



Growing Minds Therapy Addresses Rising Childhood Anxiety Crisis Affecting School Attendance

August 25, 2026

CHICHESTER, UK - August 25, 2026 -

Growing Minds Therapy has expanded its cognitive behavioral therapy services across West Sussex and South Hampshire as new government data reveals that persistent school absence remains 56 percent above pre-pandemic levels, with anxiety identified as a primary driver for many affected children.

Department for Education figures for the current academic year show that 18.66 percent of pupils have missed 10 percent or more of possible sessions, meaning roughly one in five children is now classified as persistently absent. The data indicates that 38.6 percent of pupils with identified social, emotional and mental health needs were persistently absent in the previous academic year, more than double the rate for pupils with no identified additional needs.

The scale of the crisis has prompted government intervention through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026, which received Royal Assent in April and introduced new statutory duties on schools and local authorities to monitor and support attendance. The number of specialist mental health support teams operating in schools is set to rise from 607 to 713, offering targeted sessions for pupils experiencing anxiety and low mood who do not meet NHS referral thresholds.

"School avoidance is rarely about a child choosing not to attend and is almost always a signal that something deeper is going on," said Melissa Urwin, a BABCP-accredited CBT psychotherapist and founder of Growing Minds Therapy. "Cognitive behavioral therapy helps children identify the thought patterns that drive their avoidance, build practical strategies for managing anxiety, and gradually re-engage with the situations they find most difficult. Parents often arrive at our practice exhausted and uncertain, and supporting the whole family to understand the anxiety cycle is a critical part of helping a child return to school with confidence."

Recent research supports the effectiveness of therapeutic intervention. A meta-analysis published in the Journal of Pediatric Nursing in January 2025, covering 29 studies, confirmed that cognitive behavioral therapy is significantly effective in reducing anxiety in children. Additionally, a 2026 Bayesian meta-analysis in the Journal of Clinical Psychology found that school-based CBT produces durable preventive effects that can be maintained for up to one year.

The Centre for Social Justice warned in March 2026 that 1.4 million children were persistently absent and that without urgent action, an additional 180,000 school leavers could become long-term workless at a lifetime cost of 14 billion pounds. Research from the School Avoidance Alliance indicates that as many as 28 percent of children experience school avoidance at some point, most commonly between the ages of 10 and 13.

Growing Minds Therapy specializes in providing evidence-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for children and young people experiencing anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, school avoidance, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The practice offers a structured three-step approach beginning with an initial consultation to discuss the main reasons for accessing therapy, followed by a comprehensive assessment to explore current symptoms, and intervention sessions to work on collaboratively agreed goals. Therapy for children and young people is delivered both in-person across West Sussex and South Hampshire, and through online sessions to ensure accessibility for families throughout the UK.

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Growing Minds Therapy

Growing Minds Therapy provides specialist CBT for children and young people with anxiety, depression, OCD and PTSD. Founded by a BABCP-accredited psychotherapist with 20+ years in education and NHS CAMHS. Based in Chichester, West Sussex.

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