



How to: Support your Child with Anxious Non-Attendance, in School

*This is part two of a three-part resource for parents on **How to: Support your Child with Anxious Non-Attendance, in School**. This guide suggests strategies and tips for helping your child or young person with anxious non-attendance from school, as a second step to providing effective support.*



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Disclaimer



This resource provides information that is believed to be accurate and has been fact-checked in good faith.



However, given the nature of this topic, some information may be considered health related. Any health-related information is constantly evolving, so it is essential to stay informed and review the latest guidance.

Please note that this resource does not constitute, nor is it a substitute for, personalised professional medical advice.



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In the **How to Series**, we provide you with our suggested strategies and top tips, to help you to effectively support your child.

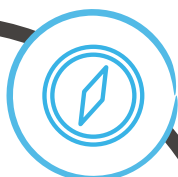
In this guide:



How to: Support your Child with Anxious Non-Attendance, in School

This guide is **part two of three** resources on **supporting your child with anxious non-attendance, in school**.

The **first** resource looks at **what** anxious non-attendance from school is and the third resource provides some **helpful tools** to make supporting your child even easier.



What is: Anxious Non-Attendance and How may it Impact Autistic Children and Young People?



How to: Support Your Child with Anxious Non-Attendance, in School.



Supporting Your child With Anxious-Non-Attendance, **Toolkit of Resources.**



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Contents Page

In this Resource

1. <u>The AET Values Voice: The making of this resource</u>	05
2. <u>Section 1: Introduction</u>	08
3. <u>Section 2: How can we work together? Rights, roles and responsibilities:</u>	09
• <u>What should my child's school be doing to support them?</u>	09
• <u>What are my responsibilities as a parent or carer?</u>	10
• <u>What should the Local Authority be doing to support?</u>	11
4. <u>Section 3: Supportive strategies</u>	12
5. <u>Section 4: Top five takeaways</u>	17
6. <u>Section 5: How to: Take the next step</u>	18
7. <u>Links to finding further information and support</u>	19
8. <u>References</u>	20





The AET Values Voice:

The making of this resource

All our training materials and resources are co-produced with young people, parents/carers and professionals across the ethnic, cultural, socio-economic, gender and disability diversity.

The Autism Education Trust (AET) is supported by a panel of Autistic Young Experts who consult on AET projects, materials and strategy. Since 2016, this group of young people, aged 16-25, have shared their voice and lived experiences to steer the work we do.

In addition, the panel have been involved in activities such as: speaking at events; co-delivering training; sharing their experiences with professionals on film; and contributing to national consultations and research projects.



**Autistic
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Experts**



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The AET Values Voice:

The making of this resource



In their own words, the Autistic Young Experts describe what they do below:



We are a panel made up of autistic young people from across England.



We have different experiences of education and of being autistic.



Education types vary and include home education, mainstream, specialist, alternative provision, college and university.



While we are all autistic, that doesn't make our experiences the same. Many of us struggled with education and we don't want that to be the experience for other autistic young people.



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The AET Values Voice:

The making of this resource

Click [here](#) to watch a short video and meet the Autistic Young Experts.



Video

The panel have coproduced the AET's module about Anxious Non-Attendance and their experience is included within this guide.

In addition to the panel of Autistic Young Experts, contributors to this module also include Helen Spiers, Head of Counselling with Mable Therapy, and parents and carers of children and young people experiencing Anxious Non-Attendance.



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Section 1:

Introduction

This second resource focuses on how to support your autistic child or young person if they are experiencing **Anxious Non-Attendance (ANA)**, which is often referred to as 'Emotionally Based School Avoidance' (EBSA).



As covered in the first part of this series, *children and young people who are described as experiencing ANA / EBSA often have absences that are:*

- **Prolonged**
- **Increasing over time**
- Following periods of **transition** (for example, from primary to secondary school, across key stages, or from Year 7 to Year 8).

ANA / EBSA is not necessarily **complete** absence from school - the child or young person may be attending school regularly, but **avoiding certain lessons** or being **frequently late**.

This resource will refer to this kind of absence as '**Anxious Non-Attendance**' rather than using the term 'Emotionally Based Schools Avoidance,' in accordance with the preferences of our Autistic Young Experts.

This resource outlines the roles and responsibilities of professionals, and also provides examples of strategies you can try to support your child or young person. You will also find information about **Tools** that may help you in supporting your child or young person. These will be covered in more detail in part three of this series, the **Anxious Non-Attendance Toolkit**.



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Section 2:

How can we Work Together? Rights, Roles and Responsibilities:



What should my child's school be doing to support them?



'If your child is regularly absent from school because of illness (regardless of whether it is mental or physical) or special educational needs or a disability, they have the same right to a suitable full-time education as any other child.'

(Department for Education, 2024)

The Department for Education guidance on supporting pupils with medical conditions or SEND with poor attendance (August 2024) sets out that schools are expected to:

- Maintain the same **ambition** for attendance (as for all other pupils) and **work with pupils and parents** to maximise attendance.
- Ensure join up with **pastoral support** and, where required, put in place **additional support and adjustments**, such as an Individual Healthcare Plan.
- Ensure the **provision requirements** outlined in the pupil's Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP) are adhered to – if the pupil has an EHCP in place.
- Consider additional support from **wider services and external partners**, making timely **referrals**.

(Department for Education, 2024)



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Section 2:

How can we Work Together? Rights, Roles and Responsibilities:



What are my responsibilities as a parent or carer?

Department for Education guidance on supporting pupils with medical conditions or SEND with poor attendance (August 2024) sets out the following responsibilities of parents and carers:

- Work with the school and local authority to help them **understand** their child's **barriers to attendance**.
- **Proactively engage** with support offered.
- If parents or carers feel the school and/or local authority have not delivered what they are expected to, they should **discuss** the case with the school and/or local authority's attendance support team.

(Department for Education, 2024)



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Section 2:



What should the local authority be doing to support?

Department for Education guidance on supporting pupils with medical conditions or SEND with poor attendance (August 2024) sets out the following responsibilities of local authorities:

- Under **Section 19** of the **Education Act 1996**, your local authority has a **legal duty** to secure **suitable, full-time education** for **all** children of compulsory school age*.

(Department for Education, 2024)

Compulsory School Age:

In the UK, the compulsory school age is the term after a child's fifth birthday, on the following prescribed days: December 31, March 31, and August 31.

If a child's fifth birthday falls on one of these dates, they reach compulsory school age on that day. For example, if a child's fifth birthday is on March 31, they must start full-time education at the beginning of the next term.

Children must remain in full-time education until they reach school leaving age, which is the last Friday in June in the year they turn 16.

- The local authority should work closely with **relevant services and partners** (for example, educational psychologists and mental health services) to ensure **joined up support** for families.
- The local authority is responsible for ensuring that **suitable education**, such as **alternative provision**, is arranged for children of compulsory school age who, because of **health reasons**, would not otherwise receive a suitable education. This includes reasons relating to **mental health**, such as anxiety.

(Department for Education, 2024)



The school should contact the local authority to request support following the fifteenth day of absence for the same reason (for example, anxiety). The fifteen days do not need to have run consecutively.



Further details on rights, roles and responsibilities and all updated information can be found on the GOV.UK website. The **Links to Finding Further Information and Support** and **References** sections of this guide list documents from this website that you may also find useful.



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Section 3:

Supportive Strategies

This section includes a range of strategies, including ‘top tips’ from parents or carers who have experienced supporting their child or young person through Anxious Non-Attendance.

As every experience of Anxious Non-Attendance is unique, these strategies may work for some but not for others. It may take time and several attempts to find strategies or solutions that work for your child or young person.

The key to securing effective support is communication and collaboration: with your child or young person, wider family, the education setting and any other involved professionals.



With Your Child or Young Person:

- ✓ **Listen** to and **believe** your child or young person. Be patient – they may find it difficult to put into words why they find attending school difficult.
- ✓ **Reassure** your child or young person that you understand why school is difficult for them and why they do not always feel able to go.
- ✓ Set aside **time to talk** each day – this could be alongside another activity, for example walking, cooking or gaming, to make this less intense for your child or young person.
- ✓ **Diary/journal** patterns of anxiety or non-attendance to try to spot any patterns – for example, specific lessons, days that could indicate burn-out or avoiding certain situations.
- ✓ **Discuss** with your child or young person which aspects of the school day or physical environment are causing anxiety – they may colour-code a copy of their timetable or map of the school to help. You could then share this with the setting when requesting reasonable adjustments or support.



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Section 3:

Supportive Strategies

'Try to be empathetic about what a school day feels like for some children, and the expectations around that.'

(Rachael, Parent and Teacher)

- ✓ Try to support your child or young person to continue with **activities outside of school** to reduce social isolation.
- ✓ **Avoid incentives or punishments** – reduce demand as far as possible to avoid further overload for your child or young person.
- ✓ For some children and young people, a **familiar routine** in the evenings and mornings may help – for example, having activities each morning on the way to school or set routines before leaving the house. For others, this may place too much demand on them – decide what works best for your child or young person.
- ✓ Provide a **low-demand, calm environment** on return home from school – give time to decompress with no mention of school. Talk about your child or young person's day when they are ready.



An example of a colour-coded timetable is included in the **Toolkit of Resources on this topic**.



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Section 3:

Supportive Strategies



With the School:

- ✓ **Request a meeting** with the setting as soon as possible – putting support in place quickly can make a big difference in helping a child or young person through anxiety.
- ✓ **Work with the school** to request **reasonable adjustments** to address anxiety. Bring **potential solutions** to conversations – for example, if requesting adaptations to uniform, share examples that may be more comfortable for your child or young person.



A list of **reasonable adjustments** that have been helpful for others is included in the **Toolkit of Resources** on this topic. Consider, through discussion with your child or young person, which ones may help them and talk these through with their school.

- ✓ Share any **examples** (from discussions with your child) about which aspects of the school day or physical environment are causing anxiety –this may help to secure the most appropriate reasonable adjustments or support to help reduce anxiety.



'Our son has sensory differences which made school uniform one of the barriers to him attending school. He wore a hoodie in the school colour embroidered with the school logo by the uniform supplier, instead of the usual polo shirt and jumper. We had suggested this to the head, and he supported us.'
(Emma, parent of autistic children)



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Section 3:

Supportive Strategies

- ✓ Speak to staff to request '**soft starts**,' if you feel this could help. A 'soft start' may give your child or young person the option of arriving in school earlier, avoiding crowds on arrival and settling in with an activity that interests them.
- ✓ Request a **home-school communication book** if you feel this could help. This will enable you to keep school updated on how things are, whether there are any changes, what is working and what isn't working. It will also enable school to do the same. This helps keep communication channels open and ensure that support is responsive, meaning it is more likely to be helpful for your child.



An example of a **Home-School Communication Tool** is included in the **Toolkit of Resources** on this topic. The Tool can be used to inform school of strengths, differences and support needs and for professionals to provide updates about your child or young person's day in school.

- ✓ Keep a **record of distressed behaviour** your child or young person is demonstrating at home – this can be used to request support from school, particularly if they are 'masking' and appearing to cope well whilst they are there.



An example of a **template to record distressed behaviour** is included in the **Toolkit of Resources** on this topic. The Tool can be used to record instances of distressed behaviour with the aim of identifying causes of anxiety and reasonable adjustments.



Section 3:

Supportive Strategies

- ✓ Consider speaking to the setting about applying for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) – you can apply for this independently as a parent/carer and organisations such as the Independent Provider of Special Education Advice (IPSEA) can support with this (<https://www.ipsea.org.uk/>).
- ✓ Research other options if your child or young person's attendance at school breaks down. Your local authority has a responsibility to provide suitable, full-time education for all children and young people, and may have a directory of alternative provision with options that may better suit your child or young person's support needs.

*'Try and keep
liaising with the
school, and be aware
that there are alternatives
out there.'*
*(Rachael, parent of autistic
children and teacher)*



With other professionals:

- ✓ **Speak to your GP.** They may be able to refer to **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)** or other services to support with your child or young person's anxiety – taking records of non-attendance or distressed behaviour to evidence any request for support may be helpful.
- ✓ There is a lot of information available on supporting children and young people through anxiety. The **Where can I Find Further Support?** section in this guide includes examples of organisations that may be able to provide further advice and support.



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Section 4:

Top Five Take Aways:

There is a lot to think about in this resource, so below are our *Top Five Take Aways*:

1

Listen to and believe your child or young person.

2

Communicate regularly with the setting – offer ideas for solutions and strategies.

3

If one strategy does not work for your child or young person, try something different.

4

Be aware of the roles and responsibilities of professionals – remember that the setting has a responsibility to make reasonable adjustments and your local authority has a responsibility to provide suitable, full-time education.

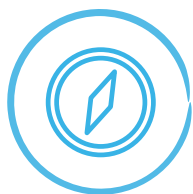
5

Research options that may be available if attendance breaks down – remember that not every setting suits every child or young person and that mainstream education does not suit every child or young person. Your child may thrive if a setting takes a more flexible approach or if they receive education in an alternative setting.



Section 5:

Now, why not Take the Next Steps?



If you haven't done so already, check out our guide on ***What is:*** Anxious Non-Attendance and How may it Impact Autistic Children and Young people?



Check out our Supporting Your child With Anxious-Non-Attendance, ***Toolkit of Resources.*** to help you put support in place more easily.



Parent Resources



Where can I Find Further Support?

Anti-Bullying Alliance: <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/>

Independent Provider of Special Education Advice (IPSEA): <https://www.ipsea.org.uk/>

National Autistic Society: <https://www.autism.org.uk/>

Not Fine in School: <https://notfineinschool.co.uk/home>

SENDIAS: <https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/>

YoungMinds: www.youngminds.org.uk



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