, perhaps somewhere you've been on holiday
4. Focus on the place and imagine yourself there
5. What can you see? What can you smell? What can you feel?

Try to exercise

This increases your heart rate and releases endorphins which make you feel better. Running, going to the gym, cycling, skateboarding, surfing, horse riding, swimming or being part of a sports team, sports such as cricket or netball are all great exercise.



Think balanced thoughts

If you notice negative thoughts e.g. 'I'll fail all my exams because I'm stupid'. Try to think of more balanced or positive thoughts instead e.g. 'If I work hard, I can be proud of the effort, whatever the result'. When you notice the negative thoughts - stop and ask yourself the following questions; What evidence do I have? What would my friend/parent/teacher say to me if they knew I was having these thoughts? What would I say to my best friend if they felt this way? Try to think of more balanced or positive thoughts instead.

Useful Resources

Amser i siarad

'Amser i Siarad' is a local mental health charity that supports people in Ynys Môn and Gwynedd who experience mental health problems. They offer a confidential 1-1 service. It's an opportunity for you to talk about anything that worries you, get help and information, and provide skills to self-manage. They provide information and a range of services relating to mental health and wellbeing.

01286 685279
info@amserisiarad.org

Amser i
Siarad
Ynys Môn
Talk

The SAM app provides a variety of self-help techniques organized into several well-being categories, along with offering a way to record and monitor changes in your well-being every day, to help identify potential "triggers" that you can work on.

MindShift CBT - a free self-help anxiety relief app, which helps you reduce anxiety, stress and panic by following evidence-based strategies based on cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).



Anna Freud Center - 'On my Mind' is an online platform with lots of information for young people to support them with their mental health and access to services. The website is https://www.annafreud.org/on-my_mind/

Stem4 - Supporting Adolescent Mental Health

- Free CBT apps for young people to download to manage anxiety and depression

Meic - the helpline service for children and young people up to the age of 25 in Wales. From finding out what's going on in your local area to help dealing with a tricky situation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWZYMfYxXz8&t=3s>

Kooth - online support and counselling. Set smart personal goals and track your progress towards achieving them. Kooth Diary - track how your mood changes as a result of things that happen throughout the week. Identify behaviors and events that make you feel good and bad. Chat with the friendly Kooth online team about anything that's bothering you.

Childline website - advice and support on a variety of different topics, including help with anxiety, exams, stress etc. They also offer free confidential counseling and are available 24 hours a day. <https://www.childline.org.uk/>



Anxiety guidance for young people - Young Minds website www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/mental-health-conditions/anxiety/

