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How to get your child the right support at school

Many pupils will need extra help or reassurance at times, particularly during their first term somewhere new. And some may require additional emotional or physical support to help them flourish in the school environment.

Everyday worries

The first term back at school is often nerve-racking for parents and pupils alike. Any concerns parents or children may have about school life may well have been exacerbated by the disruption to education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic over the past eighteen months.

Almost all children worry about some aspect of school at some time or other. "Children worry about feeling inadequate, invisible or alone," explains [Dr Sharie Coombes](#), child and family psychotherapist and author. "They also worry about not knowing what to do, getting lost or left behind; or not knowing what to do if they need the toilet or where to go for lunch."

For these minor, everyday worries, it may be sufficient for parents simply to provide reassurance and advice. "It's a good idea to remind them that all the children will be feeling the same, and to reassure them that the staff will be able to help them with the information they need," advises Coombes. You may also wish to talk to their form tutor, if you feel further reassurance or vigilance is required.

Additional difficulties

While nearly all children will experience some anxiety and nervousness around issues at school at some point, it's important to recognise when your child might need additional help with their mental health.

Signs that your child is starting to struggle emotionally may include "a decline in self-esteem and confidence, a loss of previous resilience to challenges, more tearfulness or irritability," explains Coombes. Physical signs may also sometimes be an indicator of emotional problems or excess [stress](#). These may include: "complaints of tummy aches, headaches or feeling exhausted and avoidance of previously enjoyed activities."

In addition, your child may have a pre-existing or developing physical health problem that requires support at school.

Mental health support

If you feel your child would benefit from additional emotional support, it's worth finding out whether your school has a dedicated counsellor. An [estimated 84%](#) of secondary schools and 56% of primary schools now provide counselling, and this type of support can be invaluable in the school environment. If your school doesn't currently have a counsellor, you may need to speak to your GP or – if you are able to – may decide to pay for private counselling.

If you are unsure as to what to do, the organisation [YoungMinds](#) is a great place to seek help and advice for supporting your child's mental health at school.

Physical health

If your child has a physical health problem that will require additional support or understanding, it's important to inform the school as soon as possible.

Your school should have procedures and policies in place to manage and support children with health conditions, both short and long term. Depending on where your child's school is in the UK, they may have to adhere to specific legislation (such as the guidance '[Supporting Children with Medical Conditions in Schools](#)' in England). Regardless of location, all schools should have a system through which support can be provided. Your child may be issued with a personal plan to help ensure they have the best possible experience at school.

As well as offering the required physical support, your school should also take steps to educate staff on your child's condition if necessary, so that staff are aware of the ways in which the condition may affect your child's learning and behaviour.

First contact

The first port of call in your child's school is usually their form tutor or class teacher. The form tutor will have an oversight of your child's school experience and will be able to speak to other members of staff on your behalf. If you speak to your child's form teacher and feel the issue has not been resolved, try contacting the child's Head of Year, who will be able to look into any issues for you.

Your school should also have policies on how to support children's mental and physical health, and you should be able to request a copy of these to familiarise yourself with agreed procedures.

Next steps

If you feel that the school has not provided adequate provision for your child, try contacting a more senior member of staff – the deputy or head teacher. If you are still concerned, it's worth contacting the school governors or, if you are still having issues, the [Local Education Authority](#).

When a child is struggling, it can be extremely worrying for parents. But the majority of schools will be well-versed in helping children with a variety of different health conditions. So if your child has additional needs, or you are worried about any aspect of their health, communication is key.

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