

# SCHOOL ATTENDANCE DIFFICULTIES

Define Fine is led by a small team of parents and professionals with lived experience of school attendance difficulties.

Parent Carers are welcome to join our supportive Define Fine Facebook group for peer to peer support, advice, information, resources, and through our online sessions bookable on Eventbrite.

We also provide consultancy, training and case management to professionals in schools, Local Authorities, health, EWO's PCFs, SENDiass, SEND and mental health support groups, and other organisations. See website for details.



**WARMTH**  
Well being first  
Affirming practice  
Relational approach  
Mutual understanding  
and partnership  
Timely response  
Holistic support

See Spectrum Gaming  
Barriers to Education

School Attendance Difficulties are complex but often children and YP are described as being "fine in school". Are they really fine or are they masking or just about coping? We need to DEFINE FINE working together to assess, understand and support to overcome barriers to education from the earliest signs of struggling.

"All those who work with children and young people should be alert to emerging difficulties and respond early. In particular, parents know their children best and it is important that all professionals listen and understand when parents express concerns about their child's development. They should also listen to and address any concerns raised by children and young people themselves." The SEND COP

## BASED ON THE FOLLOWING CURRENT GUIDANCE & STATUTORY GUIDANCE

- THE SEND CODE OF PRACTICE
- WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE (DFE)
- SUPPORTING PUPILS WITH MEDICAL CONDITIONS AT SCHOOL (DFE)
- EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH HEALTH NEEDS WHO CANNOT ATTEND SCHOOL (DFE)
- SUMMARY OF RESPONSIBILITIES WHERE A MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE IS AFFECTING ATTENDANCE (DFE)
- EQUALITY ACT TECHNICAL GUIDANCE EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION,
- PREVENTING AND TACKLING BULLYING
- KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE IN EDUCATION
- HOME EDUCATION GUIDE

## SUPPORTING A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON STRUGGLING TO ATTEND SCHOOL

### Support mental and physical health

Schools and colleges should develop an environment where all pupils with mental and physical health conditions feel properly supported so that they can play a full and active role in school life, remain healthy and achieve their academic potential.

### Assess, acknowledge and support Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SEND children and YP are more likely to struggle with attendance, especially those with needs not yet fully assessed, understood and supported. SEND includes ADHD, Autism, PDA, Sensory Processing Difficulties, Dyslexia, executive functioning, processing and working memory, learning differences, and social, emotional, mental and physical health conditions. These may affect their ability to learn, to communicate, and regulate emotions or behaviour.

Missing the signs of these needs or focussing only on emotional needs and/or parenting based factors can cause delays in arranging appropriate support and increase the risk of school trauma or burnout.

### Referrals to specialist health or education professionals

A child or young person may need referrals to mental health teams, CAMHs, pediatricians, Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists or specialist teaching services. An Educational Psychologist can assess a child young person's barriers to learning and recommend appropriate interventions. Struggling, or being unable to attend school or college is often a symptom of need, perhaps not yet identified.

Schools do not have to wait for a formal diagnosis before providing support to pupils but should follow advice from relevant professionals, and listen to children and young people, and their parents.

## Listen to children and young people. Collaborate on person centred evidence based plans

Children and young people and their parents, school or college and other professionals should work together to develop a flexible, tailored, evidence based action plan, SEND support plan and/or an individual health care plan to remove barriers, and provide necessary support.

Plans should be shared with all staff and include the necessary training and resources.

An \*EHC needs assessment may be necessary for a child or young person who is struggling with school attendance who "has or may have special educational needs and may need special educational provision to be made through an EHC plan\*", or an early review if they already have an ECHP. They may need specific support, or an alternative to their current provision. \*or statement in Wales or Scotland.

### Early Help and Social Services referrals

Some families may benefit from Early Help or social care assessments, but school attendance difficulties are not necessarily safeguarding or parenting issues. It is vital that there is multi-agency understanding of the issues and guidance surrounding these difficulties. Any interventions should be led by professionals who are qualified and experienced in SEND, mental health and attendance difficulties.

### Respond to all incidents of bullying and assault

Schools, colleges and Local Authorities have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. Schools' anti-bullying policies should set out the actions which will be taken to prevent or address all forms of bullying.

### Home Education

Parents have a right to educate their children at home. This works well when it is a positive, informed and dedicated choice. Pressure should not be put on parents to remove a child from a school roll as they then become solely responsible for their child's education.

### Authorising absence

Schools must record absences as authorised where pupils cannot attend due to illness (both physical and mental health related). There is no need to routinely ask for medical evidence to support recording an absence as authorised.

### Provide learning and connections while absent

Children unable to attend school should be supported to access a broad and balanced education, suitable for their needs, to enable them to maintain academic progression, allowing them to thrive and prosper. Schools should welcome pupils back following absence, and provide support to build confidence and bridge gaps in learning.

The LA are responsible for arranging education for children who, because of illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education, as soon as it is clear that the child will be away from school for 15 days or more. LAs should look at the evidence for each individual case, even when there is no medical evidence, to make a decision about providing alternative education.

Your Local Offer directory should provide information about local SEND services and support across education, health and social care including [SENDiass](#) and local support groups.



Proud to be members of the

**Children & Young People's  
Mental Health Coalition**



**COUNCIL  
FOR DISABLED  
CHILDREN**



Supported by



DO YOU HAVE A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON  
STRUGGLING WITH SCHOOL DISTRESS OR  
BARRIERS TO ATTENDANCE ?

**PLEASE JOIN US AT DEFINE FINE**



### Parental Mental Health and Self Care

Our aim is to ensure that parent carers are not alone, that they have a community to belong to and are supported to work with professionals to assess and plan appropriate support for their child or young person. Parenting or caring for a child or young person struggling with school attendance can be difficult. It is important to make sure you look after your own mental wellbeing and seek support for yourself.

Ways to prioritise  
your mental health

by Mellow doodles

