Turning Things Around

A resource created by parents & carers who have experienced the process of exclusion.

PEARS FAMILY SCHOOL
FOUNDED BY ANNA FREUD CENTRE

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National Centre for Children and Families
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The Pears Family School is an Alternative Provision (AP) for children and their families with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Our vision is to provide our pupils with the confidence, educational progress and ambition necessary for a successful reintegration into mainstream school. This includes cultivating a productive lifestyle, personal resilience and the values required to become responsible members of society.

The Pears Family School is busy working with Pupil Referral Units and other APs to disseminate the Family School approach to working with parents and carers.
What does it feel like when your child gets excluded?

How do you get to grips with the strong emotions and frustrations? And how do you move on to a position of strength, able to support your child make progress in school again?

In the words of parents and carers who know this journey well, this document aims to support other parents and carers who may find themselves on the same road.

The parents and carers at the Pears Family School have been keen not to describe this as ‘advice’. No two people’s experience is the same and being told what to do by others is not always the most useful way forward.

Our parents and carers say it is more about sharing with others how they found a way forward from feeling angry, helpless and anxious when their child was excluded to feeling that they were part of a positive process of change.

“Well able to hear first-hand that other people have felt the same way that I do, and seeing from them that there is a way through – is the best thing about coming here”

Parent at the Pears Family School
"I’m so angry with the school!…..”

They didn’t seem to like my child.

My child wasn’t the worst behaved but they just seemed to pick on him.

They should have made more of an effort to talk to me before it got to this.

They didn’t address his needs.

They just wanted him out.

Towards the end my child hated going to school because he knew they didn’t want him.
The Pears Family School says...

How could any loving parent or carer not be angry when the place responsible for educating their child, giving them the grounding to make the most of their life opportunities, wants them to leave? How could this not feel like a massive rejection? After all, this is the place at the heart of their child’s community - the place where they see all their friends. Doesn’t the school realise the impact that this decision will have on their child?

A parent or carer’s relationship with their child’s school is an important one and a great deal of investment goes into it. The school promises to provide a great education, to keep their child safe and look after their wellbeing. The parent promises to get the child to school on time, to uphold the school rules and support the teachers & school staff. Exclusion can remove and represent a final break in this relationship and the pain and anger is often in line with all the effort that has gone into it.
Where are we now....?

I still get angry sometimes - it’s been hard getting over what I have felt as rejection.

With hindsight I can see that things weren’t going well and that things had to change.

I’m aware the school did try some things to help and I know lots of the teachers did like him.

Once I’d got to know the new school, what felt like an ending started to feel like a new opportunity.

I’ve thought a lot about my relationship with the previous school and how I would do things differently.

Being closer to him in the Pears Family School I have to admit I’ve seen what he can be like in class.
I think I had to get to the point where I said - let’s accept that things were not right; how can I work with the new school to create another chance for him?

Over the last few months I think I’ve been able to work out why it wasn’t working at his old school – in some ways this has made me more critical because I can see what the school could have done differently. I think I know more now about what I can do.
“I’m both angry with my child and worried for them”

They knew this would happen – I had told them over and over to behave.

What is in store for them now?

He just didn’t listen to me.

On the surface she pretends she doesn’t care but I know she is upset.

What will the new school be like?

Will he lose his friends?

Will they ever get any qualifications?

Is there something wrong with them?
The Pears Family School says...

Fear and anger are understandable. Of course, it is reasonable to be frustrated with your child: Look at all the trouble they have caused you – all the visits to the school, all the phone calls, all the missed opportunities to get on with your own life. And it is totally normal to be worried for them at the same time. Exclusion feels like a journey into the unknown. What might the impact be on them? Will they still be able get good qualifications? Will they learn bad habits at this new school that deals with excluded children? Will they miss their friends?

Our parents and carers are typically very aware of all these potential concerns for the future when they arrive at our school, feeling that there is with no educational pathway visible and hearing stories of long-term problems for children or young people who fall through the gap.

Some of our parents and carers are worried that there might be some underlying problem with their child that hasn’t been diagnosed properly by the school. Whilst it is very sensible to check to make sure that there is no particular underlying problem it is vital that parents and carers feel empowered to make the difference in their child’s life, themselves.
Where are we now....?

It took a while to move on.

Meeting other parents and knowing that I wasn’t the only person feeling these things helped massively.

For me, realising that I had work to do to help get my child back on the right track gave me a focus.

The teachers at the new school wanted the best for my child and were prepared to listen and help.
The school has always focused on getting my child back to a mainstream school so I’ve never thought as this as a permanent situation. They have helped me think of this as a learning chapter.

Yes – some of the other children have difficulties with their behaviour sometimes, but then so does my son – I had to get over myself!
"I'm questioning myself and I'm struggling"

What am I doing wrong...?

Am I too hard on him; too soft?

Why does she not listen to me...

The embarrassment of having to walk through the playground to collect him again...... I grew to expect that I would get a phone call every day- come and get your child- I gave up on trying to have a life of my own.

I feel helpless and exhausted.

You just know what people are thinking...!

She's had everything I could give her...

Is there something wrong with them?
Most parents and carers question themselves and their parenting most of the time. If your child is excluded then this comes at you - times a million. Often parents and carers look for reasons as to why this has happened; pondering over the impact of different life events wondering if they are responsible. Often parents and carers do not voice these thoughts, but they can be there. They often feel accused of poor care when their child does not manage at school, especially when aggressive behaviours are part of the presenting problem. Being told your child does not fit the acceptable “norm” is upsetting, even if you’ve had your own worries.

Feeling alone and isolated, with no-one you feel you can trust to talk to in school, is what parents of excluded pupils talk about, have in common. You may even feel sad or angry that your child is no longer part of the school family, missing out on trips and invitations to celebrations. These complex feelings and adjustments can have an impact on your mental and physical health.
Where are we now....?

Once I’d dropped my guard – and the other parents are good at helping you do that – I started to think in terms of next steps.

I learnt to accept my feelings - I recognised that some of my feelings were often linked to a sense of embarrassment and stress.

There was this Ah-ha moment – when I was ok with the idea that change means we all must think and do things differently.

Getting rid of the thought that needing to change meant it must be my fault - has taken time. I’m more confident now.
I have worked with school staff to figure out what triggers my son’s behaviour. They give me strategies to try at home.

The parent learning programme has taught me so much: I’ve been able to help other parents.

I’ve learnt the importance of getting and staying connected and talking to others who have similar experiences.

I think I understand more about why my child struggles.

My son’s just done his first week back in mainstream. Fingers crossed!
Thank you

We wish to thank the parents, carers and children at the Pears Family School for sharing their thoughts and feelings to support other parents and children.

The Family School Model training team is busy working with mainstream, PRU and AP schools across the country, changing the way they engage with the parents and carers and families of excluded children. For more information please contact adelaide.o’mahony@annafreud.org
Do you need help right now?

The AFC Crisis Messenger text service is a free, confidential, 24/7 text message support service for anyone who is feeling overwhelmed or is struggling to cope. The service is staffed by trained volunteers who will work with you to take your next steps towards feeling better.

We can help with issues such as anxiety, worry, panic attacks, bullying and depression and are here to talk at any time of day or night.

If you need support, you can text AFC to 85258. School page resources - advice for parents and carers
About the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families

The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families has developed and delivered pioneering mental health care for over 60 years. Our aim is to transform current mental health provision in the UK by improving the quality, accessibility and effectiveness of treatment. We believe that every child and their family should be at the heart of the care they receive, working in partnership with professionals.

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