

When your child is struggling to attend

A calm first-step guide for understanding what may be getting in the way.

Your role

Keep school informed, report absence using the school's process, share relevant barriers early and work with the school on agreed actions. Legal rules differ across the UK, so use the official guidance for your nation.

Notice the pattern

- When is attendance hardest - Sunday night, waking, leaving home, arriving, particular lessons or specific days?
- Look for changes in sleep, physical symptoms, friendships, workload, transport, family circumstances or confidence.
- Ask what feels easier as well as what feels difficult. This can reveal protective factors and possible solutions.

What to do first

- Tell the school early that attendance is becoming difficult and ask for one named contact.
- Share what your child is saying in their own words where possible.
- Agree one or two practical actions rather than a long list. Ask who will do what and by when.
- Keep a simple one-week record of attendance, distress, sleep, triggers and what helped.

Useful questions for school

- What have you noticed in school?
- Is there a trusted adult my child can check in with?
- Are there patterns by lesson, time, place or peer group?
- What support can start now, and when will we review whether it is helping?

Remember

- Attendance difficulty can be a signal of unmet need. Responsibility for education matters, but families should also expect schools and services to help identify and remove barriers.

Use this leaflet as a conversation starter. It is general information, not legal, medical or safeguarding advice. If you are worried about immediate safety, use the appropriate local emergency or safeguarding route.