

I WORRY ABOUT GOING TO COLLEGE

“What if...?”

“No one
likes me”

“I’m scared”

“I can’t...”

“I’m stupid”



**Young person’s quick guide on
emotionally related college avoidance**

ARE YOU FEELING ANXIOUS ABOUT COLLEGE?

Worrying or anxiety is a normal feeling that we all experience from time to time. It can keep us safe from harm or help us perform in difficult situations. However, sometimes anxiety or excessive worrying can become a problem especially when it stops us doing what we want or need to do.

Many young people worry about college. This is normal. Anxieties are part of life and learning to deal with them is part of growing up. But sometimes, our feelings can make us not want to attend college.

If you have high levels of anxiety and worry about attending college, you may be experiencing emotionally related college avoidance.



Reflect...

How do you feel when you think about college?

Regardless of how you feel, you are not on your own. We all feel like this from time to time because of things that happen in our life, at home, in college or elsewhere.

Struggling to sleep
Unwell
Unconfident
Angry
Worried
Out of control
Bad
Low in mood
Scared

THERE MIGHT BE THINGS IN COLLEGE MAKING YOU FEEL THIS WAY

- Problems with friendships
- Changing college
- Bullying
- Feeling too different from other people
- Worried about your appearance
- Worried about getting changed for PE or games

THERE MIGHT ALSO BE THINGS OUTSIDE OF COLLEGE THAT CAN MAKE YOU FEEL THIS WAY

- Death of somebody important to you
- Parents or carers arguing or splitting up
- A parent or carer who is ill
- Members of your family feeling worried, depressed or sad
- Death or loss of a pet
- Birth of a new brother or sister
- New people moving into your home
- Difficulties in getting to college
- Parents or carers not understanding your feelings

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DON'T ATTEND COLLEGE?

Reflect...

Worry about going to college

Impact on friendships and college work

Days missed from college

Thoughts and feelings on attending college

It is very important to try to overcome these difficulties as soon as possible.

It is important to let an adult know if you are worried about anything in college or at home and get help to make it better.

Most importantly, talk to somebody. This could be your parents, an adult at college, other family members or a friend.

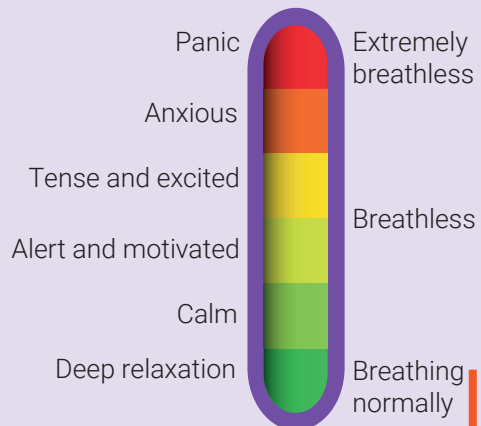
EXPLORING MY FEELINGS

Think about the things that are worrying you. Write a list or draw them, then order them from what you are most worried to least worried about.



For each, measure your anxiety on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most. You can use the scale to describe how it makes you feel and what these feelings may look or sound like.

You can explore situations that may make you feel a certain way and think about what you can do to reduce overwhelming or difficult emotions.



STEPS I CAN TAKE

Draw a ladder or use the one shown.

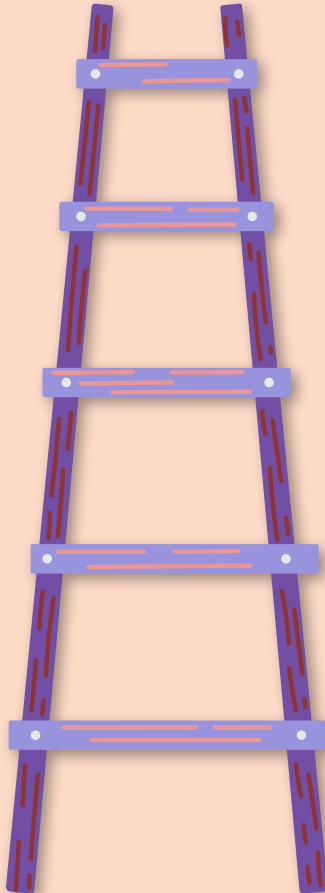
On the top rung, write the final step that you want to achieve to be able to attend college.

On the bottom rung, write the first thing you want to do to face your anxiety. This needs to be an action that is currently in reach.

Put other steps on the rungs, gradually building up to reach the top rung. Ensure steps are small and achievable.

Move on to the next rung when you feel ready.

Reward yourself for achieving each step.



WHAT CAN MY COLLEGE DO TO HELP ME?

Find an adult at college you trust and talk to them, they should listen and believe you. They can work with you and your parents to help find out what things are worrying you and what you and they can do to help you. These actions could be written up into a support plan so that you, your parents and college know what actions have been agreed to help support you.

WHAT CAN I DO TO GO BACK TO COLLEGE?

If your worries are so great that you are not attending college, it is important that you work with your college and your parents to help you get back to attending college as soon as possible.

Things you can do to help include:

- take part in the planning of how you will go back to college
- work with your parents and teachers to think of things that will help you
- think about a time that you did cope with a worry, what did you do then
- keep in contact with your friends and what is happening at college
- catch up on some of the work that you may have missed before you go back
- take little steps to get back into the routine
- take the chance to go to college and reflect on how you felt it went
- acknowledge the steps you have taken and celebrate the small successes

IF YOU'RE FEELING ANXIOUS, HERE ARE SOME THINGS THAT CAN HELP YOU IN THE MOMENT

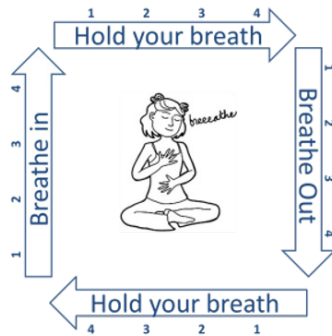
Visualisation



Calming music



Square breathing



Physical exercise



Grounding

Look around you and notice:

5 things you can see:
your hands, the sky, a plant

4 things you can feel:
feet on the ground, the chair

3 things you can hear:
birds chirping, your breath

2 things you can smell:
coffee, your lunch, clothes

1 thing you can taste:
a mint, gum, fresh air

MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

'Thoughts are not facts'

Thoughts have a very powerful influence on the way we experience our world and our feelings. Mindfulness is a way to observe your thought processes on a moment-to-moment basis. This non-reactive observation gives you the opportunity to see your thoughts differently.

- **Just watch your thoughts come in and leave, without thinking that you have to follow them.**
- **View your thoughts as a mental event rather than a fact.**
- **Write your thoughts down on paper.**
- **Ask yourself the following questions:**
 - Did this thought just pop into my head automatically?
 - Does it fit with the fact of the situation?
 - Is there something about it that I can question?
 - How would I have thought about it at another time, in another situation?
 - Are there any alternatives?
- **Gently ask yourself:**
 - Am I overtired?
 - Am I jumping to a conclusion?
 - Am I thinking in black and white terms?
 - Am I expecting perfection?

Reflect on how you feel:



CHALLENGING NEGATIVE AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS

We might have negative thoughts about ourselves or our ability to cope. For example, thinking 'I am not good enough' or 'Nobody likes me.'

We listen to our thoughts a lot, and often accept them as the truth without really challenging them. These thoughts can become loud and make it harder to hear the positive thoughts.

Identify a negative automatic thought that you experience and then ask yourself:

- What is the evidence for this thought?
- What is the evidence against this thought?
- What would my best friend say if they heard my thought?
- What would my teacher say if they heard my thought?
- What would my parents or carers say if they heard my thought?
- What would I say to my best friend if they had the same thought?
- Am I making mistakes? For example, blowing it up and forgetting my strengths or good points, self-blaming or predicting failure or thinking that I can mind-read what others are thinking?

Negative thinking patterns

All-or-nothing: 'If I don't get that 'A', I am a failure.'

Negative self-labelling: 'I didn't have anything to contribute to that conversation. I am so boring.'

Fortune telling: 'If I talk to that person, they are not going to want to respond to me.'

Minimising: 'I did well on that test, but I just got lucky, anyone could have done that.'

Overgeneralisation: 'I messed up my science test today. I'm never going to get anything right.'

Identify a negative automatic thought that you experience and then ask yourself:

What is the evidence
FOR this thought?



What is the evidence
AGAINST this thought?



Weighing up your thoughts,
what do you believe now?

WORRIED ABOUT A FRIEND?

Have you got a friend who might be experiencing emotionally related college avoidance? Here are some tips for how you can support them.

- **Keeping in touch** and letting them know that you are there for them.
- **Listening** to your friend and empathising with how they feel are helpful ways to support them. It can help them make sense of what is happening when they share their experiences with a trusted friend.
- Sometimes your friend might need to **rest and recover** from what is happening at college. You can find relaxing and fun ways to connect with them. This can be based on their interests and hobbies - it does not have to be related to how they are feeling about college.
- **Reach out** to them and invite them to stuff, even if they don't come.
- Your friend just might need a **reminder of their strengths and interests**.

If you found this guide helpful, you might wish to share this with them, or completing some of the activities together.

While looking out for friends is important, don't forget to look out for yourself too.

Do you think your friend is in danger? It's very important that they get help from a trusted adult.

If you need urgent help, but it's not an emergency, you can call the Mental Health Crisis Team on **0300 365 0300**.

If you need emergency help or are worried about your **immediate safety**, call **999**.

Childline is a free, private and confidential service where you can talk about anything. Call free at **0800 1111**.

If you have any concerns about child abuse, including peer-on-peer abuse, it is always best to report it. You can contact the **NSPCC Helpline** by calling **0808 800 5000**.

OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES AVAILABLE

Preparing for Adulthood (14 to 25 years old) Local Offer

Website: https://rbwm.afcinfo.org.uk/local_offer

Number 22

Number 22 provides free, confidential counselling to young people (11 years and above) and adults in Windsor, Maidenhead and Slough.

Website: www.number22.org

Phone: 01628 636661

Friends in Need

Friends in Need provide peer support and activities for people that are lonely, anxious or depressed.

Website: <http://www.bucksmind.org.uk/services/peer-support-groups/friends-in-need>

Phone: 07496 874882

KOOTH

Kooth is a website that children and young people (aged 11 to 18) can use to access online counselling which is anonymous and confidential.

Website: <https://www.kooth.com>

Youngminds

Youngminds is the UK's leading charity fighting for children and young people's mental health. They provide support and advice to young people, parents, carers and professionals.

Website: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk>

Talking Therapies (NHS)

If you live in England and are aged 18 or over, you can access NHS talking therapies services for anxiety and depression.

Website: www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-NHS-talking-therapies-service

Mental Health Integrated Community Service (MHICS)

MHICS provides specialised mental health support within the community for adults, focusing on recovery and resilience. The service can be accessed via a referral from your GP or other healthcare professionals.

