**For use by School,
Parents, Children and Young people**

Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership **NHS**

NHS Trust

Post Covid Restrictions return to school - School Refusal Action Plan

School Refusal is sometimes referred to as Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). This is when A Child/young person has great difficulty or fear of attending school. This is quite different to truancy. We know that often there are emotional reasons for school refusal, including difficulties with worry and anxiety.

Due to the worldwide pandemic, many have experienced months of school closures. Students have been at home and away from any educational setting for some time. As families prepare for the reopening of schools we may see:

- some reoccurring avoidant behaviours in children who already displayed school refusal in the past
- New avoidant behaviours in children who previously have had no difficulties with attending school.

We do know that avoidance of school will only increase and reinforce your child's fears over the long-term, and make it increasingly more difficult to attend.

<u>**Some common worries about returning to school after the summer break:**</u>

Who will be my new teacher?

What if my new teacher is mean?

Will any of my friends be in my class?

What if I miss the bus?

Will I fit in?

Are my clothes OK?

Will I look stupid?

Who will I sit with at lunch?

<u>Possible worries about returning to school post covid restrictions:</u>

- Contracting the virus, passing it onto loved ones or even dying.
- Worry around loss and bereavement
- Health based concerns regarding re-integrating in society when the virus is still very much centre stage in the media.
- Concern about changing friendship sets due to isolation and a new year group
- A preference for the slower paced lockdown lifestyle
- Fear of academic abilities/ or being behind peers
- Decreased motivation and mood after reduced physical activity
- Fear of being away from loved ones during the day
- Worries and Anxiety relating to all of the above factors

Having a plan can help empower and give a sense of control and reassurance about returning to school.

"School refusal occurs when stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience and when 'pull' factors that promote school non-attendance overcome the 'push' factors that encourage attendance" Thambirajah et al, (2008)

If your child is concerned about returning to school having a plan may help:
School Refusal Action Plan Tips:

Action Immediately	2 weeks before term	Back to school
Identify the positive aspects of school or college e.g.: good friends, favourite subjects. We refer to this as the "push" factors. Identify the challenging aspects of school/college e.g: worry about work being too challenging, or having no friends, we refer to this as the "pull" factors. This will be really helpful information to share with school or college.	Agree what a first day back will look like. School or college may have formed their own handout to help with this. Ask for clarification of any measures around covid: and explain how this will impact upon your school day and routine	Use your practised morning routine: allow extra time until this is an established routine. Aim for a calm household to help you and your child stay regulated.

School refusal action plan: Post Covid restrictions return to school/college

Action Immediately	2 weeks before term	Back to school
Make contact with school or college: request support, inform them of your concerns. Let them know about the push and pull factors. Leave your email address or telephone number with school.	Plan a simplified and predictable routine: For example: waking up, eating breakfast, and going to bed at regular times to begin with. **Refer to routine planner handout: Visual/tick list**	Use a 2 way communication tool: diary or online school platform daily to establish regular contact with your named contact at school/college. Share concerns and celebrate progression.
Think about sleep routine now, readjusting back to a pre covid sleep pattern. **Refer to website for strategies:** https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/advice-support/sleep-advice/common-sleep-scenarios/sleep-advice-for-children/	Identify a named person in school/college that you can contact if they are feeling overwhelmed. For secondary and college aged students prepare for returning to college or school: **Refer to: Return to college or school post covid checklist handout**	Try to Redirect your child away from excess worry. The fun aspects may be getting overlooked by worries. Redirection can help when there is a cycle of worry. Attempt to reframe worries.**Refer to website for strategies:** https://learnykids.com/worksheets/reframing-negative-thought
Find out the names of the class teacher, form tutor, teaching assistant, pastoral care or SENCO (special education needs coordinator) for future reference.	Offer reassurance, be mindful of the need for excessive reassurance, use problem solving skills: **Refer to website for strategies:**https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/ProblemSolvingWorksheet	Think about/plan your after school conversation. Rather than focus on what went wrong: Ask your child, "tell me about three things that were great today?".
Practice allocated, supported worry time daily, refer to the worry bucket tool resource. Encourage specified worry time to reduce generalised worry. **Refer to worry bucket handout**	Help your child understand how worry or anxiety can cause physical symptoms in our bodies. **Refer to website for helpful strategies:** https://cwrise.com/anxiety	If your child talks about concerns, try not to say "don't worry", Instead problem solve and plan. **Refer to website for strategies:**https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/ProblemSolvingWorksheet
Model and Practice coping strategies at calm times, when mastered encourage use when feeling worried/anxious: Use relaxation strategies, breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, grounding techniques and a form calm down kit. **Refer to: calm down kit handout and relaxation strategies listed in other resources.**	Fit in new ways to relax and unwind into your day: **Refer to website for strategies re post covid return to school/college:** hhttps://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zmtxdp3 Make a calm down kit with all your favourite things, Refer to website for strategies:https://www.teenbreathe.co.uk/2019/09/10/create-a-self-care-kit/	At drop off, separate from your child confidently and calmly, if they resist, model calm behaviour "I can see that going to school is making you scared, but you still have to go. Tell me what you are worried about, so we can talk about it".

School refusal action plan: Post Covid restrictions return to school/college

	Action Immediately	2 weeks before term	Back to school
	Consider completing the dimensions tool for helpful strategies for any advice regarding any young person's non urgent mental health difficulties. 	Practise self-care/relaxation strategies to cope with the physical symptoms of worry: **Refer to websites for relaxation strategies:** https://relaxreleaserenew.co.uk/exercises/breathing-exercises-part-1-blowing-candle/	Praise your child for resilient behaviour. This will increase resilience and self-esteem. Celebrate success.
	If your child asks covid related questions answer them in an age appropriate manner: **Refer to website for strategies re covid:** https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/healthy-parenting	Establish a safety plan with school in case things don't go to plan and your child is asking to go home. This will ensure you are both in agreement with the outcome. If focused on worrying thoughts at school: **Refer to the grounding handout**	Make time to do things you enjoy, chill out, speak to friends, plan down time into your day. **Refer to website for strategies:** https;//youngminds.org.uk/find-help/looking-after-yourself/take-time-out/
	Tune into your own behaviours, how do you respond to news about the pandemic? Or things that worry you? how are your coping skills? Reach out for help around this. **Refer to website for strategies and advice:** https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks/self-care-for-anxiety/	Agree strategies with school/college to ensure successful attendance: Strategies could include: Time to re-focus throughout the day. • Talking to a trusted adult. • Having a break time buddy. • Spending a few minutes with a calm down kit	Request a review with school/college if things aren't going to plan. It is helpful to focus on: The Push, The Pull and problem solving.

If you still have concerns about school refusal and possible mental health difficulties parents and carers can self-refer to the Primary Mental Health Team (PMHT) via Rise. We can offer a telephone consultation and provide advice and guidance. If needed we can refer onto more appropriate services within RISE.

For immediate helpful strategies please complete the dimensions tool: https://cwrise.com/dimensions-tool

To book a PMHT consultation call:

If the child or young person lives in Warwickshire call: **07917504682** or email: https://risecommunityoffer@covwarkpt.nhs.uk

If the child or young person lives in Coventry call: **02476 96147**

School refusal action plan: Post Covid restrictions return to school/college

Helpful Rise Resources to refer to:

➢ Return to college or school post covid checklist
➢ Routine planner
➢ Worry/stress bucket
➢ Grounding activity
➢ Rise CWPT website for an overview of our services/ support and advice:
  https://cwrise.com/
➢ Rise have a wide range of online resources for children and young people specifically around covid-19: https://cwrise.com/resources-for-children-and-young-people-covid-19
➢ Rise video resource re bereavement:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nlYkfdb16E
➢ The Rise dimensions tool, a web based app to support the well-being of children and young people: https://cwrise.com/dimensions-tool

Helpful strategies/advice from other sources:

➢ Fight/Flight: physical responses to anxiety and perceived threat:
  https://www.psychologytools.com/resource/fight-or-flight-response/
➢ Problem solving tools :https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/ProblemSolvingWorksheet
➢ Candle Breathing exercise: https://relaxreleaserenew.co.uk/exercises/breathing-exercises-part-1-blowing-candle/
➢ Relaxation strategies, Progressive muscle relaxation:
  https://www.savethechildren.org/us/what-we-do/emergency-response/coronavirus-outbreak/resources/easy-at-home-relaxation-activities-to-help-calm-kids
➢ Advice re mental health, returning to school and coronavirus:
  https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/returning-school-after-lockdown
➢ Parent information: https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/fis
➢ Parental advice relating to parenting and corona virus:
  https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/healthy-parenting
➢ Advice for carers concerned about corona virus: https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19

Helpful strategies/advice from other sources:

➢ Sleep Hygiene: ://https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/advice-support/sleep-advice/common-sleep-scenarios/sleep-advice-for-children/
➢ Reframing your thoughts: https://learnykids.com/worksheets/reframing-negative-thoughts
➢ School refusal advice: https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-guide-to-support-a-z/parents-guide-to-support-school-anxiety-and-refusal/
➢ Advice for parents regarding returning to college and school:
  https://childmind.org/article/teenagers-and-reopening/

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Post Covid Return To School/College Tick List:

Actions	Done	Next steps Needed
Find out when I start: date/time and finish		
Where do I go on my first day		
Who is my form tutor		
Have I got a copy of my time table/when will I get this:		
Will I be in a bubble/who is in my bubble?		
What restrictions/rules will there be because of Covid		
Who can I talk to at school/college if I'm worried or overwhelmed		
What stuff do I need for school/college: stationary/resources/uniform		
5 things I can do at school/college if I feel overwhelmed		
How will I plan what school/college work I have: With a diary/On my phone/make my own plan		
List emergency telephone numbers for home and school:		
List what I like about school/college		
List what's not great about school: Use a problem solving handout to tackle this list or talk to a trusted adult or friend		

Rise Resource 2020

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Daily tick list planner Ideas

AM: Wake up at:

Action	M	T	W	T	F
Out of bed					
Make my bed					
Toilet break					
Have my breakfast					
Teeth brush/wash					
Get dressed					
Check my bag					

PM: Go to bed at:

Action	M	T	W	T	F
Give letters to parents					
Eat dinner					
Complete homework					
Bath/shower					
Teeth brush					
Prepare my bag					
Prepare my uniform					
Relax					
Lights out/bed					

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Blank daily tick list planner

AM: Wake at:

Action	M	T	W	T	F

PM: Go to bed at:

Action	M	T	W	T	F

<u>Grounding techniques to help take the focus away from worry</u>

What can I see NOW?

What can I hear NOW?
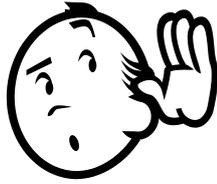
What can I smell NOW?

What can I touch NOW?

What can I taste NOW?

Rise resource 2020

RISE

What's in your stress bucket?

What's filling up your
stress bucket?

What's filling up your
stress bucket?
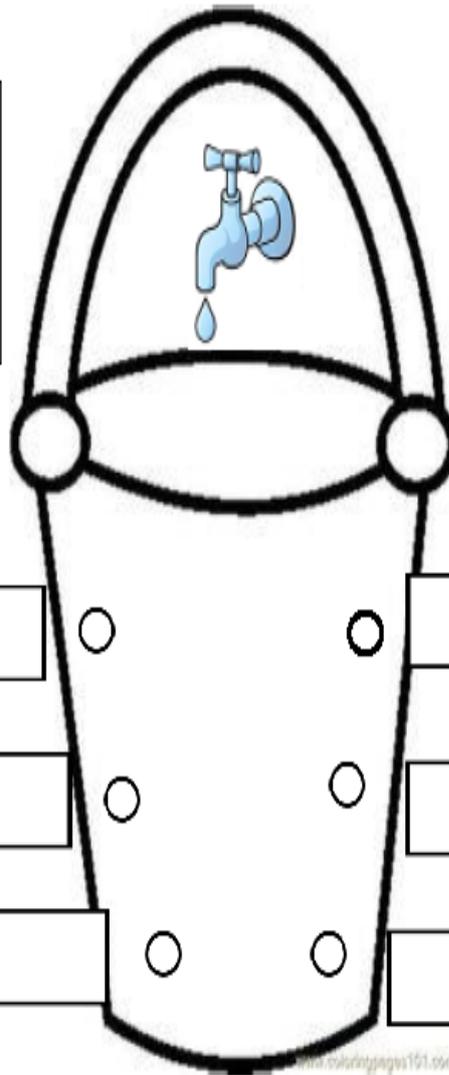
What puts a hole in your
bucket and lets out stress?

What puts a hole in your
bucket and lets out stress?

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References:

➢ Thambirajah et al, 2008, pg33.Understanding School Refusal, London, Kingsley Publishers
➢ Emotionally based school refusal(2020)retrieved from htttps://westsussex.local-offer.org/information:what-is-emotionally-based-school-avoidance:viewed 20/07/2020
➢ The stress bucket: formed using: Greenberger et al (1995) Mind over mood: A cognitive Therapy Treatment Manual for Clients. New York. Guilford Press

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