

Little Heath School - Supporting Your Child When School Feels Difficult

When school starts feeling harder to attend and when young people begin to feel overwhelmed

At Little Heath School we see attendance as a partnership between school and families. Our aim is always to understand what may be making school difficult and to work together to remove barriers wherever possible.

As they move through school, our students are often managing:

- increased academic expectations
- social pressures
- changing friendship groups
- planning for GCSEs and the future

For some young people this can lead to increasing worry about attending school, particularly in the mornings.

You might notice:

- stomach aches before school
- increased tiredness or irritability
- reluctance to leave the house
- worries about lessons or friendships

These experiences are very common during adolescence, and early support can make a significant difference.

Quick Summary – What Often Helps

- Keep expectations **calm but consistent** around attending school
- Break mornings into **small, manageable steps**
- Encourage focus on **positive connections in school** (friends, staff, subjects)
- Support **healthy sleep routines and phone boundaries**
- Let school know early if attendance is becoming difficult

WHAT TENDS TO HELP?

Keeping expectations calm but consistent

Young people often feel safer when adults remain calm and clear about expectations around attendance.

Many parents find it helpful to acknowledge the difficulty while encouraging attendance. If you are able to talk about how you manage any anxiety you have experienced, to normalise it, that makes a real difference to children; they see that it's normal to struggle a bit but help them to find their own coping strategies.

We have found that sometimes focusing on all of the things they are potentially missing can be helpful... not just learning, but they're missing friends, events, confidence and importantly, fun!

Breaking the morning into small steps

Some students feel overwhelmed by the idea of the whole school day.

Focusing on manageable steps can help:

- getting ready
- arriving at school
- settling into the first lesson

Confidence often builds once the day has begun.

Focusing on positive connections

Encouraging young people to think about:

- supportive staff, subjects they enjoy, friendships in school

Thinking about this can help shift attention away from worries.

What's also really important is what you do after school

When your son/daughter returns home, ask them to tell you one funny/interesting/good thing that has happened today that they would have missed if they hadn't been to school.

Encourage them to think about funny things they remember from primary school or lower down at LHS and things you remember from your own school days. We really want the students to realise that when they are not in school, they are missing out on great things, so focusing on those things is so important. Getting them to focus on what went well, not the negative, is absolutely crucial in changing their mindset about school.

Some people use gratitude journals, or make notes in their phones, anything to help them to see the positives in their day!

Sleep, Phones and School Readiness

Many young people feel more alert at night and struggle more with early mornings.

This biological change can be made more challenging by:

- phones and social media
- notifications during the night
- late-night gaming
- irregular sleep patterns

Many students who struggle with morning attendance are not deliberately avoiding school — they are simply extremely tired.

Signs sleep may be affecting attendance

You might notice:

- difficulty waking up in the morning
- feeling unwell in the morning but improving later
- frequent tiredness or headaches
- increased irritability

Why phones and social media matter

Social media platforms are designed to keep users engaged for long periods.

Many teenagers intend to check their phones briefly but end up scrolling much longer than expected.

Even small changes in bedtime can significantly affect energy and resilience the next day

Approaches families often find helpful

Different families manage this in different ways, but some common approaches include:

- creating a phone charging space outside bedrooms overnight
 - agreeing a time to shut off phone
 - limiting notifications during the night
 - encouraging consistent sleep routines across the week
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WHEN RETURNING TO SCHOOL FEELS DIFFICULT AFTER ABSENCE

Why returning to school can sometimes feel challenging

After several days away from school — even due to genuine illness — some students find that returning feels harder than expected.

This can happen for a number of reasons. Students may worry about:

- catching up on missed work
- feeling behind compared to their peers
- seeing friends again after time away
- explaining their absence
- managing a full school day after time at home

These worries are very common, particularly during the GCSE years when academic pressure can feel higher. Please encourage them to take one step at a time and get in touch if you need practical support with getting students back up to date with what they have missed.

What we often see

Many students report that the anticipation of returning feels more difficult than actually being back in school.

Once they attend, they often find:

- teachers understand when students have been unwell
- work can be caught up gradually
- routines settle quickly again

Maintaining or re-establishing routine can therefore be one of the most important steps in rebuilding confidence.

What can help our students return successfully

Parents often find the following approaches helpful:

- Focusing on returning rather than catching up immediately
- It is usually more important for students to rebuild the routine of attending school than to worry about completing all missed work straight away.
- Teachers can support students with catching up once they are back in lessons.

Keeping the return calm and low-pressure

Students often benefit from reassurance that they do not need to have everything “sorted” immediately.

Encouraging them to simply take the day one lesson at a time can help reduce anxiety.

How school can help

If minor illnesses are beginning to affect attendance, we may be able to support through:

- tutor or pastoral check-ins
- monitoring attendance patterns
- helping students catch up with missed work
- identifying any underlying concerns

Please contact us early if you feel attendance is becoming more difficult. Working together early usually makes the biggest difference.

We are here to help and we cannot do something if we do not know about it.