

TÚSLA

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Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency



Clare School Avoidance Toolkit

Information for Schools and Parents



Acknowledgements

School avoidance is a challenge that confronts all schools sooner or later. Professionals supporting young people who are avoiding school may come from a variety of sectors both in the school setting and outside of the school setting.

Young people may also be receiving ancillary supports from a youth work service or family support service in the community or through another statutory service such as the H.S.E Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

The role of the parent is one of the most crucial supports a young person will need with regarding to supporting their attendance at school. This toolkit acknowledges the wide variety of supports young people engage with as well as the importance of home based parental support.

With this in mind, the Achieving in Learning & Development subgroup of the Clare Children and Young People's Services Committee instigated the development of this practical toolkit which will offer a wide range of useful resources to professionals who work with young people and/or parents where there is currently school avoiding behaviour occurring.

As this resource has been designed for an in-school and out- of-school setting, the content developed required an extensive multi-agency response. The Clare CYPSC would like to extend its gratitude to the content contributors who shared their years of extensive frontline work with parents and young people.

The suggestions and strategies outlined in this toolkit are not exhaustive. It is intended as a guide only. Not all the suggestions here will apply to any one student or situation. However, it is hoped that the toolkit will provide some guidance and support to young people, parents and professionals alike.

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Glossary of terms

CAMHS – Child and Adult Mental Health Services

CYPSC – Child and Young People's Services Committee

EWO – Education Welfare Officer

EWS – Education Welfare Service

HSCL – Home School Community Liaison

HSE – Health Service Executive

ISS – Inclusion Support Service

NCSE – National Council for Special Education

NEPS – National Educational Psychological Service

PC Psychology – Primary Care Psychology

SCP – School Completion Programme

SENO – Special Education Needs Organiser

SNA – Special Needs Assistant

TESS – Tusla Education Support Service

TUSLA – Child and Family Agency

School avoidance and **school refusal** are common terms used for students that are not attending school for reasons outside acceptable not attendance issues i.e. illness etc.

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Who is this toolkit for and how can you use it?

This practical toolkit has been designed for an in-school and out-of-school setting. It can be used by any practitioner who is working with a young person of secondary school age or their parents/carers. This could be:

- Guidance counsellor/school counsellor.
- Youth Worker.
- Social Care Worker/Social Worker.
- Family Support Worker.
- Home, School, Community Liaison (HSCL) Coordinator.
- School Completion Programme.
- Year Head.
- Garda Youth Diversion Worker.
- Parent Support Worker.
- Student Support Team.
- Education Welfare Officer.

Section 1 is particularly important for practitioners who are not working in the education sector and want a broad understanding about the current structures that are in place regarding school avoidance in the post-primary school environment.

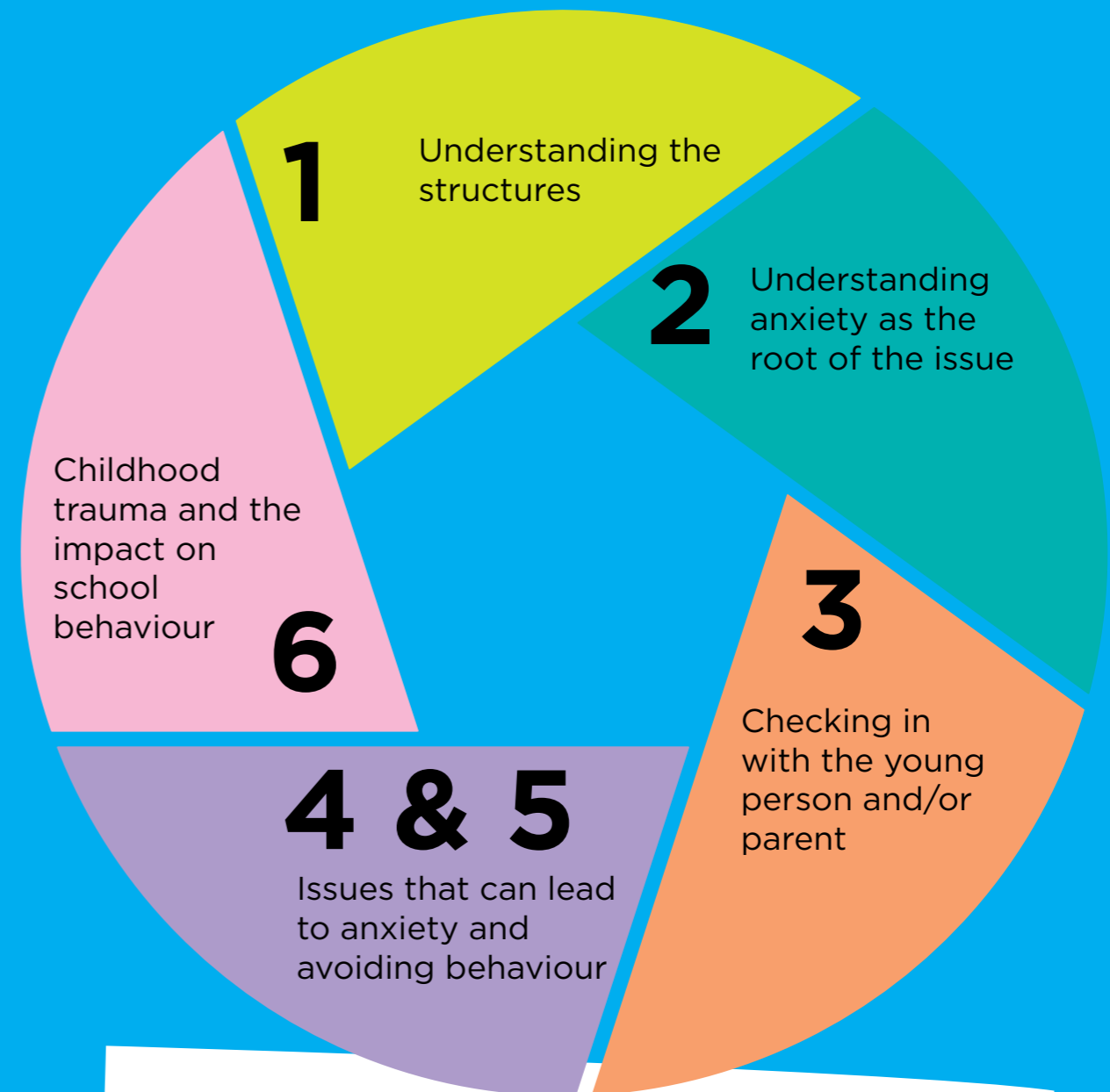
Section 2 is a recommended core piece of work that should be undertaken by all practitioners using this toolkit. Anxiety is the root cause of all avoiding behaviour and should be explored further to understanding why the young person is not attending school.

Section 3 gives practitioners a set of tools they can use to start the conversation with their student/client and explore their anxieties/thoughts on why school avoidance is happening and what they need in order to return to school.

Sections 4 and 5 cover a broad range of topics that can lead to anxiety and in turn avoiding behaviour. These sections offer practical advice and tips for practitioners as well as resources they can use. Section 4 is for practitioners working directly with young people and Section 5 is aimed at practitioners working directly with parents of young people avoiding school.

Section 6 explores the theme of trauma and how an abundance of adverse childhood experiences can lead to a trauma-based response in a young person. This may present in the classroom in a myriad of ways and could also exacerbate school avoidance if not supported and understood for the complex issue it is.

How to use the toolkit



Some practitioners using this toolkit will be working directly with the parents of the young person avoiding school and some practitioners will only be doing direct work with the student who is avoiding school. This toolkit is designed so practitioners can easily access the sections that are relevant to them and their clients.

What is school avoidance?

School avoidance is a systemic difficulty and refers to student, parent/guardian and school challenges where the student finds it difficult to attend or stay in school. The parent/guardian and school may find it difficult to support the young person, which often results in the request for involvement of other services.

School avoidance may happen at any age but most typically occurs in those between 5 and 7 years of age, and those between 11 and 14 years of age. Generally, the student refuses to attend school and experiences significant distress.

School avoidance differs from truancy in that the young person is at home with the knowledge of the family despite their efforts to enforce attendance. The behaviour is differentiated from parents/guardians who deliberately withdraw a young person from school. It is also differentiated from youths experiencing difficult circumstances, such as homelessness, that prevent adequate school attendance.



What causes school avoidance?

There are many reasons why a student may avoid attending school or remaining in school.

When school refusal starts

BEHAVIOURS

- Refusal to get ready for school.
- Refusal to attend school, leave the house, etc.
- Avoidance of school related situations and people.
- Crying, hiding, tantrums, etc.

FEELINGS

- Anxiety, fear, embarrassment, inferiority, depression, uncertainty, insecurity, isolation.

THOUGHTS

- Mammy is sick and might go to the hospital if I'm not here.
- I'm safe at home
- I don't have to worry about not being able to do the work.
- No one can laugh at me when I'm at home.

or

BEHAVIOURS

- Refusal to get ready for school.
- Refusal to attend school, leave the house, etc.
- Avoidance of school related situations and people.
- Crying, hiding, tantrums, etc.

FEELINGS

- Anxiety, fear, embarrassment, inferiority, depression, uncertainty, insecurity, isolation.

THOUGHTS

- Everyone will be asking me questions about why I haven't been to school.
- I won't know the work because
- My friends won't want to mix with me anymore.

Source: CYPSC Wicklow School Refusal Pack pg. 11

Section 1

The educational environment, supports and structures that are currently in place



This section will cover a number of key structures, supports and services that are in place in the Irish education system, that are designed to support school retention.

This section is of particular importance for practitioners using the toolkit who are not working in the education sector, who may be engaging with a young person in a youth service environment, family support environment etc. and who may not be familiar with educationally based supports they can liaise with in the course of their work. It also offers clear guidance to Student Support Teams on strategies/programmes they could adopt, and the importance of liaising effectively with parents where there is avoiding behaviour happening.

The section will cover:

- The role of specific school officers and structures.
- The role of the curriculum.
- Liaising with parents.
- The school environment and student fit.
- Categories of home tuition and eligibility.



What can the school do?

The school plays a vital role in supporting the return of a school avoider to school after an episode of avoidance. The school avoider should be discussed at the weekly Care Team (Student Support) and Year Head meetings. A Support Plan should be put in place which sets out the actions to be undertaken to best support the student.

The key personnel within the school who can oversee this are the:

- Principal.
- Deputy Principal.
- Year Head.
- Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO).
- Behaviour for Learning (BFL) Coordinator.
- Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Coordinator.
- Guidance Counsellor.

The Wellbeing Coordinator is also a key person in developing the school's wellbeing curriculum around the student need.

The following are important factors in how the school can support the young person:

1. Act early: Try to get the avoider into school as soon as possible.
2. Support strongly: Dedicate one good adult to the case to support the student.
3. Monitor closely: Track and review progress.
4. Reconnect swiftly: Maintain professional good practice.
5. Communicate clearly: With parents, staff, outside agencies and the school avoider.

Other factors to include are:

- **Information gathering:** It is imperative that all accurate information regarding the student's attendance, their home situation and any inter-agency involvement is gathered first, in order to assess the situation.
- **Role clarification:** It is imperative that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined in relation to supporting the student's return to school so that double-jobbing or overlapping doesn't occur. For example, it is not best practice that the Year Head and SENCO would call a parent regarding the same issue on the same day. This happens when there is lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities. Roles and responsibilities should be set out in the Whole School Guidance Plan.

What can the school do?

- **Support Plan:** Support Plans should be devised for the students at the top of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) Continuum of Support i.e. those at most risk. This would include school avoiders. These Support Plans are oriented around action and evaluation. They set out the steps that are to be taken and who will take these necessary steps. The Support Plans should be revisited frequently to assess the situation and an evaluation of supports must be carried out to determine their effectiveness.
- **The student voice:** Involving a school avoider in decisions that impact on them can benefit their emotional health and wellbeing. It helps them to feel part of the school and wider community. It also helps them to establish some control over their lives, gives them a sense of belonging and a sense of mastery of their circumstances. At an individual level, benefits include helping a school avoider to gain belief in their own capabilities, including building their knowledge and skills to make healthy choices while developing their independence. Collectively, young people benefit through having opportunities to influence decisions, to express their views and to develop strong social networks. It is recommended that:
 - o The school should fully involve students in discussions around their return to school.
 - o Students with Support Plans should be encouraged to self-monitor and reflect on their progress.
 - o The student voice should be captured, as this is essential around school avoidance.
- **Additional needs:** The SENCO should carry out universal testing. CAT4 testing is done by the Guidance Counsellor. The model of assessment and intervention is underpinned by the recognition that educational needs occur along a continuum, from mild to severe and from transient to long term. The response to the needs of students is organised according to NEPS' Continuum of Support. A Student Support Plan is devised for students with Special Education Needs. All students involved in SEN support will have a tailored learning plan, with students with resource teaching hours or more complex needs having a more detailed Support Plan. The Support Plan process involves:
 - o Gathering information, such as personal and background details.
 - o Educational details (primary school details/assessment and learning support details).
 - o Categorisation of need (assessment reports/ information attained from parents).
 - o General profile based on formal/informal assessment.
 - o SEN provision.
 - o Priority need.
 - o Setting targets for each priority learning need.
 - o Identifying the strategies and resources required.
 - o Relevant documentation.
 - o Setting the date for review: a review occurs each academic year. However, it may occur more often, depending on student progress and circumstances.

The Support Plan aims to include the most relevant information in a clear and concise manner. A one-page Support Plan document ensures only the most important information is included and that the Support Plan functions practically as a working document.

What can the school do?

Provision for students with emerging needs

For students with emerging needs, including the exceptionally able, the concern may have been identified through the whole school screening and monitoring systems (CAT4, in class assessment, informal observation, parental concern).

Teachers should complete a referral form for students who they have a concern about that focuses on the student's behaviour, academic performance, homework etc. Some students will need further individual or diagnostic testing to identify the nature of their needs (both learning and behavioural). Parental consent should be obtained before diagnostic tests are administered. Teachers should be also encouraged to refer to students' CAT4 results to determine the student's areas of strength and their needs, and link with at least two other subject teachers before completing a referral form.

Models of SEN provision

In assessing and deciding which students need to be in receipt of supplementary teaching and which students may benefit from support within the mainstream context, the following options are considered:

- Curricular differentiation.
- Curricular reduction (reduced load): a student with SEN who experiences difficulty in coping with the breadth of the current curriculum may be permitted to 'drop' a subject. This should occur only after all avenues have been exhausted. A consultation between the parents/guardian and Guidance Counsellor is also necessary. Parents should sign a consent form giving permission for a reduced subject load.

Other measures may include:

- Team teaching/cooperative teaching.
- In-class support/differentiation.
- Inclusion of SNA in specific classes.
- Small group withdrawal.
- Individual withdrawal.
- Organisation and life skills lessons.

The period of intervention recommended for each student is dependent on the nature and extent of their individual need. The duration of provision is varied and is reviewed throughout the intervention. There are cases where support is needed on a short-term basis, after which the student is in a position to recommence with the regular curriculum.

All decisions in this regard are discussed with parents/guardians, class teachers, principal, guidance counsellor and of course, the student.

Role of the Year Head

The role of the Year Head is to:

- Keep the Principal/Deputy Principal informed on developments in the year group.
- Monitor lateness and absenteeism.
- Support the overall emotional and academic wellbeing of students in that year.

Role of the School Guidance Counsellor

The School Guidance Counsellor is qualified, licenced and supervised to support students in crisis within the school setting. The Guidance Counsellor's approach must have unconditional positive regard for the student at all times. It is imperative that the appropriate Guidance Counselling hours are allocated to the school so that there is consistency in the Guidance Counselling provision across the school communities countywide.

The Guidance Counselling allocation is the responsibility of the school principal. Guidance hours allocation can be easily determined by accessing the <https://igc.ie/> website. The Guidance Counsellor can support students across the entire school via classroom-based initiatives, small group initiative or one-to-one work. They can support students across a wide range of issues such as:



Role of the School Guidance Counsellor

The role of the guidance counsellor is to:

- Work with the other members of the Care Team in facilitating the provision of education for students and their inclusion and return to school.
- Refer to Support Plan for the school avoider and clarify the Guidance Counsellor's role in supporting the school avoider.
- Provide personal, educational and career counselling supports for the school avoider.
- Administer assessments including the CAT4 prior to entry and again in third year.
- Facilitate student choice around subject, programme and career choices.
- Consult with parents, staff, senior and middle management.
- Consult with necessary outside agencies such as NEPS and CAMHS.
- Liaise with student, parent/guardian and Year Head regarding reintegrating into school.

Role of the Student Support Team (Post Primary)

The Student Support Team is part of the student support system in a school. That system encompasses a range of supports that cater for the learning, social, emotional and behavioural needs of students. The Guidance Plan for the school sets out the components of this system which includes the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum, the behaviour management system and the role of Year Head.

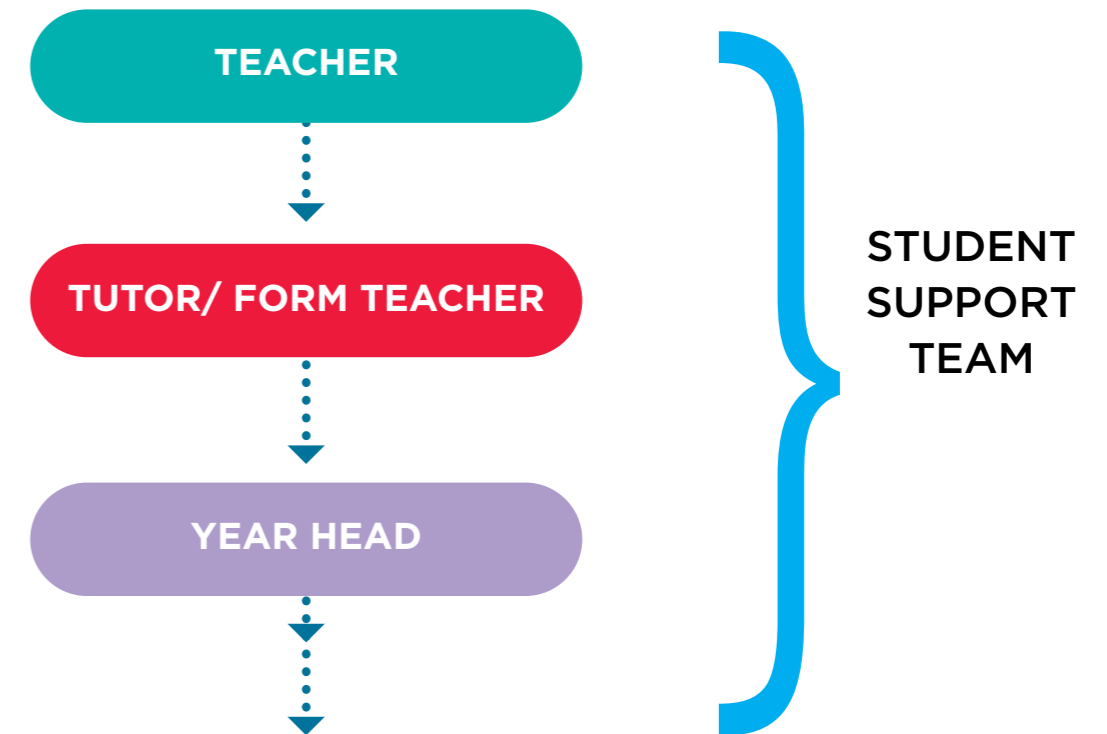
Essentially, a Student Support Team is a student-focused mechanism put in place by a school in order to:

- Coordinate the support available for students in the school.
- Facilitate links to the community and other non-school support services.
- Enable students with support needs to continue to access a full education.
- Assist staff to manage those students effectively.
- Ensure new staff members are briefed about policies and procedures relating to student wellbeing and support.
- Advise school management on the development and review of effective student support policies and structures.

The function of the Student Support Team in relation to managing school avoiding behaviour is to bring together all school personnel to coordinate a shared response.

The student support team has strong links with the behaviour management system of the school and can initiate preventative programmes for addressing the issues that arise. The National Education Welfare Board's (NEWB 2008) guidelines on a school's code of behaviour emphasises the promotion of good behaviour as the goal of the code.

BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT SYSTEM



Support offered by Care Teams around school avoidance behaviours

The D.E.S Wellbeing in Post-Primary Schools' guidelines highlight the potential that schools have to make a significant contribution to the general wellbeing of young people, and to provide a stable and supportive environment for all students. It is likely that, for most, difficulties will be short-lived and resolved with good support and minimal interventions. However, some difficulties that arise in adolescence can be of serious and enduring nature. Some students will require more intense and/or long-term support, including referral to specialist services.

Early identification and intervention will ensure the best outcomes. A strong support system in a school is vital first step in addressing difficulties, whether through providing in-school interventions or through involving specialist services.

School-based programmes/curriculum/extra-curricular supports

The school Wellbeing Programme supports all students across their social, emotional and academic learning. The Wellbeing Programme incorporates Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), Physical Education (PE) and Wellbeing. The plan should be malleable to meet the needs of the students and should be regularly updated and reviewed. The programmes or initiatives that may be part of the Wellbeing Programme can be as follows:

Curricular programmes	In-school supports	Extra-curricular supports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Going WELL Programme • AWARE Life Skills • Learning to Learn • RSE • Lockers • Be In Ctrl • MISP • Working Things Out • LLADAT • Headstrong • LIFT • Future Leaders • Young Social Innovators • Narrative 4 Story Exchange • Empathy Education • Friends for Life • Peer Mentor Programme • L2LP • LCVP • Accelerated Reading • Work Experience Modules • JCSP Initiatives • NCSE Programmes • Leadership for Life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pastoral Care Team • SRC (Student Voice) • Stand Up Week • Year Head • Class Directors • Step Up Project • Team Teaching • SENCO • SNA • Guidance Counsellor • Digital Team • Parents Association • Alumni Association • Professional Supports Team • Supervised Study • Active Schools • Green Schools • Quiet Room • Prayer Room • Breakfast Club • Lunch Club • Mission Week • SCP • HSCL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Choir • Sports • School Trips • Guest Speakers • Young Scientist • Competitions • Wednesday Walk • Fresh Air Friday • Lunchtime Library • School Musical/Play • Spelling Bee • Poetry Prize • Linguistics Olympiad • Rotary Youth • Walk of Honour

External educational supports schools can avail of in relation to school avoiding behaviour

In situations where a student continues to avoid school despite the best efforts of the school, consideration must be given to accessing additional supports. In the first instance, the school should engage with their NEPS psychologist for additional guidance and advice. Additional supports may also be available from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and TESS.

If a young person is accessing external supports from other agencies, it is essential that those agencies liaise with school personnel to ensure an effective Support Plan is agreed.

External supports include CAMHS, Child Psychology, Tusla, local counselling services, Clarecare, ISPCC, Family Resource Centres, Garda Youth Diversion Programmes, Clare Youth Service and other locally based services.

National Education Psychology Service (NEPS)

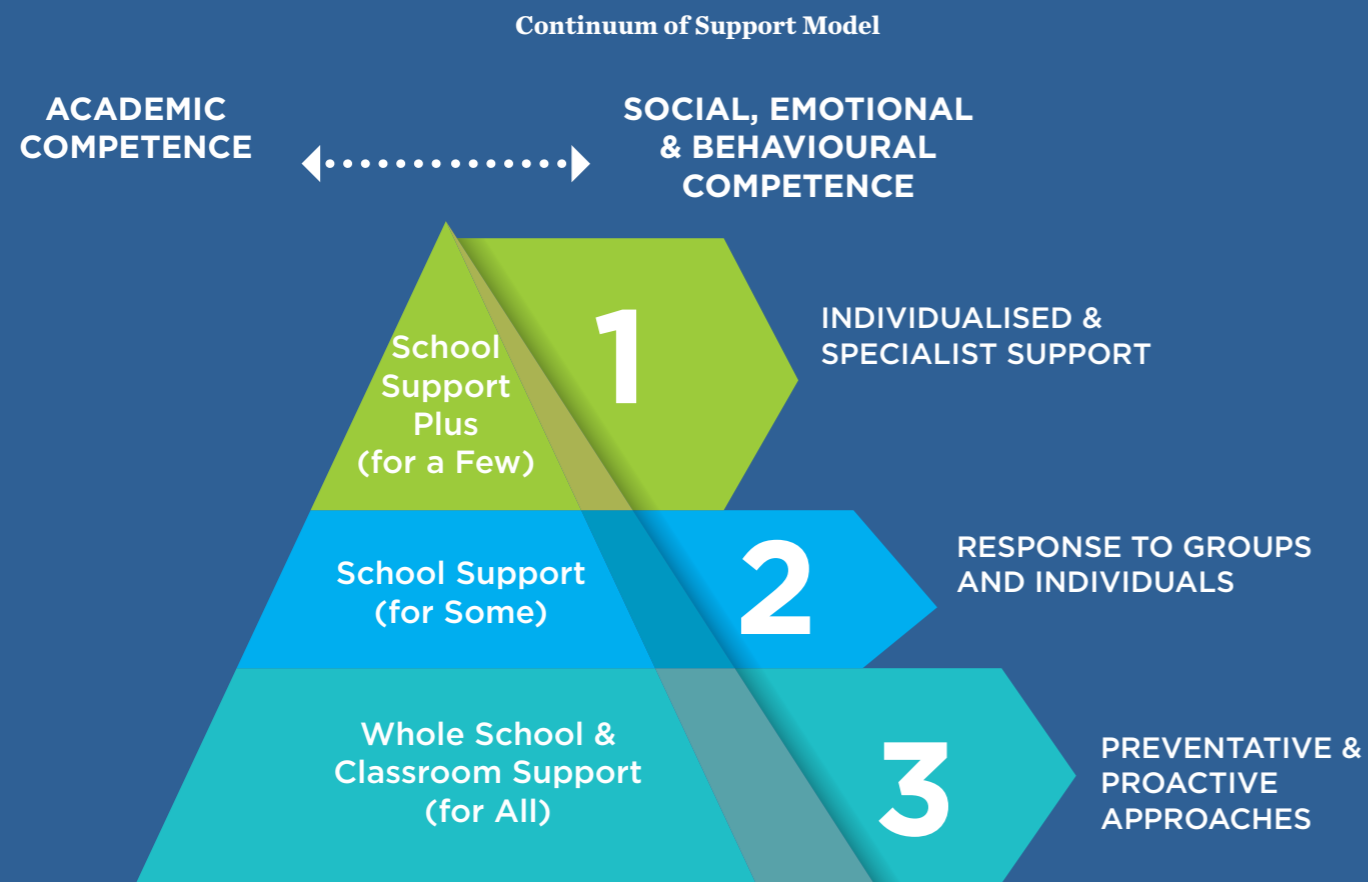
In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with students whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring.

Psychologists use a problem-solving and solution-focused consultative approach to maximise positive outcomes for these students. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum-based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for students with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties.

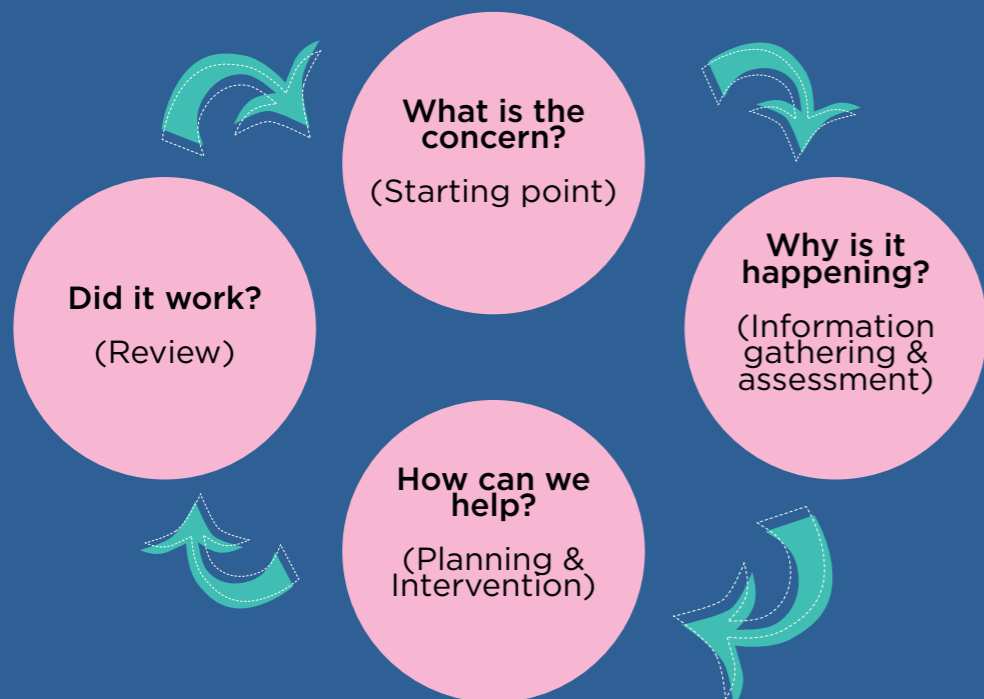
Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual young person for intensive intervention.

External educational supports schools can avail of in relation to school avoiding behaviour

This process has been advised and communicated to schools in the following guidelines and resource materials:



Collaborative Problem Solving and Solution Focused Consultative Approach



External educational supports schools can avail of in relation to school avoiding behaviour

Whole-school and classroom support for all
NEPS role: Signposting, consultation and advice.

School support for some: young person experiencing difficulties with attending school
NEPS role: Consultation and advice with school staff, young people and parents/guardians. The consultative process facilitates further exploration of why this may be happening, identifying strategies and interventions and supporting the development of a plan for increasing attendance in school.

School support plus for a few: young person experiencing complex difficulties with attending school
NEPS role: Consultation, liaison with other services and advice. A review of the support plan is provided to school staff, young people and parents/guardians. The consultative process facilitates identification of other strategies and interventions as needed alongside the identification of involvement of other services as appropriate and onward referral/liaison with other services.

Behaviour support staff on site - NBSS Model of Support to Schools

In 2017, the NBSS amalgamated with the Special Education Support Service (SESS) and the Visiting Teachers for the Deaf/Blind to become the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Support Service. The National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) was established by the Department of Education and Skills in 2006 in response to the recommendation in School Matters: The Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools (2006).

The role of the NBSS is to assist partner schools in addressing current behavioural concerns on three levels. The NBSS works with schools in addressing students' social, emotional, academic and behavioural needs at:

- Level 1: school-wide for all students,
- Level 2: targeted intervention for some students and
- Level 3: intensive individualised support for a few students.

The NBSS model of support draws extensively from Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports and Response to Intervention (RTI) frameworks. The integration of these frameworks offers opportunities to address the behavioural and social, emotional and academic needs of students effectively with interventions at different levels of intensity and support. In NBSS partner schools, this three-tiered approach is applied to behaviour interventions as well as interventions that address the social, emotional and academic literacy and learning needs of students.

The NBSS also researches, collates and disseminates evidence that informs the development of a school-wide positive behavioural approach that meets the needs of schools and provides sustainable long-term outcomes.

External educational supports schools can avail of in relation to school avoiding behaviour

NBSS support for school avoidance behaviour: NBSS Level 2 & Level 3 targeted and individualised support

Students who are offered NBSS Level 3 support may present with a variety of challenging behaviours, including social skills deficits, low self-esteem, difficult relationships with adults/peers and poor concentration/attention difficulties in most subjects. Many students are also persistently at risk of suspension and/or expulsion. The severity of their behaviour in classrooms not only hinders their own educational progress but may also impede that of their peers.

Level 3: intensive individualised support is provided to students in NBSS partner schools:

- By Behaviour for Learning Programme teacher(s).
- By various school personnel in partnership with NBSS team members.

The Behaviour for Learning Programme aims to explore ways in which an individual teacher, allocated with 22 hours per week, can develop a school Behaviour for Learning Programme, specifically targeted at students in need of intensive individualised intervention (NBSS Level 3).

Additionally, the Behaviour for Learning Programme teacher facilitates the planning, implementation and evaluation of effective responses to challenging behaviour at small group/class and/or year group level i.e. Level 2: targeted support for some students.

The teacher works with identified students, individually or in small groups on Behaviour for Learning Programmes that are designed to meet their social, emotional, wellbeing and behavioural and academic needs, so they can achieve and succeed in school.

An individual Student Behaviour Plan and targets are developed for each student in receipt of this support.

Rather than responding after young people present with chronic behaviours ('a wait to fail' intervention model), a school's 'Behaviour for Learning Programme' also includes preventive strategies and early intervention approaches for all students i.e. NBSS Level 1 support.

The Behaviour for Learning Programme Teacher uses specific evidence-informed programmes to support students with school avoidance behaviour.

DEIS Schools: What is DEIS?

Launched in 2005 by the Department of Education and Skills, DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) is the most recent national programme aimed at addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities. A very significant element of DEIS is known as the School Support Programme (SSP) which is in place in about 340 urban primary schools, 340 rural primary schools, and 200 post-primary schools with the highest levels of disadvantage (see www.education.ie).

All primary and post-primary schools participating in DEIS receive a range of additional resources including additional staffing, funding, access to literacy and numeracy programmes, and assistance with activities such as school planning. As part of the SSP, interventions such as the Home School Community Liaison Scheme and the School Completion Programme are available to DEIS urban primary schools and to DEIS post-primary schools. These additional supports are not available in all schools.

Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme

The Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) was established in the autumn of 1990. The underlying policy of the scheme is one that seeks to promote partnership between parents and teachers. The purpose of this partnership is to enhance students' learning opportunities and to promote their retention in the education system. In addition, the HSCL Scheme places great emphasis on collaboration with the local community. The HSCL Scheme is the pioneer in involving the school in the life of the community and involving the community and its agencies in the life of the school. The Local Committee of the HSCL Scheme is central to this process of parental involvement. The five goals of the HSCL Scheme focus on:

- Supporting marginalised students.
- Promoting cooperation between home, school, and community.
- Empowering parents.
- Retaining young people in the education system.
- Disseminating best practice.

What supports does the HSCL Coordinator offer around school avoidance behaviours?

Due to positive relationships the HSCL Coordinator has with the parents, and phone calls or house visits, the HSCL Coordinator will often be the first person to learn from parents/guardians about any developing school avoidance behaviour. The HSCL Coordinator will work with the parents/guardian to support the young person and link them into any additional supports required. The HSCL Coordinator provides a link between the parents/guardians and the school and supports them in school meetings if required. The HSCL Coordinator organises training and support programmes for parents/guardians and parent/guardian young person groups which can focus on targeting school avoidance behaviours or general social and emotional concerns.

DEIS Schools: What is DEIS?

SCP - School Completion Programme

The School Completion Programme (SCP) is a targeted programme of support for primary and post-primary children and young people who have been identified as potentially at risk of early school leaving or who are out of school and have not successfully transferred to an alternative learning site (e.g., Youthreach, Community Training Centre etc.) or employment. It is a support under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Programme, funded by Tusla Education Support Services (TESS).

SCP aims to retain a young person to completion of the leaving certificate, equivalent qualification or suitable level of educational attainment which enables them to transition into further education, training or employment.

There are 122 SCP projects covering 467 primary and 222 post-primary schools.

The SCP is one of 3 strands of TESS including the HSCL Scheme and the Educational Welfare Service. All three strands share the same national outcomes:

- Improved attendance.
- Improved participation.
- Improved retention.

Who is SCP For?

The SCP supports children and young people who are at risk of early school leaving and students of school-going age who are not currently attending school.

Who can make referrals to a SCP Project?

Referrals can be made in relation to any child or young person enrolled in a school which is included in a SCP project. The majority of schools included in the programme are DEIS schools. Referrals can be made by participating primary and post-primary schools, parents, self-referrals or other agencies working with children and young people in the project cluster.

What supports can SCP offer around school avoidance behaviours?

SCP projects provide the following interventions to children and young people:

- Evidence-based/evidence-informed interventions at universal level to whole class/whole school groups.
- Brief interventions for 8 weeks or less for students identified as needing an immediate short-term SCP-led intervention.
- Targeted interventions to children and young people with significant support needs who have been identified through the SCP Intake Framework.
- A mixed approach of the above interventions, along with mentoring and utilising programmes specifically designed to support students with School Avoidance Behaviours, allow SCP to meet the individual needs of each student and respond appropriately. The support may be short, medium or long-term depending on need, and it may involve in-school support, out-of-school support (house calls/morning calls) and holiday-time support.

General guidelines for intervention

- **Triggers:** The school can identify the triggers and any behaviours that keep the school avoidance behaviour going. Triggers for school avoidance may be unclear and the school avoidance may be justified in some way, for example, if the student is being bullied.
- **Contextual factors:** The school can explore the impact of contextual factors e.g. parents' work schedule, separation, as well as any protective or supportive factors or strengths there may be, for example, a student's interest in school, grades and an important relationship within and outside school.
- **Positive relationships:** The school avoider should be encouraged to develop positive relationships in school. Consider providing structured peer support at school through a mentor programme or using one key adult. Use these valued relationships as rewarding positive factors to encourage and acknowledge successful attendance, especially if the function of the school avoidance is attention from significant people.
- **Obstacles:** Remove any obstacles that might prevent success if you can e.g. ensure work and activities are provided that the student is motivated to try and is able to do.
- **Solutions:** Collaboratively generate possible solutions to problems with the student and a key family member. Acknowledge their feelings and their difficulty but convey a belief that they can cope. Reassure them that the school will help them to learn to do this. This develops their sense of efficacy. The more the young person feels part of the plan and empowered to make changes, the better.
- **Timeline:** Develop a consensual timeline for return to school by identifying more positive aspects of school for the young person and begin by asking them to attend for these parts of the day. This will reconnect them with school and social interactions that take place there.
- **Transitional objects:** If separation anxiety is a relevant factor, consider using transitional objects to represent the people who are important to the young person. For example, in school, have a photo in their pencil case or an object belonging to their significant person to reassure them that the person is supporting them even if they are not physically with them.
- **Thoughts and feelings:** Teach the young person about anxiety and how thoughts, feelings, body responses and school avoidance behaviours can be linked, and the function of these behaviours.
- **Self-regulation:** Support them to notice and monitor their own feelings, thoughts, body responses and behaviours (self-monitoring) and help them to develop calming or self-regulation skills in each of these areas:
 - o Teach them emotional vocabulary to label and talk about their feelings.
 - o Help them recognise that thoughts are just thoughts, and they can come and go like cars on a road or clouds in the sky. Help them to work out helpful ways of thinking about school.
 - o Provide them with strategies to help them calm their body responses.
 - o Encourage them to try difficult things rather than avoid them so that:
 - They learn to manage their anxiety.
 - They are exposed to situations they initially perceived as threatening and learn that the situations are not as bad as they thought they would be.

General guidelines for intervention

- **Early return to school:** Aim for early return to school, even if only for a very short period each day and build from there. This is graded exposure and involves a graduated return to school. You might suggest:
 - A student come in for a tour of the school when there are no students in the building e.g. after school.
 - A student come in for lunchtime only to meet their friends.
 - A student attends their favourite classes only such as Art or PE.
 - A student's friend(s) meet them at the gate and accompany them into the building.
- **Support and supervision:** Enhance support and supervision for the student in school from key adults and peers. School avoiders should have suitable resources in place that are communicated to the student and family prior to returning to school.
- **Routine:** Establish routines and allow time for preparation and transition - be flexible, allow for small delays. Expect some setbacks but do not give up.
- **Relapse:** Plan with the student and their family to prevent relapse. Ask parents/carers to work with you and tell you about any difficulties as soon as they occur.
- **Feedback:** Be constructive in your feedback to the student and their family and praise both effort and success. Support the parents/carers in developing their understanding and skills to help the young person.
- **Questioning:** Do not question the young person about the reasons for their absenteeism.
- **Collaborative approach:** Work collaboratively with other agencies if they are involved.
- **Hope:** There may be setbacks - but with the right support to develop skills and with supportive relationships in school, young people can successfully return to attending school full time.

The school recognises its responsibility under Section 14 of the EPSEN Act 2004, with regard to informing and consulting with parents/caregivers on all matters relating to the young person's education.

General guidelines for intervention

The table below outlines the components of intervention for school avoidance:

Young person	Parents/carers	School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement • Problem-solving skills • Relaxation training • Social skills training • Focus on helpful thoughts • Graduated return to school • Relapse prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussing concerns • Problem-solving skills • Psychoeducation • Practice morning routines and coping behaviours • Strategies to manage parents'/carers' own emotions - identify unhelpful thoughts of parents/guardians • Relapse prevention review and plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare behaviour management strategies for return to school • Supportive member of staff to greet and help student settle • Other students identified as support • Curriculum /timetabling adjustments • Create positive reinforcing experiences in school • Staged reintroduction to classes • Monitoring attendance • Maintain regular contact with family/carers • Keep a record of attendance and interventions

Next steps for practitioners if interventions are not yielding results

What can a practitioner do if return to school interventions with young people and/or their parents/guardians is not progressing well, and a student is still not availing of educational supports?

A referral should be made to the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) if the young person continues to miss school in the same academic year. A review meeting with the parents/guardians and school should take place to:

- Discuss progress.
- Discuss barriers that have impeded progress and possible solutions to these.
- Identify the areas of the Return to School Plan that have worked and look at why these supports have proved helpful.
- Brainstorm other supports which may help.

All supports currently in place should also be reviewed, and if additional supports are needed, they should be identified and implemented as soon as possible. This may include NEPS and Tusla Family Support Services. Linking with local youth/community agencies to provide out of school supports can be beneficial in supporting the young person. Youth Work organisations provide personal and social development programmes that compliment a young person's formal, academic or vocational education and training.

It may be helpful to request that the case be considered for the Tusla Meitheal process with the written consent of the parents/guardians. The Meitheal process identifies the strengths and needs of the young person and family while coordinating services in order to develop an agreed action plan and review process of same. The aim is for the identified unmet needs of the young person to be met by the parents/guardians, with support from the various agencies. There must be two or more agencies involved with the young person for Meitheal to be considered. Following this meeting, regular reviews will take place with the young person, parents/guardians and professionals to monitor and support the implementation of the Meitheal Action Plan.

If no significant progress has been made, a referral can be made through a GP or a senior clinician to the HSE, CAMHS or to primary care psychology (if behavioural or mild to moderate mental health difficulties are present). A referral can be made to a Tusla Child Protection Social Worker if it is deemed that the parents/guardians are not supporting the young person to meet their identified unmet needs.

Home tuition policy and procedures

In some situations where a young person is involved with external support services, a decision may be made for them to avail of home tuition. The purpose of home tuition is an interim measure to allow a young person to engage in educational provision while unable to attend school.

Applications will only be considered by the Department of Education for home tuition if the young person presents with school phobia and/or associated depression/anxiety which has caused and is likely to cause major disruption to attendance at school. It will be necessary to obtain a report from the psychologist or psychiatrist who the young person attends which confirms the diagnosis of school phobia and or associated depression/anxiety.

The report must also provide details of medical or therapeutic intervention plans in place with a view to reintegrating the student back into their school including a recommencement date. In addition it must indicate that absence from school was/is required to facilitate appropriate medical or therapeutic intervention as well as detailing engagement with the relevant support agencies (e.g. school, CAMHS, Tusla, HSE).

Section 2

Anxiety at the core of school avoiding behaviour

Overview

It is recommended that this is a core section that all parents and young people of secondary school going age cover as part of the school avoiding work. This section will look at issues such as:

- What anxiety looks like and how it can present in the classroom.
- How to address anxiety in your work with a young person.
- How to address anxiety issues in your work with a parent.
- Further signposting to supports services.

What anxiety looks like

Everyone experiences anxiety. It is a natural and important emotion and can be experienced as worry, fearfulness, and alarm that danger or a sudden, threatening change is near. Anxiety is necessary to keep us safe from harm. Sometimes anxiety can be an exaggerated, unhealthy response and becomes problematic when it prevents a young person from engaging in normal everyday activities such as sports, social events or school.

Anxiety is normal and expected, considering the changes and uncertainties facing a normal young person. For some young people, anxiety becomes a chronic, high-pitched state, interfering with their ability to attend school and to perform up to their academic potential. Participating in extracurricular activities, making and keeping friends, and maintaining a supportive, flexible relationship within the family can become difficult. Anxiety can present as a constant state of unease or as incident-related panic attacks.

What are the signs of anxiety?

Anxiety disorders vary greatly from young person to young person. Anxiety can present in the following ways:

- Excessive fears and worries, and/or feelings of inner restlessness.
- A tendency to be excessively wary and vigilant. Even in the absence of an actual threat, some young people describe feelings of continual nervousness, restlessness or extreme stress.
- In a social setting, anxious young people may appear dependent, withdrawn, or uneasy.
- They seem either overly restrained or overly emotional.
- They may be preoccupied with worries about losing control or unrealistic concerns about social competence.
- Young people who suffer from excessive anxiety often experience a range of physical symptoms as well. They may complain about muscle tension and cramps, stomach aches, headaches, pain in the limbs and back or fatigue. They may blotch, flush, sweat, hyperventilate, tremble, and startle easily.
- Anxiety during adolescence is often as result of changes in the way the adolescent's body looks and feels, social acceptance, and conflicts about independence.
- When flooded with anxiety, adolescents may appear extremely shy. They may avoid their usual activities or refuse to engage in new experiences.
- Young people can often express anxiety through anger or defiant behaviour. In order to diminish or deny their fears and worries, they may engage in risky behaviours, drug experimentation, or impulsive sexual behaviour.

How clinical anxiety may present

Panic disorder

More common in girls than boys, panic disorder presents as feelings of intense panic that may arise without any noticeable cause. They may be triggered by specific situations, in which case they are called panic attacks. A panic attack is an abrupt episode of severe anxiety with accompanying emotional and physical symptoms.

During a panic attack, the young person may feel overwhelmed by an intense fear or discomfort, a sense of impending doom, or the fear that they are going crazy. Accompanying the emotional symptoms may be shortness of breath, sweating, choking, chest pains, nausea, dizziness, and numbness or tingling in the extremities. During an attack, some young people may feel they're dying or can't think. Following a panic attack, they may worry that they will have other attacks and try to avoid situations that they believe may trigger them. They may begin to avoid normal activities and routines, including school.

Phobias

Some young people develop exaggerated and usually inexplicable fears called phobias that centre on specific objects or situations that tend to involve school and social performance. These intense fears can limit a young person's activities. With school avoidance, excessive worries about performance or social pressures at school may be at the root of the reluctance to attend school regularly. This leads to a cycle of anxiety, physical complaints, and school avoidance. The longer a young person stays out of school, the harder it becomes for them to overcome their fear and anxiety and return to school. They feel increasingly isolated from school activities and different from other kids.

Causes and consequences

There are a number of reasons why a young person may become anxious:

- A young person may be naturally shy or nervous.
- If a parent is naturally anxious, there's a good chance that the young person will also have anxious tendencies.
- A significant change at school, such as the transition from primary to secondary.
- A significant life event such as a divorce, illness, or a death in the family.
- A young person may experience bullying or become fearful about bullying or the lack of safety in school.



Practitioner tips

In working with the young person and their family, you may notice that a parent or caregiver is also presenting as anxious. There is a useful section in this resource on working with parents who experience anxiety that you may find useful (see various worksheets in Appendix A). The Facing and Feeling model described below is also suitable for work with adults and may be of use to you in working with parents and caregivers. If appropriate, you can also photocopy the Facing and Feeling section with parents, caregivers or colleagues who are also supporting the young person.

Working with a young person

Facing and Feeling: How to support a person experiencing anxiety

The strategy described below is taken from Lawrence J. Cohen's book 'The Opposite of Worry' (Ballantine Books, 2013), and is a useful step by step guide on how to support a person experiencing anxiety. It has been used effectively by many to help young people face situations that act as barriers to school attendance.

When something makes a person feel anxious, there are 4 main responses:

Avoidance

This is when a person avoids the thing, person, activity or place that is making them anxious. While this is effective in reducing anxiety in the short term, it can greatly reduce their capacity to live a full life. This strategy does not allow for confidence or coping skills to manage anxiety to be built and consequently avoidance can actually end up greatly increasing anxiety. This can cause the person to live an increasingly limited life as they continue to avoid situations they feel they cannot cope with, and become more and more anxious. This type of reaction is the foundation of anxiety-based school refusal.

Flooding

Flooding happens when a person faces a challenging situation and becomes completely overwhelmed by feelings of anxiety. This can look like rage, cowering, freezing, clinging, crying, hiding, agitation, hyperactivity, running away or aggression. This can happen when a person finds themselves in – or has been forced into – a situation they are not ready for. No learning can occur in this state. A person who is flooded needs comfort, soothing and empathy until they feel confident and ready enough to try facing this situation again.

White knuckling

This happens when a person may have to endure the situation, but they do everything they can to avoid enduring the feelings. This will look like zoning out, dissociation, gritting teeth, 'getting on with it' and lack of engagement. No learning can happen in this state as the person does not feel safe and is not really experiencing the situation at all.

Facing and feeling

Facing and feeling happens at the place where we feel afraid but stay until we feel ready and move a step closer to our fear. We call this place 'The Healing Edge'. It's where a young person can face and feel their fear without becoming flooded. They gain the experience of feeling scared as well as secure, with a safe adult staying with them while gently encouraging them to move forward. Although they feel afraid, they can take small steps forward and pause frequently to cool down. An emotional connection with a safe and calm adult is key to success.

How to assist a young person in facing and feeling

To overcome a fear, we need to spend time at 'The Healing Edge'.

This is done as follows:

1) Approach the feared situation gradually.

You can say, "I can see you're nervous. I know this is scary. But we'll do it together. I know you can do this. We won't take any steps you're not ready for. I'm here with you."

2) Spend time at the Edge.

You can say, "ok I see this is getting too much for you. Let's stop. Let's not go back to the car. Let's just stay here and wait until this feeling has passed. I'm here with you. You're safe. We won't do anything you're not ready to do."

3) Allow the person to experience and validate their feelings of fear.

You can say, "I can understand why you would be scared. It's been a long time since you've been in school and that must feel uncomfortable. It's normal to feel anxious. But I'm here with you, and you are safe."

4) Allow them to experience the fear reducing.

You can say, "Let's do a calming exercise together until you feel a bit better. How do you feel now? Let's take one more step together and see how you feel. We won't go any further until you're ready. I know that you're scared, but I also know that you can do this in your own time."

This is the only response that allows any learning to take place. The young person learns that it is possible to FEEL scared and yet BE safe.



Practitioner tips

This strategy is most effective with a young person and calm adult who has a good relationship with them. You may have to identify who is best suited to work with the young person using this strategy. In order for this strategy to be effective, it's important to identify the causes underlying school avoidance. Below is some guidance on using worksheets to help the young person to identify these issues.

Communication

Worksheet: Planning a gradual, stepped approach to support a person experiencing anxiety

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 1.
- This worksheet is designed for the practitioner to develop a structured plan to assist the young person in facing a fear or situation that causes them anxiety. The worksheet can be completed independently by the practitioner or in conjunction with the young person, parent or school personnel where appropriate.

Worksheet: Circles of support

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 2.
- This worksheet can be completed with or by the young person to help them to explore various sources of support and empower them to seek support if needed. Encourage the young person to keep the completed worksheet in a safe place.

Worksheet: Identifying my main stressors

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 3.
- This worksheet is designed to allow you to explore a range of incidents that may cause stress or anxiety for a young person and identify the key stressors.

Worksheet: When I feel anxious or stressed

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 4.
- This worksheet is designed to allow the young person to identify how and where they experience anxiety in their body. This will help them to recognise when they are becoming anxious and begin to manage the symptoms better.

Communication

Worksheet: Stressors self-reflection activity

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 5.
- This worksheet explores how the young person currently manages their feelings or anxiety and their coping mechanisms.

Worksheet: Healthy vs unhealthy coping mechanisms

- <https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheet/healthy-unhealthy-coping-strategies>
- This worksheet allows the young person to explore their current coping mechanism and assess if they are helpful. It offers suggestions of effective coping strategies.

Worksheet: Self-Regulation and self-soothing

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 6.
- This worksheet allows the young person to compile a collection of their most effective coping mechanisms for future reference.

Working with the parent/carer



Practical tips for practitioners

Anxiety can present in many ways and may sometimes look like another feeling or behaviour. Some people may mask anxiety with anger, withdrawal, refusal or illness. This is true of adults and children and young people. When working with parents whose young person is struggling with school engagement, consider that they may feel anxious about this too.

We suggest using the parent/ worksheets 11 and 30 – 'You and school (parent)' and 'It's all about HOW we communicate' – to open up the conversation with parents/carers. This can help you get an understanding of how the parent feels about school and to what extent they experience feelings of anxiety in their own lives too.

We also suggest giving the section 'Facing and Feeling' to parents/carer as this information may help them if they experience similar challenges in dealing with their own anxiety.

Note to Parent

Everyone experiences anxiety. It is a natural and important emotion. It can be experienced as worry, fearfulness or an alarm that danger or a sudden, threatening change is near. Anxiety is necessary to keep us safe from harm. Sometimes anxiety can be an exaggerated, unhealthy response and becomes problematic when it prevents us from engaging in normal everyday activities like sports, social events or work.

It is normal for young people to experience some feelings of anxiety considering the changes and uncertainties they face as they move through adolescence. For some young people, anxiety becomes a chronic, high-pitched state, interfering with their ability to attend school and to perform up to their academic potential. Participating in extracurricular activities, making and keeping friends, and maintaining a supportive, flexible relationship within the family can become difficult. Anxiety can present as a constant state of unease or as incident related panic attacks.

If this sounds familiar to you as a parent, you may be feeling overwhelmed and unsure about what you can do to manage your own feelings of anxiety, and also to support your young person.

Your Support Practitioner will give you information that explains anxiety – the signs and different ways that it can show in people. This information is relevant if you experience anxiety, as well as being relevant to your young person.

The information also outlines strategies you can use with your young person to help them face the situation that causes anxiety and experience feeling supported to get through it.

What can you do as a parent/carer when you feel anxious, and your young person also experiences anxiety?

Tune in

- You can help by showing that you practice effective ways of managing your own anxiety and emotions. This means 'Press pause' before you approach your young person to talk to them.
- This gives you time to think, rather than react immediately from a position of your own fear and anxiety about the situation.

- Press Pause
- Notice how you're feeling
- Practice the breathing activities provided by your support practitioner
- You can say, "I feel anxious about situations too at times. I try these breathing exercises and tuning into my 5 senses to help me calm down. I find they really help. Will we have a go together?"

Anytime your young person manages to go to school despite strong feelings of anxiety, it can be really helpful to notice this and to make an encouraging comment.

You can say, "Well done, I know that was a challenge for you to get up and go to school. I'm proud of you for achieving that today."

What could you say in your own words?

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.....
.....
.....

Communication

You can support your young person with school-related anxiety by talking positively about school and the benefits of education whilst also acknowledging that it can be difficult to be in school for several reasons.

You can say, 'Tell me a bit about when you think this started...';
'Tell me about times you feel a bit less anxious...'

When are the best times or situations for you to connect and chat with your young person?

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.....

You can say, 'I know it can be hard when you don't like a teacher or think they don't like you.'

How else can you let your young person know you understand their feelings of anxiety?

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.....

It can be less intense and intimidating to have a one-to-one chat in the car or whilst doing an activity that doesn't require too much concentration on your part. Give your young person your full attention so that they know you are available to support them and find ways of helping them manage the anxiety so they can return to school. They need to hear and feel - 'I'm always here for you'. This means putting away the phone, turning off the TV.

'I'll just turn off that TV so we can chat in peace. I want to understand how you feel about all this school stuff.'

How do we know when someone is really listening to us?

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Practical tips for young people and parents

Some activities that may help release some anxious energy:

- Spending time with friends.
- Listening to music.
- Playing sport.
- Going for a walk.
- Reading.
- Drawing.
- Cooking.
- Watching your favourite movie.
- Playing with your pet.
- Learn a new dance.
- Singing.

Book recommendations:

- Don't let your emotions run your life for teens: Dialectical behaviour therapy skills for helping you manage mood swings, control angry outbursts and get along with others by Sheri Van Dijk (New Harbinger Publications, 2021).
- The anxiety and phobia workbook Volume 2 by Edward Bourne (New Harbinger Publications, 2010).
- One year wiser: An illustrated guide to mindfulness by Mike Medaglia (Selfmadehero, 2017).
- Start where you are: A journal for self-exploration by Meera Lee Patel (Particular Books, 2016).
- Little ways to keep calm and carry on: twenty lessons for managing worry, anxiety or fear by Mark Reinecke (Mjf Books, 2012).
- My anxious mind: A teen's guide to managing anxiety and panic by Michael Tompkins, Katherine Martinez and Michael Sloan (Magination Press, 2010).

Podcast recommendations:

- The Youth Mentor Podcast.
- Teen Wealth.
- SuperGirls Podcast.
- Teen Talk.
- You Inside Out.
- Anxiety Free Teen Podcast.
- The Start of Something.



Practical tips for young people and parents

Spotify playlist recommendations:

- Stress relief.
- The stress buster.
- Calming music for anxiety.
- Nature meditation.
- Nature sounds.
- Calm vibes.
- Calming classical.

App recommendations:

- Calm.
- Headspace.
- Colorfy.
- Nature sounds relax and sleep.
- Shine.
- Breathwrk.
- Antistress anxiety relief game.

Some links to useful YouTube videos:

- The five ways to wellbeing (Mental Health Ireland)
<https://youtu.be/bsc2QkCC3uI>
- How can I manage anxiety (Jigsaw)
<https://youtu.be/Q8qPa3kcDFw>
- Are you anxious to go to school? Advice from a therapist.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3nCwYcwuHM>
- Dealing with school phobia and anxiety. Hear a young person's experience.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqs1BuNyVY4>
- Where does stress come from? (Jigsaw)
<https://youtu.be/qZp8BkaHmOE>

It's all about managing how you feel when you want to communicate well

It can be a real challenge to communicate well when we are feeling out of sorts. When we are overwhelmed by our feelings we can often **REACT**.

This can look like anger and aggression. It can also look like being dismissive and unwilling to cooperate.

When we take time to calm our emotions first then we have time to think about how we want to **RESPOND**.

Tips to calm you when you feel anxious or overwhelmed

Try the tips in the picture below to help to stay focused on the present moment. This moves your attention away from worries and helps you simply focus on simple things in the here and now.

5 Senses Grounding Tool



5 things you can see



4 things you can feel



3 things you can hear



2 things you can smell



1 things you can taste

It's all about managing how you feel when you want to communicate well

Below are 2 simple breathing exercises. You can simply trace a figure 8 on your own palm or your thigh if you are sitting. At first you might only breathe in and out for the count of 4. As your breathing slows down, maybe you can breathe in and out for the count of 8.

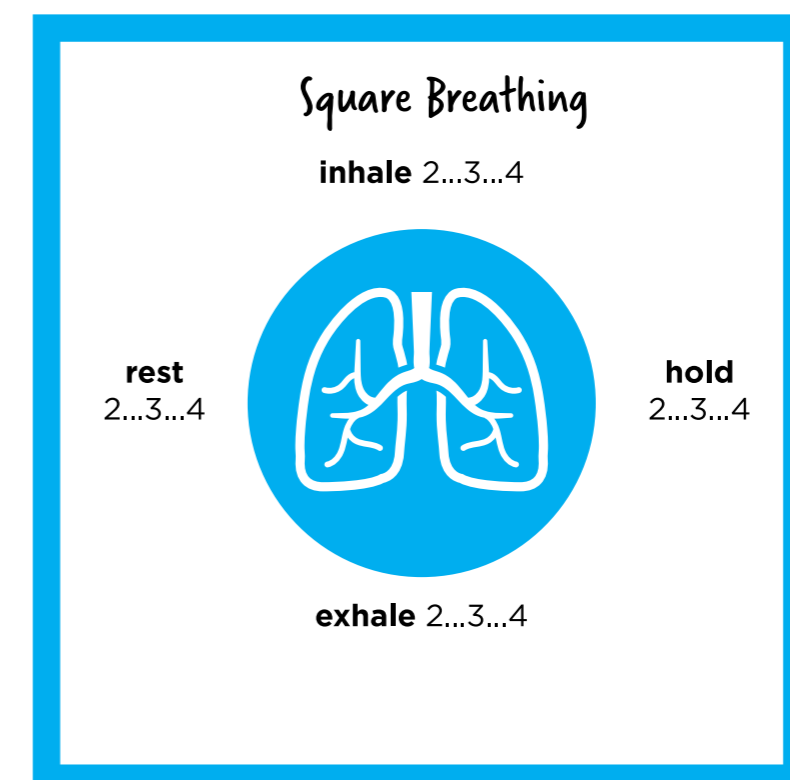
Lazy 8 Breathing

Start with an 8 on its side. Starting in the middle, go up to the left and trace the left part of the 8 with your finger while you breathe in. When you get to the middle of the 8 again, breathe out while you trace the right part of the 8 with your finger.



www.copingskillsforkids.com
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Square Breathing



It's all about managing how you feel when you want to communicate well

Simple steps to avoid feeling highly stressed and overwhelmed

Structure your day:

- Maintain a daily routine.
- **How this helps:** This gives you back a sense of predictability and control.

Notice 3 positive things every day:

- Really notice these positive things and then write them down or make a voice message on your phone to build up a memory bank of positive moments that you can remember again at any time.
- **How this helps:** This helps to shift the brain from continuously focusing on the negative.

Keep objects close by:

- Have objects that bring a smile to your face or give you comfort, in each room of your home.
- **How this helps:** This contributes to making your home your secure base/place.

If you are feeling low or down, movement up-regulates or helps lift your mood:

- Movement shifts the feeling of being stuck and helpless.
- Sitting on an exercise ball instead of the chair (don't do this if you have poor balance).
- Go out if you can, a brisk walk energises you. Walk or run on the spot if you can't go out.

If you are feeling frustrated or angry, physical effort down-regulates or calms your mood:

- Any activities that involve physical effort i.e. active pressure on the muscles and joints helps calm you down. For example, using weights, doing push ups, sit ups, pushing against the wall, going on all fours and 'being the horsey' for the young person.
- Fastest down regulators are hanging, climbing and crawling.
- Food that helps to calm you: eat hard and chewy foods.

Ref: With thanks to Éadaoin Bhreathnach, The Just Right State Programme for Adolescents and Adults ©2020.

Signposting for support services

If you are concerned for the mental wellbeing of a young person, you should advise the parent/carer to bring the young person to their GP, who will assess if that young person requires a referral to CAMHS or Primary Care Psychology Services.

If you have any reasonable concerns that the young person may harm others, you should contact the Gardaí. If you have concerns that the young person may be harmed at home, you should contact Tusla Child and Family Agency.

Information on how to make a report into your local Tusla office can be found here:

<https://www.tusla.ie/children-first/report-a-concern/>.

If you are concerned about the mental wellbeing of a parent/carer, it is advisable to encourage them to speak to their GP.

If you are looking for more information to share in relation to managing anxiety, the websites below are good sources of information:

- **Anxiety text line: 50808**
- <https://text50808.ie>
- <https://jigsaw.ie/asking-for-help/>
- <https://www.mentalhealthireland.ie>
- <https://www.aware.ie/information/anxiety/>



Section 3

Checking in with a young person: reflecting and exploring the broader issues that are leading to the avoiding behaviour



Practitioner tips

Anxiety-based school avoidance can often develop as a result of a variety of challenges facing a young person. To successfully support a young person, it is crucial to develop an understanding of the various factors impacting their motivation to attend school. The worksheets listed in this section will help you to explore these issues further.

Once you have identified the key issues causing the young person to avoid school, you can select any relevant topics in Section 2 to work on the issues in a more targeted way.

Tune in

Exploration of the root causes of a young person's anxiety has the potential to be upsetting, painful and frightening for them. You may be met with significant resistance in the form of aggression, sadness, refusal to engage, or criticism. It is important to meet the young person – however they present – with compassion, understanding and patience.

It is therefore crucial that the person completing these worksheets has a positive and trusting relationship with the young person. If you are unfamiliar with the young person, you may need to work on building a relationship first or identify another suitable adult to complete this piece of work.

“Communication”

You can support your young person with school-related anxiety by talking positively about school and the benefits of education whilst also acknowledging that it can be difficult to be in school for several reasons.





Practical tips for practitioners

Some of what they say may seem minor or unimportant, but it is very important to listen to the young person and not to dismiss anything they are saying. You can show you care and are really listening by validating their feelings and experiences.

“Communication”

Worksheet: You and school (positives)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 8.
- This worksheet can be used to explore the positive school experiences that may encourage a young person to attend school.
- Throughout the discussion, encourage the student to record any key positives they identify. This worksheet can be very useful if designing a Return to School Plan.

Worksheet: Working on solutions

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 9.
- This worksheet can be used to explore potential solutions and identify people in a position to help the student. This worksheet can also be very useful if designing a Return to School Plan.

Worksheet: You and school (parent)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 25.
- This worksheet can be used to exploring school avoidance further with the parent.



Practitioner tips

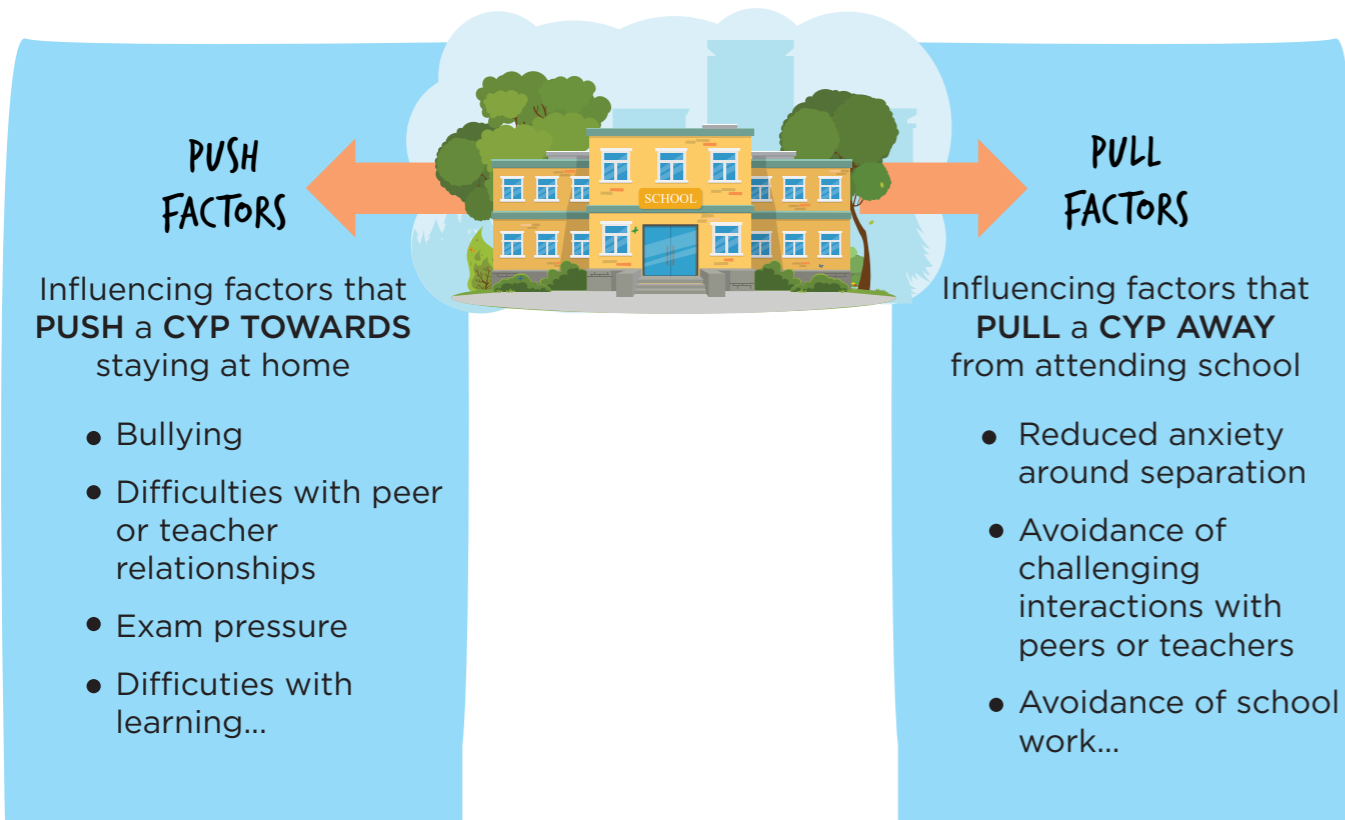
The purpose of these worksheets is to encourage discussion and exploration with the young person. There is no recommended completion time - they can be completed in a single session or spread out over a number of sessions. The young person may want to complete them alone and bring them back to discuss on a later date. In order to gain the trust of the young person and explore these issues well, it is important to proceed at a pace they are comfortable with.

Section 4

Practical ways to engage young people with issues that can lead to avoiding behaviour

Please take note: Before proceeding to section 4 you should complete section 2 as having an understanding about anxiety is essential to understanding school avoidance.

Factors leading to school avoidance



Relationship challenges that may lead to school avoidance include:

- Friendships.
- Intimate relationships.
- LGBTQ+ issues and identity crisis that may lead to school avoidance.
- Relationship between parent/carer and young person.
- School-parent/carer relationships.
- Online relationships.

Family functioning issues that may lead to school avoidance include:

- Living in a congregated setting e.g., homelessness, refuge, direct provision centre.
- Separation/divorce.
- Bereavement.
- Addiction issues in the home.
- Mental health issues in the home.
- Pregnancy during school year.
- School transition.

Young people with additional needs who may face challenges that could lead to school avoidance are also covered in this section.

Friendships



Practical tips for practitioners

Friendships are an essential aspect of secondary school. However, with social media and phones, friendships have taken on new forms. It's important to remember that not all young people will thrive with friendships. Some may require additional support for meeting new people and making friends. Navigating friendships can be tricky. A young person might not want to go to school if they are having a hard time with their friends.

How might friendships be affecting a young person's relationship with school and their education?

When a young person is struggling with friendship issues, they may be avoiding school because they:

- May have experienced a falling out with friends.
- May feel as though they do not belong in any group.
- Feel isolated from their peers and are reluctant to attend school due to fear of social exclusion/loneliness.
- May be experiencing bullying at school or online.

The anxious energy the young person might have may lead to struggles with sleep and setting a routine. This can lead to poor concentration in class due to tiredness or worry.



What can you do as a practitioner?

Tune in

- Before opening up a conversation about school attendance, it is a good idea to allow the young person to express how they feel about their friendships. They may be feeling, fear, anxiety and/or sadness amongst other emotions. The young person may need significant time to explore these difficult feelings. Actively listening without judgement and responding with empathy can help them feel more comfortable sharing.
- The young person may be very resistant to attending school and respond defensively or angrily when you begin to explore the issue. It is important to remember that anxiety can often present as anger in young people and to use this opportunity to validate and empathise with what the young person is feeling and tune into the feelings that may live under surface emotions.
- Although it might not seem like it, friendships made by young people might not last forever. Friends and relationships fall out all the time. Friendships can end due to natural growing apart, emotional fights, betrayal, or a transition such as moving school. It's normal for the young person to feel down, anxious or upset if they've had an argument with their friend. However, if friendships are causing the young person to feel down or anxious more often than they cause happiness, or if they make them not want to go to school, it might be time to move on.

Communication

Once the young person has confided in you about their friendship issues, you can help them to plan what is going to happen next. Together, you and the young person can tune in to the friendship and decide if you want to mend the friendship or if it's time to move on.

Although they might be feeling scared that they will be all alone or that their friends will hate them, it is important that they put their happiness first and find real friends that care about them.

Communication

Worksheet: You and school (barriers)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 7.
- This worksheet can be used to explore the practical and emotional barriers to attending school the young person may be facing.
- Throughout the discussion, encourage the young person to record any key barriers they identify.
- Finally, explore potential solutions to the barriers facing the young person.

Worksheet: You and school (positives)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 8.
- Use this worksheet to explore what may entice or encourage the young person to attend school. This information can be useful when creating a return to school or school attendance plan.

You can say, "Look at all the wonderful things about you: you're kind, caring, funny. These are the things people will love about you and why they'll want to be your friend."

Worksheet: Barnardo's back to school pack – Star qualities

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 14.
- This worksheet can be used to explore characteristics of friends that a young person needs, to help them identify positive friendships and eliminate toxic friendships.
- This can also be used to build a young person's self-esteem by identifying their own qualities which make people want to be their friend.

Remember: Some of what they say may seem minor or unimportant in their current context, but it is very important to listen to the young person and not to dismiss anything they are saying. You can show you care and are really listening by validating their feelings and experiences.

It's important to empathise with the young person. Try and see things from their point of view. Acknowledge what they are experiencing or feeling and let them know it's ok.

You can say, "I hear you. It can be difficult to go to school if you're fighting with your friends."

You can say, "I can understand that. It can be scary meeting new people and making friends."

What can you do as a practitioner?

Communication

Remind the young person of their strengths. Show them all the ways they have been resilient so far and explain that this identity crisis is just another one of those steps. Pointing out their strengths might show a young person certain aspects of themselves that they didn't recognise.



Practical tips for practitioners

- If possible and with consent, link in with the school to see what supports can be put in place. Are there bullying workshops/team bonding activities that could be run? Do they have a friend in another class that they could be switched to?
- Where possible, work collaboratively with the young person, school and family to create a school attendance plan.
- Work on developing a daily routine and a sleep routine with the young person if necessary.
- Ask the young person questions about themselves and their interests. A positive attitude may provide the young person with the support they need. Speak positively about school and celebrate successes, talents and good work.
- Try to encourage participation in extra-curricular activities to meet new friends.
- Try to encourage parental involvement in meetings by remaining mindful of scheduling of meetings, locations, travel cost etc.

You can find information about relevant services and how to access them here:

- <https://goshh.ie/> (For gender/sexual identity-based bullying)
- https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/friendship-guide-for-adults_0.pdf
- <https://parenthubdonegal.ie/blog/helping-your-young-person-with-friendship-problems/>



Practical tips for young people

Some tips for making friends at school

- First work on your own confidence; liking yourself is an important step before building healthy friendships.
- Be kind to everyone. People are often going through hard times in their own lives and your kindness might go a long way. If others see you as a kind, caring person, they are more likely to want to be your friend.
- Get involved in clubs and youth groups. Whether it's in your school, or in your local youth club, see if there's a group you're interested in where you could meet new people such as a football club, a cookery club, and dance class.
- When talking to someone new, ask questions about themselves and listen sincerely.
- Show you're open to new friendships with your body language – maintain eye contact, smile, try to avoid shrinking into yourself, create open body stances.
- Make an effort with others – don't wait around for people to organise something. Take charge, organise meeting them and agree activities you can do together.
- Make sure you use 'good friend' traits – act the way you want your friends to be - trustworthy, kind, supportive.



Leaving a toxic friendship

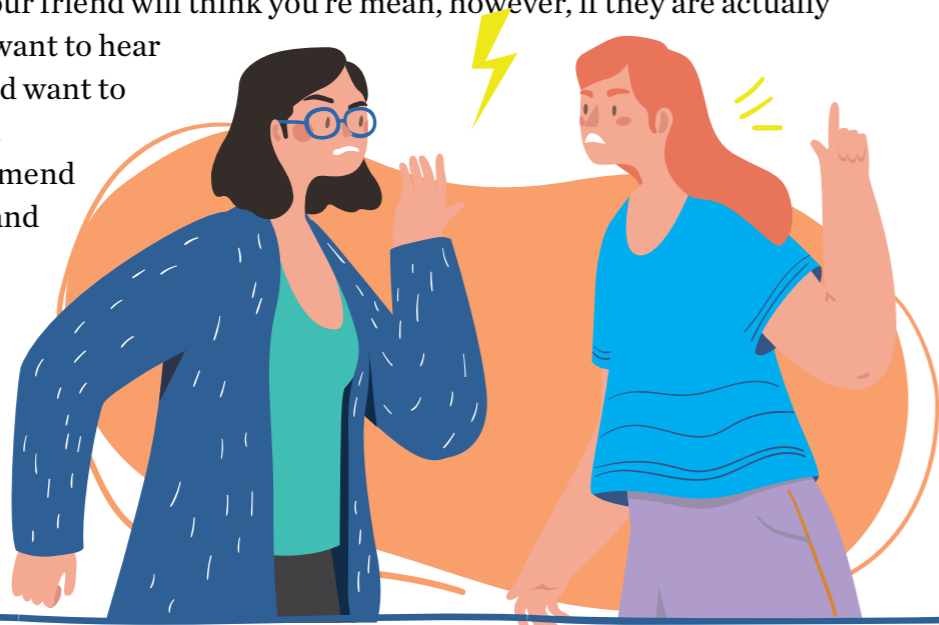
If you've decided it's time to move on from the friendship, there are ways to make this transition easier for everyone involved.

- Make yourself unavailable to the friends – declining invitations is the easiest 'no-drama' way to begin to exit a friendship.
- However, try to avoid complex stories or lies about why you can't hang out. Keep it simple – "I've too much homework" or "My mum wants me to do something with her today".
- Avoid posting indirect digs or nasty things on social media. If you need to/want to say anything to your friends, do so face-to-face.
- Just because you've ended a friendship doesn't mean you can't ever speak to them again. It's important to be kind to your peers so be civil. Smile, say hello as you pass them at school. You don't have to be their best friend, but you don't have to be enemies either.
- Ask your older sisters, brothers, cousins, mum, dad, teachers for advice. They have plenty of years of experiencing friendships and can provide good advice for you.
- It's important not to view your friendship breakup as a failure, but an opportunity to develop and grow. You've learned a lot about how to be a good friend and will be able to use these skills in your future friendships.

Mending friendships after a fight

If you decide to try and mend the friendship, here are some tips for doing so:

- It's important to use "I" statements when talking things over with a friend. For example, instead of "you never include me" try "I feel left out, I wish we could hang out more". An honest conversation like this makes it easier for your friend to listen because they're not automatically on the defensive.
- Speaking up about your feelings in a friendship isn't always easy, so practice what you want to say beforehand. Make a list of the 3 main things you want to say and try to find calm, kind ways to say them to avoid a big confrontation.
- When talking with your friend, try and stick to the facts – avoid any "well he said.../she said.../they said..."
- You might be afraid your friend will think you're mean, however, if they are actually your friend, they will want to hear about your feelings and want to help you to feel better.
- If you're struggling to mend a friendship breakup and it's causing you severe stress, your school guidance counsellor can help. They can sit everyone involved down and help you all talk things out in a structured way.



Intimate relationships

How might intimate relationships be affecting the young person's relationship with school and their education?

When a young person is struggling with relationship issues, they may be avoiding school because they:

- Have experienced a breakup.
- Feel have fallen out with friends over a relationship.
- Feel isolated from their peers and are reluctant to attend school due to fear of social exclusion/loneliness.
- May be experiencing a toxic relationship.
- The anxious energy the young person might have may lead to struggles with sleep and setting a routine. This can lead to poor concentration in class due to tiredness or worry.



Practical tips for practitioners

Young people can struggle with navigating the ins and outs of relationships. It's important to provide support during these times particularly if it's causing a slip in school attendance. However, it is important to get the balance between providing support and prying. Ensure you allow the young person to set boundaries and stick to them.

What can you do as a practitioner?

Tune in

- Before opening up a conversation about school attendance, it is a good idea to allow the young person to express how they feel about their relationship. They may be feeling, fear, anxiety and/or sadness among many emotions. The young person may need significant time to explore these difficult feelings. Actively listening without judgement and responding with empathy can help them feel more comfortable sharing.
- The young person may be very resistant to attending school and respond defensively or angrily when you begin to explore the issue. It is important to remember that anxiety can often present as anger in young people and to use this opportunity to validate and empathise with what the young person is feeling and tune into the feelings that may live under surface emotions.
- Intimate relationships are a big part of being a young person. However, navigating relationships can be tricky. A young person might not want to go to school if they're having a hard time with their relationship, especially if their partner goes to the same school. It is important to remember that although their relationship may seem like the most important thing now, times might change. It's essential the young person doesn't give up on everything else in their life for their relationship.
- Communication is an essential part of a relationship. Problems in the relationship don't mean the relationship is over. It's important the young person understands they don't have to avoid school every time they have a fight with their boyfriend/girlfriend. The more they hide from their problems the bigger they can get. So encourage the young person to sit down with their boyfriend/girlfriend and talk things over – explain how they feel, listen to how the other person feels, try and be understanding, avoid bringing up past arguments, try and avoid being overly critical, aim to be more productive “ok, how can we move on from this?”

Communication

Sitting a young person down to have a conversation about their struggles can be daunting for them. Instead try and approach the subject while they're doing something. For example, bring them for a walk outside, or ask them to help with simple tasks such as stapling pages together. Young people find it easier to talk when not all the focus is on them. You may have lots of questions that you want to ask but it will be more supportive if you can hold back and respect their boundaries. Let the young person share information at their pace.



Communication

Worksheet: You and school (barriers)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 7.
- This worksheet can be used to explore the practical and emotional barriers to attending school the young person may be facing.
- Throughout the discussion, encourage the student to record any key barriers they identify.
- Finally, explore potential solutions to the barriers facing the student.

Worksheet: You and school (positives)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 8.
- Use this worksheet to explore what may entice or encourage the young person to attend school. This information can be useful when creating a return to school or school attendance plan.

Worksheet: Barnardo's back to school pack – Star qualities

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 14.
- This worksheet can be used to explore characteristics of friends a young person needs to help them identify positive relationships and eliminate toxic relationships.
- This can also be used to build a young person's self-esteem by identifying their own qualities which make people want to be in a relationship with them.

Remember: Some of what they say may seem minor or unimportant in their current context, but it is very important to listen to the young person and not to dismiss anything they are saying. You can show you care and are really listening by validating their feelings and experiences.

It's important to empathise with the young person. Try and see things from their point of view. Acknowledge what they are experiencing or feeling and let them know it's ok.

You can say, "I hear you. It can be difficult to go to school if you're fighting with your boyfriend/girlfriend."

You can say, "I can understand that. It can be tough going through a breakup."

What can you do as a practitioner?

Remind the young person of their strengths. Show them all the ways they have been resilient so far and explain that this identity crisis is just another one of those steps. Pointing out their strengths might show a young person certain aspects of themselves they didn't recognise.

You can say, "Look at all the wonderful things about you: you're kind, caring, funny. These are the things people will love about you and why they'll want to be in a relationship with you."



Practical tips for practitioners

- Where possible, work collaboratively with the young person, school and family to create a school attendance plan.
- Work on developing a daily routine and a sleep routine with the young person if necessary.
- Ask the young person questions about themselves and their interests. A positive attitude may provide the young person with the support they need. Speak positively about school and celebrate successes, talents and good work.
- Try to encourage participation in extra-curricular activities to meet new friends or to form new positive relationships.
- Try to encourage parental involvement in meetings by remaining mindful of scheduling of meetings, locations, travel cost etc.

You can find relevant articles and information about relevant services and how to access them here:

- <https://www.ispcc.ie/supporting-my-child-to-form-healthy-relationships/>
- <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/sex-relationships/healthy-relationships/>
- <https://goshh.ie/> (For LGBTQ+ relationships)
- <https://onefamily.ie/parenting-accepting-teen-relationships/>



Practical tips for young people

Tips for maintaining a healthy relationship

- Look for a boyfriend/girlfriend that you can be yourself around and you don't have to pretend to be someone you're not. Maybe this means having different musical taste, different opinions, different hobbies but your partner encourages this and embraces it rather than makes you feel ashamed about it.
- Look for a boyfriend/girlfriend you can trust when you're not together. This means you know they are not going to cheat on you, say horrible things about you or do something you're not comfortable with when you're not around. A trustworthy boyfriend/girlfriend is very important to find.
- Keep your friends. Don't drop all your friends just because you now have a boyfriend/girlfriend. It's important to still have friendships outside of your relationship.

Signs of an unhealthy relationship

Not all relationships are healthy, and it can be hard to spot if your relationship is toxic. Here are some signs of an unhealthy relationship:

- A boyfriend/girlfriend who is constantly critical of you and always puts you down. They may make you feel terrible about your appearance, your schoolwork, your hobbies etc.
- A boyfriend/girlfriend who tries to keep you away from your friends or school. If they ask you to stay out of school or don't meet with friends in order to spend time with them, they can be overbearing and possessive. This can cause you to lose important friendships or miss valuable time at school. Your boyfriend/girlfriend should be encouraging these things instead.
- If your boyfriend/girlfriend checks your phone when you've left the room or uses social media to track where you are.
- Boyfriends/girlfriends who hurt you physically, verbally or emotionally are not the type of person you should be with.
- Boyfriends/girlfriends who make you feel guilt of not spending enough time with them, maybe because you're spending so much time at school or doing schoolwork. Relationships are about balance and if they can't see that you need time to live your own life too rather than spend all your time with them, they might not be the one for you.
- Anyone who is pressurizing you through sexual acts, making you wear things you don't want to wear, go places you don't want to go or do things you don't want to do, is a sign of a toxic person.



Practical tips for young people

How to survive a relationship break-up

Whether you are breaking up with someone or you have been broken up with, relationship breakups are not easy. There are no ‘magic words’ to make a breakup less painful but here are some tips to help:

- No matter how bad the breakup was, you probably had some really good memories together, so do what you have to do to get through it – cry, dance to loud music, watch silly movies, walk, run – whatever works for you!
- Write down your feelings and reasons for breaking up. Seeing it written down can help you process everything.
- Talk to someone who cares – friends, family or even your school guidance counsellor. Although it might be awkward to open up about it at first, you will feel so much better once you share your feelings.
- Don’t post about the breakup or your ex on social media. It can cause additional pain for both of you and lead to major drama. Sometimes it’s even just easier to unfriend/unfollow your ex on social media.
- You may feel like taking a few days off school, which might be what you need but avoiding school forever isn’t the solution. You might feel it’s going to be awkward in school if you meet your ex in the corridor or people ask about the breakup. Practice what you will say - “The breakup was ok, thanks for asking but I don’t really want to talk about it now” or “Hi ex, hope you’re keeping well”.
- Being sad after a breakup is completely normal, but if your feelings are affecting your attendance, grades or school activities, you might need additional help. Counselling is a great way to help, and you can find a counsellor by talking with your parents, doctor or school guidance counsellor.



LGBTQI+ students



Practical tips for practitioners

Exploring their identity can be terrifying for a young person. With access to much more information via the internet for young people, they may see representations of themselves online. They may begin to explore themselves to discover their true identity. You may feel overwhelmed and not fully knowledgeable on all the terms or abbreviations. The important thing is to provide a listening ear and ensure the young person is heard and supported.

We suggest using this pack to explore the barriers and that may be facing a young person who may be struggling with their identity before accessing supports.

How might LGBTQ+ identity be affecting the young person’s relationship with school and their education?

When a young person is struggling with LGBTQ+ issues, they may be avoiding school because they:

- Feel a sense of shame and embarrassment about their sexuality or identity.
- Feel confused about who they are.
- Feel isolated from their peers and be reluctant to attend school due to fear of social exclusion / loneliness.
- Be experiencing bullying at school or online due to their identity.

The anxious energy the young person might have may lead to struggles with sleep and setting a routine. This can lead to poor concentration in class due to tiredness or worry.



What can you do as a practitioner?

Tune in

- Before opening up a conversation about school attendance, it is a good idea to allow the young person to express how they feel about their sexuality and identity. They may be feeling, fear, anxiety and/or sadness among many emotions. The young person may need significant time to explore these difficult feelings. Actively listening without judgement and responding with empathy can help them feel more comfortable sharing.
- The young person may be very resistant to attending school and respond defensively or angrily when you begin to explore the issue. It is important to remember that anxiety can often present as anger in young people and to use this opportunity to validate and empathise with what the young person is feeling and tune into the feelings that may live under surface emotions.
- Being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is just as normal – and wonderful – as being straight. It's important for young people to celebrate who they are! Starting to think about and understanding their own feelings is a great step towards a young person's own self-discovery. However, if a young person is questioning their identity, they might want to avoid school to get their head straight. It is important to encourage them to live their day-to-day life.
- Deciding to come out can be a big decision for a young person and it's important they pick a time that feels right for them. There is no rush or time limit on this, so ensure you encourage them to take their time and not pressure themselves into making decisions about it.

Communication

Sitting a young person down to have a conversation about their struggles can be daunting for them. Instead try and approach the subject while they're doing something. For example, bring them for a walk outside, or ask them to help with simple tasks such as stapling pages together. Young people find it easier to talk when not all the focus is on them. You may have lots of questions that you want to ask but it will be more supportive if you can hold back and respect their boundaries. Let the young person share information at their pace.

Communication

Worksheet: You and school (barriers)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 7.

What can you do as a practitioner?

Communication

Worksheet: You and school (positives)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 8.
- Use this worksheet to explore what may entice or encourage the young person to attend school. This information can be useful when creating a return to school or school attendance plan

Worksheet: Rainbows Covid-19 programme – Bottling up worries

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 15.
- This worksheet can be used to explore what the young person is worrying about with regards their gender identity, sexuality etc.
- This can be used to explore both school-based worries and external worries.

Remember: Some of what they say may seem minor or unimportant in their current context, but it is very important to listen to the young person and not to dismiss anything they are saying. You can show you care and are really listening by validating their feelings and experiences.

It's important to empathise with the young person. Try and see things from their point of view. Acknowledge what they are experiencing or feeling and let them know it's ok.

You can say, "I'm here for you and I accept you as you are."

You can say, "I can understand that. It can be scary not knowing who you are. You have plenty of time to figure things out, there is no rush."

What can you do as a practitioner?

Remind the young person of their strengths. Show them all the ways they have been resilient so far and explain that this identity crisis is just another one of those steps. Pointing out their strengths might show a young person certain aspects of themselves they didn't recognise.

You can say, "Look at all the wonderful things you have achieved (awards, grades etc.). Your sexual identity won't change any of that. No matter who you are, you still have all these strengths."



Practical tips for practitioners

- If possible and with consent, link in with the school to see what supports can be put in place. Are there gender-neutral bathrooms the young person could use? Inform their teachers of their preferred pronouns and model the use of these pronouns amongst students.
- Where possible, work collaboratively with the young person, school and family to create a school attendance plan. This may be a sensitive area for young people to discuss with their family. Ensure you talk about it with the young person before you arrange a meeting.
- Work on developing a daily routine and a sleep routine with the young person if necessary.
- Ask the young person questions about their journey. A positive attitude may provide the young person with the support they need. Speak positively about school and celebrate successes, talents and good work.
- Try to encourage parental involvement in meetings by remaining mindful of scheduling of meetings, locations, travel cost etc.

Tips for working professionals to help young people struggling with LGBTQ+ issues create a safe space for them:

- Include LGBTQ curricula, hire LGBTQ educators, and adopt policies that support trans and queer young people's positive experiences.
- Participate in LGBTQ-related trainings often.
- Incorporate LGBTQ youth-inclusive resources, images, and posts on social media channels.
- Normalize the usage of pronouns.
- Provide youth drop-in hours physically and/or virtually.
- Change policies and continuously analyse procedures and programmes to ensure that they are inclusive.
- If possible, recruit culturally competent and LGBTQ-inclusive medical experts to facilitate groups for LGBTQ young people to have conversations about physical and mental health.

You can find information about relevant services and how to access them here:

- <https://goshh.ie/>



Practical tips for young people

You may feel isolated from your teachers and feel as though they don't understand you. However, teachers may just be lacking the language and knowledge you have regarding sexual identity. Patiently and politely inform teachers of your preferred pronouns. It may take them a while to get used to the change so have patience if they make a few mistakes.

Relationship with parents



Practical tips for practitioners

Navigating family dynamics between a young person and a parent can be tough. However, positive family functioning can lead to increased educational and social success for a young person. It is important to try to positively influence parent-young person relationships without crossing any boundaries.

We suggest using this pack to explore the barriers and that may be facing a young person who may be struggling with parent-young person relationships before accessing supports.

How might relationships with parents be affecting the young person's relationship with school and their education?

When a young person is struggling with relationship issues, they may be avoiding school because:

- They may no longer believe in their educational capabilities. A toxic relationship with parents can lead to low self-esteem and self-worth for the young person.
- Tension at home may lead to a lack of completed homework, no clean uniform, lack of lunch etc.

The anxious energy the young person might have may lead to struggles with sleep and setting a routine. This can lead to poor concentration in class due to tiredness or worry.



Relationship with parents

Tune in

- Before opening up a conversation about school attendance, it is a good idea to allow the young person to express how they feel about their relationship. They may be feeling fear, anxiety and/or sadness among many emotions. The young person may need significant time to explore these difficult feelings. Actively listening without judgement and responding with empathy can help them feel more comfortable sharing.
- The young person may be very resistant to attending school and respond defensively or angrily when you begin to explore the issue. It is important to remember that anxiety can often present as anger in young people and to use this opportunity to validate and empathise with what the young person is feeling and tune into the feelings that may live under surface emotions.
- Conflict is normal in parent-young person relationships. However, a young person shouldn't avoid school to spite their parents or because they're distracted from the conflict. In the end, the only one who suffers from school avoidance is the young person. Here are some alternatives you could suggest to the young person for solving parent-young person conflicts:
 - o Talk to your parents about boundaries. Tell them what you like and don't like in a respectful manner. For example, "Mum, I don't like when you just barge into my room without warning, it leaves me on edge. Would you please knock before you come in?". By asking for boundaries to be set, you are communicating your needs to your parents in a non-confrontational way.
 - o Identify things your parents do that upset you and tell them. If you find it hard to bring things up, write it down and use the list as a crutch for the hard conversation. Even bring it up on a car journey or while doing a small effort task such as gardening or baking. The distraction of the task may make it easier to talk about how you feel.
 - o Telling parents what they did wrong is not enough. Make sure they know what change you would like to see. Identify what they could do instead. For example, if they go through your stuff without you knowing say, "I don't like when you go through my stuff without telling me. Please ask before doing so."

Communication

Sitting a young person down to have a conversation about their struggles can be daunting for them. Instead try and approach the subject while they're doing something. For example, bring them for a walk outside, or ask them to help with simple tasks such as stapling pages together. Young people find it easier to talk when not all the focus is on them. You may have lots of questions that you want to ask but it will be more supportive if you can hold back and respect their boundaries. Let the young person share information at their pace.

What can you do as a practitioner?

Communication

Worksheet: You and school (barriers)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 7.
- This worksheet can be used to explore the practical and emotional barriers to attending school the young person may be facing.
- Throughout the discussion, encourage the student to record any key barriers they identify.
- Finally, explore potential solutions to the barriers facing the student.

Worksheet: You and school (positives)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 8.
- Use this worksheet to explore what may entice or encourage the young person to attend school. This information can be useful when creating a return to school or school attendance plan.

Worksheet: Communication between you and your parents

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 23.
- Use this worksheet to explore the young person's communication with their parents and prompt conversations about their relationship with them.

Remember: Some of what they say may seem minor or unimportant in their current context, but it is very important to listen to the young person and not to dismiss anything they are saying. You can show you care and are really listening by validating their feelings and experiences.

It's important to empathise with the young person. Try and see things from their point of view. Acknowledge what they are experiencing or feeling and let them know it's ok.

You can say, "I hear you. It can be difficult to concentrate on school if you've just had a big fight with your parents."

Or "I can understand that. It can be lonely if you don't have your parents' support'."

Remind the young person of their strengths. Show them all the ways they have been resilient so far and explain that this identity crisis is just another one of those steps. Pointing out their strengths might show a young person certain aspects of themselves they didn't recognise.

You can say, "Look at all the wonderful things about you - you're kind, caring, funny. This side of you will help you to mend your relationship with your parents."



Practical tips for practitioners

- Suggest activities that could be completed as a family to increase the positivity in the relationship.
- Where possible, work collaboratively with the young person, school and family to create a school attendance plan. This will be a sensitive area if family tensions are high. Ensure you have informed the young person of your intended plan, so they don't feel ambushed by a meeting with the school and parents.
- Work on developing a daily routine and a sleep routine with the young person if necessary.
- Ask the young person questions about themselves and their interests. A positive attitude may provide the young person with the support they need. Speak positively about school and celebrate successes, talents and good work.
- Try to encourage parental involvement in meetings by remaining mindful of scheduling of meetings, locations, travel cost etc.
- Ensure parents are equipped with knowledge on how to work collaboratively with their young person.

You can find information about relevant services and how to access them here:

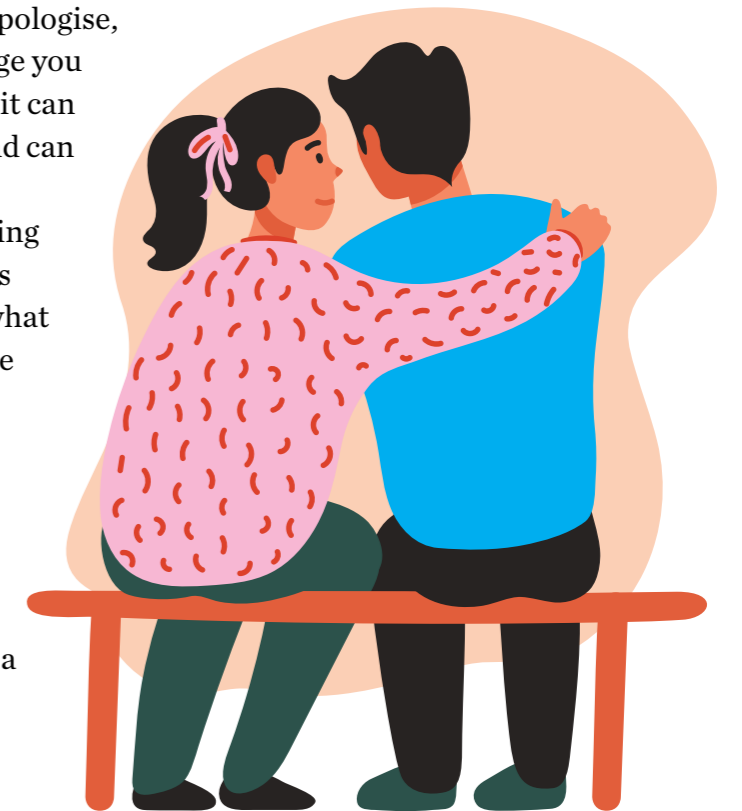
- <https://onefamily.ie/parenting-10-ways-to-relate-to-your-young-person/>
- https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Young_people_Wellbeing_d3.pdf



Practical tips for young people

Tips for fixing your relationship with your parents:

- Make sure you spend time with you parents. You might want to spend all your time with your friends, boyfriend/girlfriend but don't forget to spend time with your parents too. Try to bond through watching a TV series together or going for walks together. Even if you're not ready to talk about big issues in your life, spending quality time together can begin to fix your relationship.
- If your parents refuse your request, it can be quite upsetting. Try to offer a compromise or ask your parents to take some time to think about your request again before making a final decision.
- Thank your parents when they do something helpful. If they provide you will good advice or respect the boundaries you set up, then thank them and tell them you appreciated what they did. This will help to let them know what you like them doing and what they should avoid.
- When conflict arises, even if your parents are in the wrong, try and be the bigger person and make the first step towards solving the peace. This step doesn't have to be a big apology or admitting you did something wrong. Start small - compliment your parents (e.g. "This dinner is so delicious") or do something together (e.g. watching TV in the evening.). This will help to break the tension from the conflict.
- It's important that if your parents have wronged you in some way, that you provide forgiveness. When your parents apologise, it can be hard to let go of the grudge you may be holding. But holding onto it can build up anger and resentment and can eat away at you inside. Forgiving someone doesn't mean you're saying their behaviour is ok, it just means you're accepting that they know what they did was wrong and that you're choosing to let go of the negative emotions.
- Sometimes talking can be too difficult. Instead write a letter to your parents outlining all your thoughts and feelings. By explaining things clearly through a letter, you are also giving your parents time to read and process what you're saying.



Relationship with the school



Practical tips for practitioners

School can be a great place for learning, personal development and growth. However, school can also be tough, especially if young people feel as though you don't get on with your teachers, principal or school staff.

Where available, Home School and Community Liaison (HSCL) Coordinators and School Completion Programme (SCP) staff are very well placed to offer practical supports. We suggest using this pack to explore the barriers and that may be facing a young person who may be struggling with parental addiction before accessing supports.

How might a young person's relationship with the school be affecting their education?

When a young person is struggling with their relationship with the school, they may be avoiding school because they:

- May feel attacked by teachers or school staff.
- May experience continuous conflict with school staff.

The anxious energy the young person might have may lead to struggles with sleep and setting a routine. This can lead to poor concentration in class due to tiredness or worry. There may be negative associations with education if the young person's parents had a poor relationship with the school.

What can you do as a practitioner?

Tune in

- Before opening up a conversation about school attendance, it is a good idea to allow the young person to express how they feel about their relationship. They may be feeling, fear, anxiety and/or sadness among many emotions. The young person may need significant time to explore these difficult feelings. Actively listening without judgement and responding with empathy can help them feel more comfortable sharing.

What can you do as a practitioner?

Tune in

- The young person may be very resistant to attending school and respond defensively or angrily when you begin to explore the issue. It is important to remember that anxiety can often present as anger in young people and to use this opportunity to validate and empathise with what the young person is feeling and tune into the feelings that may live under surface emotions.

Communication

Worksheet: You and school (barriers)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 7.
- This worksheet can be used to explore the practical and emotional barriers to attending school the young person may be facing.
- Throughout the discussion, encourage the student to record any key barriers they identify.
- Finally, explore potential solutions to the barriers facing the student.

Worksheet: You and school (positives)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 8.
- Use this worksheet to explore what may entice or encourage the young person to attend school. This information can be useful when creating a return to school or school attendance plan.

Worksheet: Communication between you and school

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 22.

Sitting a young person down to have a conversation about their struggles can be daunting for them. Instead try and approach the subject while they're doing something. For example, bring them for a walk outside, or ask them to help with simple tasks such as stapling pages together. Young people find it easier to talk when not all the focus is on them. You may have lots of questions that you want to ask but it will be more supportive if you can hold back and respect their boundaries. Let the young person share information at their pace.

Remember: Some of what they say may seem minor or unimportant in their current context, but it is very important to listen to the young person and not to dismiss anything they are saying. You can show you care and are really listening by validating their feelings and experiences.

It's important to empathise with the young person. Try and see things from their point of view. Acknowledge what they are experiencing or feeling and let them know it's ok.

What can you do as a practitioner?

You can say, "I hear you. It can be difficult to concentrate on school if you're worried about your younger brother."

You can say, "Look at all the wonderful things about you - you're kind, caring, funny. Your brother would be so proud of you."

Remind the young person of their strengths. Show them all the ways they have been resilient so far and explain that this identity crisis is just another one of those steps. Pointing out their strengths might show a young person certain aspects of themselves they didn't recognise.



Practical tips for practitioners

- Inform the young person's teachers to explain outbursts in behaviour or arguments.
- Where possible, work collaboratively with the young person, school and family to create a school attendance plan. This will be a sensitive area for the young person if they believe the school is working against them. Ensure you have informed the young person of your intended plan, so they don't feel ambushed by a meeting with the school and parents.
- Work on developing a daily routine and a sleep routine with the young person if necessary.
- Ask the young person questions about themselves and their interests. A positive attitude may provide the young person with the support they need. Speak positively about school and celebrate successes, talents and good work.
- Model a positive, optimistic attitude towards school to set an example for students.
- Incorporate reward systems and positive learning environments.



Practical tips for young people

Tips for school:

- It can help to make a note of the things in your life you have the power to control e.g. which piece of homework to do first, what you have for lunch. Also make a list of the things that aren't in your control e.g. the weather, the result of Saturday's football game. This can help us see that we have control over lots of things and make the uncontrollable things seem less scary.
- Get involved in student council to have your voice heard. If you don't like the way things are done in the school, this is your chance to have your say.
- Eliminate negative language. Through small changes in speech, you may notice a large impact on you overall attitude and outlook.
- Make a list of things you are grateful for in school (e.g. your friends, your favourite subject). This will help to show you that school isn't all bad!



Online relationships



Practical tips for practitioners

The internet can be a great tool for communication, however there are negative sides to the internet too that young people need to be careful of. It is important to provide young people with the information to create safe relationships online. Additionally, it is important to support young people if things go wrong online.

We suggest using this pack to explore the barriers and that may be facing a young person who may be struggling with online relationships before accessing supports.

How might online relationships be affecting the young person's relationship with school and their education?

When a young person is struggling with relationship issues, they may be avoiding school because they:

- May have abuse or negative comments online from classmates/peers.
- May have experienced an embarrassing moment caught on camera and posted online.
- May feel have fallen out with friends over something online.
- Feel isolated from their peers if not invited to something posted online and be reluctant to attend school due to fear of social exclusion/loneliness.

The anxious energy the young person might have may lead to struggles with sleep and setting a routine. This can lead to poor concentration in class due to tiredness or worry.

What can you do as a practitioner?

Tune in

- Before opening up a conversation about school attendance, it is a good idea to allow the young person to express how they feel about their relationship. They may be feeling, fear, anxiety and/or sadness among many emotions. The young person may need significant time to explore these difficult feelings. Actively listening without judgement and responding with empathy can help them feel more comfortable sharing.

What can you do as a practitioner?

Tune in

- The young person may be very resistant to attending school and respond defensively or angrily when you begin to explore the issue. It is important to remember that anxiety can often present as anger in young people and to use this opportunity to validate and empathise with what the young person is feeling and tune into the feelings that may live under surface emotions.
- The internet can be a great tool for communication, however there are negative sides to the internet too you need to be careful of. Ensure you understand these aspects and can empathize with a young person and guide them through the challenges:
 - o Cyberbullying: If you fall victim to cyberbullying, it can be very disheartening as there feels like there is no escape. However, like other forms of bullying, telling someone helps ease your burden and can start the process of fixing the problem. Confide in someone you trust; a friend, family member or teacher, and they can help guide you. If you are being cyberbullied by someone at school, you may not want to go in. However, cyberbullying is a part of every school's anti-bullying policy, and they will have steps in place to ensure the issue gets solved.
 - o Embarrassing pictures: With every smartphone having a camera function, everyone has a camera handy at all times. This means if something embarrassing happens, it is likely to be captured. It may feel like the end of the world if an embarrassing picture gets put on social media for everyone to see, but people will forget quickly and move on to the next funny picture they see. You might even want to skip school until everyone forgets. However, it can be easier to face these things head on. The longer you wait before returning to school, the harder it can be. Practice a few clever retorts to jokes people might make about the picture, but if the jokes go too far and they are upsetting you, don't be afraid to approach a teacher for advice. They can shut down the comments before they go too far.
 - o Feeling left out: Social media can be great for keeping in contact with friends and seeing what they are up to. Unfortunately, it can also make us feel down if we see group chats we're not a part of, or pictures from a party we weren't invited to. If your friends were all together at the weekend without you and you saw it all over social media, you might feel like skipping school to avoid them. But it is better to go into school on the Monday and have an open, honest conversation with them. Explain how you didn't know about the party, and you wish you were invited. A lot of the time it can be a miscommunication, where they didn't realize you missed the conversation about going. However, if they are purposefully excluding you, they are not the type of friends you need.

What can you do as a practitioner?

Communication

Sitting a young person down to have a conversation about their struggles can be daunting for them. Instead try and approach the subject while they're doing something. For example, bring them for a walk outside, or ask them to help with simple tasks such as stapling pages together. Young people find it easier to talk when not all the focus is on them. You may have lots of questions that you want to ask but it will be more supportive if you can hold back and respect their boundaries. Let the young person share information at their pace.

Communication

Worksheet: You and school (barriers)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 7.
- This worksheet can be used to explore the practical and emotional barriers to attending school the young person may be facing.
- Throughout the discussion, encourage the student to record any key barriers they identify.
- Finally, explore potential solutions to the barriers facing the student.

Worksheet: You and school (positives)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 8.
- Use this worksheet to explore what may entice or encourage the young person to attend school. This information can be useful when creating a return to school or school attendance plan.

Worksheet: Webwise lesson 1 worksheet – My internet

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 16.
- This worksheet can be used to explore how the young person uses the internet and prompts conversations around safe internet usage.

Remember: Some of what they say may seem minor or unimportant in their current context, but it is very important to listen to the young person and not to dismiss anything they are saying. You can show you care and are really listening by validating their feelings and experiences.

It's important to empathise with the young person. Try and see things from their point of view. Acknowledge what they are experiencing or feeling and let them know it's ok.

What can you do as a practitioner?

You can say, "I hear you. It can be difficult to go to school if something embarrassing has been posted on social media."

Or "I can understand that. It can be lonely if everyone was invited to something you weren't."

Remind the young person of their strengths. Show them all the ways they have been resilient so far and explain that this identity crisis is just another one of those steps. Pointing out their strengths might show a young person certain aspects of themselves they didn't recognise.

You can say, "Look at all the wonderful things about you - you're kind, caring, funny. This is the side of you, you should show online."



Practical tips for practitioners

- Ensure cyber-safety workshops are in place in the school.
- Where possible, work collaboratively with the young person, school and family to create a school attendance plan.
- Work on developing a daily routine and a sleep routine with the young person if necessary.
- Ask the young person questions about themselves and their interests. A positive attitude may provide the young person with the support they need. Speak positively about school and celebrate successes, talents and good work.
- Try to encourage participation in extra-curricular activities to meet new friends or to form new positive relationships external from the online world.
- Try to encourage parental involvement in meetings by remaining mindful of scheduling of meetings, locations, travel cost etc.

You can find information about relevant services and how to access them here:

- <https://www.webwise.ie/>
- [https://www.schooldays.ie/articles/internet-safety-for-kids-and-teens](https://www schooldays.ie/articles/internet-safety-for-kids-and-teens)



Practical tips for young people

Online tips:

On the internet, it can be difficult to read someone's tone and see if they're joking or serious. So before you send a message have a quick check to see could it be read differently? Will somebody take offense to the message? It's easier to prevent hassle with the messages being read wrongly than to deal with the consequences afterwards.

Tips for staying safe online:

- Keep your information private – it can be easy to accidentally overshare information, so make sure your privacy settings are adjusted so only people you choose can see your page.
- When out and about without internet, it can be easy to just connect to a public network connection such as a café/shop. Through these networks, it can be easy for others to access your information or internet activity, so make sure you are not doing anything that brings a security risk, for example, checking your bank balance.
- The most important thing to remember is that whenever something is on the internet, it is there forever. This includes apps like Snapchat. Despite the picture 'disappearing' after opening, screenshots, screen recordings and screen captures can ensure your message is permanent. Therefore, do not share something you would not want anyone seeing – be it family, teachers or your boss at your part time job.



Living in temporary and/or group settings

No child, young person, adult or family should ever have to live in a temporary or group setting. A housing first approach is the only way to approach this issue. Nonetheless, this is unfortunately not always the resolution put in place for many families. This section aims to provide a general overview of how a practitioner can support a young person living in a temporary or group setting but recognises that families in this situation may have very little control over their day-to-day living experience.



Practical tips for practitioners

Young people living in temporary or group settings can include young people who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless, living temporarily with friends of family, living in women's shelters or direct provision and reception centres. It is important to consider that many young people and their families may not wish to discuss their housing status with the school and if so, this must be respected.

Students living in insecure or group accommodation should be prioritised for access to these supports.

Community welfare officers or local and voluntary groups may also be in a position to assist. If liaising with other agencies, it is important to avoid duplication and minimise the number of people the students and families need to engage with and repeat their story to.

Supports are available through:

- <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d71446-list-of-offices-administering-supplementary-welfare-allowance-swa-in-co-clare/> (Supplementary Welfare Allowance)
- <https://www.svp.ie/what-we-do/local-offices/mid-west-region.aspx> (St. Vincent de Paul)
- Find your nearest Family Resource CentreTusla - Child and Family Agency (Family Support Centres)
- www.clarecare.ie (Clarecare)

We suggest using Worksheet 7 'You and school (barriers)' in Appendix A to explore the barriers and that may be facing a young person living in a temporary or group setting before accessing supports.

Living in temporary and/or group settings

How might living in a temporary or group setting be affecting the young person's relationship with school and their education?

When a young person is living in a temporary or group setting, they may:

- Feel shame and embarrassment in relation to their living environment and may try to hide where they are living from friends and the school. This can affect their friendships, self-esteem, wellbeing and stress levels.
- Struggle to set and keep a sleep routine and get up on time for school. This can lead to poor concentration in class due to tiredness or worry.
- Live some distance from the school and may be regularly late for class or find the commute challenging.
- Struggle to keep up with schoolwork due to not having access to a quiet study space.
- Not have access to washing and cleaning facilities and may not be able to organise a clean uniform/sports gear as required.
- Not have access to cooking facilities or healthy balanced meals.
- Not be able to attend extracurricular activities, school trips or social events due to costs and transport.

Tune in

- Before opening up a conversation about school attendance, it is a good idea to allow the young person to express how they feel about their current living situation. They may be feeling shame, anger, fear, anxiety and/or sadness among many emotions. The young person may need significant time to explore these difficult feelings. Actively listening without judgement and responding with empathy can help them feel more comfortable sharing.
- The young person may be very resistant to attending school and respond defensively or angrily when you begin to explore the issue. It is important to remember that anxiety can often present as anger in young people. Use this opportunity to validate and empathise with what the young person is feeling, and tune into the feelings that may live under surface emotions.



Communication

Worksheet: You and school (barriers)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 7.
- It is very important to listen to the young person and not to dismiss anything they are saying. You can show you care and are really listening by validating their feelings and experiences.

You can say, "I can understand why you would feel uncomfortable going to school without your uniform. It must be hard standing out and feeling different."

Or "I can understand that. I would be angry and upset too if a teacher gave out to me for being late when it was out of my control."

Worksheet: You and school (positives)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 8.
- Use this worksheet to explore what may encourage the young person to attend school. This information can be useful when creating a Return to School or School Attendance Plan.

Worksheet: Working on solutions

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 9.
- In discussing main barriers and potential solutions, you may talk about contacting the school to arrange supports or to let them know about of the situation. The young person may have real fears about this. It is very important to explore these fears and maintain trust by agreeing on what to share and with whom, together.

You can say, "What worries you about sharing information about your living arrangements? Let's decide together what we want to and don't want to share with the school. Do you have a particular teacher or staff member you trust that you would like to talk to?"

If the young person decides against sharing information with the school, you can explore voluntary and community links and discuss what supports can be arranged (refer to Useful resources and links opposite).



Practical tips for practitioners

- If possible and with consent, link with the school to see what supports can be put in place. Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Coordinators and School Completion Programme (SCP) staff may be able to arrange quiet study spaces, practical assistance with uniforms, books, equipment, lunches, and transport and school trips or add the young person to breakfast and homework clubs.
- Where possible, work collaboratively with the young person, school and family to create a school attendance plan. Make sure staff are aware of the challenges facing them so that allowance can be made where appropriate. (i.e. timekeeping, uniforms, homework)
- Work on developing a daily routine and a sleep routine with the young person if necessary.
- Ask the young person questions and show interest in what they did in school. Speak positively about school and celebrate successes, talents and good work.
- Try to encourage involvement by parents/guardians in meetings by remaining mindful of scheduling of meetings, locations, travel cost etc.

Useful resources and links

- <https://www.focusireland.ie>.

Teaching resources for schools:

- <https://www.focusireland.ie/get-involved/schools/teaching-resources/>
- <https://pmvtrust.ie/services/information-and-advice>.
- <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/primarycare/socialinclusion/about-social-inclusion/partnerorganisations/homelessness.html>
- https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/housing/losing_your_home/agencies_for_homeless_people.html#

Parental separation



Practical tips for practitioners

It is worth bearing in mind that some parents may not advise teachers that they have separated. How can you draw this information out in a sensitive way and what can you do in school to reduce stress factors for the young person and the separated parents?

It can help to agree to forward information to both parents rather than rely on one parent forwarding on texts, reports, information about events etc. to the other.

We suggest using this pack to explore the barriers and that may be facing a young person who may be struggling with parental separation before accessing supports.

How might parental separation be affecting the young person's relationship with school and their education?

When a young person is struggling with parental separation, they may be avoiding school because they:

- May feel a sense of guilt about the separation and believe they are at fault.
- May feel responsible for looking after a younger sibling.
- May feel ashamed that their parents are separating, fearing what their friends and peers might say.

Tension at home may lead to a lack of completed homework, no clean uniform, lack of lunch etc. The anxious energy the young person might have may lead to struggles with sleep and setting a routine. This can lead to poor concentration in class due to tiredness or worry.

Items and belongings can easily get left behind if young people are going between 2 homes. If school materials are forgotten, it can leave young people anxious about going to school without the right uniform, books or materials.

If a parent is not coping well after the separation a young person can feel responsible for that parent and want to stay home to see they are ok.

What can you do as a practitioner?

Tune in

- Before opening up a conversation about school attendance, it is a good idea to allow the young person to express how they feel about their relationship. They may be feeling, fear, anxiety and/or sadness among many emotions. The young person may need significant time to explore these difficult feelings. Actively listening without judgement and responding with empathy can help them feel more comfortable sharing.
- The young person may be very resistant to attending school and respond defensively or angrily when you begin to explore the issue. It is important to remember that anxiety can often present as anger in young people and to use this opportunity to validate and empathise with what the young person is feeling and tune into the feelings that may live under surface emotions.
- Feeling a sense of powerlessness over their life is normal for a young person when things are changing so much. When parents separate, a lot of things seem to change, and it can seem very scary for young people at first. They might not want to go to school and want to stay home all day in case more things change. Sometimes they might even feel responsible for a younger sibling and want to stay home from school to look after them.

Communication

Sitting a young person down to have a conversation about their struggles can be daunting for them. Instead try and approach the subject while they're doing something. For example, bring them for a walk outside, or ask them to help with simple tasks such as stapling pages together. Young people find it easier to talk when not all the focus is on them. You may have lots of questions that you want to ask but it will be more supportive if you can hold back and respect their boundaries. Let the young person share information at their pace.

Communication

Worksheet: You and school (barriers)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 7.
- This worksheet can be used to explore the practical and emotional barriers to attending school the young person may be facing.
- Throughout the discussion, encourage the student to record any key barriers they identify.
- Finally, explore potential solutions to the barriers facing the student.

Worksheet: You and school (positives)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 8.
- Use this worksheet to explore what may entice or encourage the young person to attend school. This information can be useful when creating a return to school or school attendance plan.

Communication

Worksheet: Barnardo's back to school pack – Inside/Outside of your control

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 18.
- This worksheet can be used to help the young person identify the aspects of their life that have changed since the separation and aspects that have stayed the same.
- For some young people, separation will make it feel as though their whole world has changed. This worksheet will encourage the young person to look at all that's the same that they can hold on to. This will prompt conversation on how to cope with things that have changed.

Worksheet: Parenting NI – My self-care plan

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 19.
- This worksheet will help the young person to identify ways they can look after themselves even when things at home are tough.

Remember: Some of what they say may seem minor or unimportant in their current context, but it is very important to listen to the young person and not to dismiss anything they are saying. You can show you care and are really listening by validating their feelings and experiences.

It's important to empathise with the young person. Try and see things from their point of view. Acknowledge what they are experiencing or feeling and let them know it's ok.

Remind the young person of their strengths. Show them all the ways they have been resilient so far and explain that this identity crisis is just another one of those steps. Pointing out their strengths might show a young person certain aspects of themselves they didn't recognise.

You can say, "I hear you. It can be difficult to concentrate on school if you're worried about your parent's separation."

Or "Look at all the wonderful things about you - you're kind, caring, funny. Your parents still love you for all of these things despite what's going on between them."



Practical tips for practitioners

- Encourage contact between the young person and both parents to reduce the emotional impact.
- Promote the development of a clear routine and checklist system for ensuring school supplies are taken to the correct house.
- Where possible, work collaboratively with the young person, school and family to create a school attendance plan. This will be a sensitive area if family tensions are high. Ensure you have informed the young person of your intended plan, so they don't feel ambushed by a meeting with the school and parents.
- Work on developing a daily routine and a sleep routine with the young person if necessary.
- Ask the young person questions about themselves and their interests. A positive attitude may provide the young person with the support they need. Speak positively about school and celebrate successes, talents and good work.
- Ensure home addresses are correct on the school system if they are changed.
- Ensure both parents receive notes, letters, reports etc.

You can find information about relevant services and how to access them here:

- <https://www.barnardos.ie/>
- https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Parents_Coping_with_Separation_d3.pdf
- <https://www.rainbowsireland.ie/separation-links/>



Practical tips for young people

- It can help to make a note of the things in your life you have the power to control e.g. which piece of homework to do first, what you have for lunch. Also make a note of the things that aren't in your control e.g. the weather, the result of Saturday's football game. This can help us see that we have control over lots of things and make the uncontrollable things seem less scary.
- Here's a quick video on how you can support a sibling without missing out on school: https://youtu.be/Z_aZbFLEb3Q

Family bereavement



Practical tips for practitioners

It is worth bearing in mind that some parents may not advise teachers if a family bereavement occurs. How can you draw this information out in a sensitive way and what can you do in school to reduce stress factors for the young person?

We suggest using this pack to explore the barriers and that may be facing a young person who may be struggling with family bereavement before accessing supports.

How might family bereavement be affecting the young person's relationship with school and their education?

When a young person is struggling with family bereavement, they may be avoiding school because they:

- May feel a sense of guilt about the death and believe they are at fault, particularly if suicide is a factor.
- May feel responsible for looking after a younger sibling.
- May not want to face their friends and peers, not ready to talk about the death.
- May feel ashamed that their parents are separating, fearing what their friends and peers might say.

The chaos at home may lead to a lack of completed homework, no clean uniform, lack of lunch etc. The anxious energy the young person might have may lead to struggles with sleep and setting a routine. This can lead to poor concentration in class due to tiredness or worry.

Young people do not like feeling different – some friends may shy away from a grieving friend as they do not know how to 'be' around each other in this grief.

What can you do as a practitioner?

Tune in

- Before opening up a conversation about school attendance, it is a good idea to allow the young person to express how they feel about their relationship. They may be feeling fear, anxiety and/or sadness among many emotions. The young person may need significant time to explore these difficult feelings. Actively listening without judgement and responding with empathy can help them feel more comfortable sharing.
- The young person may be very resistant to attending school and respond defensively or angrily when you begin to explore the issue. It is important to remember that anxiety can often present as anger in young people and to use this opportunity to validate and empathise with what the young person is feeling and tune into the feelings that may live under surface emotions.
- When parents die, a lot of things seem to change, and it can seem very scary for a young person at first. They might not want to go to school and want to stay home all day in case more things change. Sometimes they might even feel responsible for a younger sibling and want to stay home from school to look after them. Some young people may think going back to school means they have forgotten about their parent. Remind them that it doesn't. They can celebrate them, remember them and still continue with their normal day-to-day activities.
- Some young people may not be 100% ready to talk about how they feel. However, they may enjoy reminiscing on old memories or telling funny stories about their loved one.

Communication

Sitting a young person down to have a conversation about their struggles can be daunting for them. Instead try and approach the subject while they're doing something. For example, bring them for a walk outside, or ask them to help with simple tasks such as stapling pages together. Young people find it easier to talk when not all the focus is on them. You may have lots of questions that you want to ask but it will be more supportive if you can hold back and respect their boundaries. Let the young person share information at their pace.

Communication

Worksheet: You and school (barriers)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 7.
- This worksheet can be used to explore the practical and emotional barriers to attending school the young person may be facing.
- Throughout the discussion, encourage the student to record any key barriers they identify.
- Finally, explore potential solutions to the barriers facing the student.

Communication

Worksheet: You and school (positives)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 8.
- Use this worksheet to explore what may entice or encourage the young person to attend school. This information can be useful when creating a return to school or school attendance plan.

Worksheet: Barnardo's back to school pack – Inside/Outside of your control

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 18.
- This worksheet can be used to help the young person identify the aspects of their life they can control such as what they wear, or what they eat. It also highlights the things they cannot control such as their parents' death. This will prompt conversation on how to cope with things outside of their control.

Worksheet: Parenting NI – My self-care plan

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 19.
- This worksheet will help the young person to identify ways they can look after themselves even when things at home are tough.

Remember: Some of what they say may seem minor or unimportant in their current context, but it is very important to listen to the young person and not to dismiss anything they are saying. You can show you care and are really listening by validating their feelings and experiences.

It's important to empathise with the young person. Try and see things from their point of view. Acknowledge what they are experiencing or feeling and let them know it's ok.

Remind the young person of their strengths. Show them all the ways they have been resilient so far and explain that this identity crisis is just another one of those steps. Pointing out their strengths might show a young person certain aspects of themselves they didn't recognise.

You can say, "I hear you. It can be difficult to concentrate on school if you're coping with a bereavement/grief."

Or "Look at all the wonderful things about you - you're kind, caring, funny. Your mum would be so proud of you."



Practical tips for practitioners

- Explain clearly to the young person about what will happen next and what supports are available for them.
- Inform their teachers to allow for allowances with late homework, no uniform etc.
- Promote the development of a clear routine and checklist system for ensuring school supplies are accounted for.
- Where possible, work collaboratively with the young person, school and family to create a school attendance plan. This will be a sensitive area after a recent death. Ensure you have informed the young person of your intended plan, so they don't feel ambushed by a meeting with the school and parents.
- Work on developing a daily routine and a sleep routine with the young person if necessary.
- Ask the young person questions about themselves and their interests. A positive attitude may provide the young person with the support they need. Speak positively about school and celebrate successes, talents and good work.

You can find information about relevant services and how to access them here:

- <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/mental-health/bereavement-and-loss.html>
- <https://hospicefoundation.ie/i-need-help/i-am-bereaved/types-of-grief/the-grieving-family/>
- <https://www.barnardos.ie/our-services/work-with-families/bereavement-services>



Practical tips for young people

- It can help to make a note of the things in your life you have the power to control e.g. which piece of homework to do first, what you have for lunch. Also make a note of the things that aren't in your control e.g. the weather, the result of Saturday's football game. This can help us see that we have control over lots of things and make the uncontrollable things seem less scary.
- When big changes happen in young people's lives, feelings of anxiety and worry can escalate. They can feel that things are out of control, and this is scary. It may sound harsh but getting back into a routine can really help young people feel secure and grounded.
- Here's a quick video on how you can support a sibling without missing out on school: https://youtu.be/Z_aZbFLEb3Q

Parental addiction



Practical tips for practitioners

Addiction can come in many forms: gambling, alcohol, drugs, tobacco. It can be hard for a young person to watch a person they know and love struggle with addiction. Addiction is a serious illness, and most people struggle to overcome addiction.

It is worth bearing in mind that some parents may not advise teachers if there are addiction problems in the family. How can you draw this information out in a sensitive way and what can you do in school to reduce stress factors for the young person?

We suggest using this pack to explore the barriers and that may be facing a young person who may be struggling with Parental addiction before accessing supports.

How might parental addiction be affecting the young person's relationship with school and their education?

When a young person is struggling with parental addiction, they may be avoiding school because they:

- May feel a sense of guilt about the addiction and believe they are to blame.
- May feel responsible for looking after a younger sibling.
- May not want to face their friends and peers, not ready to talk about the family issues.
- May feel ashamed about the parental addiction fearing what their friends and peers might say.

The chaos at home may lead to a lack of completed homework, no clean uniform, lack of lunch etc. The anxious energy the young person might have may lead to struggles with sleep and setting a routine. This can lead to poor concentration in class due to tiredness or worry. The young person may choose to stay at home to 'mind' their parent. There may be a lack of money in the household budget for school materials if money is being regularly spent on alcohol and/or other substances.

What can you do as a practitioner?

Tune in

- Before opening up a conversation about school attendance, it is a good idea to allow the young person to express how they feel about their relationship. They may be feeling, fear, anxiety and/or sadness among many emotions. The young person may need significant time to explore these difficult feelings. Actively listening without judgement and responding with empathy can help them feel more comfortable sharing.
- The young person may be very resistant to attending school and respond defensively or angrily when you begin to explore the issue. It is important to remember that anxiety can often present as anger in young people and to use this opportunity to validate and empathise with what the young person is feeling and tune into the feelings that may live under surface emotions.
- The young person may benefit from speaking with a professional about their parent's addiction. A greater understanding of what's going on may ease some of their worries. See if you can schedule an appointment for them with a GP and ask some questions they have. Ensuring they have a reliable source of information is important otherwise they may just be looking things up on the internet which won't always provide accurate information.
- The young person may opt to go for counselling. It is important to remind them that this does not mean they are part of the addiction problem; it just means they're being supported the best they can to ensure they can still live their best life.

Communication

Worksheet: You and school (barriers)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 7.
- This worksheet can be used to explore the practical and emotional barriers to attending school the young person may be facing.
- Throughout the discussion, encourage the student to record any key barriers they identify.
- Finally, explore potential solutions to the barriers facing the student.

Worksheet: You and school (positives)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 8.
- Use this worksheet to explore what may entice or encourage the young person to attend school. This information can be useful when creating a return to school or school attendance plan.

Communication

Worksheet: Barnardo's back to school pack – Thinking about change

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 17.

Worksheet: Barnardo's back to school pack – Inside/Outside of your control

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 18.
- This worksheet can be used to help the young person identify the aspects of their life they can control such as what they wear, or what they eat. It also highlights the things they cannot control such as their parents' addiction issues. This will prompt conversation on how to cope with things outside of their control.

Worksheet: Parenting NI – My self-care plan

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 19.
- This worksheet will help the young person to identify ways they can look after themselves even when things at home are tough.

Sitting a young person down to have a conversation about their struggles can be daunting for them. Instead try and approach the subject while they're doing something. For example, bring them for a walk outside, or ask them to help with simple tasks such as stapling pages together. Young people find it easier to talk when not all the focus is on them. You may have lots of questions that you want to ask but it will be more supportive if you can hold back and respect their boundaries. Let the young person share information at their pace.

Remember: Some of what they say may seem minor or unimportant in their current context, but it is very important to listen to the young person and not to dismiss anything they are saying. You can show you care and are really listening by validating their feelings and experiences.

It's important to empathise with the young person. Try and see things from their point of view. Acknowledge what they are experiencing or feeling and let them know it's ok.

You can say, "I hear you. It can be difficult to concentrate on school if you're worried about your parent."

Or "Look at all the wonderful things about you - you're kind, caring, funny. Your mum would be so proud of you."

Parental addiction

Remind the young person of their strengths. Show them all the ways they have been resilient so far and explain that this identity crisis is just another one of those steps. Pointing out their strengths might show a young person certain aspects of themselves they didn't recognise.



Practical tips for practitioners

- Explain clearly to the young person about what will happen next and what supports are available for them.
- Inform their teachers to allow for allowances with late homework, no uniform etc.
- Promote the development of a clear routine and checklist system for ensuring school supplies are accounted for.
- Where possible, work collaboratively with the young person, school and family to create a school attendance plan. This will be a sensitive area if there are family issues. Ensure you have informed the young person of your intended plan, so they don't feel ambushed by a meeting with the school and parents.
- Work on developing a daily routine and a sleep routine with the young person if necessary.
- Ask the young person questions about themselves and their interests. A positive attitude may provide the young person with the support they need. Speak positively about school and celebrate successes, talents and good work.
- Show them that support groups are available for families affected by addiction. For example, Family Support Network (FSN) or Families of Addiction provide advice and help for those with family members with addiction.

You can find information about relevant services and how to access them here:

- <https://www.fsn.ie/>
- <https://www.drugs.ie/>
- <https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/5029/1/241-0184437.pdf>
- <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/primarycare/socialinclusion/about-social-inclusion/partnerorganisations/substance-use.html>
- Limerick Drug and Alcohol Service. Corporate House, Mungret Street, Limerick
Tel: (061) 318 633. Fax: (061) 318 637
- Clare Drug and Alcohol Service. Museum House, Francis Street, Ennis
Tel: (065) 686 5852
- North Tipperary Drug and Alcohol Service. Kenyon Street, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary
Tel: 067 46512
- HSE National Drug and Alcohol Helpline. Tel: 1800 459 459



Practical tips for young people

- It can help to make a note of the things in your life you have the power to control e.g. which piece of homework to do first, what you have for lunch. Also make a note of the things that aren't in your control e.g. the weather, the result of Saturday's football game. This can help us see that we have control over lots of things and make the uncontrollable things seem less scary.
- Parents may become violent or aggressive while using addictive substances. Understand that you are not the problem and that it is important to get help if a parent begins to abuse you physically or verbally. You may be worried that you'll be moved from your family, but your safety is the number one priority, so in times of emergency, pick up the phone and ring 999.
- You may feel ashamed about the illness and want to miss school as a result. Practicing what to say to people if they ask can help relieve some of the school-based anxiety, for example, "I don't really want to talk about Mum's illness now, thanks". If your peers are making nasty comments, find a teacher you can turn to and tell them. Nasty comments are a form of bullying and most schools have a no-tolerance bullying policy, meaning they'll investigate the issue and help you find a solution.
- Sometimes local groups are available to support you such as Foróige or after school clubs. These programmes can provide you with a safe space to do your homework and chill out if things are difficult at home.
- Work to create a daily routine and write it down. Detail school starting times, collection times, training times and location etc. This way if another family member is looking after you for a few days, they have a handy document to follow to help you keep up with your daily routine.
- Here's a quick video on how you can support a sibling without missing out on school: https://youtu.be/Z_aZbFLEb3Q



Parental mental health



Practical tips for practitioners

It is worth bearing in mind that some parents may not advise teachers if there are mental health problems in the family. How can you draw this information out in a sensitive way and what can you do in school to reduce stress factors for the young person?

Where available, Home School and Community Liaison (HSCL) Coordinators and School Completion Programme (SCP) staff are very well placed to offer practical supports. We suggest using this pack to explore the barriers and that may be facing a young person who may be struggling with Parental addiction before accessing supports.

How might parental addiction be affecting the young person's relationship with school and their education?

When a young person is struggling with parental mental health, they may be avoiding school because they:

- May feel a sense of guilt about the mental health issues and believe they are to blame.
- May feel responsible for looking after a younger sibling.
- May not want to face their friends and peers, not ready to talk about the family issues.
- May feel ashamed about the parental mental health fearing what their friends and peers might say.

The chaos at home may lead to a lack of completed homework, no clean uniform, lack of lunch etc. The anxious energy the young person might have may lead to struggles with sleep and setting a routine. This can lead to poor concentration in class due to tiredness or worry.



What can you do as a practitioner?

Tune in

- Before opening up a conversation about school attendance, it is a good idea to allow the young person to express how they feel about their relationship. They may be feeling fear, anxiety and/or sadness among many emotions. The young person may need significant time to explore these difficult feelings. Actively listening without judgement and responding with empathy can help them feel more comfortable sharing.
- The young person may be very resistant to attending school and respond defensively or angrily when you begin to explore the issue. It is important to remember that anxiety can often present as anger in young people and to use this opportunity to validate and empathise with what the young person is feeling and tune into the feelings that may live under surface emotions.
- The young person may benefit from speaking with a professional about their parent's mental health. A greater understanding of what's going on may ease some of their worries. See if you can schedule an appointment for them with a GP and ask some questions they have. Ensuring they have a reliable source of information is important otherwise they may just be looking things up on the internet which won't always provide accurate information.
- The young person may opt to go for counselling. It is important to remind them that this does not mean they are part of the problem; it just means they're being supported the best they can to ensure they can still live their best life.

Communication

Sitting a young person down to have a conversation about their struggles can be daunting for them. Instead try and approach the subject while they're doing something. For example, bring them for a walk outside, or ask them to help with simple tasks such as stapling pages together. Young people find it easier to talk when not all the focus is on them. You may have lots of questions that you want to ask but it will be more supportive if you can hold back and respect their boundaries. Let the young person share information at their pace.

Communication

Worksheet: You and school (barriers)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 7.
- This worksheet can be used to explore the practical and emotional barriers to attending school the young person may be facing.
- Throughout the discussion, encourage the student to record any key barriers they identify.
- Finally, explore potential solutions to the barriers facing the student.

Communication

Worksheet: You and school (positives)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 8.
- Use this worksheet to explore what may entice or encourage the young person to attend school. This information can be useful when creating a return to school or school attendance plan.

Worksheet: Barnardo's back to school pack – Inside/Outside of your control

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 18.
- This worksheet can be used to help the young person identify the aspects of their life they can control such as what they wear, or what they eat. It also highlights the things they cannot control such as their parents' mental health. This will prompt conversation on how to cope with things outside of their control.

Worksheet: Parenting NI – My self-care plan

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 19.
- This worksheet will help the young person to identify ways they can look after themselves even when things at home are tough.

Remember: Some of what they say may seem minor or unimportant in their current context, but it is very important to listen to the young person and not to dismiss anything they are saying. You can show you care and are really listening by validating their feelings and experiences.

It's important to empathise with the young person. Try and see things from their point of view. Acknowledge what they are experiencing or feeling and let them know it's ok.

You can say, "I hear you. It can be difficult to concentrate on school if you're worried about your mum."

Or "Look at all the wonderful things about you - you're kind, caring, funny. Your mum would be so proud of you."

Parental mental health

Remind the young person of their strengths. Show them all the ways they have been resilient so far and explain that this identity crisis is just another one of those steps. Pointing out their strengths might show a young person certain aspects of themselves they didn't recognise.



Practical tips for practitioners

- Explain clearly to the young person about what will happen next and what supports are available for them.
- Inform their teachers to allow for allowances with late homework, no uniform etc.
- Promote the development of a clear routine and checklist system for ensuring school supplies are accounted for.
- Where possible, work collaboratively with the young person, school and family to create a school attendance plan. This will be a sensitive area if there are family issues. Ensure you have informed the young person of your intended plan, so they don't feel ambushed by a meeting with the school and parents.
- Work on developing a daily routine and a sleep routine with the young person if necessary.
- Ask the young person questions about themselves and their interests. A positive attitude may provide the young person with the support they need. Speak positively about school and celebrate successes, talents and good work.
- See if there is another family member the young person could turn to for support. Remember, they are not an expert carer, they are not expected to look after their parent themselves. Aunties, uncles, or community members may be able to support if they ask.

You can find information about relevant services and how to access them here:

- <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/our-health-service/making-it-better/parental-mental-health-distress-addressed.html>
- <https://www.barnardos.ie/policy/the-issues/health-development/mental-health>
- <https://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/>
- <https://www.stpatricks.ie/getting-help/carers-supporters>



Practical tips for young people

- It can help to make a note of the things in your life you have the power to control e.g. which piece of homework to do first, what you have for lunch. Also make a note of the things that aren't in your control e.g. the weather, the result of Saturday's football game. This can help us see that we have control over lots of things and make the uncontrollable things seem less scary.
- You may feel ashamed about the illness and want to miss school as a result. Practicing what to say to people if they ask can help relieve some of the school-based anxiety, for example, "I don't really want to talk about Mum's illness now, thanks". If your peers are making nasty comments, find a teacher you can turn to and tell them. Nasty comments are a form of bullying and most schools have a no-tolerance bullying policy, meaning they'll investigate the issue and help you find a solution.
- Sometimes local groups are available to support you such as Foróige or after school clubs. These programmes can provide you with a safe space to do your homework and chill out if things are difficult at home.
- Work to create a daily routine and write it down. Detail school starting times, collection times, training times and location etc. This way if another family member is looking after you for a few days, they have a handy document to follow to help you keep up with your daily routine.
- Here's a quick video on how you can support a sibling without missing out on school: https://youtu.be/Z_aZbFLEb3Q



Pregnancy



Practical tips for practitioners

Teenage pregnancy can be terrifying for a young person. The associated stigma may create fear and anxiety for them. You may feel overwhelmed and not medically equipped to help a young person with pregnancy. My Options is a HSE free phone line that provides free and confidential information and counselling to people experiencing an unplanned pregnancy. It can also provide you with the information to support the young person 1800 828 010 (Mon-Fri 9am-8pm).

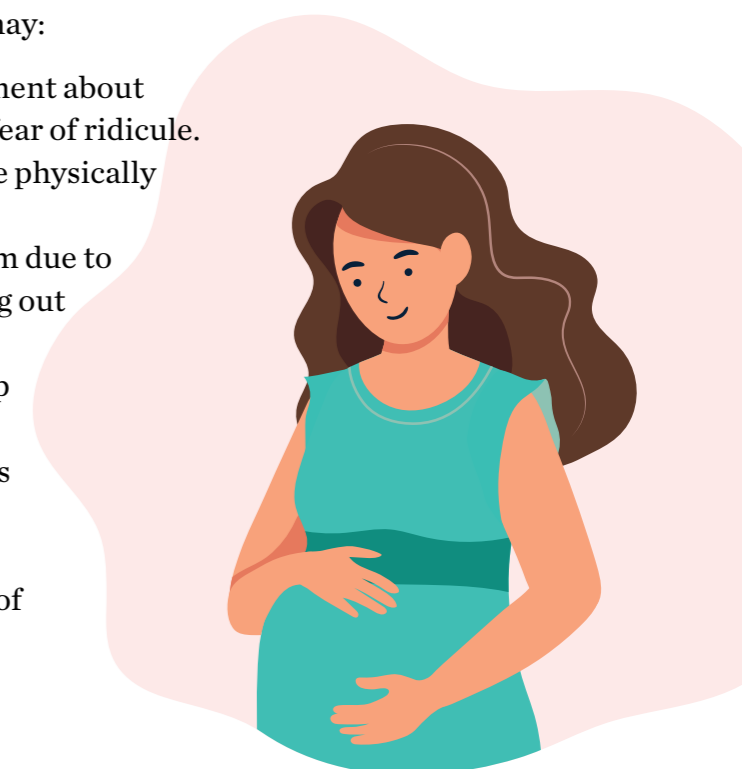
When a young person is pregnant, going to school can be very hard work. However, if they do finish their education, they will end up in a much better position to get a job they enjoy and to provide for themselves and their baby. Unplanned pregnancies can leave young people feeling overwhelmed, worried and confused.

We suggest using Worksheet 8 'You and school (barriers)' in Appendix A to explore the barriers and that may be facing a young person who may be pregnant or suffering from post-natal depression before accessing supports.

How might a pregnancy be affecting the young person's relationship with school and their education?

When a young person is pregnant, they may:

- Feel a sense of shame and embarrassment about the pregnancy and avoid school over fear of ridicule.
- Feel unwell with the pregnancy and be physically unable to attend.
- Be unable to fit into the school uniform due to changing body shape and fear standing out at school in their own clothes.
- Be struggling to set a routine and sleep schedule. This can lead to poor concentration in class due to tiredness or worry.
- Feel isolated from their peers and be reluctant to attend school due to fear of social exclusion/loneliness.



What can you do as a practitioner?

Tune in

- Before opening up a conversation about school attendance, it is a good idea to allow the young person to express how they feel about the pregnancy. They may be feeling, fear, anxiety and/or sadness among many emotions. The young person may need significant time to explore these difficult feelings. Actively listening without judgement and responding with empathy can help them feel more comfortable sharing.
- The young person may be very resistant to attending school and respond defensively or angrily when you begin to explore the issue. It is important to remember that anxiety can often present as anger in young people and to use this opportunity to validate and empathise with what the young person is feeling and tune into the feelings that may live under surface emotions.
- Post-natal depression is a common occurrence after teenage pregnancy. It's important to look for the signs of post-natal depression in the young person and ensure they get the support they need. Post-natal depression is when:
 - o You feel incapable of dealing with everyday things.
 - o You feel over-anxious about your baby.
 - o Even when exhausted, you struggle to sleep.
 - o Everything seems like a huge effort.
 - o You don't want to go out and meet people.
 - o You're irritable and not enjoying your life.
- When they're so busy with the baby, young people can forget to make time for themselves. However, as the baby gets into a new routine, encourage the young person to find a pocket of time for themselves, where they can check in with their own mental health and see if they need anything to support it.

Communication

Sitting a young person down to have a conversation about their struggles can be daunting for them. Instead try and approach the subject while they're doing something. For example, bring them for a walk outside, or ask them to help with simple tasks such as stapling pages together. Young people find it easier to talk when not all the focus is on them.

Communication

Worksheet: You and school (barriers)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 7.
- This worksheet can be used to explore the practical and emotional barriers to attending school the young person may be facing.
- Throughout the discussion, encourage the student to record any key barriers they identify.
- Finally, explore potential solutions to the barriers facing the student.

Communication

Worksheet: You and school (positives)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 8.
- Use this worksheet to explore what may entice or encourage the young person to attend school. This information can be useful when creating a return to school or school attendance plan.

Worksheet: Barnardo's back to school pack – Inside/Outside of your control

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 18.
- This worksheet can be used to help the young person identify the aspects of their life that have changed since the baby and aspects that have stayed the same.
- For some young people, pregnancy will make it feel as though their whole world has changed. This worksheet will encourage the young person to look at all that's the same that they can hold on to. This will prompt conversation on how to cope with things that have changed.

Worksheet: Parenting NI – My self-care plan

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 19.
- This worksheet will help the young person to identify ways they can look after themselves after the baby is born.

Remember: Some of what they say may seem minor or unimportant in their current context, but it is very important to listen to the young person and not to dismiss anything they are saying. You can show you care and are really listening by validating their feelings and experiences.

It's important to empathise with the young person. Try and see things from their point of view. Acknowledge what they are experiencing or feeling and let them know it's ok.

You can say, "I hear you; you're worried about what other people might say."

Or "I can understand that. It can be scary having a baby. Your future might seem uncertain now."

Pregnancy

Remind the young person of their strengths. Show them all the ways they have been resilient so far and explain that this pregnancy is just another one of those steps. Pointing out their strengths might show a young person certain aspects of themselves they didn't recognise.



Practical tips for practitioners

- If possible and with consent, link in with the school to see what supports can be put in place. The young person may be entitled to the Home Tuition Grant for students on maternity-related absences. Under this grant, they are allocated 90 hours of home tuition over a 6 month period. The tutor cannot be a parent/guardian, should be fully qualified at post-primary level and registered with the teaching council. This ensures the young person is guaranteed a good standard of education while at home.
- Where possible, work collaboratively with the young person, school and family to create a school attendance plan. If time off is needed for pre-natal appointments or antenatal classes, teachers can arrange options for getting notes or homework to the young person. Make sure staff are aware of the challenges facing the student so allowance can be made where appropriate. (i.e. timekeeping, uniforms, homework)
- Work on developing a daily routine and a sleep routine with the young person if necessary.
- Ask the young person questions and show interest in the pregnancy. A positive attitude may provide the young person with the support they need. Speak positively about school and celebrate successes, talents and good work.
- Try to encourage parental involvement in meetings by remaining mindful of scheduling of meetings, locations, travel cost etc.
- Unless a young person is feeling unwell or suffering from morning sickness, they should be able to attend school until a few weeks before the due date. They may be afraid to attend school if they think people are talking about them. At the beginning, people may be curious and ask questions, so practice how the young person will respond to people when they approach, for example, "Thanks for asking but I don't want to talk about it right now."

You can find information about relevant services and how to access them here:

- <https://www2.hse.ie/services/unplanned-pregnancy-support-services/my-options-freephone-line.html>
- <https://www.tpsp.ie/>



Practical tips for young people

Tips for making your pregnancy at school a bit easier

- Ask the school if you can wear tracksuit or other comfortable clothes instead of the uniform.
- Try not to carry a heavy school bag. Ask the book rental scheme if they have additional books so you could leave some at home and some at school to avoid carrying them back and forth.
- Try and put your feet up on your breaks and when you get home in the evening, especially if they start to get swollen.
- Try to bring healthy lunches, snacks and drinks to keep your energy up and to avoid nausea.
- Although you might not be able to engage with the full PE programme, use PE to walk around outside and to engage with gentle exercise.
- Ante-natal appointments are usually during the day. Make sure you explain to the school that you will absent then.

Important ways to support your mental health when pregnant/with a newborn

- Although there is less free time, it's important you make some for yourself.
- Try and get out and spend time with your friends – text or talk on the phone if you don't want to meet them.
- Reward yourself with small treats; sit down with a magazine, paint your toenails, watch your favourite TV show – all this can help to recharge the batteries.
- Remember you are still a person as well as parent. Although you might feel as though all you talk about and think about is your baby, it's important to remember that you have needs and interests outside of your baby.
- Don't give up on your dreams; having a baby doesn't mean you still can't do what you hoped, you might have to slow your plans down or change the ways you are going to do things, but it does not mean that you have to give them up. You can still do things in your life and be a good mum or dad.

Young people with additional needs

Young people can be classified as having additional needs for a huge variety of reasons. It is beyond the scope of this pack to go into each need in detail. This section will look more closely at three conditions most commonly linked with anxiety-based school avoidance (ABSA).

- Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC).
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).
- General Learning Disorders (GLD) and Specific Learning Disorders (Dyslexia, Dyscalculia).



Practical tips for practitioners

It is crucially important that practitioners working with a young person with an additional need have a clear understanding of the nature of that condition. All adults working with these young people should try to access training where possible or complete the necessary reading and research in order to provide appropriate support.

Where possible, try to link in with parents/guardians, SEN teachers, SNAs and other school personnel that may already have Support Plans or other supports already in place. It can be extremely difficult for a young person to discuss their need and/or diagnosis. There is a possibility they may never have discussed it with anyone, or even be fully aware of the nature of their need. It is important that the practitioner has built a trusting relationship with the young person before completing the worksheets provided in this section. Exploring this issue with a young person who is not ready could cause significant distress or lead them to disengage further. It is advisable to discuss with parents/guardians and other professionals to decide who is best placed to complete this work.

It may be that in the course of your work with a young person, you begin to query if they have an undiagnosed condition. In this case, it is advisable to share your concerns with parents/guardians and/or school and suggest a referral for the young person to an assessment.



Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC)



Practical tips for practitioners

It is well documented that anxiety and poor stress management are common in young people with ASC and that anxiety may worsen during adolescence, as young people face increasingly complex social interactions and often become more aware of their differences and interpersonal difficulties. Consequently, autistic young people can find school exhausting as they may be expending large amounts of cognitive energy managing this social experience and can become overloaded and increasingly anxious.

Given the increased risk of a child with ASC experiencing high levels of anxiety that may lead to school avoidance, it is essential that there is early attention and intervention given to developing their social skills, emotional literacy, resilience and ability to self-regulate.

How might a diagnosis of ASC impact the young person's relationship with school and their education?

Young autistic people may:

- Lack the complex social skills that come naturally to others and therefore struggle to make friends and experience bullying.
- Have difficulty coping with the curriculum as they may experience difficulty processing information and understanding questions and text.
- Struggle to cope with the demands of a school timetable due to organisation and prioritising difficulties.
- Find school exhausting and overwhelming as they are spending huge amounts of cognitive energy 'masking' or attempting to hide their autistic traits.
- Have sensory processing differences making aspects of the school environment like noises, smells and lighting distracting or triggering.
- Strive for perfection in their work and see anything less as failure.
- Get into trouble with staff and students for being unintentionally rude.
- Find sudden changes in routine or transitions difficult (like moving classes or changing teachers).
- Find that unstructured time, like breaks and lunchtime, cause anxiety.

What can you do as a practitioner?

Tune in

- If you have not done so already, try to access training or do the necessary reading or research around the young person's diagnosis so that you have a solid understanding of their challenges and needs. Maintain a strengths-based approach when working with the young person.
- Anxiety levels can be reduced by ensuring all adults working with the young person have an understanding of ASC and adopt general good practice strategies that are individualised to the young person's specific needs i.e. visual supports, structure, managing change and generally increasing the certainty of the school day.
- Professionals need to analyse and understand the specific needs and strengths of the young person and design an individualised programme to address school avoidance. (See Pupil Progression Tool - Autism Education Trust (AET 2019) in Resources).
- Try to build up a clear picture of exactly what elements of attending school are increasing their anxiety in order that best endeavours can be made to alleviate the anxiety. (See Worksheet 1).
- Frequent monitoring and assessment of the student's emotional state, view and reactions can be very useful for anticipating and managing difficulties. By understanding the student's own inner world, thoughts and misconceptions, fears (irrational or not) and general emotional state, schools are in a better position to act upon the factors preventing the young person from attending school.
- Remember that anxiety-based school avoidance is rooted in anxiety. If you have not already done so, please read Section 2 and complete the worksheets in Section 3 on Anxiety before proceeding with the worksheets below.

Communication



Practical tips for practitioners

Collaborative work and good communication with SEN teachers, SNAs and other members of school staff, parents and the young person is crucially important. If possible, try to link in with other key adults to see what has worked, or not, in the past.

Communication

Worksheet: Identify your school triggers (ASC-specific)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 10.
- This worksheet can be used to explore the practical and emotional barriers to attending school the young person may be facing.
- As you progress through the checklist, you can explore topics in more detail, where appropriate.

Worksheet: What do you like about school?

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 11.
- This worksheet can be useful when drawing up a Return to School Plan with the student. It is a checklist style worksheet, used to identify the positives of school.

Worksheet: Things I would like people in school to know

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 12.
- This worksheet can be used to allow the student to express and identify some difficulties they may be having and propose solutions.
- With consent from the student, this can be shared with the school or used to inform a Return to School Plan.

Worksheet: What does my learning difficulty mean to me?

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 13.
- This worksheet is designed to explore the young person's experience of their additional need/diagnosis. It is important to ensure this work completed by the young person with a trusted adult. The student may need significant empathy, validation and support in completing this work as it is a very sensitive topic. It is also important to discuss your intention to complete this work with parents/guardians to gauge what understanding the young person has of their additional need.





Practical tips for practitioners

- Try to anticipate problems and prepare the student for challenges. Social Stories can be easily written in advance to prepare for transitions or changes to routine. Social stories can also be used to validate emotional experiences, explore worries or concerns and present potential solutions or coping strategies. (See 'How to Write Social Stories with Visual supports in resources section)
- Sharing resources such as social stories and timetables with parents and mirroring strategies at home can be really beneficial.
- Acknowledge, empathise with and validate the struggles the young person may be experiencing.
- The adoption of simple reward schemes for attendance or to recognise and reinforce days well spent or positives of attending school can be really impactful.
- Teaching relaxation skills the student can call upon quickly when anxious. These can include specific bodily relaxation protocols, breathing exercises, imagery, Mindfulness or Yoga techniques or other - there are many accessible programmes on the web.

Recommended resources

- **Pupil Progression Tool - Autism Education Trust (AET 2019):** <https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/shop/pf-shop/>
- **How to write a social story with visual supports:** <https://www.yourtherapysource.com/blog/2017/11/18/write-social-story-visual-supports/>
- **Excellent Resource from Middletown Autism on 'Autism and School Refusal'** <https://vle.middletownautism.com/>
- **Resource to share with parents:** <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/education/attendance-problems/parents>

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)



Practical tips for practitioners

It's common for young people diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) to struggle with anxiety, whether it's a few symptoms or a full-blown disorder. According to the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) in the United States, most recently conducted in 2016, 3 out of 10 children with ADHD also have an anxiety disorder¹.

Many ADHD symptoms can feel incompatible with the structured and controlled setting of a school and consequently students with ADHD (and ADD) often struggle in school and may try to avoid attending.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/data.html>

How might a diagnosis of ADHD impact the young person's relationship with school and their education?

- Students with ADHD present with behaviours that can be very disruptive to classroom activities including interrupting, blurting out, fidgeting, and forgetfulness. Consistent correction can lead to low self-esteem and increased stress.
- ADHD can impact a student's working memory, time-management skills, and organisational skills. As a result, completing long and short-term tasks and following daily school routines can feel significantly more difficult.
- If the student begins to fall behind academically, this can lead to chronic stress and/or disengagement.
- Sleep disturbances occur in more than half of young people with ADHD which can impact their engagement in class.
- Young people with ADHD can struggle with emotional regulation and become easily flooded with unmanageable emotions (positive or negative). This may lead to them being rejected by their peers and being at a higher risk of being excluded and/or bullied.
- Due to the behaviours described above, students with ADHD can be labelled as 'disruptive' with challenging behaviour, which can impact their self-esteem and motivation to attend school.



What can you do as a practitioner?

Tune in

- If you haven't done so already, try to access training or do the necessary reading or research around the young person's diagnosis so that you have a solid understanding of their challenges and needs. Maintain a strengths-based approach when working with the student.
- If there are indications that the young person is at risk of school avoidance, it will be important to build up a clear picture of exactly what elements of attending school are increasing their anxiety in order that best endeavours can be made to alleviate the anxiety. If you haven't already done so, please read Section 2 on Anxiety before proceeding and complete the activities in Section 3.
- The young person may be very resistant to attending school and respond defensively or angrily when you begin to explore the issue. It is important to remember that anxiety can often present as anger in young people. Use this opportunity to validate and empathise with what the young person is feeling and tune into the feelings that may live under surface emotions.



Practical tips for practitioners

- Acknowledge, empathise with and validate the struggles your student may be experiencing.
- Try to identify and understand the stressors that cause the most anxiety for the student. This helps to predict anxiety-inducing situations and manage symptoms as they arise (see Sections 2 and 3).
- If necessary, arrange a buddy system with a classmate to assist the young person with transitions, organisation and time management.
- Complete lessons on sleep hygiene and link with home where necessary.
- Allow the young person to take rest breaks where possible.

Communication

- Read and complete appropriate worksheets from Section 2 before proceeding.
- Complete worksheets 8, 9 and 10 from Section 3.



Practical tips for practitioners

Young people with ADHD often find it difficult to maintain focus and attention for long periods. It may help to:

- Complete worksheets over a number of shorter, 15-20 minutes blocks instead of all at once.
- Complete worksheets orally while out on a walk
- Allow the young person to complete small sections independently in class or at home and then discuss later.
- Adapt worksheets to suit the ability of the student.

“Communication”

Worksheet: What does my learning difficulty mean to me?

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 13.
- This worksheet is designed to explore the young person's experience of their additional need/diagnosis. It is important to ensure this work completed by the young person with a trusted adult. The student may need significant empathy, validation and support in completing this work as it is a very sensitive topic. It is also important to discuss your intention to complete this work with parents/carers to gauge what understanding the young person has of their additional need.

Worksheet: Sleep hygiene

- <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/sleep-hygiene-handout.pdf>
- Sleep hygiene information hand out for young person.

Worksheet: Sleep diary

- <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/sleep-diary.pdf>
- If sleep difficulties are an issue for the young person, this worksheet can be used to enable the student to log and analyse their sleeping behaviour and identify areas to work on improving.



Practical tips for practitioners

- Analyse and identify the specific needs and strengths of the child and design an individualised programme to address their school avoidance patterns.
- Emphasis and celebrate multiple intelligences (See Resources: Gardner's Theory of Multiple intelligences) Try to avoid placing disproportionate value on more academic and cognitive activities.
- Students with additional need to be given regular opportunities to display mastery and experience success, which should be publicly acknowledged and celebrated.
- Reward and praise effort and personal improvement over high results and perfection. Create a safe environment where it is ok for the young person to make mistakes.
- It's important to help the young person to recognize and manage stress, the skills of honest self-appraisal, and the ability to learn from and correct mistakes.

Recommended resources

- <https://adhdireland.ie/>
- <https://www.psycom.net/adhd-children-anxiety>
- https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Teaching-and-Managing-Students_FINAL.pdf

General Learning Disorders (GLD) and Specific Learning Disorders (Dyslexia, dyscalculia etc.)



Practical tips for practitioners

Young people who are diagnosed (or sometimes undiagnosed) with specific or general learning disorders are also at increased risk of school avoidance. They may experience anxiety in relation to class performance or being asked to engage in class activities such as reading aloud, group projects or presentations. If they perceive they are under-achieving, this can affect their self-esteem and confidence. They may experience exclusion or bullying by other students.

There are two main types of learning disorder:

- A general learning disorder (GLD) can range from borderline mild, mild, moderate, to severe/profound. Children with general learning disabilities find it more difficult to learn, understand and do things than other children of the same age.
- A specific learning disorder (SLD) is defined as 'impairments in specific aspects of reading, writing and arithmetical notation, the primary cause of which is not attributable to assessed ability being below the average range, to defective sight or hearing, emotional factors, a physical condition or to any extrinsic adverse circumstances'. This includes dyslexia and dyscalculia.

How might a diagnosis of a learning disorder impact the young person's relationship with school and their education?

- A student with a GLD may struggle with working memory, processing, time-management skills, and organizational skills. They may become tired easily and struggle to maintain concentration for long periods.
- A student with an SLD like dyslexia is vulnerable to experiencing stress and anxiety, as their academic progress may be significantly slower than their peers despite having a similar IQ and understanding of class content.
- Students with learning disorders often do not fully understand the nature of their learning disability, and as a result, tend to blame themselves for their own difficulties. This can impact self-esteem and general interest in school.
- Students with learning disorders adopt a strategy of avoiding making public mistakes (and the inevitable negative reactions) by disengaging with classroom activities. This can often lead to school avoidance.



General Learning Disorders (GLD) and Specific Learning Disorders (Dyslexia, dyscalculia etc.)

How might a diagnosis of a learning disorder impact the young person's relationship with school and their education?

- Some students with learning disorders engage in masking their difficulties and will go to huge efforts to hide their struggles from other students. This can present as being the 'class clown', misbehaviour, or copying others' work, which can lead to being repeatedly reprimanded for behaviour. This can result in further disengagement from school.
- Other students with learning disorders may exhibit traits of perfectionism. They may expend huge extra effort trying to keep up with the class, which can have a big impact on their self-esteem and overall energy levels.
- Students with learning disorders may also experience significant test and exam anxiety.

Tune in

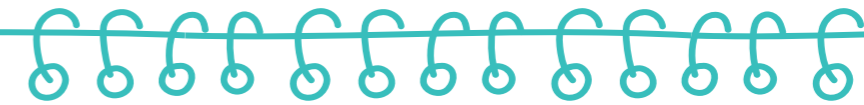
- If you haven't done so already, try to access training or do the necessary reading or research around the young person's diagnosis so that you have a solid understanding of their challenges and needs. Maintain a strengths-based approach when working with the student.
- If there are indications that the young person is at risk of school avoidance, it will be important to build up a clear picture of exactly what elements of attending school are increasing their anxiety in order that best endeavours can be made to alleviate the anxiety. If you have already not, please read Section 2 on Anxiety before proceeding and complete the activities in Section 3.
- The young person may be very resistant to attending school and respond defensively or angrily when you begin to explore the issue. It is important to remember that anxiety can often present as anger in young people and to use this opportunity to validate and empathise with what the young person is feeling and tune into the feelings that may live under surface emotions.



What can you do as a practitioner?

Communication

- Read and complete appropriate worksheets from Section 2 before proceeding.
- Complete worksheets 8, 9 and 10 from Section 3.



Practical tips for practitioners

Young people with GLD and SLD may find it difficult to complete written work. It may help to:

- Complete worksheets over a number of shorter, 15-20 minutes blocks instead of all at once.
- Complete worksheets orally and write the answer as the student speaks.
- Adapt worksheets to suit the ability of the student.

“Communication”

Worksheet: Things I would like people in school to know

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 12.
- This worksheet can be used to allow the student to express and identify some difficulties they may be having and propose solutions.
- With consent from the student, this can be shared with the school or used to inform a Return to School Plan.

Worksheet: What does my learning difficulty mean to me?

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 13.
- This worksheet is designed to explore the young person's experience of their additional need/diagnosis. It is important to ensure this work completed by the young person with a trusted adult. The student may need significant empathy, validation and support in completing this work as it is a very sensitive topic. It is also important to discuss your intention to complete this work with parents/carers to gauge what understanding the young person has of their additional need.



Practical tips for practitioners

- Analyse and identify the specific needs and strengths of the young person and design an individualised programme to address their school avoidance patterns.
- Emphasise and celebrate multiple intelligences (See Resources: Gardner's Theory of Multiple intelligences) Try to avoid placing disproportionate value on more academic and cognitive activities.
- Students with learning disorders need to be given regular opportunities to display mastery and experience success, which should be publicly acknowledged and celebrated.
- Reward and praise effort and personal improvement over high results and perfection. Create a safe environment where it is ok for the young person to make mistakes.
- It's important to help the young person to recognize and manage stress, the skills of honest self-appraisal, and the ability to learn from and correct mistakes.

Recommended resources

- <https://www.sess.ie/categories/specific-learning-disabilities>
- <https://www.sess.ie/categories/general-learning-disabilities>
- <https://dyslexiaida.org/the-dyslexia-stress-anxiety-connection/>
- <https://www.simplypsychology.org/multiple-intelligences.html>
- <https://childmind.org/article/how-to-help-kids-talk-about-learning-disabilities/>



School transition



Practical tips for practitioners

The transition from primary to secondary school can be an exciting time for young people. However, it's important to remember that not every child will thrive in this new environment. Some young people will struggle and their school attendance may suffer as a result.

Where available, Home School and Community Liaison (HSCL) Coordinators and School Completion Programme (SCP) staff are very well placed to offer practical supports. We suggest using this pack to explore the barriers and that may be facing a young person during the transition from primary school to secondary school before accessing supports.

How might transitioning to secondary school be affecting the young person's relationship with school and their education?

When a young person is transitioning from primary to secondary school, they may:

- Feel excluded from their peers and be reluctant to attend school due to fear of social exclusion/loneliness.
- Struggle with the increased workload and avoid school to avoid the work which is too difficult.
- Struggle with the increased number of teachers and classes and need help organising themselves.
- Struggle with the increased homework and may not have the support at home to help.

The anxious energy the young person might have may lead to struggles with sleep and setting a routine. This can lead to poor concentration in class due to tiredness or worry.



What can you do as a practitioner?

Tune in

- Before opening up a conversation about school attendance, it is a good idea to allow the young person to express how they feel about the transition. They may be feeling, fear, anxiety and/or sadness among many emotions. The young person may need significant time to explore these difficult feelings. Actively listening without judgement and responding with empathy can help them feel more comfortable sharing.
- The young person may be very resistant to attending school and respond defensively or angrily when you begin to explore the issue. It is important to remember that anxiety can often present as anger in young people and to use this opportunity to validate and empathise with what the young person is feeling and tune into the feelings that may live under surface emotions.
- Some of the young person's fears can stem from rumours from older brothers and sisters. Try and work through some of the rumours with them and identify what is reality and what is a tall tale.
- As a young person transitions into secondary school, they will gain a greater responsibility for themselves and their own education. Suggest that the young person tries out some of this newfound independence at home – try making their own lunches, washing up their own dishes.

Communication

Sitting a young person down to have a conversation about their struggles can be daunting for them. Instead try and approach the subject while they're doing something. For example, bring them for a walk outside, or ask them to help with simple tasks such as stapling pages together. Young people find it easier to talk when not all the focus is on them.



Communication

Worksheet: You and school (barriers)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 7.
- This worksheet can be used to explore the practical and emotional barriers to attending school the young person may be facing.
- Throughout the discussion, encourage the student to record any key barriers they identify.
- Finally, explore potential solutions to the barriers facing the student.

Communication

Worksheet: You and school (positives)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 8.
- Use this worksheet to explore what may entice or encourage the young person to attend school. This information can be useful when creating a return to school or school attendance plan.

Worksheet: How I feel about going to a new school

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 21.
- Use this worksheet to explore the emotions a young person is feeling with regards school transition.

Remember: Some of what they say may seem minor or unimportant in their current context, but it is very important to listen to the young person and not to dismiss anything they are saying. You can show you care and are really listening by validating their feelings and experiences.

It's important to empathise with the young person. Try and see things from their point of view. Acknowledge what they are experiencing or feeling and let them know it's ok.

What can you do as a practitioner?

You can say, "I hear you; you're worried about the work getting more difficult."

Or "I can understand that. It can be scary meeting new people."

Remind the young person of their strengths. Show them all the ways they have been resilient so far and explain that this transition is just another one of those steps. Pointing out their strengths might show a young person aspects of themselves they didn't recognise.

You can say, "Look at how well you transitioned back to school after Covid-19. This transition is just another challenge like that."



Practical tips for practitioners

- If possible and with consent, link with the school to see what supports can be put in place. Home School and Community Liaison (HSCL) Coordinators and School Completion Programme (SCP) staff may be able to arrange individual visits to the school prior to the young person starting school, to allow them to get used to their new environment. Help could be arranged for breaking down the timetable, figuring out lockers, locating classes, etc.
- Where possible, work collaboratively with the young person, school and family to create a school attendance plan. Use of morning and evening checklists can help ensure the young person is equipped practically for the school day. Make sure staff are aware of the challenges facing the student so allowance can be made where appropriate (e.g., timekeeping, uniforms, homework).
- Work on developing a daily routine and a sleep routine with the young person if necessary.
- Ask the young person questions and show interest in what they did in school. Speak positively about school and celebrate successes, talents and good work. Find their area of interest and highlight all the way they can explore it in their new school e.g. art clubs, sports, music.
- Try to encourage parental involvement in meetings by remaining mindful of scheduling of meetings, locations, travel cost etc.

You can find information about relevant services and how to access them here:

- <https://jigsaw.ie/supporting-the-transition-to-secondary-school/>
- <https://iacp.ie/files/UserFiles/IJCP-Articles/2017/Anxiety-and-stress-in-the-transition-from-primary-to-secondary-school---How-lasting-psychological-impact-can-be-avoided-by-Maretta-Byrne.pdf>





Practical tips for young people

Tips to help ease your nerves about a new school:

- Get a map of the school, study it, find the classrooms you'll be going to and mark them off. This will help prevent you from getting lost!
- Have a look at your timetable, check out your subjects and see if you can figure out what homework you'll have on what days. Use your homework diary to organize yourself for the school year.
- Make sure you have all your materials for your classes, pencils, pens, copybooks, rubbers etc.
- Try the new walk to your new school so you know the route and don't get overwhelmed on your first day.

Create checklists so you don't forget your tasks to do!

Night-time checklist

- Choose and lay out clothing and shoes.
- Put any items that you need for school in your school bag (e.g. permission slips, books, journal, homework).
- Make your lunch.
- Set your alarm!

Morning checklist

- Get out of bed when your alarm goes off.
- Have a good breakfast.
- Leave yourself plenty of time to get to school.
- Walk or cycle to school if you can

Ref: Wicklow School Refusal Pack pg. 17 (2019)

Sometimes with big changes, we can do things to help us feel more positive. Think of the change from primary school to secondary school.

What has changed?

How do you feel about it?

What could you do to feel better about it?



Section 5

Practical ways to engage parents on issues that can lead to avoiding behaviour

Supporting parents when addiction results in school avoidance



Practical tips for practitioners

It is important to consider that there may be multiple addiction issues within a family. For some families, the concern may be only in relation to their young person; in other situations, concerns may also centre around parental substance misuse.

It may be difficult for a parent to talk about their personal issues with alcohol or substance use for a number of reasons; embarrassment and shame; fear of the involvement of Child Protection Services; minimising or denial of the problem.

We recommend that relationship building with parents is given priority and sufficient time so that some trust can develop. This provides a supportive foundation for a conversation about parental alcohol and substance use.

Supporting parents when addiction results in school avoidance

How might addiction be affecting your young person's relationship with school and their education?

Alcohol and drugs can have neurological impact, especially on developing brain. There's also a risk of missing school to go and use drug of choice. When your young person's alcohol or drug use is out of control, they may be experiencing the following:

- Struggling to get up on time for school, especially after the weekend.
- Poor concentration in class due to tiredness.
- Poor memory because of the impact on brain function.
- Feeling distracted by thoughts about drinking/taking drug of choice after school.
- Paranoia, which leads to isolation, so a young person feels too frightened to go to school.
- Reduced motivation because of the impact of substance use on mental health.
- Regularly needing money.

If your young person is experiencing some of the above on a regular basis, we advise you to seek professional help. In the first instance you can contact your GP about supports that can help. You can also find information about resources for young people in County Clare at www.headsupclare.ie.

A note to you as a parent

Coping with the challenges of daily life can be hard at the best of times. If you are coping with addiction issues in the home, it can become more chaotic and worrying for everyone. Addiction in a family has an impact on everyone, not just the person using alcohol or drugs.

We know that young people are influenced by what is going on around them. When they are young, the biggest influencers are parents and siblings. In their teenage years, young people are much more likely to be influenced by their peer group and social media images and trends.

You can also contact the following services for information in your area.

Limerick Drug and Alcohol Service.
Corporate House, Mungret Street, Limerick
Tel: (061) 318 633. Fax: (061) 318 637

Clare Drug and Alcohol Service.
Museum House, Francis Street, Ennis
Tel: (065) 686 5852

North Tipperary Drug and Alcohol Service.
Kenyon Street, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary
Tel: 067 46512

HSE National Drug and Alcohol Helpline.
Tel: 1800 459 459

Supporting parents when addiction results in school avoidance

Substance use by others at home

If you're worried about your young person's use of alcohol or other substances, it can be helpful to take stock of your own habits too, or those of other adults in the household. This may seem like an offensive suggestion. It is meant only as an invitation to acknowledge the role you and your actions play in guiding a young person's development, decision-making and coping skills for life.

When a parent has an alcohol or drug dependency, it can also have an impact on others at home. A young person might struggle to engage fully with school for the following reasons:

- They may choose to stay at home to 'mind' their parent.
- There may be a lack of money in the household budget for school materials if money is being regularly spent on alcohol and/or other substances.
- They may feel embarrassed to attend school if parental substance use is known about in the community.
- Parental alcohol and drug use can lead to a chaotic situation in the home. This might mean it is hard for a young person to focus on homework, study for tests and just feel relaxed in their everyday life.

What can you do as a parent if you are worried about your young person's alcohol and/or drug use?

Tune In

- Before opening up a conversation that could become difficult or where your young person will be inclined to become defensive, it is a good idea to get yourself in the right frame of mind first. Knowing that you are in control of your emotions and reactions lays a positive foundation for your communication.

- **Press Pause.**
- **Notice how YOU are feeling.**
- **Practice the breathing activities provided by your support practitioner.**

This can help you feel calm, prepared and in control of yourself for a conversation about substance use that could be challenging.

- Remember that young people want to experiment with alcohol and other substances. They are often influenced by their peer group and want to be part of the habits and experiences of that group. It will help your communication with your young person if you acknowledge this and let them know you too remember what it was like to be that age.

Communication

- It's a good idea to schedule the conversation in advance rather than launching into accusations as your young person will feel under attack and be defensive.

You can say, "I'd like to talk to you this evening after dinner about alcohol and drugs. You're not in trouble; I just want to talk about some ground rules so that we are all clear about what's ok and what's not ok."

- It's a good idea to be clear about your concerns before you open up the conversation with your young person.

- Are you worried about the legal consequences – possession, fines, cautions and the consequences for your young person's future?
- Is it about risks – driving whilst under the influence, risk of unprotected sex, risk to their brain development?
- Is it about the impact on their educational achievement and how that will impact their future?

This can be hard when a conversation gets heated. Focus on Press Pause to stay calm.

You can say, "I'm worried about the consequences for you if you carry on drinking so much/using cannabis." You can simply repeat this concern like a broken record any time it feels like you might fall into arguing and speaking angrily/disrespectfully.

- The golden rule is 'Respect to Connect' – speak to your young person as you would like them to speak to you.
- It is also important to let your young person know that you are there no matter what. If they find themselves in difficulty due to alcohol or substance use, they need to know they can call you for immediate help, no questions asked. You will deal with the consequences when they are safe and sober. And it is important that you do have a follow up conversation with them about your concerns and set some reasonable consequences.

Supporting parents when addiction results in school avoidance

Talking to your young person about your own alcohol and/or substance use

If parental alcohol or substance use is the issue, it is important that your young person understands that this is not their fault or responsibility.

Communication

You can say, "We won't talk about this now. You need to get some sleep/sober up. But we WILL talk about it tomorrow."

You can say, "I know I need to get some help about my drinking. It's not your job to look after me here but it matters to me that you care about me. I will get help."

Practical tips

- Talk to someone in your young person's school. The Parents' Association can arrange for a speaker to do a talk in school, and this can be a good source of accurate information about alcohol and drug use.
- Be aware of how much money is in your bag/purse and try to keep it secure. This can reduce easy access to money for buying alcohol and/other substances.
- Do an alcohol inventory at home and consider how to store it securely.
- Have emergency numbers in your phone in case your young person is unwell because of alcohol or substance use.

You may find it helpful to consider the questions in the '**Fast alcohol screening test (FAST)**' in relation to your alcohol use.

Supporting parents when parental separation results in school avoidance

Practical tips for practitioners

It is worth bearing in mind that some parents may not advise teachers that they have separated. How can you draw this information out in a sensitive way and what can you do in school to reduce stress factors for the young person and the separated parents?

- It can help to agree to forward information to both parents rather than rely on one parent forwarding on texts, reports, information about events etc. to the other.
- It can help to let the teaching staff know about a separation and to request leniency and understanding when materials are sometimes forgotten at home. If there are spare copies of textbooks in school, this can help.
- Discreetly offering pastoral support services/guidance counselling to the young person may be of benefit.
- Knowing of services and resources in the area for separated parents may also be supportive for both parents.

A note to you as a parent

Parental separation can be a stressful experience for everyone at home.

Some parents are able to achieve a positive co-parenting relationship, whilst for others there may be ongoing conflict with the other parent or no communication at all. This can leave young people with a feeling that they have to manage their relationship with each parent on their own.

Supporting parents when parental separation results in school avoidance

How might parental separation be affecting a young person's relationship with school and their education?

Practical issues

- Items and belongings can easily get left behind if young people are going between two homes. If school materials are forgotten, it can leave young people anxious about going to school without the right uniform, books or materials.
- Parents may have different values around education. Your young person may already know that if they ask to stay home, one parent is much more likely to allow this than the other. They may use this to their advantage.
- If access arrangements are unstructured and unpredictable, this can lead to feelings of anxiety for young people, which can snowball into school-avoiding behaviour.

Emotional upset

- Young people can feel self-conscious about their parents' separation and may not want others in school to know.
- Separation is a loss even when parents can manage to maintain a positive co-parenting relationship. This can leave young people feeling emotionally vulnerable. It may be hard to be in school when they feel like this.
- If a parent is not coping well after the separation, a young person can feel responsible for that parent and want to stay home to see they are ok.
- Your young person may simply miss the other parent deeply and need help to cope with the impact this is having on their mental wellbeing.

What can you do as a parent to support your young person through the parental separation?

Tune In

- Promote contact between the young person and the other parent. It can reduce the emotional impact on the young person.
- Your young person needs to feel supported. You can best do this by tuning in. This means listening with full attention – turn off the phone, turn off the TV, look at them and let them know you are fully available. A good time can be if you are out walking, in the car or just sitting having tea and biscuits.

Supporting parents when parental separation results in school avoidance

What can you do as a parent to support your young person through the parental separation?

You can say, 'How are you feeling about us not all living together now?'

Be open to any feedback. Remember that for some young people, a separation may be a relief if things have been tense and stressful at home for a long time before the separation.

- Young people can feel anxious when there is a lot of change. It can help to reduce anxiety if you establish clear and predictable routines where possible

Remember that access can also be 'virtual' if the other parent has relocated elsewhere. The priority is to enable and support contact on a regular basis so that the young person still feel connected to both parents. Try to set a timetable for calls/video calls and respect the young person's privacy in that time. For older children, they will be able to make these arrangements more independently but will still need you to support them by giving space and time for the call and a listening ear if the call doesn't happen or if they feel upset about something afterwards.

- Give time and space for times of transition.



Communication

- Tune in to how your young person behaves before heading for access and when they return. They can benefit from a period of quiet time as they adjust to the new environment again and try to settle the feelings that inevitably come with coping with parental separation.

Even if you don't have a great relationship with your child's other parent, it is important that you give the message to them that it is ok for them to love the other parent. It can help if you can talk positively about the other parent, and if you cannot manage that then to remain neutral in your comments. It can be helpful for parents to keep an open mind and try to understand the other parent's perspective. It is important to communicate directly with the other parent and not rely on the young person to pass on messages between their parents

When you harbour resentment towards the other parent e.g. about maintenance. Instead of saying, "Your mum/dad always seems to have the money to bring you places but can't pay any maintenance", you can say, *"It sounds like you had a great time with mum/dad during your visit."*

When you feel angry about the other parent passing messages on to you via your child you can say, *"You don't need to worry about that, I'll talk directly to your mum/dad as that's adult stuff."*

Young people need to be informed about changes that are going on in relation to contact with the other parent but they do not need to be informed about parental worries about money, challenges about single parenthood, or worries in relation to legal aspects of separation.

Do share this information with the young person

- Changes about access days and times.
- Positive memories of the other parent/things you previously enjoyed as a family.
- Acknowledge that both parents love them even if they no longer love each other.

Don't share this information with the young person

- Your frustrations about communication issues with the other parents.
- Worries you have about maintenance payments, court attendance or division of assets.
- Information about the other parent's private life if they are not ready to share that with the young person – e.g. if there is a new relationship.



Practical tips

Being organised and having a clear routine will help to minimise the risks of school supplies being left in the other house. This takes planning and positive communication between both parents. It can help to use a communication book if it is a challenge to discuss things calmly when face-to-face.

You can encourage greater independence in the young person too. They can learn to take responsibility for the things they need for school, so nothing is left behind when they go between two homes.

- Give a list of items your young person takes between both homes so that they can check this when they are packing at the end of each access. This is helpful for a younger person who may not yet have developed independence skills.
- Be prepared to double up on some items that cause anxiety when forgotten, especially some basics for school.
- Let school know what is happening at home so that teachers can take this into account if your young person hasn't the correct uniform or materials for a class are missing.

Supporting parents when bereavement and loss result in school avoidance



Practical tips for practitioners

It is enormous for a child or young person to lose someone they love. This is most likely to be a grandparent, parent, sibling or perhaps a close friend. It can also be a very upsetting time if a young person loses a pet that has been part of their life since they were a young child.

Perhaps a young person may not tell anyone in school that they have experienced a loss. They may feel awkward about drawing attention to themselves if others know about this experience.

We often do not know the significance of different relationships in other people's lives and may underestimate the impact that the loss can have. How can we, as support practitioners, tune into the emotional world of the young person in order to fully empathise with their feelings?

Taking time to really notice mood and behaviour changes can offer an opportunity to open up a conversation with a young person to enquire gently about reasons why they have been missing school and what supports around their loss can act as a bridge to them returning to school. This may be:

- Knowing that they can talk with the guidance counsellor several times a week.
- Arranging for grief counselling in consultation with parents.
- Simply being with the young person to listen to how they feel.

A note to you as a parent

Young people are occupied with forming their own identity and may want to deal with the loss in a private way. Yet they may also really crave closeness as they struggle with strong feelings and emotions. Younger children may find it easier to talk to parents whilst older ones may choose to get support from peers or other adults in their lives.

For you as their parent, this can be a challenging time because you are likely to be experiencing your own strong emotions of grief depending on the loss.

How might grief impact on your young person's relationship with school and their education?

Your young person might be distracted by grief and unable to fully engage with all aspects of their life, including their education. This can result in:

- Drop in their school performance.
- Sleep problems, resulting in lack of energy for school and other activities.
- Anger, resulting at times in oppositional behaviour – at home and in school.

Young people do not like feeling different – some friends may shy away from a grieving friend as they do not know how to 'be' around each other in this grief.

Young people may be at risk of engaging in destructive behaviour as they struggle to cope with the emotions of grief. This can impact on their capacity to see education as a meaningful part of their life.

Supporting parents when bereavement and loss result in school avoidance

What can you do as a parent to support your young person through a bereavement?

Tune In

- Your young person may be confused about whether or not they want to be involved in part of the funeral arrangements. It can help if you give them time to think about this and to let them know nothing is compulsory and they can change their mind.
- When a young person loses a friend, as parents, we may be much less emotionally affected. It is important to try to connect to how your young person is feeling and let them know that you understand their pain even though this isn't happening to you.

You can say, "I'm so sorry for your loss. It's going to be a tough time ahead for you and your friends. I'm here for you whenever you want to talk."

- It is helpful to fully notice your young person's response. They may want to appear to be coping with the loss in a mature manner and hide their emotions.

You can help by letting your child know you are fully available to them. Put down the phone, turn off the TV and be quietly with your young person.

This allows you to really listen to them and tune into what they are not saying too.

Give your young person all the time they need to talk about how they are doing.

Be patient; don't react to their responses to loss.

- If you are also experiencing grief, it can help if you show your emotions; your young person can feel a connection by offering comfort to you too.

Communication

- Your young person will need to feel that they can talk about their emotions, their grief. It might help your young person to talk to another close adult as they may worry about overwhelming you as their parent if you are closely connected to the deceased.

You can say, "I don't think I can talk about this as it's simply too painful right now, but I know you want to talk. What about if I ask aunt/uncle/other supportive adult to come over and spend some time with us? It can really help to talk to someone you trust. Maybe I can talk in a few days; just not right now."



Practical tips

Your young person needs to know what happened to the deceased in simple terms.

- Keep details clear and age appropriate about what happened. Let others know what you have told the young person so that no one inadvertently gives information that you feel they are not ready to process.
- You may want to give extra information as time passes and the young person develops greater level of maturity and resilience. This can be especially the case when sharing information about death by suicide.
- As a rule of thumb, it can help to simply answer the specific question a child asks and no more. They often come with more questions when they have had time to think about things. You do not need to overload the young person with too much detail.

They also need to know what will happen next – such as immediate funeral arrangements. Perhaps in time they might have questions about life at home if the death is of one of their parents or siblings. When big changes happen in young people's lives, feelings of anxiety and worry can escalate. Young people can feel that things are out of control, and this is scary. It may sound harsh but getting back into a routine can really help them feel secure and grounded.

Supporting parents when bereavement and loss result in school avoidance

What can you do as a parent to support your young person through a bereavement?

You can:

- Agree as a family what day you will all return to work and school.
- Agree a ritual of remembrance for each day to keep a feeling of connection to the deceased.
- Let staff at school know about the bereavement so that allowance can be made for a change in mood and behaviour in your young person.
- Be kind; be responsive – some days you will not want to face your responsibilities; some days your young person will not want to go to school. When this is the exception, then let that be. It is only a problem when it becomes the norm.

Useful resources

- <https://childmind.org/guide/helping-children-cope-grief/>
- <https://www.childhoodbereavement.ie/families/adolescents-and-grief/adolescent-loss/>
- <https://hse.drsteevenslibrary.ie/bereavementgrief/children>



Supporting parents when mental health issues result in school avoidance



Practical tips for practitioners

It is important to bear in mind that there could be multiple mental health issues in a family. For some families, the concerns may be in relation to a young person who is struggling with their mental wellbeing. For others, there may be a parent or older sibling who has a mental health diagnosis.

It may be difficult for parents to talk about this issue under both circumstances. It can help to give sufficient time to build a good relationship with parents as this offers a trusting foundation from which conversations about personal home circumstances can be explored.

If you feel worried about a parent's mental wellbeing, we recommend that you talk to them about seeking support from their GP who would be able to refer them on to specialist services.

If you have immediate concerns, you can contact the Crisis Nurse in Clare on (087 7999857). This number is for adults over 18 only.

If a young person under 18 years old is in crisis out of hours (after 5 pm) they contact the Mid West Regional Hospital in Limerick (061) 301111 or Shannon Doc 0818 123500 or (061) 459500.

If you have immediate concerns during working hours, please contact the person's G.P or present to A&E for review and treatment if necessary.

It is helpful to give parents the Tip Sheets on breathing exercises in Section 2 of this pack, 'What is Anxiety'.

A note to you as a parent,

Talking openly about mental health can feel awkward and exposing, leaving us feeling vulnerable and at times ashamed.

You might be worried about your young person's mental wellbeing, and you may also be experiencing mental health problems yourself. It can be difficult to acknowledge that something is not right, either for your young person or for you as a parent. Ignoring problems in our mental health can leave us vulnerable to feelings of hopelessness with little sense of purpose or will to be active participants in our own lives.

If you are worried about your young person's mental health, it is important that you consult your GP and discuss referral to a specialist service for assessment.

If you are worried about your mental wellbeing as a parent, please reach out for support.

Supporting parents when mental health issues result in school avoidance

How might mental health problems in the family impact on your young person's relationship with school and their education?

Your young person may be experiencing mental health problems due to hormonal changes and increased brain development during adolescence.

There may also be stress factors like being bullied at school, feeling pressure to achieve a high standard in school or if they have experienced a particularly traumatic event.

Sometimes people self-medicate using alcohol or other substances and this can also exacerbate feelings of depression and paranoia. It would be difficult for a young person to fully engage with school under such circumstances.

Some indicators that your young person may need support with their mental health include:

- Disrupted sleep patterns and wanting to stay in bed for long periods of time.
- Having low levels of energy and interest in activities they have previously enjoyed.
- Choosing to isolate from others for increasing amounts of time.
- Paying increasingly less attention to self-care.
- Changes in your young person's attitude and interest towards learning.
- Extreme mood swings including unexplained crying, excessive anger or irritability.
- Unhealthy changes to eating habits and sudden changes to their weight.

When someone feels like this, it can be difficult for them to engage in normal day-to-day routines like meeting friends, doing sports, spending time with family and attending school.

What can you do as a parent if you are worried about your young person's mental health?

Tune In

- Press Pause.

Conversations about mental health can be uncomfortable. We always advise parents to notice how they feel first. This gives you time to manage your emotions and approach your young person more calmly. In this way you are in a better position to support them with how they feel because your own emotions are not taking front stage.



Supporting parents when mental health issues result in school avoidance

What can you do as a parent if you are worried about your young person's mental health?

How you are as a parent always matters:

- Press Pause.
- Notice how you feel about having a conversation with your young person about mental health.
- You may find it helpful to practice the breathing exercises given by your Support Practitioner if you feel overwhelmed.

Communication

- Respect to connect.
- You can do this by being clear about your concerns.

It is important to let your young person know that you are worried about them. Take care to find ways of saying this that do not leave them feeling like you think they are 'crazy'.

Give time for your young person to respond.

You can say, 'I notice you're spending a lot of time on your own these days. I am worried that you don't seem to be spending time with your friends anymore. Have you noticed this too?'

'I'm worried that you're spending so much time sleeping and seem to have no energy for things you used to enjoy. Are you worried about this too?'

'I wonder if we need to talk to someone about how you are feeling as it seems to be stopping you getting to school and doing stuff you used to enjoy. What do you think about that?'



Practical tips

- Make a GP appointment and attend with your young person. You can outline the concerns you have spoken to your young person about. It would be respectful to offer to leave the room for your young person to talk to the GP in private.
- If you are worried about self-harm, be mindful of risks in the home such as stocked medicine cabinets, kitchen knives etc. Try to check in with your young person regularly if they spend a lot of time in their room.
- Think about support for yourself too – you can support your young person best when you feel supported yourself.



Supporting parents when bullying results in school avoidance



Practical tips for practitioners

Bullying can have an impact on a young person's ability to engage fully with their education. This may be school-based bullying, but it might also be bullying that happens out of school hours and in online spaces.

It is helpful when schools have clear policies in relation to bullying of all kinds and that these are fully known to the school community and the parents. As a support practitioner, it will help if you have access to this information so you can go through it with the parents if needed.

Some parents may be inadvertently colluding with their young person's absence from school because they do not want them to be on the receiving end of bullying by others. Whilst this level of apparent protection is understandable, it is important to help parents understand their role in challenging bullying behaviour and supporting their young person to develop life skills and resilience.

For other parents, their style may be more authoritarian, and the tactic may be one of always trying to use force, threats or intimidation to get their young person back into school. In this scenario it can help if your support helps parents see the world from their young person's perspective so they can develop empathy and find ways of moving towards a more nurturing parenting style, whilst not losing sight of the benefits of having firm and fair expectations.

A note to you as a parent

It can be really worrying and upsetting to find out that your young person is being bullied and that it has resulted in them feeling unable to attend school. Bullying is unwanted threatening or aggressive behaviour that happens consistently over time.

Bullying can include:

- Physical aggression – pushing, thumping, spitting, taking money and personal items.
- Emotional/psychological abuse – excluding, whispering about the person, making negative comments in earshot, threatening to cause harm.
- Cyberbullying – using social media to persistently undermine, criticise and threaten the young person.

How might bullying impact a young person's relationship with school and their education?

You can imagine that if you were experiencing a number of the above behaviours on a regular basis, it could make you feel like hiding away.

Signs that a young person may be experiencing bullying could include:

- Physical injury.
- Missing money or regular requests for money.
- Damage to, or unexplained loss of, their possessions.
- Poor eating or sleeping habits.
- A loss of interest in friends and out of school activities.
- Tearfulness and consistent low mood.



Supporting parents when bullying results in school avoidance

What can you do as a parent if your young person is being bullied?

Tune In

- Positive parenting starts with you first

Press Pause and notice how you are feeling.

You may have strong emotions. If you were bullied at school this could trigger unhappy memories and feelings. If your young person is the bully, you are likely to feel angry, confused, disappointed and isolated. Pressing pause gives you time to connect with how you feel so that you can approach your young person more calmly.

- Give time to really listen.

It can help to set some time aside so you can listen to your young person. This means turning off the TV, putting away the phone and being patient to allow your child the space to tell you what is happening for them.

Encourage your young person to engage in something that they love and that helps them feel good about themselves. Being bullied can have a strong impact on self-worth. Connecting with positive feelings can help restore your young person's belief in themselves to overcome this challenging experience.

- Do good, feel good.

Communication

- We recommend that you contact your school and inform them of bullying behaviour.

If your young person is being bullied, let them know that they did the right thing by telling you. Let them know it is not their fault and that bullying behaviour is unacceptable.

If your young person is the bully, it is important to separate their behaviour and actions from them as a person. They need the message 'Your behaviour is unacceptable. I love you and I want to help you stop bullying others.'

You can refer to worksheet 23 'It's all about HOW we communicate' in Appendix A for tips on communicating with the school if this is a challenge for you.



Supporting parents when bullying results in school avoidance

What can you do as a parent if your young person is being bullied?



Practical tips

- If you believe your young person to be at risk of physical harm in school, it is important to inform the school before your young person returns. You may want to consider making a complaint to An Garda Síochána.
- Parents can feel like retaliating or encouraging their young person to retaliate. This could leave them at risk of injury, especially if there is a gang involved.
- Advise your young person:
 - Do not actively provoke a bully. Simply stand tall, look confident and stay calm.
 - Avoid going into 'risk zones' alone. Stay with a larger group of friends.
 - Leave valuable items at home. Don't brag about having the latest phone etc.
 - Consider varying the routes you walk to school. Try to stay with a group of peers.
 - Keep a record of incidents that happen.
 - If you are at risk/danger, shout out and get to a place of safety as quickly as possible.
 - If you are attacked, protect vulnerable parts of the body – your head and central organs.
- If your young person is receiving threatening messages or hate messages, you can ask them to save/screenshot them as you may need them in discussion with school or An Garda Síochána.
- You can remind your young person that they can delete an app for a while to get a break from receiving hate messages. They can continue to message close friends directly.

Useful resources

- [https://www.schooldays.ie/articles/what-to-do-if-your-young-person-is-being-bullied](https://www schooldays.ie/articles/what-to-do-if-your-young-person-is-being-bullied)
- <https://www.bullying.co.uk/advice-for-parents/what-to-do-if-your-child-is-being-bullied/>

Supporting parents when LGBTQ+ issues result in school avoidance



Practical tips for practitioners

Opening up a conversation about sexuality and gender identity is likely to feel a little awkward for both parties. We advise that conversations about very personal topics happen best when a trusting relationship has been established with the parent.

We are all different. Some parents may respond negatively to realising/finding out that their young person identifies as LGBTQ+; these parents may feel embarrassment or shame for their extended family etc. For other parents, their reaction may originate from a position of protection and wanting their child not to be hurt by others' prejudice.

We hope that in your role as a Support Practitioner to the parent, you can simply be with them and help them manage how they feel about this information first. This models what we hope parents can do with their young person – simply be with them without judgement so that their child feels safe to share their feelings.

You can also direct parents to the support resource below:
Regional support - <https://goshh.ie/>



Supporting parents when LGBTQ+ issues result in school avoidance

A note to you as a parent,

Exploring and questioning gender identity can happen at any stage as your young person is developing. Young people today have access to much more information about gender identity than in the past and are more likely to see themselves represented in a world where celebrating difference is more encouraged and accepted.

It is important that you manage how **you** feel about your young person sharing this information with you. Whatever you feel is ok. And it is very important that your young person gets a message of acceptance from you that what **they** feel is ok too.

How might gender identity issues impact your young person's relationship with school and their education?

Your young person could start avoiding school if they are being bullied due to their gender identity.

They may no longer see themselves as part of their peer group due to difference and feel that school is now a place where they are isolated and do not belong.

This may also lead them to develop low mood and mental health problems.

It is vital that you seek professional help if your young person is engaged in self-harming behaviour, excessive and consistent substance use and is becoming increasingly withdrawn.

Supporting parents when LGBTQ+ issues result in school avoidance

What can you do as a parent if gender identity issues result in your young person avoiding school?

Tune In

- Positive parenting starts with you first.
- Respect to Connect.

Pause to notice how you feel about your young person sharing information about their gender identity with you.

You may feel shocked, relieved, frightened about how you will be perceived, frightened about how they will be perceived.

Manage these thoughts and feelings so that you can be fully available to support your young person with their thoughts and feelings.

Your young person needs to hear and feel the message, "I'm here for you and accept you exactly how you are." This can help them feel secure enough to look to you for support knowing that you will listen without judgement.

Communication

- Follow your young person's lead.
- Respect to Connect.
- It is ok to not know.



Supporting parents when LGBTQ+ issues result in school avoidance



Practical tips

- You can offer to share this information with immediate family members if your young person doesn't feel comfortable doing this. Check first if that is what they want.
- You may have lots of questions that you want to ask but it will be more supportive to your relationship with your young person if you can hold back and respect their boundaries. Let your young person share information at their pace.
- It is ok to admit you don't know – you may not know the language of gender identity and LGBTQI+. You can ask your young person how they want to be referred to and follow their lead. It may also be an uncertain time for your young person and their own views could change over time too.

You can find information about local supports here: <https://goshh.ie/>



Relationships

Supporting the parent-young person relationship is key to strengthening the Return to School Plan



Practical tips for practitioners

It's all about connection

For the Return to School Plan to be effective, it is important that the parent-young person relationship can support the actions that will be contained in the plan.

If the parent-young person relationship is conflict-laden and emotionally distant, it is going to be a challenge for the parent to engage positively with their young person around the action steps in the plan. Fractures in any relationship can be a real barrier to cooperation.

The activities below can open up the conversation about the parent-young person relationship and give an insight into any supports that may be needed to strengthen the relationship so that there will be a better foundation to support their young person's Return to School Plan.

It may be very difficult/overwhelming for a parent to complete the exercises below; they might circle only negative associations of their experience of being parented. It will support the parent when you can simply acknowledge this. Identifying supports for the parent to make more conscious decisions in their own parenting style/approach could be very empowering for a parent.

Creating an Action Plan in relation to what they need to do as a parent to support the Return to School Plan can be an opportunity to identify if referral to specialist services is required.

Practitioner notes: When completing the 'Return to School' exercise the more bubbles a parent fills in the more confident they might be; the fewer the lesser their skill. This could indicate levels 1,2,3,4 on the Hardiker Scale.

Relationships

A note to you as a parent,

Being a parent can be rewarding. It's fair to say that it can also leave you feeling exhausted, defeated and a bit lost.

We often parent in an automatic way based on how we were parented as children. Sometimes this works for the best, but sometimes we realise that our parents struggled too. This can leave us feeling like we simply don't know how to manage a situation positively with our children. When this happens, it can help to talk it through with someone and get some guidance on positive ways to solve parenting challenges because that helps to keep a bond with our child.

The exercises below can help you think about the kind of parenting approach you have and what things you might like to work on to better support your young person in school.

Go easy on yourself - these exercises can stir up memories and feelings that are hard to bear. Just do your best!

Parent worksheets

Worksheet: A positive parenting approach works best

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 23.

Worksheet: Before school checklist

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 24.

Relationships

Communication

Supporting parents to communicate effectively is key to strengthening the Return to School Plan.



Practical tips for practitioners

We are all different and that includes the parents who are members of a school community. Some will be pro-active and confident in their communication with staff in school. For others, it can be stressful and lead to feeling of anxiety, intimidation and frustration. For these parents, they may simply avoid communication altogether to avoid the associated stress and feelings of anxiety.

In your role as a support practitioner, it could be helpful to work through the following activities with a parent to establish how they feel about communicating with teachers in school. This can lead to a greater understanding of the parent's experience of engaging with the school.

The tips and suggestions can offer parents simple options for communicating with teachers if they know that this is a struggle.



If you communicate, you can get by.

*But if you communicate skilfully
you can work miracles*



-Jim Rohn

Parents will need to be given the breathing exercises from Section 2 'What is Anxiety'.

A note to you as a parent,

One of the challenges around managing the big issue of school avoidance is having to communicate effectively with your child's school. This isn't easy at times.

Some parents feel overwhelmed by all the new technology used by schools to communicate with young people and their parents. It can be really tricky to work some of the apps and technology that are now part of the school day for young people and also for parents. You might also feel that you don't get enough information from school or that you need to receive it in a different way – maybe you'd prefer a phone call rather than an email or text message.

You can have your say about these issues by completing the worksheets below.

Be as honest as possible.

Parent worksheets

Worksheet: Communication between you and school (parent)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 25.

Worksheet: It's all about HOW we communicate

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 26.



Section 6

Adverse childhood experiences and complex trauma: the impact on education and attendance

The parent-child connection is the

*most powerful mental health
known to mankind*

-Bessel Van Der Kolk

What is trauma?

Traumatic experiences can impact learning, behaviour and relationships at school. Recent neurobiological, epigenetics, and psychological studies have shown that traumatic experiences in childhood can diminish concentration and memory as well as the organizational and language abilities that children need to succeed in school.

Trauma is a wound. Typically trauma refers to either a physical injury, such as a broken bone, or an emotional state of profound and prolonged distress in response to an overwhelmingly terrifying or unstable experience. Some traumas, like wounds, heal relatively quickly. Some heal slowly, and many influence life going forward, like scars. Scars and trauma do not result in defects or deficiencies; rather they are markers of life experience one has survived.

Traumatic experiences are events that threaten or violate one's safety, health, and integrity. Traumatic experiences may be directly experienced or witnessed. They may be primarily physical experiences, as with physical assaults and sexual abuse, or primarily emotional experiences, as with verbal abuse. Traumatic experiences may result in the emotional experience of traumatic stress, but not necessarily.

Acute traumatic events are typically single events and initially are accompanied by feelings of intense fear and/or helplessness. Acute traumatic events may include assaults, community violence, natural disasters, and sudden loss of a loved one.

Traumatic stress specifically identifies emotional trauma. Traumatic stress occurs when an individual's capacity to absorb, process, and progress through a traumatic experience is overwhelmed and the fear becomes stuck. Traumatic stress results from a combination of individual factors – who we are, our genes, our temperament, and our life experience, and environmental or social factors. Everyone reacts to traumatic experiences in a unique way that is influenced by life and cultural experience. Everyone is capable of recovery from traumatic stress, but each individual will require different support and a different amount of time for that recovery.

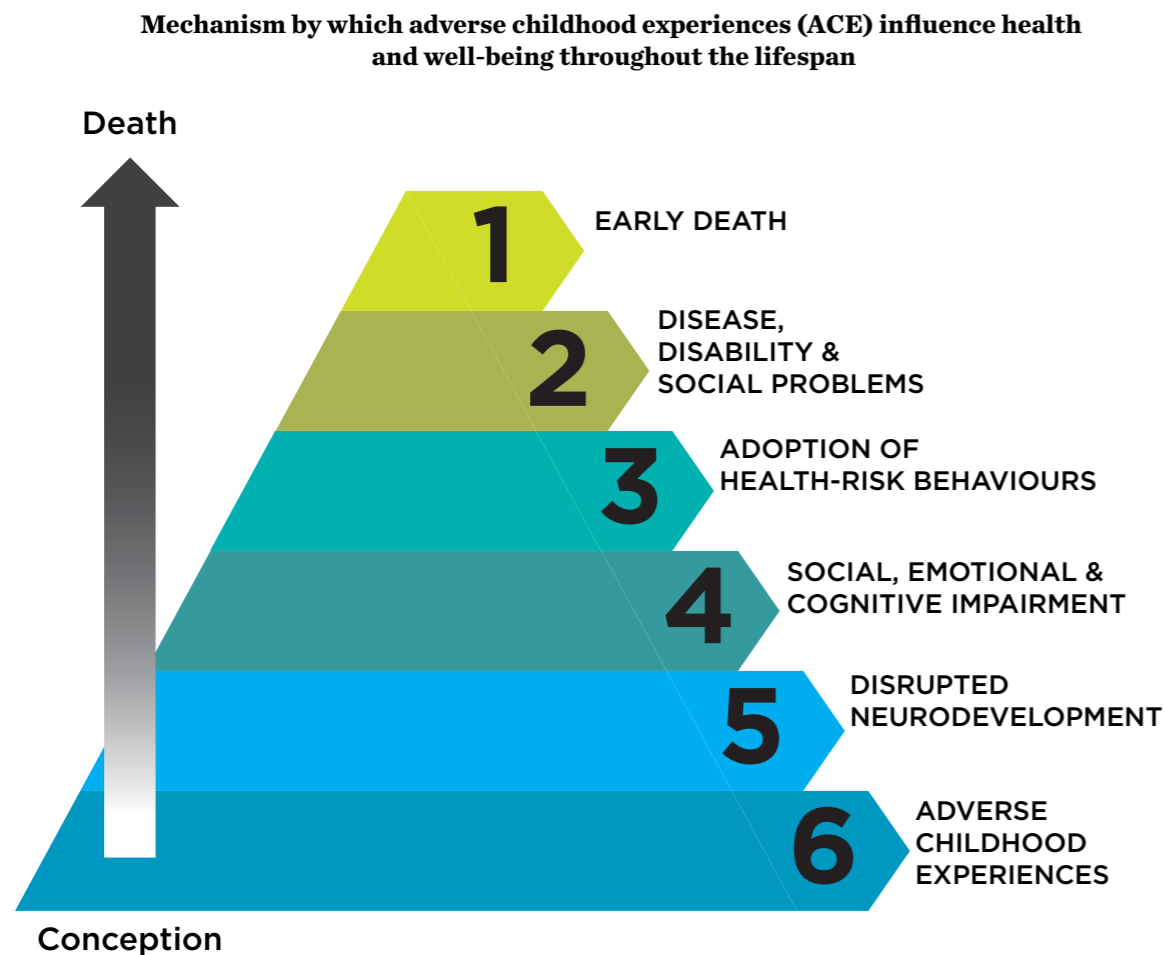
What is trauma?

Complex trauma describes both exposure to multiple traumatic events—often of an invasive, interpersonal nature—and the wide-ranging, long-term effects of this exposure. These events are severe and pervasive, such as abuse or profound neglect. They usually occur early in life and can disrupt many aspects of the child’s development and the formation of a sense of self. Since these events often occur with a caregiver, they interfere with the child’s ability to form a secure attachment. Many aspects of a child’s healthy physical and mental development rely on this primary source of safety and stability.

Ref: Adapted from The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (<https://www.nctsn.org/>).

Adverse Childhood Experiences, according to **Corcoran and McNulty (2018)**, are “traumatic events (e.g., sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse) or chronic stressors (e.g. neglect, parental separation) that are uncontrollable to the child”.

The original ACE Study was conducted at Kaiser Permanente from 1995 to 1997. Around 17,000 mostly white, middle class college-educated people in Southern California completed surveys about their childhood experiences and current health status and behaviours, and received physical exams (**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2016**). The findings of this research resulted in the development of the ‘ACE Pyramid’, which represents the conceptual framework for the ACE Study and the study’s findings identify a link between childhood experiences, and adult health and wellbeing outcomes:



The original ACE questionnaire used the following categories and referred to the respondent’s first 18 years of life, which fall under the wider categories of abuse, neglect, and household challenges:

Abuse

- Emotional abuse: a parent, stepparent, or adult living in your home swore at you, insulted you, put you down, or acted in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt.
- Physical abuse: a parent, stepparent, or adult living in your home pushed, grabbed, slapped, threw something at you, or hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured.
- Sexual abuse: a adult, relative, family friend, or stranger who was at least 5 years older than you ever touched or fondled your body in a sexual way, made you touch his/her body in a sexual way, attempted to have any type of sexual intercourse with you.

Household challenges

- Mother treated violently: your mother or stepmother was pushed, grabbed, slapped, had something thrown at her, kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, hit with something hard, repeatedly hit for over at least a few minutes, or ever threatened or hurt by a knife or gun by your father (or stepfather) or mother’s boyfriend.
- Household substance abuse: a household member was a problem drinker or alcoholic or a household member used street drugs.
- Mental illness in household: a household member was depressed or mentally ill or a household member attempted suicide.
- Parental separation or divorce: your parents were ever separated or divorced.
- Criminal household member: a household member went to prison.

Neglect (Collected during Wave 2 only)

- Emotional neglect: someone in your family helped you feel important or special, you felt loved, people in your family looked out for each other and felt close to each other, and your family was a source of strength and support (Items were reverse scored to reflect the framing of the question).
- Physical neglect: there was someone to take care of you, protect you, and take you to the doctor if you needed it (items were reverse scored to reflect the framing of the question), you didn’t have enough to eat, your parents were too drunk or too high to take care of you, and you had to wear dirty clothes.

A distinction is made between stressful life events and adverse childhood experiences. The former is associated with undesirable life events such as parental divorce or illness of a loved one whilst the latter to the experience of more severe very traumatic life events, such as being or seeing someone else physically or sexually abused or being caught in a fire, that can be associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (**Parkinson 2012**).

However, there are some concerns with the categories selected for ACEs criteria, and authors such as **Mersky et al. (2017)** suggest the need for a more systematic approach to conceptualising and measuring ACEs. Similarly, there is no consensus on the use of terms associated with trauma in childhood, which makes efforts to both implement and study trauma-informed approaches to care challenging (**Maynard et al. 2017**).

The ACE score, a total sum of the different categories of ACEs reported by participants, is used to assess cumulative childhood stress. Study findings repeatedly reveal a graded dose-response relationship between a very high ACEs score and negative health and wellbeing outcomes across the life course. In a systematic review specifically examining school-related outcomes of traumatic event exposure, Perfect and colleagues (2016) identified 44 studies that examined cognitive functioning, 34 that examined academic functioning and 24 that examined social-emotional-behavioural functioning.

Their findings suggest that youth who have experienced trauma are at significant risk for impairments across various cognitive functions, including IQ, memory, attention and language/verbal ability; poorer academic performance and school-related behaviours such as discipline, dropout and attendance; and higher rates of behavioural problems and internalizing symptoms. Other studies suggest that ACEs increase the risk of behaviour and learning problems in children (**Burke et al. 2011; Freeman 2014; Hunt et al. 2017; Iachini et al. 2016**), as well as physical and mental health outcomes in later life (**Crouch et al. 2018**).

How trauma impacts on the learning brain

If suffering from trauma a young person is in survival brain mode. This can have a serious impact on learning as you can see from the tables below:

Young Person in Learning Brain Mode

- Open to new information
- Comfortable with ambiguity
- Can see the big Picture – take Perspective
- Feel calm, peaceful
- Possibly also feel excited about what they are about to learn
- Feel playful
- Feel like they are having fun
- Be curious
- Not afraid of making mistakes
- Not really thinking about themselves and actually feel a little bit of confidence that if they just apply themselves, they might be able to pick up what they are trying to learn.

Young Person in Survival Brain Mode

- Hyper focus on threat – doesn't feel safe
- Not like ambiguity
- Think in black and white
- Feel panicky
- Feel obsessive
- Not feel calm and open to learning new things
- Just want to get things over with
- Not want to ask questions or be asked questions about the material they are learning
- Not like making mistakes and afraid of looking like they can't do it/don't know it
- Be filled with doubt about their own ability to learn things

Ref: Understanding Trauma: Learning Brain vs Survival Brain Dr Jacob Ham (July 2017)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KoqaUANGvpA>

Support

A young person can't learn when they are way too focused on looking out for threat and danger. A young person learns best when they feel they are safe and supported and protected by the adults around them.

When young people feel safe, protected and supported by adults around them, it unlocks their curiosity, openness to learning and playfulness. This requires the adults to always be sensitive and attentive to the young person's needs and to trauma reactivity (survival brain mode) when it happens.

It also requires the adult to become sensitive to their own trauma reactivity (survival brain mode) in these situations and to stay calm and responsive to the young person instead of going into a reactive state themselves. This may sound like a simple solution to supporting young people who are reacting out of trauma, but it is not easy.

Support for the supporting adults in the young person's life is important. A dysregulated adult cannot help a dysregulated young person to regulate. Only a regulated adult can support a dysregulated young person.

Student Support Teams supporting a young person in trauma

By being aware of the signs of a young person being in 'Survival Brain Mode', a teacher can highlight the behaviours of concern to the Student Support Team who can explore with the young person what is going on for them that is causing them to be distressed in the class and unable to apply themselves to learning.

The cause of the distress may become apparent but may also not be known. What is most important is understanding the importance of ensuring the young person feels safe, supported and protected as key to ensuring that the young person can successfully transition from 'survival brain mode' to 'learning brain mode'. Feeling safe, supported and protected can take many forms and each individual young person will need an approach tailored to their individual needs.

The Continuum of Support Framework in Schools is important to ensure that young people's needs can get identified and responded to. This framework recognises that special educational needs occur along a continuum, ranging from mild to severe, and from transient to long term, and that students require different levels of support depending on their identified needs. Using this framework helps to ensure that interventions are incremental, moving from class-based interventions to more intensive and individualised support, and that they are informed by careful monitoring of progress.

Resources and further learning about trauma and education

- Dr Karen Treisman TEDx talk on relational trauma and behaviour as communication here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTsPdMqVwBg>
- <https://resilienteducator.com/collections/trauma-informed-school-practices/>



Appendices



Appendix A

Worksheets

Worksheet 1:

Planning a gradual, stepped approach to support a person experiencing anxiety

(For confidentiality, it is best not to include any identifying information).

Recognising Anxiety reactions: Reflecting on the person's presentation, have you seen evidence of the following behaviours, which may have been anxiety responses?

Included examples, incidents etc...

Avoidance	Flooding	White knuckling	Facing and feeling
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•

What are the key barriers facing the person?

.....

.....

.....

Worksheet 1:

Planning a gradual, stepped approach to support a person experiencing anxiety

Identify a barrier, situation or event that the person may be anxious about facing. Plan how you are going to approach the situations by breaking it into smaller steps. For example:

Going into school: Step 1: Get out of the car. Step 2: Walk to the gate. Step 3: Walk to the car park. Step 4: Walk to the front door. Step 5: Walk into reception. Step 6: Walk to classroom.

Facing and feeling challenge

Step 1	
Step 2	
Step 3	
Step 4	
Step 5	
Step 6	
Step 7	
Step 8	

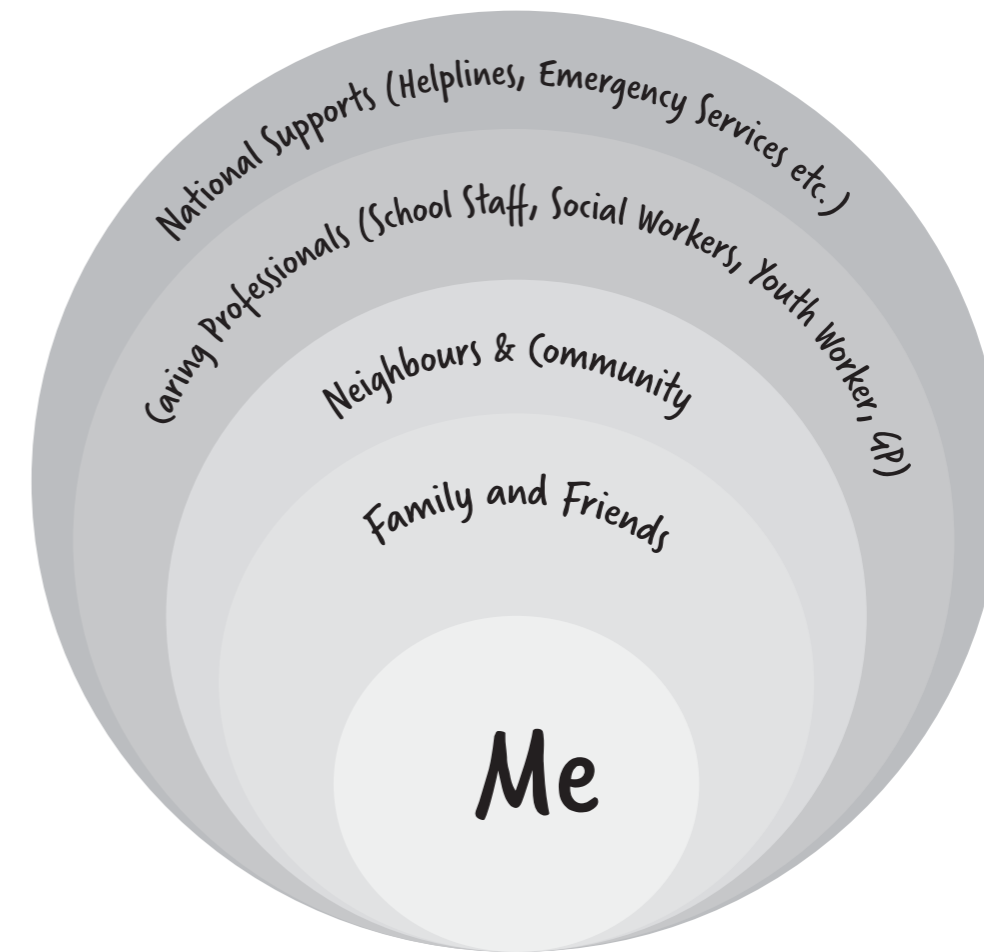


Note: Do not feel disheartened if you do not reach your goal the first time. Celebrate progress through the steps, however small. If the person becomes flooded, step back and only proceed when they feel ready. If you need to come back another day and try again, this is ok. Patience, compassion and trust is key to success.

Worksheet 2:

Circles of support

It is not always easy to ask for help. Sometimes, you might feel like talking to a close friend or family member. Other times, it might be easier to talk to a teacher or other caring professional. In certain circumstances, you might want to share something very personal and maybe a stranger is the best option. Try to think about all the people who you could ask for help. Add phone or text numbers and websites and keep in a safe place. You are not alone.



Who are the key people you would normally ask for help from?

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What other places would you consider looking for help from?

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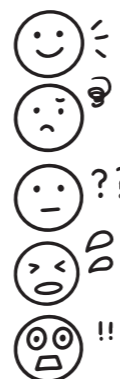
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Worksheet 3:

Identifying my main stressors

Read each suggested item and answer honestly. Write in any other things that cause you stress or make you feel anxious. Rate how anxious each one makes you feel. Rate each item from 1 – 5.

- 1 = Feeling Calm
- 2 = Makes me feel a little uncomfortable
- 3 = Makes me feel stressed and worried
- 4 = I am really stressed and struggling to cope
- 5 = I am panicking



How do I feel when...

1 2 3 4 5

	1	2	3	4	5
Exams and tests are coming up					
I think people are talking about me					
Being late					
Schoolwork or homework					
Waiting for something					
When I disagree or have an argument with a friend					
When I need to ask for help					
Large crowds or busy spaces					
Going to social events					
Group work with classmates					
Meeting new people					
Public speaking					
Extracurricular activities					
When I am excluded from an activity or conversation					

Worksheet 3:

Identifying my main stressors

How do I feel when...

1 2 3 4 5

	1	2	3	4	5
Sports or PE					
When things change suddenly					
People looking at me					
Getting into trouble					
When others get too close or touch me					
When I have to do something new or different					
Peer pressure					
When I don't understand something					
Deadlines, time pressures					
Sitting at a desk for long periods of time					
When I have to organize my things					
Find things boring					

Stress and anxiety are different for everybody.

What other things can make you feel stressed.

1 2 3 4 5

	1	2	3	4	5

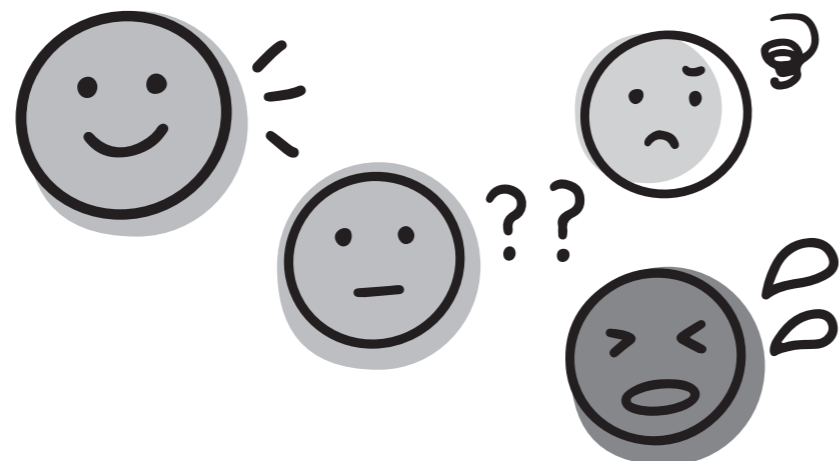
Worksheet 3:

Identifying my main stressors

Now that you have finished rating these items, identify your biggest stressors? These are items that you scored as a "5" (or perhaps even a "4"). Write those down below and be as specific as you can.

My TOP FIVE "5's" are:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5



Worksheet 4:

When I feel anxious or stressed

When you feel anxious, how do you feel? Anxiety can feel very different to everyone. Circle the words that make the most sense to you. There are no right or wrong answers. It may help to take deep breaths and try to 'revisit' a time you felt really anxious.

Jittery Heart Racing Hot Scared Quick Breathing Sick Angry

Want to run and hide Angry

Silly Terrified Sweaty Frozen Invisible Outside of my Body

Like I'm going to Die

Add your own words to describe what it feels like for you.

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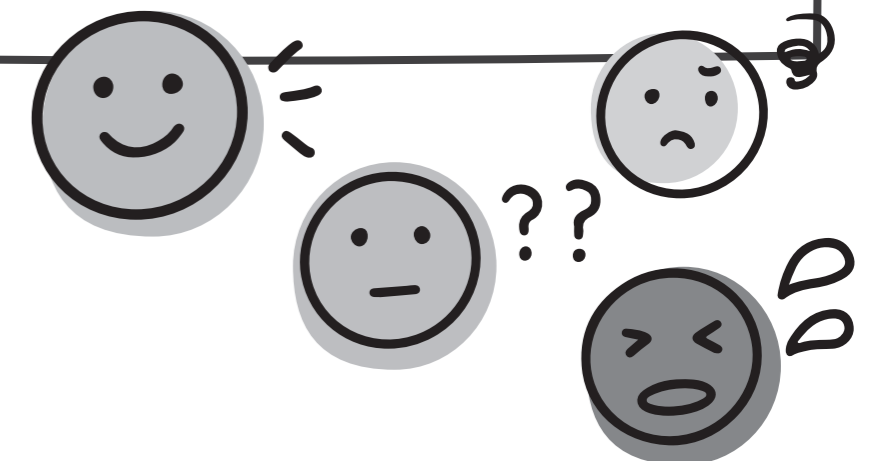
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Worksheet 4:

When I feel anxious or stressed

Use the body map opposite to mark where you feel these sensations in your body.

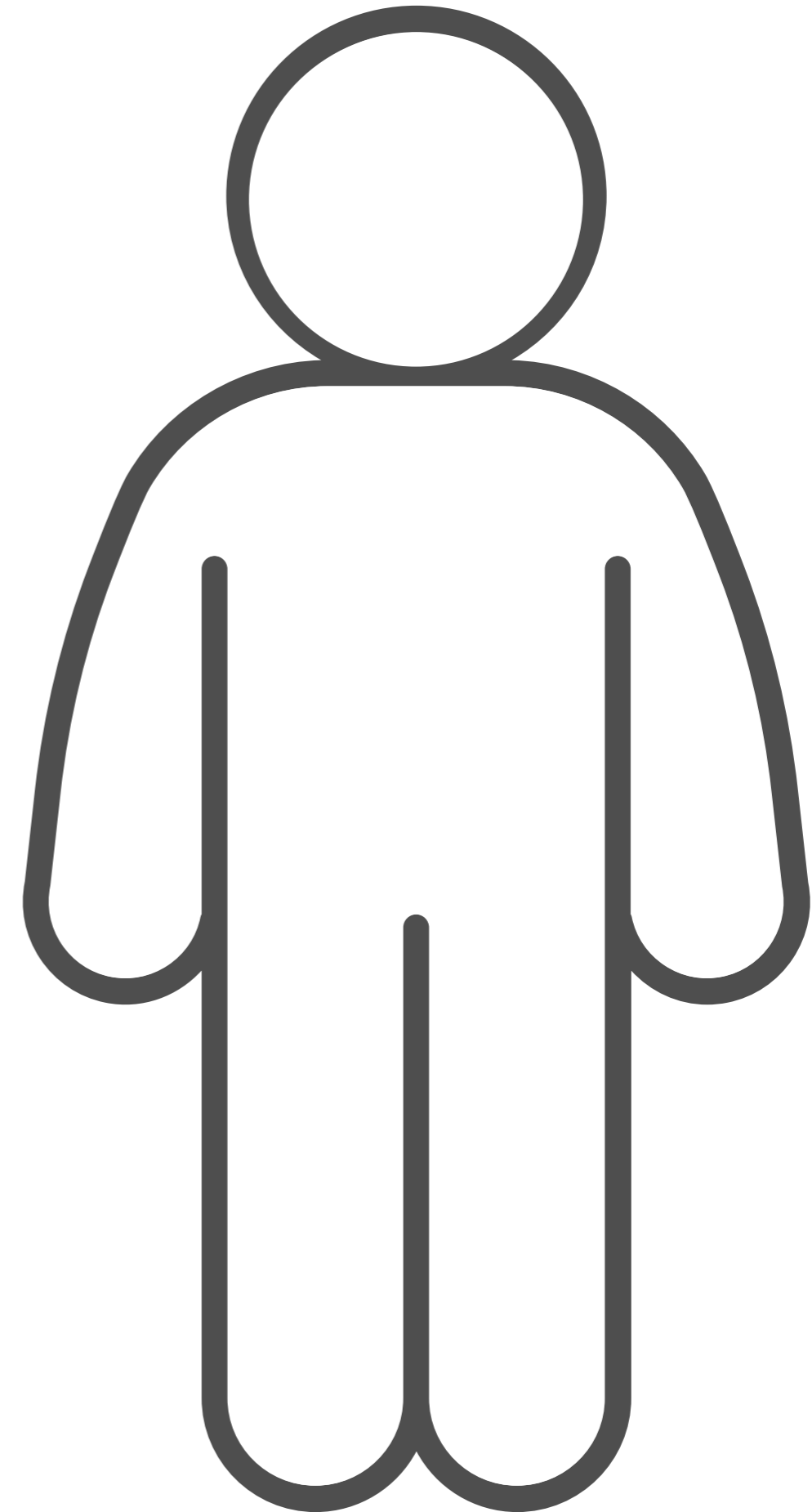


Tip: Learning to recognise feelings of anxiety in your body is the first step to learning to control anxiety, rather than Anxiety controlling you.

Next time you feel anxious, take some deep breaths and try to identify where you are feeling it in your body. What are you feeling? How intense is the feeling from 1-10? If you have rated it a 7, breathe deeply, focus on the feeling and try to slowly reduce the intensity

Worksheet 4:

When I feel anxious or stressed



Worksheet 5:

Self-reflection activity

Think of a time you became very anxious or stressed write about it below.

Where were you?

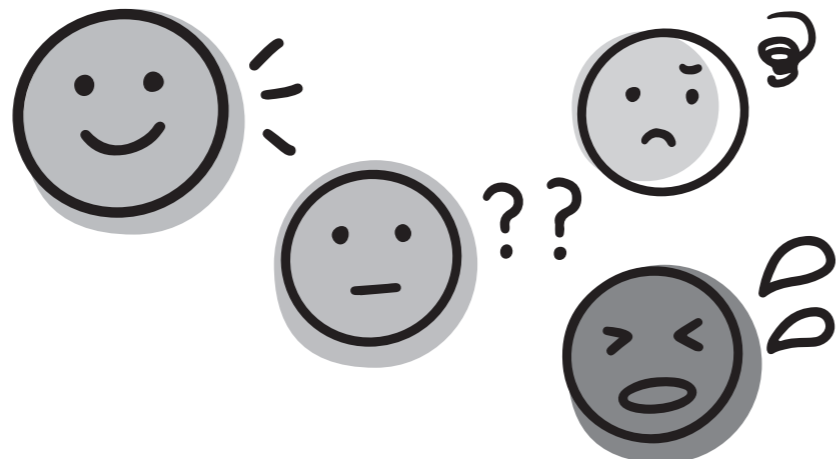
What happened?

What was said?

Write about how you felt. How did the anxiety feel in your body? How intense was it from 1-10?

Were there any other emotions underneath the anxiety and worry?

Did this incident remind you of something that has happened to you before?



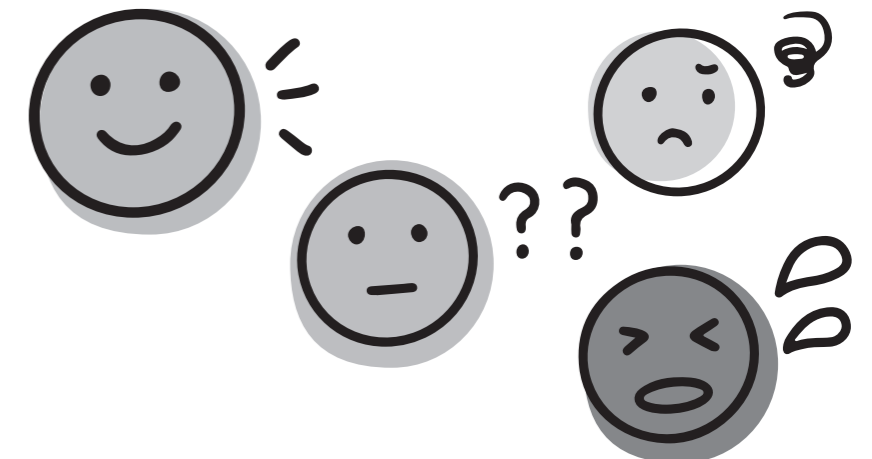
Worksheet 5:

Self-reflection activity

How did you behave? How did you relate to others when this happened?

How did other people behave to you when they could see you were in a stressed state?

How would you have liked this incident to go differently?



Worksheet 6:

Self-regulation and self-soothing

This pack contains a collection of strategies to help you with self-soothing and regulating yourself when you feel worried, anxious or over-whelmed. Some strategies work better for some than others, so it is important to figure out what works for you. You can try out a few of the strategies included in the pack or from the suggestions below, or you may already be using them!

Be active!
30 Minutes a day

Use a
meditation app

Focus on
your breathing

Be creative

Reflect and
be mindful

Bake or cook

Connect
with others

Journal about
your feelings

Worksheet 6:

Self-regulation and self-soothing

Write the strategies that work best for you in the spaces below.

What works
best for me?

Worksheet 7:

You and school (barriers)

When you think about school, what are the things that make you not want to go? Look at the list of words below and explore what memories, feelings and words come to mind. You can add your own words and ideas if you like. As you discuss, write the main things that make you not want to go to school (barriers) in the spaces provided below.

Friendships	Value of Education	Effort	Transport		
SNAs	Lonely	Teachers	Embarrassment	Lunch/food	
PE/Sports	Tiredness	Safety	Anxious	Rules	Yard
Homework	Trips	Exams	Students	Strict	Unfair

Barriers

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What do you do to manage these problems at the moment?

Who can you talk to or ask for help from when you experience these barriers?

Worksheet 8:

You and school (positives)

Think of a great day in school. What did that look like? What makes you want to go to school? Look at the list of words below and explore what memories, feelings and words come to mind. You can add your own words and ideas if you like. As you discuss, write the main things that make you want to go to school (positives) in the spaces provided below.

Friendships	Value of Education	Future Career		
Transport	SNAs	Fun	Teachers	Achievement
Lunch/food	PE/Sports	Relaxing/Rest	Safety	
Joking	Rules	Yard	Homework	Trips Exams
Students	Interesting	Fair		

Positives

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.....

What can be done to make school a more positive place?

If you were principal, what would you change?


Worksheet 9:

Working on solutions

What are the three biggest reasons you do not want to attend school?
Write them in the spaces provided below.

Think about each barrier. Is there anything that can be done to remove this barrier? Explore all solutions you can think of, no matter how unlikely. Write any solutions you think might work in the space below:

.....








Can you think of any people who can make this solution happen? Write their names beside the bubbles on the top of this worksheet. (e.g. a key worker, a particular teacher, Year Head, Principal, family member, SNA, You, Friends, teammates, any other person)

Worksheet 10:

Identify your school triggers

Name Date

Directions: Read each item and answer honestly. Take your time as you complete this. Ask for help if you don't understand an item. Rate each item from 1 - 5.

1 =	Does not bother me at all. I'm fine!	
2 =	Makes me feel a little uncomfortable	
3 =	Makes me feel stressed and worried	
4 =	I am really upset and unhappy	
5 =	I'm going to explode!	

How do I feel when...

1 2 3 4 5

A teacher gives me feedback / constructive criticism					
Someone or something interrupts me while I am working					
A teacher tells me to correct a mistake					
When I don't understand what someone is saying to me					
When I disagree with classmate					
When a classmate asks for help					
Homework					
When a teacher tells me to do something					
Group work with classmates					
Meeting new people					
When one of my ideas is not included in a project / activity					
When someone tries to talk to me, and I don't want to talk to them					

Worksheet 10:

Identify your school triggers

How do I feel when...

1 2 3 4 5

When I am excluded from an activity or conversation					
Getting a lower grade on a test or assignment					
When someone points out a mistake I made					
Wearing specific clothing (i.e. long pants, coat, shirt, PE gear)					
Getting to school on time					
Changing classes					
Greeting people					
Taking tests					
When a teacher tells me no					
Big projects					
Specific noises (i.e. beeping, humming)					
Certain smells (examples: perfumes, foods)					
When my daily routine is changed					
Loud places					
School bells or loudspeaker announcements					
Fire drills					
When I have to do something new or different					
When I am late to school					
When a classmate disagrees with me					
Hearing other people's music /radio					
When others touch me (i.e. handshake, pat on back)					
Large crowds					

Worksheet 10:

Identify your school triggers

How do I feel when...

1 2 3 4 5

When I have to wait for something					
Teasing by others					
Crowded hallways					
Peer pressure					
Bright lighting					
When I have to do something in a different way from usual					
Big classrooms					
When I don't understand a certain idea or concept					
When I don't finish something on time					
Getting wet (i.e. hands, shoes)					
Field trips or school tours					
When someone talks to me about something that I am not interested in					
Certain textures (examples: in clothing, paint, glue, chalk, cookery, art materials).					
Changes in noise level					
Deadlines, time pressures					
Sitting at a desk for long periods of time					
Reading assignments					
When other people are talking near me					
Small spaces (i.e. cubicles)					
Asking for help					
When I am confused about a task / activity					

Worksheet 11:

Identify your school triggers

How do I feel when...

1 2 3 4 5

Exams and tests	1	2	3	4	5
When I have to follow specific instructions					
Physical activity (i.e. in health class or P.E.)					
Large spaces (i.e. auditoriums, gyms, conference rooms)					
When I have to organize my things					

Now that you have finished rating these items, identify your BIG TRIGGERS. These are items that you scored as a "5" (or perhaps even a "4"). Write those down below and be as specific as you can. For example, if certain noises make you want to "explode," describe the specific noise that makes you feel this way.

My TOP FIVE "5's" are:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5






Ref: (Adapted for Irish Students from worksheet on www.do2learn.com)
<https://do2learn.com/activities/SocialSkills/Stress/StressTriggers.html>

Worksheet 11:

What do you like about school?

Name Date

Directions: Read each item and answer honestly. Take your time as you complete this. Ask for help if you don't understand an item. Rate each item from 1 - 5.

1 =	I have no interest or don't like this.	
2 =	It's ok. I don't mind it.	
3 =	I enjoy this.	
4 =	I really like this.	
5 =	This is one of my favourite things about school! I love it!	

How do I feel when...

1 2 3 4 5

Exams and tests	1	2	3	4	5
A teacher gives me positive feedback or praise					
Spending time with other students					
PE or sports activities					
A teacher asks me to do a job					
Talking about what I am interested in					
Working in pairs with other students					
Art					
Homework					
Break time					
Group work with classmates					
Meeting or talking to my friends					
Working on a project / activity					

Worksheet 11:

What do you like about school?

	1	2	3	4	5
Music					
Time alone					
Doing well in exams or tests					
The routine of school e.g. timetable, same every week					
Extracurricular activities					
Listening to music					
Changing classes					
Learning about new stuff					
History					
Geography					
Swimming					
Woodwork or other practical subjects					
Specific noises (i.e. beeping, humming)					
Certain smells (examples: perfumes, foods)					
Cooking					
A break from home					
Loud places					
Quiet places					
Working on computers or devices					
When I have to do something new or different					
Eating lunch					
Getting the bus					
Taking breaks					

Worksheet 11:

What do you like about school?

	1	2	3	4	5
Certain rooms or special places					
Field trips or school tours					
When someone talks to me about something that I am interested in					
Certain textures (examples: in clothing, paint, glue, chalk, cookery, art materials).					
Science class					
Drama					
Assembly					
Learning new skills					
Get to develop my talents and practice my hobbies					
Something to do					
Other school staff					

Now that you have finished rating these items, identify your favourite things. These are items that you scored as a "5" (or perhaps even a "4"). Write those down below and be as specific as you can. For example, if certain subjects are your favourite subjects, try to be specific about why.

My TOP FIVE "5's" are:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Worksheet 12:

Things I would like people in school to know

I find it hard to learn when:

.....
.....
.....
.....

It helps me to learn when:

.....
.....
.....
.....

It makes me not want to go to school when:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Worksheet 12:

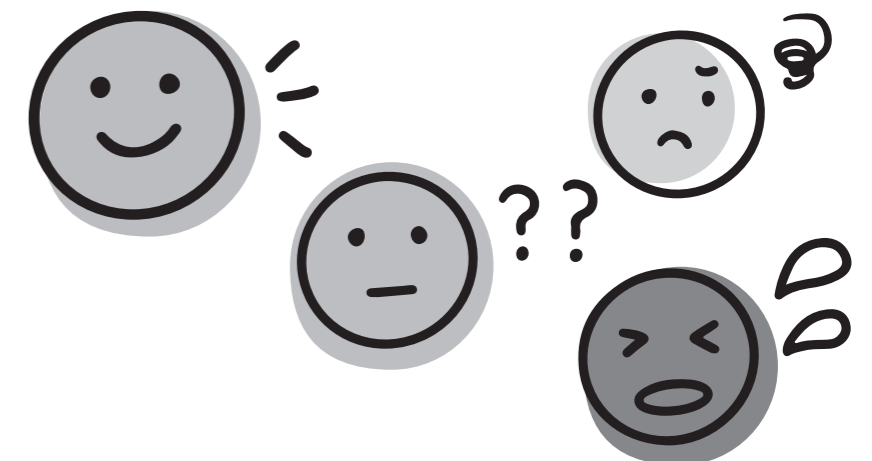
Things I would like people in school to know

It would help me attend school if:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Any other things I would like school to know:

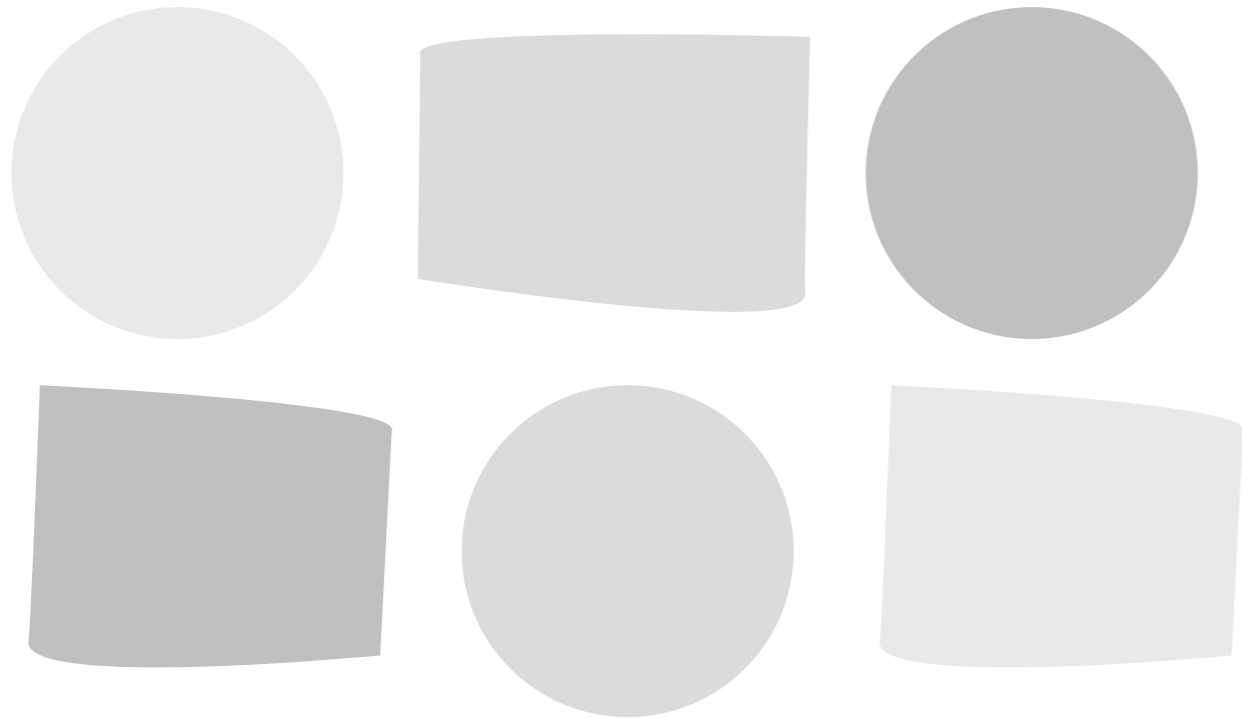
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Worksheet 13:

What does my learning difficulty mean to me?

Having a learning difficulty does not mean that you cannot learn. It means that you learn in a different way. Nobody is brilliant at everything, and you have strengths, talents and skills just like everyone else. Write a few of the things you are really good at in the spaces below.



What do you know about your additional need/diagnosis?
What information to you has about it?

How do you make sense of it in your own mind?

Large rectangular writing area with horizontal dotted lines.

Worksheet 13:

What does my learning difficulty mean to me?

How does your additional need/diagnosis impact you day to day?

What feels harder for you?

Large rectangular writing area with horizontal dotted lines.

What do people not understand about you?

Large rectangular writing area with horizontal dotted lines.

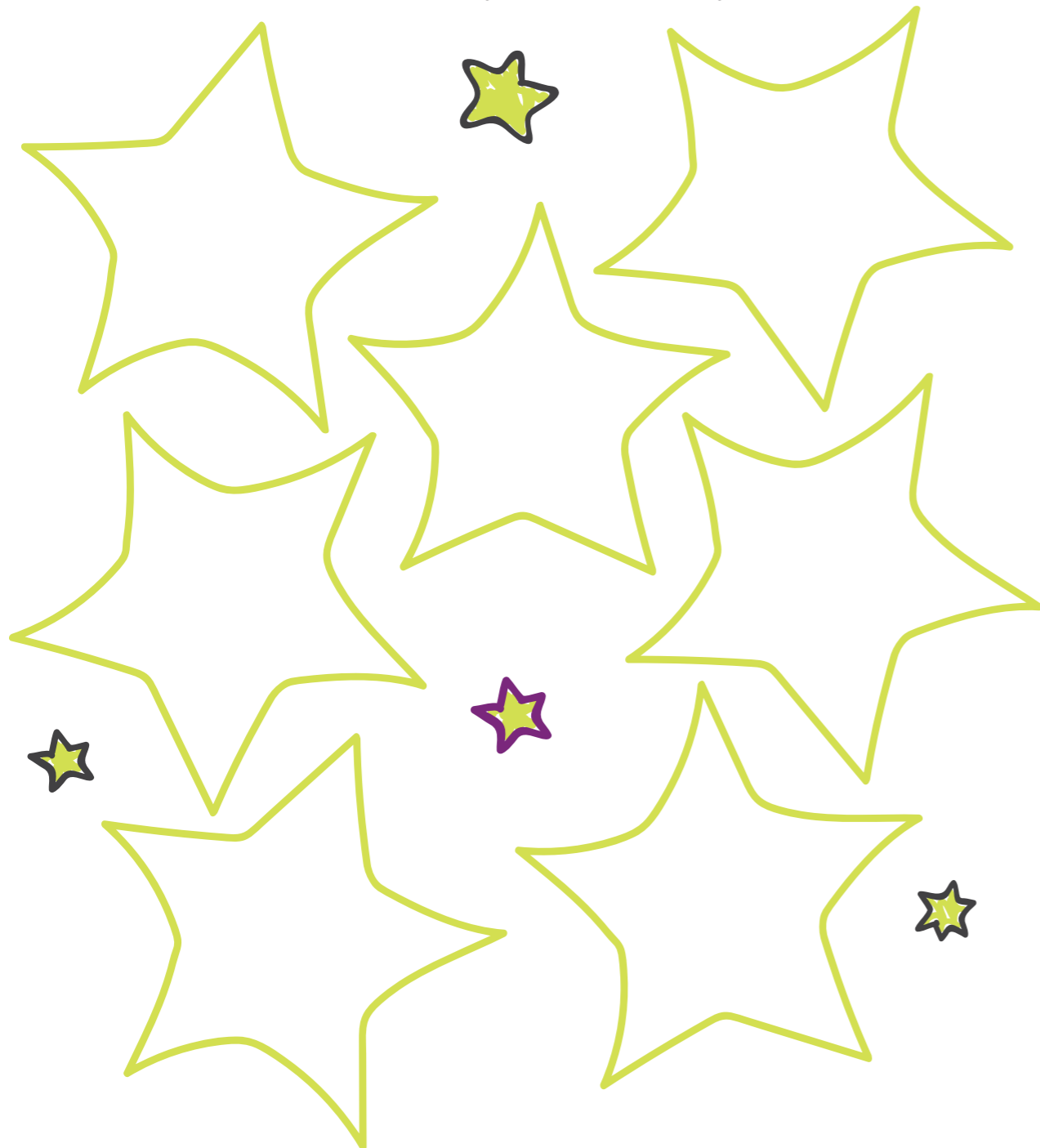
What would you like people to understand?

Worksheet 14:

Star qualities

Think of someone you trust. It could be the same person you drew in your frame. What qualities do they have?

Are they kind, helpful or friendly? What makes them special to you? Write these qualities in each star below. Once you have filled the stars, be sure to think about what qualities you have that make you special too!

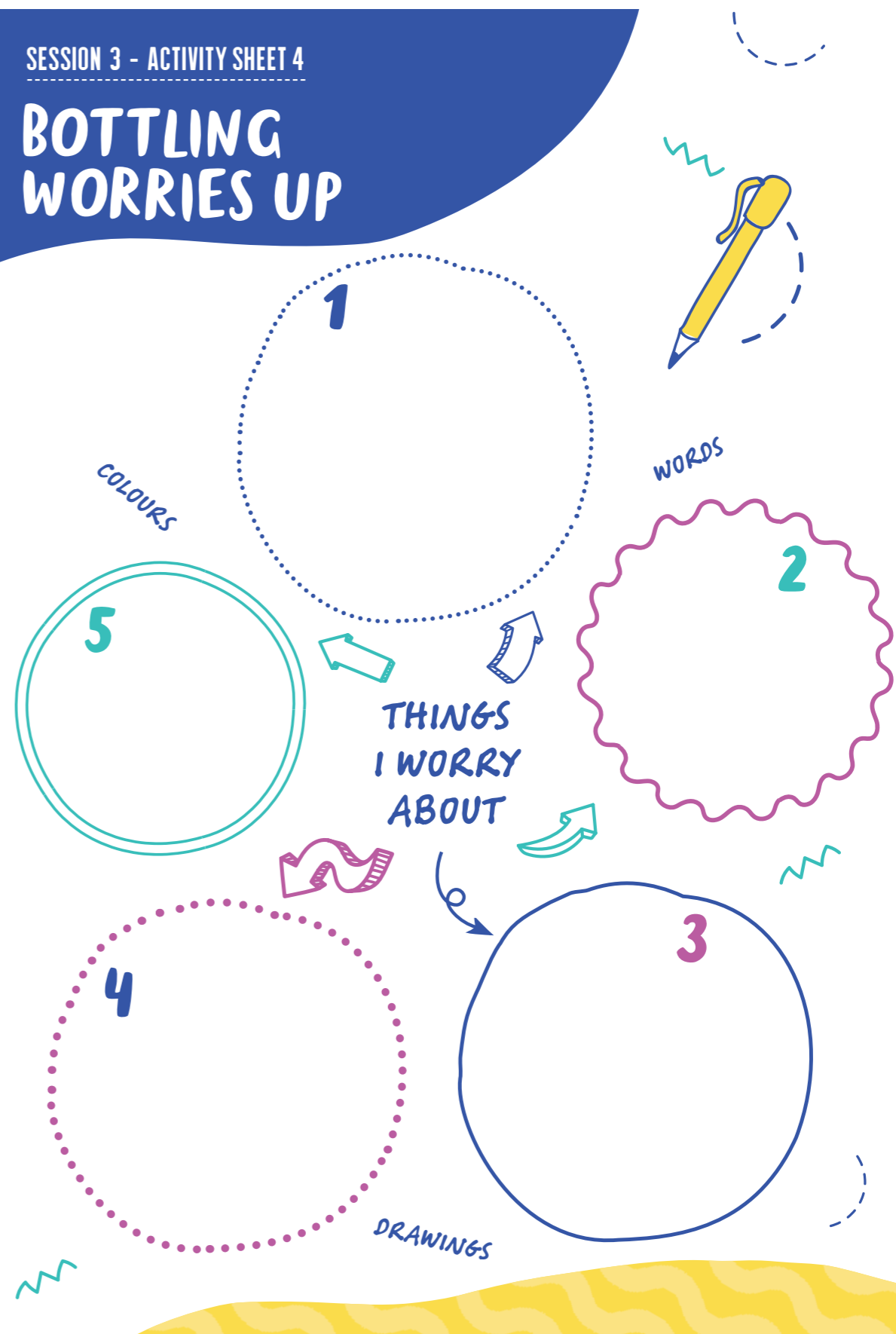


Worksheet 15:

Bottling up worries

SESSION 3 - ACTIVITY SHEET 4

BOTTLING WORRIES UP



Worksheet 16:

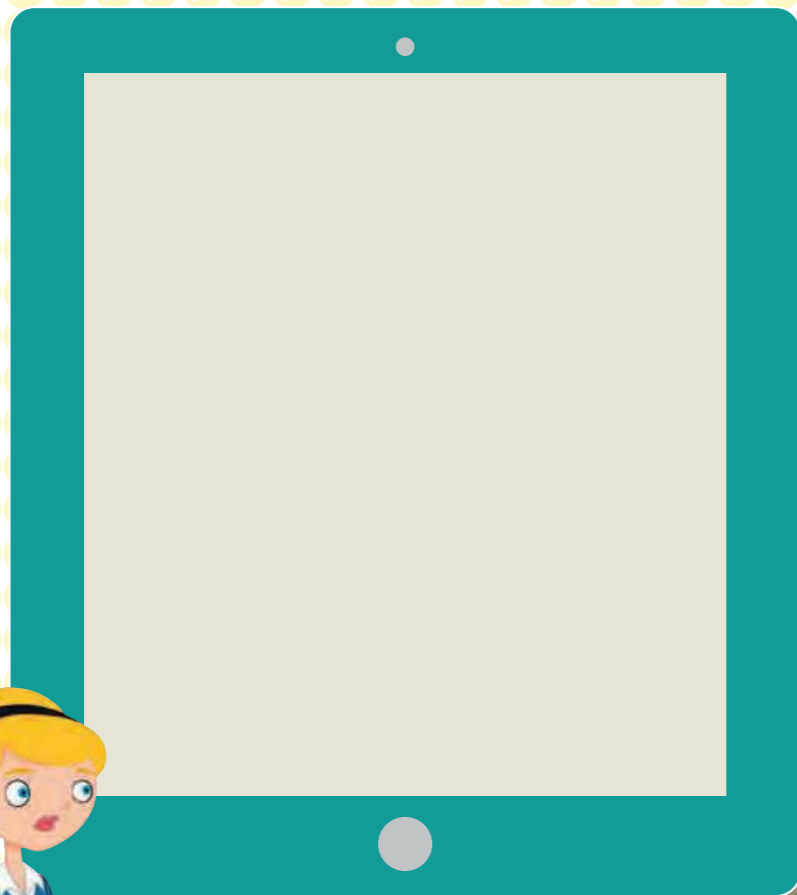
My internet

→ WORKSHEET 1.1

MY INTERNET

What's your main reason for using the internet?

- to socialise
- to find information
- to play games
- to communicate
- to learn
- to watch videos/listen to music
- other: _____



Fill in the tablet screen by drawing the best thing to do using the internet. This might be sending messages to your friend, watching funny videos or using a particularly interesting website.



www.webwise.ie

15

Ref: <https://www.webwise.ie/teachers/myselfielesson-1>

Worksheet 17:

Thinking about change

When changes happen, sometimes we can do things to help us feel more positive. Think of something that has changed for you recently. What was it? How do you feel about it? What could you do to feel better about it?



What changed?



How do I feel?



What can I do?

Ref: Barnardo's Back to School - Primary.pdf

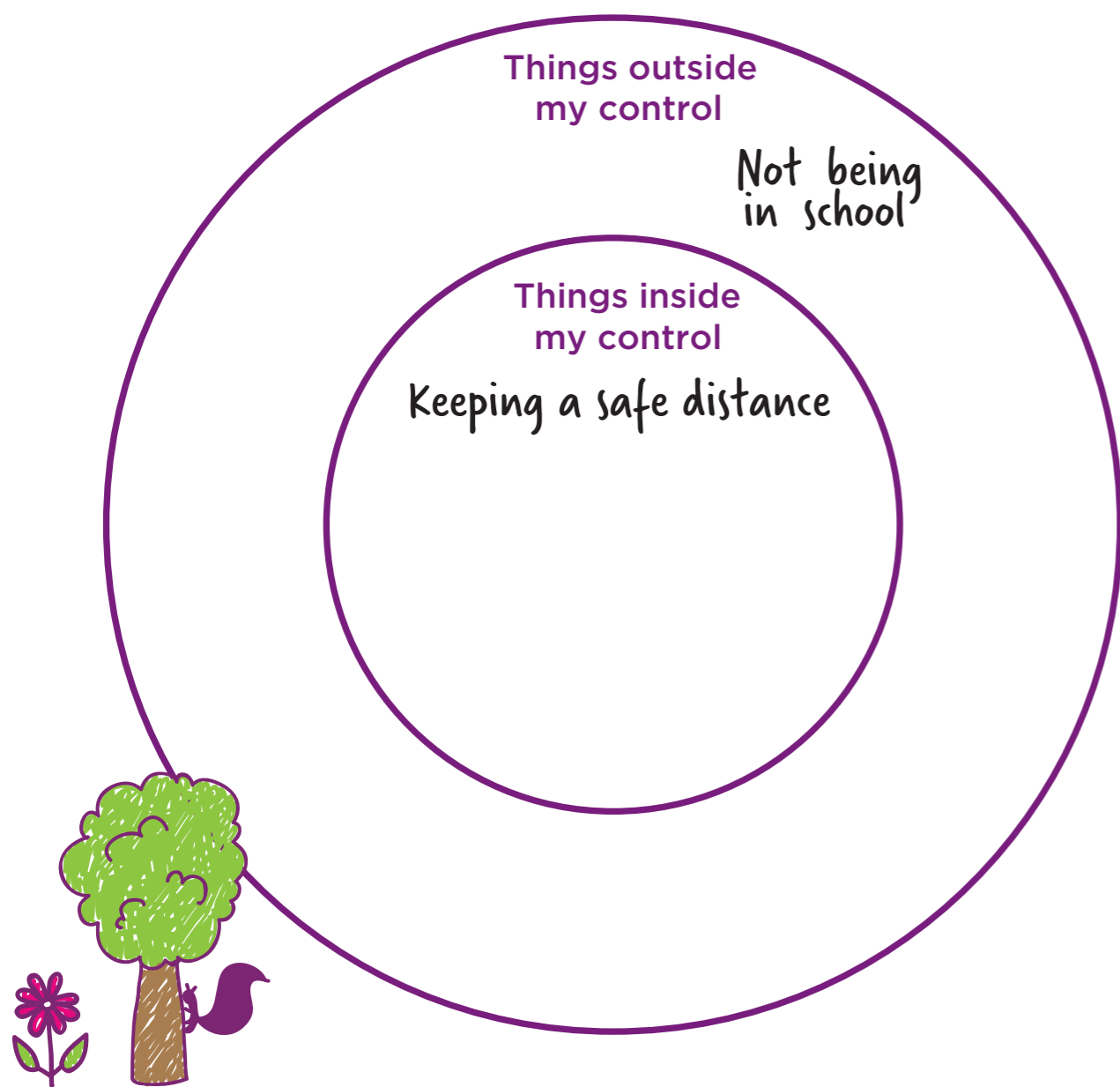
Worksheet 18:

Inside/Outside of your control

Think about the examples we've given you. Some of them you can do something about (they are in your control) and others you can't (they are outside of your control).



Add them to the circles below and think of some of your own ideas too. We've put in a few examples to help you.



Ref: Barnardo's Back to School - Primary.pdf

Worksheet 19:

My self care plan

I important people who I trust...	I can keep myself clean and tidy by...	I can eat healthy foods ...
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My Self Care Plan

I can be a good friend by...		My hopes and dreams ...
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This is me

Draw a picture of you in the circle

I can exercise my body by...	I can relax my body and mind by...	I can make myself happy by...
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Ref: <https://www.parentingni.org>

Worksheet 20:

Communication between you and your parents

Thinking about your relationship with your parent how would you rate the following statements?

I am confident about communicating with my parents.

 Not confident  Very confident

I am happy with the way my parents communicate with me.

 Not happy  Very happy

I can manage my emotions when I communicate with my parents.

 Not managing  Managing well

I understand my role and responsibilities for my own individual needs within the family.

 Not sure at all  Fully understand

Worksheet 20:

Communication between you and your parents

One small change I would like to make in relation to the communication between me and my parents is...

.....
.....
.....
.....

One thing that would help me support my relationship with my parents more effectively is...

.....
.....
.....
.....

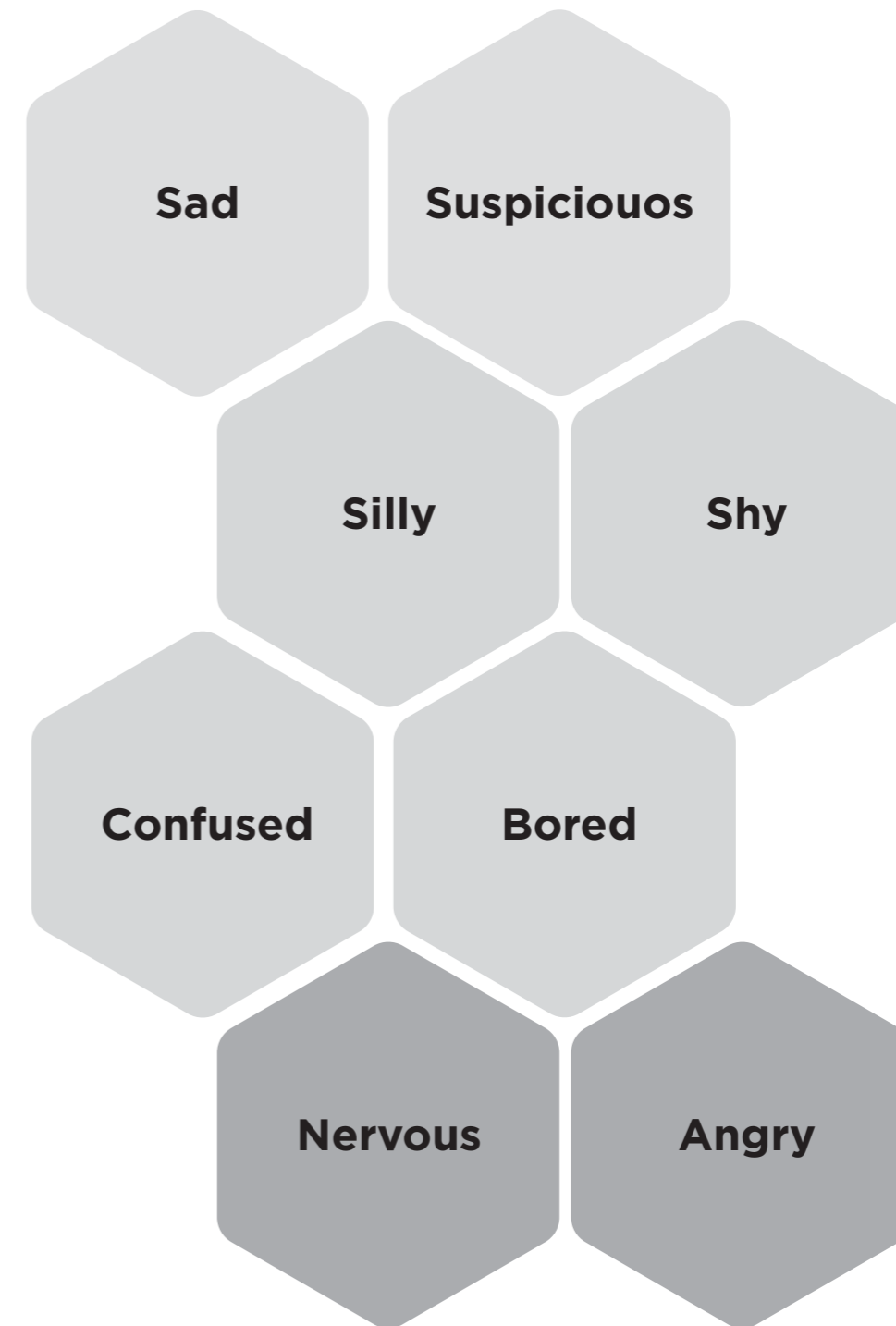
Worksheet 21:

How I feel about going to a new school



Worksheet 21:

How I feel about going to a new school





Worksheet 22:

Communication between you and school



Thinking about your relationship with your school (i.e. teachers, principal, SNAs) how would you rate the following statements?

I am confident about communicating with my school.

 Not confident  Very confident



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I am happy with the way my school communicates with me.

 Not happy  Very happy



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I can manage my emotions when I communicate with my school.

 Not managing  Managing well

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I understand my role and responsibilities for my own individual educational needs.

 Not sure at all  Fully understand



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worksheet 22:

Communication between you and school



Thinking about your relationship with your school (i.e. teachers, principal, SNAs) how would you rate the following statements?

I am confident about using the apps and technology used by the school (e.g. Aladdin, Teams, Seesaw, VSware)

 Not confident  Very confident

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I know who I can contact in school if I am worried or have concerns.

 I don't know  I know for sure

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

One thing that would help me support my educational needs more effectively is...

.....

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.....

Worksheet 23:

A positive parenting approach works best

Thinking about yourself as a child or young person, what kind of relationship did you have with your parents? Be mindful that this exercise could leave you with strong emotions if your memories of home as a child were not positive. You may want to talk about this with someone.

Circle the words below that describe what you experienced as a child and young person from your parents/carers.....

caring	nagging	blaming	kindness	threatening
patience	trusting	listening	teasing	being there
rules	anger	affection	being too busy	love
encouraging	showing an interest	knowing clear boundaries		
fear	being valued	shouting	feeling looked after	

Thinking about the words you have circled which words would you describe as helpful and unhelpful parenting approaches.

Write the words below

Helpful Parenting Approach	Unhelpful Parenting Approach
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.....
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.....

Worksheet 23:

A positive parenting approach works best

Thinking about you and your child or teenager what are the most helpful parenting approaches that will enable you to support your child to return to school? Add extra spaces if needed.

Return to school

Make sure I am fully available to meet my child's needs

Setting firm and fair boundaries and consequences

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Thinking about the parenting approaches you have identified above that will be most effective in supporting your child's return to school, use the space below to identify the changes and supports that will help you develop those parenting approaches.

What can I do to help as a parent?	What do I need to change? My action plan
e.g. I need to be fully available to support my child with this	I need to change my schedule, so I have more time to connect with my child
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Worksheet 23:

A positive parenting approach works best

What's tricky about My Action Plan?

e.g. I find it too stressful in the morning and don't know how to change our routine.

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What supports will help me with My Action Plan?

I need someone to help me draw up a routine chart that we can all follow, and maybe ask someone to walk the kids to school

Worksheet 24:

Before school checklist

Use this checklist to keep track of all the things you need to do before you head to school!

M **T** **W** **Th** **F**

Wake up on time!

Get up at a time that gives you enough time to get ready without having to rush out the door. If you feel like you're not getting enough rest, try going to sleep earlier!

Prepare for your day!

Think about your schedule for today. Do you have any tests? Is there something happening after school? Knowing what to expect can help your day go smoothly!

Get clean and dressed!

This includes taking care of your hygiene. Shower, brush your teeth, comb your hair, and make sure that your clothes are neat.

Eat breakfast!

Eating breakfast helps keep you energized during the day. Eat something that will keep you full until lunchtime!

Morning Chores!

Are there any chores that you are responsible for in the morning? This might include making your bed, feeding your pet, or cleaning up your room.

Pack up!

Before you leave the house, you want to make sure that you have everything packed that you'll need for school.

Leave on time!

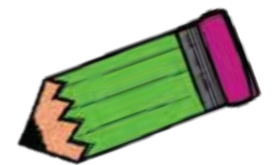
Having to rush out the door is stressful! Give yourself enough time to make it to the bus stop or to get dropped off without being late.



Graphics by Creative Clips Clipart



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For more resources, visit www.mylemarks.com/
by Krista Wallden <http://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Krista>





-Wallden

Worksheet 25:

Communication between you and school (parent)



Thinking about your relationship with your child's school how would you rate the following statements?

I am confident about communicating with my child's school.

 Not confident  Very confident



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I am happy with the way my child's school communicates with me.

 Not happy  Very happy



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I understand my role and responsibilities as a parent in relation to my child's educational needs.

 Not managing  Managing well

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I am confident about using the apps and technology used by the school (e.g. Aladdin, Teams, Seesaw, VSware)

 Not confident  Very confident



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worksheet 25:

Communication between you and school (parent)

Thinking about your relationship with your school (i.e. teachers, principal, SNAs) how would you rate the following statements?

I know who I can contact in school if I am worried about my child or need to inform school about my own concerns about my child.

 I don't know  I know for sure

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

One small change I would like to make in relation to the communication between me and my child's school is...

.....

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.....

One thing that would help me support my child's educational needs more effectively is...

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Worksheet 26:

It's all about HOW we communicate

// **If you just communicate, you can get by.**

*But if you communicate skilfully,
you can work miracles.* //

-Jim Rohn

Sometimes it can be tricky to know how to start a conversation when we have a lot of mixed emotions. This could be the case when you think about having to contact staff in your child's school. Here are some simple phrases that might help if you need to start a conversation with someone in your child's school.

Could I make an appointment to talk to the teacher please?

What times suit best?

It helps to use 'I' statements...Instead of saying, 'No-one ever bothers to contact me from school; you're not bothered about my child at all', you can say something like....

I am very upset that no-one contacted me about my child being upset in school.

Worksheet 26:

It's all about HOW we communicate

The school technology can be tricky to use. Instead of avoiding paying a bill or using the app to see communication from the school you can say something like....

I cannot understand how to use the VSware app to pay for my child's locker. Please can I use a different way to pay?

It helps if we avoid blaming someone else when a situation goes wrong... Instead of saying, 'Teacher X has it in for my child...' you can say something like...

I would like to talk to the Principal about the poor relationship between my child and teacher X.

Use the space below to write down some key messages for yourself when you need to communicate with your teenager's school

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Worksheet 26:

It's all about HOW we communicate

Reminder tip sheet for parents

Do's

- Try to use the tips for calming down given to you by your Support Practitioner
- Do know that you have a right to receive information in a way you understand it
- Talk to a friend
- Talk to your support person
- Press pause before talking with your child/teenager if you feel angry

Don'ts

- Don't phone school when you feel really angry
- Don't ignore everything because you don't understand what is going on
- Don't lose your temper with your child/teenager

Worksheet 26:

It's all about HOW we communicate

When you remember back to your school days what kind of memories and words come to mind? Use the space below to write down the words you associate with school:

You can select from the list of words below or use your own words.

- | | | | | |
|--------------|--------------------|------------|---------------|----------|
| friendships | enjoyment | fear | embarrassment | bullying |
| safety | boredom | excitement | humiliation | anxiety |
| taking risks | competition | learning | shame | escape |
| fun | value of education | work | avoidance | |
| acceptance | teacher | | | |

Me & school

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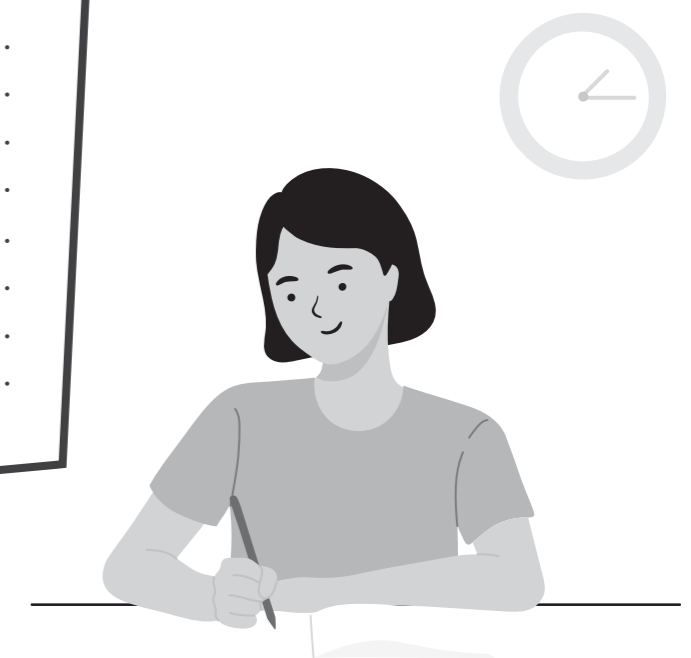
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Worksheet 26:

It's all about HOW we communicate

You, Your Child and School

Now think about the words that come to mind when you think about your child and school. Again, you can select from the list above or use your own words.

- | | | | | |
|--------------|--------------------|------------|---------------|----------|
| friendships | enjoyment | fear | embarrassment | bullying |
| safety | boredom | excitement | humiliation | anxiety |
| taking risks | competition | learning | shame | escape |
| fun | value of education | work | avoidance | |
| acceptance | teacher | | | |

My child & school

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Worksheet 26:

It's all about HOW we communicate

Step into Your Child's Shoes

If your child were filling out the shape below, what words would they put in spaces?

My child's view of school

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Appendix B

Sample Return to School Plan

Name of Young person:	Date:
Tuesday	
Arrive in school at 9.30 a.m. (after school has started and all are settled in class) Meet designated teacher (e.g. resource teacher) at main office	
Attend resource/learning support hours with resource teacher (individual or small group)	
Student meets 2 identified peers at break time and has access to quieter room/environment where possible (e.g. library/computer room)	
Student goes with 2 peers to class.	
Student goes home at lunch time and continues school work at home	
Wednesday:	
Arrive in school at 9.30 a.m. (after school has started and all are settled in class)	
SNA /identified teacher meets the student and they go to resource teaching hours	
Student meets 1-2 identified peers for break	
Student goes with peers to class.	
Student goes with peers at lunchtime.	
Student attends learning support/resource hours if available after lunch	
Student meets peer before last two classes and attends with peers	
Thursday:	
Arrive in school at 9.30 a.m. (after school has started and all are settled in class)	
SNA /identified teacher meets the student and they go to resource teaching hours	
Student meets 1-2 identified peers for break	
Student goes with peers to class.	
Student meets peers at lunch or has access to quiet environment	
Student attends class as normal for afternoon classes	
Friday:	
Arrive in school at 9.30 a.m. (after school has started and all are settled in class)	
SNA /identified teacher meets the student and they go to resource teaching hours for first class and then return to classes as normal	
Student attends lunch and classes as normal.	
Monday:	
Student arrives in school at normal start time.	
SNA /identified teacher meets the student and they go to resource teaching hours for first class and then return to classes as normal	
Student attends break times and classes as normal	

Signed: _____

Profession/Role: _____

Signed: _____

Profession/Role: _____

Signed: _____

Profession/Role: _____

Appendix C

Complaints procedure in relation to a teacher or school

In Ireland, the 1998 Education Act provides the legal framework for the delivery of education to children.

Under the 1998 Act, legally, all schools are owned by the school patrons or trustees. Legally all schools are managed by school Boards of Management who also employ the teachers at the school. Accordingly, whereas the Minister for Education and Science provides funding and policy direction for schools, the

Minister and the Department does not have the power to instruct schools to follow a particular course of direction with regards to individuals complaint cases.

Hence, ideally all complaint should be resolved at a local level.

Agreement has been reached between teacher unions and school management bodies about the procedures which should apply when investigating and resolving complaints at a local level. This procedure, which is summarised below, should act as a guide to you in making a complaint.

- 1 In the first instance, a person or parent who wishes to make a complaint should make an appointment and raise the matter with the child's teacher or year head.
- 2 Where this initial process does not succeed in resolving the complaint, the issue should be raised with the school Principal.
- 3 If the complaint is still not resolved at this stage, the person making the complaint (the complainant) should now raise the matter formally, in writing, with the Board of Management of the School.

In the case of a complaint against a school Principal, the parent or person complaining should discuss the complaint with the Principal in the first instance, and if the matter is not resolved, proceed to address the matter in writing to the Board.

- 4 The Board of Management should acknowledge receipt of the complaint and proceed to investigate the matter. The Board may at this stage, arrange a meeting between the complainant and the teacher concerned or parties involved. The Board will provide them with details of the complaint being made against them. Having carried out its investigations, the Board should write to the complainant and advise them of the outcome, and indicate to them whether they consider the matter to have been satisfactorily resolved.
- 5 If the complainant is still not happy at this stage, they should write again to the Board of Management and formally request a meeting with the Board of Management in order to be given an opportunity to present their case in person.
- 6 If the Board of Management considers that the complaint warrants further investigation, they should arrange to meet with the complainant and allow them to present their case to the Board. The person making the complaint would normally be entitled to be accompanied by a friend to such a meeting. The person about whom the complaint is being made would also generally be given an opportunity to make their case to the Board.

Appendix C

- 7 When the Board of Management have completed their deliberations, they should write to the complainant and advise them of the outcome of their investigations and of any action that they intend to take.
- 8 In instances where a complainant remains unhappy with the investigation and handling of their complaint by a school Board, complainants may choose to bring the matter to the attention of the school Trustees/Patron.
- 9 If the person who has made the complaint remains unhappy with the decision of the Board at this stage they may choose to refer the matter to the Office of the Ombudsman for Children.

Information for parents who wish to make a complaint about a teacher or other staff members of a school.

1. Complaints relating to Child Protection or Allegations of Child Abuse

If you wish to make an allegation of child abuse, or report a matter relating to child safety or the protection of children, you may contact the Department of Education directly, who will then deal with the allegation in accordance with child protection guidelines and notify the appropriate investigative authorities.

Persons should be aware that when making such allegations, that their confidentiality cannot be provided, as the information must be passed on to the appropriate authorities. To report an allegation of child abuse, please contact: Complaints Unit, School's Division, Department of Education and Science, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Ph (090) 648 4268, Fax (090) 648 4058.

2 Expulsion, Suspension, or Refusal to Enrol

Under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, where a school Board of Management permanently excludes a student from school, suspends a pupil from attendance at a school for 20 days, or refuses to enrol a student, the parent of the student may appeal that decision to the Secretary General of the Department of Education, and have that appeal heard by a committee appointed for that purpose.

If you wish to make an appeal under Section 29 please contact: Parents Learners and Data Unit, Department of Education and Science, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Ph (090) 648 4064, Fax (090) 648 4058.

Further information about the Section 29 appeal process and application forms can be obtained at www.education.ie/ About the Department (Section 16) Section 29

3 Discrimination

Discrimination is unlawful on nine grounds: gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, membership of the Traveller community, and race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin.

Appendix C

If you feel that your child has been discriminated against in their education, contrary to the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2008, and you have raised this matter with your school and remain unhappy with their response, you may refer the matter to: The Equality Tribunal, 3 Clonmel Street, Dublin 2. (Ph) 01 4774100 or Locall 1890 34 44 24, (Fax) 01 4774141 or (EMail) info@equalitytribunal.ie. Further information about the complaints procedure and complaint forms can be obtained at www.equalitytribunal.ie.

4 Ombudsman for Children

The Office of the Ombudsman for Children may investigate complaints about public services provided to children under the age of 18. This includes schools registered with the Department of Education and Science, provided that local complaints procedures have first been fully followed. Complaints can also be made in relation to services provided by the Department of Education and Science and the National Council for Special Education.

The office can be contacted at: Ombudsman for Children's Office, Millenium House, 52-56 Great Strand Street, Dublin 1, (Ph) 1890 654 654 or (01) 865 6800, E-mail: oco@oco.ie

Appendix D

Young person FAQ

- **Do I have the right to education?**

Yes. Under the Irish constitution, everyone has the right to education. The Education Act 1998 states that the Government is responsible for ensuring everyone living in the State is guaranteed, “a level and quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of that person”. This means the Government ensures there is a certain standard of education across primary and secondary-level.

- **Do I have to go to school?**

Yes. Everyone must go to school from ages 6 until 16, or until 3 years of secondary school is completed.

- **Do I have the right to be educated at home?**

A parent/guardian may choose to teach at home. However, to do this they must be registered with the Child and Family Agency’s Educational Welfare Services who will help your parent/guardian to meet education standards.

- **What are my rights in school?**

Each school has a Student and Parent Charter which places students at the centre of schooling and emphasises the role of parents in your education. It provides students and parents with information, including accountability for provision, information on school performance, providing a safe environment, operating quality assurance and ensuring courtesy, confidentiality and equality of esteem.

- **Do I have to go to school every day?**

Yes. If you are absent from school your parent/guardian must inform the school.

- **What happens if I am sick or have other reasons for not going to school?**

If you are sick or cannot attend school for other reasons, your parent/guardian should explain to the school why. If you are missing too many days (20 or more in the school year), the school must tell the Child and Family Agency’s Educational Welfare Services. If there is no clear reason for all the missing days, someone may be sent from the agency to visit your parent/guardian to create a plan to help improve your school attendance.

- **Do I have to do homework?**

Depending on the school rules/policies. Pupils are responsible for following the school rules and each school sets its own rules for homework.

- **Do I have to do tests and exams?**

Again, you must follow the school’s policy regarding tests and exams. Legally, you do not have to sit the Junior Certificate or Leaving Certificate exams. However, the most common entryway to third-level education is through the Leaving Certificate. Other education options such as the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), Quality and Qualification Ireland (QQI) Awards are available to access third-level colleges or universities.

Appendix D

- **What happens if I get in trouble at school?**

Each school implements a code of behaviour explaining what will happen if rules are broken. Upon enrolment, your parents/guardians would be given a copy of the code of behaviour and your parents/guardians confirm through writing that they agree to this code of conduct. If you cause trouble in school, you may be required to complete detention (staying in school during lunchtime/after school for an hour or so), confiscation (something taken away such as a mobile phone), temporarily excluding you from class (putting you outside the classroom). However, if your behaviour is more serious, you could be suspended or expelled.

- **What happens if I am suspended?**

Suspension means that for a set number of days, you are not allowed to attend school. Suspensions usually happen if you have seriously misbehaved. Each school has their own procedures for what steps are taken before suspension.

- **What happens if I am expelled?**

Expulsion is more permanent than suspension – it means you can’t attend this school again. There are legal steps that must be taken before expulsion: the school must determine that rule 29 was violated, then the board of management tells the Educational Welfare Officer that the school plans to expel you. Then at least 20 days must pass before expulsion. The Educational Welfare Officer will try and ensure you get an education in another school.

- **Can I appeal my suspension or expulsion?**

You cannot appeal it if you are under 18 years of age, but under section 29 of the Education Act 1998, your parent/guardians can appeal it. First it’s appealed to the Board of Management. If unsuccessful, they can appeal to the Department of Education and Skills. An appeals committee will then make recommendations to the Secretary General of the Department on what action to take. They will then write to both your parents/guardians and school’s Board of Management with the reasons for their decision or how to resolve the issue.

- **What’s the complaints procedure for schools?**

A formal complaint can be made by your parents (if you are over 18 you can do this yourself). These formal complaints can be made first to the principal and then if required can be taken further to the board of management, citizen’s advice bureau, local TDs or as a final resort, the Ombudsman for children, who will investigate the matter further. These steps are usually outlined on the school’s website on their code of behaviour policy.

- **Do I have the right to privacy in school?**

There are some very rare situations where the school can interfere with your privacy, for example if a teacher believes you have illegal substance or alcohol at school, they can search your bag. Your parent/guardian must be present if a teacher wants to search you or your belongings. However, your locker is school property and can be searched if there’s a good reason for it. The teacher needs to tell you the reason for the search.

Appendix D

- **Do my parents have the right to know how I'm doing in school?**

Yes. Your parents/guardians have the right to know about your education and behaviour in school. They are normally kept informed through school reports and parent-teacher meetings. This is due to legislation outlined by the Education Act 1998 Section 9 (g)

- **Do I have the right to see my school records?**

Only when you reach 18 years old. Parents/guardians can access school records on your behalf if you are under 18.

- **Do I have the right to educational supports?**

For children with additional educational needs, you will be educated in an inclusive setting, unless this is not in your best interests or affects the education of other children in the classroom. This is a legal requirement from the Education for Persons with Disabilities Bill (2003). Under section 3 of this bill, if the school believes you are not benefiting from the standard curriculum, measures must be put in place to meet your educational needs. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) assists the school in this. An assessment of your needs will be carried out, and supports will be put in place on the basis of this assessment.

Appendix E

If you are finding things particularly challenging, there are always those around you that you can chat with such as a member of your family, a trusted friend, a teacher, a coach or youth worker.

Below is a list of useful contact numbers of agencies in Clare and also national support services

- **Jigsaw** - Website: www.jigsaw.ie
- **Spunout** - Tel: 01 675 3554 (10am-6pm)
Email: hello@spunout.ie Website: www.spunout.ie
- **ISPCC - Childline** - Tel: 1800 66 66 66 or Text 50101.
Chat online at Childline.ie Website: www.ispcc.ie
- **Teenline Ireland** - 1800 833 634 up to 11pm or Text 'Teen' to 50015 anytime
- **Crisis Text line** - 'Text 'Hello' to 50808'.
- **GOSHH (Gender Orientation Sexual Health HIV)** - confidential helpline: 061 316661
Email: info@goshh.ie Website: www.goshh.ie
- **Heads up Clare** - Information on a range of Youth Mental Health services in Clare
Website: www.headsupclare.ie
- **Pieta Mid West** - Tel: 061 484444 24 Hour Helpline: 1800 247 247 Text: HELP to 51444
- **Clare Immigrant Support Centre** - Tel: 065 682 2026 Email: ciscennis@gmail.com
- **Clarecare** - Tel: 065 682 8178 Email: parentingsupport@clarecare.ie
- **Clare Local Development Company** - Tel: 065 686 6800 Email: info@cldc.ie
- **H.S.E Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service** - Tel: 065 670 6601
- **Shannon Family Resource Centre** - Tel: 061 707600 / 087 1232489 / 087 9649948
Email: shannonfrc@gmail.com
- **Tusla Child & Family Agency: Clare** - Tel: 065 6863902
- **Obair Newmarket-on-Fergus Buzz Stop Youth Café** - Tel: 061 368 030
Email: info@obair.org
- **North West Clare Family Resource Centre** - Tel: 065 7071144
Email: info@northwestclarefrc.ie
- **Killaloe/Balline Family Resource Centre** - Tel: 061 374741 Email: reception@kbfrc.ie
- **West Clare Family Resource Centre** - Tel: 065 905 2173 Email: info@westclarefrc.ie
- **ISPCC** - Email: clare@ispcc.ie
- **Community Substance Misuse Team (CSMT)** - Tel: 061 318904 Email: admin@csmt.ie
- **Clare Youth Service** - 065-6845350
- **East Clare Community Co-operative** - Tel: 061 921536
Email: ecfamservices@gmail.com