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How to get back to school:

A self help guide for young people

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# How to get back to school

*A self-help guide for young people*



Lots of young people find it difficult to go to school sometimes. If you are finding it difficult to go to school this book has lots of ideas that can help you.

### **Why do some people find it difficult to go to school?**

There are lots of reasons that can make it feel harder to go to school, for example:

Moving schools or moving from primary to secondary school

Struggling to get back after a long break e.g. after an illness or summer holidays.

Worry about a family member or close friend.

Experiencing difficulties at school e.g. difficulties with studies/ problems with other pupils.

These are only a few examples, but it's important to remember that whatever the cause of your difficulties there is something you can do about it.

### **How do I get back to school?**

There are three important areas to think about in order to make a plan to get back to school. These are:

**Thoughts** - the words or pictures that go through your mind when you try to go to school or think about going to school.

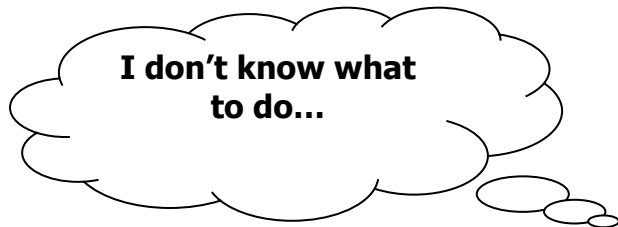
**Feelings** - the emotions and physical feelings that you have when you go to school or think about going to school.

**Behaviours** - the things that you do to manage your thoughts and feelings.

## Understanding thoughts

*Do you ever have worrying thoughts about school?*

Sometimes we know exactly what our thoughts are and can describe them easily.



Sometimes it can be more difficult to describe our thoughts.

Sometimes our thoughts are like an internal voice or a running commentary in our minds, sometimes they are more like pictures that we can see in our "minds eye"

Some questions that might help you notice important thoughts.

What do you miss about school?

What do you not miss about school?

When did you first start to worry about going to school?

What do you think are some important thoughts about school for you? Try to write some of these thoughts in the space below:

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## Understanding Feelings

*Do you ever have horrible feelings in the morning before you go to school?*

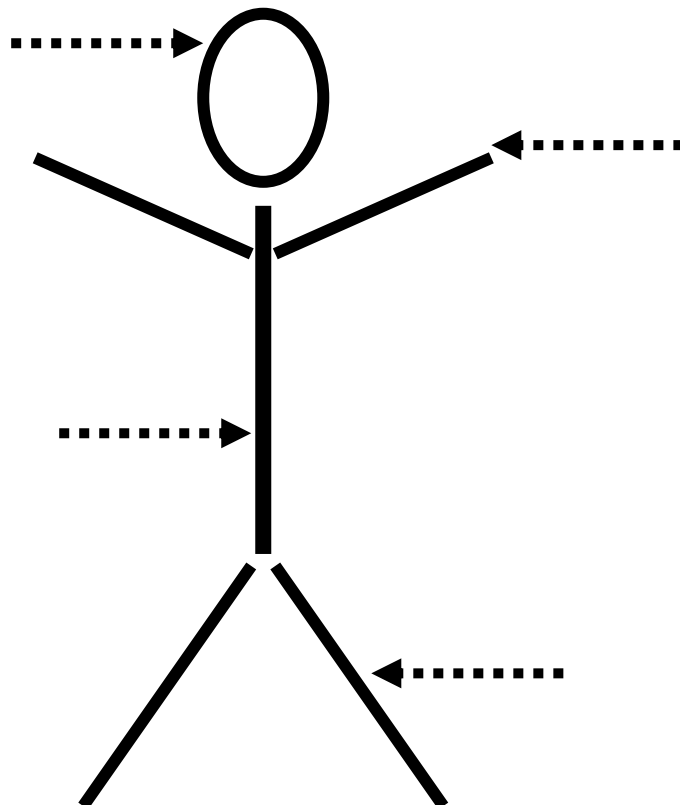
Feelings include emotional feelings and physical feelings

When we talk about feeling happy, or sad, or excited we are talking about our emotions.

When we talk about sensations and changes in our bodies we are talking about physical feelings.

Can you think about some of the physical feelings you have when you go to school/try to go to school? Write some of the feelings you have and label them on the stickman below:

*Think about what happens to your: heart rate, stomach, breathing, legs, hands...*



## Understanding Behaviour

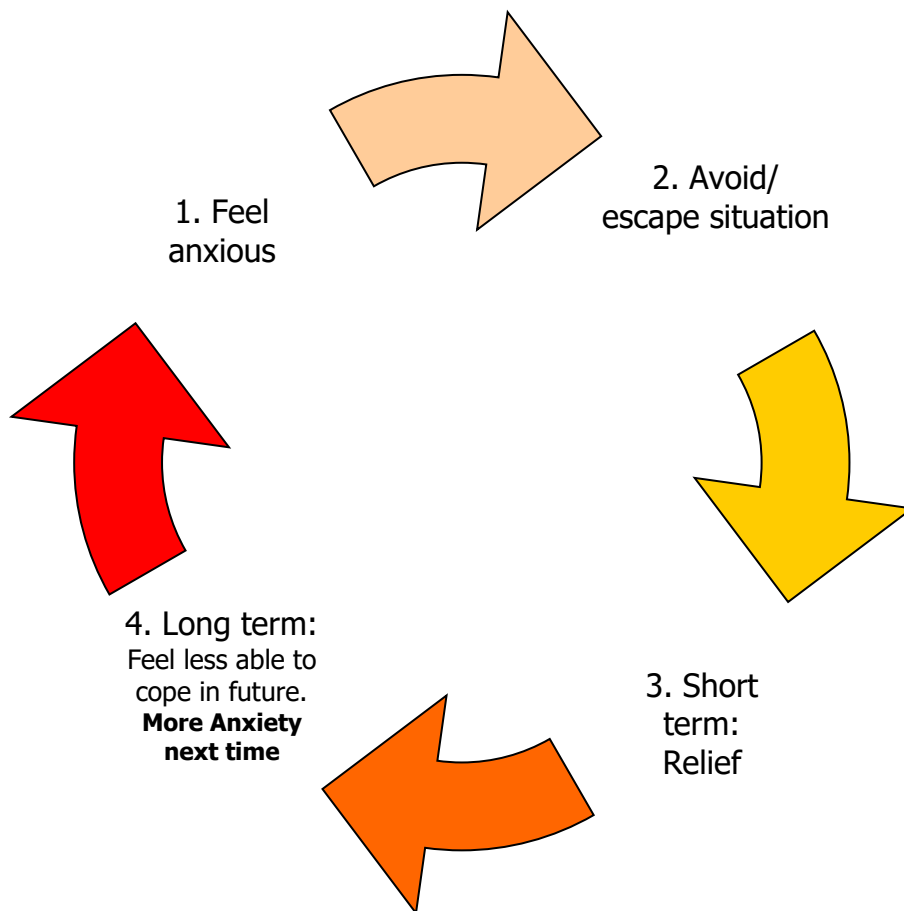
If a particular situation causes you to feel difficult feelings or think difficult thoughts you might decide to try and avoid that situation.

Not doing the things you find hard is called avoidance.

What's the problem with avoidance?

If you avoid things you might feel a sense of relief at first, but the next time try to do the same thing it can feel even harder.

### The Vicious Cycle of Avoidance



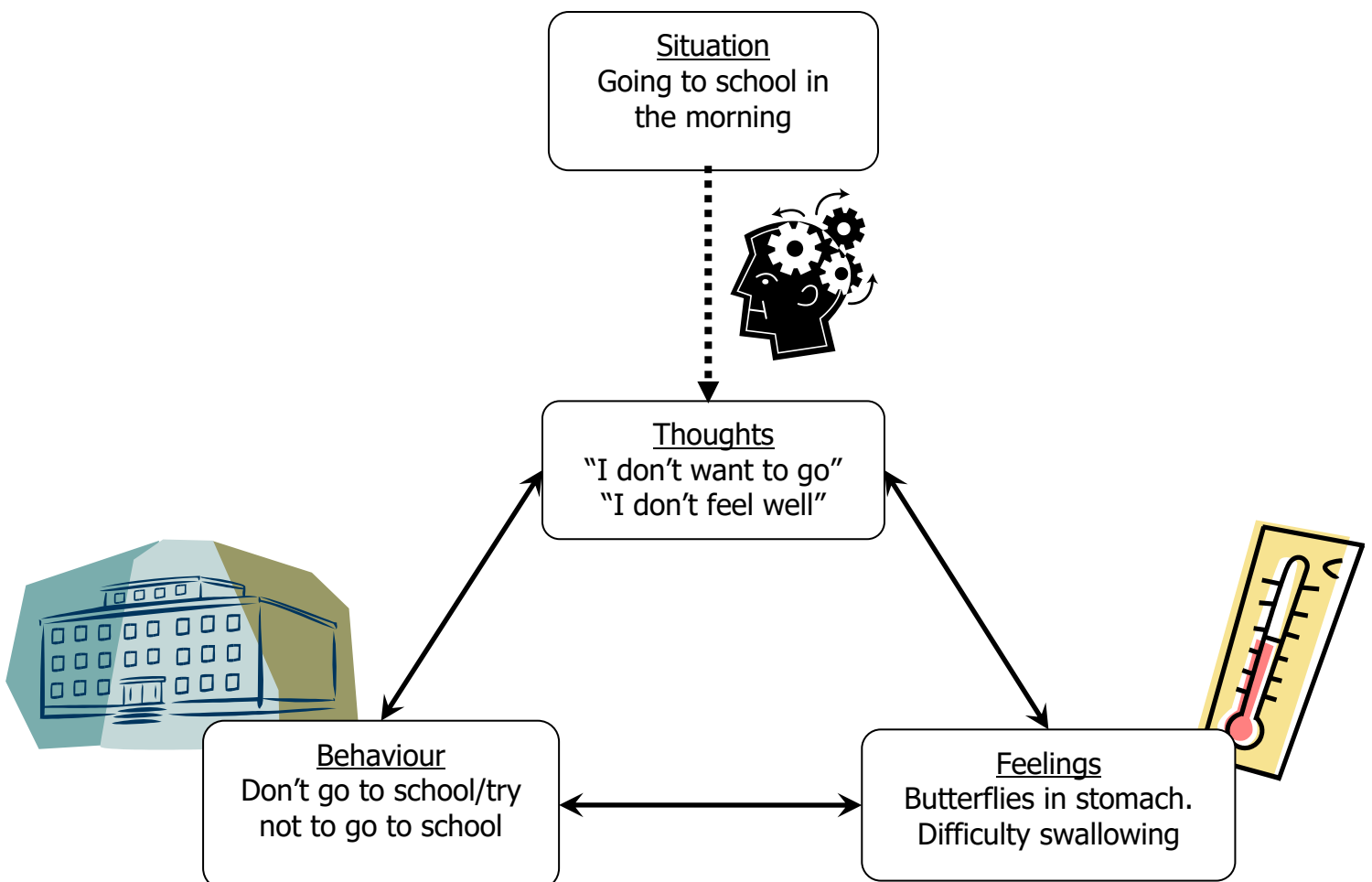
## **Why do I feel like this?**

Often when you have a bad experience or feel worried about something, you begin to look for signs that the same feelings might happen again.



Although it makes sense that you want to avoid unpleasant feelings being on the "look out" can actually make you more likely to feel these things.

Your thoughts, feelings and behaviour can work together to make it feel harder to go to school. Another word for these worried thoughts and feelings is "Anxiety".



But there is good news!  
The next section of this book will teach you techniques to combat negative thoughts, anxious feelings, and unhelpful behaviours.

## Changing your thoughts

Look back at the worrying thoughts you wrote down earlier in this book.

Now that you have identified some of your thoughts its time to learn to challenge them.



### Judging the evidence

Imagine you are a judge looking at your thoughts. Your job is to listen to the evidence and decide what you think is the most reasonable response.

#### **Thought:**

*I don't want to go to school because no one likes me.*

#### **Evidence for:**

*I had an argument with one of my friends*

*People have laughed at me before*

*I get nervous and then I can't think of anything to say*

*I don't like the same things everyone else does*

#### **Evidence against:**

*Other people have fallen out with their friends*

*I still speak to some people even though it's difficult*

*I've laughed at people but I still like them*

*I like some of the same things other people do*

#### **Balanced thought:**

*I do get on with some people when I make an effort to speak to them. Sometimes people do speak to me; they wouldn't do that if they didn't like me.*





**Thought**

**Evidence for**

*Write down all of the things that you think prove your thought.*

**Evidence against**

*Write down all of the things that argue against your thought. It might help to imagine what someone who you trust would say OR what you would say to someone else.*



**Balanced conclusion**

*Now be the "judge" looking at the evidence you have presented what do you think is a balanced conclusion?*

**Example:**

If I stand up to give a talk I will make a fool of myself

When I've been nervous before I became shaky and felt sick.

I know that anxiety doesn't last for ever.  
 There are things I can do to help me control my anxiety.  
 Other people say that they get nervous too.  
 Other people don't want to laugh at me; they have to give talks too.

Even though I might feel nervous at first I will probably feel more relaxed once I start.

## **Controlling feelings**

Can you imagine feeling relaxed and worried at the same time?  
It's not really possible.

Relaxation is actually a skill. As with any skill, the more you practise the easier it will become.

## **Relaxation exercises**

There are lots of different relaxation exercises these exercises introduce three types of relaxation for you to try.

Different people prefer different methods so have a go at all of the exercises and find your favourite(s) but stop if you feel pain or discomfort at any time.

It's important to set some time aside to practice relaxation at first.

Try to set aside 15mins each day to practice your relaxation.



Once you have found an exercise that works for you, you can start to use relaxation thought-out the day.



## Controlled breathing

- Begin by Sitting or lying in a comfortable position.
- As you breathe in slowly count along with your breath 1-2-3... until you reach the end of your breath
- Hold your breath for a couple of seconds
- Breathe out for the same count 1-2-3...



As you breathe out imagine that you are slowly blowing out the candles on a birthday cake

- Breathe out through your mouth and feel your stomach relax
- Continue breathing in this way for a few minutes.
- Try to keep feelings of calmness and relaxation with you as you return to your day.



## Body relaxation

Sometimes when we feel stressed or upset our muscles become tenser. It might sound strange, but by stretching your muscles you can get rid of tension and feel more calm and relaxed.

Sit or lie in a comfortable position

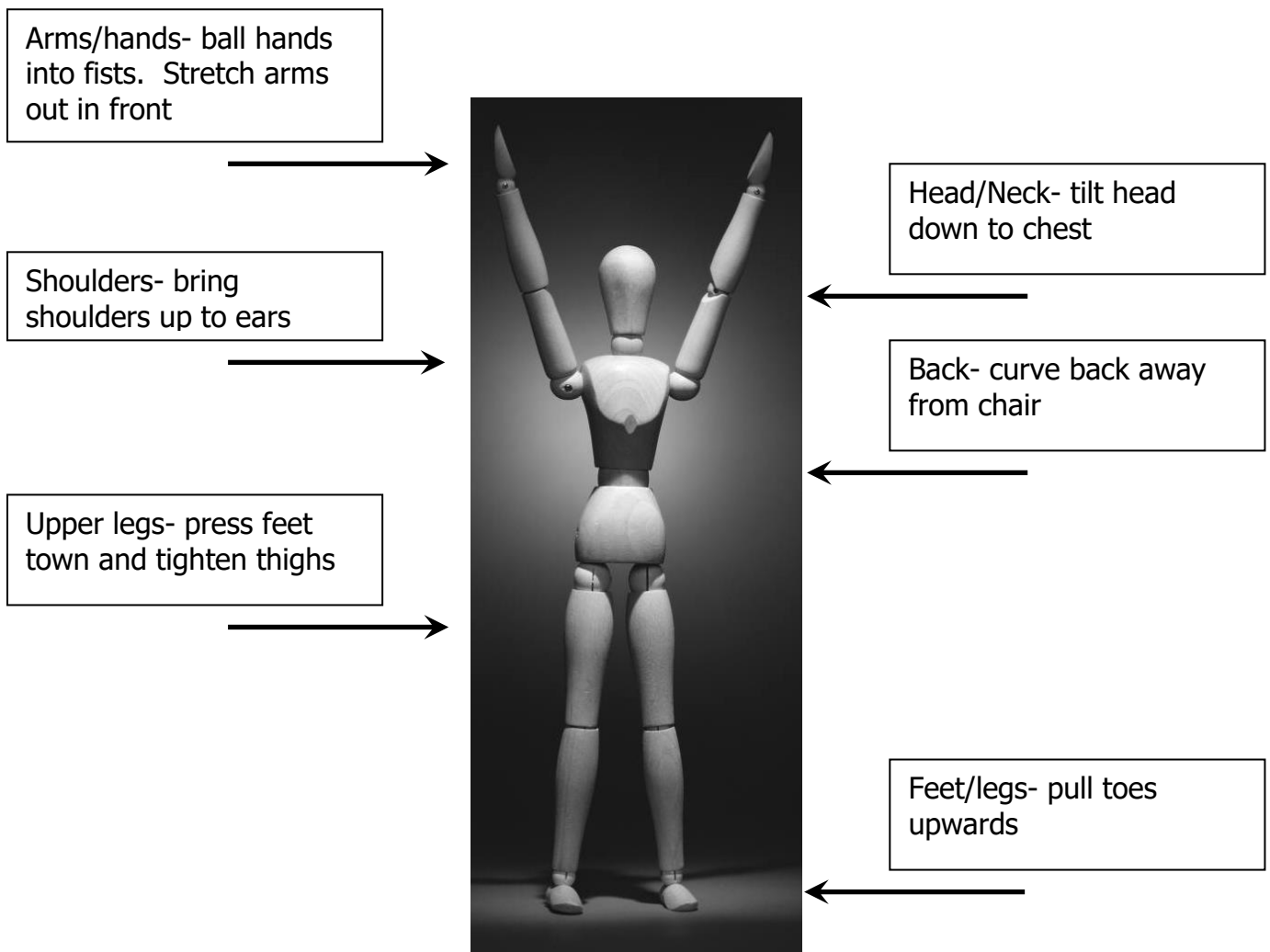
Close your eyes and take a deep breath. As you breathe out feel the tension begin to flow away.

Starting at your feet tense up your legs by pushing your toes away from you, take a deep breath, HOLD, Breathe out and relax your muscles.

Feel the difference as you let yourself relax.

Now continue to work up through your body, tensing, holding and releasing, until you have relaxed all the way from the tip of your toes to the top of your head.

There's no right or wrong way to do this but here are some suggested exercises:



## **Imagination Relaxation**

There are lots of ways to use your imagination to help you relax.

**Imagine yourself going on a journey** to a place you find relaxing. It can be somewhere you've been before, or somewhere you make up yourself. You can go to lots of different places or you can keep revisiting your favourite place.

You are only limited by your imagination, so have fun and experiment with different ideas until you find one that works for you.

### **Preparing**

It's important to try and find a relaxing place where you feel comfortable and won't be disturbed, e.g. a comfortable chair or your bed.

Begin by concentrating on your breathing. Take a few deep breaths and feel yourself relax more and more with each out breath.

### **Going to your relaxing place**

Imagine what it's like to be in your favourite place. Think about what you can see, hear, smell, and touch.

For example if you are imagining yourself at the beach you might feel the sand between your toes, hear the sea rushing up and fading away, and smell the ocean.

OR

You could go to a tropical forest and hear the birds in the trees, and feel the cool grass between your toes; perhaps you can even smell tropical fruits!

Wherever you choose to go, focus on making your picture as detailed as possible. Move around and explore until you find a place that you feel very relaxed.

Spend some time just relaxing in this place

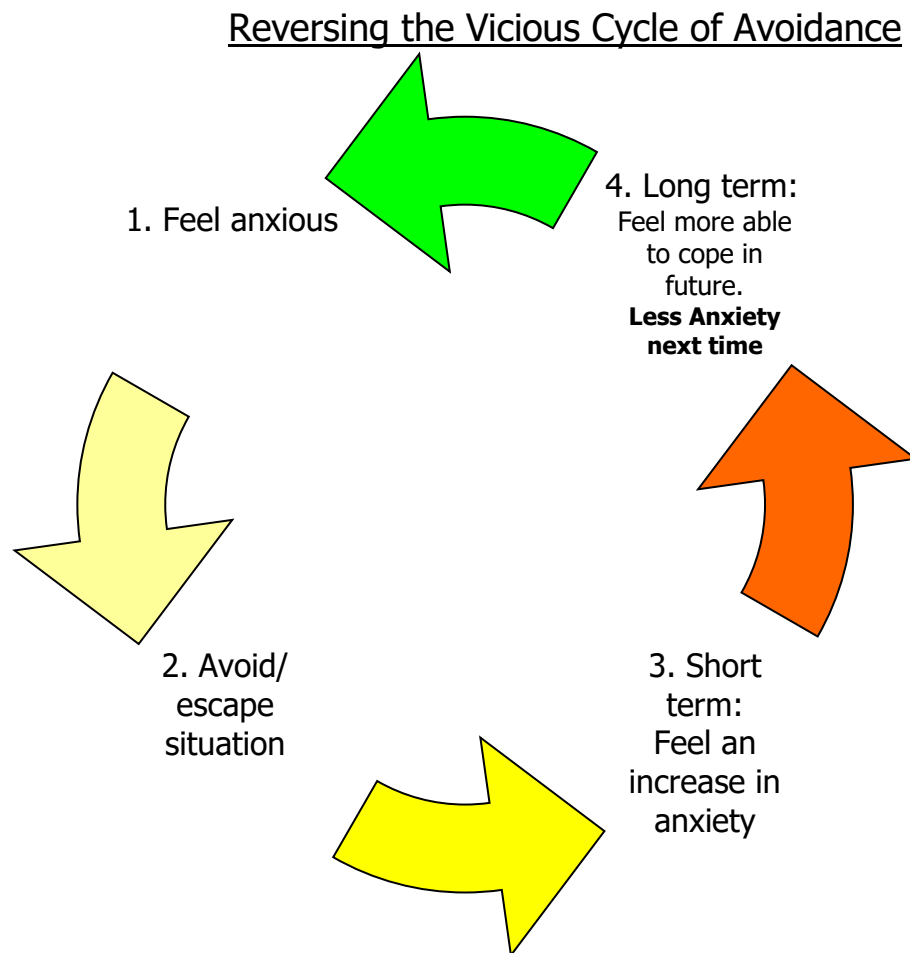
### **Coming back**

When you feel relaxed and are ready to return to your day. Do this slowly. Take a few minutes to slowly focus back on your room and bring with you your new feelings of relaxation and calmness.

## Changing your behaviours

Now that you have learnt how to control your thoughts and feelings you can use these skills as you start to change your behaviour

You might find it helpful to remind yourself of vicious cycle of avoidance on page 5.



Why do you want to change your behaviour?

Write down what you think are some of the reasons to school or not to go to school:

Reasons not to go to school	Reasons to go to school

### Making a plan

Imagine you are trying to climb to the top of a mountain.

The only way to get to the top is by taking one step at a time.

This is just the same when you are trying to reach goals in your life.

The following example shows how someone could work towards getting back to school.



My Goal stay in school every day for a week



- Step 10 Stay in school for
- Step 9 Stay in class until lunch time
- Step 8 Stay in class until break time
- Step 7 Go into class for 40 mins sitting beside friend
- Step 6 Go to school meet class teacher
- Step 5 Walk to school- meet guidance teacher
- Step 4 Have friend come round for an hour

- Step 3 Walk to school gates- stay for 15 mins
- Step 2 Phone a friend from school- talk for 10 mins
- Step 1 Walk to the school gates- stay for 5 mins

Use the space below to write down the steps that you think you could take to get back to school.

The example on the previous page might provide some useful ideas but this is your plan so be as creative as you can and invent steps that are relevant to you.

My Goal \_\_\_\_\_



Step 10

Step 9

Step 8

Step 7

Step 6

Step 5

Step 4

Step 3

Step 2

Step 1



Tips for climbing up your steps:

- Make sure that step 1 is something that you feel really comfortable doing.
- Don't move onto the next step until you feel ready.
- If you find a too difficult try to think if you make a new step that will be easier and will help you get there.
- If you find things becoming harder, or you don't manage to complete a step don't worry: just go back a step or two and start working up again.
- Remember to look back and congratulate yourself on your progress, you've already learned lots of new skills. Well done!

**Reminder sheet**

Fill in the gaps below with the most important things for you. You might want to tear off this sheet and keep it with you when you are working to get back to school.

My goal is to \_\_\_\_\_

When I reach my goal I will feel \_\_\_\_\_

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When I feel worried

I will try to relax by \_\_\_\_\_

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When I think worrying thoughts

I will try to think more positively by \_\_\_\_\_

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**My Positive mantra**

In this box write down a positive statement that you can say to yourself when things get difficult (*it might help to look back at the thoughts section*): \_\_\_\_\_

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Say this to yourself when things get difficult

## **Further help**

**If you would like further support and advice about this or another issue speak to your GP and they will be able to help.**

**Help is also available from the following places:**

### **Young minds**

Website: [www.youngminds.org.uk/young-people](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-people)

### **Living life to the full**

[www.lttf.com](http://www.lttf.com)

Provide a range of self-help advice.

### **Childline**

Phone: 0800 1111

Website: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

Free and confidential 24 hour counselling service for children and young people in the UK. You can Phone to talk to a counsellor about any problem, talk to a counsellor online, send an email or post on the message boards. Information about a wide range of issues is also available on their website.

### **Samaritans**

Phone: 08457 90 90 90

Website: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

24 hour confidential phone line for non-judgemental emotional support. You can also contact them by email or write a letter.

### **Breathing Space**

Phone: 0800 838587

Website: [www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk](http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk)

Offer counselling for all ages.

### *References*

*www.handsonscotland.co.uk*

*www.getselfhelp.co.uk Sleep Self Help. Carol Vivian.*