

In the Classroom: Supporting Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

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In this session, we will cover...

- What is meant by the term 'emotional based school avoidance' (EBSA)
- Why it happens
- What you can do to support children and young people in returning to school calmly and successfully

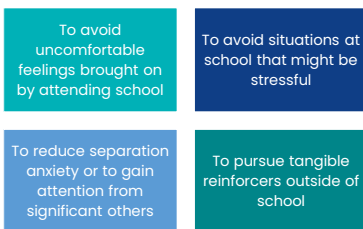
1. What is meant by the term "emotional based school avoidance"?

What is Emotional Based School Avoidance?

- A term used to describe children and young people who have **severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors**, often resulting in prolonged absences from school.
- Also sometimes referred to as 'school refusal' or 'school phobia'.

2. Why does it happen?

Functions of EBSA



Kearney & Silverman, 1990

Why does it happen?

‘School refusal occurs when stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience and when ‘pull’ factors that promote school non-attendance overcome the ‘push’ factors that encourage attendance.

(Thambirajah et al., 2008, p.33)



Risk factors

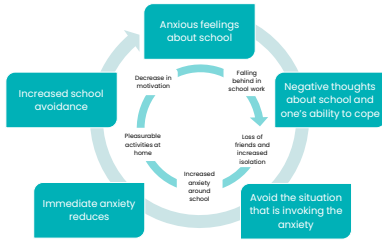
School Factors	Family Factors	Child Factors
Bullying	Separation or divorce	Temperamental style
Academic difficulties	Bereavement and loss	Fear of failure/poor self-confidence
Academic pressure	Parental health issues	Trauma
Transitions	Conflict within the home	Physical illness
Exams	Being the youngest child	Age
Peer or staff relationships	High levels of stress within the home	Learning difficulties
Transport or journey to school	Young carer	Separation anxiety

What we see - warning signs

- Increased anxiety
- Decline in punctuality
- Negative talk about school
- Reduced engagement
- Atypical behaviour
- Displays of anger/anxiety/stress



What we DON'T see - Cycle of School Avoidance



Credit: West Sussex Educational Psychology Service

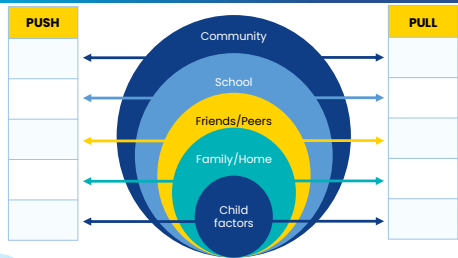
Reflect

What messages might they be picking up from me?





Push and Pull Factors



3. What you can do

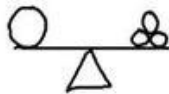
Dos and Don'ts

- **DO** try to start integrating the child back into school as soon as possible.
- **DO** take it step by step
- **DO** listen to the child
- **DO** work together
- **DO** celebrate every achievement
- **DO** treat every day as a **new** day
- **DO** increase 'protective factors'
- **DON'T** push them to try too much too soon
- **DON'T** give up



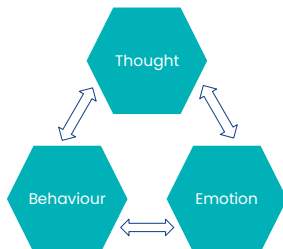
FIRST

- Make the stress smaller while you make the coping skills bigger
- Keep it successful (balanced)
- Gradually build expectation and strategies
- Appreciate the trend of the data



Tackling the anxiety

- Listen, empathise and validate
- Try to identify their underlying thoughts
- Teach calming strategies
- Scaling
- Anxiety ladder
- Sunday evening/Monday morning plan
- Emotion coaching

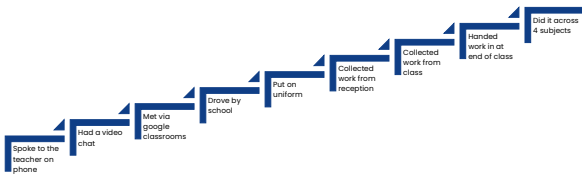


Change your language

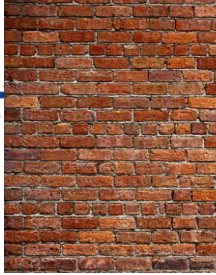
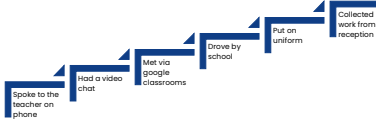
AVOID ...	TRY INSTEAD ...
'Don't worry'	'Let's talk about it and make a plan'
'It's not a big deal'	'I can see that this is hard for you, let's try ...'
'Stop thinking about it'	'I'm wondering if you're feeling worried about ...?'
'I'll do it for you'	'What do you think we could do that would help?'
'There's nothing to be afraid of'	'Would you like to try ... that will help you when you have those anxious feelings'



Break it down – then smash it up



Break it down – then smash it up



10 tips to support children when they are in

1. Tackle anxiety
2. Change your language
3. Break it down and smash it up

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2. Change your language
3. Break it down and smash it up
4. Directly teach self-soothing and co-regulation

Self soothing

Deep breathing
Mindfulness
Breathing exercises
Noticing exercises

Cognitive restructuring
Thought stopping
Activity schedule

Grounding exercises
Progressive Muscle Relaxation
Visualisation
Systematic Desensitisation

Problem solving
Happiness boosters
Gratitude

10 tips to support children when they are in

1. Tackle anxiety
2. Change your language
3. Break it down and smash it up
4. Directly teach self-soothing and co-regulation.
5. Plan restorative breaktimes with structure and routine
6. Work respectfully with the family – no blame approach
7. Exit plan or secret signal (communicating if overwhelmed)
8. Sunday family plan, Monday school plan

Sunday evening plan

- Soothe** – do some calming activities when you feel things are right, soothed – gentle music, when you are calm, and things are about to go well. **Write about 3 good things** before bed.
- Understand** – make sure you do not know that you do understand their feelings and you do not regret it because then you understand how hard it is and it will go better in time! **Devote your script for this if appropriate.**
- Neutralise** – keep any worries in a worry book and then use the next week's writing to see a solution when they are collaborating and **show them the evidence against any irrational thoughts** thinking patterns.
- Decide** – on a plan of action and go through it step by step – this will be all of them. Read out the evidence and make that everything is ready – book, bag, PC etc and get out for the next morning. **Make the plan visual if needed.**
- Attend** – be open to the child's emotional state and give more than if they need to so that they feel supported and safe. **Use reassurance and a transitional object for younger children.**
- Yourself** – be after yourself and make sure that you are regulated and feel calm yourself. Engage in some exercise and take time out after the bedtime routine to give you back to yourself. **Remember that it is ok to feel worried but don't let it overwhelm you.**

Monday morning plan

- Manage** – manage your own feelings. The child's feelings are not yours. You are responsible for your own feelings and should not feel guilty. **Remember your own needs and your own feelings.**
- Organise** – do something with the getting up earlier in the morning. You can do this with your own feelings for your own time. **Remember that you are not responsible for the child and you are not responsible for the child.**
- Neutralise** – keep any worries in a worry book and then use the next week's writing to see a solution when they are collaborating and **show them the evidence against any irrational thoughts** thinking patterns.
- Decide** – on a plan of action and go through it step by step – this will be all of them. Read out the evidence and make that everything is ready – book, bag, PC etc and get out for the next morning. **Make the plan visual if needed.**
- Accept** – be open to the child's emotional state and give more than if they need to so that they feel supported and safe. **Use reassurance and a transitional object for younger children.**
- Yourself, again** – be after yourself and make sure that you are regulated and feel calm yourself. Engage in some exercise and take time out after the bedtime routine to give you back to yourself. **Remember that it is ok to feel worried but don't let it overwhelm you.**

Boat, T., 2020, Understanding & Supporting Children & Young People with Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

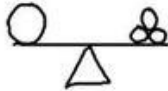
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8. Sunday family plan, Monday school plan
9. Celebrate every success
10. Relationships

The aim... keep balancing

Gradually increase demand (a tiny bit each day)

Gradually increase coping skills (by teaching them)







To summarise

Moving forwards:



Aim to:
gradually increase coping skills (by teaching them)
AND increase demand (a tiny bit every day)

HOW?
Teaching regulation
through co-regulation
Schore & Schore

Separation Anxiety



Children with ASD...

- Need consistency and structure
- Support at unstructured times
- Pre-warnings of changes
- Be aware of sensory sensitivities
- Increase feelings of control
- Support social interactions
- Minimise transitions throughout the day

Ask me anything:

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Resources

- **Emotionally Based School Avoidance Toolkit:**
https://westsussex.local-offer.org/information_pages/460-emotionally-based-school-avoidance
- **Understanding & Supporting Children & Young People with Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)** (by Tina Rae)
- **School Wellbeing Risk and Resilience Card Set** (by Dr Jerricah Holder)
<https://www.schoolwellbeingcards.co.uk/>

References

Kearney, C.A. & Silverman, W.K., 1990, A preliminary analysis of a functional model of assessment and treatment for school refusal behavior, *Behavior Modification*, 14(3), pp.340-366.

Boingboing, 2012, *Interactive Resilience Framework*, <https://www.boingboing.org.uk/interactive-resilience-framework/>

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Thambirajah, M.S., Grandison, K.J. & De-Hayes, L., 2008, *Understanding School Refusal: A Handbook for Professionals in Education, Health and Social Care*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.

West Sussex Educational Psychology Service, 2022, *Emotionally Based School Avoidance: Good practice guidelines for schools and support agencies*, <https://schools.westsussex.gov.uk/Page/10483>
