

What can you do as a parent/carer?

- Listen to the child or young person and find out if there is anything specific that is bothering them at school (e.g. exam stress or bullying). Remember that the young person may not be forthcoming with this information due to fear or embarrassment.
- If there are no genuine problems at school then school refusal/separation anxiety symptoms can be improved with firm and supportive encouragement to attend school every day.
- Keep a diary of the child or young person's reluctance to attend school or non-attendance at school and the type and frequency of their physical symptoms to determine if there are any patterns, or encourage the parents/carers to keep a diary.
- Sensitively talk to the young person about any worries they have either in school or at home.
- Have there been any significant changes or stressors in their life (e.g. bereavement or parental disharmony)?
- Try and resolve or help the young person to resolve any specific reasonable worries they have about home or attending school
- Explain to them that you understand how upset they feel, but that experience tells us that this upset will settle fairly quickly if they attend school consistently and will get worse if they continue to avoid attending.
- Encourage support from their friends, for example get them to call for the young person on school days.
- Draw up a plan of gradual steps to reintegrate them to full time schooling with support.
- Support and encourage carers to be firm in their expectation that the young person will attend school.
- If appropriate, introduce a reward for attending school.
- Avoid sending the child home when they complain of feeling unwell before first getting a detailed description of their symptoms to check that the symptoms are genuine and not the result of anxiety. However, if they have non-anxiety symptoms, such as raised temperature, do send them home or seek medical advice.