



SAFEGUARDING NEWSLETTER

School Attendance & Mental Health

Reduced or non-attendance at school by a child or young person is often rooted in emotional, mental health or wellbeing issues. Non-attendance can include not attending entirely for prolonged periods or regularly missing whole days at school. It can also include:

- not going to their classroom
- not staying in class
- not attending some lessons
- avoiding some physical spaces or people.

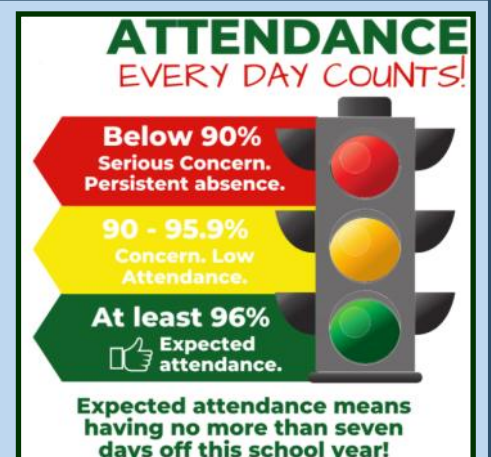
What causes non-attendance?

There is no one reason why children and young people might have difficulties attending school. It varies by individual, and is usually caused by a combination of various factors and their interaction, rather than a single cause. Potential risk factors for non-attendance can be split into three main categories:

1. Aspects specific to the child or young person
2. Factors to do with family and home and
3. Issues to do with school.



Research from the Children's Commissioner found that in the 2022/23 academic year, 22.3% of all students were persistently absent from school. In 2018/19, that figure was 10.9%, meaning that rates of persistent absence have more than doubled in this period.



SGB AND THE 'I'M HERE ATTENDANCE CAMPAIGN' IN CONJUNCTION WITH STAFFORDSDHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Why are we running a school attendance campaign?

Across the UK, we were seeing a drop in attendance rates and attendance in Staffordshire schools is down by 2.3% compared to previous years.

SGB were chosen as one of the Staffordshire schools to trial this campaign. We felt we would benefit in running a unified campaign across Staffordshire to support students and schools.

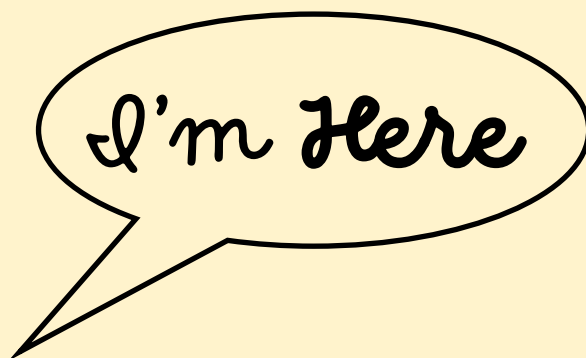
The official launch of this campaign to all Staffordshire schools was January 2026.

What is the I'm Here campaign?

We know that one of the main reasons for low school attendance is students missing school due to mild illness or anxiety.

Students told us that when they're finding it hard to attend school, the biggest factor that keeps them going is having a trusted relationship with a teacher or member of staff - someone they know they can turn to at school.

That's why the campaign calls on school staff to actively open up conversations with students and be alert to the early signs of anxiety.



What Parents & Carers can do to help their child's Attendance.....

Supporting your teen's mental health: Guidance for parents and carers

The teenage years can be a turbulent time and it's natural for young people to experience mood swings or changes in behaviour. But sometimes these changes can be signs of anxiety, low mood or mental health struggles. As a parent or carer, your instincts and relationship with your child mean you're often the first to notice when something isn't right.

Spotting the signs – When to look a little closer

Look out for patterns of behaviour or changes that seem unusual for your child and last more than a couple of weeks.

Emotional changes

- Consistently sad, anxious, irritable, or unusually angry
- Tearful for "no reason", or increasingly sensitive to criticism
- Expressing hopelessness, guilt, or low self-esteem

Behavioural signs

- Withdrawing from family life or avoiding friends
- Loss of interest in hobbies, activities, social events
- Changes in sleep — struggling to fall asleep, waking at night or sleeping too much
- Drop in motivation or school performance

Physical symptoms

- Constant tiredness or fatigue
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Frequent illnesses with no apparent cause (e.g. headaches, stomach aches)

Concerning behaviours

- Use of self-harm to cope (e.g. cuts, burns, scratching) — often accompanied by wearing long sleeves in hot weather
- Talking about feeling overwhelmed, worthless, or not wanting to be here
- Increased risk-taking behaviour, including alcohol or substance use

Starting the conversation

Opening up a conversation about mental health might feel uncomfortable — especially if your teen is withdrawn or defensive. Try these steps to gently encourage them to talk.

1. Pick a casual, relaxed moment

Choose somewhere calm and private - during a car journey, walk, or while doing an activity together, rather than making it feel like a formal 'sit-down'.

2. Notice, don't confront

Start with what you've observed: "I've noticed you've seemed more down recently and I just wanted to see how you're feeling."

3. Create space to talk

Let them speak in their own time. Show you're listening through eye contact, nodding, and open-ended questions like "What's been on your mind lately?" Avoid interrupting or jumping in with solutions.

4. Stay calm and open-minded

Try not to react with shock, panic, or judgement. Instead, reassure them that they're not in trouble and you're there to support them:

"Whatever you're going through, we'll get through it together."

5. Offer reassurance and practical support

- Acknowledge their feelings: "That sounds really hard."
- Remind them they are loved and not alone.
- Ask what would help — more time to talk, professional help, changes at home or school?

6. Know when to seek extra help

If your child is struggling to cope, or you're worried about their safety, seek support from:

- Your GP
- School mental health or pastoral team (insert contact details/link)
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) (insert contact details/link)
- Helplines like YoungMinds Parents Helpline 0808 802 5544 or Samaritans 116 123, available 24/7

You're not expected to have all the answers

The most important thing is that your child knows you care and you're there for them without judgement. Starting that conversation could be the turning point that enables them to access the help and support they need.

If you feel you may benefit from some training, please speak to the schools mental health lead or check [upcoming training](#) with StayWell.

Helpful apps

Here are some great [free apps](#) designed to help support mental health. They've got simple tools to help you manage stress, handle tough emotions, and learn more about what's going on in your mind.

Other Helpful resources

- [Mental Health Pathway](#)
- [Stay Well CYP | Stay Well Children & Young People Support](#)
- [School Anxiety and Refusal | Parent Guide to Support | Young-Minds](#)
- [Self-Esteem and Mental Health | Guide For Parents | YoungMinds](#)
- [Not Fine in School - School Refusal, School Attendance](#)
- [Mental Health Support Teams in Schools: Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust](#)

Some examples of non-attendance risk factors could include:

Child/young person	Family/home	School
Anxiety, depression or other mental health concerns	High levels of family stress (including financial stress, conflict or domestic violence)	Bullying and microaggressions
Difficulties with managing and regulating emotions	Changes to the home environment (including divorce, separation or parent/carer illness)	Difficult relationships with staff members
Trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)	Being a young carer	Lack of provision to meet specific learning or wellbeing needs
Difficulties making and maintaining friendships, being socially isolated	Loss and bereavement	Difficulties in particular subjects or physical spaces
Separation anxiety or attachment issues with a parent/carer	Family history of difficulties at school	Demanding, pressurised academic environment
Having a special educational need or disability, or being neurodivergent	Poor parental mental health	Transitions: from primary to secondary, or through key stages

What can Sir Graham Balfour do to help your child's attendance?

Although non-attendance is a complex issue, positive outcomes are very achievable.

- **Take a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing** - taking a whole-school approach to mental health has benefits for students, staff and families. It means involving all aspects of the school community in promoting and supporting wellbeing. By developing a culture which prioritises wellbeing and is supportive and safe, school staff can reduce the impact of non-attendance risk factors.
- **Keep an eye out for early indicators and start conversations** - as part of regular reviews of attendance data, school staff should try to spot early patterns of absence arising, keeping an eye out for irregular attendance and lateness.

Other early indicators can include:

- a parent or carer reporting that their child does not want to come to school
- physical signs believed to be linked to stress (e.g. stomach ache, sickness, headache)
- behavioural change e.g., reduced engagement with others and their learning.



If staff notice these patterns emerging, beginning a conversation with the student about how they are feeling can help them open up and ask for help. These conversations can feel difficult or uncomfortable, but it will let the student know that they are being listened to and supported.



- **Nurture protective factors** - a protective factor is an attribute or condition that can help protect a student against some of the risk factors outlined above. This can prevent non-attendance or reduce its impact. Schools play a very important role in developing protective factors in their students.

Ways to do this include:

- ensuring that all students have at least one adult at school who knows their strengths and concerns well e.g. Form Tutor
- building a school culture that recognises all emotional reactions as normal and helps students feel safe to express their emotions
- supporting the student in developing effective emotional regulation strategies
- providing quiet or safe spaces for students to access if they are experiencing intense emotions. At SGB, we have the Student Hub
- providing opportunities for students to contribute to decision-making in the school, helping them feel that their voices are valued and heard
- working to reduce everyday stressors in the classroom for students who easily become overwhelmed
- checking in regularly with students to see whether any agreed adaptations or strategies are working and useful, and adjusting if not.

