



**Educational Psychology Service**  
Sharing psychology to improve educational outcomes for those young people who need it most.

## **Supporting Attendance: An assessment and intervention toolkit**



# Fife Council Educational Psychology Service

## Background

This toolkit aims to support practitioners working with children and young people who are presenting with emotion-based school non-attendance and provides a framework to support assessment and intervention.

The language we use is important. Throughout this toolkit, we are using the phrase '**emotion-based school non-attendance**'. Historically, you may have heard of this being referred to as school refusal or school avoidance. These terms imply an element of choice and suggest the solution lies within the child or young person themselves. We now understand that non-attendance is usually related to a child or young person's emotional wellbeing which is largely influenced by a range of environmental factors. (NAIT, 2020; Zapata et al., 2018).

The toolkit was developed to link with Fife Council's OneNote about attendance: [Attendance, Engagement & Participation](#)

## Research

The diagram below outlines 6 key themes identified in research investigating practice that most effectively supports learners whose emotional wellbeing is creating a barrier to school attendance (Corcoran et al., 2022; Daily et al., 2020; Durham & Connolly, 2017; Finning et al., 2018; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014; Sommer et al, 2017; Zapata et al., 2018).



In summary, the literature suggests that early identification and intervention are key. Central to this is having a robust and consistent process for recording and monitoring attendance. The research calls for a staged approach to assessment and intervention where relationships are at the centre. Schools that are nurturing and reflective are more open to working collaboratively with learners, their families and other supporting professionals. Collaborative working and pupil voice are

recurring themes in the research. They are also highlighted as good practice within 'Getting it Right for Every Child' and Fife's Child Wellbeing Pathway.

## **Assessment**

### *Importance of Early Intervention*

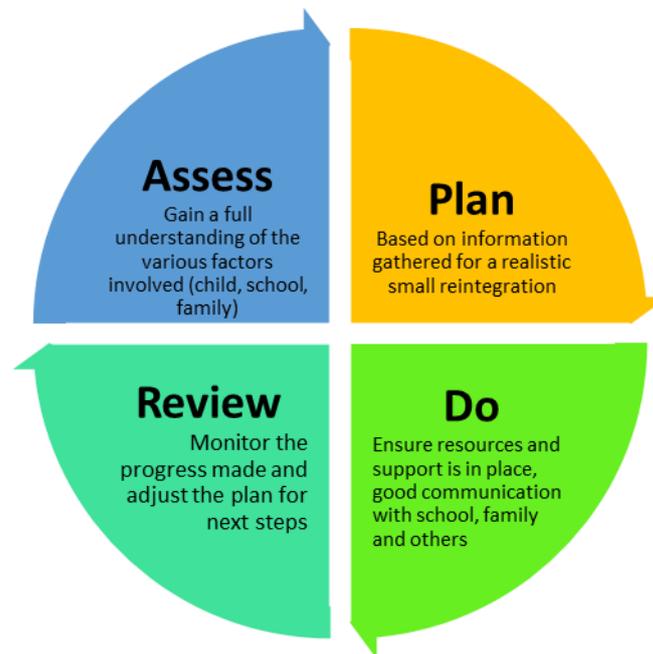
It is particularly helpful if all staff are aware of the early indicators of school non-attendance as shown in the first column of the table below. When early indicators are identified, information and concerns about a young person should be actively shared, and attendance carefully tracked and monitored. The second column of the table below shows indicators of non-attendance that is at risk of becoming an established pattern of behaviour.

Early indicators of emotion-based school non-attendance	Indicators of emotion-based school non-attendance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sporadic attendance and/or lateness</li> <li>• Parent reporting that CYP does not want to come to school</li> <li>• Physical symptoms believed to be linked to stress (e.g., stomach-ache, sickness, headache) or complaining of feeling ill.</li> <li>• Behavioural changes or fluctuations e.g., interactions with others, reduced motivation and engagement in learning tasks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Periods of prolonged absence</li> <li>• Persistent lateness</li> <li>• Parent/carer unable to support CYP to attend school</li> <li>• Identifiable patterns within non-school attendance e.g., specific days, subjects, staff members</li> <li>• Providing minor reasons for school absences</li> <li>• CYP experiences anxiety in relation to home factors</li> <li>• CYP displays greater reliance upon family members e.g., separation anxiety</li> <li>• Concerns around academic progress due to non-school attendance / missed education</li> <li>• CYP displays increased anxiety in relation to their learning and/or poor self-concept as a learner</li> <li>• Low self-esteem and/or lack of confidence</li> <li>• Struggling in relation to peer relationships and/or social situations</li> <li>• Physical symptoms believed to be linked to stress (e.g., stomach-ache, sickness, headache) or complaining of feeling ill.</li> <li>• Displays of emotional dysregulation and/or distress</li> </ul>

*Taken from: Solihull EPS: Emotionally-Based School Non-attendance: Guide for Professionals*

## *Assess, Plan, Do, Review*

Where concerns about a young person's attendance are identified, further information needs to be gathered from them, their families and any involved professionals. Understanding the young person's unique circumstance and individual reasons behind the non-attendance will allow staff to identify supports and strategies that will work for them. Early intervention is key to avoiding school non-attendance becoming an entrenched pattern.



*Taken from: St Clements Hill Primary Academy SEND: Information Report*

The Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle is a helpful way of conceptualising the process of supporting a young person to gradually reintegrate back into school.

The Promoting Attendance Assessment Tool below will help to build a holistic assessment picture of the barriers to a young person's school attendance. There are other examples of assessment tools you may wish to use in the appendices, including those that will elicit pupil voice. Using this assessment in conjunction with the intervention section of this toolkit will allow the development of an appropriate plan of support.

Recording assessment and planned interventions means you can review progress and determine further steps or goals. It also means that you have a clear understanding of who is involved and what that involvement looks like.

### *Promoting Attendance Assessment Tool*

The Promoting Attendance Assessment Tool should be completed in collaboration with the young person, key staff members and parents. It is not necessary to complete each box, and careful thought based on existing knowledge of the young person, their family circumstances and experiences should be given when deciding which factors should be explored. [See appendix 3 for a worked example](#). It is expected that completing the Tool will involve meeting on a few occasions so do not feel under pressure to complete all the boxes at once.

## Promoting attendance assessment tool

Name: School: Completed with: Date:

Review date:

Individual factors	Family/home factors	School factors
Emotional wellbeing/mental health (e.g., anxiety, low mood, separation anxiety)	Loss and bereavement/family change	Perceived bullying
Past experiences (e.g., traumatic events, illness, move school etc.)	Care-experienced	Relationships – with peers or staff
ASN (e.g., ASD, ADHD)	Parental physical and mental health needs	Difficulties with specific subject/lesson. Increased academic demand/pressure
Difficulties making and sustaining friendships	Acting as a carer; worried about parents' wellbeing or being separated from them during the day	Exams, assessments
Poor self-image	Family stress (e.g., illness, financial worries, conflict)	Primary/secondary transition, the complexity of secondary school
Challenges with learning/lack of appropriate curriculum	Parent working long atypical hours	Dysregulated behaviours in class (own or others)

Motivation, fear of failure	Family struggling to support attendance and/or engagement in school learning	School ethos (e.g., relationships, sense of belonging, connectedness/community)
Physical illness	Develop family support for resilience	Transition to school

## *Pupil Voice*

As identified in the research (Corcoran et al., 2022; NAIT, 2020) pupil voice is crucial when supporting emotion-based school non-attendance. Listening to the perceptions of learners themselves is thought to be the best way of ensuring that the assessment process is as individualised as possible. Person-centred assessment allows a shift in focus from the surface behaviour to the function of those behaviours, helping the team around the learner understand what underlying needs are not being met. Subsequently, individualised interventions and planning can then be identified to target support for these underlying needs.

Gathering the views of individual learners can be challenging for a range of different reasons. For example, they may be too shy, or they may say what they think you want to hear, rather than how they really feel. Therefore, consideration should be given to who from the team around the child is the best person to meet with the young person and gather their views. There are a range of tools available to support these conversations. We would encourage you to use your relationship with the learner to make a professional judgement when considering the best method or tool to use. Some examples include:

- Person-centred planning (PCP) tools (speak to your link EP for support with this if required)
- Pupil and Parent Attendance interview schedules (see [appendix 4 and 5](#))
- Scaling questions (see [appendix 6](#))
- The [NSPCC Solution Focused Practice Toolkit](#) includes lots of tools to support conversations with younger children or those that are older but less developmentally mature.

## Intervention

Staged intervention is based on the principle that a YP's needs are best and most effectively met at the universal level with an intervention designed to offer solutions in the least intrusive manner. The stages of intervention offer a framework for facilitating problem-solving to ensure that appropriate and proportionate supports are offered to YP and families who need them most, based on assessment information. Staged intervention does not imply that each stage must be tried and tested to move on. Rather, the stages are assessed and considered in relation to each individual's circumstances.

**When supporting a YP who is presenting with emotion-based school non-attendance, strategies should be implemented consistently to increase predictability, regardless of the stage of intervention.**

Universal level of intervention	School intervention: support & planning	Parent/carer involvement	Universal strategies
Attendance is reviewed regularly to identify early indicators of non-attendance (90-95%).	<p>Initial discussion/meeting → attendance issues resolved as a result</p> <p>or...</p> <p>Attendance issues not resolved → Arrange a follow-up meeting to review progress and consider moving onto an additional level of intervention.</p>	<p>Discussion/informal planning meeting with parents/carers regarding concerns, if appropriate.</p> <p>Information on managing anxiety provided to family, if appropriate.</p>	<p><b><u>What can we do now?</u></b></p> <p>School and LA attendance guidance referred to, ensuring appropriate procedures are followed. Respective responsibilities to support attendance should be agreed upon with key partners.</p> <p>Developing teacher awareness and understanding of non-attendance and strategies to support.</p> <p>Examples of interventions may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• breakfast club</li> <li>• soft start</li> <li>• emotion check-ins at regular points through the week/day</li> <li>• timeout card</li> <li>• alternative break and lunch plans</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mindfulness exercises</li> <li>• timetable review to rate subjects and match to teacher approach where appropriate</li> </ul> <p><b><u>What information do we need?</u></b> Explore YP's views of school to identify and understand any barriers to engagement or triggers for non-attendance.</p> <p>The CIRCLE resource - Inclusive Classroom Scale &amp; Participation Scale - could be used to consider environmental factors and supports.</p> <p><b><u>What additional support might we need?</u></b></p> <p>Information shared with involved partners.</p> <p>Consultation from partner agencies may be appropriate in line with the principle of early intervention. This can offer the opportunity to explore supports and their effectiveness. Examples of agencies who could be consulted depending on the context include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational Psychology Service</li> <li>• ASIST</li> <li>• CAMHs Primary Mental Health Workers</li> </ul>
<b>Additional level of intervention</b>	School intervention: support & planning	Parent/carer involvement	Additional strategies

<p>YP attendance 80-90%</p> <p>YP's difficulties are having a detrimental impact on their engagement with learning and/or experience of school as well as wellbeing.</p>	<p>Complete the Promoting Attendance Assessment Tool (see above)</p> <p>Following completion of assessment  → implement interventions at an additional level  → following APDR cycle through a series of regular short review meetings (this may involve the creation of a return to school plan or single/multi-agency Child's Plan)</p> <p>Attendance issues resolved as a result of intervention and/or APDR cycle</p> <p>or...</p> <p>Complex attendance issues identified which raise significant concerns about the YP's emotional well-being</p> <p>→ Intensive intervention</p> <p><b>A record of the meetings should be kept</b></p>	<p>Where concerns continue, review actions taken to address concerns, with pupil and/or parent/carer</p> <p>Family to maintain and support pupil's engagement in activities outwith the home, including maintaining peer relationships</p>	<p>As universal strategies</p> <p><b><u>What can we do now?</u></b></p> <p>Attendance guidance referred to, ensuring appropriate procedures are followed.</p> <p>Consideration of targeted interventions based on areas highlighted in Promoting Attendance Assessment Tool:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adapted curriculum/timetable (e.g., reduction in number of subjects, increasing movement breaks and/or check-in periods during day)</li> <li>• identified safe space in school</li> <li>• reducing time in school through an Agreed Reduced Attendance plan (previously Approved Flexible Package/flexi-schooling) <a href="#">NYP14</a></li> </ul> <p>Where a YP's timetable is adapted, and a gradual staged return to school is agreed, then colleagues/partners should decide on the best way to record attendance and set timescales to review progress.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to creating a single or multi-agency Child's Plan.</p> <p><b><u>What information do we need?</u></b></p> <p>Continue to engage with YP to explore their views and experiences of school. Consider using open questions and rating scales to support collaborative problem-solving.</p>
			<p><b><u>What additional support might we need?</u></b></p> <p>Discussion with other agencies (e.g., EP Service, PSS, Primary Mental Health Workers, Counselling Services, Family Support</p>

			<p>Service) to provide consultation/advice, direct involvement in meetings or undertake individual work with YP.</p> <p>When seeking direct involvement from a partner agency, discuss a request for assistance or arrange a child wellbeing meeting to plan and agree support.</p>
<b>Intensive level of intervention</b>	School intervention: support & planning	Parent/carer involvement	Intensive strategies
When attendance does not improve regardless of	Regular review meetings following the ADPR cycle. A single or multi-	Parents/carers should be invited to attend and contribute towards regular	As universal and additional strategies <b><u>What can we do now?</u></b>

<p>universal and additional intervention (&lt;80%).</p> <p>Assessment identifies complex needs resulting in significant concerns about the YP's emotional well-being which are impacting the pupil's ability to access education.</p> <p>Concerns about accessing the wider community may also have been raised.</p>	<p>agency Child's Plan should be created to record actions</p>	<p>review meetings and the Child's Plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further adaptation of school day and curriculum through alternative curricular activities</li> <li>• Consider the need for an Agreed Reduced Attendance plan if not already in place</li> <li>• Consider in-person contact with mainstream school where the YP is in an off-site provision (e.g., PSS)</li> <li>• Consider how best to maintain link with pupil (e.g., through class update letters in Primary, or a Glow message/phone call from key staff in Secondary)</li> </ul> <p><b><u>What information do we need?</u></b></p> <p>A key adult will continue to engage with the YP to help them express their views and support them to be at the centre of the planning and review process.</p> <p><b><u>What additional support might we need?</u></b></p> <p>Consider a referral to other agencies for support (Health, Social Work, FSS, Third Sector e.g., DAPL), particularly where there are wider care concerns.</p>
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## References

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[ent on Attendance to Classes and School Performance/link/5c0e4c54a6fdcc494fe90ac9/download](#)

## Appendices

*Appendix 1: Other tools which can be used to support further assessment:*

Tool	Where to Access
<b>Assessing and understanding anxiety: Anxiety is Normal Pack</b>	<a href="#">Anxiety is Normal</a>
<b>Exploring resilience: School-based Resilience Assessment Tool</b>	<a href="#">School-based Resilience Assessment</a>
<b>Coaching Conversations</b>	<a href="#">Coaching Conversations Pack</a>
<b>GIRFEC assessment</b>	<a href="#">National Practice model</a>
<b>Using a trauma-informed approach</b>	<a href="#">Using a Trauma Informed Approach to Return to School</a>
<b>NAIT questions to support planning for ASD attendance issues</b>	<a href="#">See appendix 2</a> within this guidance

Appendix 2: Assessment questions to support autistic young people

**Questions to guide next steps in planning**

*(from NAIT Anxiety Related Absence Guidance, 2020)*

Are expectations developmentally matched?
Are daily routines at home and school sufficiently predictable?
Is the child/young person supported to be as independent as they can be in daily routines?
Are the school environment and activities sufficiently desirable?
Are existing strategies and key messages consistently implemented?
Is there consistency from adults across the school?
Has the child/ young person experienced disrupted expectations? If so, what happened and what can we learn from this?
Does the child/ young person experience success?
Does the child/young person have enough opportunities to initiate and make choices?
Does the child /young person know what they are being asked to do and do they see the point –are their experiences meaningful to them?
Have the people around the child or young person understood and made adaptations for differences in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social communication?</li><li>• Sensory preferences?</li><li>• Thinking style?</li></ul>
Are the right people involved?
Is there an explicitly agreed and effective home school communication system in place?

Appendix 3 – Worked Example

### Promoting Attendance Assessment Tool

Name: X X (P3)

School: X PS

Completed with: Ms X (teacher) Date: Review date:

Individual factors	Family/home factors	School factors
Emotional wellbeing/mental health (e.g., anxiety, low mood, separation anxiety)	Loss and bereavement/family change	Perceived bullying
X appears to like school and seems very happy to be in school when he is there.	Dad in prison. Mum reports they are visiting Grandad in Glasgow who has been unwell. Older sibling now living with Gran.	
Past experiences (e.g., traumatic events, illness, move school etc.)	Care-experienced	Relationships – with peers or staff
		Lack of peer relationships due to poor attendance.
ASN (e.g., ASD, ADHD)	Parental physical and mental health needs	Difficulties with specific subject/lesson. Increased academic demand/pressure
	Mum seeing the GP for depression which is being treated.	

Difficulties making and sustaining friendships	Acting as a carer or worried about parents' well being	Exams, assessments
Lack of friendships		
Poor self-image	Family stress (e.g., illness, financial worries, conflict)	Primary/secondary transition, the complexity of secondary school
X has talked about wearing make-up and jewellery at home and that he can't do that in school - possibly feels different?	Mum has recently lost her house. Mum explained she has been struggling financially but this is now improving.	
Challenges with learning/lack of appropriate curriculum	Parent working long atypical hours	Dysregulated behaviours in class (own or others)
Achievement levels are low due to poor attendance since nursery		X is well behaved in school
Motivation, fear of failure	Family struggling to support attendance and/or engagement in school learning	School ethos (e.g., relationships, sense of belonging, connectedness/community)
	Mum reports X can be demand avoidant at home and sometimes refuses to get out of bed or get dressed.  School report difficulties with contacting Mum but haven't yet asked Mum about the best way to have regular contact.	
Physical illness	Develop family support for resilience	Transition to school

	Attendance has been irregular through the pandemic.	Family live outside catchment area. Happy when he can go on scooter to school, does not like going on bus
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### **Pupil Attendance Interview Schedule**

*The purpose of these questions is to find out about what you think about attending school.*

- What are the best bits for you about coming to school?
- What do you think you gain from coming to school?
- Are there bits of coming to schools that are a problem for you? If so, what are they?
- How could school help your attendance?
- What could your parents do to help?
- What could others do to help?
- Who are they?
- What do you want to get from your education?
- What do you see yourself doing when you leave school?

### **Parent Attendance Interview Schedule**

*The purpose of these questions is to find out about what you think about your child attending school.*

- Are there things about the school which make it difficult for your child to attend? If so, what are they?
- Are there other things that affect your child's attendance at school? What are they?
- What have school staff done to try to help improve your child's attendance?
- What have you done to try to improve your child's attendance?
- What have other people (e.g., Social Work, Family Support Service) done to try to improve your child's attendance?
- What do you think would improve your child's attendance?
- For example, are there things the school could do? What?
- Are there things you could do? What?
- Are there things other people could do? Which people? What?
- You probably get invited to meetings in school about your child. How do you feel about these meetings? Are they helpful/not helpful?
- Is there anything that school staff do to make these meetings easier for you/more helpful?
- Are there things they do which make them hard for you to attend/less helpful?
- If you could change one thing about the school, what would it be?

### **Solution Focused Questions for use with Young People**

#### **Miracle question**

Hook et al. (2006) describe this question as encouraging curiosity about the young person's preferred future:

*Imagine when you go to sleep tonight a miracle happens, and the difficulties you have talked about disappear. As you were asleep you didn't know a miracle had happened. When you wake up what would be the first signs that a miracle had happened?*

### **Strengths Finding**

- What subjects do you think are going the best?
- If I had a video camera in those classrooms, what would I see that would let me know they were going well for you?
- If I spoke to the Teachers in those classes, what do you think they would say about how things were going for you?
- What do you think they would say they were pleased with?
- What talents or skills would I see you using or learning in those classes?
- Who else notices you have those skills or talents?
- How do they know?
- Is there anywhere else that someone could see you using those skills or talents or that you feel you use them?
- Do you have any skills or talents that you don't feel you get to use at school?

### **Scaling**

Scaling is about the young person identifying where they currently are on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is their preferred future and 1 is the opposite. Questions you might ask:

- *How come you gave yourself that number rather than one?* (Identifies what is working well for them)
- If they score themselves quite low on the scale, ask how they:
  - *Got through or got by so far*
  - *Stopped things getting worse*
  - *Manage to come to school*
- To focus on a preferred future:
  - *What would the next small step on the scale look like to you*

- *What would you need to do to get to six?*

*(Hook et al., 2006)*

### **How is school going? An adapted example of scaling questioning**

How did today /yesterday go at school? If you were to rank it from 1 to 10, with 10 being brilliant and 1 being you didn't enjoy it at all, what number would you give it?

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10  
☹ \_\_\_\_\_ ☺

- What made it a (whatever number was given)?
- What went well?
- Is there anything that could move it up the scale just a little bit?
- Was there anything that went better than you thought it would?
- What was the best thing that happened today /yesterday?