

# WHAT DOESN'T HELP SCHOOL ANXIETY

COMMON APPROACHES — AND WHY THEY CAN MAKE THINGS WORSE

Well-meaning strategies can sometimes reinforce avoidance and make anxiety harder to manage over time. Here's what the evidence tells us about four common approaches:

## 1 LEAVING AT PEAK ANXIETY

*"Just have them stay as long as they can, then they can go home."*

✗ When we leave at the **peak of anxiety**, the brain learns it cannot cope. This **reduces tolerance over time** — making future attendance harder, not easier.

## 2 UNPLANNED BREAK SPACES

*"Have them go to the Bridge / Mezzanine when it gets too much."*

✗ A break can be appropriate, but it must be **time-limited** with a **clear plan to return to class**. Using the Bridge or Mezzanine as an open-ended exit **reinforces avoidance**.

## 3 REFUSING ASSESSMENT

*"Don't ask the school to assess — the student isn't attending anyway."*

✗ Schools should not need to be asked. Where anxiety affects attendance, there is usually a **reasonable suspicion of SEN**. The school should be assessing for an **EHCP or SEN support plan** in cases of school refusal.

## 4 HOME / VIRTUAL SCHOOL

*"Mental health is most important — have them do virtual or home school."*

✗ As a long-term strategy, this is **very rarely helpful**. Removing the source of anxiety usually **makes it worse** — anxious young people need to build skills, not avoid situations.

*Mental health doesn't mean not feeling anxious. It means **having the capacity to handle anxiety** when it feels like too much.*