PANS/PANDAS at School

A practical reference for families, educators, and school health staff.

PANS can involve a sudden onset of OCD symptoms or severely restricted eating, along with other changes. PANDAS involves sudden OCD symptoms or tics associated with strep. Share abrupt changes with the family and school nurse promptly so support can start.

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

What to look for

Worries, rituals, or distress
Note new checking, washing, reassurance seeking, separation distress, irritability, or rapid mood changes.

Eating, drinking, and physical needs
Notice a sudden drop in eating or drinking, more bathroom trips, tiredness, or pain. Check in with the nurse.

Movement, attention, and senses
Notice tics, extra movement or hyperactivity, and changes in tolerance for light, sound, or touch.

Learning and participation
Compare handwriting, copying, following directions, attendance, or joining peers with the student's usual abilities.

Example: A student who usually copies from the board can no longer finish a few words. Offer printed notes and record whether that helps them participate.

Build a school support plan

- ☐ Agree on one staff contact and how the family and school nurse will share updates.
- ☐ Offer short directions, extra processing time, printed notes, or another way to show the same learning.
- ☐ Plan bathroom access, lunch support, rest breaks, or a lower-stimulation workspace as needed.
- ☐ Agree on a response to distress and set a review date. Follow the school emergency plan for immediate safety concerns.

What to notice and track

Compare what you notice over time and after any changes.

FOLLOW THE PATTERN

Arrival → Classwork → Lunch → Transitions → Away from school

Compare similar activities with the student's usual participation. Keep each student's observations separate.

Observation area	What to record
Usual participation	What could the student usually do in this activity, with or without help?
When it changed	Note when the change started and whether it came on suddenly, continued, or returned.
What was noticed	Write the student's words and what staff observed. Include how often it happened and how long it lasted.
Impact on the day	Check writing, learning, transitions, eating, bathroom access, attendance, and time with peers.
Support and response	Record what was offered and whether the student took part as usual, with help, or could not take part.

Questions to discuss

- What differs most from the student's usual day?
- What support helps the student participate, and who will check in?
- When will the family and school team review the plan?

Share substantial new changes promptly with the family and school nurse. Use the log to support care and school planning.

Further reading

National Institute of Mental Health: PANS and PANDAS

PANS PANDAS UK: Resources for education professionals