

I WORRY ABOUT GOING TO SCHOOL

“What if...?”

“I’m scared”

“No one
likes me”

“I can’t...”

“I’m stupid”



**Young person’s quick guide on
emotionally related school avoidance**

ARE YOU FEELING ANXIOUS ABOUT SCHOOL?

Worrying or anxiety is a normal feeling that we all experience from time to time. It can 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. But 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 related school avoidance or ERSA for short.



Reflect...

How do you feel when you think about school?

Regardless of how you feel, 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, in school or elsewhere.

Struggling to sleep
Out of control
Unwell
Unconfident
Bad
Angry
Low in mood
Scared
Worried

THERE MIGHT BE THINGS IN SCHOOL MAKING YOU FEEL THIS WAY

- Problems with friendships
- Changing school
- Bullying
- Feeling too different from other people
- Worried about your appearance
- Worried about getting changed for PE or games

THERE MIGHT ALSO BE THINGS OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL THAT CAN MAKE YOU FEEL THIS WAY

- Death of somebody important to you
- Parents or carers arguing or splitting up
- A parent or carer 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 or carers not understanding your feelings

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DON'T ATTEND SCHOOL?

Reflect...

Worry about going to school

Impact on friendships and school work

Days missed from school

Thoughts and feelings on attending school

It is very important to try to overcome these difficulties as soon as possible.

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

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

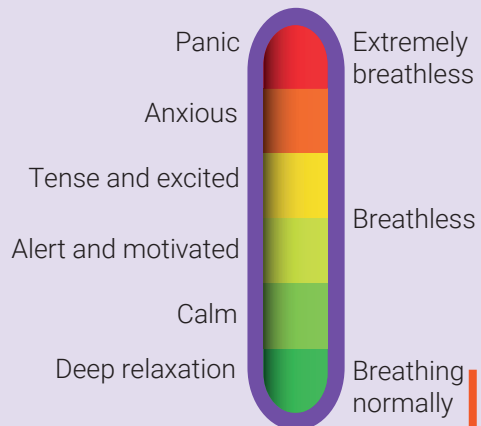
EXPLORING MY FEELINGS

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



For each, measure your anxiety on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most. You can use the scale to describe how it makes you feel and what these feelings may look or sound like.

You can explore situations that may make you feel a certain way and think about what you can do to reduce overwhelming or difficult emotions.



STEPS I CAN TAKE

Draw a ladder or use the one shown.

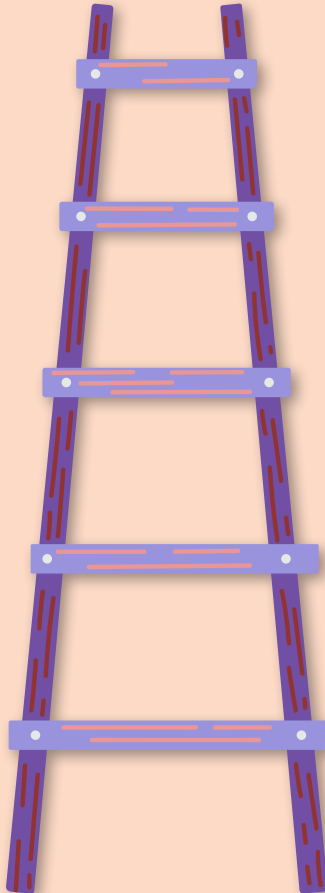
On the top rung, write the final step that you want to achieve to be able to attend school.

On the bottom rung, write the first thing you want to do to face your anxiety. This needs to be an action that is currently in reach.

Put other steps on the rungs, gradually building up to reach the top rung. Ensure steps are small and achievable.

Move on to the next rung when you feel ready.

Reward yourself for achieving each step.



WHAT CAN MY SCHOOL DO TO HELP ME?

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. 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.

WHAT CAN I DO TO GO 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
- take the chance to go to school and reflect on how you felt it went
- acknowledge the steps you have taken and celebrate the small successes

IF YOU'RE FEELING ANXIOUS, HERE ARE SOME THINGS THAT CAN HELP YOU IN THE MOMENT

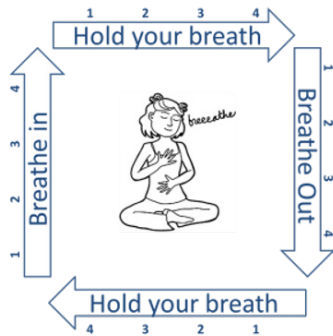
Visualisation



Calming music



Square breathing



Physical exercise



Grounding

Look around you and notice:

- 5 things you can see:**
your hands, the sky, a plant
- 4 things you can feel:**
feet on the ground, the chair
- 3 things you can hear:**
birds chirping, your breath
- 2 things you can smell:**
coffee, your lunch, clothes
- 1 thing you can taste:**
a mint, gum, fresh air

MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

'Thoughts are not facts'

Thoughts have a very powerful influence on the way we experience our world and our feelings. Mindfulness is a way to observe your thought processes on a moment-to-moment basis. This non-reactive observation gives you the opportunity to see your thoughts differently.

- **Just watch your thoughts come in and leave, without thinking that you have to follow them.**
- **View your thoughts as a mental event rather than a fact.**
- **Write your thoughts down on paper.**
- **Ask yourself the following questions:**
 - Did this thought just pop into my head automatically?
 - Does it fit with the fact of the situation?
 - Is there something about it that I can question?
 - How would I have thought about it at another time, in another situation?
 - Are there any alternatives?
- **Gently ask yourself:**
 - Am I overtired?
 - Am I jumping to a conclusion?
 - Am I thinking in black and white terms?
 - Am I expecting perfection?

Reflect on how you feel:



CHALLENGING NEGATIVE AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS

We might have negative thoughts about ourselves or our ability to cope. For example, thinking 'I am not good enough' or 'Nobody likes me.'

We listen to our thoughts a lot, and often accept them as the truth without really challenging them. These thoughts can become loud and make it harder to hear the positive thoughts.

Identify a negative automatic thought that you experience and then ask yourself:

- What is the evidence for this thought?
- What is the evidence against this thought?
- What would my best friend say if they heard my thought?
- What would my teacher say if they heard my thought?
- What would my parents or carers say if they heard my thought?
- What would I say to my best friend if they had the same thought?
- Am I making mistakes? For example, blowing it up and forgetting my strengths or good points, self-blaming or predicting failure or thinking that I can mind-read what others are thinking?

Negative thinking patterns

All-or-nothing: 'If I don't get that 'A', I am a failure.'

Negative self-labelling: 'I didn't have anything to contribute to that conversation. I am so boring.'

Fortune telling: 'If I talk to that person, they are not going to want to respond to me.'

Minimising: 'I did well on that test, but I just got lucky, anyone could have done that.'

Overgeneralisation: 'I messed up my science test today. I'm never going to get anything right.'

OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES AVAILABLE

Number 22

Number 22 provides free, confidential counselling to young people (11 years+) and adults in Windsor, Maidenhead and Slough.

Website: www.number22.org

Phone: 01628 636661

Daisy's Dream

Daisy's Dream supports children and their families who are affected by life-threatening illness or bereavement.

Website: <http://www.daisysdream.org.uk>

Email: info@daisysdream.org.uk

Phone: 0118 934 2604



Friends in Need

Friends in Need provide peer support and activities for people that are lonely, anxious or depressed.

Website: <http://www.bucksmind.org.uk/services/peer-support-groups/friends-in-need>

Phone: 07496 874882

KOOTH

Kooth is a website that children and young people (aged 11 to 18) can use to access online counselling which is anonymous and confidential.

Website: <https://www.kooth.com>

Youngminds

Youngminds is the UK's leading charity fighting for children and young people's mental health. They provide support and advice to young people, parents, carers and professionals.

Website: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk>