



Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Secondary School Guide

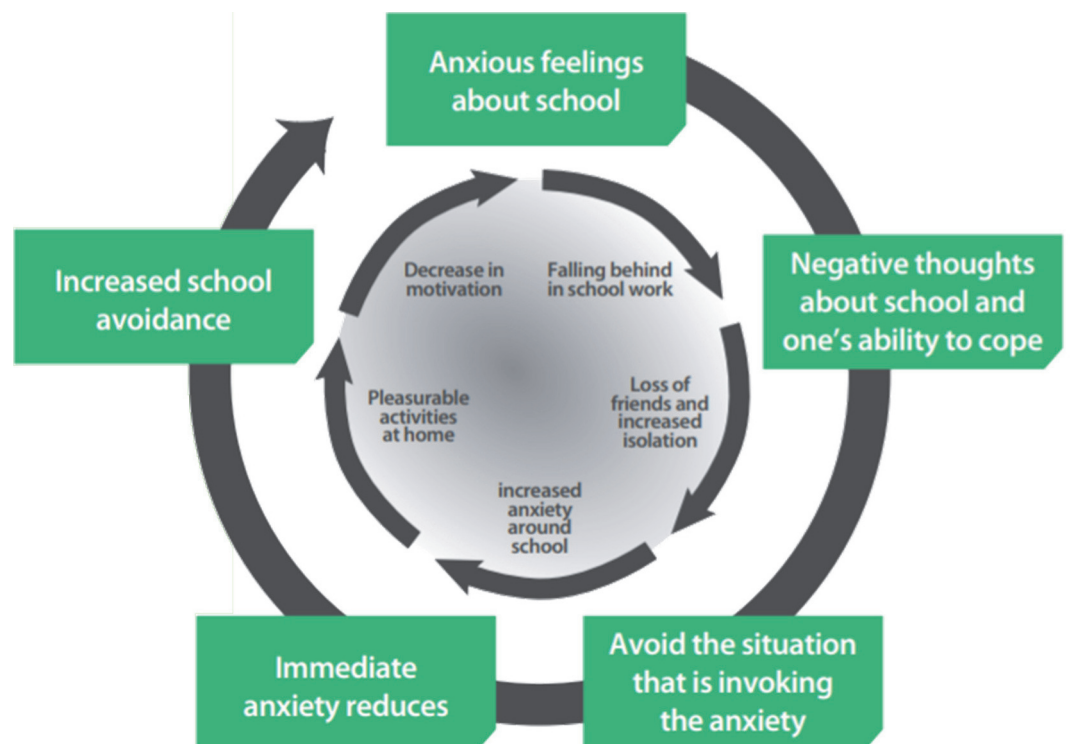
What is Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)?

EBSA is a broad term used to describe a young person 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 a young person's learning, relationships and well-being.

What can cause EBSA?

There are likely to be multiple factors, individual to that young person, 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:



Adapted from West Sussex Educational Psychology Service

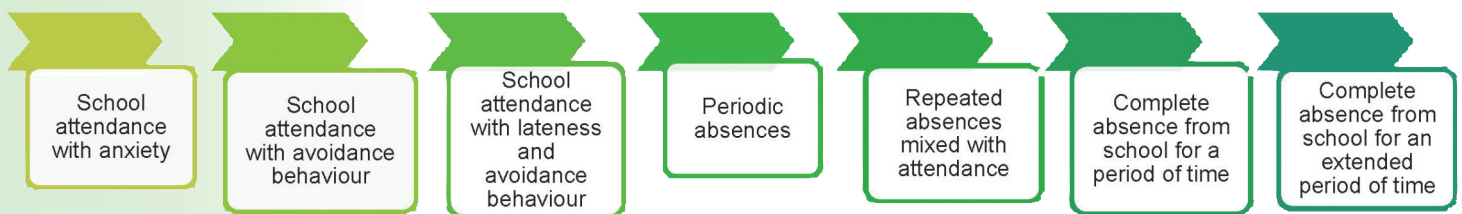
Early Identification

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

- Reported anxiety and fearfulness of attending school (particularly on Sunday evenings or in the mornings before school), changes in mood, appearance and engagement
- 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
- Persistent lateness, absence from particular lessons or at particular times of day
- 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:



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



Intervention framework

Universal Provision

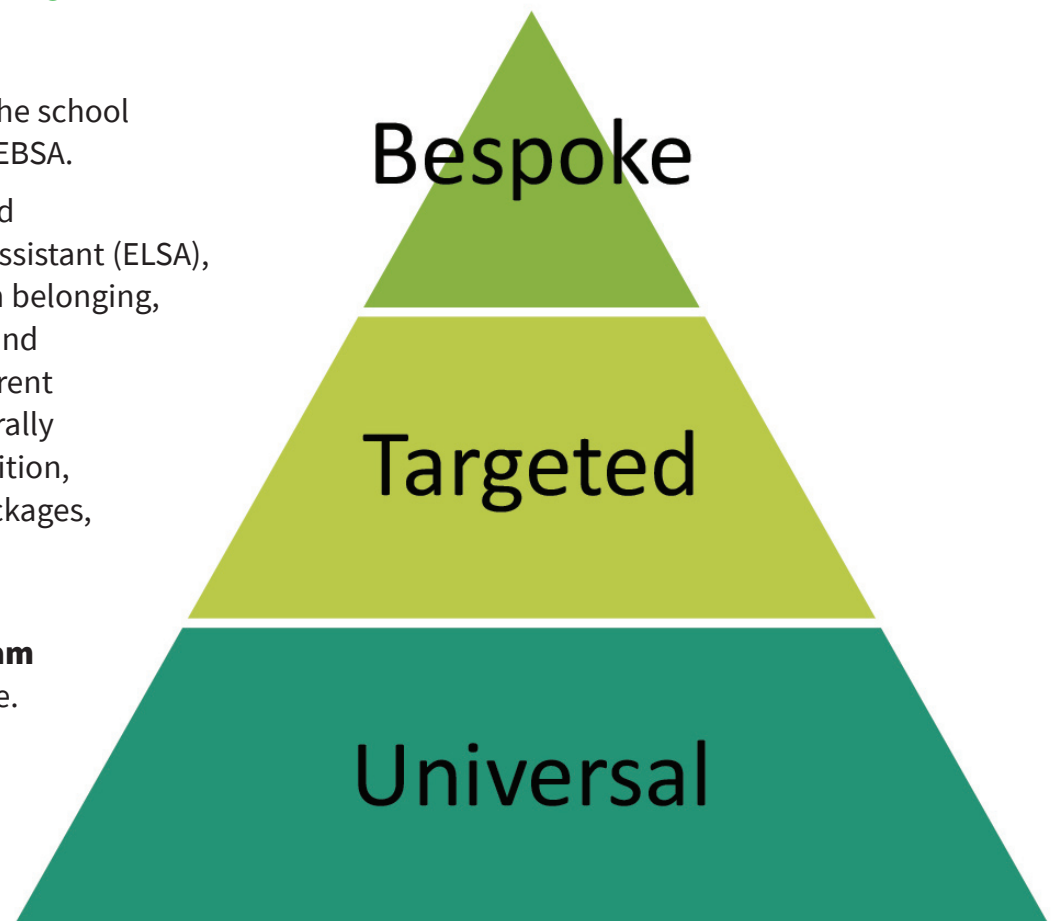
Promoting wellbeing across the school is the first step in preventing EBSA.

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.



Targeted provision (where there are concerns about attendance)

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

This will be the starting point of any intervention to support the young person 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 with in 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, alternative lunch area
- Build in opportunities to reduce anxiety/ distress throughout the school day e.g. quiet reading, time with key person

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 young person
- 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 young person to find out the experiences and views of the young person and what school can do to create an inviting environment
- Build on strengths and what the young person 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

