

Supporting a pupil in distress

Distress can affect how a pupil feels, behaves, relates to others and learns. Recognising what may be happening and responding early can help them regain a sense of control.

1 What to look out for — early signs of distress

Worry or withdrawal

Irritability or disruptive behaviour

Difficulty concentrating

Avoiding lessons or school

Low mood or feeling overwhelmed

Tiredness or poor sleep

Ask yourself: what might this behaviour be communicating, and what has changed?

2 Understand — explore what may be behind the distress

Explore what might be happening across the pupil's life:

At school: Academic pressure • bullying • friendship difficulties • setbacks

At home: Family difficulties • loss • instability • worries about others

Beyond school and home: Community stressors • adversity • stressful or traumatic experiences

3 Support — help the pupil regain a sense of control

Evidence-informed approaches highlight simple skills that can help:

CALM
RECOGNISE
THINK
CONNECT
PLAN

Support them to manage strong emotions.

Help them identify feelings and triggers.

Break problems down into manageable parts.

Strengthen connection with trusted adults and others.

Agree on one manageable next step.

Want to learn more about how to support distressed pupils?
Join our training