



# EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL NON-ATTENDANCE: GUIDANCE FOR EDUCATION SETTINGS

Worcestershire Educational Psychology Service

*With thanks to: West Sussex, Staffordshire, Solihull and Camden Educational Psychology Services*

February 2023

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# BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The purpose of this document is to provide support and advice for professionals in supporting young people and their families with Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSN). This document should be considered alongside the Worcestershire Children First Guidance for Promoting Inclusion in Mainstream Schools (September 2022) and the Department for Education guidance 'Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance' (February 2023).

## Definitions and Terminology in EBSN

The discourse and terminology surrounding EBSN has continually been evolving in response to emerging literature and research findings. Previous terms include: 'school phobia', 'school refusal', 'school withdrawal' and 'truancy' (Kearney, 2008, Pellegrini, , 2007). More recent definitions used within practice include 'emotionally based school avoidance' as coined by West Sussex Educational Psychology (2018). **See definitions below:**

- **Truancy:** 'generally refers to unexcused, illegal, surreptitious absences, non-anxiety-based absenteeism, absenteeism linked to lack of parental knowledge about the behaviour, absenteeism linked to delinquency or academic problems, or absenteeism linked to social conditions such as homelessness or poverty' (Kearney, 2008, p.452).
- **School phobia:** 'generally refers to fear based absenteeism, but youths are rarely phobic of school and so this term has been deemphasized in recent research literature (Hanna, Fischer, & Fluent, 2006; Suveg, Aschenbrand, and Kendall, 2005)' (Kearney, 2008, p.453).
- **School withdrawal:** where parents deliberately keep a child home from school for economic purposes, to conceal maltreatment, to prevent abduction from an estranged spouse, to protect a child from perceived school-based threat, to assist a parent with psychopathology, or for other reasons (Kearney, Lemos and Silverman, 2004)' (Kearney, 2008, p.452)
- **School refusal:** 'generally refers to anxiety-based absenteeism, often from separation, generalized, or social anxiety' (Kearney, 2008, p.452). School refusal is a psychosocial phenomenon defined by a prolonged absence from school, with parents'/carers' knowledge, and the prospect of going to school causing severe distress (Maynard et al, 2015, Berg, 1997). Kearney and Silverman (1993) proposed school refusal occurs when children experience lowered anxiety through avoidance of the school setting, which results in negative reinforcement.
- **Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA):** "EBSA is a broad umbrella term used to describe a group of children and young people who have severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences from school. A clear distinction is made between those that are absent from school due to truancy and those that are absent from school due to the specific emotional distress that they experience around attending school" (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008)

There is a group of children and young people whose reluctance to attend school becomes so entrenched due to emotional factors that they often experience lengthy absences from school. This is known as Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSN) – however, it is important to note that EBSN isn't a medical condition in itself and is better understood as a description of need.

## What is EBSN?



The term 'non-attendance' is used rather than 'refusal' or 'avoidance', as children in this situation often want to go to school and aren't refusing or avoiding, they simply feel as though they can't attend. The children concerned won't have control of the feelings and the easiest way to avoid them is to avoid school. Some children are even in school but not attending lessons, therefore not engaging in the full aspect of school life.

### Prevalence

Onset of EBSN may be sudden or gradual and is most common during adolescence. It is equally common in males and females (Ingles et al, 2015, Kearney, 2008).

The frequency of emotionally based school non-attendance is difficult to measure accurately; although research indicates prevalence rates amongst children and adolescents is approximately between 1-2%.

Thambirajah et al. (2008) stated that identifying and supporting young people at risk of EBSN may be challenging due to children's difficulties in communicating their distress, and difficulties that families and school staff have in understanding a child's emotional experience of school. For some young people, it may be obvious in their presentation of extended non-attendance and distress, for others they may not be so easily identifiable.

These young people may have inconsistent attendance, missing odd days or particular lessons, for others they may be only able to attend with high levels of support or modified timetables. Less recognised than that are those that may attend but are not engaged in school activities.

It is also important to note that some young people with Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance may appear to recover relatively quickly from the initial upset of the morning, which may lead some to dismiss the possibility of EBSN.

However as Thambirajah et al. (2008) highlights, it is important to hold in mind models of anxiety, as it is not unusual for the anxiety to quickly dissipate once the perceived threat is removed.



Maynard et al (2015) indicated that nearly 50% of clinic-referred youth characterised by school non-attendance have an anxiety disorder.

Crump et al (2013) found children with mental health difficulties had the highest rates of absenteeism. Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) was not specifically linked with increased school absence. However, research findings from Norway (Munkhaugen et al, 2017) suggest higher prevalence amongst CYP with ASC. There appears to be a lack of literature which investigates the link between ASC and school Non-Attendance in the UK.

## **Impact of EBSN**

EBSN can have a significant impact on CYP, in addition to the wider society (Pellegrini, 2007), and the negative outcomes of EBSN can affect an individual on both a short and long-term basis (Hughes et al., 2010, Kearney, 2002).

EBSN is likely to impact an individual's social and emotional development, alongside their educational progress. This may then subsequently affect an individual's exam results and future career options (Miller, 2008, Nuttall & Woods, 2013, Pellegrini, 2007, Hughes et al., 2010).

Furthermore, EBSN can also be associated with individuals leaving school prematurely (Kearney, 2006), in addition to also being at a greater long-term risk concerning their mental health during adulthood (Flakierska-Praquin et al., 1997, McCune and Hynes, 2005).

# WHAT IS ANXIETY?



Anxiety can be a key feature of school non-attendance. It can be described as a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about something with an uncertain outcome. When people think of anxiety, often it is as a psychological discomfort, but there can also be a physical presentation which may include shortness of breath, palpitations, hot flushes, nausea, needing the toilet more, headaches and blushing.

A significant difference between worry and anxiety is that worry is considered to be more controllable than anxiety which is generally considered to be out of one's control.

Fear, anxiety and worry are such a normal part of the human experience that we rarely stop to think about them for example, when we hear a sudden noise, we feel startled; If we face a major decision most of us will fret about it. With these temporary anxieties we usually just keep going and don't generally stop to analyse what is happening.

In fact, lower levels of anxiety (or higher levels that are temporary) are useful to us. They cause our bodies to release a quick burst of the chemical adrenalin that produces extra energy, more muscle power and speeds our brain up. That can help us in things like school tests or escaping from physical danger.

When anxiety interferes with everyday life, especially socialising or going to school or missing a lesson, people give it various names like '**anxiety disorder**', '**social phobia**', '**agoraphobia**', '**school phobia**' or '**anxiety-based school Non-attendance**'.

## **Anxiety and EBSN**

Sometimes anxious feelings can lead to a child struggling to get into school or missing a significant amount of school and that is when it *becomes* EBSN.

When the anxiety is linked to school non-attendance, the young person may experience anxious and fearful thoughts around attending school and their ability to cope with school. These feelings may also be accompanied by physiological symptoms of anxiety such as nausea, vomiting, shaking, sweating etc., and may start the night before, or even a few days before school.



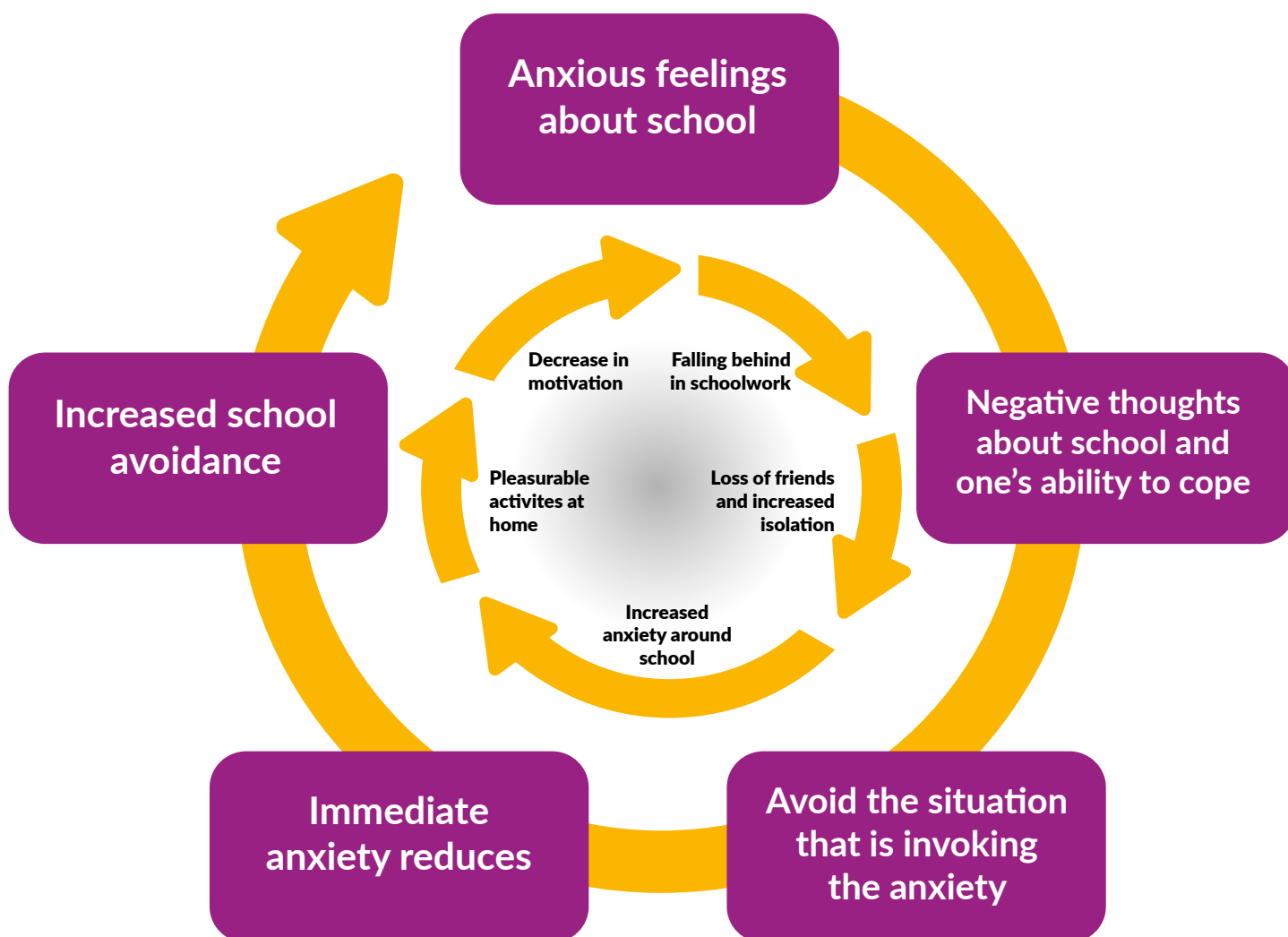
In order to avoid these overwhelming emotions and the fear associated with school attendance the young person may withdraw from the situation, refusing to get ready for school or to leave the house or enter the school.

The young person may also turn to hostile behaviours as a means to avoid the threatening situation and to try and control what feels like a very 'out-of-control' situation (Thambirajah et al., 2008)

Unfortunately, feelings of anxiety in a young person can be increased by things offered to demonstrate support for them.

**For example:**

- Parents/carers' own anxiety about their young person's situation;
- Other people around them minimising or dismissing the feelings relating to the anxiety;
- Reassurance that inadvertently demonstrates that there really is something to be afraid of;



**Figure 1.** Diagram showing the initial anxiety causing the Non-attendance and the secondary maintenance factors (Taken from West Sussex EBSA guidance, 2018)

What is most important from this diagram is that the sense of relief that comes from avoiding the situation acts as a powerful re-enforcer for the avoidance of anxiety. The relief 'rewards' the avoidance behaviour while at the same time undermining the young person's belief in their ability to handle the situation. This can lead to a further vicious circle with anxiety increasing over time.

# ESBN & AUTISM SPECTRUM CONDITION

It is well documented that anxiety and poor stress management are common in children with autism and that anxiety may worsen during adolescence, as young people face increasingly complex social interactions and often become more aware of their differences and interpersonal difficulties.

The Autism Education Trust (AET) reports that many children and young people on the autism spectrum experience high levels of anxiety due to their difficulties in interpreting the world they live in. As yet, there is little research into the prevalence of those with Autism who avoid school, but evidence and experience suggests that due to the anxieties that the children with Autism experience they are at increased risk of exhibiting EBSN.

The AET website cites four key areas of difference which create high levels of stress and anxiety, and this can have a profound impact on an individual's performance and behaviour. Differences in understanding social behaviour and the feelings of others, which informs the development of friendships and relationships.



## Sensory processing

Differences in perceiving sensory information. **Hypo** (low sensitivity), **hyper** (high sensitivity), **touch**, **sight**, **hearing**, **smell**, **taste**, **vestibular inner ear (balance)**, **proprioceptive** (body awareness).

## Interests and information processing

Differences in perception, planning, understanding concepts, generalising, predicting, managing transitions, passions for interests and ability to absorb auditory or spoken information.



## Communication

Differences in understanding and expressing communication and language, with skills ranging from individuals who are highly articulate, to others who may be non-verbal. Good language skills may mask a deep level of misunderstanding.

Schools are complex social environments that children with autism can find exhausting; they are spending cognitive energy managing this social experience and can become overloaded.

Given the increased risk of a child with Autism experiencing high levels of anxiety that may lead to school avoidance, it is essential that there is early attention and intervention given to developing child's social skills, emotional literacy, resilience, and their ability to self-regulate.

*In Worcestershire*, schools are encouraged to view Autism as a difference not a deficit – and use an empowering and inclusive approach which enables work with pupils as partners.

WE WORK BEST TOGETHER!



# EARLY INDICATORS & PREVENTION

## Risk factors of Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance

Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance cannot be defined and treated as a single condition as individual children will be reluctant to attend school for a variety of reasons and factors which are unique to them. Just as with general mental health, there have been factors identified in the research that place children at greater risk of Emotional Based School Non-Attendance and it is typically a combination of factors that lead to patterns of behaviour that are described as Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance.

### Environmental / contextual risk factors



As a school, it is important to consider how environmental and contextual factors may be promoting and/or maintaining Non-School Attendance. These include: school ethos and environment; curriculum, teaching and learning; parent/carer attitudes, and family & community.

See Table below for examples:

Risk Factor	Description
School ethos and environment	<p>A young person may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Experience bullying (found to be the most common school factor)</li><li>• Have a lack of involvement in extra curricular activities</li><li>• perceive behaviour management policies/approaches to be punitive and harsh</li><li>• feel unsafe within the school environment</li><li>• lack a sense of belonging within the school setting</li><li>• have poor relationships with teaching staff not feel valued</li><li>• fall through the net due to poor attendance processes within the setting</li></ul>
Curriculum, teaching and learning	<p>A young person may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• struggle to access the curriculum due to lack of appropriate differentiation and/or unrecognised needs perceive lessons as boring</li><li>• not feel supported with academic or other additional needs</li><li>• perceive learning tasks to be unachievable</li><li>• lack opportunities to experience success in their learning</li></ul>
Parent/carer attitudes	<p>Parents/carers may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• have little involvement or interest in their child's academic lives</li><li>• adopt a disciplinary approach to school Non-Attendance</li><li>• have poor relationships, difficult interactions and/or conflict with school professionals</li><li>• have experienced difficulties within their own education</li></ul>
Family/ community	<p>A young person may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• have experienced high levels of conflict within the home</li><li>• have parents/carers who have difficulty caring for them due to lack of capacity</li><li>• live with parents/carers who have mental health difficulties</li><li>• live in unsafe or problematic neighbourhoods</li></ul>

Kearney, (2008)

To support the identification of risk factors The Profile of Risk Schedule has been included in **Appendix 1**. The Profile of Risk schedule consists of five key areas, each of which contains a number of items you are asked to consider in terms of their possible importance in influencing emotionally based attendance difficulties.

# WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACHES



Educational settings should aim to create policies that adopt whole school evidence based approaches to promote wellbeing to reduce the likelihood of **EBSN (Emotional Based School Non-Attendance)** occurring. Public Health England (2021) highlighted eight whole school principles to promote emotional health and well-being;

1. An ethos and environment that promotes respect and values diversity.
2. Curriculum, teaching and learning to promote resilience and support social and emotional learning.
3. Enhancing student voice to influence decisions.
4. Staff Development support their wellbeing and that of students.
5. Identifying need and monitoring impact.
6. Working with parents/carers.
7. Targeted support and appropriate referral.

Further information about each of these principles can be accessed here:

['Promoting Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing' document by Public Health England \(2021\) PDF](#)

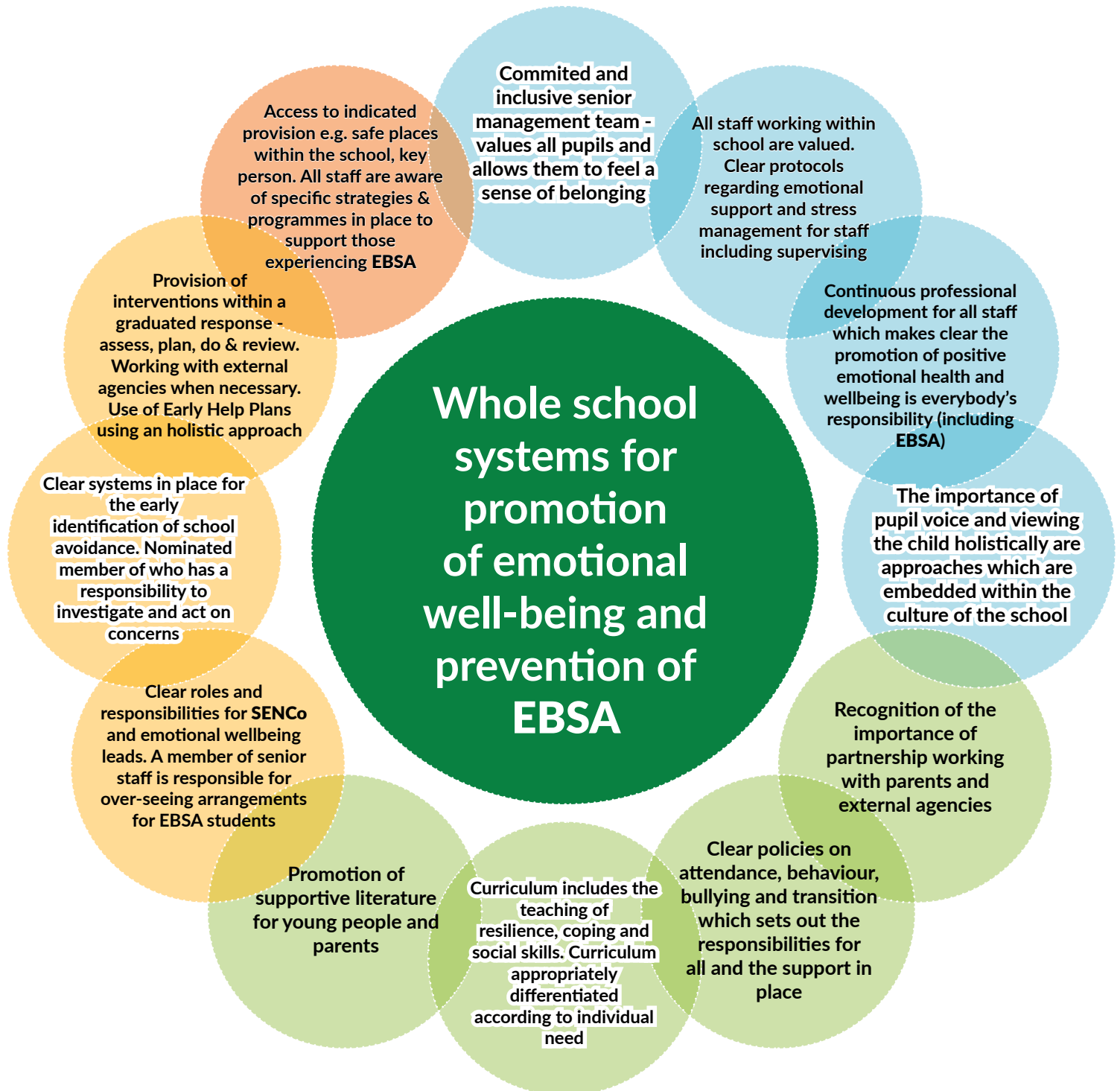
The Department for Education also encourages schools to identify a senior mental health lead who will have strategic oversight of their setting's whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing. More information on senior mental health lead training is available at:

[https://www.gov.uk/guidance/senior-mental-health-lead-training.](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/senior-mental-health-lead-training)

A whole school audit document has been developed by the West Sussex Educational Psychology Service and is available in their EBSA guidance document (2022):

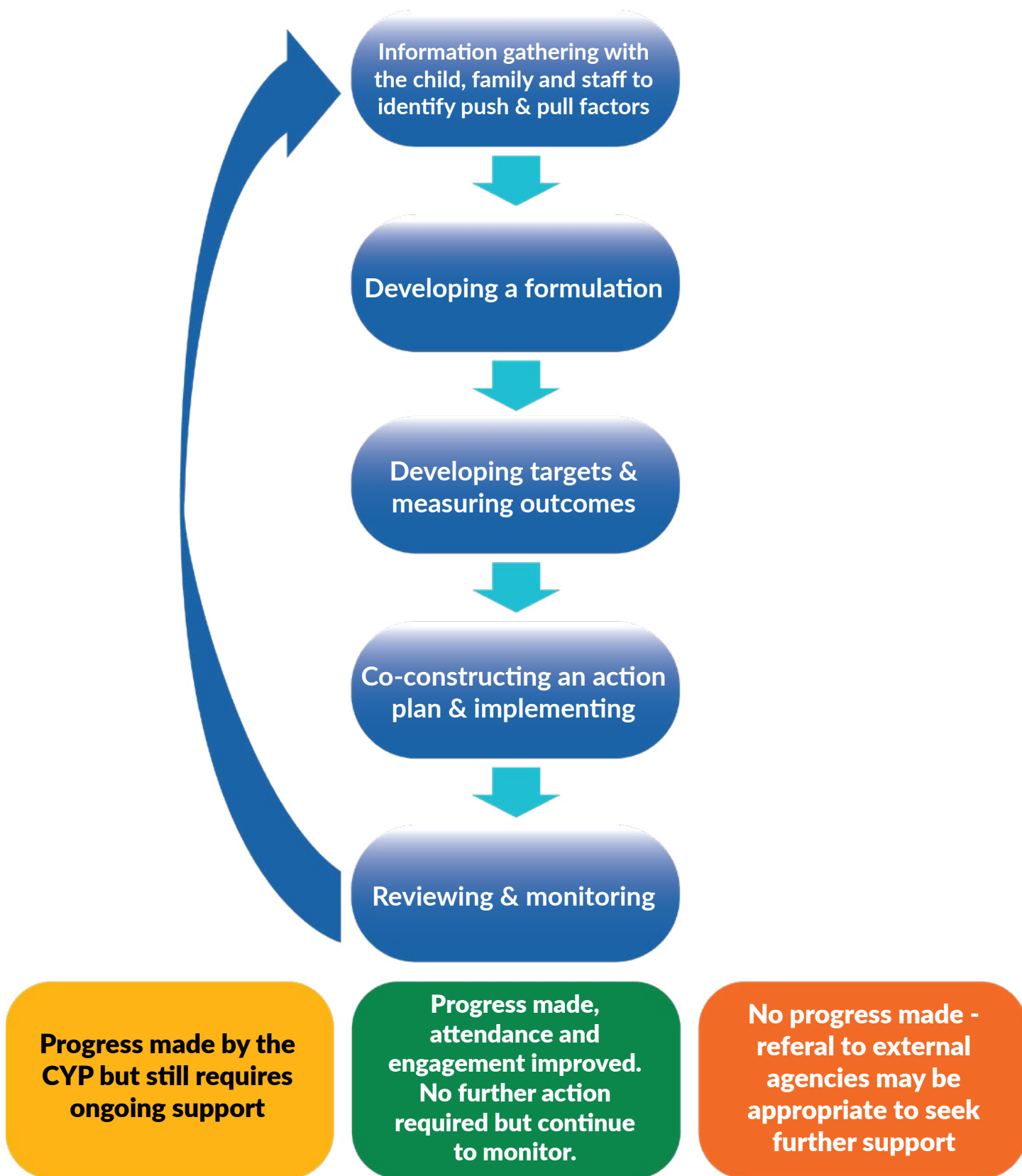
<https://schools.westsussex.gov.uk/Page/10483>

The figure presented *below* outlines the culture, structures, resources and practice within a school that can promote wellbeing of staff and young people, with particular reference to EBSA (developed by West Sussex Educational Psychology Service):



# PATHWAYS TO SUPPORTING EBSN

This guidance will now take you through the following pathway which can be used when supporting a child or young person with EBSN.



# INFORMATION GATHERING

It is important to identify the factors that promote resilience for the CYP, as well as looking at those that pose a risk to further endorsing EBSN. These, factors can also be understood in terms of 'push' and 'pull'. *Thambirajah et al (2008)* state that school refusal occurs when factors that promote school non-attendance, overcome the factors that encourage attendance.



Gaining a greater insight into these contributing and protective factors will enable us to start to establish an action plan to support the CYP – a plan that builds on their resilience and looks to lessen the risks.

Push and pull factors are present within all the various environments a young person exists within. Not just home and school but their local environment and wider.



Examples are shown on the table on the next page:



	Individual	Family	School
<b>Contributing risk factors (push away from school &amp; pull towards home)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Challenges with emotional self-awareness and self-regulation</li> <li>Fear of social and personal failure</li> <li>Previous exclusions</li> <li>Separation needs</li> <li>Social interaction anxiety</li> <li>Low self-confidence</li> <li>Worries about those at home</li> <li>Fear of parental separation/loss of a parent</li> <li>Over-dependence on parents/carers</li> <li>Illness/health needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Siblings being at home</li> <li>Limited social interactions within the home</li> <li>Family dynamics</li> <li>Loss</li> <li>Frequent conflict</li> <li>Family transitions – moving house, divorce</li> <li>Loss in the family</li> <li>Significant changes in the family</li> <li>Mental health needs with parents/carers</li> <li>Absence of a parent</li> <li>Child's anxiety causes stress easily in parents/carers</li> <li>Over protective parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Noise and organisation levels in the classroom</li> <li>Unpredictability of environment, leading to feelings of being unsafe and insecure</li> <li>Consequences from staff being viewed as being unfair and harsh</li> <li>Teachers who are perceived as having an aggressive nature</li> <li>Peer relationships – including elements of conflict, isolation and anxiety</li> <li>Poor communication which then leads to inconsistency</li> <li>Class sizes</li> <li>Bullying</li> <li>Transitions – secondary/change of school/class</li> <li>Unidentified/unsupported learning needs</li> <li>Needs with specific subjects</li> <li>Activities the young person cannot cope with e.g. P.E., assemblies, talking in front of others.</li> <li>Poor relationships with staff</li> </ul>
	Individual	Family	School
<b>Contributing protective factors (push away from home &amp; pull towards school)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CYP's strengths and interests</li> <li>CYP's aspirations and ambitions</li> <li>CYP's motivation for change</li> <li>Increasing confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive relationships in the family and/or community</li> <li>Willingness to work in partnership with school and support agencies</li> <li>Positive parenting skills</li> <li>Developing understanding of CYP needs and feelings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive relationships with a member/s of staff</li> <li>Willingness to work in partnership with family and support agencies</li> <li>Positive relationships with peers</li> <li>Experiencing success in school</li> <li>Having a flexible approach</li> <li>Developing understanding of CYP needs and feelings</li> </ul>

It is also important to consider secondary factors that might maintain school avoidance behaviours. Maintenance factors may include:

- **Falling behind with school work**
- **Loss of friends and increased isolation**
- **Enjoying being at home**
- **Decrease in motivation**

Therefore to identify the factors influencing a EBSN, it is important to gain the perspectives/ perceptions/experiences of the child, family and staff to understand the bigger picture at play. Each person may have a different perspective and have a different story to tell. It is essential that different people's views are respected and differences in views are acknowledged. When there is a difference of views, it is often more helpful to focus on how the behaviour is occurring rather than why.

## Gathering the views of the young person



Any talk about going back to school is going to raise their anxiety as you are proposing to take away their way of coping with their fears. A good place to start this work with a young person is to acknowledge that it may be difficult but you would like to know what they think and feel. It is important that the adult does not dismiss any anxieties or worries the child has, empathise with the young person but do not collude or promote the EBSN.

**To gather information, it is important to alter your approach depending upon the child's age, level of understanding and language;**

### The Ideal School

- This tool seeks to explore children's important or core constructs about themselves, and how they view the world through drawing their ideal and non-ideal school. See appendix for details.

### Multi-element plan

- This pupil discussion uses a Functional Behavioural Analysis (FBA) approach to understanding a CYP's behaviour. This involves card sorting and discussion. Resources for this is available at: <https://www.solihull.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-12/Emotionally-Based-School-Non-Attendance-Guidance-for-Schools.pdf>

### An anxiety thermometer or a scale

- Ask the child what aspects of school they find difficult and prompt them to rate their feelings on a thermometer or scale. Some areas to consider include: the physical environment, times of the day or social interactions and particular lessons or activities within lessons e.g., writing, working as part of a group, reading aloud, verbally answering a question. This can also be done through RAG (Red, Amber and Green) rating aspects of their day.

### Drawing techniques

- A child may wish to draw what their anxiety looks like, times they feel anxious or draw a story of their life using a life graph.

### School Wellbeing: Risk and Resilience Card set

- The School Wellbeing cards are suitable for children aged 7+. Through a card sort activity, the young person is empowered to share their experience of school and the factors that they feel are significant in terms of any risk factors that may need to be addressed, as well as any resilience factors that could be further harnessed to improve their experience of school and their school attendance. These are available at: <https://www.schoolwellbeingcards.co.uk/>

### School Stress Survey

- This is a short reflective exercise designed to encourage students presenting with anxiety (often manifesting in things like non-attendance) to identify the 'stress points' in their day. Link to tool: <http://www.humansnotrobots.co.uk/p/resourceshub.html>

### School Refusal Assessment Scale - Revised C

- This is a psychological assessment tool designed to identify reasons for avoiding school for young people aged 6-17 years. This looks at four functions of school avoidance: (a) avoidance of school-related stimuli provoking negative affectivity (e.g., teacher, test), (b) escaping from aversive social or evaluative situations, (c) to increase attention from others and (d) to pursue positive tangible reinforcement outside of school (e.g., television, play). The first two are centred around negative reinforcement and the other two around positive reinforcement of school avoidance. Link to tool: <https://academic.oup.com/book/1193/chapter/140028732>

## Gathering the views of parents/carers



The initial meeting/conversation with parents/carers offers an opportunity to both gather information and insight into the CYP's EBSN from the parent/carers point of view, whilst also providing an opportunity to lay the foundations for a partnership that will support the CYP to overcome their EBSA going forward.

On the following page, there are some examples of questions you may wish to ask:

Areas to cover	Example Questions
<b>Developmental and educational history</b>	What was X like as a young child? Can you tell me about their early experiences at school? The primary school, at the start of secondary school?
<b>Strengths, interests and aspirations</b>	What is X good at? What do they like doing? Do they have any hopes for the future? Do they know what they want their life to be like when they are an adult?
<b>Any potential changes or losses within the family or child's life</b>	Can you tell me about your family? Who is in it, who is like whom? Who is X closest to? Have there been any changes within the family recently? (You could ask them to draw a family tree/ genogram).
<b>Relationships</b>	Do they talk about any other children? What do they say? Do they talk about any adults within school? Who do they get on with and don't get on with?
<b>Academic progress</b>	School should be aware if the young person has identified SEN needs and should ask about these needs and the support in place. If there is no identified SEN school should ask if they have any concerns, or if the child has spoken about difficulties.
<b>The child's view - What are their specific fears/worries?</b>	Have they spoken to you about what they find difficult about school? What do they say?
<b>The child's view - What is going well in school?</b>	Have they mentioned anything that is going well in school? (e.g., teachers, lessons, friends)
<b>Behaviour and symptoms of anxiety</b>	When they are worried what does it look like? What do they say they are feeling?
<b>Typical day - When they go to school and when they don't go to school</b>	Please describe a typical day when they go to school from the moment they get up until they go to bed..... and when they don't go to school? What do they do when they do not go to school? What do other family members do?
<b>Impact on various members of the family</b>	How does their non-attendance impact on you? And on other family members? Who is better at dealing with the situation? <i>Why?</i>
<b>Parental views on the reasons for the EBSN</b>	Why do you think they have difficulty attending school? (ask each parent separately) If (other parent/ sibling/ grandparent) were here what would they say? Are there any differences of views about the reasons and what should be done within the family?
<b>Exceptions to the problem</b>	Have there been times when they managed to get into school? <i>What was different about those times?</i>
<b>Previous attempts to address the problem</b>	What has been the most helpful thing that someone else has done in dealing with the problem so far? What has helped in the past when things have been difficult? What strategies have been most helpful so far in managing their anxiety?

When engaging in discussions with parents/carers it is important that a sense of trust and support is established, opposed to feelings of judgement/accusations. If there are areas within the home context that require intervention/support, this is more easily achieved if staff are working collaboratively with parents/carers. Parents/carers are more likely to accept ideas/intervention when they feel the purpose is supportive not corrective.

A structured questionnaire that can also be used in addition to the conversation you have with parents/carers is the School Refusal Assessment Scale – Revised P. This tool maps on to the young person version of this scale, and is completed by the parent based on their observations and understanding of their child's behaviour. The tool can be used alongside or instead of the young person measure (depending on age or stage). It can be helpful to look at similarities and differences between the primary maintaining function for both young person and parent.

Link to tool: <https://academic.oup.com/book/1193/chapter/140028732>

**The Department for Education** has provided advise on how to handle situations where parents/carers do not engage or agree with the support offered in their **February 2023 Guidance available at:**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1136965/Summary\\_of\\_responsibilities\\_where\\_a\\_mental\\_health\\_issue\\_is\\_affecting\\_attendance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1136965/Summary_of_responsibilities_where_a_mental_health_issue_is_affecting_attendance.pdf)

### Gathering the views of staff

The child may have different experiences of being in different environments in and around school, they may have different experiences of subject classes, different relationships with different teachers; and here it is important to seek the views of those that are perceived as having a good relationship with the child as well as from those staff members where the relationship might be more difficult'. Key questions you may wish to ask staff could focus upon:

- The young person's strengths
- What is going well
- Any difficulties they have noticed
- Peer relationships
- Relationships with adults
- Response to academic tasks
- If they have witnessed emotional distress what did this look like and what caused it.
- What support or differentiation is put in place and how the young person responds to this
- Any ideas for further support

Where a large number of staff work with a student (e.g. within high schools) a 'round robin' form sent around to staff may be an effective way to gather this information.

## Functions of Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance

After gathering information, it can be helpful to think about the function of the child's EBSN. Kearney and Silverman (1990) developed a four-function taxonomy of school refusal behaviours, identifying the purpose that non-attendance might serve for CYP.

The information below outlines the four functions and provides examples:

### To avoid school related stressors

- Environmental e.g. noise, crowds, going into the building or classroom;
- Social e.g. groups, break times, lunchtimes;
- Transitions e.g. between lessons, to and from school;

### To avoid social situations and/or activities

- Interactions with peers which are found challenging;
- Feeling disconnected or isolated from peers, not belonging to a group;
- Evaluative situations: exams, presentations, physical education lessons, eating in the cafeteria;

### To gain needed attention

- Time at home with parents/carers/ family members;

### To engage in preferred activities

- Watching TV;
- Playing video games;
- Spending time with friend;



# FORMULATION

Following the gathering of information from the child, family, school, and other professionals involved it is important that 'sense' is made of it. In other words, an overview of the whole picture and various factors are obtained and potential formulations or hypotheses regarding the behaviour are formed. These should then inform the intervention and return to school support plan.

In order to understand the cause of EBSN, professionals must consider the CYP's underlying needs and how these may be contributing towards their presenting behaviour. It can be helpful to consider what the function of the behaviour is and what it may be communicating. Try to separate behaviours from feelings and underlying needs.



## Adopting a systemic perspective

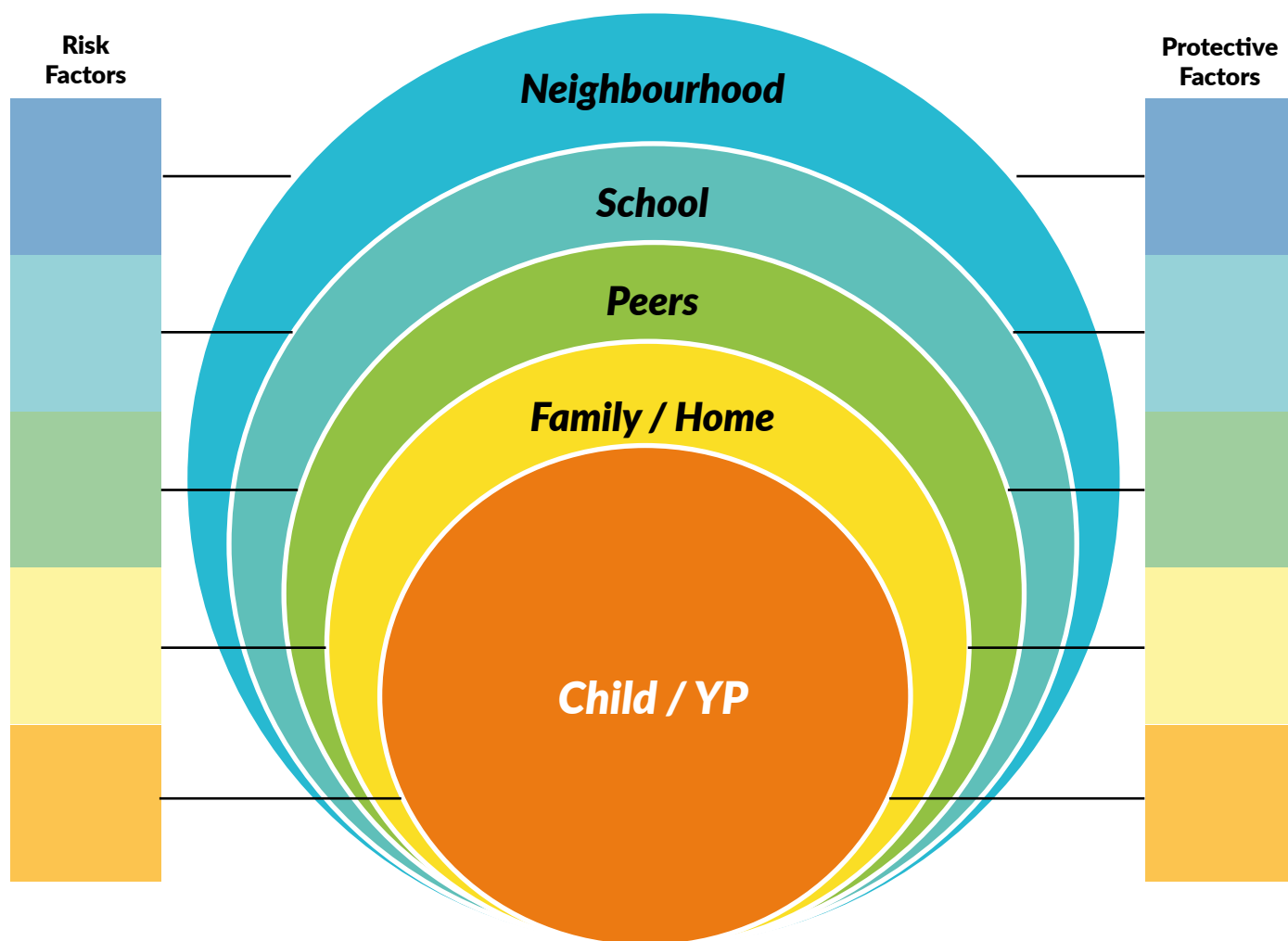
Behaviour does not emerge within a social vacuum; therefore, it is important to consider how systemic factors may be influencing the CYP. A range of underlying, intertwined, casual factors may be promoting and/or maintaining EBSN behaviour across the CYP's systems (e.g. *family/home, peers, school, and neighbourhood*). This figure below depicts how a CYP can be conceptualised as sitting within a wider range of systems; influencing factors within these systems can affect one another also the CYP.

## Risk and protective Factors

The diverse range of influencers that may exist across CYP's systems are often referred to in the literature as 'risk' and 'protective' factors:

RISK FACTORS	PROTECTIVE FACTORS
Influencing factors that reduce the likelihood of CYP to engage in school	Influencing factors that promote CYP to engage in school

Risk and protective factors are likely to be present across systems. The balance between these factors is likely to fluctuate. The diagram below can help you to formulate the risk and protective factors present for individual children:



As well as utilising the diagram above in formulations, there is a form provided in **Appendix (Action Planning 1)** that may help collate, integrate and analyse the information gathered from a variety of sources.

# TARGET SETTING

Our formulation should directly feed into the CYP's action plan and support us to establish what the next steps are to support the CYP with EBSN. When we have gathered all of our information and developed a formulation, we need to set targets that we would like to support the CYP to meet. These targets should be **SMART**.



**Specific** - Targets must be expressed using clear language describing exactly what a child will be able to do or say to be successful.

**Measurable** - The targets should be able to show that the CYP are making progress and that identified targets have been achieved.

**Attainable/Achievable** - Targets must be realistic and within the CYP's ability as identified in the information gathering stage.

**Relevant** - The targets should be linked to the CYP's desired outcomes. Go back to information gathering from the CYP- were there things they wanted to change.

**Time bound** - The targets need to have a specified date by which it is hoped the CYP will have successfully achieved them and at this point the targets should be reviewed to assess progress.

It is important that these targets are reviewed regularly with the CYP, family & school staff.

# MEASURING OUTCOMES

Outcome measures are tools that can be used to measure and understand a variety of subjective aspects of individual's mental health and wellbeing. These measures can provide pre & post data to help quantify the impact of any interventions you put in place. On top of this, measures enable collaborative working, listening to children and putting young people at the heart of decisions. This approach sees children as equal partners in planning, developing and assessing support.

A range of outcome measures are available on the Child Outcomes Research Centre website:  
<https://www.corc.uk.net/>

When selecting a measure think carefully about what you want to measure, who and when should the information be captured and how will the information be used.

Examples of some measures are detailed below:

Example	Source
<p>The Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS) is a youth self-report questionnaire and parent questionnaire with subscales including:</p> <p>separation anxiety disorder, social phobia, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and low mood.</p> <p><i>It is designed for young people aged between 8 and 18.</i></p>	<p><a href="https://www.corc.uk.net/outcome-experience-measures/revised-childrens-anxiety-and-depression-scale-rcads/">https://www.corc.uk.net/outcome-experience-measures/revised-childrens-anxiety-and-depression-scale-rcads/</a></p>
<p>The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) is a 14-item scale of positively worded statements covering feeling and functioning aspects of mental wellbeing.</p>	<p><a href="https://www.corc.uk.net/outcome-experience-measures/warwick-edinburgh-mental-wellbeing-scale-wemws/">https://www.corc.uk.net/outcome-experience-measures/warwick-edinburgh-mental-wellbeing-scale-wemws/</a></p>
<p>The Mood and Feelings Questionnaire (MFQ) is a screening tool for depression in children and young people aged 6 to 19.</p> <p><i>It consists of child self-report, parent self-report and adult self-report; long and short versions</i></p>	<p><a href="https://www.corc.uk.net/outcome-experience-measures/mood-and-feelings-questionnaire-mfq/">https://www.corc.uk.net/outcome-experience-measures/mood-and-feelings-questionnaire-mfq/</a></p>
<p>Myself as a Learner scale seeks to establish how the pupil sees themselves in relation to their academic ability;</p>	<p><a href="https://www.teachingtimes.com/bookshop/product/myself-as-a-learner-scale-8-16-analysing-self-perception/">https://www.teachingtimes.com/bookshop/product/myself-as-a-learner-scale-8-16-analysing-self-perception/</a></p>

# INTERVENTIONS

The next stage involves developing an action plan based upon the psychological formulation developed.

**Interventions should be:**

**Individualised** - Evidence suggests effectiveness of intervention is related to consideration of a range of factors within individual cases of school refusal. Every young person will be different. The actions developed will need to be based upon the formulation developed for that young person.

**Focused upon specific outcomes** - Before starting the intervention you need to consider what you want the outcomes to be (what do you hope to see as a result of the intervention)

**Supporting the young person, their family, the school and the community** - Consider that support may be needed at different levels. It may not just be that interventions are conducted by the school but also that school can support the parents develop their understanding around EBSN and help to develop consistency and routine.

**Collaboratively developed with parents, the young person, and any other relevant professionals** - It is important to have a united approach, however with many individuals involved, it is best to identify a key person within school for family contact.

**Conducted over time** - Interventions should persist and provide continued support. A long-term view needs to be taken, there is no quick fix, and each child will move at their own pace. It should be anticipated that there is likely to be more difficulties following a weekend, illness, or school holiday.

The Department for Education, in their 'Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance' February 2023 Guidance, state that;

*"In developing a plan to implement reasonable adjustments to support attendance, school staff should aim to involve parents/carers to support a child who is anxious about attending from an early stage, making it clear that part of the aim of the plan is to maximise face-to-face attendance as much as possible.*

*The plan should have regular review points built into it, and have been agreed in advance of implementation.*

*As part of any plan to support the child to attend well, schools should facilitate relevant pastoral support. This should be done with the clear aim of improving attendance as much as possible while supporting the underlying mental health issue.*

*This will involve having sensitive conversations with pupils and with parents/carers as swiftly as possible after having been made aware of the issue, and making reasonable adjustments in order to overcome specific barriers to attendance".*

## General strategies

**The role of the key adult; a key adult can support in many ways:**

- The key adult can be a frequent contact with the child when they are at home e.g., home visits, calls or virtual meetings. It lets the young person know that you are still there for them and care for them.
- The key adult can be a contact for the family and can share helpful strategies.
- The key person can act as a safe base.

- They can do a meet and greet to talk through the day's timetable and provide check ins. This gives the young person an opportunity to discuss any worries and prepare them for any unexpected changes.
- A key adult can help advocate for the young person and can help to ensure that their voice is heard.



### Creating a safe environment;

A young person must feel safe and secure within their environment.

This can be supported through ensuring the young person experiences a clear, predictable and consistent environment. Ensure the child knows what to expect and when throughout the day.

A visual timetable or a first/then board can be useful to support this. Social stories (Carol Grey) can also be used to help communicate a change in routine.

Try to keep elements of the school day the same (e.g. entering school via the same route each day, having the same settling activity at the start of the day). As part of this it is important to consider support for transitions. There are many transitions that a young person may experience in school including:

- Leaving the home in the morning (including leaving possessions, pets, family member)
- Accessing transport/making the journey to school
- Leaving parents/carers at the drive, gate, car etc.
- Entering the school building
- Entering the school corridors/playground
- Entering the classroom
- Moving from the classroom to another classroom/room/playground
- Transitioning from learning contexts to social contexts e.g. lessons to break times
- Transitioning from areas of strength to areas of perceived weakness e.g. lessons where the CYP does well to those where they find challenging
- Changing between different staff members/peer groups
- Through the academic years/educational settings (e.g. primary to secondary)

If any transitional needs are identified then the appropriate support should be provided, discussing with the CYP 'what could make this better/easier'.

### A few approaches/resources have been detailed below:

- Social Stories (developed by Carol Gray)
- Photobooks to prepare CYP for transitions to new classes/schools/people.
- Transitional objects to support CYP when they are apart from key and trusted adults e.g., provide the CYP with an object to look after for you so they know you will return to them at some point.
- Meet and Greet to support CYP to transition into the setting, classroom, from break to learning.



- Transition planning and visits.
- ‘All About Me’ sessions, to establish a positive rapport/relationship with new staff members.
- Provide the CYP with key factual information about areas of concern e.g. new subjects, to minimise how much they are required to anticipate what is going to happen.

Where necessary, if the child has sensory sensitivities e.g. noise, you may wish to conduct a sensory audit to identify whether adaptations to their environment are necessary. Adaptions may include support allowing the young person to leave lessons early, meet and greets in the morning, breakfast clubs or reducing transitions if movement is too difficult.

### Building Belonging;

Having a sense of belonging in school is a pull factor towards attendance. This may be developed through extra-curricular activities or through giving the child roles/responsibilities e.g. eco-counsellor. These roles may be linked to their areas of strength, building their self-esteem and sense of accomplishment, making school a rewarding place to be.



**Gratitude diaries** can also be used to help a young person reflect on what is going well in their school day. Research has found a relationship between change in gratitude and increased sense of school belonging and positive affect (Diebel, 2014). Before introducing the concept of gratitude diaries, it is important to ensure that the young person understands what gratitude means and talk through an example where they have felt gratitude.

Following this, you can introduce the young person to their gratitude diary. At the top of each page should be the instruction “Write down 2 or 3 things that you are thankful or grateful for today at school”. The student should be given the opportunity to fill this out everyday for 5-10 minutes at the end of the school day. You may also expand upon this further by encouraging the young person to reflect upon the situation. Reflection sentence prompts include:

- Why did this happen?
- Why is this meaningful to me?
- What can I do tomorrow to ensure this happens again?
- What can I learn from taking the time to notice and acknowledge this good thing?
- What way can others or I contribute to this in the future?

Another way in which sense of belonging can be built is through building relationships between the CYP and staff. All adults working with a young person need to get to know the child, what their interests are and who they are as a person. This isn't just teachers or TAs but the reception team may be the first faces the child sees so ensure these staff are involved and understand the importance of their role. A warm, friendly and well planned arrival and welcome to school may make a big difference. Building relationships can be improved through:

**Developing an All About Me book** – The young person develops an All About Me book so that they can communicate to adults what is important to them and what they would like adults to know about them.

**Using a PACE approach** – The PACE approach is a communication style which helps to build relationships and connections between staff and pupils. It can be used with all pupils and can be part of day-to-day interactions. Details of this approach can be found in the appendix. Training on this approach is available from the WCF Educational Psychology Service.



### Part time timetables;

**The Department for Education (2023)** states that all children of compulsory school age are entitled by law to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of all parents/carers to ensure their child receives that education by full-time attendance at school or otherwise. In very exceptional circumstances, however, where it is in a pupil's best interests, a plan to help a child to attend well may involve the use of a temporary part-time timetable to meet their individual needs.

For example, where a medical condition (*including a mental health condition*) prevents a pupil from attending school full-time and a part-time timetable is considered as part of a re-integration package.

A medical condition might include a mental health condition, however schools should keep in mind the nature of the challenge, and whether it can instead be managed by implementing reasonable adjustments to support attendance. Any part-time timetable should seek to maximise face-to-face school time as much as possible. Schools should consider providing remote education to help pupils stay on track with the education they would normally receive. Any remote education should only be considered if the pupil is well enough and able to learn and should be given in line with the guidance 'Providing remote education: Guidance for schools'.

Any part-time timetable arrangements should be designed with the specific barrier to attendance in mind, have a time limit by which point the pupil is expected to attend full-time, (*either at school or at an alternative provision setting*), and have formal arrangements in place for regularly reviewing the timetable with the pupil and their parents/carers. In agreeing to a part-time timetable, the school, parents/carers and pupil have agreed to the pupil being absent from school for part of the week or day, and therefore must treat absence as "absence with leave" (*a type of authorised absence*).

**A part-time timetable must not be used to manage a pupil's behaviour.**

A part-time timetable may also refer to full attendance at school, but with different arrangements for the attendance of lessons. School staff should consider the same principles outlined in this section for this type of arrangement (*i.e. for it to be regularly reviewed, agreed by all parties, building back up to full time spent in classes, etc.*).

## Focused strategies



As mentioned, it is important that interventions are based upon the formulation and factors influencing the non-attendance. Strategies and interventions focused upon *Kearney and Silverman's (1990)* four functions of school non-attendance are detailed below. It is important to consider that several of these factors may be involved and their effects will be interactive.

**1. To avoid something or situations that elicits negative feelings or high levels of stress (e.g., fear of the toilets; the noise in the playground; lots of people moving all together in the corridors between classes, tests/ exams);**



### Understanding & communicating emotions;

Interventions should include learning about anxiety and worry, how it affects our thinking, feeling and behaviour and how avoidance of the feared situation makes things worse. The child should be taught anxiety management techniques such as relaxation training and deep breathing. The child should be taught how to notice their worrying thoughts and then how to challenge them, if appropriate. Adults should show understanding of the worry as well as confidence in the young person being able to cope over time (with small steps and the support needed).

Approaches/resources that may be effective in supporting a young person's understanding of emotions have been detailed below:

- **Emotion Coaching** (training available through WCF Educational Psychology Service);
- **Targeted interventions for emotional literacy;**
- **Use of concrete and visual materials** e.g., story books exploring emotions, puppets;
- **Adult support and modelling to develop emotional co/self-regulation** (e.g., through techniques such as deep breathing and grounding – see appendix for details);
- **It is important that adults working with CYP validate how they are feeling.** Validation of a CYP's feelings will allow them to feel supported and understood. This is especially important if they use inappropriate methods of communication. Once the CYP is calm then the adult should support them to reflect, and problem solve;

Careful consideration also needs to be given to how adults can support students to *communicate* what they are feeling/thinking. Again, approaches have been detailed below:

- **Having access to a keyworker for 1:1 sessions/check ins,** which are planned and protected;
- **A variety of verbal and non-verbal ways to express/externalise/communicate emotions/thoughts** e.g., drama, art, writing;
- **Use of a journal to record feelings/worries, writing these down can often provide a significant emotional release.** A journal can also be helpful in providing a starting point for discussions in the 1:1 sessions and will also create a record of worries that are based on anticipating events which can then be eased by discussing what actually happened (often what we anticipate is not as negative as what happens in reality);

## Graduated exposure;

There should be a gradual re-exposure to school setting using an avoidance hierarchy created with the young person from least feared school situations to most feared. This is a move away from typical reintegration plans for CYP experiencing EBSN as they tend to 'flood' the CYP i.e. too much too soon. They also do not address the root causes of the anxiety.

Graded exposure has 3 steps. It is important to work through the steps one at a time, only moving on when the CYP is comfortable with using the previous step.

### Step 1: Identifying anxiety-provoking situations

- Identify all the activities that cause the CYP anxiety and they are therefore either avoiding, leaving or distracting themselves from;
- It may be that CYP have a number of different feared situations, objects or activities;
- It is important to separate these fears into different lists and select one specific fear to tackle at a time;
- Be specific - Include in the list what, where, when and with whom each situation occurs;

### Step 2: Developing a hierarchy

- Pick one specific fear to focus upon;
- Rank the situations identified in order of the level of anxiety the CYP experiences;
- Rank from least anxiety-provoking, to most anxiety-provoking;
- Put in the situation that would be easiest to remain in first and the situation that would be the most difficult, and then fill in situations in between;
- If CYP is finding it difficult to think of what would be more or less anxiety-provoking, it may be useful to rate predicted anxiety levels;

Most anxiety provoking	Rating
Going to PE lesson	95
Going into next 2 favourite lessons	80
Going into favourite lesson	75
Joining in a small group activity in the inclusion/SEN base	55
Sitting in the inclusion/SEN base	40
Entering the school going into the reception area	30
Entering the school when the school is closed	11
Standing outside the school when school is closed	5
Least anxiety-provoking	

### Step 3: Planning exposures

The third step of Graded Exposure is to begin exposing the CYP to feared situations starting with the least anxiety-provoking. When planning exposure be specific about what, where, when and with whom the exposure will be carried out.

When planning exposures make a specific plan based on **the four conditions**:

- **Graded** - Facing fears can be very difficult and overwhelming therefore it is important to start by exposing CYP to a situation which causes a level of anxiety but is not too much. This is achieved by using the hierarchy developed in Step 2. This way you can move up the hierarchy only when the CYP feels confident enough to do so.
- **Prolonged** - It is important that the CYP remains in the feared situation for long enough until anxiety naturally reduces through the process of habituation. Physiologically, we cannot remain at this high level of anxiety and over time and anxiety naturally reduces. This is the process of habituation. This process can take anywhere from 5 minutes to 2 hours. It can be difficult to stay in the situation for this length of time, however if the CYP leaves before beginning to feel a reduction in anxiety they will continue to avoid the situation.
- **Without distraction** - Engaging in safety behaviours or distraction whilst in an anxiety-provoking situation means we do not fully experience the symptoms of anxiety. Habituation cannot occur if we are reducing our anxiety in other ways, therefore it is important to plan the exposure to ensure the CYP is not distracted in any way.
- **Repeated** - In order for habituation in a specific situation to occur we need to repeatedly expose the CYP to it. It is recommended that an exposure to one situation is repeated 4-5 times in one week.

*Ask the CYP to rate their level of anxiety from 0-100 before, during and after each exposure to monitor reductions in anxiety levels.*

For each situation, the young person will need to be supported to think about: what coping technique they will use (e.g. relaxation, grounding exercises, positive self-talk and balanced thinking approaches) and what support will be in place (e.g. key worker available, time out card, access to secure/quiet space).

#### **2. To escape difficult social situations (e.g., feeling left out at playtime, reading out loud in class or other public speaking/group task; working as part of a group);**

If we can make people feel more comfortable with their peers then this will be helpful for reintegrating them back into school by increasing the pull factors to school and reducing avoidance of social situations. Strategies to develop relationships in school are highlighted below:

- **Provide safe opportunities for social interaction in school.** For example, you might ask for volunteers to help to do some class organisation work (sharpening pencils, cutting out letters for displays, etc) at lunchtime and select the target child and social role model child. In this situation, the target child has a chance to practice interacting socially with the role model child in a low threat context and on a simple, non-threatening task
- **Use buddying or peer mentoring**
- **Provide opportunities to develop interactions through shared interests e.g., after-school clubs.** This may also help to provide a sense of belonging to a group or the wider school community
- **Provide support in social situations a young person may find challenging (and may wish to escape).** For many young people this involves unstructured times. Providing lunchtime clubs can help provide structure, allow the young person to feel safe and have adults available to help scaffold and model social skills. Such clubs can also provide opportunities for a young person to practice social skills in real life situations

- **Role play what they are going to say when peers ask about their absence from school.**  
It may be useful to normalise any worries the child has about embarrassing situations and reassure them
- **Ensure there is social provision for long-term non-attenders to enable them to establish or maintain peer relationships** e.g., continued access to after school clubs. Support them to maintain friendships
- **Teach social skills explicitly.** This might entail at first the target child working with the key adult, then introducing one other child. Evidence-based social skills interventions include Talkabout (*Alex Kelly*), the Social Use of Language Programme (*Wendy Rinaldi*) and Socially Speaking (*Alison Schroeder and Jacqueline Jomain*). It may also be helpful to support a young person's understanding of social situations by reflecting on real life events through Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations (*Carol Gray*)

In addition to the above, as with the first function, intervention should include learning about anxiety and worrying, how it affects our thinking, feeling and behaviour. How avoidance of the feared situation makes things worse. The child should be taught anxiety management techniques such as relaxation training and deep breathing.

**3. To get attention from or spend more time with significant others (e.g., change in family dynamic, concerned about the well-being of parent);**

Interventions should include working with caregivers by supporting them to develop skills and techniques to:

- Support their travel to and from school
- Encourage the family to spend time together outside of school hours e.g., engaging in shared interests and activities. Promote them providing the child some protected quality time at home ('special time')
- Limit the attention the child receives when they do not attend school
- Establish rewards for when they attend school and where appropriate consequences if they do not
- Ensure there is a clear transition between parent/s and a trusted staff member at the start of each day
- Ensure the child sees positive interactions between home and school
- Considering using transitional objects such as teddies, hair ties, photos, keyring that the child can take from home into school

**4. To spend more time out of school as it is more fun or stimulating (watch tv, go shopping, play computer games, hang out with friends);**

Intervention would usually include:

- Increasing "rewards" for attendance and disincentives for nonattendance i.e. laptop time, access to internet, phone credit, time with friends in town etc.;
- If possible, take away the more stimulating activity;
- Teach them how to refuse offers from peers;
- Make school as stimulating as possible, find out the child or young person's interests and if possible, apply this to the work completed in school.





## Working with families

As mentioned, it is important that intervention consider the range of systems a young person is placed within. Therefore, in addition to implementing support in school, the action plan also needs to consider the support that can be put into place at home.

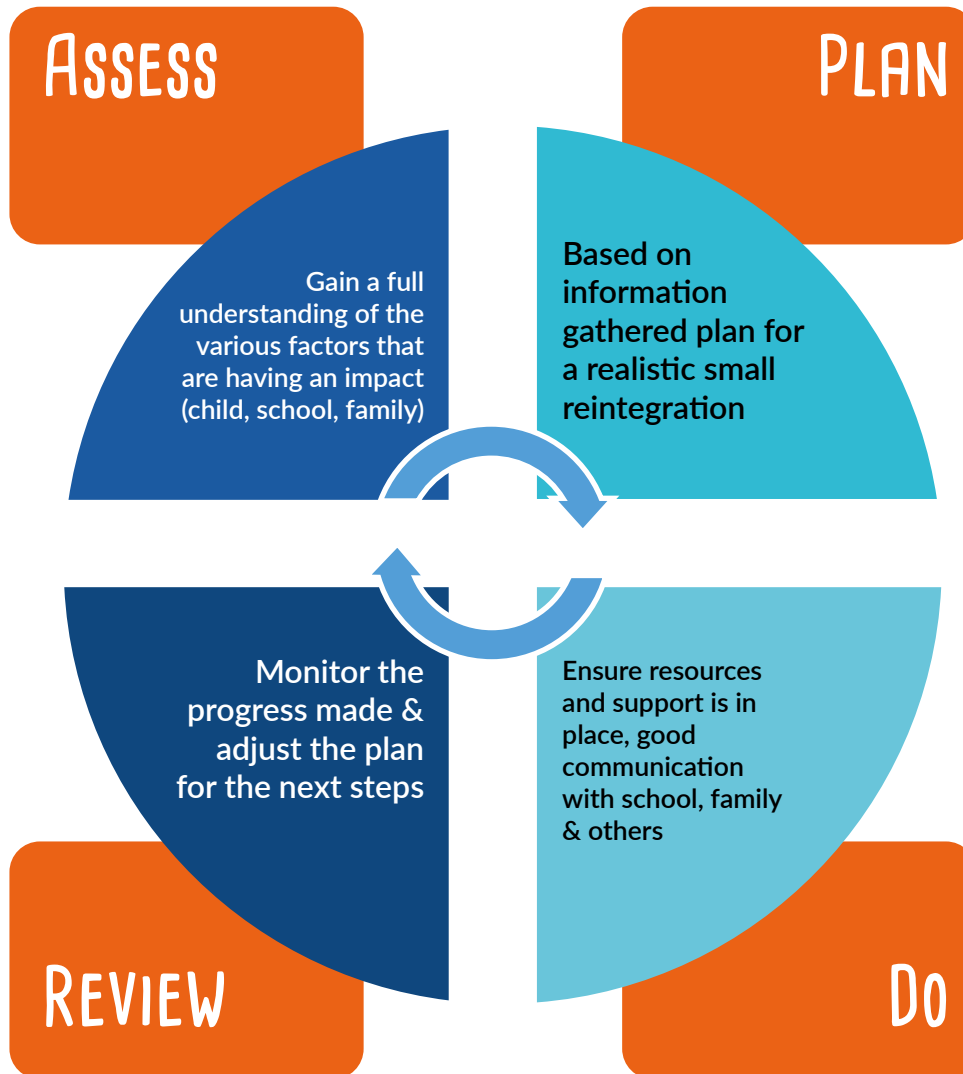
**Ways in which staff can provide assistance to families include:**

- Ensuring a clear routine is in place. This may include use of visuals/weekly planner;
- Meeting to discuss situations they are finding challenging at home;
- Provide key phrases and scripts parents can use at home;
- Ensure the same responses are being used at home and school;
- Consider what support the family needs and refer to other support agencies as appropriate;
- Giving parents space to share their worries. You may not need to solve their problems but be a listening ear and reassure them that you are working together.

# EVALUATING & MONITORING

Once we have put into place our next steps on our action plan and started to deliver interventions to support the CYP with EBSN we need ensure we monitor the progress made and adjust the plan for the next steps by evaluating what we have done. We need to regularly review the targets that were set during the action planning.

Worcestershire advocates that schools should follow thorough assess, plan, do and review cycles with the young person at the centre of the planning and interventions.



## How do we know if targets have been achieved?

We can use baseline measures and compare the measures before and after the intervention such as **RCADS**, **WEMWBS**, **MFQ** (see *measuring outcomes* section in guidance).

We can also use qualitative measures e.g. staff comment on levels engagement and other quantitative measures such as school attendance data.

## When to review?

A review should happen at the end of any intervention and review cycle- 6 weeks max however, it is important to continuously do mid point reviews at least every 2 weeks to check in, so we can make changes more quickly if needed.

# SUPPORT IN WORCESTERSHIRE

In some circumstances, for example when there has been limited or no progress in response to targeted interventions over time following the assess, plan, do, review process, it may be beneficial to seek support from external agencies, as detailed below.

## Support within Worcestershire Children First



### Educational Psychology Service

The role of the Educational Psychology service is to work with CYP, families, educational settings and other professionals already involved to develop a psychological formulation of the EBSN functions, which may be gained through further assessment (including observations, consultations and individual assessment work). Then the EP will work together with those involved to co-construct a joint action plan.

### Autism/Complex Communication Needs (CCN) team

The Autism and Complex Communication Needs team are qualified specialist teachers and specialist practitioners with vast experience of addressing the needs of autistic children and young people from early years to higher education. The team supports teachers and education professionals to meet the individual teaching, learning and wellbeing needs of autistic students and those presenting with complex communication needs.

### Learning Support Team

The Learning Support Team provides support to meet the needs of pupils with Specific Learning Difficulties (SPLD) and those struggling to engage or unmotivated to learn. The team is available to help schools and settings enhance their capacity to meet the needs of children and young people with a range of learning needs through specialist advice, interventions, assessment and training.

### Medical Education Team

The Medical Education Team discharges the duty of the Local Authority in ensuring that arrangements are in place for pupils who are unable to attend school because of their medical needs, to have appropriate and ongoing access to education. The Team consists of qualified teachers and teaching assistants who are skilled in teaching pupils of statutory school age with a wide range of physical, emotional and psychological health needs. The Medical Education Team provides:

- advice to schools on the procedures to be followed when a pupil is absent from school as a result of medical needs;
- education from the fifteenth day of absence from school (consecutive or cumulative) or from the first day when illness is recurrent or prolonged;
- a range of educational provision, tailored to the individual needs of each pupil and detailed in Personal Education Plans;
- regular monitoring and evaluation of pupil progress;
- tuition in a range of settings if professionals involved with the CYP and the MET agree this is appropriate to meet need;
- reintegration planning and support as appropriate;

- close liaison with school based and external partner agencies and professionals including CAMHS and other health professionals;

### Early Help Family Support service

Early Help is a term used to describe both preventative work and a range of services and support for children, young people and their families at the earliest opportunity when a need first emerges. By engaging a family in an Early Help Assessment, you are able to identify what help and support they need and who is already identified. If you need help in identifying possible services or support please look at the Early Help booklet or the Worcestershire Virtual Family Hub page on the WCF website.

## External Agencies

### Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service - SENDIASS

The Worcestershire SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) provide impartial information, advice and support to parents and carers of children who have special educational needs and/ or a disability. The service aims to encourage partnership between parents, school, social care, LA, health and other agencies.

### Starting Well Partnership

The Starting Well Partnership has delivered public health nursing services for children, young people and families across Worcestershire since April 2020. Led by Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust, the Partnership brings together professionals from Barnardo's, Action for Children, and Redditch Borough Council to support parents and their children during the early years and as they move through school towards adulthood. Working alongside local organisations and community groups including schools, the Partnership identifies and addresses health and wellbeing needs by empowering families and young people to access support networks and groups in their local community.

Six district teams bring together Health Visitors, Parenting Support Workers, Community Nursery Nurses, School Health Nurses, Health Care Assistants, Volunteer Coordinators, Community Health Connectors, Business Support Officers and Administrators to deliver services into their local communities. The 'Professionals Guide to the Starting Well Partnership' is available at:

<https://www.startingwellworcs.nhs.uk/professionals>

*Further information can be found by contacting your local **Public Health Lead**.*

The Starting Well Partnership offers an exciting array of parenting groups and workshops. All sessions are free to attend and run by trained staff and volunteers from the Starting Well Partnership.

More information on this is available at:

<https://www.startingwellworcs.nhs.uk/parenting-groups>

### School Nurses

According to the Department for Education, where available, school nursing services can also play an important role in helping to alleviate barriers to attendance, by providing health advice or information to pupils, including an assessment of individual needs and strengths. The school nurse can work with young people, parents/carers and the school to offer support based on these assessments, including helping families to navigate health and care services. School nurses can work with families, schools and others for early identification of vulnerability that may impact on education or attendance, so early support or referral to other services can be offered. Where pupils have complex and long-term health conditions that are impacting attendance, school nurses can offer support to young people to manage their health condition and medication within school.

## Mentor Link

Mentor Link is a charity dedicated to supporting vulnerable and distressed children and young people by providing them with a volunteer mentor. Using Safer Recruiting techniques, fully trained adults will offer listening support and guidance to these young people during difficulties in their lives, which may include self-harm, bullying, traumatic bereavement and family breakdown. The aim of mentoring is to help these young people achieve positive changes and remain engaged with their families, learning and community, and achieve a successful transition to adulthood. The wellbeing of these children and young people forms the focus of their work. Further information is available at:

<https://www.mentorlink.org.uk/about-us/>

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## Profile of Risk of Emotional Based School Avoidance

The Profile of Risk schedule consists of five key areas, each of which contains a number of items you are asked to consider in terms of their possible importance in influencing emotionally based attendance difficulties.

You should be as objective as possible when completing the schedule and base assessments on evidence.

During the process of completing the schedule, it may be useful to not factors associated with particular items, such as:

- This has been an issue in the past, but doesn't appear to be now.
- This has been an issue in the past and has persisted as an important item.

Items on the scale are not rated numerically, like a typical rating scale, as one single item (e.g. *death of a parent*) is so important it cannot be rated in the same way other items might be rated.

If the profile suggests to you that the pupil is at risk of emotionally based school non-attendance, the next step is to obtain the views of the pupil, parents and other staff.

Loss & Change	Level of concern				
	High	Medium	Low	Not an issue	Not Known
Death of parent, relative, friend					
Death of pet					
Sudden traumatic event					
Sudden separation from a parent					
Moving house, school, area					
Loss of a classmate					
Parent, relative, friend illness					
<b>Note on key items</b>					
Family Dynamic	High	Medium	Low	Not an issue	Not Known
Inappropriate parenting					
Birth of new child					
Parents separated					
Parents arguing/fighting					
Practical problems bringing the child to school					

	Level of concern				
Jealous of sibling(s) at home					
<b>Note on key items</b>					
<b>Curriculum/Learning issues</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Not an issue</b>	<b>Not Known</b>
Low levels of literacy					
PE and/or games issues					
General learning difficulties					
Specific subject difficulties					
Exam or test anxiety					
Difficulties with a particular teacher/adult					
Problems keeping up in lessons					
<b>Note on key items</b>					
<b>Social Personal</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Not an issue</b>	<b>Not Known</b>
Being bullied					
Seems to have few friend/friendship issues					
English as a second language					
Dislikes play/break times					
Few leisure interests					
<b>Note on key items</b>					
<b>Psychological Wellbeing</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Not an issue</b>	<b>Not Known</b>
Often seems tired					
Low self esteem					
Appears depressed					
Appears anxious					
Keeps feelings to themselves					
Has a pessimistic nature					

	Level of concern				
<b>Note on key items</b>					
<b>Other issues</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Not an issue</b>	<b>Not Known</b>
<b>Note on key items</b>					

West Sussex County Council Educational Psychology Service EBSA Guidance

# Action Planning 1

## Description of the Emotionally Based School Non-attendance

E.G. Is the school non-attendance just emerging, any history of similar difficulties, current rate/pattern of attendance

### Summary of Risk & Resilience Factors

 <b>Child</b>	 <b>School</b>	 <b>Home</b>	 <b>Wider Community</b>

## Identify Key Functions ( adapted from Kearney, 2002)

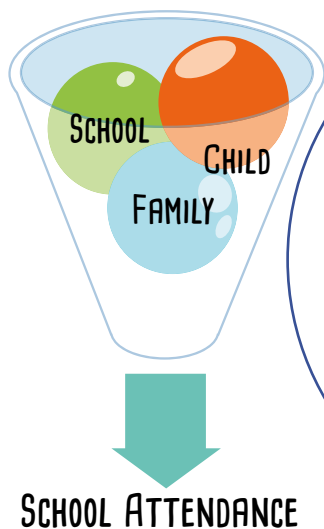
1. avoidance of situations that elicit negative affectivity or high levels of anxiety, avoids school to avoid unpleasant feelings.

2. escaping from aversive social situations, avoids school to reduce social pressures/ anxieties.

3. reduce separation anxiety, avoids school to spend time with parents/ carers.

4. to pursue rewarding activities outside of school, avoids school to engage in pleasurable activities at home.

## Formulation



## Next Steps



*Adapted from Dr J Holder EDPSYCHED Training Resources*

# The Ideal School Technique

## Guidelines for the Drawing Ideal School Technique

### Introduction

The 'Drawing the Ideal School Technique' has been adapted from an approach developed by Moran (2001). Heather Moran has been a teacher and educational psychologist and now works as a clinical psychologist. The technique enables children to become actively involved in understanding themselves and expressing their views. It is based on ideas from Personal Construct Psychology which was introduced by Kelly in 1955. This approach seeks to explore children's important or core constructs about themselves, and how they view the world. Children (and adults) behave in a way which makes sense to them according to their own view of the world. We are likely to understand children (and the sort of provision which is most likely to help them) more fully if they are able to express these core constructs to us. To summarise, this type of work attempts to:

***“Understand the child's unique perspective on life through the careful use of questions and extremely sensitive note of the child's answers.” (Moran 2001)***

The technique itself is very simple to use once the child understands what is expected. This sheet gives guidelines for the adult completing the technique to follow and the next two pages list how to complete the technique.

### Guidelines for use:

1. Equipment needed: a black pen and two sheets of plain A4 paper.
2. Allow about an hour to complete to activity, perhaps with a short break if necessary.
3. Explain to the pupil that you are going to be doing the writing today, acting as scribe, this is to take the pressure off the pupil and keep the process moving.
4. The pupil is asked to make quick drawings or sketches (rather than detailed drawings), reassure the pupil that it doesn't matter if an error is made.
5. It is important to record exactly what the pupil says using their own words.
6. If the pupil is overly anxious about drawing either model stick people drawings first or just record the pupil's verbal responses.
7. Allow time for the pupil to process the requests – repeat/reward/simplify the questions if not understood.
8. Provide reassurance that there is no right or wrong answers or responses.
9. Provide encouragement and praise for the pupil's involvement with the activity.
10. Be sensitive about sharing the drawings with others, ask the child's permission and ensure that other adults understand that the child has trusted you in revealing such views which must be respected.
11. Talk to other colleagues about planning any follow up work which might be indicated.



## Part I: Drawing the kind of school you would **NOT LIKE** to go to.

### 1. The School:

Think about the kind of school you would not like to go to. This is not a real school. Make a quick drawing of this school in the middle of this paper. Tell me three things about this school. What kind of school is this?

### 2. The Classroom:

Think about the sort of classroom you would not like to be in. Make a quick drawing of this classroom in the school. Draw some of the things in this classroom.



### 3. The Children:

Think about some of the children at the school you would not like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these children. What are the children doing? Tell me three things about these children.

### 4. The Adults:

Think about some of the adults at the school you would not like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of the adults. What are the adults doing? Tell me three things about these adults.

### 5. Me:

Think about the kind of school you would not like to go to. Make a quick drawing of what you would be doing at this school. Tell me three things about the way you feel at this school.

## Part II: Drawing the kind of school you would **LIKE** to go to.

### 1. The School:

Think about the kind of school you would like to go to. This is not a real school. Make a quick drawing of this school in the middle of the middle of this paper. Tell me three things about this school. What kind of school is this?

### 2. The Classroom:

Think about the sort of classroom you would like to be in. Make a quick drawing of this classroom in this school. Draw some of the things in this classroom.



### 3. The Children:

Think about some of the children at the school you would like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these children. What are the children doing? Tell me three things about these children.

### 4. The Adults:

Think about some of the adults at the school you would like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these adults. What are the adults doing? Tell me three things about these adults.

### 5. Me:

Think about the kind of school you would like to go to. Make a quick drawing of what you would be doing at this school. Tell me three things about the way you feel at this school.

## The PACE Approach

PACE is an approach developed by Dr Dan Hughes. PACE stands for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy. These principles help to promote the experience of safety in your interactions with young people.

P

**Playfulness** - The purpose of playfulness is to enjoy being together in an unconditional way. This gives the message that the relationship is stronger than things that go wrong. Using a playful and light-hearted tone, as if you were telling a story, shows your interest and curiosity. Playfulness reduces the shame a child might feel when something has gone wrong; difficult messages or serious conversations can be easier to have if the tone is light. It does not mean you do not take the emotions or the incident seriously. It is also helpful to maintain a playful tone if you need to deliver a short reminder about behaviour in the classroom.

A

**Acceptance** - Unconditional acceptance is fundamental to a child's sense of safety because it shows that you have connected with their feelings without judgement, and without seeking to reassure their feelings away. If a child expresses distressing emotions about themselves or others (e.g. "nobody loves me", "I'm stupid") it is hard not to challenge them as being wrong, but it is really important to accept those feelings and acknowledge them using curiosity and empathy. Accepting the child or young person's feelings and emotions does not mean accepting unwanted behaviour and it does not mean agreeing with the child's viewpoint, but for true acceptance to take place, it is important that the child also knows you can see them beyond their behaviour.

C

**Curiosity** - It's important to be curious about the child's thoughts, feelings, wishes and intentions: they may still be learning that other people can think about them in this way or that they can be held in mind by an adult without judgement and accusation at all. Showing the child that you are interested in what is going on for them and willing to do something about it is a very powerful experience.  
*Don't feel afraid to share your curiosity with the child by wondering, not telling them.* Try to avoid asking "Why?". Instead, you might ask: "Is it ok if I share my idea of what is going on for you? I might be wrong, but these are my ideas." or "What do you think was going on?", "What do you think that was about?" or "I wonder what...?" Try to be curious in a quiet, accepting tone that conveys a simple desire to understand the child: this is not the same as agreeing with their perception of the event, but shows your interest in understanding it and accepting the feelings that were involved.

E

**Empathy** - When you show empathy you are showing the child that their feelings are important to you, and that you are alongside them in their difficulty. You are showing that you can cope with the hard times with them, and you are trying hard to understand how it feels. Understanding and expressing your own feelings about the child's experience can often be more effective than reassurance.

Source: Evered, R. & Riviere, H. *Using PACE in School*. The Attach Team.

## Deep Breathing

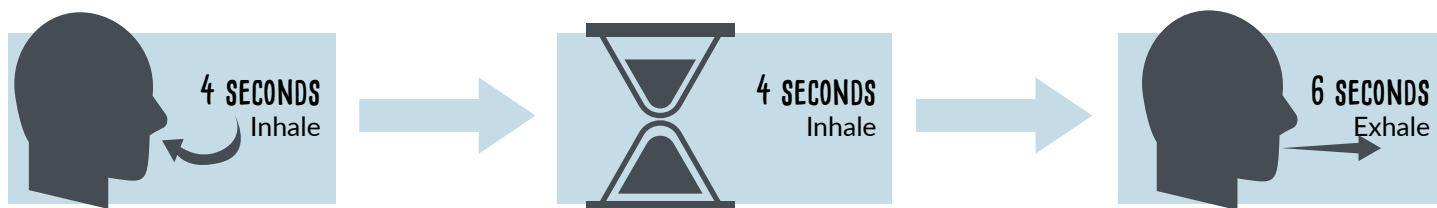
### How Deep Breathing Works

During periods of anxiety, the body triggers a set of symptoms called the stress response. Breathing becomes shallow and rapid, heart rate increases, and muscles become tense. In opposition to the stress response is the relaxation response. Breathing becomes deeper and slower, and the symptoms of anxiety fade away. Deep breathing triggers this response.



### Instructions

Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes, if you would like to do so. When you're learning, try placing a hand on your stomach. If you breathe deeply enough, you should notice it rising and falling with each inhalation and exhalation.



**Inhale.** Breathe in slowly through your nose for 4 seconds.

**Pause.** Hold the air in your lungs for 4 seconds.

**Exhale.** Breathe out slowly through your mouth for 6 seconds.

**Tip:** Pucker your lips, as if you are blowing through a straw, to slow your exhalation.

**Repeat.** Practice for at least 2 minutes, but preferably 5 to 10 minutes.

### Tips

- If it isn't working, slow down! The most common mistake is breathing too fast. Time each step in your head, counting slowly as you do so;
- Counting out your breaths serves a second purpose. It takes your mind off the source of your anxiety. Whenever you catch your mind wandering, simply return your focus to counting;
- The times we use for each step are suggestions and can be lengthened or decreased. Lengthen the time if it feels natural to do so or decrease the time if you feel discomfort.

## Grounding Techniques

After a trauma, it's normal to experience flashbacks, anxiety, and other uncomfortable symptoms. **Grounding techniques** help control these symptoms by turning attention away from thoughts, memories, or worries, and refocusing on the present moment.

### 5-4-3-2-1 Technique

Using the 5-4-3-2-1 technique, you will purposefully take in the details of your surroundings using each of your senses. Strive to notice small details that your mind would usually tune out, such as distant sounds, or the texture of an ordinary object.

**What are 5 things you can see?** Look for small details such as a pattern on the ceiling, the way light reflects off a surface, or an object you never noticed.

**What are 4 things you can feel?** Notice the sensation of clothing on your body, the sun on your skin, or the feeling of the chair you are sitting in. Pick up an object and examine its weight, texture, and other physical qualities.

**What are 3 things you can hear?** Pay special attention to the sounds your mind has tuned out, such as a ticking clock, distant traffic, or trees blowing in the wind.

**What are 2 things you can smell?** Try to notice smells in the air around you, like an air freshener or freshly mowed grass. You may also look around for something that has a scent, such as a flower or an unlit candle.

**What is 1 thing you can taste?** Carry gum, candy, or small snacks for this step. Pop one in your mouth and focus your attention closely on the flavors.

## Categories

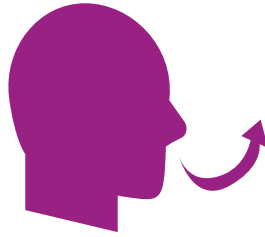
Choose at least three of the categories below and name as many items as you can in each one. Spend a few minutes on each category to come up with as many items as possible.

Movies	Countries	Books	Cereals
Sports Teams	Colours	Cars	Fruits & Vegetables
Animals	Cities	TV Shows	Famous people

*\*For a variation on this activity, try naming items in a category alphabetically. For example, for the fruits & vegetables category, say "apple, banana, carrot," and so on.*

## Body Awareness

The body awareness technique will bring you into the here-and-now by directing your focus to sensations in the body. Pay special attention to the physical sensations created by each step.



**Take 5 long, deep breaths through your nose**, and exhale through puckered lips.

1. Place both feet flat on the floor. Wiggle your toes. Curl and uncurl your toes several times. Spend a moment noticing the sensations in your feet.
2. Stomp your feet on the ground several times. Pay attention to the sensations in your feet and legs as you make contact with the ground.
3. Clench your hands into fists, then release the tension. Repeat this 10 times.
4. Press your palms together. Press them harder and hold this pose for 15 seconds. Pay attention to the feeling of tension in your hands and arms.
5. Rub your palms together briskly. Notice and sound and the feeling of warmth.
6. Reach your hands over your head like you're trying to reach the sky. Stretch like this for 5 seconds. Bring your arms down and let them relax at your sides.
7. Take 5 more deep breaths and notice the feeling of calm in your body.



## Mental Exercises

Use mental exercises to take your mind off uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. They are discreet and easy to use at nearly any time or place. Experiment to see which work best for you.

- Name all the objects you see.
- Describe the steps in performing an activity you know how to do well. *For example, how to shoot a basketball, prepare your favorite meal, or tie a knot.*
- Count backwards from 100 by 7.
- Pick up an object and describe it in detail. *Describe its color, texture, size, weight, scent, and any other qualities you notice.*
- Spell your full name, and the names of three other people, backwards.
- Name all your family members, their ages, and one of their favorite activities.
- Read something backwards, letter-by-letter. Practice for *at least* a few minutes.
- Think of an object and “draw” it in your mind, or in the air with your finger. *Try drawing your home, a vehicle, or an animal.*

# ACTION PLAN

<b>Name:</b>		<b>Year Group &amp; Class:</b>	<b>Date of Plan:</b>
<b>Contributors:</b>			
<b>Shared desired outcomes:</b> What do we hope to see as a result? What is realistic expectations given our starting point? How can we write this as a SMART target?	<b>Agreed action (intervention/strategy)</b>  What? Who? How often? For how long?	<b>Pre-intervention evaluation</b>  What does it look like now?	<b>Post-intervention evaluation</b>  What does it look like now? Have we achieved our shared desired outcome? If not, have we made steps forwards towards our shared desired outcome?