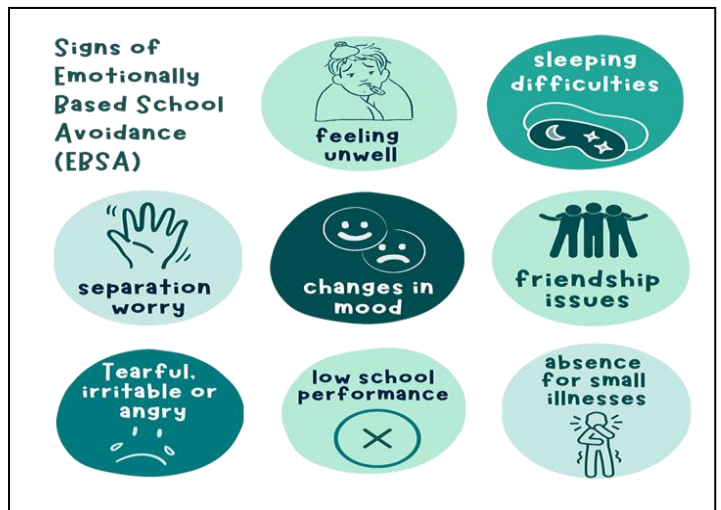


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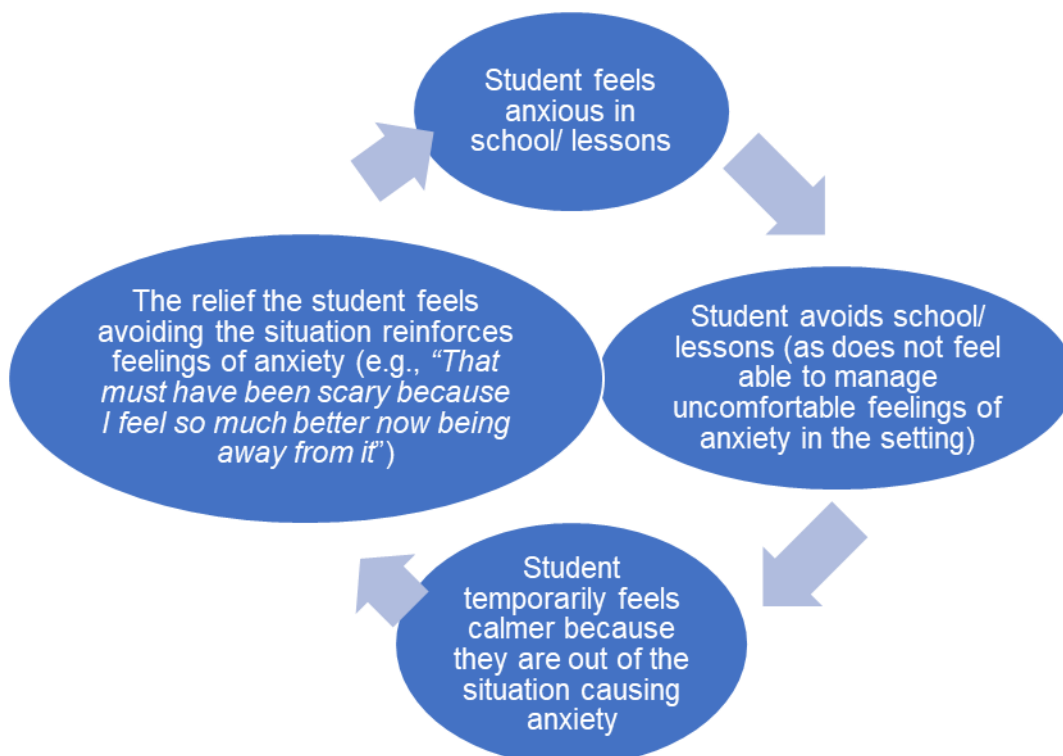
EBSA – Emotionally Based School Avoidance

Recommendations to promote school attendance and engagement in learning.

What is EBSA?

Emotionally-based school avoidance (EBSA) is when a child or young person has difficulty attending school, or certain parts of school, due to emotional difficulties. This doesn't just include children and young people who are not attending school entirely, but also includes those with reduced attendance, those not attending- or staying in- lessons and those avoiding certain spaces or situations in school.

When experiencing high levels of anxiety, we employ coping strategies to reduce this uncomfortable feeling, one of which can be avoidance. Avoidance is powerful because the relief we get from avoiding something is often an extremely strong, positive feeling and reinforces its use for future situations (see diagram below)

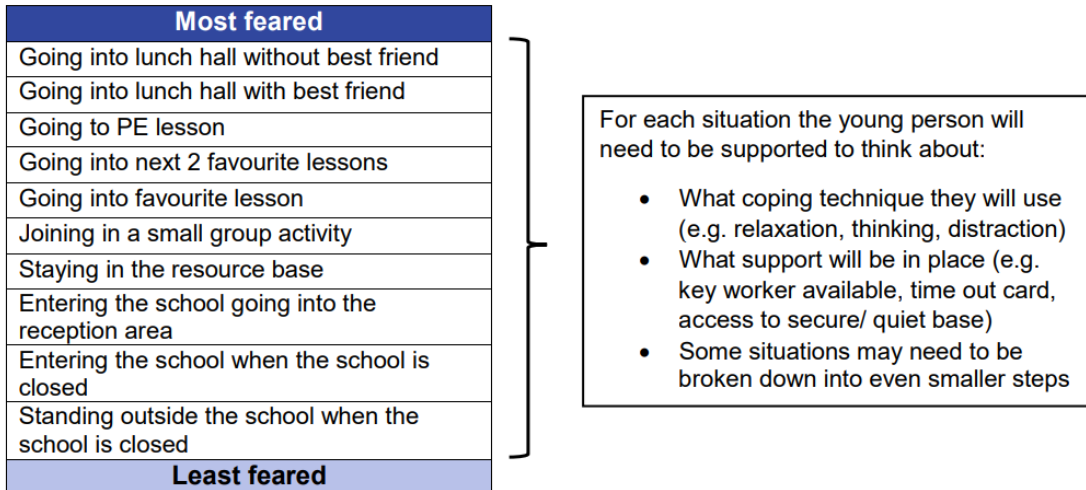


What can be done to support those with EBSA?

It is important for whole school approaches to be considered to ensure an inclusive environment to promote positive wellbeing and attendance. Training and links to prevent and intervene early are noted at the end of this document. The recommendations below focus on reintegration for students that are currently not attending school or whose attendance is considered 'persistently absent' (below 90%).

- Key adults will need to continue to develop positive and trusting relationships with the young person to promote engagement. Key adults should have protected time to build rapport with them, including ample problem-free conversations, unconditional positive regard for them to develop trust, as well as talking about, or doing, things that interest them.
- Reduce anxiety by preparing the young person for changes in routine where possible.
- Maintaining a calm, even demeanour and tone of voice, making appropriate use of humour and distractions and modelling positive self-talk / providing reassurance may also be helpful.
- Demands on the young person should be carefully considered to support their progress, but to avoid them being so overwhelmed that they refuse.
- Given that anxiety is often a significant factor in school avoidance, incorporating anxiety management strategies into the intervention plan may be helpful. Techniques from cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) and exposure-based therapies can be used to help young people identify and challenge anxious thoughts, manage physical symptoms of anxiety, and gradually confront anxiety-provoking situations in a systematic and supportive manner. A gradual approach to reintegration will be helpful, e.g. using a desensitisation ladder, child-centred goals, incorporating their strengths and interests and involving them in plans. Relaxation techniques, such as breathing exercises, mindfulness, progressive muscle relaxation or 'grounding' exercises, could also be taught to help them cope with anxiety.
- Include activities that are motivating for the student, by involving their interests.
- Help the young person to come into school at a time that they are more likely to be successful and organise a calming / motivating 'settling activity' to help the transition into school.
- In a school environment, the young person will likely need a consistent calm and quiet space they can access throughout the day. They will probably need to build up their time in school slowly and have regular breaks when at school, to self-regulate.
- Keep in regular contact with young people not attending school.
- Show the young person you are interested in them and care about them. Greet them warmly when you see them.
- Create a positive sense of belonging, e.g., by supporting friendships and by giving special jobs/ responsibilities (if the young person would like this).

- It is important that a clear plan is put in place with the aim of increasing their engagement in learning and looking towards full-time attendance at an educational setting, with monitoring of their emotional wellbeing as they move through each of the steps of the plan. Staff should build on strategies that have already been identified to be helping and involve them in an appropriate level of decision making, to increase their sense of autonomy and motivation. Reintegration should happen gradually, to avoid the young person feeling overwhelmed. Use an avoidance hierarchy created with the young person (working from the least feared situation to the most feared; see figure below).



Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) links and online training (organised by South Central Teaching School Hub) for further information.

- West Sussex ‘useful documentation’ available to download includes EBSA guidance. Information for parents, young people and support plan examples - [Emotionally Based School Avoidance | West Sussex Services for Schools](#)
- Camden useful guidance [download.asp \(royalfree.camden.sch.uk\)](#)
- YoungMinds: A guide for parents. [School Anxiety and Refusal | Parent Guide to Support | YoungMinds](#)
- A tool that can be used to explore factors motivating emotionally based school avoidance, and ‘resilience’ factors with a young person- <https://www.schoolwellbeingcards.co.uk/>
- [Addressing emotionally-based school avoidance \(annafreud.org\)](#)
- The Educational Psychology Service run a telephone contact line on Tuesday 1-4pm – **01202 126100**
- [Bitesize CPD and further resources by Pooky Knightsmith - BITESIZE CPD: EBSA/School Anxiety - Starting the Day Right - Dr Pooky Knightsmith](#)
- [Guidance on creating an education environment conducive to positive emotional wellbeing for all- https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/5-steps-to-mental-health-and-wellbeing/](#)
- Starving the Anxiety Gremlin: A Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Workbook on Anxiety Management for Young People by Kate Collins-Donnelly

EBSA training session 1 with Pooky Knightsmith – Prevention - [Emotionally Based School Avoidance with Pooky Knightsmith - Zoom](#)

Links to other resources referenced in the session:

- [Pooky’s blog re EBSA Prevention](#) with the majority of the links referenced in the first session
- [Pooky’s Getting to the why document](#)
- [A recording of Pooky as our special guest at one of our previous Pastoral Network re The power of listening to understand](#)
- [Sarah Dove’s website](#)

- PACE+ (Trauma-Informed) Approaches online course
 - [FREE PACE+ Course for staff from Dorset and BCP](#)

EBSA training session 2 Pooky Knightsmith – Early Intervention - [My Webina Emotionally Based School Avoidance with Pooky Knightsmith - Zoom](#)

Links to and details of other resources referenced in the session:

- [Pooky's blog re the 2nd EBSA session](#) with the majority of the links referenced in the second session
- [Pooky's podcast: How to be an adult that makes children feel safe](#)
- [Pooky's youtube channel](#)
- Pooky's The healthy coping colouring book and journal (2017)
- Pooky's Cards against anxiety (2020)
- Eliza Fricker's book Can't not won't: A story about a child who couldn't go to school (2023)
- Bruce Perry and Oprah Winfrey's book What happened to you? Conversations on trauma, resilience and healing (2021) – I would particularly recommend chapter 9: Relational hunger in the modern world.
- Sue Knowles' My anxiety handbook (2018)
- [A recording of Pooky as our special guest at one of our previous Pastoral Network re The power of listening to understand](#)
- Session in May with [Pooky re Mentally Healthy Schools](#)

EBSA training session 3 with Pooky Knightsmith – Reintegration - [Emotionally Based School Avoidance with Pooky Knightsmith - Zoom](#)

Links to and details of other resources referenced in the session:

- [Pooky's blog re the 3rd EBSA session](#) with the majority of the links referenced in the second session
- Eliza Fricker's book Can't not won't: A story about a child who couldn't go to school (2023)
- Fran Morgan and Ellie Costello's book Square Pegs: Inclusivity, compassion and fitting in – a guide for schools (2023)
- Paul Dix's book When the adults change, everything changes: Seismic shifts in school behaviour (2017)
- [Academy 21](#)
- Being PACEful with children and young people which you can find out more about [here](#)
- Motivational Interviewing which you can find out more about [here](#)

If you have any interesting information or resources which you would like to share with your colleagues via this fortnightly bulletin, please e-mail them to me:

ari@st-peters.bournemouth.sch.uk

Many thanks
Anne