

Approaches to school can't

Part 2: implementing strategies

For parents and carers of Autistic children experiencing school can't.

After understanding school can't, it's important to collaborate with your child's school and care team members. Working collaboratively as a support team means that the most appropriate support strategies can be implemented to support your child's needs.

Approaches to school can't

Parents and carers have said that behavioural strategies don't work. Sometimes this is referred to as the 'tough love' approach. This may include forcing your child to attend, providing incentives, or using reward charts. These approaches don't work or may only work in the short term but contribute to more significant challenges over time. This is because your child can't cope with school. Don't physically force your child to attend school. This is dangerous for you and your child and will ultimately add to your child's experience of overwhelm.

Approaches that seek to understand what is causing your child's stress or anxiety will have a better outcome for your child. The strategies and supports need to be individualised to meet your child's needs.

Overall, when addressing school can't, it is important that your child feels supported, and any demands placed on them are within their capacity. This may fluctuate from day to day. Flexibility is key.

What types of strategies could work at school?

Working with your child and their school is important. If your child is accessing therapy outside of school, the therapists may assist and offer professional advice on how to support your child with school can't. They may understand your child and be able to provide advice on strategies that can assist at school. Additionally, there may be strategies that could be used at home to reduce their anxiety levels.

Work with the school to identify areas of stress across your child's week. You may need to sit down with your child and talk about each day. Consider:

- There may be specific tasks your child worries about, such as handwriting
- Times of day, such as recess and lunchtime
- When there are changes to the timetable, such as when a teacher is away
- Classes your child finds challenging, such as specialist classes or events.

Once you have a better idea of what is causing the anxiety about school, you, your child, and your school can start to think about strategies that might help them get back to school. We consulted with several parents and carers, and they identified a range of different strategies that reduce stress or anxiety in Autistic students.

Strategies that may reduce stress or anxiety in Autistic students:

Primary School strategies

If your child is anxious about school work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced homework.• Adjusted or modified academic tasks or changes to the method of delivery (e.g. being able to type instead of handwriting).• A flexible timetable. Look at where demands can be reduced, or alternative options provided.
Providing structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A classroom schedule.• A method of communicating changes to the children, such as staff or timetable changes.• A structured activity option during recess and/or lunch.
Sensory processing barriers and support to manage stress and anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to sensory tools to reduce stress and anxiety.• Later drop-off and pick-up times to avoid crowds.• Uniform adjustments that can accommodate your child's sensory needs.• Self-regulation break. This could be a movement break or downtime.

Secondary School strategies

If your child is anxious about school work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reducing homework or scheduling free periods to complete homework at school.• A flexible timetable. Look at where demands can be reduced, or alternative options provided.• Interest-based learning.• Reducing workload in subjects.• Flexible learning options, such as blended learning.
Providing structure and supporting transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A structured activity or club over lunchtime.• Allowing time to transition between classes.
Sensory processing barriers and support with self-regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using sensory tools in the classroom.• Self-regulation breaks which may include a movement break or a quiet break.• Uniform adjustments, such as wearing the sports uniform.• Later drop-off and pick-up times to avoid crowds.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A trusted teacher that can advocate on your child's behalf with other teachers.

In some situations, it may be appropriate for your child to have a modified timetable, where they attend school for reduced hours for an agreed period. This could mean starting school later, finishing earlier, or leaving school at lunchtime. This should be a short-term measure and agreed upon by you and the school. If you and the school agree that a modified timetable could be a reasonable adjustment to support an Autistic student experiencing school can't, it can be included in your child's re-engagement plan.

This is not an exhaustive list; however, these general strategies have been identified in consultations with parents and carers as beneficial in reducing stress or anxiety in Autistic students. Collaborating with your child, their teachers, and your therapy team to implement supports specific to your child's needs is recommended, where possible.

“Don’t catastrophise about the future, just go gently and take each day and week as it comes. Expect “bumpy days” and don’t panic when they happen - this doesn’t necessarily mean a regression but just a hiccup.” - Parent of an Autistic child



Summary

- Speak to your child's school and your therapy team about school can't
- Any strategies should address the causes of school can't
- Look after yourself and reach out to other autism/Autistic parents through peer support groups for support

Resources

Association for Children with a Disability – [Reasonable Adjustments](#)

Association for Children with a Disability – [Raising a concern with school](#)

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