

"School attendance improved using positive coping strategies"



Tom was 13 years old and had a diagnosis of autism. He had been out of education for over a year, due to significant anxiety around attending school. Tom had high academic aspirations, but often refused to do work. Tom's worries about his safety impacted on his school attendance and progress.

Working in partnership with Tom's family, Tom's tutor from Peterhouse spoke to him on the phone each time he missed school. This helped Tom to recognise that school was still part of his life. The tutor and Tom worked together on understanding his anxiety, identifying patterns, and setting up coping strategies for the morning routine.

To help address Tom's worries about travelling to school, we removed the timetabled slot of travelling and this enabled Tom to still attend school. We also looked at what happened before, during and after travel, and explored the purpose of the activity. We also gave Tom opportunities to choose locations for travel, which included getting the bus with his tutor to go and get breakfast together.

The team supported Tom with planning a class journey, by showing him to consider who, where and what would be involved, Googling the route beforehand and looking at visuals of the location and its toilet access.

As a result, Tom grew in confidence and went on to attend class trips, improved his school attendance and Tom's family found it easier to manage. He also enjoyed travelling with family for a caravan trip.

Tom is now thriving at a mainstream college and enjoying a full social life. Tom has maintained contact with Peterhouse and expressed a desire to support research, training and understanding of autism in education by sharing his positive and negative experiences.