



Emotionally-based school avoidance



Some kids may occasionally resist going to school, it's a normal part of growing up and gaining independence. It's also natural to feel anxious at times, like starting a new year or facing exams.

But if a child is consistently distressed about school and it affects their well-being, it could be something more. This is known as 'emotionally-based school avoidance'.

What is emotionally-based school avoidance (EBSA)?

EBSA occurs when a child's fear or anxiety about school makes attendance difficult. They may refuse to go, arrive late, leave early, or avoid certain classes. Unlike behavioural issues, EBSA is driven by high anxiety.

It can affect children of any age but is more common in those with additional support needs, mental health challenges, a history of bullying, or trauma. It can be stressful for families, especially if parents need to adjust work schedules.

Why is my child avoiding school?

Many factors can contribute to school avoidance, including:

- Anxiety about schoolwork
- Trouble making friends or fitting in
- Difficulties with teachers or staff
- Challenges at home affecting their mindset
- Feeling unsafe
- Unmet support needs
- Mental health concerns
- Sensory overwhelm, frustration, or exhaustion, especially for neurodivergent children.

Often, a mix of these factors can leave a child feeling anxious, overwhelmed or afraid.

How do I know if my child is feeling anxious about school?

It may not be as simple as a point blank refusal to go to school. Other signs that your child may be feeling scared or anxious about school include physical, behavioural or emotional symptoms.

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Everyday school worries vs. anxiety

It's normal for kids to worry about school, friendships, exams and other challenges that can cause stress.

However, avoiding school can make things worse, leading to falling behind and feeling isolated. Parent Club have lots of tips to help you talk to your child and support them through their worries.

If your child is constantly anxious about school and it affects their daily life, it may be time to seek help from their school or a GP.

If your child is off school due to an extended illness, it's important to know that they have the right to an education and to the support they need. This means that the school must support your child and provide them with a way to keep learning.

Help and support

[Parentclub.scot/school-support](https://parentclub.scot/school-support) has advice on your rights and where to get help and support. Also, **it's really important to contact your child's school.** They're there to help and support your child to get back to school.

Tips if your child is unable to go to school

- Tip #1: Stay calm**
Getting upset or angry will only make them more anxious, so try to keep your cool when you're with them.
- Tip #2: Talk to your child and listen**
Give your child plenty of chances to talk to you. It may be easier to talk while you're doing something else. Listen carefully to what they have to say. Remember, what may seem trivial to you may be huge to them.
- Tip #3: Help them understand how they're feeling**
Helping your child understand how they're feeling in their body helps too. Remind them that it's normal to feel symptoms of worry when we're facing new situations and these feelings aren't dangerous.
- Tip #4: Make the start to the school day as stress-free as you can**
The calmer you can be as they get ready for school, the less stressful it'll be. Sorting things the night before will help mornings run more smoothly.
- Tip #5: Reassure them, then move on**
If you child is seeking lots of reassurance, try to reassure them just once then move on. Lots of reassurance about separation from you or other worries could cause your child to get stuck in a worry loop.