

Removing barriers to education

A toolkit for supporting children
and young people experiencing
Emotionally-Based School Avoidance
(EBSA)



Derbyshire Educational Psychology Service

Making a Difference:

Enabling Positive Change through Listening, Optimism and Insight

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Toolkit guidance and terms

This toolkit has been developed by Derbyshire Educational Psychology Service in response to the outcomes of the 'Derbyshire and Derby City Attendance Project' which took place in 2022-23 *The Derbyshire Attendance Project | Derbyshire Services for Schools*. The project and this toolkit were funded by the Derby and Derbyshire Integrated Care Board. The toolkit is intended to be used by school staff and other professionals who support children and young people who are experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA).

The toolkit is divided into 7 sections. Following an introduction, each of the subsequent sections focuses on one of the 6C's which were identified through the project as being important when supporting those experiencing EBSA: Child-Centred; Curious; Connection; Collaborate; Celebrate; and Commitment. The toolkit can be read from start to finish or, as is more likely, you can turn straight to specific sections. Wherever text is written in ***bold italics*** this is a link to the relevant page or resource. For example, if you want to find out more about *The Anxiety Cycle go to page 13*.

There are some terms which we will shorten throughout this document:

EBSA – Emotionally Based School Avoidance

CYP – Children and Young People

Throughout the toolkit there will also be lots of evidence-based strategies and ideas of how to support CYP experiencing EBSA. We acknowledge that there are many challenges which schools currently face. Therefore, if there are strategies which do not currently seem feasible in your school, try to take a moment to reflect on:

- Why this might be? What are the barriers? Is there anything that can be done to overcome these barriers?
- What might a compromise be? How could you meet this CYP's needs in a different way?

Acknowledgements

In developing this toolkit, we have drawn upon some fantastic resources and materials which have been developed by other organisations and services. We wish to particularly thank the following:

West Sussex Educational Psychology Service

Wakefield Educational Psychology Service

Lancashire Educational Psychology Service

Somerset Educational Psychology Service

Sheffield Educational Psychology Service EBSA

Dr Jerricah Holder

A big thank you to Lauran Perkins @laurans.creative.studio for the wonderful illustrations throughout this toolkit.

We would also like to thank the schools, families, children, and young people who took part in the Derbyshire and Derby City Attendance project for their involvement and feedback. As an Educational Psychology Service, we recognise the importance of developing and growing our understanding in response to the real-life experiences of those at the focus of this toolkit. The information included in this toolkit is our best effort at the time of writing. However, if there are changes which you feel need to be made, please contact Edpsych.admin@derbyshire.gov.uk

We hope you enjoy reading this toolkit and find it useful!

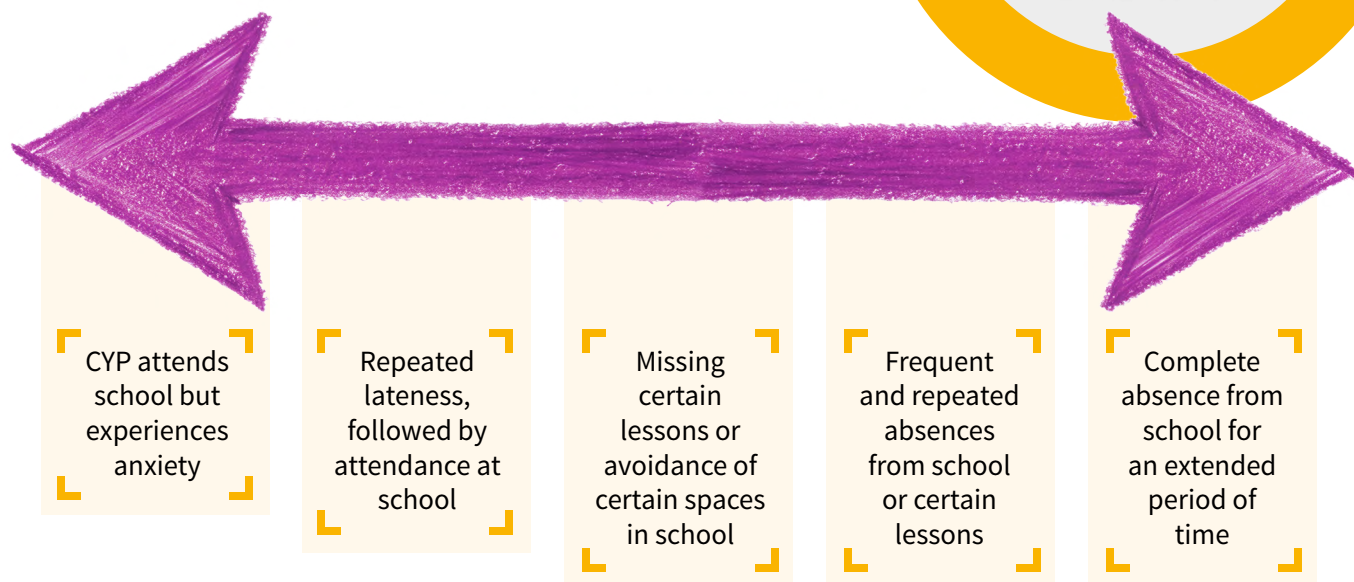
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What is EBSA?

EBSA stands for Emotionally Based School Avoidance. It's the term that is sometimes used when CYP are struggling to access some aspect of school due to emotional reasons such as feeling fearful or anxious.

It can be helpful to think of EBSA as a spectrum of needs.

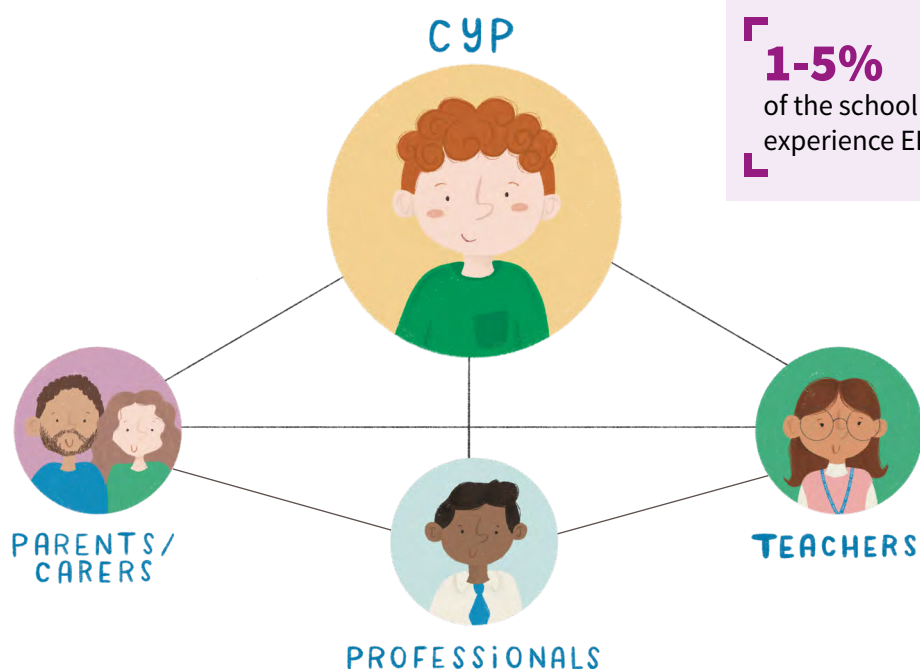


Therefore, some children may have good attendance at school but 'avoid' or experience difficulties with certain aspects of school such as attending specific lessons or coming into school in the morning.

There is no single cause of EBSA, and it is important to consider each CYP and their situation on an individual level. What works for one CYP may not work for another. Although this can be challenging at times, research and experience has shown us that by listening to the CYP's views, being flexible and having a focus on connection and relationships we can make a difference to these CYP.

EBSA should be seen as different from truancy or other forms of absence. Often CYP experiencing EBSA want to attend school but are unable to due to their high levels of anxiety or other mental health needs.

There are a variety of factors which can impact upon **EBSA** but we know that it is more prevalent at key transition points (e.g. Y6 to Y7; Y9 to Y10). Therefore, it's important to recognise the early signs of EBSA so that strategies and interventions can be put in place as early as possible.

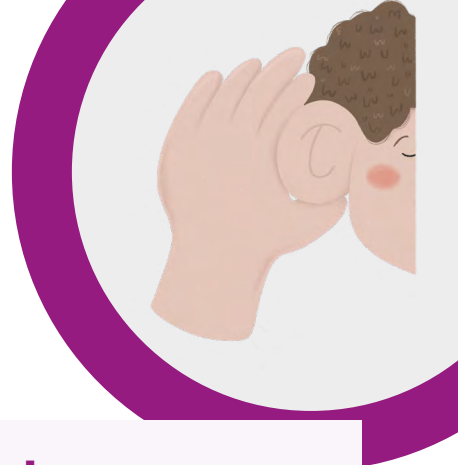


1-5%
of the school population
experience EBSA

EBSA is
underpinned
by emotions
such as anxiety

Early Intervention is key

What's in a name?



The language that we use when working with CYP experiencing EBSA is hugely important, but it can feel like a bit of a minefield when knowing the right term to use!

You may have heard phrases like 'school phobia' and 'school refusal' used to describe CYP who are struggling with some aspect of school attendance. However, these terms suggest that the child is to blame for their difficulties. They also suggest that the CYP has some element of control and does not want to attend school, which is rarely the case for CYP experiencing EBSA.

Instead, terms such as Emotionally-Based School Avoidance or Emotionally-Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) are currently used. Whilst these terms are not without criticism, they attempt to acknowledge the spectrum of challenges which may be experienced (i.e. the CYP may have good overall attendance but 'avoids' certain lessons).

Both terms also highlight that the CYP's difficulties are rooted in emotional distress. This may be helpful when considering how to support this cohort of CYP, especially if we view 'avoidance' as being a self-protective strategy or an emotional response to a challenging situation, rather than a conscious behavioural choice.

It is more than likely that the terminology around EBSA will change as we learn more. For the purposes of this guidance though, we have decided to use EBSA as a 'best fit'.

A final word on language...

As school staff and professionals working with CYP and families experiencing EBSA, you may be tempted to tell parents/carers that "they're fine in school". Although this can be well-meaning, it is rarely (if ever) helpful to the family of a young person who is struggling. For many of these CYP, they may appear 'fine' in school but their high levels of distress before and/or after school suggest that this may not be the case.

Between 1932 and 2015 around 20 different terms were found to be used in publications to describe absence from school (Heyne et al., 2019). It's no wonder we can feel confused!

Do the best you can until you know better.
Then when you know better, do better.

Maya Angelou

DO

Use the terms 'EBSA' and 'EBSNA'

Recognise that every situation is different, so a label isn't always helpful or necessary

Ask the CYP and their family what terminology they would like you to use (if it is needed)

Take time to meet with the families of CYP experiencing EBSA to genuinely listen to their views

DON'T

Use terms such as 'school refusal' and 'school phobia'

Label CYP

Tell the CYP and their families what terminology to use without taking their views into consideration

Use phrases such as "but they're fine in school" when talking with families

Early Signs of EBSA



Early intervention is key when supporting CYP who are experiencing EBSA and ideally this should be part of a **whole-school approach to EBSA**. But what signs do we need to look out for? Below are some examples of early signs of EBSA. However, it is not an exhaustive list, and it will be important to consider other **risk and resilience factors** when identifying CYP who are more likely to require support.

- ✓ Attendance: late arrival, missing certain lessons, leaving class, frequent absences
- ✓ Patterns in absences e.g. missing school after weekends or holidays
- ✓ Separation anxiety: distress when separating from parents/carers upon arrival at school
- ✓ Sleep difficulties: difficulties getting to sleep, waking up in the night, struggling to wake up in the morning
- ✓ Reluctance or 'refusal' to get ready for school and leave the house
- ✓ Emotional distress: crying, pleading, appears defensive or aggressive, appears anxious and/or withdrawn when in school
- ✓ Change in behaviour in lessons (i.e. potentially as a way of communicating that they feel 'out of control' or anxious about a situation)
- ✓ Psychosomatic symptoms: nausea, headaches, tummy ache, panic attacks
- ✓ Avoidance of certain spaces or people in school
- ✓ Lack of engagement and motivation. Becoming more withdrawn.

EBSA is generally underpinned by high anxiety, and this is what makes it distinct from truancy or ill-health. Compared to these forms of non-attendance, CYP experiencing EBSA also typically:

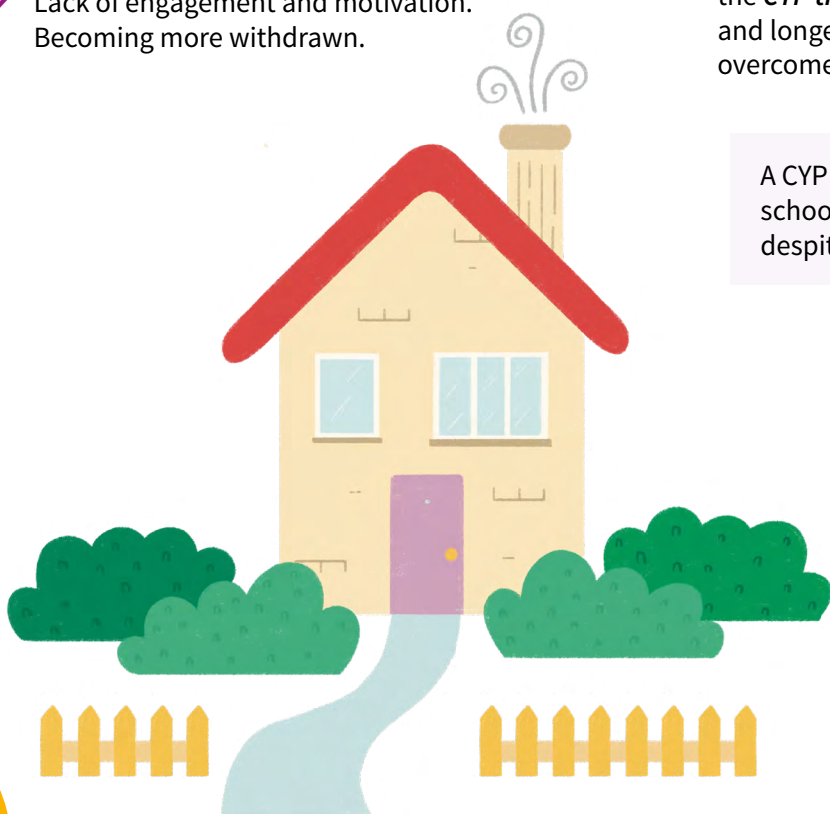
- ✓ Stay at home with the knowledge of their parents and school staff.
- ✓ Don't tend to engage in antisocial behaviour.
- ✓ May express a desire to attend classes/school but are unable to do so due to their high levels of anxiety.

Where CYP are identified who may be at risk of EBSA, it is vital that early steps are taken to explore and develop a plan to support the CYP as part of a wider **Assess Plan Do Review process**. Early intervention is absolutely crucial in supporting the outcomes of CYP experiencing EBSA, as is working closely with **parents and carers** and the **CYP themselves**. Once EBSA becomes entrenched and longer term it is much more challenging to overcome and change.

A CYP may appear as though they are 'fine' in school or settle quickly once they arrive at school, despite their underlying emotional distress.

Remember

CYP experiencing EBSA may still have good attendance at school



Risk & Resilience Factors

There is rarely one single cause of EBSA. Each CYP experiencing EBSA will have varying needs and factors impacting upon them and their attendance in school.

The following is not an exhaustive list, nor should it be seen as a 'tick box' exercise. However, we encourage you to use this list to identify CYP who may be at risk of developing EBSA. Any action plan should then address aspects of all factors.



RISK FACTORS

SCHOOL	HOME	CHILD/YOUNG PERSON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Bullying ✗ Academic difficulties in specific subjects ✗ Particular subjects (e.g. PE) ✗ Transition to new key stage or new school ✗ Poor SEN provision ✗ Learning needs not identified or being met ✗ Academic demands ✗ Transport/journey to school ✗ Exams ✗ Environmental factors (e.g. noise levels) ✗ Relationship difficulties with staff or peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Family change (e.g. separation, divorce or change in family dynamic) ✗ Family conflict or complex family interactions ✗ Parental physical/mental health needs ✗ High levels of family stress ✗ Loss and bereavement ✗ Family history of EBSA ✗ Being a young carer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Learning difficulties ✗ Autism or other social communication differences ✗ Low self-confidence or self-esteem ✗ Physical illness ✗ Separation anxiety from parent/carer ✗ Worrying about home situation/family ✗ Traumatic events ✗ Difficulties with peers ✗ Sensory differences ✗ Poor emotional literacy ✗ Age (linked with key transition points)

When working with CYP who are experiencing EBSA, it is also really important to identify and build upon protective or 'resilience factors' which can be supported and developed further to promote their attendance in school.

RESILIENCE FACTORS

SCHOOL	HOME	CHILD/YOUNG PERSON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Positive relationships with staff members ✓ Positive relationships with peers ✓ Flexibility in approaches and strategies ✓ Whole-school approach to EBSA and emotional wellbeing ✓ Staff understanding of EBSA ✓ Safe space in school ✓ Experiences sense of belonging to school ✓ CYP feels supported by staff in school ✓ School willingness to work with family and support agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Parents/carers value education and talk positively about school ✓ Willingness to work in partnership with school staff and external professionals ✓ Good communication between home and school ✓ Stable family dynamics ✓ Close relationship with family ✓ Feels safe/secure at home ✓ Can separate from parents/carers ✓ Siblings consistently attend school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ CYP has a desire to attend school ✓ Ambitions and aspirations for the future ✓ Interests and activities out of school ✓ Academically able ✓ Able to recognise strengths and demonstrates pride in themselves ✓ Good emotional understanding ✓ CYP has effective emotional regulation strategies ✓ CYP feels listened to and understood ✓ Good friendship group

It can be helpful to think of 'risk and resilience' factors as push and pull factors:

'Push' factors – push the CYP towards attending school (i.e. resilience factors)

'Pull' factors – pull the CYP away from attending school (i.e. risk factors)

When pull factors are greater than the push factors, or when risk factors are greater than resilience, Emotionally Based School Avoidance is more likely to occur (Thambirajah et al., 2008).

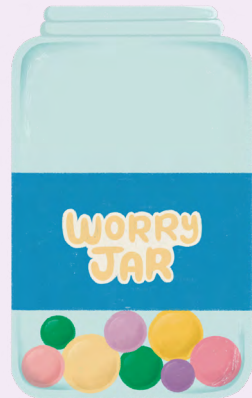


Functions of EBSA

There is rarely one single cause of EBSA and it likely to be underpinned by 'several complex and interlinked factors including the young person, the family and the school environment' (Thambirajah et al, 2008).

However, through an extensive literature review, Kearney and Silverman (1990) identified four main functions, or reasons, as to why EBSA occurs:

To **avoid** uncomfortable feelings (e.g. anxiety and low mood) brought on by attending school



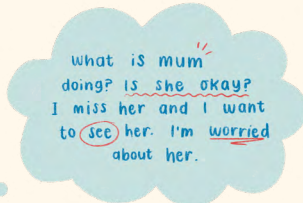
I feel worried when I'm at school.

To **avoid** situations that might be stressful e.g. academic demands, social situations, environmental factors



I find the school environment overwhelming. The corridors are so noisy and busy!

To **reduce** separation anxiety or to seek attention from significant others e.g. parents or family members



I'm worried about my mum

To access **rewarding** experiences at home e.g. playing computer games during school time, going shopping



I get to watch TV and play games if I stay at home

'All behaviour is communication'

By considering the function of a CYP's EBSA, or what their behaviours might be trying to communicate, we can then start to consider what we can do to help them more effectively.

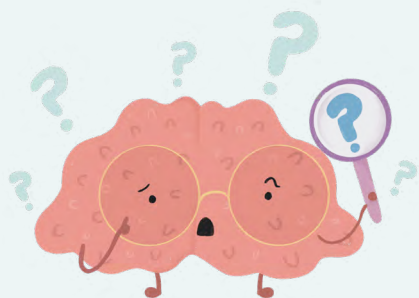
- ✓ What are their behaviours telling us about how they are feeling?
- ✓ What are their behaviours telling us about what they need?
- ✓ What situations are they trying to avoid?
- ✓ What does their avoidance achieve for them?

Introduction to the key themes

Through the evaluation of the Derbyshire and Derby City Attendance Project which took place in 2022-23, six key themes were identified in supporting CYP experiencing EBSA.

Curious

Be curious about their feelings and support in developing ways to manage their feelings.



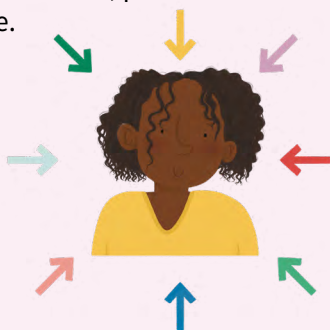
Collaborate and listen

Listen to everyone's views and work collaboratively to develop a shared understanding and goals.



Child-centred

The children and young people should be at the heart of any discussions, plans or decisions that are being made.



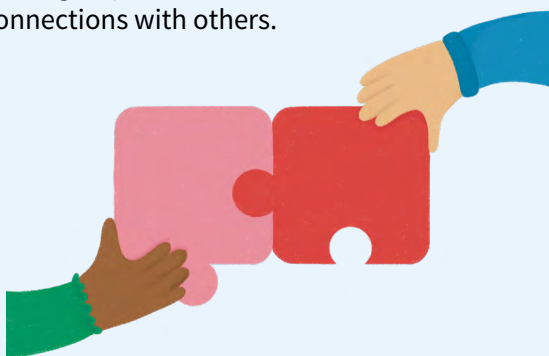
Celebrate!

Notice, share and celebrate the small steps of progress.



Connection

Finding ways to maintain relationships and connections with others.



Commitment

Everyone working together and being committed to supporting CYP experiencing EBSA through a whole-school approach.



Each theme will now be explored with key information and possible strategies described. Follow the heading colours to know which section the page links to.

What is Anxiety?

The Fight, Flight, Freeze Response



What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a 'normal' emotion, and we all feel anxious at times. Anxiety is part of our body's alarm system – it lets us know that something may not be right. Anxiety is useful when we are doing something new so we can plan and take care in what we are doing. But sometimes our anxiety 'alarm' can be set off by things that other people would not be worried about. Anxiety becomes a problem when it is persistent, difficult to control and gets in the way of doing everyday things that we need or would like to do.

There are several types of anxiety:

Separation anxiety

When CYP worry that something bad may happen to a parent/caregiver when they are away from them.

Social anxiety

When CYP are very self-conscious and struggle to be in group settings. They may worry that others might laugh at them, or they might look silly in front of others, for example.

Specific phobias

When children have excessive fears of particular things, for example spiders or buttons.

Generalised anxiety

When children worry about a wide variety of everyday things.

The Fight, Flight or Freeze Response

When we are anxious, our body goes into a fight, flight, or freeze state and releases adrenaline. This gets our body ready for action (in our evolutionary past, this would have been needed to survive – either to fight or run for our lives!). It increases our heart rate and raises our blood pressure so that more blood is pumped around our body to the muscles that need to be ready. The muscles overheat because of the energy rush and so we sweat to cool down the muscles. The digestive system shuts down because blood is diverted from the stomach to the muscles, causing the feeling of butterflies. Anxiety can also cause pain like stomach-aches and headaches, difficulties getting to sleep, and struggling to pay attention and focus.

When someone is in a fight, flight or freeze response, some of the behaviours we might see include:

Fight

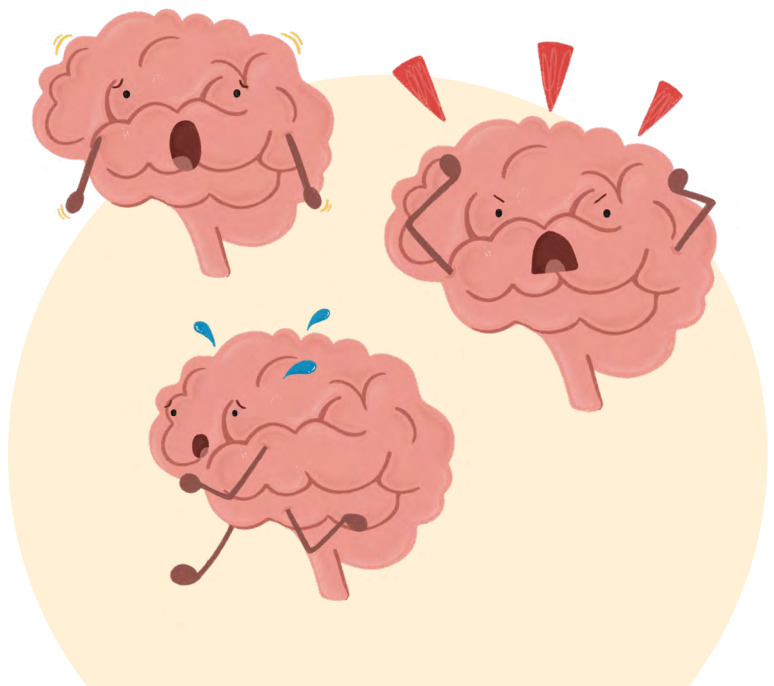
Kicking, screaming, spitting, pushing, throwing objects, clenched fists, shouting, hurting others

Flight

Restlessness, darting eyes, excessive fidgeting, doing anything to get away, running without concern for own safety, hiding, 'refusing' to go to school

Freeze

Holding breath, heart pounding or decreased heart rate, withdrawal, shutting down, feeling unable to move, feeling numb, daydreaming, not talking.



EBSA and Anxiety

Anxiety is the underpinning emotion associated with most situations of CYP experiencing EBSA. How we behave is thought to be linked with different emotions. For example, if we're feeling anxious, we're more likely to enter a flight state and attempt to avoid the situation. This explains why many CYP who are highly anxious 'avoid' school as they see this as a threatening, unsafe situation.

However, as we've described already, many CYP who are experiencing EBSA may be attending school despite the anxious feelings that they experience. They may display some of the fight, flight or freeze behaviours outlined on the previous page. They may also display other signs or behaviours:

Fight

Throwing things; physical aggression towards another child or teacher; pushing over desks or chairs; generally feeling out of control.

Flight

Asking to go to the toilet often; avoiding eye contact; looking down or pretending to write something when adults are looking for a child to 'call on'; asking a lot of questions including repetitive ones (a sign that they need reassurance).

Freeze

Not being able to answer a question when called on in class, despite them doing well in their work and homework; 'refusal' to get ready for school; difficulties entering the school building.

CYP experiencing EBSA also often report physiological symptoms of anxiety such as nausea, vomiting, sweating etc. These may begin the night before a school day or even a few days before (such as in the school holidays).

When anxiety underpins a CYP's view of school, they are likely to be experiencing anxious or fearful thoughts about the environment or their ability to cope with school.

I don't want to leave my dad,
I'm worried something will happen to him

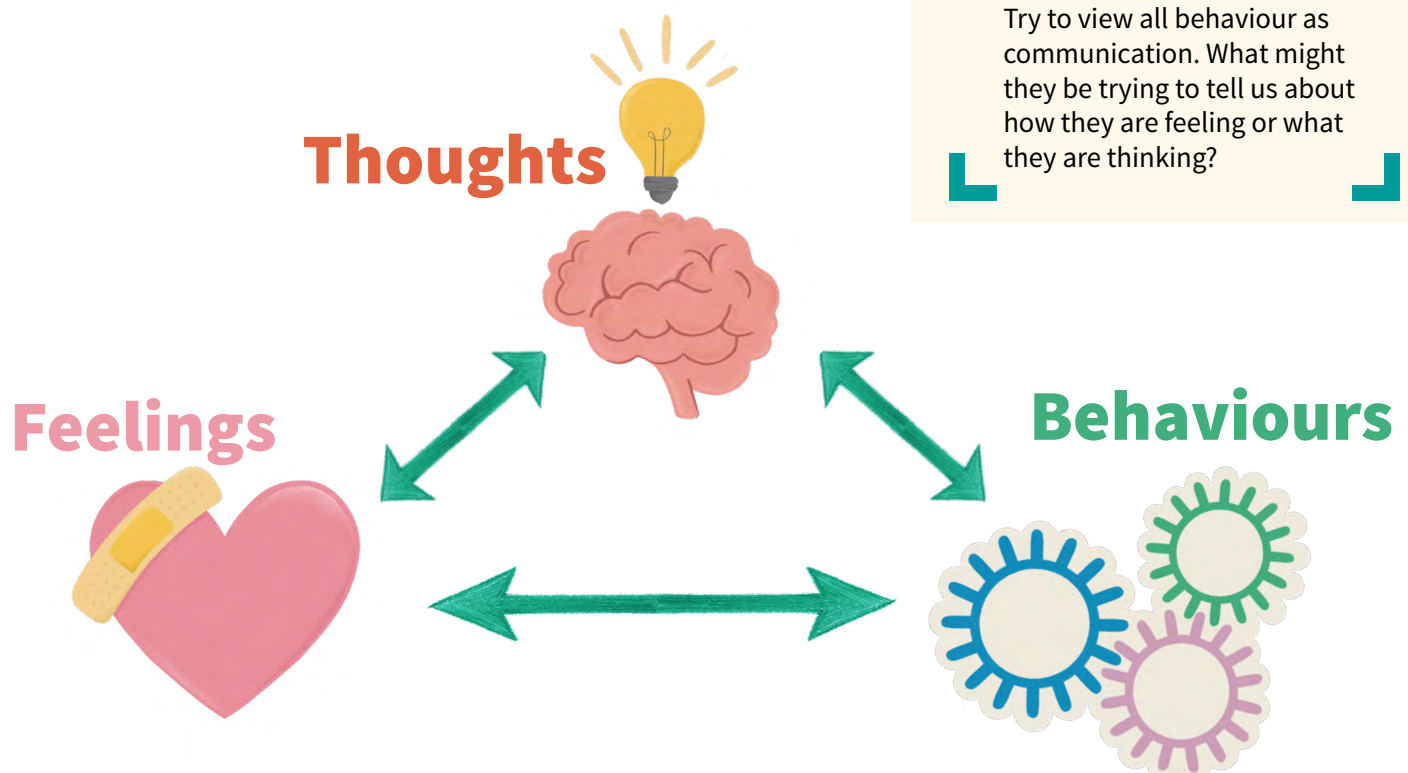
Nobody likes me, I've got no friends

That teacher doesn't like me,
they're going to tell me off

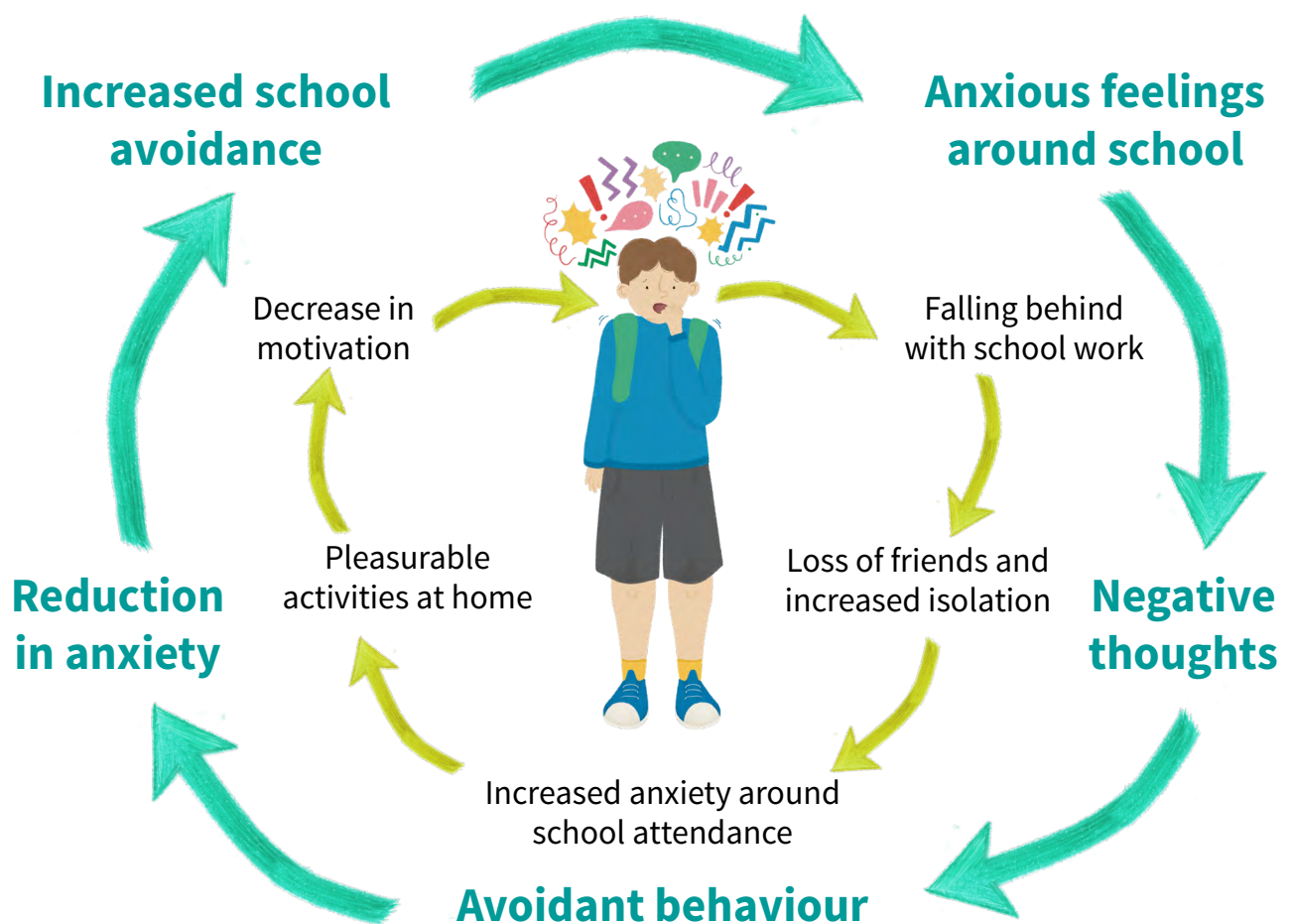
How we think about situations also has a direct impact upon our feelings and the behaviours or actions we take. An example of this is shown in the 'Anxiety Cycle' which is described in more depth on the next page.

Remember

Try to view all behaviour as communication. What might they be trying to tell us about how they are feeling or what they are thinking?



The Anxiety Cycle



“I can’t cope”

If the CYP has a negative perception about their ability to cope in a situation this can lead to further feelings of worry and negative thoughts. If these aren’t addressed, and effective coping strategies aren’t developed, the success of any attempts to improve their attendance and engagement in school may be limited (Heyne and Rollings, 2002)

In the example here, a CYP might experience uncomfortable, anxious feelings around school which leads to them experiencing negative thoughts (e.g. “nobody likes me, I have no friends”). They may then display ‘avoidant’ behaviours such as missing certain lessons or arriving late to school.

This leads to a temporary relief and brief reduction in anxiety. However, as the CYP’s anxious thoughts and feelings haven’t been addressed or challenged, their fears keep growing and the anxiety feels much worse.

Maintaining factors

Alongside this, other maintaining factors may also be taking place. For example, because the CYP isn’t in school, their previous friends may start playing with someone else. When they do return to school, this confirms their negative thoughts that “nobody likes me, I’ve got no friends”. This again increases their anxiety around attending school.

At home, we don’t have to deal with these feelings and often engage in activities that we enjoy. This leads to a decrease in motivation to attend school, and so the cycle continues unless we find a way to break it through the approaches and strategies described throughout this toolkit.

Person-Centred Approaches

Person centred planning has the person at the centre. It's a way of enabling people to think about what they want now, and in the future, so that we can support them in working towards their goals and getting the right support.

Person Centred Planning is a collection of tools and approaches that can be used with a person, not for them.

It's important to remember that everybody has a way of understanding ideas which shapes each person's unique view of the world and how they interpret situations. CYP should be listened to, and their views and feelings should be taken into account.

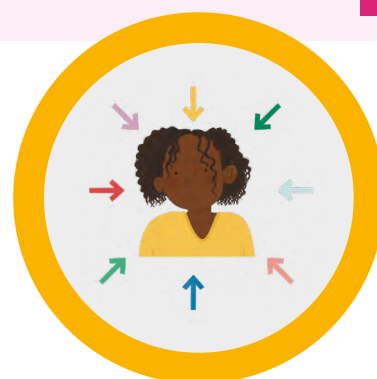
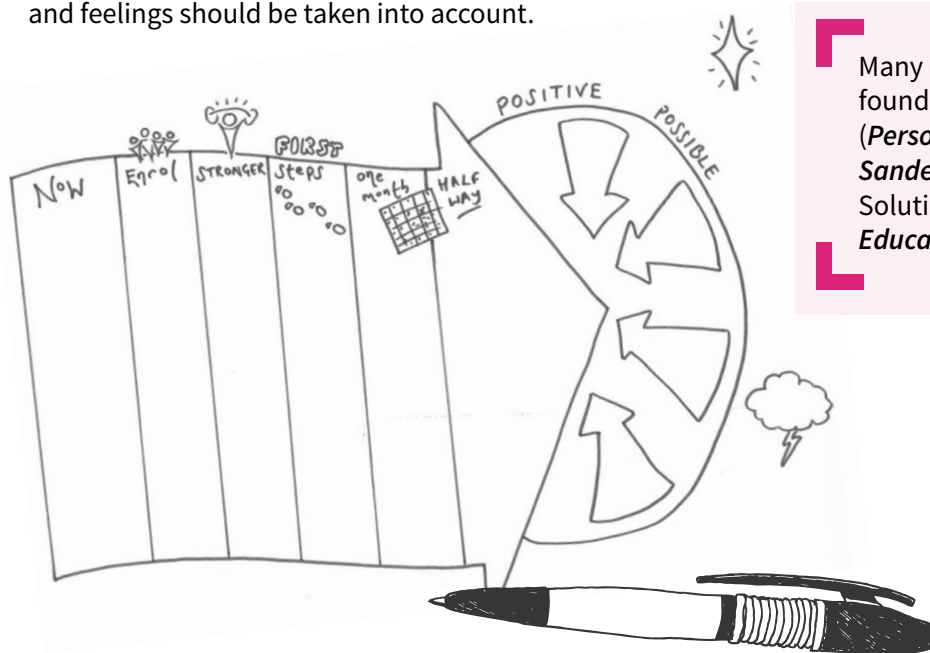
They have a right to be consulted about the support and services they receive and to participate actively and equally in school life.

The adults' role is to empower the child or young person, to promote their independence and enable them to reach their personal goals.

There are lots of person-centred planning tools available:

- ✔ *Ideal School*
- ✔ *PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrow's with Hope)*
- ✔ *MAP (Making Action Plans)*

Many other fantastic tools can be found at Helen Sanderson Associates (*Person-Centered Thinking Tools - Helen Sanderson Associates*) and Inclusive Solutions (*Inclusive Solutions | Inclusive Education Courses*)



A PATH was carried out with many of the CYP who were involved in the Derbyshire and Derby City Attendance project. Here's what our children & young people, schools and families had to say about the process:



Exploring the views of CYP



Capturing the views and perspectives of CYP who are experiencing anxiety surrounding attending school is essential.

A well-known psychologist (Kelly, 1955) once said: ‘..if you don’t know what is wrong with someone, ask them, they may tell you.’

Why should we explore the views of CYP?

- ✓ It allows more individualised support and intervention to be implemented.
- ✓ It ensures the CYP feels listened to, heard, and valued which can be empowering.
- ✓ It gives the CYP a sense of control and predictability about the next steps.

Who should explore their views?

This work is best completed by someone who the CYP feels comfortable with and who they trust. Where this is not possible, time should be spent building rapport and establishing a positive relationship before exploring their views.

How can we explore the views of CYP?

Some CYP may find it difficult to express their thoughts and feelings about school, given the level of anxiety being experienced. By avoiding school, it is likely they are minimising these feelings and being asked to talk about school and/or returning to school could result in increased anxiety. Let them know that you understand it may be difficult to talk about, but that you are interested in what they think and feel. Empathise with the young person, and be careful not to dismiss their worries.

Tools that are recommended

When deciding which tools to use, consideration should be given to the CYP’s age, level of understanding and language. Often CYP will feel more comfortable when more visual and creative approaches are used, such as card-sorting and drawing activities. This reduces the conversational demands and alleviates the possible pressure of finding the right words to say!

Some potentially helpful resources include:

- ✓ *School Wellbeing Risk and Resilience Card Set*
- ✓ *Ideal School or Ideal Classroom*
- ✓ *Multi-Element Plan (MEP) cards (pgs. 37-46)*
- ✓ *Staffordshire County Council’s card sorting activity*
- ✓ *Mapping the Landscape Activity*



Tools and strategies to support CYP



The way that we support CYP should be tailored to their individual situation and needs. Once we've identified the possible **function of their behaviours**, we can then consider which targeted strategies may be appropriate. Below are some possible ideas for planning an approach that can be agreed by school staff, parents/carers and CYP.

To avoid fear/anxiety related to attending school

- ✓ Take small gradual steps – reduce pressure on the CYP and go at their pace.
- ✓ '3 dials' metaphor – consider the environment, social and task demands - needing to balance how far each is turned up and recognising that they cannot all be turned up at once.
- ✓ Develop an **anxiety 'exposure' ladder** with the young person – start with the things they are least worried about.
- ✓ Develop the CYP's understanding of the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviour and developing positive coping strategies that work for the young person.
- ✓ Adults should be aware of individual triggers and support needed e.g. learning support/ catching up on missed work, unstructured times, managing what to say to peers about absence.

To avoid anxiety-provoking social situations

- ✓ Take small gradual steps – reduce pressure on the CYP and go at their pace.
- ✓ Support in developing tools to navigate social situations through:
 - ✓ Peer buddies or peer mentoring.
 - ✓ Role playing and scripts.
 - ✓ Comic strip conversations.
 - ✓ Social skills programmes (e.g. Talkabout, Socially Speaking, SEAL materials, Lego Therapy).

To gain attention/reduce feelings of separation anxiety

- ✓ Develop regular and effective communication between home and school e.g. discussing the **morning and previous evening routine**.
- ✓ Consider meet/greet with key adult at arrival times.
- ✓ Explore ways of keeping connections with home e.g. transition object, notes from parent/ carer in lunchbox, phone call home etc.
- ✓ Specific support if loss/bereavement or changes at home have occurred.

To gain some reward from being at home

- ✓ Make school a rewarding place to be (e.g. preferred activities).
- ✓ School staff to provide work for completion at home and provide feedback for any work completed.

Sense of belonging and feelings of security

- ✓ Foster key relationships with adults.
- ✓ Provide positive experiences for the young person linked to their strengths and interests.
- ✓ Find ways for them to achieve feelings of success to support self-esteem through personalised rewards or responsibilities.
- ✓ Identify a safe space in school.

EBSA and autism

CYP with neurodivergent conditions such as autism are at a greater risk of developing EBSA behaviours. In fact, research has found that CYP with autism are up to 6 times more likely to experience EBSA (Munkhaugen et al. 2017). For many CYP with neurodiverse conditions such as autism, school can be a highly anxiety-provoking place due to many complex intertwined factors. When we specifically consider our school systems and the complex social environment within them, CYP with autism may experience anxieties related to factors such as:



- ✓ Sensory processing needs and other environmental factors (e.g. size of school)
- ✓ Differences in social communication
- ✓ Social isolation and bullying
- ✓ Differences in understanding of and responding to their own and others' emotions
- ✓ Worrying about uncertainty, change or transitions
- ✓ Masking or trying to 'fit in' and subsequently internalising stress and anxiety
- ✓ Demand and performance anxiety, such as pressures of school work

These factors can all impact upon a CYP's ability to 'cope' with the school environment and can often lead to anxiety 'overflowing' and putting them at increased risk of EBSA.

Given this increased risk, it is essential that proactive strategies and interventions are put in place. Many of the strategies and approaches described in this toolkit are appropriate for CYP with neurodiverse conditions such as autism and ADHD.

As with all CYP, it is important to remember that every situation will be different and there is no 'one size fits all'. Take time to genuinely listen to the CYP and their family, so that you can collaboratively develop a plan which meets their specific EBSA needs.

Additionally, the following strategies are particularly relevant for CYP with autism:

- ✓ Ensure that all staff working with the CYP have a good understanding of autism and implement general autism 'good practice' strategies e.g. clear, predictable, and consistent environment, visual timetable, clear language.
- ✓ Recognise differences in social communication. For example, do not insist upon eye contact (as this can lead to genuine discomfort) and be aware that verbal responses may be a reflection of their literal understanding and not rudeness.
- ✓ Comic Strip conversations and Social Stories can be helpful in developing CYP's understanding of social rules and situations.

Useful websites

- ✓ *Resources | Spectrum Gaming*
- ✓ *National Autistic Society ([autism.org.uk](https://www.autism.org.uk))*
- ✓ *Autism Education Trust*

Autistic girls and EBSA

Girls with autism are a misdiagnosed and misunderstood group. It is only recently that people have realised that just as many girls are autistic as boys. However, they present differently and often have a more subtle presentation of autism rather than the more typical characteristics that are traditionally associated with this diagnosis. Many girls with autism describe masking or camouflaging their differences to fit in with peers, despite it being exhausting to do so!

"I would be smiling and acting like I was fine. I would be getting on with my work and doing everything I could to fit in. Inside I would be worried and upset and anxious."
Rosie

Things to look for

- ✓ Special Interests might be similar to peers but may be more intense.
- ✓ Their social skills may appear relatively strong as they are able to copy and mimic others.
- ✓ Difficulties often arise in secondary school when the social dynamics become more complex.
- ✓ They may have (or desire) one intense friendship, rather than interacting with larger groups.
- ✓ They might be eager to please and have a perfectionist approach to their work.
- ✓ They may show a preference for communicating via social media rather than face to face.
- ✓ They may experience high levels of anxiety but internalise these feelings so as not to stand out or appear different to peers.

Without appropriate strategies and support systems, autistic girls and young women are at risk of developing mental health difficulties such as anxiety, depression, self-harm and/or eating disorders. They are also at risk of disengaging with the learning process and school in general.

Although autistic girls may share many traits and experiences, it should also be remembered that every individual has a different profile of strengths, differences, support needs and life experiences and it is important not to make assumptions about what autistic girls can or can't do.

What helps girls with autism in School?

- ✓ Provide access to quiet spaces and offer activities/clubs at unstructured times.
- ✓ Support with friendships, for example offering a social space to engage with friends.
- ✓ Think about gender specific support for sensitive topics such as 'Sex & Relationships' and 'Social Media'.
- ✓ Celebrate Neurodiversity – provide positive role models and create an atmosphere which accepts differences.
- ✓ Explicit teaching around self-awareness and identity, advocacy, and emotional regulation.



EBSA and sensory processing differences



We explore the world around us and try to make sense of it using our eight senses - vision, auditory, smell, taste, tactile, vestibular, interoception and proprioception.

Throughout the day, we are bombarded by sensory information and our brain must filter out any unnecessary information before formulating a response to the information it has received. So, for example, if we hear a fire alarm, the auditory sensory input we receive tells us that we leave the building and escape from the potentially dangerous situation.

Many CYP with neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism will also experience differences in the way they process sensory information. This is often even more noticeable in the school environment which can be unpredictable and overwhelming on our sensory systems. Next time you walk around school, take a moment to notice what you can hear, smell, feel and see. It's likely that you will be experiencing a whole variety of sensory input all at one time.

For many CYP, especially those experiencing EBSA, this can be totally overwhelming and can often be one of the biggest factors which impact upon their attendance and engagement with school.

What can we do to help?

- ✓ Use the *Derbyshire Sensory Processing Needs Toolkit* to explore the sensory environment and identify the specific needs of a CYP so that appropriate strategies can be developed.
- ✓ Consider what reasonable adjustments can be made for the CYP:
 - ✓ What adaptations can be made to their school uniform?
 - ✓ Can they arrive later or earlier to avoid busy, noisy places?
- ✓ Use the 'Mapping the Landscape' activity as a tool to gain the CYP's voice around their sensory needs. *This can be found here.*
- ✓ Create a sensory-friendly environment (e.g. quiet, safe space to use).
- ✓ Timetabled opportunities for relaxation/calming/ sensory-based activities.
- ✓ Allow for sensory-breaks before the CYP becomes overwhelmed – consider using a 'pass' or card to leave the classroom when necessary and have a clear plan for where they should go.

Maintaining connections and relationships



Relationships and connections with others are incredibly important in all our lives. They can help to support our emotional wellbeing through creating a sense of belonging and safety. This is particularly true for CYP experiencing EBSA and, where CYP have connections with key members of staff and peers in school, it can make a real difference to their engagement and attendance at school. Below are some practical resources and strategies for maintaining connections with CYP, even if they are not in school.

- ✓ Identify a key adult who the CYP trusts. Take time to build this relationship through low-pressure activities e.g. art, playing a game. When the CYP is in school, try to agree a regular time when they can meet with their key adult pre-emptively (i.e. before their worries get too much) as well as a plan for when they do need support during the day.
- ✓ Regular check-ins with a key trusted adult – this can be anything from a ‘thumbs up’ across the classroom to a ‘safe and well’ check at home if they are not in school.
- ✓ Take time to explore how they currently keep in touch with their friends. Many CYP use gaming or social media as a way of maintaining connections, especially if they currently feel unable to leave their house.
- ✓ Send video messages home. For example, their teacher reading a story or their friends talking about what they’ve been doing in school that day.
- ✓ *Send learning tasks home* (if the child is well enough) and provide meaningful feedback.

Separation anxiety

For many CYP, the separation anxiety they experience when apart from a parent, carer or loved one can significantly impact their attendance and engagement at school. It’s therefore important to consider how the CYP maintain connections with their loved ones at home when they are at school.

- ✓ For younger CYP, ‘The Invisible String’ (by Patrice Karst) is a lovely book that teaches children that we can still be connected to someone even if we’re not physically close.
- ✓ Transitional objects – these are objects which offer security and comfort to a CYP, and remind them that they are connected to a loved one even if they are not physically together. Some examples include a keyring, a tissue with a familiar perfume on, a small cuddly toy.
- ✓ ‘Heart button’ on a wrist – an alternative transitional object involves the CYP and their parent/carers drawing a heart on their wrist. If the CYP (or the parent/carers!) is feeling ‘wobbly’ they can press the heart for an immediate connection to their loved one.
- ✓ We know that many schools now have a ‘no phone’ policy. For some CYP experiencing EBSA, their phone is their lifeline to home where they may be experiencing anxiety about a parent who, for example, may be unwell. Consider finding ways to support this connection in alternative ways, for example, arranging a set time for them to call or message parents/carers from the school office.

For many parents/carers of CYP experiencing EBSA, they may be experiencing anxiety themselves and may feel ‘blamed’ for the situation. CYP understandably look to their parents/carers to know who to trust – if the parent/carers doesn’t trust school it is likely that this will impact upon the CYP and the success of any interventions that school put in place. It is therefore important to consider the connections and relationships that parents/carers have with school staff. Who is their ‘key adult’ or point of contact in school?

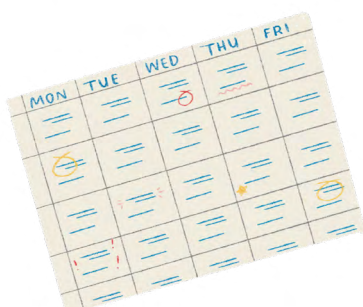
Transitions

Transitions are a part of our everyday life. For CYP, these 'big' transitions might include changing classes in September or even moving schools. Many CYP can manage transitions and the changes that come alongside them well. However, transition years can be a particularly challenging time for many CYP, and research has shown increases in EBSA behaviours at key transition points (e.g. Reception → Year 1; Year 6 → Year 7). When we consider the number of changes that can all occur together at these transition times it is perhaps not surprising.

As a school, you probably have many strategies in place to support the transition of CYP to or from your school and it is likely that these will be helpful for CYP experiencing EBSA. These may include:

- ✓ **Additional transition visits** – allow the CYP to visit school at quieter time (e.g. after school), meet key staff, and take photos (to potentially share with rest of class back at school or look at during the summer holidays).
- ✓ **Provide videos or maps** to show the layout of the school.
- ✓ Allow an opportunity to **explore 'what if'** questions and provide possible responses.
- ✓ Adopt a **key adult approach** for vulnerable CYP who provides regular check-ins and/or **meet and greet**.
- ✓ **Lists and visuals** to support organisation e.g. equipment checklist, visual timetable.
- ✓ Encourage parents/carers to **practise getting to school** or walking/driving past school to familiarise their child with the school.

As a school, you might also want to look at resources available at *Moving up! The transition to secondary school* | Anna Freud



Although it is important to have strategies for the 'big' transitions that CYP experience, we also need to recognise the amount of 'micro' transitions that take place throughout the day which can lead to CYP experiencing high levels of anxiety.

These might include:

- ✓ Journey from home to school
- ✓ Leaving parents/carers at the school gates
- ✓ Entering the classroom
- ✓ Moving classrooms
- ✓ Different types of lessons (e.g. practical lessons to more formal learning)
- ✓ Changes in staff or environment (e.g. break time to lessons)

As well as the strategies described above, the following may also be helpful:

- ✓ Social Stories
- ✓ Visual timetables
- ✓ **Transitional objects**
- ✓ Prepare for any changes – verbally and visually if needed
- ✓ **Develop a ladder of strength and courage**
- ✓ Identify a 'safe space' for the CYP to use
- ✓ Consider a plan for social times (e.g. break and lunchtime)

Should we send work home?

This is one of the most common questions that we get asked by school staff and, although there is no ‘one size fits all’ answer, it is hoped that this toolkit will help you to identify CYP experiencing EBSA more confidently so that you can identify what help and support will benefit them most.

For some CYP experiencing EBSA, their emotional challenges mean that they are unable to attend some or all aspects of school. Historically, there has been a view that by sending work home we may be encouraging CYP to stay at home for longer. However, research and lived experiences of those experiencing EBSA have helped us to develop our understanding in this area.

Imagine you are off work for a period of time, and it is now time for you to return. However, whilst you were absent, a number of changes happened in your workplace which you weren’t aware of. Consider for a moment the emotions and feelings that you might experience.

For CYP who have difficulties in attending or engaging with school due to EBSA, it is likely that they will be missing out on learning opportunities. This can then exacerbate their situation when they do feel able to return to school. Thoughts such as “I’ve missed out on so much learning, I won’t understand what I’m doing” can in fact lead to further **avoidance behaviours** (these are known as maintaining factors).

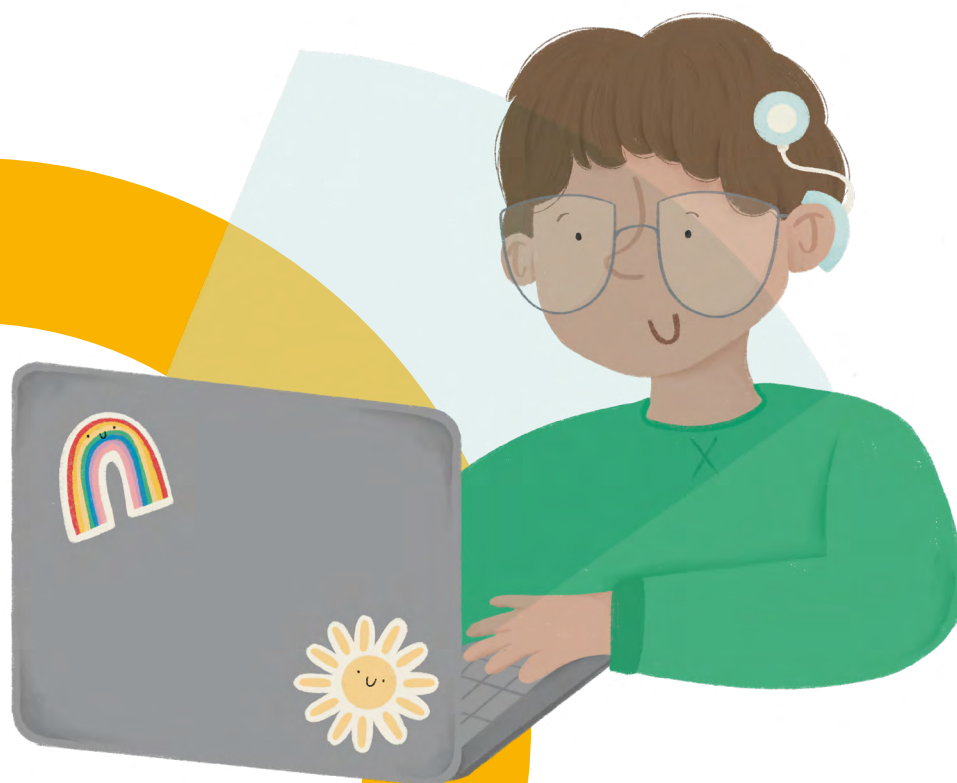
The DfE document ‘*Summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance*’ (February 2023) should be used alongside this guidance when considering whether to send work home. In summary, if you have identified that a CYP is experiencing mental health difficulties and/or EBSA which is affecting their attendance then ideally work should be sent home to be completed if the CYP is well enough to do so.

If it is agreed that work should be sent home:

- ✓ This should be arranged on an individual ‘case-by-case’ basis.
- ✓ It should be viewed as a short-term arrangement.
- ✓ The CYP should be provided with feedback for any work they do complete.
- ✓ This should be agreed with the CYP and their parents/carers (ideally through **Person Centred Planning tools**).

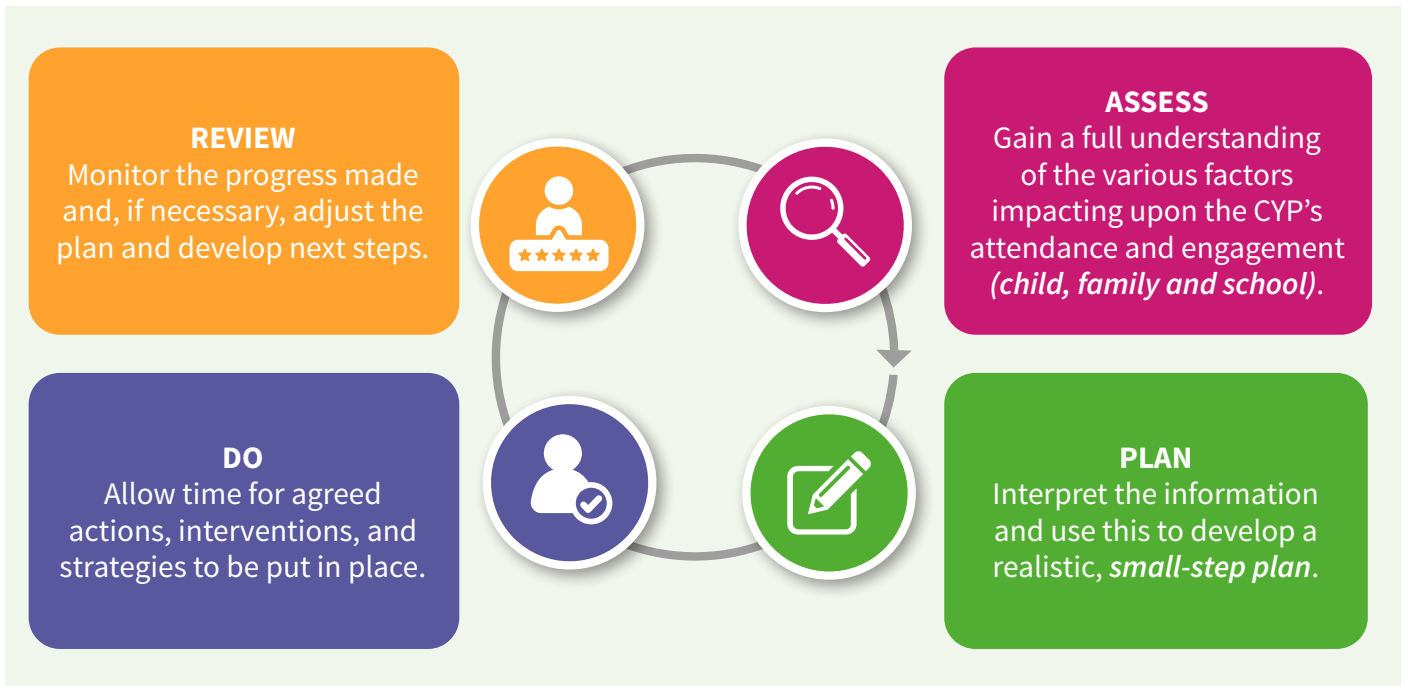
For some CYP, it may be possible for them to access **Out of School tuition (OOST)** or other virtual learning provision such as Academy 21. However, this will need to be arranged in agreement with other services and the local authority.

Schools should consider providing remote education to help pupils stay on track with the education they would normally receive (p.11, DfE, 2023).



Working together to support EBSA

When supporting CYP experiencing EBSA, working collaboratively with school staff, other professionals, CYP and their families is absolutely essential. Once a CYP has been identified as being at risk of **developing EBSA**, early intervention can support positive outcomes and prevent the EBSA from becoming entrenched. An Assess-Plan-Do-Review approach should be used which places the CYP at the heart of any discussions, plans and interventions.



This section explores some of the factors which should be considered when working collaboratively with parents, carers, and school staff. It is highly likely that you will all have different perspectives and views on the factors impacting upon the CYP's situation. However, through adopting an empathetic, no-blame approach where all parties feel genuinely listened to, positive outcomes for CYP are far more likely.



Key features of active listening

- ✓ Paraphrase
- ✓ Summarise
- ✓ Clarify information
- ✓ Ask open-ended questions
- ✓ Ask probing questions
- ✓ Consider body language (nod, smile, open body posture)
- ✓ Show empathy
- ✓ Be attentive and present
- ✓ Be attuned to feelings and emotions
- ✓ Non-judgemental

Working with parents and carers

Working with parents and carers is essential when supporting a CYP experiencing EBSA. But it can be really challenging at times. You may have different perspectives about the underlying factors impacting upon the CYP's wellbeing. Or you may have very different views about what might help the CYP. You are not always going to agree on everything. It is also possible that the parent/carer is feeling blamed or judged for the situation their child is in. But where school staff and families are respectful of each other and work well together, evidence shows that this can lead to positive change for the CYP experiencing EBSA.

When working with parents and carers, there are a few things to consider:

- ✓ Which member/s of staff does the parent/carer have the most positive relationship with? How can you support them to feel as calm, safe, and comfortable as possible?
- ✓ What was the parent/carers' own experience of school?
- ✓ Does the parent/carer have mental health needs?
- ✓ Is the parent/carer experiencing their own anxieties about their child's situation? How can you help them feel safe and less anxious?

As with CYP, we know that if we don't feel safe or comfortable in a situation, our body can go into a fight, flight, freeze state. This happens to adults too and can explain why parents and carers (and school staff!) sometimes become highly dysregulated in meetings.

CYP understandably look to their parents and carers to know whether a person, environment or situation is safe. If a parent or carer expresses (verbally or non-verbally) that they do not feel that school is a safe place for their child, the CYP may pick up on this and it is likely to impact upon the success of any strategies or interventions you put in place for the CYP.



When working with parents/carers, the following strategies and approaches may be helpful:

- ✓ Make sure that you take the time to genuinely listen to the views of parents/carers.
- ✓ Agree a time to meet in an environment where the parent/carer will feel most comfortable. This may be in their home or may be in a neutral environment such as a room in a local library. Make sure this time works well for the parent (i.e. are they having to miss work?)
- ✓ Start any meetings by setting ground rules and clear boundaries which must be followed by everyone (e.g. be respectful, one person talking at a time).
- ✓ Be curious and open-minded.
- ✓ Use tools and resources such as the **ATTEND framework** to structure and gather information.
- ✓ Try to find a common ground. You may all have very different views but consider what you all have in common. Often this is that you all want the best for the CYP.
- ✓ Show genuine empathy for the parent/carer. Acknowledge their child's anxieties and avoid using phrases such as "but they're fine in school".
- ✓ Have a 'no-blame' approach and avoid judging or making assumptions about the parent/carer and their situation.
- ✓ Adopt a 'key adult' as the parent/carers main point of contact. You may need to put boundaries in around this relationship (i.e. when you will be contactable etc) and this is ok.
- ✓ Agree a regular communication schedule (i.e. contact parent/carer each week at a set time).

Below are some the types of questions or areas you might want to explore with parents and carers. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list and that tools such as the **ATTEND framework** may be useful to ensure that all areas have been covered.

Some of these may be sensitive topics, but they are important to explore to make sure that those involved have a good understanding of the CYP's situation. As described above, it will therefore be important to think about who is best placed to work with the parents and carers to explore their views.

The ATTEND framework (by Dr Adele Tobias) is an evidence-based tool which supports information gathering and provides a structured approach to collaboratively developing targeted interventions and action plans which are individualised to each CYP.

TOPIC TO EXPLORE	POSSIBLE QUESTIONS
Strengths, interests and aspirations	<p>What do you like and admire about X?</p> <p>What are they good at? What are their strengths?</p> <p>What are they interested in? What do they like to do?</p> <p>What are your hopes for their future? Do they have hopes for their future (including beyond school and life as an adult)?</p>
Developmental and medical history	<p>What were they like as a young child?</p> <p>Were there any concerns about their development?</p> <p>Does X have any conditions/diagnoses?</p> <p>What is X's sleep/diet like?</p>
Family history	<p>Who does X live with?</p> <p>Are there any other important family members?</p> <p>What is X's relationship like with family members?</p> <p>Who are they closest to?</p> <p>Have there been any significant changes or events within the family (e.g. separation, illness, bereavement, loss)?</p> <p>Are there any upcoming changes in the future?</p>
Educational and academic history	<p>Can you tell me about their school history? What were their early experiences like...up to present day?</p> <p>What progress has been made across school (both academic and wider e.g. engagement, motivation, approach to learning etc.)</p> <p>When were the first indicators of EBSA present?</p> <p>School should be aware of any Special Educational Needs (SEN) which have been identified but they may need to be explored further.</p>

Relationships	<p>What are their relationships like with adults/staff in school? Who do they get on well with? Is there anyone they don't get on with?</p> <p>What are their relationships like with other children in school?</p> <p>Are there any stronger/more challenging relationships?</p>
Perception of school	<p>What is X's view of school? Is there anything that they think is going well (e.g. certain teachers, lessons, friends)?</p> <p>Have they spoken to you about what they are finding more difficult in school? What do they say about the situation?</p>
Feelings and emotions	<p>How does X feel about school?</p> <p>Is there anything specific that they worry about in school/home? When they are worried (or feeling other emotions) what does this look like? Is there anything that they/adults do to reduce their worries (e.g. calming activities, 'avoiding' certain situations).</p>
Typical day and potential patterns of EBSA	<p>Describe a typical day when X goes to school – start from the night before, to getting up in the morning, to coming home from school and going to bed.</p> <p>Describe a typical day when X doesn't go to school. What do they do when they don't go to school? What do other family members do?</p> <p>Are there any patterns in their attendance/engagement? E.g. particular days, times, lessons which are more challenging.</p> <p>Are there any particular events in school which are more challenging? E.g. school trips, assembly.</p>
Exceptions to the situation	<p>Have there been times when X has managed to get into school or engaged with school more? What was happening? What was different about those times?</p>
Impact on family	<p>How does the current situation impact on you and the rest of the family?</p>
Parent views on the possible reasons for EBSA	<p>Why do you think X is having difficulty attending school? What do you think is impacting upon their attendance and engagement in school?</p> <p>What would other family members say? Are there any different views within the family of the situation and what should be done?</p>
Previous attempts to address EBSA	<p>What has been the most helpful thing that someone else has done in dealing with the situation so far?</p> <p>What has helped in the past when things have been difficult?</p> <p>What strategies have been most helpful so far in managing X's anxieties?</p>
Future strategies	<p>What would you like to happen? What are your best hopes for X and the strategies that could be implemented?</p> <p>How would you know that these strategies have made a difference?</p>

Working with school staff

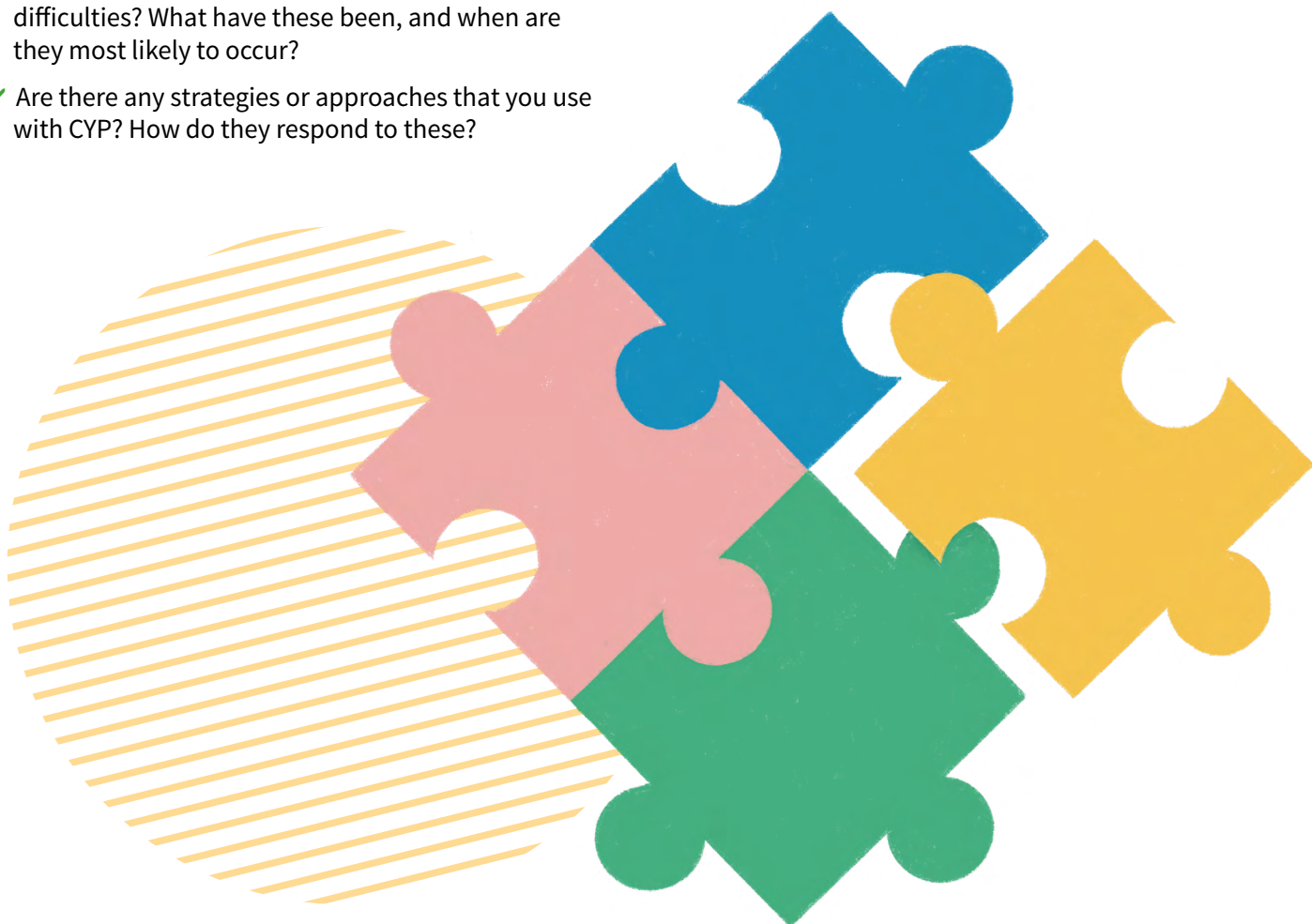
As part of your **whole-school approach** to EBSA it will be important to ensure that the views of key staff members are explored to develop a clearer picture of the CYP's strengths, needs and overall situation. We all respond differently to different people in different environments and, to understand a CYP's situation as fully as possible, we need to listen to these different perspectives. School staff may have valuable information which can help to identify triggers and strategies to support CYP experiencing EBSA.

In some schools, this is achieved through a 'Round Robin' which can be completed and collated by a key member of staff. This might ask:

- ✓ What are the CYP's strengths?
- ✓ What is going well for CYP?
- ✓ What does the CYP find more difficult?
- ✓ How do they present in your class? Are they engaged and motivated? Are they making progress? If not, why do you think this might be?
- ✓ What is their relationship like with you/their peers/other members of staff?
- ✓ How does the CYP appear in your class in terms of their emotional wellbeing? Have there been any difficulties? What have these been, and when are they most likely to occur?
- ✓ Are there any strategies or approaches that you use with CYP? How do they respond to these?

Once information has been gathered from everyone involved (including parents/carers and the CYP themselves) a plan for the CYP should be developed. This will need to be shared with all key members of staff. It will also be important to ensure that all staff have a basic understanding of EBSA through whole-school training or signposting to this toolkit and other resources. Seek out support from external agencies such as the Educational Psychology Service if this is needed.

Supporting CYP experiencing EBSA can be incredibly rewarding but it can also be very challenging. Take a moment to consider your own emotional wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of other staff members. You might benefit from further support or supervision which may be provided by the Educational Psychology Service if this is required.



EBSA support plan

You've taken the time to listen to the CYP and have a clear picture of their views. You've met with their parents/carers and have spoken to key members of staff in school to make sure that you have a good understanding of the background and other factors impacting upon the CYP.

Now what? As part of the Assess-Plan-Do-Review process, it's now important to interpret the information and develop a clear action plan which has the CYP at the heart of it.

✓ Features of an effective EBSA school action plan

- ☐ Collaborative – work together with everyone involved to co-produce the plan
- ☐ Personalised and individualised to each CYP
- ☐ Holistic, flexible approach which considers the needs of the CYP and their family
- ☐ Celebrates the CYP's strengths and interests beyond school
- ☐ Focus on reintegration as early as possible but recognise that there is no 'quick fix'
- ☐ Small-step approach (gradual, realistic and achievable)
- ☐ Regular contact between home and school (e.g. home visits, phonecalls)
- ☐ Recognition that full return to school may not happen quickly and that progress will take time
- ☐ Identify a key adult
- ☐ Agree on a safe space for the CYP to use

Below is an example of a 'keeping strong plan' or EBSA support plan which could be completed with the CYP and their family. Once completed, allow some time to put the plan in place before reviewing it 4-6 weeks later (or sooner if needed).

It is important to recognise that any discussions with a CYP about their return to school is likely to lead to an increase in anxiety. Show genuine empathy and reassure them that the plan will go at their pace.

Sometimes the plan will be more challenging e.g. after weekend, holidays, or after illness. It might feel like one step forward, two steps back. But try to view each day as a new day and notice *small steps of change*.

Reviewing the plan

It might feel tempting to miss this stage out, especially if things are going well. However, it is really important to get together to monitor the situation, celebrate any progress made, consider any new information or changes and plan the next steps. In reviewing, the following questions might be useful to consider:

- ✓ What has gone well?
- ✓ What has not gone so well? What have the challenges been?
- ✓ What is the CYP's views about the current situation and how things have changed?
- ✓ Have the actions from the plan been put in place? How successful have they been? If not, consider if they need adapting or breaking down further.
- ✓ Is there any new information or changes which have come to light?
- ✓ Are there any other factors which need to be considered?
- ✓ What are the next steps?

Keeping strong plan

My name is...

I'm in Year...

What people like and admire about me...

I find these things more difficult...

These things make me feel anxious or worried...

When I am feeling ...

- I notice these things about myself...
- Others may notice these things about me...

My key adult is...

- I can speak to them at these times...
- I can speak to them at this place...

My safe space is...

- I can go here at/when...

Something I want to work on is...

My goal/s is...

[make sure this a clear, small-step, realistic target]

You can help me by...

[strategies which will be put in place by adults]

I will try to...

[strategies which may be tried by the CYP]

Any other changes which will be made (e.g. timetable, classroom expectations):

This plan will be reviewed on...

Celebrating success

Working in situations involving EBSA can be challenging, frustrating, and exhausting at times for everyone involved. However, it can also be very rewarding and positive change is possible!

It might not be easy and, unfortunately there is no 'quick fix', but where everyone is working together with respect, flexibility, and kindness, with the CYP at the heart of any discussions or decisions, you will notice small steps of positive change. Sometimes these can be seemingly 'small' changes such as a CYP coming downstairs from their room to make a cup of tea for themselves or a CYP putting their hand up to answer a question in class. At other times, these changes can be more obvious such as a CYP feeling comfortable enough to come into school in the morning without their parent. Whatever changes they are, however big or small, it is important to notice and celebrate these small steps of change. This does not mean ignoring the challenges that are still being faced or seeing their world through 'rose-tinted glasses', but research underpinned by Positive Psychology has demonstrated the importance of noticing positive changes on our emotional wellbeing.

Here are some approaches and ideas for celebrating success:

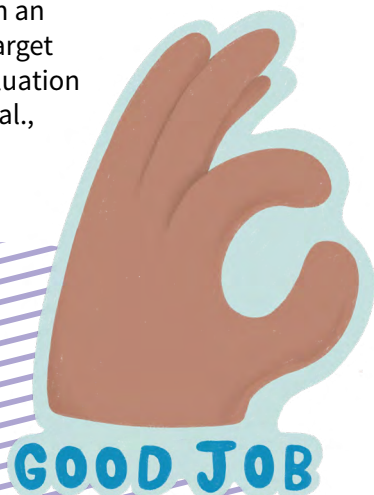
- ✓ Notice your own thoughts about the situation and if possible, try to positively reframe your thoughts. For example, instead of thinking "they're choosing not to come to school" consider, why might they be struggling to come into school? What might be getting in their way? And how can you help?
- ✓ Use a gratitude journal (or similar) to notice what you are grateful for.
- ✓ Alternatively, keep a diary to help you reflect on what has improved.
- ✓ Set targets based on an approach such as Target Monitoring and Evaluation (TME) (Dunsmuir et al., 2009).



Take a small step approach using the TME tool

Through the child-centred work with the CYP identify some 'goals' or targets they would like to aim for. Be aware that these may not necessarily 'fit' with what school staff would typically expect. In some situations, they may not even appear to be relevant to the overall aim of the CYP increasing their engagement and attendance at school. However, often they are the building blocks to the CYP becoming more engaged with the world around them and by giving the CYP some autonomy they are more motivated and driven to work towards these goals.

1. Set a goal/target e.g. CYP will feed the class fish by 10am on 4/5 days.
2. Rate this goal on a scale from 1 – 10 (where 1 is 'not achieved' and 10 is 'fully achieved').
3. Agree a time to review the goal/target (normally around 4-6 weeks)
4. Rate the progress on the scale. Consider whether a new goal should be set or more time to ensure that this skill/goal is secure.



Feedback from the Derbyshire and Derby City Attendance Project

The 'Derbyshire and Derby City Attendance Project' took place during the 2022/23 academic year. Through the project, a team of six Assistant Educational Psychologists were supervised by a project lead (Senior Educational Psychologist) to work with 82 CYP experiencing EBSA.

Principles and aims of the project

- ✓ As a **pilot** project we aimed to explore what worked (and what didn't work) to inform future practice across Derbyshire and Derby City schools. As such, the project was designed as an **early intervention** and schools were encouraged to consider this when identifying a suitable CYP for the project.
- ✓ There was a strong emphasis on the use of **Person-Centred Planning tools** (such as PATH – Planning Tomorrows With Hope). The CYP was at the centre of everything we did.

- ✓ We facilitated meetings aimed at developing a **shared understanding** of the factors impacting upon a CYP's attendance.
- ✓ We aimed to support others in **collaboratively** developing appropriate strategies and provision to support the CYP.
- ✓ We supported others in using an assess-plan-do-review approach as part of the **graduated response**.

Following involvement in the project, CYP, their parents/carers and school staff were asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire. Evaluation questionnaires were completed by 33 members of staff, 16 parents/carers and 10 CYP. The full evaluation report and a summary evaluation report are available at *The Derbyshire Attendance Project | Derbyshire Services for Schools*.

What did the children and young people say about the project?

[I liked that] "I could come to the meeting...I liked being there and saying my own truth".

"It will be okay because there is always a solution to your problems".

"[I felt] really confident [to be] open with my feelings and it impacted me to push and challenge my negative thoughts".

"I loved it, it helped so much".

"I thought it was fun and I liked the plan".

[I liked] "doing a lot of work around helping me overcome my thoughts. I believe now I can be my best and help myself when needed".



What did the parents and carers say about the project?



“My child has now got more confidence and trust which is allowing him to access more of school”.

“I think it has had a great impact on my child and family, but has also highlighted the schools’ weaknesses”.

“Having the discussion, ideas and goals made it a positive path to follow for all involved”.

“The PATH meeting was incredibly helpful...as a parent it showed me there can be light at the end of the tunnel”.

“The project was fantastic. 100% worth it. Eye opening and life changing”.

What did the school staff say about the project?



“It made me think about the young person’s needs in a more holistic manner”

“The project has lead to an improved working relationship with parents”

“I feel far better informed of the student’s needs, despite him being assigned to me for weeks prior to our PATH meeting”

“The PATH meeting was brilliant...although it was an emotional time for all involved it helped immensely”

“It enables and facilitates a personalised approach to forward planning for the pupil leading to positive change”

“[Child’s] involvement in the PATH meeting had a big impact and allowed him to feel like being a part of a team and seeing his suggestions being acted upon”

“Proactive, positive and engaging, supportive”

[The project] “allowed us to think about the CYP and their experience from a different perspective”

The next section describes three case studies from the project. These are all based on real-life situations, although any names and identifiable features have been changed to protect the anonymity of those involved.

For each case study, an Assess-Plan-Do-Review cycle was followed and included the use of **information gathering** and **Person-Centred planning tools** such as a PATH. Through this, a plan and strategies to support the CYP were agreed before being reviewed 6-8 weeks later.

Case study: Sophie (age 7)

Sophie is in Y2. She lives at home with her mum, dad, and younger brother. Sophie experiences high levels of anxiety which sometimes lead to her not wanting to come to school in a morning, being late and having difficulty separating from her mum. Sophie's parents shared that her distress in a morning and 'refusal' to get ready are making mornings extremely difficult for the family.

When Sophie does arrive at school she is met by a member of staff at the school gate. School staff reported that she is missing significant amounts of learning in the morning due to it sometimes taking up to 2 hours for her to regulate and feel ready to learn. At the time of referral, Sophie's attendance was 91.43%. Sophie is on the waiting list for CAMHS involvement.

RISK FACTORS

High levels of anxiety around mum's health (Sophie's mum had a long-term illness and had regular hospital appointments and stays).

Perceived sensory and academic demands leading to 'what if' worries (e.g. what if it's too loud in Science?).

Psychosomatic symptoms of anxiety in a morning (e.g. feeling sick).

Separation anxiety from her mum including school drop off and bedtime.

Reluctance to accept support that made her appear 'different from peers'.

RESILIENCE FACTORS

Cohesive family unit.

Family do enjoyable activities together. Sophie engages in gymnastics club outside of school.

Supportive school where staff have a good relationship with parents.

Key adult identified who Sophie has a good relationship with.

Sophie has a small group of friends in school.

Sophie has told adults that she wants to go to school.

What changed?

- ✓ Sophie started walking to school with a friend.
- ✓ Sophie's separation from her mum was quicker and easier; there were fewer tears.
- ✓ Sophie was less distressed in the morning and less 'resistant' to getting ready for school.
- ✓ Sophie started to access learning following a calming activity when she arrived at school.
- ✓ Sophie was able to recognise 3 positives about her day with an adult in school and could use a worry book to communicate her worries about home and school.



What made a difference?

- ✓ A **small step plan** was developed to support the transition from home to school. This involved another family member bringing Sophie to school, before gradually progressing to a friend walking with her.
- ✓ A **separation ritual** and transition objects were used with her mum.
- ✓ **Social stories** were developed to explain her mum's hospital visits.
- ✓ Designated time in school to **talk about worries and positives** about her day in school.
- ✓ A **secret signal** developed between Sophie and her trusted adult to let the adult know when help was needed.
- ✓ **Morning routine** changed at home – they got up 10 minutes earlier and named 'three positive things', put on favourite music and had 'pre-breakfast dance'.
- ✓ Sophie brought in a small cuddly toy to school as **comfort**.

Case study: Andrew (age 10)

Andrew is in Year 6. He joined his current primary school at the beginning of Year 3. He lives at home with his dad and step-mum. His step-mum is expecting a baby in the coming weeks. Andrew's mum sadly died when he was two years old. Andrew has a diagnosis of autism and the Autism Outreach service have been involved. He has an Education, Health and Care plan in place and accesses support from a teaching assistant and the Support Service for Special Educational Needs (SSSEN).

Since transitioning to Year 6, Andrew has been experiencing high levels of anxiety which have resulted in him not wanting to come to school in a morning. His dad shared that Mondays are particularly difficult for Andrew, with him often reporting physical symptoms such as headaches, sickness, and tummy aches. Andrew's attendance is 84%.

RISK FACTORS

Number of significant changes at home (e.g. new baby, house move).

Poor sleep – waking in the night multiple times with 'what if' worries.

Challenging morning before school, especially Mondays.

Busy Sundays with grandparents means not seeing his dad as much as Andrew would like.

Probable masking in school. Andrew shared that he was "putting on a different version of himself" in school.

RESILIENCE FACTORS

Attuned relationships with staff in school.

Positive relationships at home and a supportive family.

School adopted a flexible, low-pressure approach (e.g. time he started school).

Andrew felt listened to and understood.

Family worked well with school staff and other professionals involved with Andrew.

School staff were keen to develop their understanding of EBSA.

What changed?

- ✓ Attendance increased significantly.
- ✓ Family moved house and were settled into their new home.
- ✓ Morning routine became easier with Andrew displaying less resistance to getting up and ready for school.



What made a difference?

- ✓ **Flexibility** in approach and **reduction of perceived pressure**. For example, school changed their approach to 'come in when you can' rather than 'you have to be here for 8.40am'. This helped Andrew to feel able to come in earlier than he had been doing and he reported feeling less stressed.
- ✓ Having **trusted adults** and a **clear, consistent routine**.
- ✓ School staff were **responsive** to Andrew's emotional state. If he came into school dysregulated, he did calming, soothing activities rather than feeling 'forced' into doing academic tasks.
- ✓ His family **adapted weekend routine** which led to a calming, Sunday evening routine and special time for Andrew and his dad.
- ✓ **'Worry time'** was **scheduled** in at home each day after school (but not too near to bedtime).
- ✓ Andrew was **involved in the PATH** which allowed him to **feel understood and validated**. He also reported that he valued having some control in the decisions made about his support.

Case study: Lewis (Year 7)

Lewis is 12 years old and transitioned to his local secondary school in September. Lewis lives with his mum, stepdad, older brother, and younger sister. Lewis does not have any contact with his dad and the family have experienced traumatic events in the past.

Lewis has a diagnosis of autism and accesses some additional support in school. He often experiences difficulties with his peers and reports that he is being bullied.

Lewis' attendance is currently 56.9% and this has continued to decrease since he started at secondary school. Lewis is highly distressed in the morning before school, and this has impacted upon his mum's ability to get to work on time. She is at risk of losing her job and this is causing pressure and anxiety for the family.

RISK FACTORS

- Lewis has a diagnosis of autism.
- He perceives that he is being bullied by his peers.
- Family have experienced traumatic events in the past.
- Lack of sense of belonging to school.
- High levels of family stress.
- Key transition point i.e. Y6 → Y7.
- Lewis reports that the school environment is too noisy and busy.

RESILIENCE FACTORS

- Lewis has a close relationship with his mum.
- Lewis' attendance at primary school was good.
- Relationship between home and school has improved.
- Lewis' mum values education and is keen for him to attend school.
- Lewis has friends outside of school who he enjoys gaming with.

What changed?

- ✓ Lewis' attendance increased to 74% and he began to access more lessons in school.
- ✓ Lewis started to feel more comfortable and safe in 'The Zone' (an area for CYP to use when they begin to feel dysregulated or need some space in school).
- ✓ Lewis developed a friendship with another child from 'The Zone' who has similar interests. They are spending increasing amounts of time together in school.



What made a difference?

- ✓ School allocated a **key adult** to work with Lewis and his family. They agreed when he would be able to meet with his key adults (and a back-up plan for when they were not available).
- ✓ The key adult has also agreed to 'check in' with Lewis' mum on a weekly basis by calling her at the end of the week.
- ✓ 'The Zone' was identified as a **safe space** for Lewis to use when he was starting to become anxious in lessons. He was given a 'pass' to use to communicate to teachers that he needed to leave the lesson.
- ✓ Lewis was also given permission to use 'The Zone' at breaktimes and this allowed him to spend time and develop a relationship with another child in the setting.
- ✓ Lewis is starting to build **relationships** with key adults in 'The Zone'. This is allowing school to develop a better understanding of Lewis' strengths and needs which can be shared with other members of staff.

Case study: Sofia (Year 10)

Sofia is in Year 10 at a large secondary school. She has always struggled with attending school and experiences high levels of anxiety which often present as tummy aches and worries about what other people think about her.

During the school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Sofia's anxieties reduced significantly, and she struggled to return to school after this time. This has impacted upon Sofia's relationship with her mum, and they often argue.

Sofia has said to the Welfare Officer that she feels misunderstood and pressured to attend school. Sofia's mum, who experiences her own mental health difficulties, worries that she will be fined for Sofia being out of school.

Sofia is on the waiting list for CAMHS involvement. She currently accesses Out of School Tuition (OOST) at home and has a good relationship with her tutor. However, she hasn't yet felt able to attend school and became highly distressed even when she was driven into the school grounds.

RISK FACTORS

CYP experiences high levels of anxiety associated with school.

Parental mental health difficulties.

Family conflict between Sofia and her mum.

Feeling pressured to attend school.

Sofia describes the school environment as being overwhelming.

RESILIENCE FACTORS

Sofia values education and has aspirations to support other young people in the future with similar difficulties.

Sofia is academically able and engages well with learning at home.

Staff in school have continued to attempt to engage and maintain relationships with Sofia and her family despite her not being in school.

Sofia has a good group of friends who she sees out of school.

What changed?

- ✓ Sofia managed to leave her house to meet with a friend in a shopping centre and took her dog for a walk.
- ✓ Sofia developed aspirations to use her own experiences to help other young people in the future with similar difficulties.
- ✓ Sofia's relationship with her mum and the Welfare Officer improved significantly and became a more trusting, positive relationship.



What made a difference?

- ✓ **Relationships** were absolutely key to Sofia feeling able to express her views and **feel genuinely listened to**. This took time and involved low-pressure activities.
- ✓ Sofia took **ownership** of the exposure ladder. This meant that she was more motivated and engaged to achieve each step. She also **felt listened to** and more **understood**.
- ✓ School staff demonstrated a willingness to change their view about Sofia's situation. After learning more about Sofia's situation, staff were a lot more **empathetic** and **reduced the pressure** on her to attend school. They recognised that Sofia was **not choosing** to 'refuse' to attend school and were willing to learn about underlying emotional impact of EBSA.
- ✓ Although progress was relatively slow (and at times felt frustrating), everyone recognised the importance of **going at Sofia's pace**.

Whole School EBSA Audit

Research has highlighted the importance of addressing EBSA at a whole-school level. The audit below is set out to support your school in identifying strengths around your approach to EBSA, as well as areas for development. It has been divided into 5 sections. You may wish to use the whole audit or focus on one area at a time. It will also be important to regularly review the audit to ensure that your school's response to EBSA is as up-to-date as possible.

R (red) – not achieved/no evidence
A (amber) – working towards/some evidence
G (green) – achieved/clear evidence

WHOLE SCHOOL SYSTEMS, POLICY AND PRACTICE

	R	A	G	EVIDENCE OR COMMENTS	NEXT STEPS
Our school has clear policies on attendance, behaviour, bullying and transition which clearly set out the responsibilities for all and includes what support is in place.					
School Improvement Plans and policies within school make clear reference to social and emotional wellbeing (including EBSA).					
Our school actively promotes student wellbeing. The curriculum includes the teaching of resilience, coping skills, conflict resolution as well as how to understand and manage feelings.					

IDENTIFICATION AND SUPPORT FOR CYP AROUND EBSA

	R	A	G	EVIDENCE OR COMMENTS	NEXT STEPS
Our school has clear systems and procedures in place for the early identification of CYP who may be experiencing EBSA.					
There is a nominated member of senior staff who has responsibility for overseeing arrangements for <i>CYP experiencing EBSA</i> .					
Where concerns are identified, there is a nominated member of staff/team of staff who have responsibility to assess, identify needs and develop an action plan, as required.					
<p>When a CYP experiencing EBSA is identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>The views of the CYP are explored.</i> ✓ The CYP feels genuinely listened to. ✓ <i>The views of parents/carers are heard and valued.</i> ✓ <i>The views of other members of staff are gained to help to identify triggers and strategies.</i> ✓ <i>A clear action plan is developed collaboratively with the CYP and their parents/carers.</i> ✓ The action plan is reviewed and used to guide further support plans. 					

Our school adopts a Person-Centred approach to supporting CYP experiencing EBSA.					
CYP who are experiencing EBSA are allocated a key worker or small team of staff who they can 'check in' with ideally when needed, or at a minimum, at agreed set times.					
Where CYP experiencing EBSA are not currently attending school, 'safe and well checks' and regular contact is made to ensure their safety and promote their belonging to school.					
Personalised transition plans are developed for CYP who may be at risk of EBSA.					

ETHOS AND ENVIRONMENT

	R	A	G	EVIDENCE OR COMMENTS	NEXT STEPS
Our school is a safe and inclusive environment which is responsive to the individual needs of CYP experiencing EBSA (e.g. safe spaces, key person).					
Our school adopts a flexible approach to supporting CYP experiencing EBSA (e.g. arrival at different times, modified timetable, adaptations to school uniform or environment).					
Our school recognises the importance of relationships (between staff, students, and parents/carers) in supporting emotional wellbeing and a sense of belonging for CYP experiencing EBSA.					
Our school has systems in place to support and develop students' sense of belonging (e.g. school council, clubs).					

STAFF TRAINING AND SUPPORT

	R	A	G	EVIDENCE OR COMMENTS	NEXT STEPS
All staff in our school have had access to whole school training on emotional wellbeing including anxiety and EBSA.					
All staff in our school have a basic understanding and awareness of <i>risk/resilience factors</i> and specific strategies to support CYP experiencing EBSA.					
Key members of staff in school have an in-depth understanding of EBSA. They are aware of specific strategies and approaches to support CYP experiencing EBSA.					
Staff in our school have access to regular supervision and support to discuss challenges around supporting CYP experiencing EBSA					
Staff in our school are given opportunities to share good practice around supporting CYP experiencing EBSA.					
All staff in our school are aware of who they should report any concerns to regarding CYP who may be experiencing EBSA.					
Staff in our school work together with other agencies and professionals to support CYP experiencing EBSA.					

WORKING WITH PARENTS AND CARERS

	R	A	G	EVIDENCE OR COMMENTS	NEXT STEPS
Staff in our school work together closely with <i>parents/carers</i> to support their CYP who are experiencing EBSA.					
A member of staff is identified as the main point of contact for parents/carers of CYP experiencing EBSA.					
Parents/carers have access to information and guidance around understanding and managing their child's anxieties.					

EBSA pathway

Below is an example of a whole school pathway for identifying and supporting CYP experiencing EBSA. The pathway is underpinned by the Graduated Response to SEN and should be adapted to reflect the wider systems and processes in individual schools.



Identify

- ✓ CYP identified by key members of staff (e.g. form tutor, attendance staff, pastoral staff) using agreed criteria (e.g. attendance <90% and/or missing certain lessons/days and CYP presenting with SEMH needs).
- ✓ Concerns shared with EBSA lead.



Assess

- ✓ EBSA lead or designated member of staff makes contact with parents/carers to explore concerns.
- ✓ **ATTEND framework** materials (or similar) used by EBSA lead or designated member of staff with CYP, family and school staff to explore factors impacting upon the CYP's attendance and emotional wellbeing.
- ✓ *Views of the CYP* are explored in more depth



Action plan

- ✓ **Person-Centred** meeting (e.g. PATH or MAP) arranged and attended by (ideally) the CYP, their parents/carers and school staff. Other professionals (e.g. EP, social care) are invited to contribute if appropriate.
- ✓ **'Positive and Possible'** goals agreed and short-term targets set.
- ✓ Action points, tasks and strategies are agreed. These are specific i.e. who, what, where and when.



Implement

- ✓ 4-6 week implementation phase, led by EBSA lead or designated member of staff.
- ✓ Action points, tasks and strategies carried out as agreed.
- ✓ Key information shared with key members of staff (i.e. through 'Keeping Strong Plan' or similar which is created **collaboratively with CYP**).



Review

- ✓ Targets and action plan reviewed after 4-6 weeks.
- ✓ Review meeting attended by (ideally) the CYP, their parents/carers and school staff. Other professionals (e.g. EP, social care) invited if appropriate.
- ✓ Next steps agreed and cycle repeated as required.

Key messages about EBSA

1. CYP can attend school and have **good attendance but still be experiencing EBSA**.
2. **Think about the language you use** – avoid the term ‘refusal’ and try not to say ‘but they’re fine in school’. You may mean well, but it is rarely helpful to a parent or carer to hear this and they often already feel blamed for the situation.
3. **Early intervention is key** – if you notice something, talk to someone as this information may be part of a bigger EBSA jigsaw and will allow strategies and approaches to be put in place at the earliest possible stage.
4. Take the time to genuinely **listen to the child or young person’s views**.
5. **Go at the CYP’s pace!** Reduce the pressure to attend. It may sound counter-intuitive but by placing pressure on them, they are likely to feel out of control and may actually attend school less.
6. Each CYP’s experience of EBSA will be different. Try to take an **individualised, flexible approach**. For example, can they arrive at school slightly later to avoid the crowds? Or are there adjustments that can be made to their uniform?
7. **Stay curious and view all behaviour as communication**. What might the child or young person be trying to communicate through their behaviours at home and at school? I’m feeling...I’m thinking...
8. **Adopt a ‘no-blame’ approach** – there is rarely one factor which ‘causes’ EBSA. Instead, consider all factors holistically and involve the CYP’s parents/ carers to make sure you have a clear understanding of all factors. At times, this may be hard, and you may have very different views. Try to keep the CYP at the heart of this and focus on what can change.
9. **Relationships are key** – does the CYP have a key adult? Try to have regular contact with the CYP and their family, even if they’re not in school at the moment.
10. View each day as a new day – even if the plan doesn’t go ‘to plan’ one day, remain hopeful – **positive change is possible**. Celebrate the small wins!



Appendix 1

Laddering activity

Returning to school, or some aspect of school (e.g. a certain lesson), can be overwhelming for CYP. A 'laddering activity' can be a useful tool to break a specific goal down into small, manageable steps. The ladder must be co-constructed with the CYP, and steps should be gradual and realistic.

The CYP would first be asked to identify the situation in school which they are most worried about, for instance going back into a mainstream lesson, and then less fearful situations working down the ladder. On the bottom rung of the ladder would be the situation that the pupil feels least worried about and already feels comfortable doing with minimal anxiety.

Remember to start small and ensure that the first step is something that the CYP is fairly confident with and able to achieve with relative ease. This will help to provide a sense of success and ultimately build their self-esteem.

It is essential that the CYP experiences success at each step of the ladder. Therefore, each step must be fully secured before moving onto the next. Where this is proving more difficult, it may be necessary to break a situation down into small steps on the ladder, or even have a separate ladder for a specific skill that is needed before they can progress on the main ladder.

Most worried about



Least worried about

Going into a busy dining room

Going into an empty dining room

Speaking to a peer

Going into a lesson (maths)

Seeing peers around school

Going into an empty classroom

Going into the reception area

Meeting a member of staff in the car park

Putting on uniform in the home

Keeping Strong

What reminders do you need to give yourself?

What will others do to help you stay strong?

Most worried about

Least worried about

My Goal

Have courage

What strategies can you use when you're finding things harder?

Appendix 2

Sunday Night/ Monday Morning

We've all had that dreaded feeling on a Sunday evening about the imminent arrival of Monday morning. For CYP experiencing EBSA, this is often a weekly (or even daily!) feeling that they experience. However, if they are able to attend school on a Monday, they are more likely to feel able to attend school for other days in the week.

Although we often focus on the plan for a morning, it may be more effective to start the plan on a Sunday night. The following points can be shared with parents/carers and a helpful video by Dr Tina Rae can be found at *Sunday evening and Monday morning plans - YouTube*.

Sunday evening plan

Soothe – think about what calming activities you could do, or what activities you find soothing. For example, having a warm bath, listening to calming music, listening to a story.

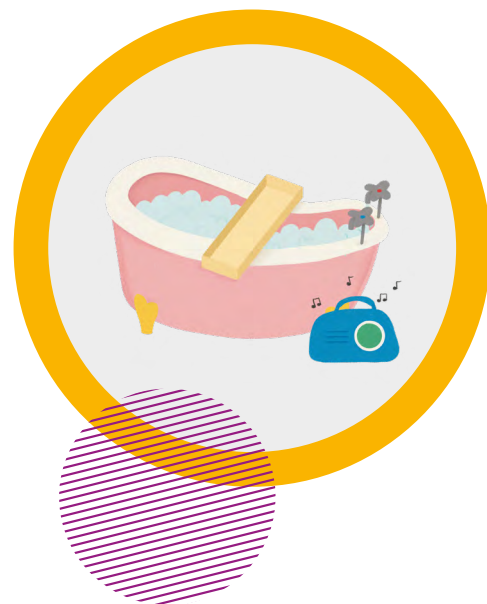
Understand – empathise with your child and let them know that you understand their feelings without dismissing them. It might be helpful to develop a script such as “wow, I can see you’re starting to feel really worried about school tomorrow. It’s ok to feel worried. We will find a way through this together”.

Neutralise – note down any worries your child has and, ideally not too close to bedtime, talk through their worries. Be careful not to dismiss their worries. Instead, acknowledge and help them to find solutions or recognise when they may be catastrophising. Try to look for the evidence for/against these irrational thoughts or thinking patterns.

Decide on a plan of action. Go through it step-by-step and plan ahead for the next day. For example, get PE kit or books out ready for the next morning. Make it visual or use a smart speaker to recall the list.

Attend to your child’s emotional state. Notice and be vigilant as to how they might be feeling. Be aware that they may need more time and reassurance.

Yourself – it’s absolutely vital that you look after yourself and make sure that you are as emotionally regulated and calm as possible before you try to help your child. Try to take a moment to recognise how you are feeling and what emotions the situation is bringing for you. Try to do a relaxing activity or take time for yourself, even if it’s just a cup of tea before bed.



Monday morning plan

Manage – recognise and manage your own emotions first. Think about the oxygen mask on the plane – they always tell you to sort your own mask before helping others. You will need to be as regulated and calm as possible so that you can support your child. Use calming activities or grounding/mindfulness activities if these are what help you calm.

Organise – you may need to get up slightly earlier to make sure that everything is organised (e.g. bag packed, breakfast on the table). This will give you the best chance of attending to your child’s emotional needs without the potential additional stress of being late.

Neutralise – take some time to talk through any worries your child has. Acknowledge your child’s worries and help them to find solutions or recognise when they may be catastrophising. Try to look for the evidence for/against these irrational thoughts or thinking patterns.

Decide – on a plan for getting to school and make the plan clear to your child so that they feel prepared. This might include a plan on what transport they will get to school, what music they will listen to on they way, who might be with them etc.

Accept – how your child is feeling. Empathise and acknowledge their feelings and reassure them using scripts e.g. ‘It’s ok to feel scared. I am here and I will help you to manage this feeling’.

Yourself – as on the evening before, take some time to make sure that you are emotionally regulated. Use grounding techniques and scripts if these are helpful to you e.g. “I am safe, my child is safe, I can be calm”.

With thanks to Tina Rae



Appendix 3

The Ideal School

The 'Drawing the Ideal School' activity has been adapted from an approach by Moran (2001) which helps CYP to explore and express their views about school. It is based on Personal Construct Psychology and aims to explore the CYP's core constructs that they have about themselves and the way they view the world.

Instructions

PART 1.

The kind of school you WOULD NOT like to go to.

Ask the CYP to draw or make a model of each element if they wish (e.g. school, classroom). Remind them that this is not a real school, so they can be as creative as they like. Record exactly what the CYP says using their own words.

The School

Can you tell me three things about this school? What kind of school is this? What does it look like? How do you get into this school? Is it quiet or busy?

What is the playground/outside area like? What are the other children doing?

The Classroom

What objects/things are in this classroom? What's on the walls of the classroom? What are the different areas in this classroom? What are the rules in this classroom?

Where do you sit and who do you sit with? How many other children are in your class?

The Children

What are the other children like in this school? What are they doing? What do you do with these children? How many of these children are your friends?

You will need:

- ✓ Paper
- ✓ Pens, pencils (or Lego, Playdoh etc).
- ✓ A quiet space
- ✓ Approximately 1 hour

The Adults

What are the adults like in this school? What are they doing? How do they talk to you and other children? How do they help you with your learning?

Me

What are you like at this school? How do you feel when you're in this school? How do you act/behave in this school? Where are you happiest/caldest in this school?

PART 2.

The kind of school you WOULD like to go to.

Repeat the activity and questions but, this time, for the kind of school the CYP would like to go to. Record exactly what the CYP says using their own words.

Reflection

After the activity, ask the CYP to rate how close they feel their current school is to their 'ideal' school.

Take some time to explore any ideas that the CYP has as to how their current school could become closer to their ideal school. This can often be something seemingly small but could make a big difference to making school a happier place for them!

