

School Anxiety

Many children ask to stay away from school from time to time, but sometimes you might find that your child gets extremely upset and distressed. This can be very upsetting for you and your natural instinct is to want to keep your child away or stay with them.

There is rarely a single cause for a child not wanting to come to school, but it may be due to separation anxiety and the issues need to be addressed with care and understanding.

By not going to school, a child might be able to:

- ☹ avoid scary things
- ☹ get out of social situations with peers or teachers
- ☹ avoid separation anxiety

At Thistly we have found that the following strategies can be helpful.

Home

The way things are at home can make a difference to the way your child feels about school.

☺ Talk about what needs to happen to help your child attend and feel safe and comfortable at school – **not** about whether she goes to school.

☺ Show that you believe your child can go to school by saying **positive and encouraging** things. For example, 'You're showing how brave you are by going to school'. This will build your child's self-confidence.

☺ Use **clear, calm statements** to let your child know that you expect her to go to school. Say 'when' rather than 'if'. For example, you can say, 'When you're at school tomorrow ...' instead of 'If you make it to school tomorrow ...'.

☺ Use direct statements that don't give your child the chance to say 'No!'. For example, 'It's time to get out of bed' or 'Jo, please get up and into the shower'.

☺ Stay calm. If your child sees or senses that you're worried, stressed or frustrated, it can make your child's anxiety worse. By staying calm, you model a positive way of handling the situation.

☺ Plan for a calm start to the day by establishing morning and evening routines. You can do this by organising uniforms, lunches and school bags the night before and getting your child to have a shower or bath in the evening.

☺ Make your home 'boring' during school hours so that you don't accidentally reward your child for not going to school. This means little or no TV, video games, leisure activities, internet use and other fun stuff.

☺ Provide attention-based **consequences** for not going to school – for example, an early bedtime or limited time with you at night.

☺ Help your child stick to a reasonable **sleep and wake cycle**. It's very hard to help your child get to school if she's sleeping during the day and awake at night.

Getting to school

It might help to make some changes to school drop-offs and pick-ups.

☺ Get someone else to drop your child at school. Children often cope better with separation at home rather than at the school gate.

☺ When your child goes to school, **praise** him by describing what he might be feeling. You could say, 'I know this is very hard and I am proud of you for trying hard'.

☺ **Reward** your child for going to school. This could be some special time with you or your partner, or stopping on the way home at the playground or park. Make sure the reward is on the same day and your child understands what it's for.

At School

☺ Your child may be asked to arrive at school early. They will be met by a member of staff, who will be able to reassure them and take them to their classroom.

☺ They may take your child to a quiet area to calm down if needed, before going to the classroom.

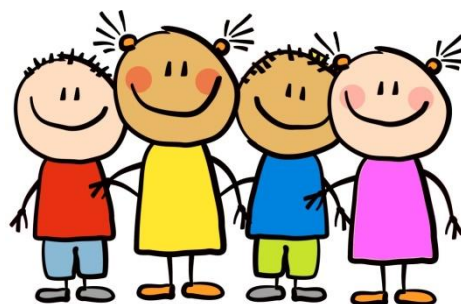
☺ If a child takes longer to calm, they may be offered the opportunity to do an activity they like for a short time before going to class.

☺ If they haven't had breakfast we will offer toast and a drink.

Although it can be very distressing to see your child upset we ask that parents do not come into the school as this only prolongs the separation anxiety. In most instances children calm down quickly and are able to go back to their class. They may need to be taught strategies by our trained staff; this though could take several weeks. Be reassured - if your child is inconsolable and their distress means that they are unable to return to their class we will contact you.

Your child's teacher would appreciate any relevant information that may help them understand your child's needs and will be happy to discuss your concerns over the phone or meet up with you at an agreed time.

By staying in **control**, remaining **calm** and by **working together** we can help your child.



Anxiety is like that gallon of milk. Without a container, it spreads out and becomes nearly impossible to avoid. Anxiety needs to be contained.