

What do we mean?

A withdrawn child may seem unusually quiet, disconnected, or emotionally distant. This behaviour isn't always obvious, but it's often a sign of inner distress. You might notice your young person;

- Spending more time alone, including retreating to their room more often and avoiding shared spaces at home.
- Not joining in with friends or family. They may turn down invitations or seem uninterested in activities they used to enjoy.
- Avoiding eye contact or conversation. This can be a sign they're feeling overwhelmed, ashamed, or unsure how to express themselves.
- Saying 'I'm fine' but showing flat or low mood. Watch for a mismatch between their words and tone, facial expression, or body language.
- Becoming easily irritated or unusually quiet. Emotional withdrawal can show up as either silence or short-temperedness.
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns. Withdrawal often affects appetite and sleep - either too much or too little.
- Spending excessive time online or gaming. Digital escapism can sometimes replace real-world connection.

When to seek help:

Get further support if your young person:

- Is persistently withdrawn or emotionally unresponsive
- Stops engaging with friends or school for more than two weeks
- Is experiencing sleep loss, panic attacks, or persistent sadness
- Expresses hopelessness or talks about 'not being here'

Helpful organisations:

- YoungMinds: www.youngminds.org.uk
- MindEd for Families: www.minded.org.uk/families
- Place2Be: www.place2be.org.uk
- Childline: www.childline.org.uk or call (0800) 1111
- Mindworks (Surrey): www.mindworks-surrey.org.

School contacts:

- The Pastoral Manager or Head of Year for your young person
- Mr Todd (Student Mental Health and Personal Development Lead)
- A member of the school's safeguarding team

How can school help:

We recognise that quietness may be a sign of emotional need. The school can offer check-ins with a trusted adult, calm, quiet spaces if needed during the day and/or help from our mental health or pastoral team.

Mental Health Support

Leaflet 6



Information to support
if your young person is
appearing withdrawn or
worried

Why it's happening:

There are many reasons a child may withdraw emotionally. Possible causes include:

- Anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem
- Bullying or social anxiety
- Academic pressure or perfectionism
- Family stress or relationship changes
- Trauma or grief
- Sensory overwhelm (especially in neurodivergent young people)
- Feeling misunderstood or unheard. When children believe their thoughts or emotions won't be taken seriously, they may retreat inward.
- Fear of failure or embarrassment. Avoiding connection can be a protective strategy to reduce feelings of shame or vulnerability.
- Negative body image or identity struggles. Young people exploring gender, sexuality, or body-related concerns may feel unsure how to express themselves.
- Chronic illness or fatigue. Ongoing physical discomfort or low energy can reduce emotional resilience and engagement.

Young people don't always know why they feel withdrawn, they just feel overwhelmed, unsafe, or disconnected from themselves and others.

Signs to look for:

Some changes are subtle. Look out for:

Behavioural:

- Withdrawing from social groups or hobbies
- Avoiding school or activities
- Becoming quiet, compliant, or shut down
- Increased screen time or excessive escapism
- Reluctance to try new things or take part in group tasks

Emotional:

- Appears sad, numb, or emotionally 'flat'
- Easily overwhelmed or tearful
- Struggles to express feelings
- Over-apologising or frequent self-blame
- Irritability or sudden mood changes

Physical:

- Sleep problems or fatigue
- Changes in appetite
- Complaints of headaches or stomach aches
- Neglect of appearance or hygiene
- Frequent minor illnesses or drop in overall energy

Sometimes quiet children are overlooked because they don't 'cause disruption', but their silence can be a signal.

What can you do?

If your young person is appearing withdrawn, the following strategies may help when it comes to opening the dialogue with them;

Stay calm and gentle

- Don't pressure them to talk - just let them know you're there
- Reassure them they're not in trouble and you're not angry

Create safe openings

- Try low-pressure conversations (for example, while driving or walking - not having direct eye contact can make it easier to open up)
- Ask, 'Is there something on your mind?' or 'Do you want company or space?'

Name and normalise feelings

- Say things like: 'It's okay to feel low sometimes. You don't have to carry it alone.'

Offer predictability and safety

- Keep routines consistent
- Respect their space but don't withdraw emotionally yourself

Keep involving them gently

- Invite them to join activities, even if they don't say much
- Don't interpret silence as rejection - it may be all they can manage in that moment