

Talking to your school about...

Anxiety Related Absence



Tips for positive communication

Now schools have returned some children and young people may be experiencing anxiety related to being back at school. For autistic children and young people it can be particularly hard to cope with all the changes taking place.

It's not possible to take away all of the sources of anxiety for learners but by schools and parents working together, they can help to reduce them.

The **National Autism Implementation Team (NAIT)** have put together 11 handy tips for parents and carers to help when talking to the school:



1

Don't wait, signs of anxiety build up over time. There is rarely one event that leads to anxiety related absence. It is okay to request a child planning meeting, particularly in preparation for times of transition (e.g. starting a new school year or planning for a residential visit).

2

You can talk to school staff about how your child shows (or doesn't show) that they are anxious.

3

Think about the 24-hour life of your child. Discrepancies between behaviours we see at home and at school are common and can be a sign of a problem building up e.g. some autistic children can 'hold it together' while at school and it is only at home that you see reactions to how they are feeling.

4

Many autistic children will not be able to talk about how they feel or to express what would help. Some may say what they think the adults want to hear. You can help school staff to understand your child's experience by sharing what you know from what you see and hear at home.

NAIT is a cross sector partnership working to support the delivery of the Scottish Government Strategy for Autism.

Whilst aimed at parents and carers of autistic children and young people, many of these tips will be helpful for families of children with a range of additional support needs who are missing school due to anxiety.



5

It can be helpful to reflect on what you have noticed has helped your child to be calm and well-regulated recently and in the past. Writing this down might help you remember the important things to share in meetings and discussions.

6

Be aware that there is rarely one solution. Discuss with your child's school ways that the school day can be made sufficiently predictable and desirable for your child to want to attend. Try to avoid solutions which involve rewarding your child for attending school. Good things should just happen.

7

Remember that the best solutions are usually in adaptations to the everyday environments of home and school. Simply reducing the time your child spends at school without other adjustments is unlikely to lead to sustained change.

8

Don't be afraid to talk about your own needs and those of your family. Anxiety related absence can have a significant impact on families in a range of ways.

9

On-going communication with the school will be important. You can work together with school staff to monitor a plan over a period of time. Persisting with a plan may lead to successes.

10

Agree the best way to communicate with the school outside of planned meetings. Discuss how you and school staff can share information about things that may affect your child's routine. Communication works best when it is planned, regular, balanced, honest and empathetic.

11

Be prepared for ups and downs.

There may be days where things do not go to plan but having a positive relationship with the school means you can communicate openly and respectfully about how things are going and work together to get the right support in place.



NAIT produce a range of resources to support practitioners working with autistic children including guidance on Anxiety Related Absence and the return to school. www.thirdspace.scot/nait/

Practical advice and information to support the inclusion of autistic learners can be found on the Autism Toolbox: www.autismtoolbox.co.uk



More information

For advice and information about additional support for learning contact Enquire on 0345 123 2303 or visit our website: www.enquire.org.uk

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This infographic was written in collaboration with:

