Oxfordshire Educational Psychology Service

Feeling good **EPS** *Learning well*

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)
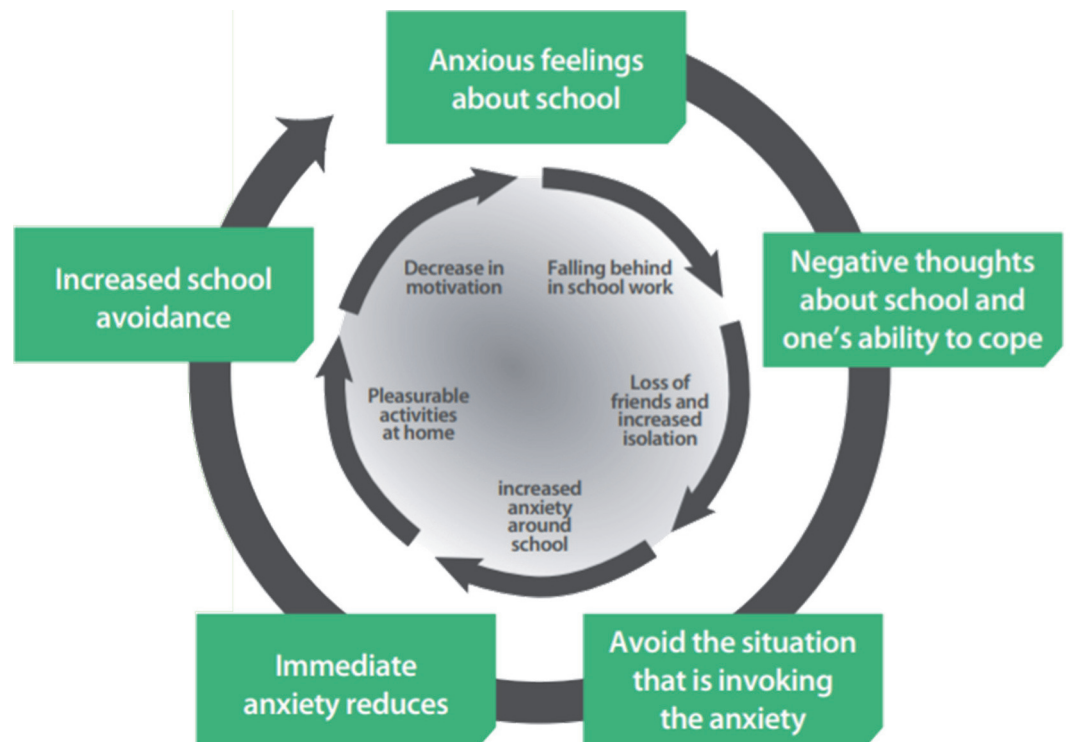
Primary School Guide

What is Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)?

EBSA is a broad term used to describe a child who struggles significantly in attending school due to heightened levels of emotions such as anxiety. This can result in significant absence from school and impacts the child's learning, relationships and well-being.

What can cause EBSA?

There are likely to be multiple factors, individual to that child, that contribute to attendance difficulties. They may be related to school factors (e.g. bullying, transition, unmet learning needs) or home factors (e.g. bereavement, separation anxiety or EBSA issues within the family).

The diagram represents how EBSA behaviours can develop:

Anxious feelings about school

Negative thoughts about school and one's ability to cope

Avoid the situation that is invoking the anxiety

Immediate anxiety reduces

Increased school avoidance

Decrease in motivation

Falling behind in school work

Loss of friends and increased isolation

increased anxiety around school

Pleasurable activities at home

Adapted from West Sussex Educational Psychology Service

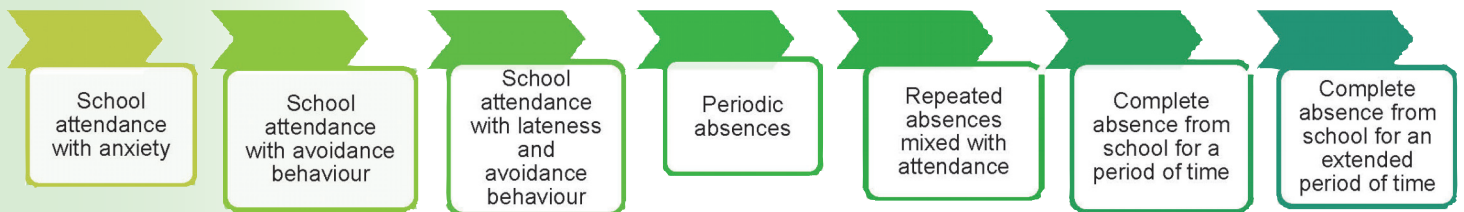## OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Early Identification

Recognising the signs of EBSA could result in early intervention to support the child and their family. Signs of EBSA include:

- Reported anxiety and fearfulness of attending school (particularly on Sunday evenings or in the mornings before school)

- Expression of negative feelings such as refusal, hiding, running away, hitting out

- Complaints of stomach pain, headache or other feelings of being unwell without the physical sign of illness

- Difficult or distressing transition into school in the mornings (including lateness)

It is helpful to think of school avoidance as a spectrum.

Early intervention is key, the example below indicates how low-level concerns can develop into longer term, persistent absence:

| School attendance with anxiety | School attendance with avoidance behaviour | School attendance with lateness and avoidance behaviour | Periodic absences | Repeated absences mixed with attendance | Complete absence from school for a period of time | Complete absence from school for an extended period of time |

Adapted from Informed by Kearney, C & Albano, A. (2018) When Children Refuse School, Oxford University Press

Intervention framework

Universal Provision

Promoting wellbeing across the school is the first step in preventing EBSA.

This may include e.g. a trained Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA), A Nurture approach, Focus on belonging, school-based mental health and social-emotional learning, parent involvement initiatives, culturally responsive approaches, transition, 'bridging' and orientation packages, school readiness support.

Talk to the **Educational Psychology Team** if you would like any guidance.

Bespoke

Targeted

Universal
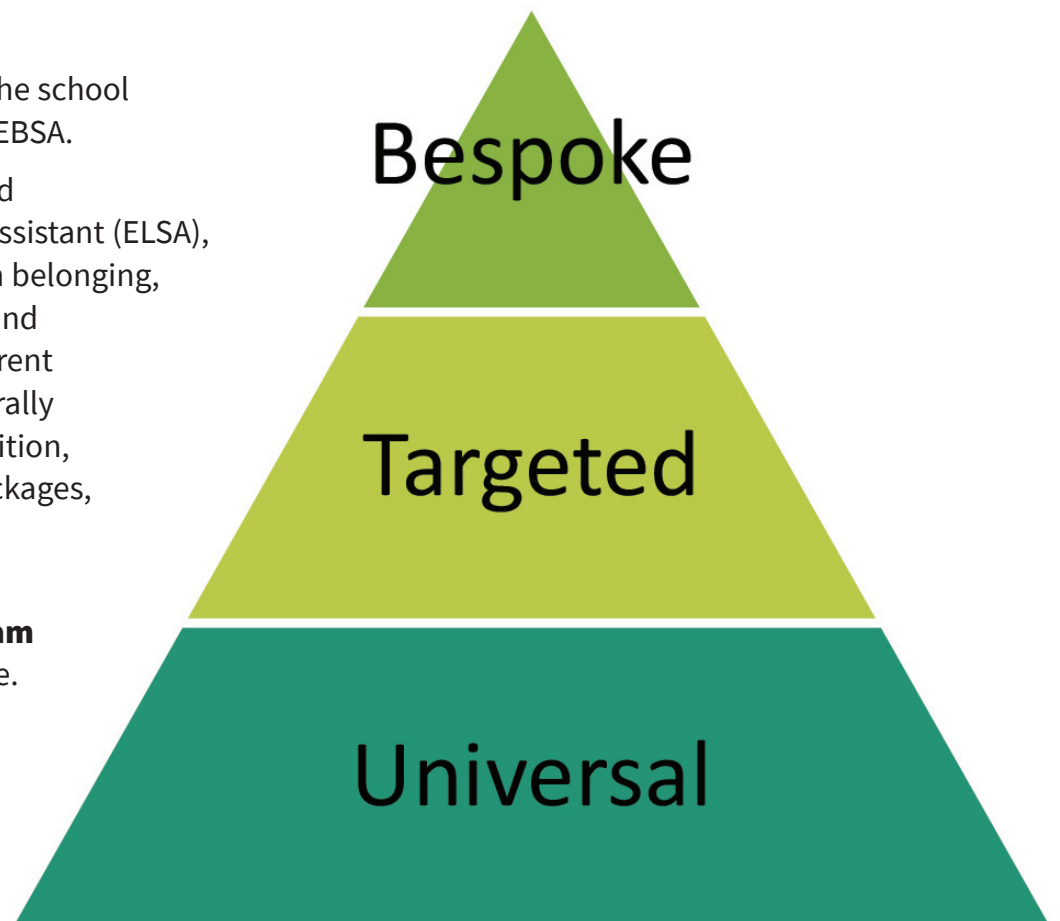
Targeted provision
(where there are concerns about attendance)

It is important to identify factors which encourage the child to school ('pull factors') and those which are challenging ('push factors').

This will be the starting point of any intervention to support the child to increase attendance. The grid below can help you consider these areas with a parent or carer.

School – 'Push' factors
- Have there been any significant changes in mood/ appearance/ performance?
- Is there a pattern to attendance or unauthorised absence?
- How do they return after illness or a holiday?
- Do parents/carers report difficulties getting ready for and going to school?
- How independent are they in school?
- How do they cope with unstructured times?
- How do they relate to peers? Teachers?
- Are there any reported incidents of bullying?

Home – 'Push' factors
- Do they talk about school at home?
- Do they talk about key staff or pupils who are helpful?
- Do they engage in school tasks (homework) at home?
- What strengths and interests have you noticed?
- Do they talk about the future/ careers?
- What helps them attend school?
- What helps them feel calm?

School – 'Pull' factors
- What helps them come to school and participate in school?
- What is enjoyable about school?
- Who do they like to spend time within school?
- What can child/ parent/ keyworker do at the start of the day/ end of the day that is helpful?
- What helps them keep calm?
- How have they coped with/ overcome difficulties in the past?

Home – 'Pull' factors
- Have there been any significant/ traumatic events in the family? Loss and bereavement? Illness?
- Are there any significant changes expected?
- Do they care for siblings/ parent/ carer in the home?
- Do they follow a morning routine/ eat breakfast/ sleep well?
- How do they manage homework tasks?
- Are they reluctant to leave you/ family?
- Have there been any changes in mood/ appearance/ behaviour/ friendships?
- Who do they interact with out of school?

- Agree a link person to coordinate the school response and link with the family
- Maintain clear records of attendance, distress, issues before school or other times of the day to identify patterns in behaviour
- Reduce emerging distress and obstacles to attendance where possible. Rule out school-based threats e.g. bullying
- Build in additional support at difficult times of day e.g. a keyworker meet-and-greet, a calming activity on arrival
- Build in opportunities to reduce anxiety/ distress throughout the school day e.g. sensory room, quiet reading, ELSA session

Bespoke support
(where there are serious concerns about attendance)

- As soon as possible, establish a meeting with key people and the family to develop a clear, graduated strategy and timetable for reintegration
- Maintain contact with the family and the child
- Secure academic work from teachers to be completed at home and establish clear expectations around this
- Encourage family to maintain a regular morning routine including school preparation activities
- Work together with the family and child to find out the experiences and views of the child and what school can do to create an inviting environment for the child in mind
- Build on strengths and what the child feels they are able to do
- If difficulties persist, contact the **Oxfordshire Educational Psychology Service** for further support

Contact the team

Educationalpsychologycentral@oxfordshire.gov.uk