A Parent(s)/Carer(s) Guide – Working Together to Improve School Attendance – Early Years

Children learn and develop more from birth to five years than at any other time in their lives and any gaps in their learning by the end of the Early Years will, on average, double by the end of primary schooling.

Early Years providers have a very important role to play in encouraging and establishing good attendance habits. This is vital both in ensuring that children make the best possible progress and that any gaps in learning are minimised, and also in establishing good habits which will continue throughout their education and into later life.

Good attendance practice promotes good outcomes for children including accessing their educational entitlement, supporting their learning and development, developing social skills and forming secure attachments.

In a small minority of cases, good attendance practice may also lead to the earlier identification of more serious concerns for a child or family and may have a vital part to play in keeping a child or other family members safe from harm.

Good attendance in the early years leads to:

- the best opportunities for social development, including making friends and learning how to get on with others
- the best opportunities for children to learn and develop their skills and learn through play, this includes early language, reading and maths skills
- the development of good habits for future school attendance and good attendance and punctuality skills into adulthood

Parents can encourage good attendance by:

- having a regular bedtime and morning routine
- preparing for the morning routine by packing a bag the night before and setting out clothes
- talking together about all the fun their child will have at nursery
- having a back-up plan for getting there if something happens
- arranging routine medical appointments, outings and holidays for the times their child does not attend nursery if possible
- talking to their child's key worker if there are any concerns or anxieties
- working with their child to develop healthy hygiene practices

Even for very young children who attend Early Years provision, there are positive benefits to be gained from regular attendance, whatever the weekly pattern of childcare. This includes not only coming to every planned session but also being there on time. Benefits include the following:

Good habits

- It builds in young children the idea that getting up and going to EARLY EDUCATION provider is simply what you do.
- Children who attend every planned session develop a feel for the rhythm of the week and gain a sense of security from some regular elements, even when the actual pattern or focus of their learning or activity may vary widely from week to week. Secure relationships
- Young children find it easier to build and sustain a range of social relationships when they regularly attend their childcare setting, according to the pattern agreed with the family.
- For some families, particularly at times of stress, the child's regular attendance at a setting allows parents to get other things done and helps them enjoy spending time with the child when he or she is at home.

Self – esteem

- Children who rarely miss sessions at a setting and arrive on time are more likely to feel good about themselves. This is because they know what goes on and what to expect, feel more confident with the adults and the other children and have more opportunities to be valued and praised for their own special contribution.
- Children who regularly miss sessions or are generally late, can frequently experience a sense of having to try a little bit harder just to understand what is going on and what other children are talking about or doing.
- Regular attendance, on time, helps many young children to separate from their parents or carers at the start of the day and settle more readily into daily life in their setting. Some children may need some flexibility when they first start attending to settle in but there should be a clear, time-bound plan in place to ensure the attendance patterns are normalised as soon as possible

Learning and development

- Staff carefully plan every session for each child in their care and want to take every opportunity to help them thrive; experiences gained in one session are often developed further in following sessions.
- Children learn in many different ways; through play with others and through being in the company of staff who actively support their learning and development.
- Underachievement is often linked to lower attendance. For some older students this is linked to a steadily deteriorating trend in attendance which is traceable

right back to their first attendance with an EARLY YEARS childcare setting. For all these reasons, good attendance and coming to a setting on time is important for every child.

Working together to improve school attendance

Being in school and having the best attendance possible underpins all the many benefits of school for your child, such as their learning, wellbeing, and wider development. For some children, attending school every day will be harder than for others. This is why John Taylor Multi- Academy Trust, Church Gresley Infant and Nursery School and Derbyshire local council are committed to working together with families to solve problems and support your child's school attendance.

What are my responsibilities for my child's attendance?

Whilst your child is not of statutory school age there is no legal requirement for you as a parent to ensure that your child receives a suitable full-time education. However it is still important to make sure that your child attends each session they should.

If my child needs to be absent from school, what do I need to do?

You should contact the school as early as possible, on the first day of absence to explain why. If you do not, the school will contact you on the first morning of their absence to find out why they are not in school.

All parents can request a 'leave of absence' for their child and the Headteacher will either approve or decline this request.

Does my child need to attend school when they are unwell?

If you child is ill, read the NHS advice to help you decide whether they can go to school.

If they are too ill to attend, you are not breaking the law and will not be penalised. You should let the school know on the first day of absence and the school will record such absence as authorised. If the absence due to illness is ongoing or frequent the school may ask you to provide medical evidence and will offer support to help improve attendance.

In the majority of cases medical evidence is not needed by school may ask you for evidence where:

- Your child is regularly absent because of illness, to assess how they can help your child by putting the right reasonable adjustments in place
- In a small number of cases where the school has reason to believe your child was not too ill to attend and a conversation cannot resolve the issue

If you are asked to provide medical evidence this does not need to be a letter from your doctor or consultant, and doctors will not usually provide such letters. It can instead be an appointment card, prescription, notes of previous consultations (including from the NHS App).

What should I do if my child needs a dental or medical appointment in school time?

To avoid disruption to your child's attendance, medical and dental appointments should not be booked during the school day whenever reasonably possible. When they are, you should ask the school in advance for a leave of absence an collect them as close a possible to the time of the appointment and return them to school for the rest of the school day afterwards.

My child is struggling to attend because of an issue in school. Who can help us?

The first step is to talk to your child's school about why your child is missing school and what help the school can give. You should still do everything you can to help your child attend as much as possible whilst waiting for help and support to be put into place. The person to contact in school you can contact for help is (school to complete). You can also look at the school attendance policy (website link to school website) on our website for more details.

If your child is struggling to attend because of something that is happening at school we will work with you and your child to overcome the issues. We will agree a set of joint actions that we develop together. This will include a commitment to support you and your child by working together or help you to access the support services in exchange for an agreement from you and your child to take part in the support offered. We will arrange times for you to come into school to review the actions and your child's progress.

Depending on the reasons for your child's absence, this may take form of an action plan, an early help plan or a parenting contract.

My child is struggling to attend because of an issue at home or getting to school. Who can help us?

Talking to school is the first step as we can help you to access the support you need. If there are lots of reasons for your child's absence, local services that support the school will work with us to support you and your child. They will devise an action plan and a lead worker to support you. This may be a member of school staff, but it might be a member of the services within the local council or healthcare teams. In exchange you are expected to agree and take part in accessing the support once it has been put in place.

My child has a long-term illness, special educational needs or a disability that is impacting their attendance. What help is available?

If your child is regularly absent from school because of illness, regardless of whether it is mental or physical or special educational needs or a disability, they have the same right to have a suitable full-time education as any other child. We encourage you to work with us to discuss the reasons and make sure the right support is in place.

We will work with you to:

- Make reasonable adjustments to help your child attend
- Ensure your child receives pastoral care and, in some cases, consider a time-limited phased return to school where appropriate

- Work jointly with services including the local council and health services
- For pupils with a long-term medical condition, we can make attendance support a key feature of any individual healthcare plan
- Access to any provision outlined an education health and care plan

To make this work it is important that you are open and work with us by sharing written information. This will help agree the right support and take an active part in agreeing and putting in place the solution.

Where can I get help if my child is too anxious to go to school

Attending school usually helps to protect your child's mental health for a range of reasons including giving them a chance to be with friends and to benefit from learning. However some children can be anxious or worried about going to school, particularly around the start of the new year or joining a new school or class. This is a normal emotion and not necessarily indicative of an underlying mental health condition.

If their anxiety continues and becomes and attendance issue, you can speak to us in school to find out more about why they are anxious and what can be done.

You can find some useful advice at Young Minds to help work through likely reasons together with your child, what to do and how to make sure that you get the right support if there are more serious issues.

Will my local council take legal action against me

If your child is absent from school without permission or a valid reason you are likely to be breaking the law. Where this happens, we will speak with you to help you understand the reasons for our concerns. If you child is not attending because they are struggling, we may ask the local council for support to help you.

If you do not take part in this support or it does not work because more structured formal support is needed, then we may:

- Invite you to attend a parenting contract meeting – where we will put in place a formal action plan setting out what we will all do to improve your child's attendance;
- Apply to the family court for an education supervision order to ensure you and your child receive advice, assistance, and direction to make sure your child receives a full-time suitable education

If you do not make any efforts to improve your child's attendance or it is clear you have knowingly allowed your child to be absent without good reason, for example taking your child on holiday during school time without permission, the local council may prosecute you to protect your child's right to a full-time education. Even during this process, you have the opportunity to engage in voluntary support, such as an early help assessment, or formal support such as a parenting contract or education supervision order to prevent the case from going to court. If found guilty you may be given a parenting order, community order, or

a fine up to £2,500 or in very exceptional circumstances a sentence of up to 3 months in prison.

Attendance Matters			
Attendance during one school year	Equals approximate days absence	Which is approximately weeks absence	Which is approximately lessons missed
95%	9 days	2 weeks	40 lessons
90%	19 days	4 weeks	80 lessons
85%	29 days	6 weeks	120 lessons
80%	38 days	8 weeks	160 lessons
75%	48 days	10 weeks	200 lessons
70%	57 days	11.5 weeks	230 lessons
65%	67 days	13.5 weeks	270 lessons

Punctuality Matters		
Minutes per day during the school year		Approximate number of days teaching lost in a year
5 mins	=	3 days
10 mins		6 days
15 mins		9 days
20 mins		12 days
30 mins		18 days

Glossary

Attendance action plan – an informal agreement between you, your child if they are old enough to understand, their school and sometimes your local council about what actions supporting your child will take to improve their attendance.

Community order – an order that can be made by a Court after you have been found guilty of knowingly failing to secure your child's regular attendance rather than sending you to prison. This may include requirements for you to take part in certain activities or observe certain rules.

Early help assessment – a voluntary assessment of what you and your family need help with to allow your child's school and/or your local council to put the right support in place or help you access the right services.

Education supervision order – an order that can be made by the Family Court to require a local council to advise, assist, and direct you and your child so that they receive suitable full-time education. This is not a criminal conviction, but persistently breaching the council's directions can lead to prosecution.

Leave of absence – permission given by your child's school for them to be absent from school for a specified period of time. You should write to the head teacher and ask for a leave of absence before the time your child needs to be absent from school. They will only be agreed to in exceptional circumstances.

Parenting contract – a formal signed agreement between you, and your child's school and/or your local council agreeing what actions you will take to improve your child's attendance and what the school/council will do to support you in this.

Parenting order – an order that can be made by a Court after you have been found guilty of failing to secure your child's regular attendance. You will be required to take part in certain activities or observe certain rules.

Reasonable adjustment – a change made by your child's school to remove or change something that is preventing your child from attending school.

Regular attendance – attending school every day that the school is open in line with the school rules apart from in a small number of allowable circumstances.