

Anxiety, EBSA and school attendance

Understanding distress and working towards safe, supported participation.

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.

What you may notice

- Physical symptoms before school, panic, tearfulness, shutdown, anger or repeated requests to stay home.
- Distress linked to particular lessons, people, transitions, social situations, sensory demands or fear of failure.
- Relief when school is removed from the immediate situation does not by itself tell you what the underlying cause is.

Helpful principles

- Stay curious about the cause rather than treating the behaviour as defiance.
- Keep communication with school active even when attendance is very low.
- Agree small, realistic steps that build connection and confidence.
- Identify a trusted adult and a predictable arrival/check-in plan.
- Ask whether SEND, bullying, trauma, mental health or unmet learning needs require further support.

Avoid

- Long morning arguments, threats or repeated negotiations that increase distress.
- Plans that depend only on willpower without changing the barrier.
- Allowing a temporary workaround to drift indefinitely without review.

When to seek more help

- If anxiety is severe, persistent, affecting daily life beyond school, or you are worried about safety, seek appropriate health or mental-health advice while continuing to work with school.

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.