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## School Phobia: Tips for Parents

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If a child refuses to go to school, they may be experiencing school phobia — an intense and debilitating level of anxiety about attending. The term emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) is often used to describe this. Underlying causes vary and may not be obvious at first, but can include an undiagnosed learning difference or neurodivergence, sensory differences, bullying, or distressing situations outside school such as bereavement.

Here are ten tips and practical ideas for supporting a child with school phobia.

### Tip 1 — Don't try to cope alone

Many families are going through something similar. Connecting with another parent in the same situation can help you share experiences and approaches that have worked.

### Tip 2 — Don't force your child into school

Supporting a child with school phobia can be a long journey. Forcing a child back before they are ready can damage your relationship, break their trust, and undermine the work you need to do together.

### Tip 3 — Look after your own emotions first

It is normal to feel guilt, worry, sadness, or stress when a child won't go to school. To support your child effectively, it is important to have self-compassion and take care of your own mental health too.

### Tip 4 — Understand the problem

Try to understand your child's point of view and resist the temptation to fix things too quickly. Really listening and acknowledging how hard things are helps them process their feelings and identify what needs to change.

### Tip 5 — Look for patterns

Help your child become curious about their own experience by asking questions about their anxiety. They may not have answers straight away, but noticing patterns together can make the situation feel more predictable and manageable.

### Tip 6 — Involve the school early

The earlier children get support, the better. Small adjustments can make a significant difference — for example, changing seating plans, allowing your child to arrive when it is quieter, or not calling on them in class.

### Tip 7 — Work in partnership with the school

It helps for a child to have someone at school they trust and can turn to when they are struggling. The school's SENDCo (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Co-ordinator) can explore barriers to learning, make adjustments, and refer to other professionals where needed.

### **Tip 8 — Keep a predictable morning routine**

Staying calm and composed yourself has a powerful effect on reducing your child's anxiety. Routines and predictability help anxious children feel more in control.

### **Tip 9 — Make a plan and start small**

Getting a child back into school needs careful planning. Too much too soon can overwhelm them. Start small, build gradually, and expect setbacks — they are a normal part of the process.

### **Tip 10 — Be aware of trigger points**

A child's anxiety will shift over time. Common triggers include returning after a holiday, academic pressure, and friendship difficulties. If school phobia returns, draw on what worked before and try again.