



Do you worry about going to school?

Worrying or anxiety is a normal feeling that we all experience from time to time. It can even 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 people doing what they 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. However, sometimes these worries may lead to difficulties attending school.

When a young person has lots of worried feelings and does not want to attend school they may be experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). EBSA is not a medical diagnosis but a way of understanding that there is something causing a young person to feel worry and that this is impacting how they feel about attending school.

When you think about school are you?

Bad tempered

Scared

Feeling depressed

Feeling ill or
pretending to
feel ill

Struggling to
sleep

Feeling unsure
of yourself

Worried

Worrying about
friendships



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, at school or elsewhere.

Why do I feel like this?

There is no single reason why a young person experiences these feelings. This is why it is important for someone you trust to work with you and your family to help understand what is causing the worries about school and what might help.

There can be lots of factors that impact on how a young person feels about school. These could be:

School factors

Bullying

Too big/too busy

Problems with friendships

Worried about changing for PE

Not getting on with teachers

Not understanding or coping with school work

Changing schools
Exams / pressure

Home factors

Parents not understanding you

Difficulties getting to school

Changes (moving house / divorce)

Tough times

Someone who is ill at home

Death of someone you love

Individual factors

Individual differences – learning, autism

Trauma

Confidence

Physical illness

Growing up





What happens when you don't go to school?

It is very important to try to overcome these difficulties as soon as possible. Sometimes you might feel that staying at home is the best thing to do as it makes you feel better. However, the more time you spend out of school the more you miss out on lessons and the learning gets harder.

You also miss out on seeing friends which means keeping friendships becomes more difficult. This can be seen in the diagram opposite. It is important to let an adult know if you are worried about anything in school or home and get the help to make it better rather than let things get worse and get stuck.



Let someone know how you're feeling.

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

Think about the things that are worrying you so you know what you want to say.

Write a list or draw them then order them from most worried about to least worried about.

Most worried	
Least worried about	

I am going to talk to.....

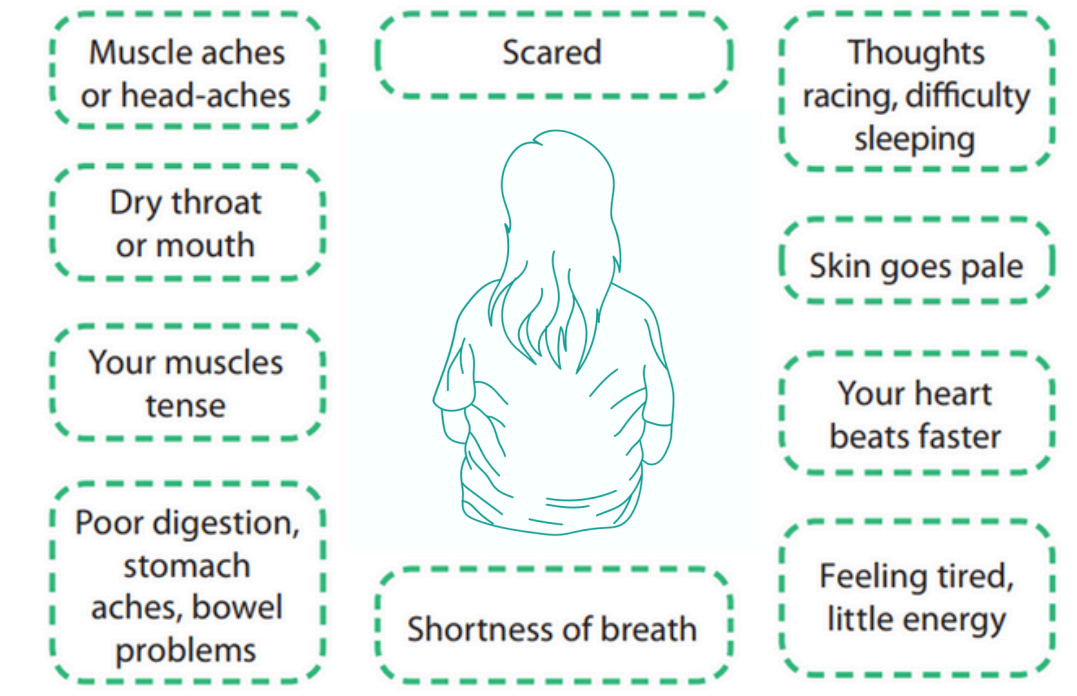
The best time/place to talk to them will be.....

.....



Look after yourself!

When you are feeling worried... Your whole body may react.



How do you cope with worries?

Do you have any coping strategies? Some people like to listen to music, draw, write/journal, go for a walk, spend time with a family pet, cook, have a bubble bath or even tidy their room!

Sometimes people find physical activity, concentrating on their breathing, or thinking about other things can help. There are some suggestions below you could try if you think they could help?

Calm breathing

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



Visualisation

1. Close your eyes
2. Take slow deep breaths in and out
3. Think of your favourite place, maybe somewhere that you go on holiday
4. Focus on the place and picture yourself there
5. What can you see? What can you smell? What can you feel?

Physical exercise

This increases your heart rate and releases endorphins that make you feel good. Running, going to the gym, cycling, skateboarding, surfing, horse-riding, swimming, or team sports such as cricket or netball are all great exercise. Choose one you love and build your exercise routine around that.

Balance your Thoughts If you find yourself thinking a negative thought or worry a lot of the time e.g. 'I will fail all my exams because I am stupid'. Try thinking of a more balanced or positive thought instead e.g. 'If I work hard, I'll do ok in my exam'. Every time you notice yourself thinking the negative thought – see if you can stop and tell yourself the positive thought. Keeping a gratitude journal where you write down good things that happen each day can help.

What can your school do to help you?

Find an adult at school you trust and talk to them, they should listen and believe you. They can work with you and your family to help find out what things are worrying you and what you and they can do to help you. Things they could do include:

- ✓ Key person to talk to
- ✓ Help with school work or friendships
- ✓ Find a safe space for you to go to
- ✓ Alter your timetable



What can I do to get 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?
- ✓ Think about teachers and times of the day you like and make a plan that involves returning for these positive parts of school.
- ✓ Keep in touch with 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 – don't expect that everything will get back to normal or will be okay immediately.
- ✓ Take the chance! Once you're at school, it may not seem as bad.
- ✓ Acknowledge the steps you've taken and celebrate the small successes!

Places to go to get further help

Locally

Support for young people – Healthy Minds online information service which provides information to young people about well-being and has details about services that could support and help such as:

Kooth.com is a free, safe and anonymous online support for young people.



Guide Line is a confidential telephone and online support service which offers mental health advice.

Nationally

Childline comforts, advises and protects children 24 hours a day and offers free confidential counselling. Phone 0800 1111 (24 hours).

YoungMinds is the UK's leading charity championing the wellbeing and mental health of young people.

The Mix provides information, support and listening for people under 25. Phone 0808 808 4994 (24 hours).

This leaflet has been adapted from a leaflet originally written by the West Sussex Educational Psychology Service, who kindly gave Bradford Educational Psychology Team permission to adapt it to fit the needs of our local authority.

The wording in this publication can be made available in other formats such as large print. Please call: 01274 439500.