# PANS/PANDAS at school

A reference for families, educators, and school health staff

PANS involves abrupt OCD symptoms or severely restricted eating with other sudden difficulties; PANDAS describes a pattern associated with strep. Symptoms may persist, fluctuate, or recur. This list is not diagnostic; symptoms are not specific to PANS/PANDAS, and a clinician considers other explanations. [1,2]

USUAL BASELINE → CHANGE NOTICED → SCHOOL IMPACT → SUPPORT / REVIEW

## Common symptoms to pay attention to [1,3]

- OCD symptoms: intrusive fears, rituals, checking, washing, or reassurance seeking.
- Restricted eating or drinking, food refusal, or fears around food.
- Tics or movements and sounds that appear involuntary; motor-skill changes.
- Anxiety, including marked separation distress.
- Irritability, aggression, sadness, tearfulness, or rapid mood shifts.
- Hyperactivity, fidgeting, or difficulty sustaining attention.
- Loss of previously used skills or a return to younger behaviors.
- Unusual sensitivity to sound, light, or touch.
- Sleep difficulties, frequent urination, or bedwetting (family may report).
- Joint pain, fatigue, or other physical discomfort.

## How this may show up at school [3,4]

- Changes in handwriting, copying, coordination, or math.
- More difficulty remembering directions or processing work.
- Reduced work completion, independence, or peer participation.
- More absences, bathroom requests, or nurse visits.

Not every child experiences every symptom. Compare similar activities and home/school observations. Notice new, ongoing, or recurring difficulties. [3,4]

## School support checklist

Discuss with the family, nurse, and school team. Individualize supports.

- ☐ Name one staff contact; agree how the family and nurse will share updates.
- ☐ Discuss short directions, extra processing time, reduced copying, or keyboard / note-taking alternatives.
- ☐ Plan bathroom access, rest or quieter workspace, and lunch support as needed.
- ☐ Agree on a consistent distress response with the care team and set a review date. [3,4]

Share sudden, substantial new changes promptly with the family and school nurse; do not wait to finish a log. For immediate safety concerns, follow existing health plans and school emergency procedures.

This tool is for personal observation and documentation only. It is not a medical record or diagnostic tool.

# What to notice and track

A reference for noticing patterns and discussing support. No personal information is required.

### LOOK ACROSS THE DAY

Arrival · Activities · Meals · Later in the day · Away from school

Consider timing and setting alongside usual functioning. Similar observations across days can inform a discussion; they do not establish a diagnosis or cause.

| Observation area | Useful details to consider |
|---|---|
| **Usual functioning** | Compare the same kind of activity with the student's usual work, independence, and participation. |
| **Onset and course** | Note when a change first appeared; whether onset was abrupt, gradual, or unclear; and whether difficulties are new, ongoing, or recurring. |
| **What was noticed** | Separate the student's own words from what an adult saw or heard. Describe frequency and duration without assuming a cause. |
| **School impact** | Consider writing, learning, transitions, eating, bathroom access, attendance, and peer participation. |
| **Support and response** | Notice which agreed supports were available, what happened afterward, and whether participation changed. |

## Questions to discuss

- Which changes differ most from usual functioning, and what observations can home and school compare?
- Which supports help access to learning, and who coordinates communication with the family and nurse?
- When will the team review the pattern and any clinician-provided guidance?

Describe participation: usual / extra help / unable to take part. This is a functional description, not a clinical symptom score. Keep each student's observations separate.

## Sources & further reading

[1] NIMH - PANS and PANDAS: Questions and Answers (nimh.nih.gov)
[2] American Academy of Pediatrics - PANS overview (healthychildren.org)
[3] PANDAS Physicians Network - School resources (pandasppn.org/school)
[4] PANS PANDAS UK - A Summary for Teachers (panspandasuk.org, 2024)