


EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL AVOIDANCE



DELIVERED BY SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL'S EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE

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AIMS


1. Increase understanding of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)
2. Identifying risk factors
3. Supporting parent/carers
4. Developing support plans
5. Looking at whole school strategies to include; prevention work and processes
6. Next steps; putting this into practice

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & THE EBSA JOURNEY

Sheffield Educational Psychology Service	West Sussex Guidance	EP webinar
Somerset Council EBSA website	Staffordshire EP service	Solihull EP service

Sheffield City Council
Emotionally Based School Avoidance
Guidance for professionals working with families and young people



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INCREASE UNDERSTANDING OF EBSA

Emotionally Based School Avoidance is a term sometimes used to describe some children and young people who do not attend school due to emotional factors. The difficulties associated with school non-attendance are far-reaching and can have a negative impact on long-term outcomes including: reduced future aspirations, poor emotional regulation, mental health difficulties, limited academic progress and reduced employment opportunities (Gregory & Purcell, 2014; Hughes et al, 2010; Lyon & Cotler, 2007). Progress towards a successful reintegration can be slow and at times may feel like you take one step forward and two steps back.

Although EBSA is a complex issue, let's remain hopeful as positive outcomes are achievable. Staying curious, feeling confident to try a different approach, remembering that no one is to blame for the situation along with a culture that promotes staff and student well-being, can all support a successful reintegration. Many of the factors associated with positive outcomes will already be present within your school's existing good practice and include:

❖ Prevalence

❖ Causes

Early intervention

Working with parents and school staff as well as the CYP

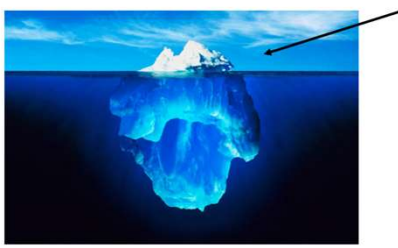
A focus on a rapid return to school alongside intervention, support and adaptations within the school and home environment

Working flexibly with a focus on understanding the function of the CYP's avoidance behaviour

Factors associated with positive outcomes for successful reintegration (Baker & Bishop, 2015)

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Avoidance behaviours: consider what might we see?



"All behaviour is communication"


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ANXIETY



Anxiety is a natural human response when we feel that we are under threat. It can be experienced through our thoughts, feelings and physical sensations.

"You know that feeling when you're rocking on the back legs of your chair and suddenly for a split second you think you're about to fall; that feeling in your chest? Imagine that split second feeling being frozen in time and lodged in your chest for hours/days, and imagine with it that sense of dread sticking around too, but sometimes you don't even know why."



School avoidance can be a response to overwhelming feelings of anxiety that a young person may or may not be able to communicate.

"All behaviour is communication"

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What is the function of the school avoidance behaviour? What purpose is it serving?

To avoid uncomfortable feelings brought on by attending school

To avoid stressful situations

To reduce separation anxiety

To pursue tangible reinforcers outside of school

Kearney and Silverman 1990

Resource: Pupil voice card sort Appendix 5a Sheffield Guidance

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IDENTIFYING RISK FACTORS

Early identification is key and best practice would mean that there is a whole school approach to this that develops staff awareness and understanding of EBISA. In order to recognise the possible indicators of EBISA; remain curious about your CYP's behaviour, try to refrain from making assumptions and share information with colleagues to establish a holistic picture.

- ◆ Tools
- ◆ Assessment tools
- ◆ PASS software

Resource: Push and pull formulation template Appendix 3 Sheffield Guidance

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CASE STUDY: TASK

Read through the case study
Which risk factors are present?
Use the push and pull factors template to begin a formulation

Push (Towards School)	Pull (Away from School)
School factors	
Home factors	

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	Push (Towards School)	Pull (Away from School)
School factors	Academically able	Prolonged period of absence
	Forming close friendship	Isolated (not leaving house)
	Helps brother with homework	Difficult transition to secondary
	Previous patterns of attendance	Academic demands
	In top classes?	Social difficulties – possible bullying
Home factors	Parents aware and concerned	Mum's illness
	Friend visiting house	Difficulty sleeping, nightmares
	Brother's attendance?	Separation anxiety
	Brother wanting to complete homework?	Not having to complete schoolwork

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INDICATORS

- Difficulty attending school with periods of prolonged absence
- Child reluctant to leave home and stays away from school with the knowledge of the parent/carer
- For younger children, a reluctance to leave parents or get out of the car
- Regular absence without indication of anti-social behaviours
- Frequent absences for minor illnesses
- Patterns in absences, for example, particular days and/or subjects, after weekends and holidays
- Reluctance to attend school trips
- The young person expresses a desire to attend classes but is unable to do so
- Anxiety on separation and inappropriate dependence on family members e.g. worry expressed about the safety of those at home
- Evidence of under-achievement of learning potential
- Social isolation and avoidance of class mates or peer group
- Challenging behaviours, particularly in relation to specific situations at school
- Severe emotional upset with excessive fearfulness, outbursts of temper and complaints of feeling ill on school days
- Depression and sense of isolation resulting in, low self-esteem and lack of confidence
- Confusion or extreme absent mindedness shown in school due to lack of concentration resulting in, lower attainments
- Physical changes i.e. sweating, sickness, aching limbs, headaches, panic attacks, abdominal pain, rapid weight loss or gain

Sheffield guide p10

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Signs and Risk Factors for Emerging School Refusal

School factors	Family / home factors	CYP factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bullying (the most common factor) ▪ Difficulties with student-teacher relationship and unpredictability at school ▪ Social isolation and loneliness ▪ Teacher stress ▪ Difficulties in particular subjects ▪ Academic demands/high levels of pressure and performance orientated classrooms ▪ Transitions: from primary to secondary, KS3 → KS4 ▪ Transition between home and school; transport, entry to classroom/building ▪ Exams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Changes to home environment; divorce, separation, parental illness (mental & physical) ▪ High levels of family stress ▪ Overprotection from parent ▪ Dysfunctional family interactions ▪ Being the youngest child ▪ Loss and bereavement ▪ Family history of EBSA ▪ Young carer ▪ Parental psychopathology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Age (5-6, 11-12, 13-14) ▪ Anxiety and/or depression ▪ Somatic complaints ▪ Difficulties with emotional regulation ▪ Negative thinking, low self-esteem, and limited problem solving ability ▪ Learning difficulties, developmental problems or ASD if unidentified / unsupported ▪ Fear of failure and low self confidence ▪ Separation anxiety / attachment issues with parent ▪ Trauma and ACEs

Adapted from West Sussex guide, Thambirajah et al 2008 and Ingul et al 2019

Sheffield guide p11

Resources: Profile of risk factors tool
Appendix 2 Sheffield Guidance
Risk factors card sort Staffordshire Guidance

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INTERRELATED FACTORS & THE IMPACTS

- ❖ EBSA can make people feel very stuck, generating considerable stress amongst parent/carers and staff
- ❖ Can result in parent/carers taking CYP out of school through feeling at a loss
- ❖ Covert parental support for the CYP to stay at home (difficult to withstand the relentless pressure put on them by their CYP / find it unbearable to witness the extreme anxiety shown and so let them stay at home)
- ❖ Keep in mind:
 - ❖ Usually not one cause – interaction of multiple factors
 - ❖ People are trying their best in the situation they find themselves in (which is not of their choosing)

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SUPPORTING PARENT/CARERS

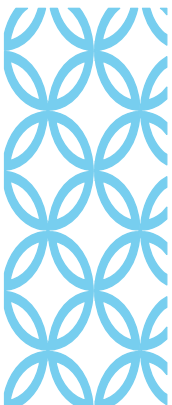
- Gathering their voice
- Support plans
- Identification of the function of behaviour
- Keeping informed
- Multiagency working
- Developing relationships
- Regular communication and check-ins
- Tailoring support
- Developing anxiety management techniques used at school and home
- Signposting to resources

Websites:

- We heart CBT <https://weheartcbt.com/for-parents/>
- Parent support website: [Somerset Council Support for parents](#)

Information Gathering from parents with prompts Appendix 7 Sheffield Guidance

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DEVELOPING SUPPORT PLANS

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DEVELOPING SUPPORT PLANS



"I might not always be able to tell you what is up. I may not always be able to communicate with you or myself about what the problem is. Your job is to help me with this."


A range of tools/approaches can be useful for exploring young people's views, including use of scaling, drawing, visuals/cards, The Ideal School, School Stress survey etc.

A RIGHT TO BE HEARD

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x14_2chkaE Resources: Appendices 5 & 6 Sheffield Guidance School Wellbeing cards

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PUPIL VOICE TASK

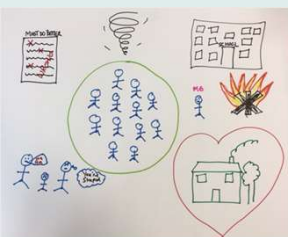


Read through your section of the pupil view task sheets

Through considering a young person you have worked with or Alison's case study – which activity might you be best placed to either use in your role or suggest a colleague use?

What do you like most about the activity?

Which would you feel most comfortable using? Why?



How could this be used within your school?

How can you build upon existing good practice?

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PUPIL VOICE TASK FEEDBACK

Timetable review

Anxiety thermometer or scale

Card Sort: Function of School Avoidance

Ideal Classroom/School

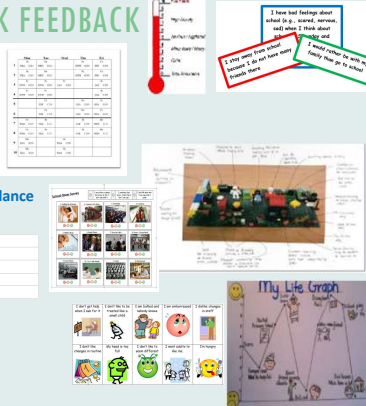
School Stress Survey

Life Graph

5 point scale

Multi Element Plan (MEP) cards

Externalisation



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DEVELOPING SUPPORT PLANS

Resources: Support and action plan templates
Appendices 10 & 11
Sheffield Guidance

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Appendix 10

Return to school action plan template

Name: _____ Year group: _____ Date: _____

Contributors: _____

Who is involved? _____

Key adult: _____ Safe place: _____ Date of next review: _____

Regular communication between home and school will take place:
When? Who? How? _____

Hoped for outcomes: What do we hope to see as a result?	Steps What is a realistic expectation given our starting point? How can we write this as a SMART target?	Agreed Action Intervention/Strategy What? Who? How often? For how long? Consider school, family and child	Pre-action evaluation What is the current situation?	Post action evaluation What is the situation now? Are outcomes reached? Has progress been made towards the outcomes?
	Step 1			

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APPROACHES TASK

Read through your section of the **approaches** document

Decide in your groups which approaches may be worth including in a support plan for Alison

Give consideration to the pros and cons of the approach

Be prepare to feedback and justify the use of an approach to the group

Approaches – under the Do section of the guidance. Ideas and practical approaches to help support a CYP back into school.

Breakout room 1 :
Read pages 1 & 2

Breakout room 2:
Read pages 3&4

Breakout room 3 :
Read pages 1 & 2

How could this be used within your school?
How can you build upon existing good practice?

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NEXT STEPS; PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE

- ❖ How can you firm up the process from identifying a CYP at risk to gathering their views to implementing a support plan
- ❖ Think about how you currently record and communicate EBSA
- ❖ Consider who could be the lead(s) on EBSA in your school
- ❖ Consider developing a check-list for use when exploring a pattern of absence for example
- ❖ Consider using in-school meetings as a forum to raise concerns
- ❖ Consider an EBSA whole-school audit (see Sheffield Guidance)

Individual take-away
 What could your role be?
 Your ideas:
 Your commitment:

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RESOURCES



Training video

<https://www.the-educational-psychologists.co.uk/for->

EBSA cards

<https://www.schoolwellbeingcards.co.uk/>

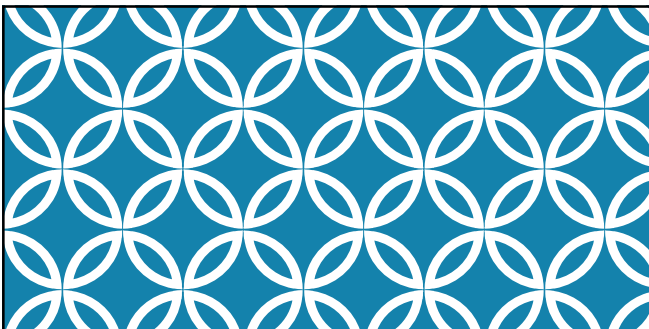
Staffordshire Risk Factors card sort

[link](#)

Guidance from councils

- ❖ Sheffield Includes appendices referred to in this training
- ❖ Somerset Includes a fantastic website with resources for parent/carers and CYP

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