

SENCO Forum– Autumn 1

Welcome back!

House keeping



Agenda

- Reducing Parental Conflict (Justine Mortimer)
- General Update
- Supporting Engagement for School “avoiders”

Reducing parental conflict

Justine Mortimer

Update

- New SEND handbook
- Local offer (any updates)
- KIDS questionnaire
- Government updates

"The temporary changes to the law on the timescales for EHC needs assessments and plans, which give local authorities and others who contribute to the relevant processes more flexibility in responding to the demands placed on them by coronavirus (COVID-19), will expire as planned on 25 September 2020."

"Local authorities and health commissioners were required to use their 'reasonable endeavours' to secure or arrange the specified special educational and health care provision within EHC plans. To ensure that children and young people receive the support they need to return to school, we will not be issuing further notices to modify this duty unless the evidence changes."

"Specialists, therapists, clinicians and other support staff for pupils with SEND should provide interventions as usual."

"Schools should ensure that appropriate support is made available for pupils with SEND, for example by deploying teaching assistants and enabling specialist staff from both within and outside the school to work with pupils in different classes or year groups."

"provision for children who have SEND may have been disrupted during partial school closure and there may be an impact on their behaviour. Schools will need to work with local services (such as health and the local authority) to ensure the services and support are in place for a smooth return to schools for pupils."

New SEND Handbook – Updated with ADHD and ASD Pathway

Local Offer – Please can you check your schools information on the local offer.

– If this is not correct please notify Vicki Pellet who can update it for you.

LocalOffer@hullcc.gov.uk

Kids Questionnaire – Regarding how their voice is heard in Hull

Supporting engagement for school avoiders

What is school avoidance?

What does it look like to others?

There is only a small proportion of students whose experience of anxiety affects their attendance at school (approximately 2% of all school age young people (Thambirajah et al, 2008)).

The term school refusal implies that there is a choice being made to not attend school. School refusal is often driven by extreme anxieties which restrict the child. School refusal is different for every child; some may get as far as the school gates and not be able to go in. Others will not be able to leave the house.

Other behaviours may include:

Refusal/reluctance to go to school in the morning

Leaving or running away from school during the school day

Tantrums and outbursts, especially in the morning

Threats to harm themselves if they're made to go to school

Physical symptoms like headaches, stomach aches, panic attacks and diarrhoea

Extreme clinginess: not wanting to be alone in a room

Sleep disturbances.

Contributing factors

School factors	Child factors	Family factors
Transition to secondary school or change of school	Separation difficulties	Recent family transitions
Problems with peers at school	Anxiety about interacting with peers	Recent losses in the family
Bullying	Fear of failure, lack of self-confidence	Significant changes in the family
Unmet learning needs	Developmental needs	Anxiety or other mental health needs in parents/carers
Difficulties in specific subjects	Worries about parental wellbeing	Under-involvement of father
Activities the child cannot manage e.g. PE or public speaking	Fear of parental separation or a parent/carer leaving	Parents/carers easily stressed by child's anxiety or protests
	Over-dependence on parents/carers	Parental over-involvement or over-protection

“School refusal (avoidance) occurs when stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience and when ‘pull’ factors that promote school non-attendance overcome the ‘push’ factors that encourage attendance” (Thambirajah et al, 2008:33).

Research has shown that it is the result of a combination of factors; searching for one main factor will not sufficiently explain the problem (Thambirajah et al, 2008).

Anxiety

Source: Anxiety Canada YouTube | [Fight Flight Freeze – Anxiety Explained For Teens](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpolpKTWrpp4), www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpolpKTWrpp4
Published on Mar 25, 2019

It is important to remember that when anxiety impacts on a child and their amygdala is in control this can impact on an individuals ability to regulate their emotions, communicate effectively, as well as learn.



In short, anxiety is our body's response to feeling unsafe. A helpful way to think about this can be to imagine the anxiety response like a smoke alarm. The smoke alarm is designed to detect a house fire (a real physical threat) but it can also be triggered by someone burning the toast (not a physical threat). What we perceive as a threat differs from one individual to another. In order to support our children and young people to return to school we need to support them to manage their anxiety. We can do this by identifying what is causing the anxiety and supporting their feeling of safety and belonging.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpolpKTWrpp4>

Perceived Threat

What perceived threats might a child experience in relation to school?

It is important to acknowledge that these threats may be aspects of school which others do not consider to be threats. But for the child/young person at the time these are threats are “real” and therefore trigger the anxiety response outlined in the previous video.

This could include:

Not feeling protected (Bullying/spaces in school)

Negative relationships (with peers/staff)

Unpredictability (Lack of Routine/Structure)

Failure (difficulties accessing work/feeling unsuccessful)

Sensory Processing Difficulties (Common for ASD/ADHD pupils)

Developing a feeling of safety

- Provide routine – predictability is safe.
- Advanced warning of changes
- Soft landings (At school and home)
- Little spots of worry (Child/Young Person Voice)
- RAG the timetable

To support children and young people who find it difficult to attend school it is important to develop their sense of safety and belonging. This could be done in a number of ways:

Provide Routine – Share a visual timetable with the child or young person

Parents can support by running through this with them at home the night before/in the morning

Advanced warnings of changes – Give the child or young person an opportunity to process the changes, allow them to ask questions or show them pictures of what it may be like instead. Using social stories may be helpful for some children. This helps the child to feel in control.

Plan “soft landings” for those children who find attending difficult – Ensure their first activity each day is consistent, expected and successful. When arriving home children/young people may be in a highly anxious state (after trying to manage the day), encourage parents to allow them time to unwind and relax before trying to dissect their day which reliving may increase their anxiety further.

Little Spots of Worry – Can be done 1:1 or as a small group. Use a copy of a map of the school and with coloured dots ask children/young people to identify areas which feel “safe” and those which feel “unsafe”. This can then be used as a discussion starter around what makes them feel safe/unsafe and how the “unsafe” areas can be

made to feel safer.

RAG the timetable – Colour Coding the timetable may also help you to identify spaces/staff with which the child/young person feels safer/calmer or it may identify certain elements of the day such as social time/assembly.

Be mindful of these times/locations – There may be a pattern relating to sensory processing which the child is not able to articulate.

Developing a feeling of belonging

- Notice children/young people
- 5 x 3 positive contacts
- Give the child a role/responsibility
- Give praise
- Time in

Notice Children/Young People – Use their name, say good morning, welcome them to the classroom

5x3 Positive Contacts – Encourage 3 members of staff (this may be a teacher, TA, pastoral Lead, Emotional Wellbeing Officer, Dinner lady, caretaker or office staff) to give the child 5 positive comments throughout the day. E.g. That's a lovely smile this morning. This leads to 15 positive communications with the child, they feel noticed, they develop a sense of belonging.

Give the child a role/responsibility – This allows the child/young person to feel as though they have a purpose, they are needed, they belong.

Give praise – Making a positive phonecall home, sending a postcard or positive note, supports the child/young persons confidence and helps them feel special/important.

Time in – Plan an opportunity for the child/ young person to spend time in with a trusted adult. This may be talking about their interests, completing an activity together, sharing their worries. Again think outside the box on who this person may be.

Understanding their anxiety

- Explain to children/young people how their brain works – It is trying to keep them safe.
- Normalise the child/young person's feelings
- Encourage them to share their worries
- Monitor their emotions throughout the day



Explain to children/young people how their brain works – Sharing the earlier video may be helpful for them to understand. Understanding physical symptoms may also be helpful such as understanding that a shortness of breath due to panic, may feel like your windpipe is closing but actually this is a safety mechanism in your body, whereby your windpipe expands (to allow more air in) and therefore pushes against the muscles. Feeling like it is tight.

Normalise the child/young persons feelings. It is natural to feel worried or anxious about things. Everyone has felt anxious at some point.

Encouraging children/young people to share their worries allows you to help them rationalise their thoughts. For example, previously I taught a student with Autism. In writing down her worries she wrote "I'm worried I will say something wrong and go to prison". In discussion she was aware she sometimes worded things in a way that sometimes came across as socially inappropriate. She explained that she was worried this would lead to someone reporting her to the police and that they would then put her in jail for her comments. We talked about this, understanding that being worried about saying the wrong thing is a reasonable worry, but that accidentally making an inappropriate comment would not lead to her being imprisoned. We talked about how there are processes in place to prevent people

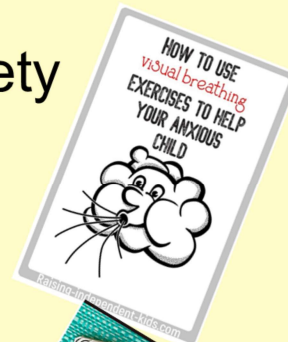
going to jail incorrectly, how there are many steps in a place of work for example before the police would become involved. We also talked about how she could share her diagnosis with people if she wanted and explain that sometimes she may say things “badly” and that she would rather someone explain to her how to improve this if it happened rather than ignore it.

Worries could be shared by writing on pieces of paper before ripping them up/ placing them in a worry monster. Others may prefer to write a diary, draw or share their worries through activities such as lego.

For some children/young people their stress/anxiety build up throughout the day. It is helpful to give them tools to reflect on their current emotional state. This could be done through activities such as Blob trees, Zones of Regulation or the 5 Point Scale.
<https://www.5pointscale.com/scales.html>

Managing anxiety

- Methods of communication
- Range of strategies
 - Breathing techniques
 - Sensory activities
 - Mindfulness techniques/Yoga
 - Recreate opportunities for fight/flight/freeze



Sometimes preventative steps are not enough and we find ourselves managing a child in “survival mode”.

It is important to remember that when highly anxious some children/young people may not be able to articulate this. Ensure they have clear means of accessing help should they need it. This may be a time out card/support from a trusted adult.

Develop a range of strategies which the child/young person could use to help them calm down, this could include:

Breathing techniques, <https://raising-independent-kids.com/calming-anger-anxiety-teaching-kids-breathe/> (image)

sensory activities such as pushing/pulling/rocking/smelling soothing scents, stroking relaxing fabrics,

Mindfulness Techniques such as grounding/5 senses or Yoga moves which can support the relaxation of muscles <https://childhood101.com/yoga-poses-kids/> (image)

Recreating the fight/flight/freeze response in manageable ways may also be helpful with activities such as boxing/ aerobics or running/ access to a quiet and calm space without the requirement to communicate.

Supporting a return to school

- Work in partnership with families
- Seek support
- Plan for success (the anxiety ladder)
- Small steps
- Part time/phased returns
- Focus on the physical feelings
- Avoid avoidance



If a child is refusing/struggling to attend school share these concerns with the family. Have they noticed a change at home? Has the child's routine changed? Has there been something happen out of school such as a bereavement which may lead to this child/young person being anxious about leaving family members?

It may be appropriate to suggest the family share their concerns with their GP, support from health services may be needed or support for the family from social care/early help.

Develop a plan together which allows the child to experience regular success. Small steps are likely to be needed. In some cases this may initially be the child getting their uniform on in a morning, then you can work towards leaving the house, arriving at school, speaking to a designated member of staff with a parent present, entering the school building, meeting with a trusted adult in school, attending a favourite lesson and so on.

To enable this it may be appropriate to consider a part time timetable or a phased return. This may incorporate supported handovers, a later start/earlier finish to avoid busy spaces or loud noises such as bells. The part time timetable protocol can be found in the SEND Handbook.

When thinking about the triggers of anxiety it is important to remember this is the body's response to perceived threat. Often while children/young people believe they

are trying to avoid a particular situation what they are really trying to do is avoid the physical sensation of being anxious. Learning to manage their anxiety, and focussing on the physical sensation (how it feels) will lead to the child/young person being less sensitive to it and in turn it being easier to manage. By removing or avoiding the trigger you are reinforcing that there is something to fear. For example if a child identifies that maths makes them anxious, removing them from maths reinforces that this is something to be feared. Unfortunately this will not resolve the problem but move it to something else which triggers the same anxious feelings, in turn leading to avoidance of that thing too. Over time removing more and more triggers ultimately shrinking the world for that child/young person.

Useful Links

- [South Gloucestershire - Managing anxiety guidance](#)
- [Emotionally based school refusal - North Somerset guidance](#)
- [Emotionally based school refusal – West Sussex](#)
- [theschoolrun.com](#)
- [youngminds.org.uk](#)

Evaluation

Please can you take a couple of minutes to provide feedback on todays session.

Share link in chat.