FREE PARENT AND CARER GUIDE

When Your Child's Behaviour Changes

A calm first-steps guide to noticing what has changed, opening a conversation and deciding what to do next.

Seeing every child. Hearing every voice.

NOTICE CLEARLY | LISTEN CALMLY | ACT SAFELY

Supporting the child you see - and the one you don't.

Free to download and share

START HERE

You do not need all the answers

A change in behaviour can feel worrying, frustrating or confusing. This guide helps you slow things down, notice patterns and choose a sensible first step.

The aim is not to diagnose your child.

Behaviour can have many causes. It may reflect stress, relationships, learning needs, health, sleep, change, loss, feeling unsafe or something else entirely. Stay curious and avoid deciding on one explanation too early.

Use this guide when

- your child's behaviour, mood, attendance or routines have changed
- home and school seem to be seeing different things
- you want to prepare for a calm conversation or school meeting
- you are unsure whether to monitor, ask for help or act quickly

Important boundary

The Pastoral Hub provides general information and signposting. It does not provide emergency, medical, legal or safeguarding case advice. Do not include names or identifying details about a child when contacting us.

If there is immediate danger

Call 999. If urgent medical or mental health help is needed in England, call 111 and select the mental health option where appropriate.

STEP 1

Notice before you interpret

Write down what you actually saw or heard. Clear observations are more useful than labels such as 'lazy', 'defiant' or 'attention-seeking'.

Label	Observation
'He was completely out of control.'	'He shouted, left the room and stayed upstairs for 40 minutes.'

What has changed?

Think about behaviour, mood, sleep, eating, friendships, attendance, learning, phone use and time spent alone.

When did you first notice it?

A date or approximate week can help you connect the change with events or pressures.

Where and when does it happen?

Home, school, particular lessons, transitions, mornings, evenings or after contact with certain people.

What happens just before and just after?

This may reveal demands, triggers, escape, reassurance or patterns in adult responses.

What is still going well?

Strengths and calmer moments can show what helps your child feel safer or more capable.

My clearest observation

STEP 2

Start a conversation, not an interrogation

Choose a reasonably calm moment. You do not have to solve everything in one talk. The first aim is to make it easier for your child to say more later.

Try one simple opening

'I've noticed mornings seem harder recently. I might have got this wrong, but I wanted to check how things feel for you.'

Helpful	Often unhelpful
• Describe what you have noticed	• Starting in the middle of an argument
• Ask one question at a time	• 'Why are you doing this to us?'
• Allow silence or a later reply	• Rapid questions or demanding eye contact
• Reflect back what you heard	• Promising to keep every secret
• Thank them for telling you	• Threatening consequences for honesty

Useful follow-up questions

- What is the hardest part of the day at the moment?
- When does it feel a little easier?
- Is there anything you wish adults understood better?
- Would you rather talk, write it down or come back to this later?
- What would make tomorrow 10 percent easier?

STEP 3

Work with school as one team

School may see a different version of your child. That does not mean either account is wrong. Compare information and look for patterns together.

Before contacting school

- Choose two or three specific examples rather than a long history
- Say what has changed and roughly when
- Include what your child says, using their words where possible
- Explain what has already been tried and whether it helped
- Ask who is best placed to coordinate the next step

A clear opening message

'I have noticed a change in Sam's mornings and attendance over the last two weeks. I would like to compare what we are seeing at home and school and agree one or two next steps. Who would be the best person to speak to?'

Use a first name only in your own notes. Do not send personal details to The Pastoral Hub.

Questions for the meeting

- What has school noticed, and in which lessons or times of day?
- Has attendance, punctuality, work, behaviour or friendship changed?
- Who has a positive relationship with my child?
- What small adjustment or check-in could be tried first?
- Who will do what, and when will we review it?

The two actions we agreed

STEP 4

Choose the next sensible step

Use the least dramatic response that is still safe. Review it rather than letting an unclear plan drift.

Monitor briefly

Suitable when the change is mild, recent and there are no immediate safety concerns.

- Keep short factual notes
- Try one supportive change
- Set a review date

Ask for support

Do this when the change persists, affects daily life or leaves you unsure what to do.

- Contact school pastoral/SEND staff
- Speak to the GP where health may be involved
- Use a trusted support service

Act promptly

Do not wait for a planned review if a child may be unsafe, reports abuse, talks about suicide, has seriously harmed themselves or someone else, is missing, or there is another immediate risk.

Call 999 if there is immediate danger or a serious risk to life. For urgent medical or mental health help in England, call 111. For safeguarding concerns, contact the police, the child's local authority Children's Services or the NSPCC Helpline.

My next step

What will I do?

Who will help?

When will we review it?

TRUSTED SUPPORT

Where to go next

Availability and eligibility can change. Check each service's website for the latest information and local access arrangements.

NHS 111

Urgent medical or mental health help in England.

Call 111
111.nhs.uk

NSPCC Helpline

Advice for adults worried about a child.

0808 800 5000
nspcc.org.uk/helpline

Childline

Free support for children and young people, by phone and online.

0800 1111
childline.org.uk

Samaritans

Free listening support at any time, day or night.

116 123
samaritans.org

Kooth

Online mental wellbeing support for young people. Access and service names can depend on local commissioning.

Check local availability
kooth.com

The Pastoral Hub

General guidance and signposting for parents, carers and school staff.

hello@thepastoralhub.co.uk
thepastoralhub.co.uk

Sources checked 6 September 2026

Service details were checked against NHS England, NSPCC, Childline, Samaritans and Kooth. This guide is educational and does not replace assessment or advice from an appropriate professional.

Remember

You do not have to solve everything today. Notice clearly, listen calmly, act safely and agree the next small step.