



Dudley School Nursing Service



**NHS**  
Dudley Integrated  
Health and Care  
NHS Trust

# Anxiety

in school age children



A Guide for Parents and Carers



# Contents

<b>A Guide to Anxiety in School Age Children .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Dudley School Nursing Service .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>What can affect a child’s mental health? .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>You can help .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Supporting your child and getting early help .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Reception – Year 2 .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Year 3 – Year 6 .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Year 7 – Year 9 .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Year 10 – Year 11 .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Useful websites .....</b>	<b>21</b>

# A Guide to Anxiety in School Age Children

**This guide provides information on children and young people's mental health, what can affect it and where to go if you need help with your child.**

Children and young people's minds are developing at a rapid rate.

And as they grow up, all the challenges they face can affect their behaviour, emotions and their view on the world.

In today's complex society, those challenges can lead to difficulties which have a big impact as children get older.

Helping your child develop socially and emotionally throughout their childhood and adolescence will help establish a solid foundation for a lifetime of positive mental health.

When a child's social, emotional and behavioural needs are consistently met, they are more likely to show success in school attendance and performance and they are more likely to make positive behaviour choices in the future.

One of the most important things a parent can do is spend time with their child and let their child know that they are loved, have a purpose in life and people to count on if bad things do happen. This is called building resilience.

When protecting your child and building resilience, it is also important to talk about negative experiences that can lead to worries and anxiety.

Some stress is normal and healthy, but too much can cause problems.

## Dudley School Nursing Service

Children and young people in school have access to a NHS School Nurse who offers a confidential service.



All schools in Dudley (except private or independent schools) have a designated School Nurse who can help support your child.

You can contact the school reception for the name and contact details of your School Nurse.

### **Your School Nurse can help with:**

General health and development / growth / diet / weight (underweight & overweight) / hearing / speech / vision / continence / infectious diseases / special needs / behavioural problems / bullying (including online and social media) / sleep problems / emotional wellbeing / accident prevention / puberty / childhood illnesses (e.g., asthma, epilepsy, allergies)



## What can affect a child's / young person's mental health

There are many things in life that can make growing up hard including:

- School pressures
- Friendships
- Family relationships
- Technology
- The media

Most children cope well, especially when they grow up in a supportive environment. But there are also things that happen around them that can trigger difficulties such as:

### Bullying

- Learning difficulties
- Starting a new school
- Moving house
- Divorce, separation or bereavement
- Distressing or traumatic experience, such as a car accident or house fire
- Physical and mental illness or disability in the family
- Parental disagreements

## You can help

Every child needs three key things:

- **Love**
- **Stability**
- **Understanding**

And it is the adults in their life who provide them.

That includes relatives, teachers and family friends as well as parents and carers.

Your support is essential in making sure that the environment your child grows up in, is best able to help them grow up with a healthy mind.

## Supporting your child and getting help early

Spotting a problem early, providing support and asking for help if you need it, can prevent your child from developing certain problems or difficulties such as:

- Becoming very withdrawn or sad
- Anxiety

## Identifying challenges and problems

The following pages contain information around the challenges and problems that children may experience in different school year groups as they grow up (some of the information maybe be repeated throughout the year groups).

The information is presented in the following format:

- **Challenges**
- **What is expected behaviour**
- **What parents can do when up against such behaviour**
- **If your child's problem continues**
- **5 ways to emotional wellbeing**
- **Gaming / Internet safety**



# Reception – Year 2

## Challenges

- School Readiness / Transition to Reception
- Transition to Year 1
- Separation anxiety
- Sleep
- Toileting
- Complaining of tummy aches or being ill
- Being 'clingy'
- Quickly getting angry or irritable, and being out of control during outbursts

## What is expected behaviour

### ***Ages 5 – 6 years***

- Enjoying playing with other children and are more conversational and independent
- Testing boundaries, but are still eager to please and help out
- Beginning to understand what it means to feel embarrassed

### ***Ages 7 – 8 years***

- Are more aware of others' perceptions
- May complain about friendships and other children's reactions
- Want to behave well, but are not as attentive to directions
- Try to express feelings with words, but may resort to aggression when upset



## What parents can do when up against such behaviour

- Be consistent, make clear rules and stick to them
- Do not overreact
- Redirect children toward positive behaviour
- Create a 'Worry Box'
- Try not to become overprotective or anxious yourself
- Mindfulness technique – practice simple relaxation, 3 deep slow breaths

## If your child's problem continues

If you are concerned about a possible mental health issue in your child, it is best to address the problem as soon as possible by talking to:

- Teacher
- School Nurse
- GP

If necessary, children can be referred to other services such as:

- Positive Steps (by the School Nurse or GP)
- Reflexions (by School or School Nurse)
- Paediatrician or CAMHS (by the GP)
- Paediatric Occupational Therapy
- Paediatric Physiotherapy

## 5 ways to emotional wellbeing

### ***Connect***

Set time aside to talk to your child each day.

Do fun things together as a family, such as playing games, reading, and going to events in your community.

### ***Be Active***

Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of anxiety across all age groups.

Walk to school.

Try and encourage your child to do an hour of enjoyable physical activity a day.

Encourage your child to join afterschool clubs or clubs in the community.

### ***Take Notice***

Take notice of your child, the little things matter.

Get involved with your child's school.

Meet the teachers and staff and get to understand their learning goals and how you and the school can work together to help your child do well.

### ***Give***

Give a smile.

Let your child know that you and other supportive adults are always available to listen and talk to.

### ***Keep learning***

Help your child set their own achievable goals, which will help them develop pride and become more independent and rely less on approval or rewards from others.

Learn something new every day.

## Gaming / Internet Safety

Agree rules, such as:

- Screen time, in front of the TV and computer, this should be limited to one to two hours a day, which will lead to more active play and better sleep patterns
- Ensure your child is watching age-appropriate programmes
- All devices should have parental controls set
- Show an interest in your child's social media / games



# Year 3 – Year 6

## Challenges

- Moving towards adolescence, becoming more independent
- Peer pressure
- Friendships
- Physical changes may be starting - puberty
- Preparing to start high school
- Wanting to be liked and accepted by others
- May start to take risks

## What is expected behaviour

- Spending a lot of time talking with peers
- Become sensitive to what others think of them and to seek adult approval
- Develop competitiveness, wanting to be first and best and get things right
- May be quite sensitive and overly dramatic
- Can change emotions quickly and display moments of anger or frustration
- Show interest in being more grown-up and able to begin tackling more responsibilities and routines
- Begin to develop their own point of view, which is sometimes different from parents' ideas

## What parents can do when up against such behaviour

- Make clear rules and stick to them, such as how long your child can watch TV or when your child has to go to bed
- Be clear about what behaviour is okay and what is not okay
- If your child continues to have challenging behaviour, redirect your child toward positive behaviours
- Avoid yelling and screaming. When calm, have discussions about why they should behave a certain way
- Be consistent. It is stressful to hear mixed messages. If you do not mean it, do not say it
- Praise your child for good behaviour and always recognise their accomplishments
- Help your child develop their sense of right or wrong. Discuss with them about risky things friends might try to coax them to do
- Talk with your child about the normal physical and emotional changes of puberty
- Children who feel good about themselves can fend off negative peer pressure and make better choices

## If your child's problem continues

If you are concerned about a possible mental health issue in your child, it is best to address the problem as soon as possible by talking to:

- Teacher
- School Nurse
- GP

If necessary, children can be referred to other services such as:

- Positive Steps (by the School Nurse or GP)
- Reflexions (by School or School Nurse)
- Paediatrician or CAMHS (by the GP)
- Paediatric Occupational Therapy
- Paediatric Physiotherapy

## 5 ways to emotional wellbeing

### ***Connect***

Set time aside to talk to your child each day.

Do fun things together as a family, such as playing games, reading, and going to events in your community.

### ***Be Active***

Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of anxiety across all age groups.

Walk to school.

Try and encourage your child to do an hour of enjoyable physical activity a day.

Encourage your child to join afterschool clubs or clubs in the community.

### ***Take Notice***

Take notice of your child, the little things matter.

Get involved with your child's school.

Meet the teachers and staff and get to understand their learning goals and how you and the school can work together to help your child do well.

### ***Give***

**Let your child know that you and other supportive adults are always available to listen and talk to.**

### ***Keep learning***

Help your child set their own achievable goals, which will help them develop pride and become more independent and rely less on approval or rewards from others.

Learn something new every day.

## **Gaming / Internet Safety**

Agree rules, such as:

- Screen time, in front of the TV and computer, this should be limited to one to two hours a day, which will lead to more active play and better sleep patterns
- Ensure your child is watching age-appropriate programmes
- All devices should have parental controls set
- Show an interest in your child's social media / games



# Year 7 – Year 9

## Challenges

- Puberty
- Seeking independence from parents
- Starting a new school
- Separated from current friends and having to make new friends
- Establishing their identity, little fish in a big pool situation
- Peer pressure
- Having to be organised with multiple lessons / multiple teachers
- Finding their way around unfamiliar surroundings
- Less nurtured and having to think for themselves
- An expectation that they will walk home without a parent, this scares some Year 7 children
- Increased homework and carrying more equipment
- Choosing subject options

## What is expected behaviour

- The young person will be more tired and irritable
- Hormones kicking in will make the young person more emotional at times
- Friendships become more important than spending time with parents
- The young person will be more selective with what information they choose to share with you
- Image and social media will have a major influence on what young people perceive to be correct



- Young people will start to question their identity/sexuality, and may start to show interest in others
- Behaviours and activities they have previously enjoyed will seem childish to them as they put on a persona of being grown up
- Risk taking behaviour can be exciting (experimentation with cigarettes etc.)

## What parents can do when up against such behaviour

- Give the young person some space
- Communicate, sit around table family meals or find some time each evening just to talk through how everyone's day has gone
- Encourage independence in small steps and increase it as the young person realises you can trust them
- Try not to appear shocked by what they say but listen and try to identify some positives / strengths you can work with
- Encourage some friendships in your home to get to know who they hang around with a bit better
- Realistic consequences for behaviour, do not ground them for a week when you only manage a day
- Do not overreact to a situation
- Monitor internet usage and sites, it may mean blocks on internet usage
- Remember you cannot be friend and parent. Your role is to parent and it is okay to have rules and boundaries as long as they are realistic and achievable
- Observe for changes in behaviour such as becoming withdrawn or isolated
- Ensure all parents/carers agree with parenting strategies so young person hears the same message

## **If your child's problem continues**

If you are concerned about a possible mental health issue in your child, it is best to address the problem as soon as possible by talking to:

- Teacher
- School Nurse
- GP

If necessary, children can be referred to other services such as:

- Positive Steps (by the School Nurse or GP)
- Reflexions (by School or School Nurse)
- CAMHS (by the GP)
- The What? Centre (including LGBTQ+ groups)
- Brook (sexual health for young people)
- Here4Youth
- Connexions
- Kooth (offer online counselling for children age 11+)
- Local MBC activities / youth clubs

***If you are worried that your child may be involved in a gang/ knife crime***

<https://parentinfo.org/article/if-your-child-is-in-a-gang>

## **5 ways to emotional wellbeing**

### ***Connect***

Set time aside to talk to your child each day.

Communicate.

Do family activities together.

Encourage young person to be part of a group which brings a sense of belonging (e.g., Cadets, Scouts, football, dancing etc).

It is good as a parent to talk to other parents then you realise you are not alone and you can share ideas.

### ***Be Active***

Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of anxiety across all age groups.

It also helps encourages sound sleep setting you up for the next day.

Try and encourage young person to do an hour of enjoyable physical activity a day.

Encourage your child to join afterschool clubs or clubs in the community.

### ***Take Notice***

Look out for when the young person is stressed or feeling low, becomes quiet.

Picking signs up early means issues can be resolved more quickly before they become entrenched.

### ***Give***

Giving back to the community encourages responsibility, maturity, sense of achievement and value.

There are lots of voluntary groups young people can get involved in such as soup kitchens, food banks, help the aged.

### ***Keep learning***

Ambition and drive.

## **Gaming / Internet Safety**

Agree rules, such as:

- Never giving out personal information and contact details online and the reasons why
- Advise them that whatever is posted online is there permanently, it can never be deleted

# Year 10 – Year 11

## Challenges

- Exploring relationships and sexuality
- Exam stress
- Bullying
- Social Media
- Concerns regarding mental health
- Gang affiliation

## What is expected behaviour

- Young people require more sleep, so it may be that your child is sleeping longer or appears tired
- Your child may become more secretive as they are developing in independence. Allow some level of privacy whilst balancing this with safety
- It is normal at this time that young people will experience some stress and we need a certain level of stress to function effectively. This will vary between individuals
- What is important to recognise is if the stress is having a negative impact on their quality of life

## What parents can do when up against such behaviour

- Encourage a good sleep pattern and a healthy balanced diet

- Encourage exercise and times for rest and relaxation
- Monitor the use of social media
- Allow an open dialogue for your child to discuss any concerns they may have

## **If your child's problem continues**

If you are concerned about a possible mental health issue in your child, it is best to address the problem as soon as possible by talking to:

- Teacher
- School Nurse
- GP

If necessary, children can be referred to other services such as:

- Positive Steps (by the School Nurse or GP)
- Reflexions (by School or School Nurse)
- CAMHS (by the GP)
- The What? Centre (including LGBTQ+ group)
- Brook (sexual health for young people)
- Here4Youth
- Connexions
- Kooth (offer online counselling for children age 11+)
- Local MBC activities / youth clubs

### ***Worried about exam stress?***

Senior consultant Dr Ramya Mohan offers some tips on exam stress and how to support your child with revision.

<https://parentinfo.org/article/helping-your-child-cope-with-exam-stress>

### ***Talking to your child about sex and relationships***

<https://parentinfo.org/article/talking-about-sex>

### ***If you are worried that your child may be involved in a gang/ knife crime***

<https://parentinfo.org/article/if-your-child-is-in-a-gang>

## 5 ways to emotional wellbeing

### ***Connect***

Encourage your child to be involved with clubs and groups.

Make family time a priority several times a week with face-to-face communication

### ***Be Active***

Encourage exercise, find an activity where there is interaction with others.

### ***Learn***

Whilst your child may feel overwhelmed with learning and revision try and encourage other forms of learning outside of the curriculum such as learning a new skill / sport or research your family tree.

### ***Take Notice***

Encourage time away from social media to take notice of what is around us.

Go for a walk in the woods or sit at a café and people watch.

### ***Give***

The value to self-esteem of doing something to help someone else is invaluable.

As your child is getting older maybe encourage some voluntary or paid work that makes the young person feel valued.

## **Gaming / Internet Safety**

As with anything moderation is the key.

It is important to ensure your child is acting safely in the online world whilst allowing some sense of independence.

# Useful websites

Family Lives ([www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk))

Internet Matters ([www.internetmatters.org](http://www.internetmatters.org))

Parent Zone ([parentzone.org.uk](http://parentzone.org.uk))

Childline ([childline.org.uk](http://childline.org.uk))

Young Minds ([youngminds.org.uk](http://youngminds.org.uk))

Connexions ([www.connexionsdudley.org](http://www.connexionsdudley.org))

The What? Centre Ltd ([www.thewhatcentre.co.uk](http://www.thewhatcentre.co.uk))

Kooth ([www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com))

Teen Sleep Hub ([www.teensleephub.org.uk](http://www.teensleephub.org.uk))

BEAT eating disorders ([www.beatingdisorders.org.uk](http://www.beatingdisorders.org.uk))

Health for Teens ([www.healthforteens.co.uk](http://www.healthforteens.co.uk))

Health for Children ([www.healthforkids.co.uk](http://www.healthforkids.co.uk))

ERIC – continence info and resources ([www.eric.org.uk](http://www.eric.org.uk))



Dudley Integrated Health and Care NHS Trust

[www.dihc.nhs.uk](http://www.dihc.nhs.uk)

Trust Headquarters: Brierley Hill Health and Social Care Centre  
Venture Way, Brierley Hill, DY5 1RU