

A quick guide: First-day phone calls for non-attendance

Why is this important?

Every conversation with a parent is an opportunity to build positive relationships and reinforce some key message e.g. ***your child is important to us. We care. Your child belongs here. We miss your child not being here, key activities the child will miss by not being in school.***

Before making the call, it is worth reviewing your MIS to understand any patterns of absence, what is the child's current attendance, is there a theme to reasons of absence. You will then be prepared to support parents in your conversation.

During the call, do your best to establish that the child and family are safe.

If you have any concerns, share them immediately with the DSL team. Record the discussion: Note the conversation and any actions taken in the child's record – on SIMS or CPOMS depending on the school's process.

1. Introduce yourself

Use parent/carer's name. Inform them that you are calling from [school] and use your full name and job title. Please check you are speaking to the right person to ensure you are compliant with GDPR.

2. Explain the purpose of your call

You are calling because [child] is not at school today and you are concerned because you have not received a message to explain why. You are calling to check that [child] and family are ok and to find out why [child] is not in school.

3. Guiding the phone call

Ask why the child is not at school today. It is important that this is an **open question** and that you do not ask leading questions for example, don't say: "is [child] ill today?".

If the parent does not provide a valid reason for their child being off school such as illness, but instead states that their child overslept, they have no packed lunch, no clean school uniform etc, listen to them and be supportive but firm. Explain that it is important that their child comes into school anyway, even if it means they are late. Validate their feelings by using phrases such as "I understand that" and wherever possible offer practical support to overcome the barrier that is being presented. Try and get a firm commitment that they will bring their child in today and ask how long it will take for them to get ready and agree a time that you will expect to see them.

If the parent is adamant that they are not going to bring their child into school, explain the absence **will not be authorised** by the school as it is not a valid reason for absence. Say that you look forward to the child being back in school tomorrow, you do not need to explain what the consequences of this unauthorised absence might be (e.g., penalty notice) as this will be followed up through the attendance route separately if needed, depending on whether this is an absolute one off, or part of a pattern.

If the parent says their child is feeling 'unwell', when a child is ill, some parents will offer the details of the illness automatically (e.g., "they have sickness and diarrhoea", "I think they've developed tonsillitis and I've made a doctor's appt for this afternoon").

However, if the parent simply says their child is ill, **try and establish the reason why**. Say something like "I'm sorry to hear that, please could you let me know what's wrong so that I can update our records and let their class teacher know." If the parent refuses to tell you what's wrong, there is no need to probe further, just explain that you will pass the information on to [member of staff name/role]. It will be for this person to contact the parent for more information should they deem it necessary.

If it sounds like the illness is very minor and the child should be in school, explain this to the parent and ask them to bring the child into school anyway. Explain that you will ask [member of staff name/role] to keep an eye on the child and the school will contact the parent if it seems necessary for the child to go home. If the parent sounds genuinely unsure if the child is quite well enough or not, you could suggest the parent sees how the child is at lunchtime and brings them in time for lunch (ensure there is a school meal where appropriate), or for the afternoon session if they are well enough then. Explain that it is better for them to be in school for half a day than not at all. If the parent says they are not going to bring them in for the rest of the day as they think it's better for them to have a whole day at home, explain that you look forward to seeing the child back in school tomorrow.

It can be useful to promote activities that are happening at school that the pupil would enjoy, or ensure it is not that the child is trying to avoid anything at school.

If it sounds like a GP or 111 should have been consulted, ask the parent if they have contacted the GP/111. If they say no, suggest they may want to do this.

If the parent gives a reason such as 'family emergency', sensitively try and establish what kind of emergency. If it seems appropriate, ask if there is anything the school can do to support them so the child can still come into school today. Where unclear, or it seems the reason should not be a reason for the child to be off school, but the parent thinks it is, explain that you will let [member of staff name/role] know and they will call the parent back to discuss further. The subsequent call can then establish more about the situation and aim to resolve the child's absence.

If the parent says their child is refusing to attend, ask if they know why this is. If it is reasons such as worried about something at home, schoolwork, friendship issues or bullying etc., ask the parent to reassure the child that you will arrange for them to speak to [member of staff name/role] when they arrive at school today before they go into their class.

If the parent says they don't know what the issue is, ask them to reassure the child that you will arrange for the child to speak to [member of staff name/role] when they arrive at school today, so that they can share any worries they have and come up with a plan to help. If the parent says

they are unable persuade the child to come to school, arrange for [member of staff name/role] to call the parent back to discuss the matter further.

Finishing the call

Explain that if the child is still unwell tomorrow and will not be coming to school, the parent must let the school know by [x:xx am] and explain how they can do this.

Please note in some circumstances this may not always be relevant, for example if a parent says their child has been taken into hospital. In which case just explain that you will let [member of staff name/role] know and ask the parent to keep the school updated. It will be for this person to contact the parent for more information should they deem it necessary.

Explain that if the school does not know why a child is off and cannot contact the parent to find out why, this is a worry for the school. This means the school will then follow its safeguarding process, which could include making home visits or even requesting a Welfare Check from the police.

It may be beneficial to tell the parent how many sessions of education they have missed this term and explain any concerns due to repeated themes.

If the reasons appear to be complex, or if at any point the call is not going well for any reason, politely explain that you will ask [member of staff name/role] to call the parent back to discuss further.

Agree Next Steps: Summarise what you have agreed will happen next.