

# Supporting Children and Young People Experiencing Barriers to Attending School

Presented by Andrea Jordan  
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# Agenda

- To consider different barriers to attendance for CYP
- To consider approaches of supporting CYP and their families experiencing barriers to attendance
- To consider how the school system can support CYP experiencing barriers to attendance
- To be aware of the guidance and support available for schools, parents and pupils in relation to mental health

[Guidance to support children and young people experiencing barriers attending school | Gloucestershire County Council](#)

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# DfE guidance on mental health and attendance

[Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance: guidance for schools - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-issues-affecting-a-pupil-s-attendance/guidance-for-schools)

What should school staff be doing to support pupil mental health?

- School staff are **not** expected to diagnose mental health conditions or person mental health interventions
- The role of school staff is to ensure that the school is a calm, safe and supportive environment where all pupils want to be and are keen and ready to learn, which is the foundation of securing good attendance
- Whole school approach.....by developing a trusted relationship with parents/carers and families that involves them in the conversation about the school's ethos and emphasises the importance of supporting mental health and regular attendance
- Develop a plan to implement reasonable adjustments....making it clear that part of the aim of the plan is to maximise face-to-face attendance as much as possible

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## Should school staff ask for medical evidence of a mental health-related absence?

- It is important that children and parents/carers do not feel as though their concerns about mental health have gone unheard which is why...schools must record absences as authorised where pupils cannot attend due to illness (both physical and mental health related).
- There is no need to **routinely** ask for medical evidence
- In instances of long term or repeated absences for the same reason, however, seeking medical evidence may be appropriate to assist in assessing whether the child requires additional support to help them attend more regularly.....

GCC are working closely with health colleagues to develop an agreed protocol between education and health in relation to attendance

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# Addressing Barriers to School Attendance



Difficulties experienced by children and young people attending school can be cyclic and behaviours can become ingrained.

Promoting school attendance may not be a short process.

Recognising any difficulties a child or young person is experiencing in school as early as possible and providing appropriate support as soon as possible is of key importance.

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# Terminology

- school refusal
- school phobia
- school avoidance
- parentally condoned absence
- truancy
- persistent absenteeism

These terms can suggest responsibility or blame on the CYP and their families.

Important to consider the language that we use when communicating.

Variety of reasons why children and young people experience barriers to attending school

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# Activity

What issues/ reasons/ barriers are given for children not attending your school?

Discuss in pairs/small groups

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# Push and pull factors

A 'Push' factor 'pushes' the child or young person towards attending school.

A 'Pull' factor 'pulls' the child or young person away from attending school



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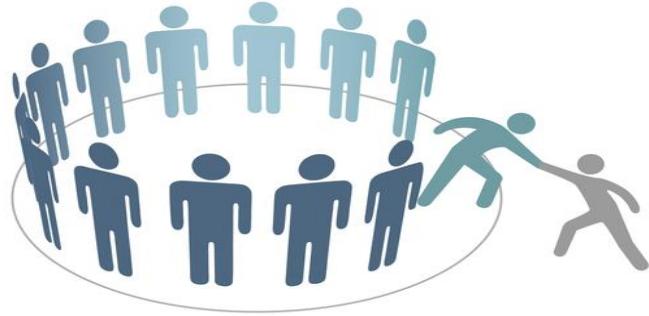
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# Activity



| Push (to school) | Pull (away from school) |
|------------------|-------------------------|
|                  |                         |
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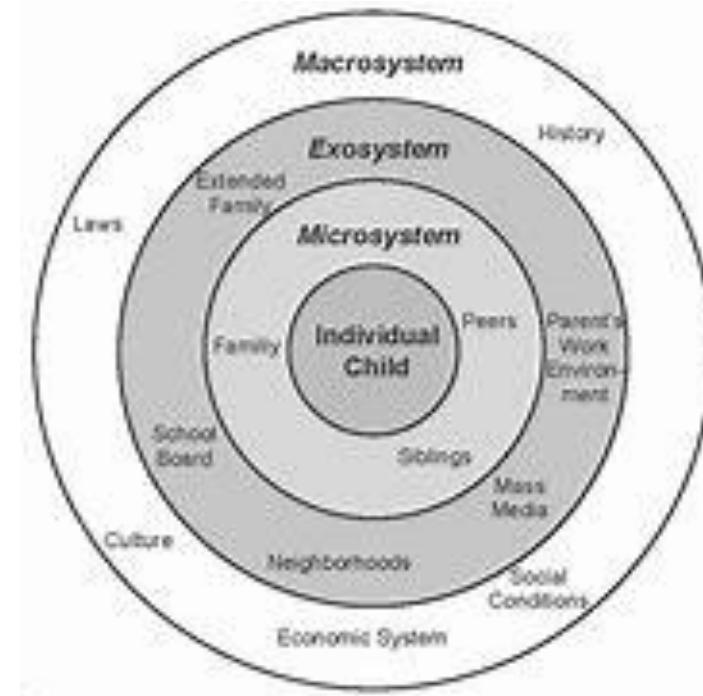


# Factors that can contribute

Home and family factors

School factors

Individual factors



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# What schools might notice

- Distress when separating from parent or carer;
- Verbalising concern about the safety or wellbeing of someone at home;
- Difficulties coming into school;
- Expressing a want to attend and engage but struggling to do so;
- Struggling to leave home;
- Patterns of absence, for example, particular days and/or subjects;
- Reluctance to attend school trips;
- Recurrent absences for what might be considered 'minor illnesses';
- Physical symptoms, for example, sweating, sickness or abdominal pain, aching limbs, headaches, changes in weight;
- Changes to temperament, for example, presenting as fearful, frustrated or low in mood;
- Negative commentary about self and own abilities;
- Difficulties concentrating;
- Changes to social behaviour, for example, increased time on their own;
- Changes in academic engagement and/or progress.

# Thoughts, feelings and behaviours

The ability to understand and express feelings

**Thought:** "This work is getting too hard"

**Feeling:** worried

**Sensation:** heart racing

**Behaviour:** avoiding school

**Thought:** "why am I different to others?"

**Feeling:** confused

**Sensation:** prickling tears

**Behaviour:** missing lessons



# What is Emotional Literacy?

- Knowing when you are feeling a certain way;
- Naming that feeling or emotion;
- Sharing this feeling with trusted other/s;
- Identifying personal strategies that alleviate difficult emotions and encourage feelings of contentment or ease;
- Applying useful strategies to promote emotional wellbeing;
- Recognising that emotions are transient and will change; and
- Accepting that there will be commonplace stressors.

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# Exclusions and Barriers to Attendance

Exclusions and suspensions can abruptly end friendships, trusting relationships with key adults in school and can reinforce a negative self-image

Exclusion and suspension results in disruptions within education and can contribute to difficulties for children and young people reintegrating socially and academically back into educational settings.

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# Promote Resilience

- Considering their ambition, aspirations and motivations
- Access to positive experiences
- Opportunities to develop confidence and self-esteem
- Promote feelings of safety, security and a sense of belonging
- Support to develop positive relationships with adults/ peers
- CYP feels listened to and understood
- Promoting Emotional Literacy

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# Build trust and promote relationships

Active listening includes:

- Focusing attention on the person speaking- demonstrate that you are listening;
- Reflecting and paraphrasing to ensure you have understood the message correctly.
- Asking follow up questions to help clarify the person's meaning.
- Summarising what you have heard and checking that you have understood
- Not preparing your response whilst the other person is talking;
- Noticing their body language and tone of voice and what this might be communicating;
- Use of eye contact, leaning forward, nodding in response to comments and matching your facial expressions with the information being conveyed;
- Responding with empathy, respect, curiosity and openness.

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# Social and Communication Needs

Some CYP may need additional support with:

- Managing time and transition periods;
- Changes to routine, daily structure and where there may be uncertainty;
- Sensory stimuli;
- Tasks where they perceive that they will fail;
- Social situations and unstructured times.
- Difficulties communicating in order to be understood by others;
- Their understanding of rules.

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# The school environment

Children and young people experiencing barriers to attendance may need:

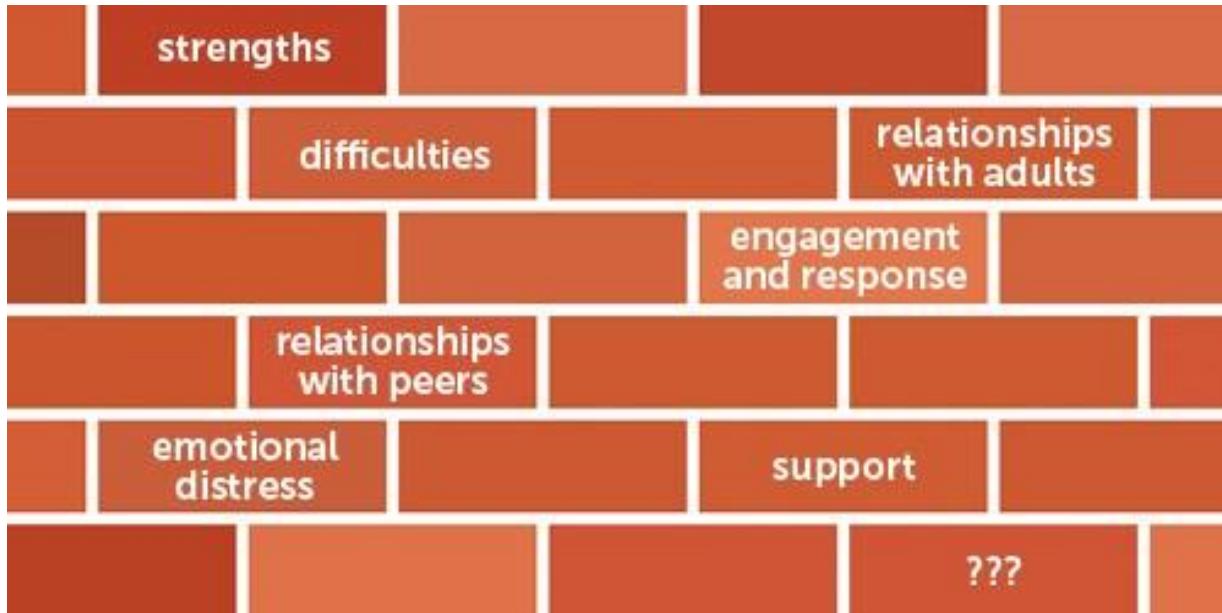
- Consideration about physical aspects of the school that will need to be accessed
- Consideration of how they will need to move around the site, including unstructured times and transitions between lessons
- Predictability in the school environment and clear information regarding the structure of the school day and lessons.

# Adapt learning

Children and young people experiencing barriers to attendance may need:

- Tailored learning tasks and curriculum activities;
- Work that is achievable and delivered appropriately in terms of needs;
- Work that is prepared, marked and returned to them even when they are not attending lessons;
- Time to ask questions, explore ideas, have fun and challenge perceptions within learning activities;
- The opportunity to take risks and make mistakes;
- To be given choices;
- Adults who are welcoming and accepting, who can reassure them that they will not have to catch up on work missed.

# Working Together



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# Communication with parents and carers

It is important for there to be a close and supportive partnership between school and parents/carers. A joined up approach is the most effective.

- Have a warm, welcoming ethos that promotes partnerships with parents/carers;
- Have systems and resources that prioritise and promote the attendance of all children;
- Inform parents/carers about the clear systems that are in place;
- Share relationship based policies;
- Make parents aware that they can be accompanied to meetings by someone of their choosing;
- Connect parents with the pastoral leads and key adults

# Making a plan

Developing a plan:

- The views of the child or young person are central to their support;
- Meeting where the CYP feels comfortable;
- Communicating with CYP in way that suits them;
- CYP, their parent/carers and supporting adults agree expectations;
- Trusted adults to consistently check-in regarding the wellbeing of CYP;
- Jointly consider barriers and resiliency factors which 'push' to school and 'pull' from home;
- Factors associated with transition are considered;
- Actions agreed at meetings are carried out and reviewed.

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# Staff wellbeing

*“By taking care of myself I have so much more to offer the world than I do when I am running on empty.”*

— ALI WASHINGTON



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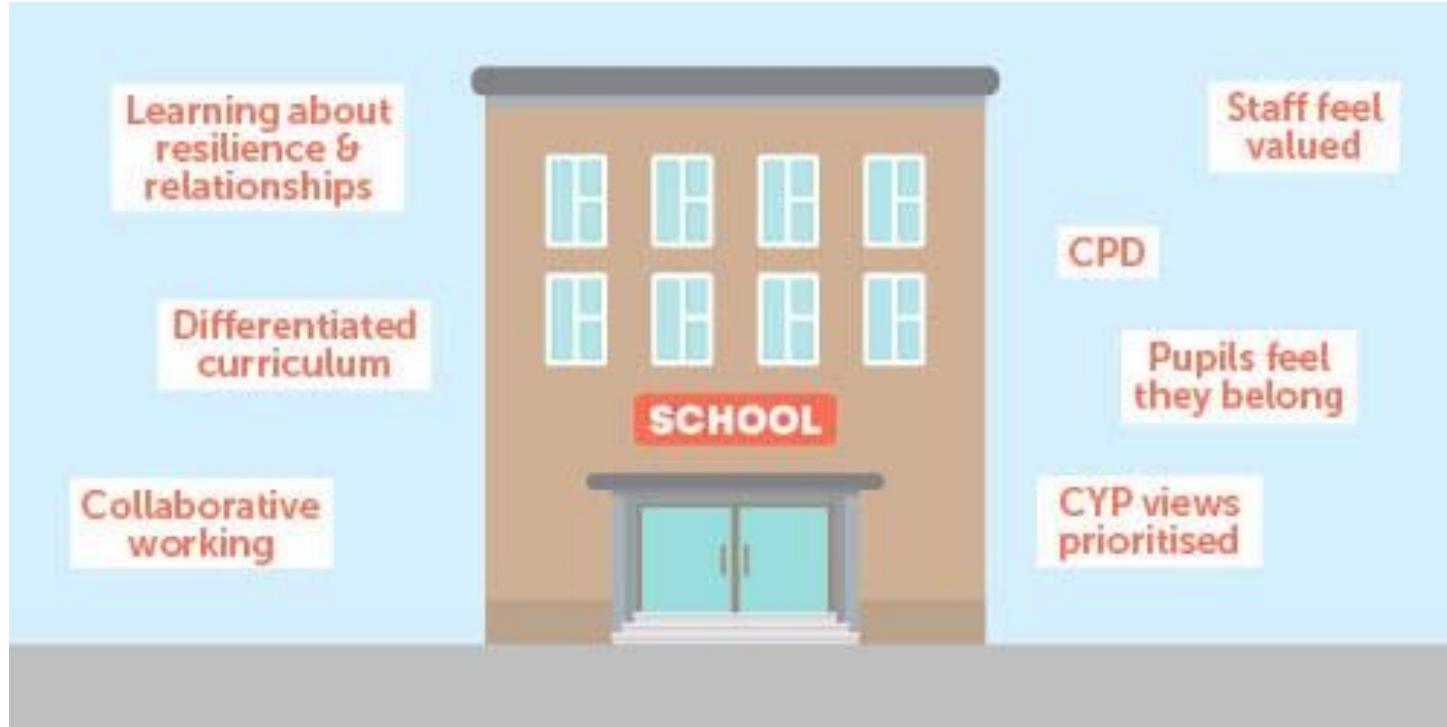
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# Whole school working practices and ethos

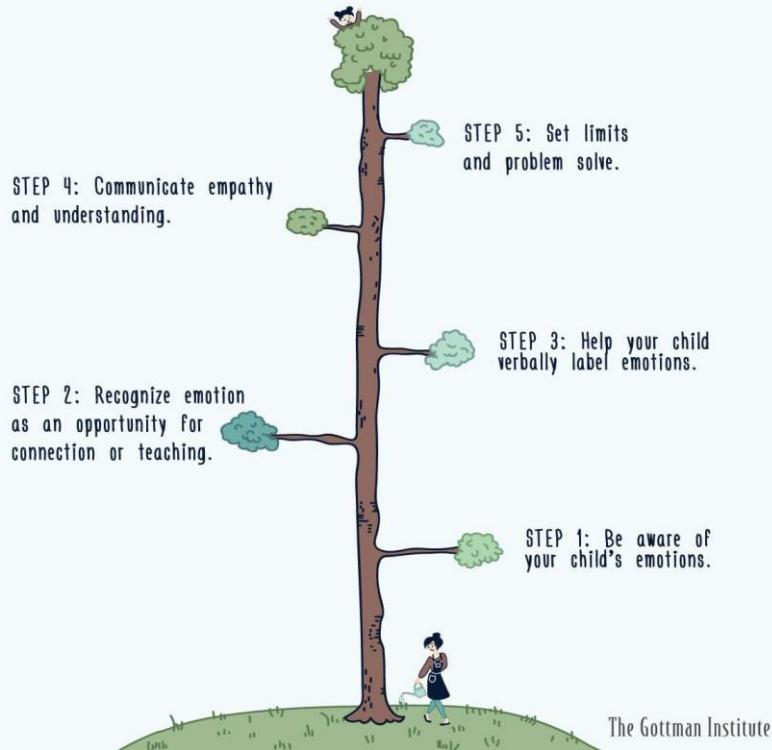


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## Five Steps of Emotion Coaching

Dr. John Gottman



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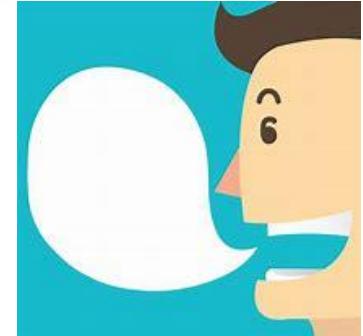


# Emotion Coaching



# Other ideas to promote inclusion and belonging

*From CYP views in GCC*



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# Useful links

- [Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance: guidance for schools - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-issues-affecting-a-pupils-attendance-guidance-for-schools)
- [State of the nation 2022: children and young people's wellbeing \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/2022/01/10/state-of-the-nation-2022-children-and-young-peoples-wellbeing/)
- [Providing remote education: guidance for schools - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/remote-education-guidance-for-schools)
- Training resource – Recognising and responding to adversities, Belonging, relationships and connections, Finding solutions to prevent exclusion from school - for primary schools [Early Years Foundation Stage/Primary Age Phase | The University of Sunderland](https://www.yearlyearsfoundation.org.uk/stage-primary-age-phase/)

# Useful links

- [School and college resources | Anna Freud](#)
- [Promoting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)
- Training available for Senior mental health lead – DfE are encouraging every school to have a nominated person [Senior mental health lead training - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Mental Health : Gloucestershire Healthy Living and Learning \(ghll.org.uk\)](#)
- [Lumi Nova : Gloucestershire Healthy Living and Learning \(ghll.org.uk\)](#)  
free to Glos 7-12 year olds with anxiety – digital therapy game

# Questions



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