

Early Intervention Guidelines for Supporting School Anxiety

Information for Schools,
Professionals and Parents/Carers





Aims

- To outline what anxiety is and when it becomes problematic for children and young people
- To outline what school anxiety is (with insight from young person)
- To outline importance of early intervention
- To introduce an early intervention process which could be used to support children and young people experiencing school anxiety
- To discuss possible next steps

What is anxiety?



Low anxiety

- Low state of arousal
- Less likely to perceive threat
- Slower reaction to threat

High anxiety

- High state of arousal
- Very likely to perceive threat
- Faster reaction to threat – better chance of survival



When does anxiety become maladaptive?

There is a distinction between adaptive and maladaptive feelings of anxiety.

- Feeling nervous about an exam or delivering training is adaptive (can support performance).
- Feeling nervous about going to Sainsbury's – could be maladaptive

Anxiety becomes maladaptive when it presents a barrier to an individual from engaging in developmentally appropriate tasks in their everyday lives.



What is school anxiety?

- For some young people, attending particular lessons or school in general can trigger feelings of anxiety and has been associated as a risk factor for reduced school attendance (Elliott and Place, 2012, Berg, 1996).
- There are many terms used by professionals to describe school anxiety including ‘school phobia’ and ‘school refusal.’

A poem about my life (contributed by 16 year old person with school anxiety)

A small figure in the playground
Looking up, searching for Mum
The classroom door
Open but not inviting
Walking down the street
Excited for something new-
Unaware of the disappointment to follow.
Sitting in a crowd,
One of many
Having trouble fitting in
Like a piece of a puzzle
Being used in the wrong set,
Alone at home
Forgetting my worries
But they are still there
At the back of my mind;
Sitting in a room
The only safe room in my life
Happy for now
But just delaying the inevitable ,
Delaying the return to school

After the long search
I have found my place
A place where I am happy
The sun is shining
Everything is bright
After all this time
I can finally sleep at night.





Why is early intervention important?

- Maladaptive anxiety negatively impacts the emotional wellbeing of children and young people, affecting their self-esteem and confidence
- Long term consequences of non-attendance can include young people being NEET following secondary education, being at risk of mental health problems, poor social relationships and engaging in risk-taking behaviours
- Research suggests that early intervention is six times more likely to produce successful outcomes for young people rather than when they have reached the severe stages of non-attendance (Reid, 2002)

School Anxiety Group

- The guidelines were developed through a multi-agency group consisting of professionals from Education, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Health, Social Care and Youth and Community in 2012.
- The process was piloted in a Barnet Primary and Secondary School.
- The views of school staff and parents/carers were gained through the Barnet SEMH Leading Edge Group in November 2018.
- The views of young people were gained through a focus group at Pavilion (Meadway 2) in September 2018.

Supporting School Anxiety Plan: who is it aimed at?

The Early Intervention process is designed to support children/young people who:

- Are showing signs of school anxiety
- They may have started to communicate some reluctance to attend school
- They may have started to miss some lessons
- They may have started to miss some days at school

STEP ONE: Identifying Signs of School Anxiety

Common signs:

- Difficulty focusing or mind going blank
- Fatigue from sleep disturbance
- Appearing restless or on edge
- Irritability (sometimes referred to as “acting out”)
- Fear of talking in front of a group
- Fear of scrutiny or judgment
- Difficulty separating from care givers
- Avoidance behaviours
- Tantrums or meltdowns
- Psychosomatic complaints (headaches, stomach-aches, muscle pains, etc.)
- Panic attacks
- Excessive worry

<https://www.barnetlocaloffer.org.uk/pages/home/information-and-advice/how-to-get-help/what-to-expect-from-schools>

Open access screening tools

SPENCE CHILDREN'S ANXIETY SCALE (Parent Report)

Your Name: Date: _____

Your Child's Name:

BELOW IS A LIST OF ITEMS THAT DESCRIBE CHILDREN. FOR EACH ITEM PLEASE CIRCLE THE RESPONSE THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR CHILD. PLEASE ANSWER ALL THE ITEMS.

1. My child worries about things.....	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
2. My child is scared of the dark.....	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
3. When my child has a problem, s(he) complains of having a funny feeling in his / her stomach	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
4. My child complains of feeling afraid.....	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
5. My child would feel afraid of being on his/her own at home.....	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
6. My child is scared when s(he) has to take a test.....	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
7. My child is afraid when (s)he has to use public toilets or bathrooms.....	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
8. My child worries about being away from us / me.....	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
9. My child feels afraid that (s)he will make a fool of him/herself in front of people.....	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
10. My child worries that (s)he will do badly at school.....	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
11. My child worries that something awful will happen to someone in our family.....	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
12. My child complains of suddenly feeling as if (s)he can't breathe when there is no reason for this.....	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
13. My child has to keep checking that (s)he has done things right (like the switch is off, or the door is locked).....	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always

Screen for Child Anxiety Related Disorders (SCARED)

Child Version - Page 1 of 2 (To be filled out by the CHILD)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Directions:

Below is a list of sentences that describe how people feel. Read each phrase and decide if it is "Not True or Hardly Ever True" or "Somewhat True or Sometimes True" or "Very True or Often True" for you. Then for each sentence, fill in one circle that corresponds to the response that seems to describe you for the last 3 months.

		0 Not True or Hardly Ever True	1 Somewhat True or Sometimes True	2 Very True or Often True
1.	When I feel frightened, it is hard for me to breathe	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.	I get headaches when I am at school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3.	I don't like to be with people I don't know well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4.	I get scared if I sleep away from home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5.	I worry about other people liking me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.	When I get frightened, I feel like passing out	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7.	I am nervous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8.	I follow my mother or father wherever they go	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9.	People tell me that I look nervous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10.	I feel nervous with people I don't know well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11.	My I get stomachaches at school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12.	When I get frightened, I feel like I am going crazy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13.	I worry about sleeping alone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14.	I worry about being as good as other kids	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15.	When I get frightened, I feel like things are not real	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

STEP TWO: identify a key person

- It is important to identify a key member of staff who knows the child/young person well and has a good understanding of their needs
- The key person will be responsible for collating relevant information, gaining the young person's views and facilitating the meetings



STEP 3

Appendix 1: School Anxiety Support Plan (SASP): Preparation for the meeting

SCHOOL ANXIETY SUPPORT PLAN PREPARATION FOR MEETING 1	
School:	
Name:	Year/class:
Date set for meeting:	
Names of Parent/s / Carer/s:	
Name and role of any additional professionals to be invited	
The Plan aims to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• reduce anxiety about school• improve attendance.	
Ideally, create a person-centred meeting. Questions can be put on the wall and a flipchart used. In preparation for meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Obtain a current print out of attendance data.- Have a reference copy of the young person's timetable. Have red, orange and green colouring pencils available.- Complete relevant background data on this sheet	
Brief background and issues that may be affecting current attendance: <p><i>What was the pattern in primary school? How did child cope with transition? Changing schools or classes/Struggling to make friends/Bullying /Competitive sporting activities/Pressure over achievement of grades in school/Family history of emotionally based school refusal, anxiety, phobias, depression / Change in family set up, for example, birth of a new baby / Experience of loss through the death of a parent, parental separation, parent hospitalised.</i></p>	
Attainment, Academic Strengths, Personal Qualities: (NC levels, outside interests and successes)	

STEP 4: For key person to prepare child/young person for the meeting if attending and to gain their views

Feedback from young people at Pavilion (Meadway 2)

- They need to feel safe to talk about anxiety in a private environment with an adult who they trust prior to the meeting
- It is important to check with young person whether they want to share their views during the meeting themselves or whether they would prefer a trusted adult to communicate on their behalf
- It is sometimes helpful to communicate their views in ways other than talking e.g. drawing or writing
- They want to be part of decision making but don't always have the answers as to why they are feeling anxious
- Pace in meetings can be too fast, need to go at the young person's pace
- Need to be given opportunity and space to talk around the questions covered in the forms and to elaborate if they want to

STEP 5: for key person to facilitate Supporting School Anxiety Meeting

- For a meeting to be held with the child/young person wherever possible
- For individuals in the child/young person's support network to also attend
- For the Key Person to complete Appendix 2 (School Anxiety Support Plan Meeting 1) form during the meeting. Young person's views and questionnaire can be completed beforehand.

Appendix 2: School Anxiety Support Plan (SASP): Meeting 1

SCHOOL ANXIETY SUPPORT PLAN MEETING 1

School:

Name:

Year/class:

Date:

Names of all attendees at this meeting:

The Plan aims to:

- reduce anxiety about attending school or returning to school
- improve attendance.

At the meeting:

- *Have a current print out of attendance data.*
- *Have a reference copy of the pupil's timetable.*
Have red, orange and green colouring pencils available.
- *Have preparation sheet with background information and current levels of attainment*

What do you each feel you want to happen for this meeting to be worthwhile?

Pupil:

Parent/Carer:

School:

Refer to preparation papers and highlight any key points

- Brief background and issues that may be affecting current attendance:
- Pupil Achievements, Academic Strengths, Personal Qualities and Attributes:
- Do you think the child has any additional or special educational needs?

1) Looking for any underlying issues — to be completed by the young person (with a trusted adult if needed):

On a scale of 1 — 10 where would you rate the seriousness of the problem?

1= is not a problem or worry for me to 10= makes me very anxious

Knowing it is a school day, waking up, saying good-bye and leaving home

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

Making the journey into school and/or being at the school entrance

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

Sitting in lessons, understanding and completing the class work

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

Sitting in lessons, and seeing the behaviour of other children in the class

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

Having free time at breaks and lunch times and playing with other children

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

Going to assemblies and /or into the dining hall and /or going to the toilet

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

Teachers: do they make you feel welcome and supported or anxious

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

Use this space to add or draw any other school based worries you have:

2) Summary of student's views:

What works well for you in school?

What is working less well for you in school?

What changes could make a positive difference?

3) Summary of parents'/carers' views:

What works well for you in school?

What is working less well for you in school?

What changes could make a positive difference?

4) Summary of school's views:

What works well for you in school?

What is working less well for you in school?

What changes could make a positive difference?

5) What additional support is needed? Could any of the following help?

- What could be done to make the journey into school feel better?
- Would a reduced timetable or a later start/ earlier finish be helpful?
- Look together at the child's timetable - child may use red, amber, green to highlight difficult, OK and comfortable times in school day
- Can there be a 'safe haven' / special place to go in school?
- Is it possible for the child to have an 'exit card'?
- Who is the key member of school staff who will support the child/family?
- Could a 'buddy system' give some extra support?
- Is there a nurture group in school that could help?
- Could some special work be prepared for times when the child is unable to be in class (to do in a quiet area/ library)
- Could parents/carers prepare a study timetable at home when the child is not in school and keep to school hours including getting up early)?
- What else might help, for example, mentoring sessions? Relaxation exercises?
- Could the child keep a daily log to track feelings for two weeks?
- Which seating place is most comfortable for the child in each lesson?
- Would the child like the teacher to speak to the class before the return? If so, what will be said?
- Or how will the child answer questions about their absence?
- How will parents and school acknowledge and praise improving attendance?
- Review of anti-bullying policy and procedures.

Actions	By whom?	By when?

Other notes:

STEP SIX: For Key Person to Facilitate Review Meeting (after approximately 4 weeks)

REVIEW – SCHOOL ANXIETY SUPPORT PLAN	
MEETING NUMBER _____	Outcome: Plan Number _____
School:	
Name:	Year/class:
Date:	
Names of all attendees at this meeting:	
The Plan aims to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• reduce anxiety about school• improve attendance.	
In preparation for the meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Obtain a current print out of attendance data.- Have a reference copy of the young person's timetable.- Have red, orange and green colouring pencils available.- Complete relevant background data on this sheet	
Looking at attendance pattern since School Anxiety Support Plan was agreed — has there been a change?	
Summary of progress, issues and points arising from School Anxiety Support Plan	

1) Looking for any underlying issues — to be completed by the young person

On a scale of 1 — 10 where would you rate the seriousness of the problem?

1= is not a problem or worry for me

10= makes me very anxious

Knowing it is a school day, waking up, saying good-bye and leaving home

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

Making the journey into school and/or being at the school entrance

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

Sitting in lessons, understanding and completing the class work

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

Sitting in lessons, and seeing the behaviour of other children in the class

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

Having free time at breaks and lunch times and playing with other children

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

Going to assemblies and /or into the dining hall and /or going to the toilet

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

Teachers: do they make you feel welcome and supported or anxious

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

Use this space to add or draw any other school based worries you have

2) Summary of young person's views

Where has there been some improvement?

What has stayed the same?

Where does there need to be more change or improvement?

3) Summary of parents'/carers' views

Where has there been some improvement?

What has stayed the same?

Where does there need to be more change or improvement?

4) Summary of school's views

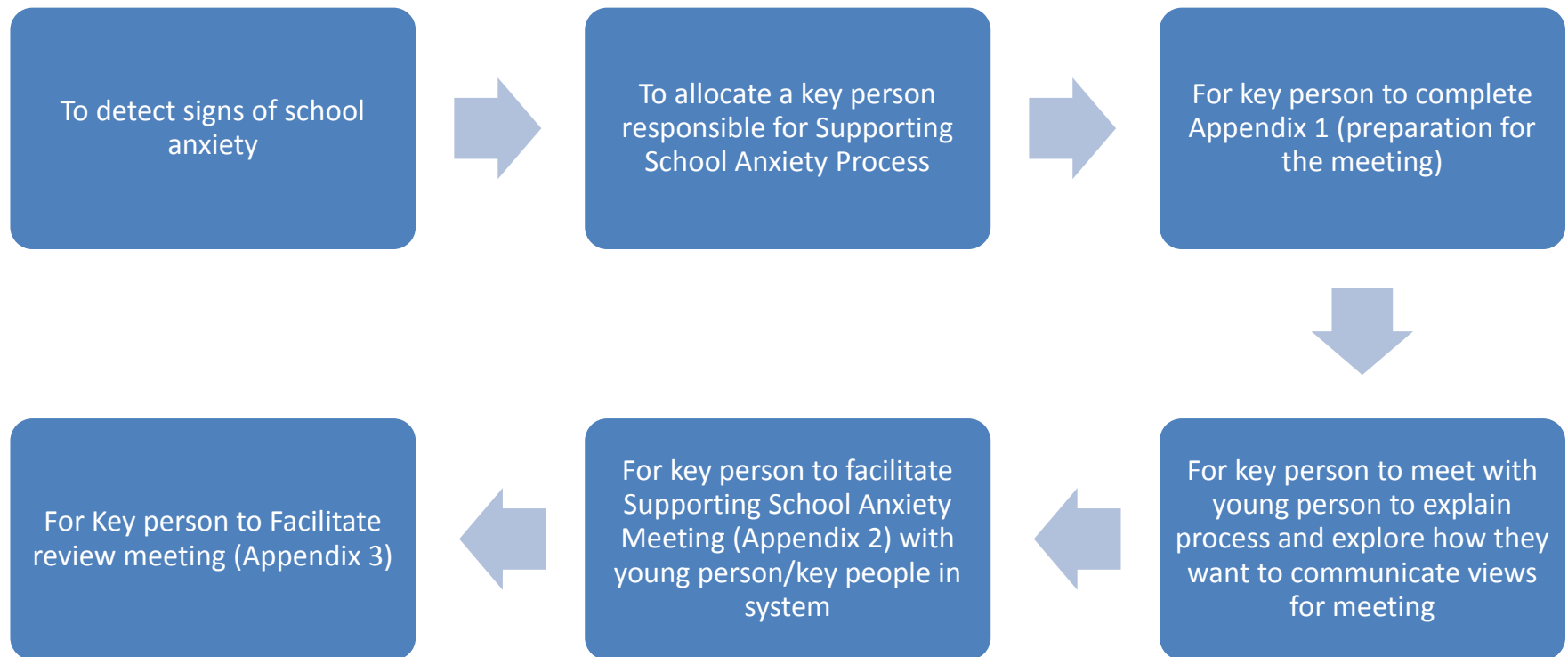
Where has there been improvement?

What has stayed the same?

Where does there need to be more change or improvement?

5) What additional support is needed?		
	By whom?	By when?
Which working-well actions should continue from IAP Number --?		
New actions		
What are the next steps? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has a referral to CAMHS in schools been made? ▪ Would a CAF (Common Assessment Form) be helpful to create a professional team around the child? ▪ Is additional input is required from the following agencies? E.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service – CAMHS Tier 3 ▪ Pavilion Outreach Team (see school website) ▪ Educational Psychology Team – EPT ▪ SEN Disability Information and Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) (was Parent Partnership) ▪ Youth + Community – Y+C ▪ Intensive Family Focus –IFF 		
Key Recommendations		
	Exit process and monitor with school and home based actions	
	School to complete a CAF and set a 'Team around the Child' meeting, including referral/s to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ▪ 	
	Refer to Youth + Community / Education Welfare for consideration of Court Assessment	

Supporting School Anxiety Process



Next steps?

- More information regarding school anxiety and the Supporting School Anxiety Process and forms available on local offer (link)
- Presentation also available on Local Offer which can be disseminated to school staff
- To school staff to work together to identify cases in individual schools who are experiencing school anxiety
- For each case for a key person to be identified to work through Supporting School Anxiety process