

School Attendance and Mental Health

Research suggests that school absence and mental health difficulties are associated, though the direction of this relationship is not yet fully understood.

Mental health difficulties are linked to missing school

- Anxiety may be associated with absence from school, including absenteeism, unexcused absence, and school refusal
- Depression appears to be associated with absenteeism and truancy
- Absence has also been linked to a broader range of difficulties, including neurodevelopmental conditions and self-harm

Evidence in this field remains limited, and it is not yet clear whether mental health difficulties precede absence, or vice versa.

Absence may also signal risk ahead

Longitudinal research suggests that adolescents with persistent absence (missing more than 10% of school sessions) may be more likely to experience mental health problems later in adolescence.



Poor attendance may act as an early indicator that a young person needs support.

What emerging evidence suggests about support

- There appear to be no quick fixes or one-size-fits-all solutions
- Supportive school environments that promote safety and belonging may help encourage attendance.
- Understanding individual pupils and the barriers they face may help inform more tailored support.
- Proactive, personalised communication with families may help improve attendance

Join Sophie Epstein, Joanna Reid and Igraine Rhodes, chaired by Tamsin Ford, for a session bringing together research, emerging evidence and lived experience on mental health and school attendance.

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