

# Learning about **PANS** and **PANDAS**

Accompanying video guide and resource for primary school educational teams

**PANS (Paediatric Acute-onset Neuropsychiatric Syndrome) and PANDAS (Paediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders Associated with Streptococcal Infections)** are post-infectious autoimmune and/or neuro-inflammatory conditions that affect both physical and mental health.

These conditions are triggered by common infections such as strep throat, chickenpox, influenza, or COVID-19 and involve a proposed misdirected immune response targeting the brain. Both conditions are clinical diagnoses made by medical professionals and often follow a relapsing and remitting course, with symptom exacerbations known as flares.

## Impact on learning and behaviour

Onset is typically abrupt, leading to marked changes in a child's behaviour, emotions, and learning. While some symptoms are visible, such as distress or irritability, others are internal, including anxiety or obsessive thoughts, and may be masked in school. Presentations frequently fluctuate, which can make friendships unpredictable when a child alternates between engaging and withdrawing.

Children with PANS or PANDAS often also experience extended absences and may develop the sudden onset of special educational needs with or without disabilities (SEN/D); all of which can further impact their sense of identity and peer relationships.

## Why this resource is needed

PANS and PANDAS are often misunderstood in school settings due to low levels of awareness, because symptoms can appear suddenly, fluctuate, and resemble behavioural or emotional difficulties rather than a medical condition. Children may experience stigma, isolation, or inappropriate reactions from peers and staff.

## This resource will help schools:

- Recognise that changes in behaviour and learning may be linked to an underlying medical cause.
- Reduce misconceptions that lead to judgment or exclusion.
- Promote empathy and inclusion among pupils and staff.
- Provide practical strategies for supporting affected children in everyday classroom situations.

## Resource purpose

The accompanying video has been developed to help primary pupils (ages 7-11) understand PANS and PANDAS when a pupil in the school is affected. It can be used in assemblies, lessons, or small group settings. The video is approximately eight minutes long and explains:

- What PANS and PANDAS are
- Common symptoms children may experience
- How education staff can help
- How peers can support their friends

## Intended outcomes

By using this resource, schools aim to:

**Increase understanding** of PANS and PANDAS among pupils and staff

**Foster a supportive environment** where kindness and trust are prioritised

**Encourage peer empathy** and reduce stigma through age-appropriate discussion

**Connect classroom learning** with whole-school initiatives, including PANS PANDAS Awareness Day and fundraising activities for the PANS PANDAS UK charity.

Everyone is

D I F F E R E N T

## How to use this resource

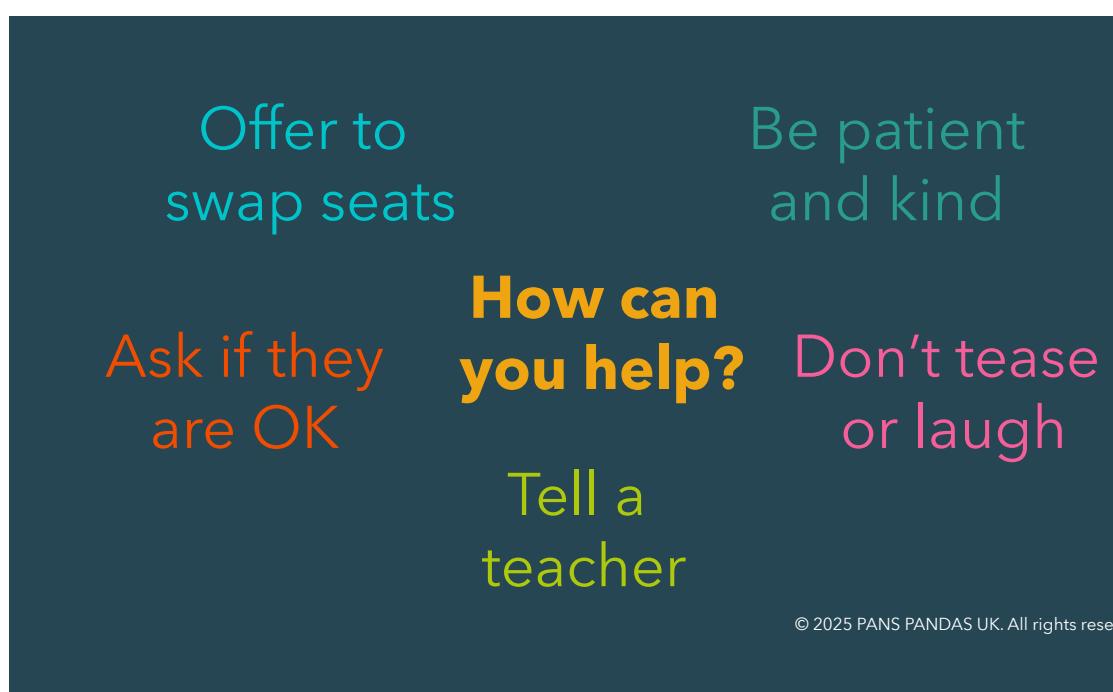
Practitioners are encouraged to pause the video at key points to promote discussion and link content to pupils' experiences. These are ideal moments to reinforce the importance of kindness and inclusion. Before sharing the video with pupils, practitioners should review it in full to identify key teaching points and ensure sensitive issues are handled appropriately. Discussions and activities should be tailored to the needs, age, and maturity of the cohort, while considering how much the child understands about their own condition.

Because symptoms can overlap with other conditions such as tics, obsessive-compulsive behaviours, or eating difficulties, previewing the video helps ensure these topics are addressed with care. This resource is not a diagnostic tool; if concerns arise, families should be signposted to medical professionals.

## Discussion points

(Select questions appropriate for your cohort)

- What symptoms did you notice in your body when you were last poorly?
- How did those symptoms make you feel?
- What helped you to feel better?
- What do you think big feelings might look like on the outside?
- What makes you feel scared and what helps you feel better?
- What could you do to help a child who had PANS or PANDAS?



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## Voices from Young People

PANS PANDAS UK run a youth advisory board (YAB) for children, young adults and siblings who are affected by PANS and PANDAS. Some of our members have shared what helps them feel supported in school.

**Their experiences highlight the importance of empathy, understanding and practical adjustments:**

### Key message

**People think I am using [my diagnosis] as an excuse.**

- If a child leaves class due to anxiety, remind peers that this is not poor behaviour.
- Avoid placing them with pupils who have been removed for disruptive behaviour.

**My friends call me weird because I have PANS**

- Reinforce that having PANS or PANDAS is not the child's or young person's fault.
- Promote kindness and inclusion at every opportunity.

**Kindness and trust are the most important things for teachers and friends to have.**

- Younger children suggested it was helpful for the whole class to know about their condition, so that everyone understands.
- Conversely, older YAB members reported that they often prefer sharing only with a few trusted friends, because older peers can be more judgmental.
- Teachers should speak with the child first and consider their feelings before deciding how widely to share information.

## Whole-school initiatives

After the peer scenario section (approximately 7.3 minutes) the video moves on to different content, including information about the PANS PANDAS UK charity, PANS PANDAS Awareness Day (9th October), and ideas for how children can help through fundraising or awareness activities. This provides an opportunity to connect classroom learning with whole-school initiatives and community engagement. These ideas are introduced at the end of the video and can be extended through whole-school activities such as:

- Marking PANS PANDAS Awareness Day (9th October)
- Fundraising for PANS PANDAS UK
- Displaying posters in staffrooms and sharing training resources with education professionals.

## Important note

Some children living with PANS or PANDAS may want to share their experiences, while others may prefer not to. Every case is different, and pupils should never feel pressured to share. Encourage a supportive environment where children can choose whether to participate and ensure any disclosures are handled sensitively. Before delivering a group session on PANS or PANDAS, consider discussing it with parents or carers and the child (as appropriate) in advance. This helps families prepare for any questions at home and ensures that they are aware of the sensitive nature of the topic.

Do not share any child's medical information with peers or staff without explicit parental consent. This includes details about diagnoses, treatments, or health history. Always follow your school's confidentiality and safeguarding policies.

## Further information

PANS PANDAS UK is the only UK charity supporting children and families living with the neuropsychiatric conditions PANS and PANDAS. They have a wide range of professional resources including free online CPD accredited teacher training.

- General information:  
<https://www.panspandasuk.org>
- Children and families:  
<https://www.panspandasuk.org/for-families>
- Educational professionals:  
<https://www.panspandasuk.org/panspandas-for-educators>
- Education Training for teachers and educational psychologists -  
<https://panspandasuk.org/training/>

