

Trouble at School



“I couldn’t bear the thought of him being chucked out of school”

My son Paul has always been a bit cheeky and sometimes got into trouble, but I never thought it would amount to anything serious. I had a few phone calls from the school about various things but I couldn’t afford to take time off work to go to see his teachers. To be honest, I also wasn’t that keen on going back into school to get another telling off, this time for being a bad parent.

Then one day, I was putting Paul’s clothes in the wash, and found a letter in the pocket. It was addressed to me, from the school, saying that there had been a number of ‘incidents’ and asking me to make an appointment to come in for a meeting. It mentioned the possibility of exclusion. I was so upset that Paul was in serious trouble and he hadn’t even given me the letter. He had always been easily distracted, but I knew he wouldn’t do anything seriously wrong. I couldn’t bear the thought of him being chucked out of school, especially if it wasn’t his fault.

I met his Head of Year. She told me that most of the teachers liked Paul, but were finding his behaviour increasingly difficult. He had become friends with a group of boys in his year who were ‘cool’, but whose behaviour was disruptive: they, with Paul, were causing problems in classes, and were bunking off school.

Jackie

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It can be worrying and alarming when things start going wrong for your child at school. Their schoolwork and results may be getting worse, they might stop telling you about what they’ve been doing at school, or you may get a phone calls or letters from the school about their behaviour.

You might think that it’s a slippery slope, either towards your child missing their chance for a good education, or worse – being excluded from the school. But it doesn’t need to be like that. This leaflet explains:

- 1 how you can spot the early signs of problems at school
- 2 how you can work with the school and your child to get him or her back on track
- 3 your rights and responsibilities as a parent

What happened to Paul?



“When I met Paul’s teacher we agreed on a plan to help Paul. I would talk to him and let him know that I knew what was happening and that I, and the school, wanted to help him. We agreed that I would make sure he was ready for school in the morning and that time was put aside each night for homework. For the rest of the term, teachers would send home weekly reports about his

behaviour, and would be sure to praise him for making an effort and working well. The teacher also suggested that an older pupil might mentor him or that some of his class-mates might look out for him, helping him to distance himself from the disruptive boys in his year.

When I talked to Paul, I was surprised to find that he was feeling really stressed and anxious about the situation. He knew he was behaving badly but couldn’t think of a way out. He needed me and his teachers to lay down the law a bit! I can’t say it’s all been plain sailing since, and he still mucks about sometimes, but I feel that because we acted quickly, we stopped the problem becoming far worse. One of those boys is now out of the school, and I see him just hanging around, not doing anything with his life – I hate to think that Paul could have gone the same way.”

Dealing with the school

If you think things are beginning to go wrong with your child, don’t just wait, hoping they’ll get better – get in touch with the school straight away. You will probably be feeling stressed about the situation, and may feel that teachers aren’t doing enough for your child. but you must treat them politely. Emotions can run high, but it won’t help you or your child if you shout at or intimidate teachers.

If parents behave really badly, the Head can withdraw their right to enter the school. However, pupils cannot be excluded from school because of their parent’s behaviour.

Your responsibilities as a parent

The law says that parents have responsibilities for their children’s education.

1

You must make sure your child receives a full-time education. This usually means attending school, but parents do have a right to educate their children at home. If your child is permanently excluded they must be offered full-time education, usually in a pupil referral unit, from the sixth day after the exclusion until they move to a new school.

2

Your child must start to go to school on the first school day of the term following their fifth birthday.

3

Your child must stay at school until the last Friday in June in the school year they reached 16, which means right until the end of Year 11, even if your child is not taking any exams.

4

By law, parents must make sure that their child is attending school regularly.



What's exclusion?

“I had a problem with Janine almost as soon as I started school. She was always bothering me and winding me up. In class, she called me a stupid slag and I told her that if she didn't shut her mouth, I'd shut it for her. After class we had a big fight – lots of other kids were around us. She pushed me and I punched her, and broke one of her teeth. It's not fair that I was the one who got excluded.”

Layla, 14

Exclusion is when a student is told they cannot come to school, either for a fixed term, that is, for a certain period, which could be anything from a few hours up to 45 days in one school year.

The length of time for a fixed term exclusion should be for the shortest time necessary, as it becomes more difficult for children to come back into school after a few days exclusion. Pupils can also be excluded permanently, because of their behaviour. But it is the end of a long road, and should never be used lightly by a school. Schools have to keep to very strict rules about how and when they exclude students.

Permanent exclusion is a very serious move, and can only ever be done as a last resort, if all else has failed. A child can be permanently excluded because of a first offence if the offence is very serious, for example:

- serious actual or threatened violence against another pupil or a member of staff;
- supplying illegal drugs;
- carrying an offensive weapon such as a knife; or
- sexual misconduct.

What happens if the school decides to exclude your child?

Once the Head has decided to exclude your child, you should be

told immediately, preferably by phone. The Head should then confirm this in a letter within a day. Your child may be sent home immediately but the Head must bear in mind your child's age and vulnerability, whether you are at home, and whether your child would be placed at risk (for example, by being left to wander the streets).

The Head's letter should explain:

- that your child must not come into school during the period of the exclusion;
- why they have excluded your child, including details of the incident that prompted it;
- what schoolwork will be arranged for your child;
- that your child must not be in a public place in school hours during the first five days of the exclusion (unless there is a good reason);
- if your child has been excluded for more than five days, the alternative arrangements made for your child's full-time education;
- that you have the right to a copy of your child's school records; and
- that, if you disagree with the exclusion, you have the right to put your case to the school's Governing Body (generally the Discipline Committee).

If your child has been excluded permanently

In the first five days of a permanent exclusion, the local authority should arrange to assess your child's needs and how to meet them, including any special educational needs they may have. This is usually called the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process and involves a range of professionals e.g. educational psychologist, behaviour support specialist, Connexions personal adviser. You should be invited to meet with the local authority to discuss the options.

What can you do if the school wants to exclude your child?

If you disagree with the exclusion, you have the right to tell the school governors why, in a letter and, if the period of exclusion adds up to more than five days that school year, face to face at a governors' hearing. If you want to do this, you first need to write to the Clerk of the Governing Body – their contact details should be in the Head's letter.

If the exclusion is for five days or less, the governors do not have the power to allow your child to go back before the end of the exclusion, but they can do so if your child has been excluded for a total of five and a half days or more, or if your child will miss a public examination. The meeting of the governors may not happen before your child goes back to school, but it will still give you an opportunity to state your views and the governors can put their views about the exclusion on your child's school record. You have the right to attend this meeting.

If the Governing Body upholds the decision of the Head to permanently exclude your child, you have the right to appeal.

You should receive a letter explaining how to appeal within 15 days of receiving the decision of the committee.

The Advisory Centre for Education has a booklet for parents whose child has been permanently excluded. See www.ace-ed.org.uk/advice/booklets/PermanentExclusion.html, or phone 020 7354 8318 for a copy.

Avoiding exclusion

Permanent exclusion should always be a last resort, and schools should try whatever they can to help your child before that happens. There are several things that schools can try before a permanent exclusion.

Fixed-term exclusions

Fixed-term exclusions are used as punishment for a variety of reasons. There is no complete list saying what a child can be excluded for, but examples include:

- fighting in the playground;
- regular disruptive behaviour in the classroom;
- refusing to obey instructions;
- bullying;
- damaging property; or
- persistently breaking the school rules.

The government says that a child shouldn't be excluded for things like:

- not doing homework;
- truanting;
- not wearing uniform correctly; or
- wearing jewellery.

However, if, for example, the school rules forbid wearing jewellery, then a child could be excluded if they continually broke the rules. So schools have a lot of power to decide the reasons for excluding a child.

A child can be excluded for as little as half a day, or even just a lunchtime. A typical exclusion might be for one to three days. No child can be excluded for more than 45 days in one school year. The Head should always try to exclude a child for the minimum time necessary.

The Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) has a detailed booklet for parents on what to do if your child is excluded for a fixed period. See www.ace-ed.org.uk/advice/booklets/FixedExclusion.html, or phone 020 7354 8318 for a copy.

Reintegration meetings

Schools must call a reintegration meeting following an exclusion, unless your child is between 11–16 and the exclusion was for a fixed period of less than 6 days. The purpose of the reintegration interview is to discuss how your child's return to school can best be managed. You must be given at least six days notice of the meeting. Your child's return to school cannot be delayed until the meeting has been held, or if you fail to attend. However, failure to attend a reintegration interview is a factor taken into account by a magistrates' court if, on future application, the school or local authority apply for a parenting order on you.

The meeting should discuss ways of avoiding further exclusions. For some children setting up a Pastoral Support Programme may be suggested (see below). A parenting contract with support for you may also be suggested (see below).

Pastoral Support Programme

Pastoral Support Programmes are for students who have already had some short fixed-term exclusions, or whose behaviour is rapidly getting worse. There are some rules about putting a Pastoral Support Programme in place.

- There has to be a meeting of the school and possibly other agencies, such as Connexions or the educational psychologist (see 'Who's involved in helping your child' on page 9).
- The parents must be invited to that meeting.
- At the meeting, there will be a discussion about the next moves, and a plan made.

Some of the options might be:

Mentoring

Older pupils can act as mentors or role models. Mentors can also be volunteers from outside organisations, or people working within the school, and they work with individual pupils

or in groups to help them change their behaviour. They can help children and parents get other help, and work with other agencies like social services and the health services. A lot of mentors' work is about building a student's confidence and self-esteem, as well as helping them with their behaviour and ability to get on with teachers and other students.

Disapplying the National Curriculum

Heads can amend the National Curriculum to help troubled pupils. Teachers can adapt the curriculum to suit a particular child and they can also concentrate on a few key subjects, such as literacy and numeracy for up to six months initially.

When the child becomes 14 and moves into Key Stage 4, it is possible for the young person to start attending work-related courses outside school, while still remaining on the school roll. Before this happens, you should be consulted, but for those young people who are no longer interested in school and are not likely to take many GCSEs, it could be a positive choice to try working. If your child is offered this possibility the law says that the child must be offered careers guidance.

Organising a move to another school

This is sometimes called a *managed move*, and it is not exclusion; it is more of a fresh start. The old and new school agree together to move the child. This can work well if, for example, the child has a problem with a particular teacher, student or group of students at the old school. In order to fully address your child's difficulties, it may be helpful for your child to be given a full support package. Parents should never feel pressurised to agree to a managed move, particularly under threat of a permanent exclusion.

Pupil Referral Unit

Excluded pupils often attend a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). These separate schools can offer more individual and targeted learning and support. If the school recommends that a pupil moves to a PRU, it is not the same as moving to another mainstream school. A pupil could be at the PRU either

full-time, or part-time, spending the rest of the time at mainstream school, which may help with returning to the school full-time at a later date.

Help for the parent

Part of the package agreed at the reintegration meeting may include some help and support for the parents, for example, by finding parenting classes to help them deal with their child's truancy and bad behaviour. There are a whole range of parenting classes and programs on offer, some based in the school, others at doctors' surgeries, community centres or family centres. This may be in the context of a Parenting Contract (see below).

If you are interested in parenting classes, contact Parentline Plus on 0808 800 2222.

Watch for warning signs

One clear sign of problems at school is if you get a phone call or letter from the school about particular incidents. The school might also give your child detentions – either within school hours or, more seriously, after school (see box). Although the incidents might seem trivial to you, the school is doing the right thing contacting you at an early stage. There is a danger that if you do nothing now, things may get worse.

What can parents do?

You should be alert to changes in your child's attitude and behaviour. Has something happened either at home or at school which might be affecting him or her? Starting school or moving to secondary school can cause some behaviour problems; your child may be feeling shy or insecure. Or perhaps they are finding it hard to make friends, or there are strong groups of friends already which your child finds intimidating.

Do you know what the school expects from its students? Make sure you are aware of school policies on behaviour, dress, uniform and attendance. You can get copies of school policies from the school office.



When can the school give detention?

All schools are allowed by law to keep your child after school for detention, without your consent, but detentions must be reasonable and in proportion to the offence. The school must give you 24 hours' notice in writing (except for lunch time detentions) if it wants to give your child detention. The school must tell you why they have given detention, and when, where and for how long your child will have to remain at school. You can object to it, but the Head is still allowed to go ahead with the detention if they wish.

Bullying

Bullying can take many forms.

It may mean being hit or punched, having money or things stolen, or being generally pushed around, often in front of other students. It can also include verbal bullying, being sworn at, being shut out of a particular group or being ignored. Bullying is very common in primary and secondary schools. Most schools have an anti-bullying policy, but not all schools are very effective in stopping it.

If you think your child is being bullied, it may not be a good idea to rush up to the school to talk to them. Many children don't want to talk to teachers or the Head immediately – it can make the bullying worse. First try and talk to your child and find out what is going on, and what to do

“Leanne had been very happy at school, but she changed when she went into Year 5. She'd wanted to take her own lunches, but she was coming home starving. Sometimes her clothes were muddy and she came home one day with a ripped jacket. She told me she had caught it on a nail. She never wanted to talk about her day and I wasn't sure whether to push her or not. It was odd because she had always been so chatty and lively.

Me and her dad were puzzled and worried, but didn't want to interfere. Then one morning Leanne's teacher told me that her behaviour had got much worse – she had started playing up in the class and being disruptive. The teacher wondered if everything was alright at home. When confronted, Leanne confessed that one of her long-time friends, Chloe, had started whispering about her and not letting her join in their games. Leanne had felt so desperate that she had started showing-off and being lippy to win back Chloe's friendship.”

Sarah

about it. Your child may feel better talking to older students, rather than teachers. In many schools, older students run peer support schemes to help children who are having a difficult time.

The school should have an anti-bullying policy: find out what it says, so that your child has some idea of what would happen if they report the bullying to the school. Above all, it's important not to blame your child or suggest that the bullying is their fault – you need to give them lots of reassurance and love.

What if my child is the bully?

Hard though it is to accept, it may be that it is your child who is bullying others. If your child has just started behaving this way, it may be that something is troubling them. You may well be angry and want to punish them, but it might help more to talk to your child and try to find out what's going on. Has he or she been going through a hard time? Have they been bullied themselves, or are they having problems with friends? Are they struggling with the work, or are feeling that they can't cope?

The school will want to help, so speak to their teacher – don't assume that the school will only want to punish your child. They should have suggestions about how to help your child stop bullying others: for example, a friendship circle, or some work in class on respecting others.

Children who are being bullied or who are bullying can call ChildLine in confidence, free, on 0800 1111.

Truancing

We haven't seen your boy at school recently, Mrs Moore

Yes - I was surprised when he said they let him take his pit bull into classes!



YOU'RE STILL RESPONSIBLE EVEN IF YOU DON'T KNOW...

By law, parents are responsible for making sure their child gets a full-time education. If your child does not attend school regularly, you will be held responsible, even if your child is truancing without your knowledge. The Government says that children should not be excluded from school if they have been truancing. But a school might want to exclude a child if they have been truancing and their behaviour has been unacceptable.

Schools are trying hard to reduce truancy, and the Government has brought in new penalties, including fines, for parents who fail to make sure their child is going to school. The local authority could take you to court if your child frequently truants. They could also take you to court if your child is often late for school.

However before taking that step, schools should offer to help you and your child. Once the school notices that your child is truancing, an Education Welfare Officer (EWO) will get in touch with you. The EWO will work with you and the school, and will try to find out about any problems your child might be having at school that might have led to them truancing. The EWO will also work with you and your child on a plan to help them get to school on time every day, and stay there. The plan might include, for example:

- setting targets for attendance;
- you taking your child to school;
- helping your child if they have particular problems with a teacher; or
- taking the attendance register at every lesson.

However, if your child continues to truant, you could be prosecuted. If the local education authority takes you to court, it must show that you knew that your child wasn't going to school. If you can't show that you have been trying to make your child go to school, you could be:

- fined up to £2,500;
- put in prison for up to three months;
- made to attend counselling or parenting courses, under a 'parenting order'.

You might also be told to go with your child to school each day to ensure that he or she does actually go to school.

If your child is not registered to attend any school and is not receiving a suitable education at home, then the local authority can issue a School Attendance Order (SAO). This names the school your child must attend. If you do not obey the SAO you can be prosecuted. If you can show that your child is receiving a suitable education, you can use this as a defence to such legal action.

Tackling bad behaviour

Most schools have a 'behaviour support' policy, which sets out what they do to both reward good behaviour and change disruptive behaviour. Schools generally try to promote good behaviour across the whole school by, for example, organising games and sports in the playground to try to defuse conflicts, or by having senior staff visible at the school gate at the beginning and end of each day.

Some schools are part of a scheme where a local police officer is based in the school. It might seem heavy-handed, but it has worked well in some schools: the children get to know the police officer and go to him or her if there is trouble, and the number of incidents in and around the school has dropped.

Encouraging good behaviour

Schools help develop good behaviour in students by, for example:

- sending letters home when they have done a good piece of work;
- holding commendation assemblies, when students are presented with a certificate or praised for their good work or behaviour;
- involving them in setting their own behaviour targets, for example, on talking in class or losing their temper;
- pairing them up with an older student to act as a mentor; or
- organising a 'circle of friends' for them (see box).

Dealing with bad behaviour

To deal with bad behaviour, schools can use a range of punishments and sanctions, as well as detentions, including:

- removing the child from the class;
- placing a student on report, which means teachers of the Head of Year provide parents with daily or weekly reports on the student's behaviour and work;

- withdrawing break or lunchtime privileges;
- internal exclusion, which means the student must come into school later than other students, and leave after other students have left;
- lunchtime exclusion, which means the student is not allowed to play at lunchtime, and the parents may have to pick him or her up during lunchtime;
- not being allowed to go on school trips;
- making the student carry out a useful task in school, for example, picking up litter or cleaning up; and
- making the student carry out some community work (for example, if they had vandalised a piece of equipment, they might have to repair or repaint it).

Circle of friends

A 'circle of friends' works to help manage a student's behaviour by getting the support of some of his or her peer group or class. A group of students meet regularly with the young person to help them set and check on behaviour targets. It's similar to peer mediation or peer support, and helps everyone involved, by helping them make closer relationships with other students in their class or year, by having clear targets to keep to, and by helping them gain greater understanding of themselves and others.

Some schools also run 'restorative justice programs'. This means that, if a child has hit or bullied another child, the two children meet with a teacher to talk about it and for the bully to apologise to the other child.

Sanctions and support for parents

Penalty notices

Local authorities, headteachers, and the police can issue parents with fines for truancy or if an excluded child is in a public place during the first five days of the exclusion (without a strong reason, such as a medical emergency).

Fines for non-attendance are an alternative to prosecution. They are £50 if paid within 28 days, and £100 if paid later than 28 days but within 42 days. Parents who pay up on time will not be prosecuted. However, if they do not pay, the LA will usually prosecute.

Parenting contracts

The school may suggest drawing up a parenting contract. This is an agreement between you and the school about your child. It is not a punishment, but rather a way of working together to help your child. The school may suggest a parenting contract if it feels your child's behaviour is getting worse; perhaps if your child has been excluded for several short periods, or if they are not attending school regularly.

The school will invite you to a meeting to discuss the parenting

contract – your child may also be asked to come to the meeting. Under the contract, you agree to do certain things, for example, signing a weekly behaviour report and making sure that your child arrives at school on time each day. In return, the school will offer you and your child support.

Parenting contracts are voluntary – the school can't force you to sign one.

You can see an example of a parenting contract on the Department for Education and Skills website. See <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/behaviourandattendance/guidance/Contracts/Sample%20parenting%20contract.cfm>.

Parenting orders

These are court orders which compel a parent to attend parenting classes as well as other requirements required by the court for improving their child's behaviour. It is not a criminal conviction. It can be issued following a parent's conviction for their child's non-attendance, if their child has been excluded for serious misbehaviour either permanently or twice in 12 months for a fixed period, or if the child's behaviour is serious enough to have warranted a permanent exclusion.

Learning support units

Learning support units are special places within the school where students who are disruptive or have other problems are taught separately from the rest of their class for a time. They are not a 'sin-bin' – they give the student an opportunity to get help, either with particular work, or with

particular aspects of their behaviour. Students usually attend for no more than two months, sometimes just part-time, with the remainder of time in their usual class. While there, they continue to learn from the National Curriculum, and they might also learn anger management and social skills. Students are also given their own targets for learning in different

subjects, and the emphasis is on getting them to a point where they can rejoin their class. Learning Support Units mean that students with problems can remain in their school, with a good chance of being able to rejoin their class after a time. They allow teachers to work more intensively with students who might otherwise end up excluded.

Schools and parents – talking to each other

Schools should be welcoming places for parents and children.

When your child starts either primary or secondary school, they enter a world where few people, if anyone, knows them. If there is good communication between schools and parents, any problems can be nipped in the bud, before they develop into something more serious.

That doesn't mean that you should be constantly contacting the school, but it does mean playing your part, and making sure the school plays its part, in keeping communication going. Most schools will organise appointments with teachers to talk about your child, but there are other ways that schools and parents can communicate:

School reports

By law, the school must send at least one written report on your child's progress each year and give you the opportunity to discuss it with teachers. You also have the right to see and have a copy of your child's school record.

The school rules

The school should make sure that you receives information about the school rules, either in a handbook sent to every new student, or by making them available in the school office. You should read the school rules: if your child breaks them regularly, they could be excluded. Rules cover many aspects of school life: how children should behave in class, in the corridors and in the playground; policies on bullying, racism, and dress codes or uniforms; and rules about behaviour out of school, for example, while on school trips.

Home-school agreements

All schools now have home-school agreements, which the school, parents and students all sign. They are a three-way agreement, usually covering learning, attendance and behaviour. Typically, parents promise to make sure their children attend school, punctually, properly dressed and prepared; the school promises to teach children and help them learn; and the children promise to be punctual, behave well and concentrate in class. Home-school agreements are not legal documents – neither parents nor the school can be taken to court if they are broken, but they are there to help parents,

the child and the school know exactly what is expected of them. There is no legal obligation to sign them.

Parents' evenings

All schools organise parents' evenings. They are usually held early on in the year for parents of children starting at the school, and later on for children in other years. It's really important to go to parents' evenings so you have the chance to meet the teachers face to face. If you then have to contact them later on, it makes it much easier. Don't be afraid to let the school know right from the beginning about any concerns or anxieties you have about your child's learning or behaviour.

Does your child have special needs?

One reason your child may be having difficulties at school is because they are having problems learning in class. It might be with one particular subject, like reading, or numbers, or they might have difficulty understanding what's expected of them. Sometimes children get into trouble because no-one recognises that they have a special need, either for extra help with learning or with controlling their behaviour.

If you have a concern, the best thing is to first talk to your child's teacher or Head of Year. It's best to act quickly: starting the process of getting extra help for your child with special needs is often easier in primary school. If your child does have a special need, there is a lot of extra help they can receive, from extra support in class through to receiving a Statement of Special Educational Needs. This Statement describes the child's difficulties and the special help they must be given by law. Local education authorities may employ experts to decide the nature of the child's difficulties by assessing the child. All schools have a special needs co-ordinator (SENCO) who is responsible for organising the assessment and help of pupils with special needs.

There is a lot of good advice for parents. Try *Getting Extra Help and Asking for a Statutory Assessment*, published by the Advisory Centre for Education. Look on their website, www.ace-ed.org.uk.

Who's involved in helping you and your child?

Having to cope with a child who is facing exclusion is very stressful. Not only are you worried about your child, but you are likely to have to meet with teachers and a raft of education and other professionals. This can be intimidating, particularly when professionals use lots of jargon.

But the professionals are there to help, even if you do feel judged to be a bad parent. If you want to just let off steam, or to talk to someone in confidence, try calling Parentline, the 24-hour advice line for parents, on 0808 800 2222. You can phone free at any time to speak to a counsellor.

Some of the professionals you will come across will be based in the school; others are based in the local authority, and cover some or all schools.

Education Welfare Officer

The Education Welfare Officer (EWO) works with parents to improve children's attendance. If a child is truanting, the EWO will contact the parent and discuss a plan of action. The EWO might also be part of a truancy patrol – pairs of police officers and EWOs who patrol town centres and places out of school, and who have the legal right to return truanting students to school.

Home School Liaison Officer

This person is similar to an EWO, but they are employed by the school to work with parents to improve their child's attendance. They also help parents get involved in the school and make sure there is good communication between parents and schools.

Parent support advisers (PSAs)

This new role is being introduced across England to help schools provide parenting support and swift and easy access to specialist services. Children with all types of additional needs should benefit from the PSAs' help to identify the right support. The parent support adviser might be based in an after-school club, in the community, or in the school itself.

Education psychologist

Education psychologists are employed to assess, help and support children who have challenging and troubled behaviour, and to advise schools and

local authorities on their mental health needs. Education psychologists will, for example, be asked to attend meetings to advise on the best course of action for a particular pupil.

Learning mentor

Learning mentors are based at the school, to help pupils with their education and their behaviour. That might be in the Learning Support Unit, or in their usual class. Learning mentors can be volunteers or paid workers. There are now specific training and standards for this role.

Connexions adviser

Connexions is a national service based in local authorities combining the old careers service with more personal mentoring, advice and counselling. All 13- to 19-year-olds should have access to a Connexions personal adviser, and most students with challenging behaviour will be offered support from Connexions. Connexions also run local drop-in youth centres in town centres or high streets.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

If there are concerns about a student's mental health, it is likely that the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) will be involved. These services are based at the local primary care trust (the local part of the NHS, including doctors' surgeries), and will be able to recommend counselling or other mental health services if they are needed.

Youth Offending Team

If a pupil has been involved in criminal behaviour in or out of school, the Youth Offending Team may be involved in meetings with the school about their behaviour. Many teams offer activities such as summer sports programs, and run parenting courses for parents of young people who have committed an offence.

Behaviour and Education Support Team (Best)

You might hear the word 'Best' in discussions about your child. This is a government-funded program to help all these agencies to work together to help challenging and disaffected pupils.

Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)

The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator is employed by the school, and is responsible for organising the assessment and support of students with disabilities and special needs. The SENCO will also liaise with parents of children with special needs.

Parent support

In every local area, there is a range of help and support available to parents. There will be parenting groups, often organised by parents themselves, and more structured parenting education courses. If you want to find some support for yourself to help you cope with your child's difficult behaviour, ask the school for information on parent support. You can also phone Parentline, on 0808 800 2222.

For more information and advice, contact:

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)

0808 8000327:

advice on exclusions

0808 8005793: advice on bullying, special educational needs, attendance and admissions
www.ace-ed.org.uk

Advice for parents on their children's education

Young Minds Parent Information Service

0800 018 2138

www.youngminds.org.uk

Advice for adults concerned about the mental health of a child

Independent Panel for Special Education Advice

0800 0184016

www.ipsea.org.uk

Advice for parents on children's special educational needs appeals and disability discrimination claims.

Your local Citizens Advice Bureau or Law Centre

Look up the address and phone number in the phone directory or at www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk

Quiz

Are you a star parent?

What can you do to help your child at school?
Try our quiz to see if you get full marks for effort,
or could do better.

When your child brings a letter home
from school, do you:

- 1 Read it from top to bottom, fill in the reply slip and make a note of any dates in your diary
- 2 Scan it to see if they are asking for money
- 3 Chuck it in the bin or use it as scrap paper

Your child has to stay behind for a detention.
They swear it was someone else's fault. Do you:

- 1 Listen to your child's side of the story and send a note in with the homework asking for a word on the phone
- 2 Tell your child that they must have done something to deserve a detention
- 3 Phone up the school and shout at the teacher

At parents' evening, the teacher tells you
that your child has been misbehaving in class and
swearing at the teachers. Do you:

- 1 Try to think if something has been upsetting your child, and make an appointment to talk to the school about your child's behaviour
- 2 Shrug and say it's a phase they are going through – you were just the same
- 3 Tell the teacher that if they were a better teacher, this wouldn't happen and not to complain to you about the lack of control in their class

Your son tells you that the school is threatening
to exclude him because he is always late for school
and hasn't done his homework. Do you:

- 1 Phone the school, ask to speak to the teacher and find out the facts of the case
- 2 Tell him to pull his socks up or else he won't get any pocket money that month
- 3 Storm into the school and threaten to complain to the education authority

How did you do?

Mostly 1s – You are a star parent! You get the information, try to find out the real story and are prepared to talk to the school to sort out the problem, without just blaming your child.

Mostly 2s – You're trying to do the right thing but without getting involved. Maybe you think it's better for your kid to sort out their own troubles, or the thought of dealing with the school makes you feel like a pupil again! But, probably both your child and the school want a bit more help and support from you. Don't underestimate how much your involvement can benefit your child in the long run.

Mostly 3s – Nobody is going to get the better of you! It's great to stand up for your kids, but sometimes it can be better not go in all guns blazing. Next time, it might be worth giving the school a chance to tell their side of the story.

Question and Answer

Q Is it right that the school can exclude my child for wearing jewellery? She had her ears pierced for her 13th birthday and was given some really pretty earrings but the school say that it is against school rules, and that if she continues to wear them, she could be excluded from school.

A You might feel that the school is over-reacting but, if wearing earrings is specifically prohibited in the school rules, then the school is entitled to exclude your child for breaking the rules. Schools are allowed to draw up rules of conduct, appearance and behaviour that children must follow. You knew the rules when your child joined the school so it isn't unreasonable of them to expect you to accept them.

Q My son was in a fight. He's 13 and he's never been in trouble before. He won't tell me all the details but from other kids who saw the fight, it seems another boy from his class was teasing him, and he just lost his temper and punched the boy. Now the school tells me that he's a danger to himself and others because he can't control his anger, and that they have a policy of excluding children who fight.

A If your child has been in a fight, it's reasonable that the school might want to punish him, but if he hasn't been in trouble before, you also have a right to expect the school to offer him

some help and support. Does he have a problem with anger? Is he being bullied and lashed out in response? There are all sorts of things a school can do to find out if there is a problem and to stop your son's behaviour getting worse. Ask to meet with his tutor or Head of Year as soon as possible.

Q I hated school and did my fair share of bunking off when I was a kid, but I have just found out that my son has been leaving school in the middle of the day and hanging around the shopping centre. The thing is, I feel really nervous about going to see the teacher about it – some of the teachers were there when I was at school and they are the last people I want to see again.

A It's easy to feel like a child again when you go into school, but you are an adult now and the parent of your son. The school will be pleased that you want to stop your son bunking off and should be keen to work with you. They are likely to suggest a joint plan of action. For example, you might take your son to school in the morning and meet him after school. The school might arrange for a mentor to talk to him and help him, to try and find out if he is truanting from particular lessons where there might be a problem with the teacher. They could then move him out of that class and teach him in the Learning Support Unit for a while.

Q My 15-year-old son tells me he's really bored in lessons and doesn't see the point of carrying on at school. He's desperate to find a job, but I keep telling him he has to stay at school.

A He does have to stay at school until the end of Year 11, but the school can arrange for him to spend some of his time outside the school, in work, if that is what he wants. The government has said that young people can start to work in approved companies and organisations for part of their time in their last year at school. Your son will still be on the school roll, and the school will check on his attendance and behaviour.



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The information in this guide applies to England and Wales only.

The law is complicated and every case is different. Get advice.

This guide was written by Gill Keep, with thanks to Islington Law Centre. With extra material by Margaret McGowan.

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If you have any comments on this guide, please email us at feedback@advicenow.org.uk



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