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Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) and Barriers to Setting Attendance

Guidance for Barnet school staff, parents/carers and professionals



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Introduction & Rationale

1. Introduction and Rationale

This guidance has been formulated through the Barnet EBSA working group, with representation from the Barnet Parent Carer Forum, Barnet Education and Learning Service (BELS), Barnet schools, health and family services.

The EBSA working group is part of a broader Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) Leading Edge Group in Barnet, a multi-agency group which aims to improve outcomes for children/young people with SEMH needs in Barnet through evidence-based, strategic planning and project development. It is important to note that this guidance highlights good practice recommendations from the research at the current time. The guidance reflects developments in practice and research literature since the initial version of the EBSA guidance developed in September 2024.

Prevalence

The true prevalence of Emotionally Based School Avoidance is difficult to establish. Earlier research estimated that between 1% and 5% of school-aged children may experience these difficulties, although findings should be interpreted cautiously because studies have used different terminology, definitions and thresholds (Pellegrini, 2007[1]; Elliott and Place, 2019[2]).

EBSA is not recorded through a single national attendance code. National absence statistics therefore do not show how many children and young people experience EBSA specifically, but they demonstrate that barriers to attendance remain a significant concern.

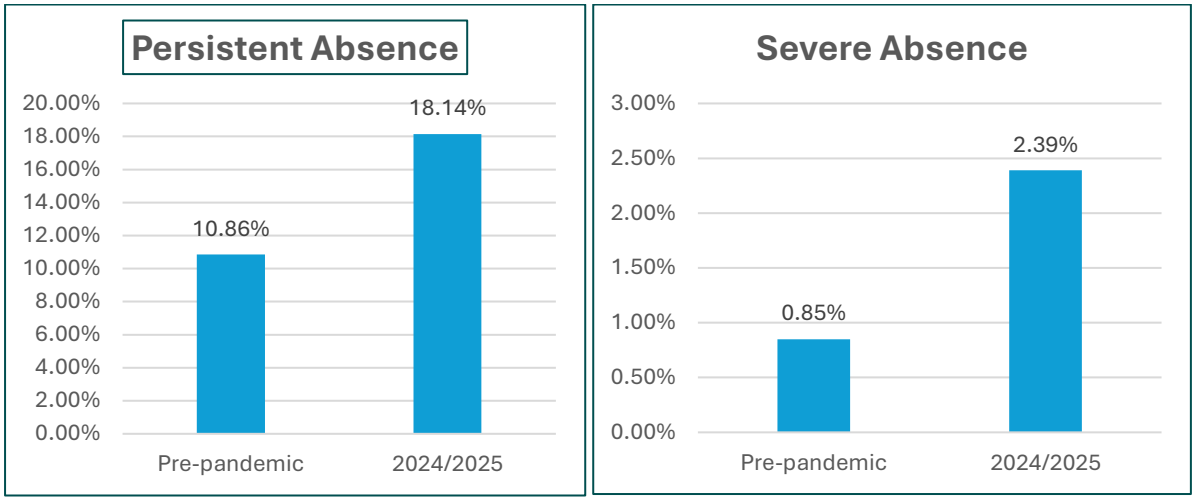
In 2024/25:

- 18.14% of pupils in England were persistently absent, compared with 10.86% before the pandemic
- 2.39% were severely absent, compared with 0.85% before the pandemic
- Pupils eligible for Free School Meals were more than two and a half times as likely to be persistently absent

[1] Pellegrini, D (2007) School Non attendance: Definitions, meanings, responses, interventions. *Educational Psychology in Practice,* 23, p. 83-77

[2] Elliot, J.G., & Place, M (2019) Practioner Review: School Refusal: developments in conceptualisation and treatment since 2000. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry,* 60(1), p.4-15

- Pupils with identified SEN were almost four times as likely to experience severe absence Source: Department for Education (2026)[3].



Why EBSA may be underestimated

Attendance figures alone do not capture the full spectrum of EBSA. Difficulties may be overlooked because:

- Some children and young people attend school but struggle to access lessons or learning
- Some maintain high attendance while experiencing significant distress or exhaustion
- Distress may be masked in school and become more visible at home
- EBSA-related absence may be recorded using different attendance codes
- Children and young people may be following part-time timetables or accessing alternative arrangements
- Anxiety may be communicated through physical symptoms, withdrawal, shutdown or externalised behaviours
- Neurodivergent, sensory, communication or learning needs may not yet have been identified

The number of children and young people experiencing EBSA is therefore likely to be greater than the number who are fully absent or formally identified.

[3] Release home - Pupil absence in schools in England - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK

Purpose of the guidance

This guidance aims to support schools and professionals to:

- Identify emerging concerns before difficulties become more established
- Develop a shared understanding of barriers to education
- Recognise EBSA across the full spectrum, including within-school difficulties
- Reduce avoidable distress, demands and environmental barriers
- Strengthen safety, belonging, relationships and engagement
- Plan and review coordinated support with children, young people and parent/carers
- Recognise progress in wellbeing and access to learning alongside attendance

Barnet's response is underpinned by the **WARMTH framework**[4] and organised through a tiered approach to support.

How to use this guidance

- The opening sections provide a shared foundation for understanding EBSA and deciding what level of support may be required.
- The Working Together and Assess, Plan, Do, Review sections support individual planning at every tier.
- Additional guidance is provided where barriers have become persistent or entrenched.
- The safeguarding, attendance, statutory and multi-agency sections should be considered alongside the practical guidance as relevant.
- The appendices provide a response pathway, tools for gathering perspectives, support-plan materials and worked examples.

[4] Hatton-Cororan, S,. & Lyons, R (2025) *The Warmth Framework: Barriers to education.* WARMTH Framework - Barriers to Education

Contributors

- **Dr Sophie Driver** (Senior Educational Psychologist and SEMH Leading Edge Group Chair)
- **Chloe Hand** (Trainee Educational Psychologist)
- **Angela Tawfig and Steve Henshall** (Assistant Educational Psychologists and EBSA Schools Project Leads)
- **Dr Abbey Giannini** and **Dr Jade Davey** *(Educational Psychologists)*
- **Carly Rendell** (Deputy Headteacher at Finchley Catholic High Secondary School)
- **Hannah Mann** (Assistant Headteacher, the Compton School)
- **Luci Rose** (Lead Autism Advisory Teacher, BELS)
- **Louise Wilmshurst** (Education Welfare Team Lead, BELS)
- **Nicola Axford** (Children with a Social Worker Lead, Barnet Virtual School)
- **Samantha Rothwell** (BELS Inclusion Advisory Team Lead Practitioner)
- **Lisa Coffman** (Co-ordinator of Barnet Parent Carer Forum)
- **Ablavi Dagbo** (Manager, Barnet SEND Information Advice and Support Service)
- **Lois Hoare and Sally Bye** (Team Managers, Child and Family Support, South, East and Central Hub)
- **Dr Amina Tareen** (Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist in Barnet Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service-CAMHS)
- **Dr Sarah Leighter** (Barnet Integrative Clinical Service-BICS Clinical Manager)
- **Imani Muhammad** (BICS Primary Mental Health Worker)

We would like to thank Dr Jerricah Holder (Educational Psychologist, EBSA Horizons) whose excellent guidance and Continued Professional Development inspired the group to create EBSA guidance to support the needs of our local community. We would also like to thank schools and families in our Barnet community, whose resilience, commitment and passion continue to inspire our work.

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Terminology: Language Matters

2. Terminology- language matters

Section summary:

- **EBSA** is characterised by a significant difficulty attending school as a result of emotional factors.
- The term **EBSA** is considered as more accurate and respectful than the previously used term 'school refusal.' The term **Barriers to Setting Attendance/Education** also reflects the range of factors that can affect access to education.

The aim of using terminology is to develop a shared understanding to inform support. Curiosity and sensitivity should be used when using language to describe need.

Terminology

This guidance uses the term **Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)** because it is widely recognised locally and nationally, while also acknowledging that broader terms such as **Barriers to Setting Attendance** and **Barriers to Education** may better reflect the range of factors that can affect access to education.

EBSA is used as an umbrella term. It may include children and young people who:

- Are unable to attend school
- Attend intermittently or for part of the day
- Arrive late or leave early because of distress
- Attend school but struggle to enter or remain in lessons
- Experience significant distress before, during or after the school day
- Maintain attendance at a substantial cost to their wellbeing

The term should not be used as a diagnosis or as a fixed description of the child or young person. It describes a pattern of difficulty that requires further understanding.

Language matters

The language used by adults can affect whether children, young people and parent/carers feel understood, blamed or able to participate in support.

Terms such as **school refusal** may suggest that the child or young person is making a deliberate choice not to attend. This can overlook the role of anxiety, distress, unmet need, environmental barriers and experiences that may make education feel unsafe or unmanageable.

This guidance therefore encourages language that:

- Describes what is happening without assuming intent
- Recognises distress and barriers
- Avoids locating responsibility solely within the child or family
- Remains open to different explanations
- Identifies what adults, environments and systems may need to change
- Recognises strengths, communication and attempts to engage

Moving from judgement to curiosity

Instead of	Consider
Refusing school	Experiencing difficulty attending or accessing education
Choosing not to attend	Feeling unable to attend at this time
Non-compliant	Communicating distress or finding the current demand difficult
Avoiding work	Finding this lesson, task or environment difficult to access
Manipulative	Attempting to communicate or meet a need
Attention-seeking	Seeking connection, reassurance or support
The parent/carer is not engaging	There may be barriers affecting communication or participation
The intervention has failed	The current plan has not yet reduced the identified barriers
They are fine once they arrive	Distress may be masked, delayed or more visible outside school
They just need to attend	We need to understand what is making attendance or participation difficult

These alternatives are not intended as fixed scripts. Staff should select language that is accurate, respectful and appropriate to the individual situation.

Recognising distress and attendance as communication

Children and young people may not always be able to explain their experiences directly. Distress may be communicated through:

- Withdrawal or silence
- Shutdown or reduced communication
- Physical symptoms
- Lateness or absence
- Difficulty entering lessons or spaces
- Emotional distress before or after school
- Increased need for control or predictability
- Anger, conflict or behaviour that others find difficult
- Masking or appearing compliant while experiencing significant internal distress

It is important to note that the phrase **behaviour as communication** can sometimes be misunderstood as suggesting that behaviour is always a deliberate or volitional form of communication. For many children and young people experiencing EBSA, behaviours such as avoidance, withdrawal, shutdown or distress may instead reflect underlying anxiety, overwhelm, unmet support needs or a lack of felt safety. Rather than focusing solely on the behaviour itself, practitioners should remain curious about what it may tell us about the child or young person's experience and the support they need.

Emotional Culturality

Emotions are experienced and communicated within cultural, family and community contexts. Children, young people and parent/carers may hold different understandings of anxiety, distress, independence, behaviour, education and help-seeking.

Within this guidance, **emotional culturality** means remaining curious about how experiences, identities, values, beliefs, language and relationships with education may influence:

- How distress is understood and expressed
- Which emotions feel acceptable to discuss
- How and when support is sought
- Expectations around attendance, achievement and independence
- Relationships with teachers and other professionals

- What feels reassuring, respectful or stigmatising

Adults should avoid making assumptions based on a family's culture, faith, language or community. The purpose is to ask respectful questions and seek to understand the individual family's perspective.

When distress is misunderstood as defiance

EBSA-related distress is not always immediately recognised. Difficulty entering lessons, leaving a space, following instructions, accepting a change of plan or communicating during periods of overwhelm may be understood as defiance, disruption or deliberate non-compliance.

Emotional culturality can influence both how distress is expressed and how adults interpret it. Expectations around emotional expression, behaviour, authority and help-seeking may differ across children, families and school communities. Assumptions linked to culture, race, faith, language, gender, disability, neurodivergence or communication may also affect whose distress is recognised and whose behaviour is viewed primarily as misconduct.

Recognising distress does not mean overlooking harm or removing appropriate boundaries. Schools remain responsible for maintaining safety and responding to behaviour. However, sanctions, removal from lessons, suspension or permanent exclusion should not replace efforts to understand what is happening and reduce the barriers contributing to the situation.

Where behaviour is repeated, escalating or leading to exclusionary responses, schools should consider:

- What the child or young person may be communicating
- Whether distress, overload, unmet need or communication differences are contributing
- Whether agreed support, SEN provision and reasonable adjustments are available and consistently implemented
- Whether particular environments, relationships, demands or transitions are increasing difficulty
- How emotional culturality may have influenced the expression or interpretation of distress
- Whether the response may increase shame, disconnection or barriers to returning
- What adults, environments or systems may need to change

Neuroaffirming language

Neurodivergent differences should not be described as deficits that sit solely within the child or young person.

Language should recognise the interaction between the individual and their environment. For example:

- "The environment is currently overwhelming" rather than "They cannot cope"
- "They may need more processing time" rather than "They are refusing to answer"
- "The demand may currently exceed their capacity" rather than "They are being oppositional"
- "The support needs to be adapted" rather than "They are not responding to intervention"

A formal diagnosis is not required before schools begin exploring needs, reducing barriers or making reasonable adjustments.

Shared understanding

Different people may use different terms to describe the same situation. The child or young person, parent/carers, school staff and professionals may also hold different initial explanations.

Rather than trying to establish one correct account immediately, adults should work towards a shared understanding that:

- Brings together information from home, school and involved professionals
- Distinguishes known information from hypotheses
- Remains open to change as new information emerges
- Leads to practical changes in support and the environment
- Keeps the child or young person's experience central

Language should help adults stay curious about what is happening and what may need to change.

The aim is not to find a label that explains everything, but to develop a shared understanding of the barriers affecting the child or young person's access to education.

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Understanding EBSA

and barriers to attendance

3. Understanding EBSA and barriers to attendance

Section summary:

- EBSA provides a lens for understanding difficulties accessing education where emotional distress plays a significant role
- EBSA exists on a spectrum, from early or less visible signs to prolonged or complete absence
- Children and young people may be physically present in school while experiencing significant barriers to participation and learning
- EBSA is shaped by the interaction of individual, family, school and wider contextual factors
- Neurodivergent children and young people may face increased barriers when environments, communication and expectations do not meet their needs
- Understanding what is contributing to and maintaining distress helps adults identify what needs to change

What is EBSA?

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) describes difficulties attending or accessing education where emotional distress plays a significant role.

EBSA is not a diagnosis and should not be understood as a deliberate choice or as a difficulty located solely within the child or young person. It is an umbrella term that can describe a wide range of experiences and patterns.

EBSA can also be used as a lens for understanding. It encourages adults to look beyond attendance figures or behaviour and consider:

- What the child or young person may be experiencing
- What is making education difficult to access

- What needs may not yet have been recognised or met
- What adults, environments and systems may need to change
- What is already helping the child or young person feel safer and more able to engage

EBSA exists on a spectrum, from early or less visible signs of distress to prolonged or complete absence from education.

What EBSA might look like

EBSA can present in many different ways. It may develop gradually or appear to emerge suddenly, particularly around key transitions, periods of change, or after experiences that have increased stress or reduced a child or young person's sense of safety.

Some children and young people may communicate distress directly through words. Others may communicate distress through behaviour, physical symptoms, withdrawal, shutdown, verbally/physically distressed behaviours or changes in routines. Some may mask or socially camouflage their distress in school, meaning that signs are more visible at home than in the school environment.

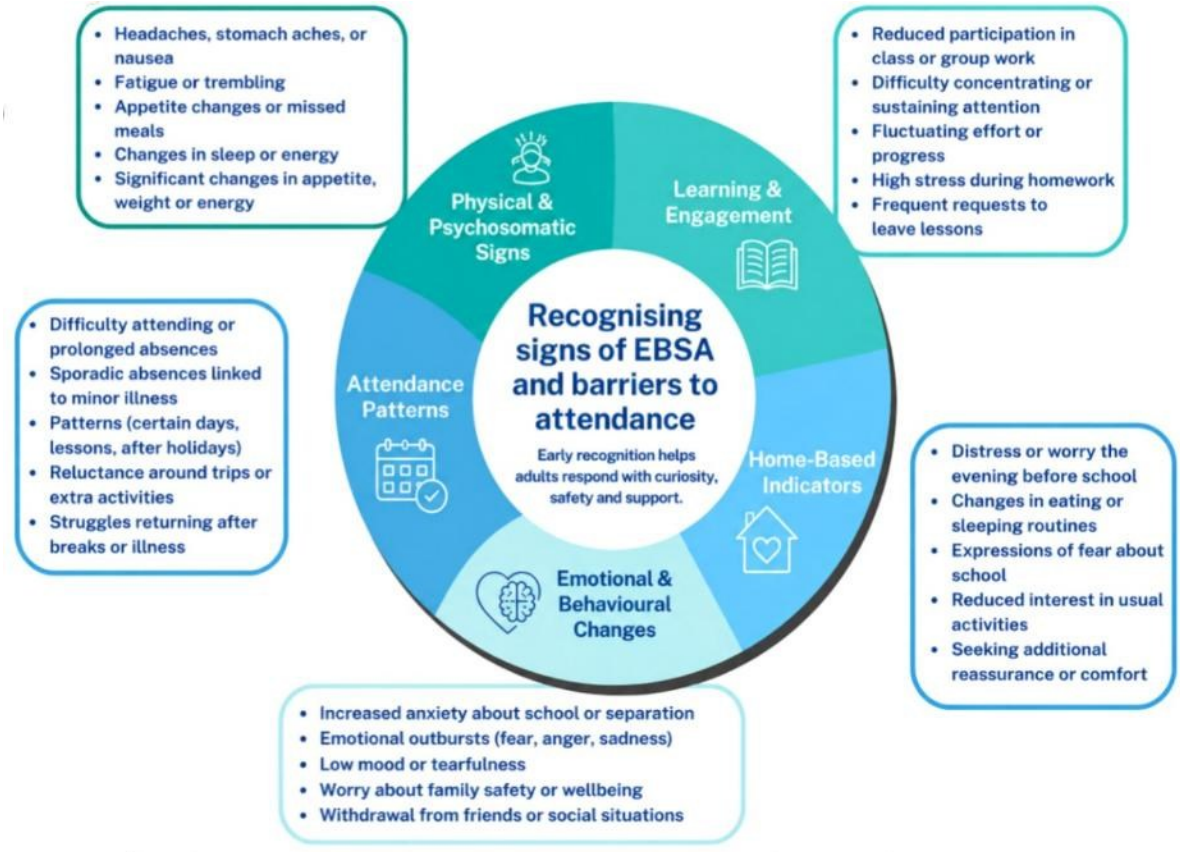


Figure 1: Recognising possible signs of EBSA and barriers to attendance. These signs should be understood in context and explored collaboratively with the child or young person, parent/carers and school staff.

The signs shown in Figure 1 are not exhaustive. A child or young person's presentation should always be understood in context. Differences between home and school presentation should be taken seriously and explored collaboratively with parent/carers. For example, a child may appear settled in school but experience significant distress before or after the school day. Others may attend consistently but be unable to engage fully in learning, social relationships or the wider life of the school.

Within-school EBSA

Attendance data does not always show whether a child or young person can access education meaningfully.

Some children and young people are physically present in school but experience significant barriers to:

- Entering or remaining in lessons
- Moving between classrooms
- Participating during structured or unstructured times
- Engaging with adults or peers
- Managing sensory environments
- Beginning, organising or completing tasks
- Recovering from the demands of the school day

These difficulties may be missed where recorded attendance remains high. Monitoring lesson access, participation, distress and recovery can therefore be as important as monitoring registration data.

Neurodivergence and EBSA

Neurodivergent children and young people have individual strengths, identities, communication preferences and support needs. Not every neurodivergent child or young person will experience EBSA, and experiences will vary.

Barriers may arise when there is a mismatch between the child or young person's needs and the environment, expectations or support around them. These may relate to:

- Sensory environments
- Communication and processing demands
- Uncertainty, change and transitions
- Executive functioning and task initiation
- Social expectations
- Limited opportunities for regulation and recovery
- The cumulative impact of demands
- Previous experiences of being misunderstood or unsupported

Some children and young people may mask distress in school and experience exhaustion, shutdown or emotional distress later. Differences between home and school presentation should therefore be taken seriously.

Adults should work with the child or young person and parent/carers to understand what supports safety, communication, participation and belonging, and what adjustments may reduce unnecessary barriers.

The aim is not to help the child or young person tolerate an environment that remains inaccessible. Communication, routines, expectations and environments should be adapted where needed.

A formal diagnosis is not required before needs are explored, SEN Support is considered or reasonable adjustments are made.

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How EBSA can develop;

risk and protective factors

4. How EBSA can develop, Risk and Protective Factors

Section summary:

- EBSA occurs when avoidance is used as a coping strategy to manage difficult emotions related to attending school
- EBSA occurs when risk factors (school, home and or/child factors) or 'push' factors exceed protective or 'pull' factors.
- EBSA is rarely explained by one event or difficulty. It is usually shaped by the interaction of factors across the child or young person, their family, school and wider context.

The anxiety and avoidance cycle

Avoiding or escaping a distressing lesson, space or school day may bring immediate relief. This response is understandable and may feel protective in the short term.

However, the relief that follows avoidance can sometimes teach the brain that the situation was dangerous and that avoidance was necessary. The situation may then feel even harder to approach in the future.

The cycle may involve:

- A school-related situation or demand is anticipated or encountered
- Anxiety, physical sensations and feelings of overwhelm increase
- The child or young person avoids, escapes or reduces contact with the situation
- Distress reduces in the short term
- Avoidance becomes associated with safety or relief
- Anxiety and uncertainty may increase the next time the situation is encountered



Figure 2: The anxiety and avoidance cycle

The anxiety cycle can help explain one part of how difficulties may become maintained. It should not be used as a complete explanation of EBSA or to locate responsibility within the child or young person.

Avoidance may continue because the original barriers remain present. For example, the environment may still feel unsafe, sensory or communication needs may remain unmet, or appropriate support may not yet have been implemented.

The purpose of support is therefore not simply to stop avoidance or encourage the child or young person to push through overwhelming distress. Adults should first understand and reduce the barriers that are making education feel unsafe, inaccessible or unmanageable.

Gradual reconnection is more likely to be sustainable when it is supported by:

- Appropriate reasonable adjustments
- Trusted and consistent relationships

- Reduced uncertainty and avoidable demands
- Opportunities for regulation and recovery
- Small and manageable steps
- Regular review of whether support is helping

What can maintain EBSA over time?

EBSA can become more entrenched when barriers are not identified early or when support does not match the child or young person's needs. Over time, the following factors may maintain or increase barriers to attendance:

- **Reduced sense of safety:** school continues to feel unpredictable, overwhelming or unsafe.
- **Missed learning:** the child or young person worries about falling behind or being exposed as not knowing.
- **Social disconnection:** friendships, peer relationships or trusted adult relationships weaken.
- **Increased shame or pressure:** the child or family feel blamed, judged or misunderstood.
- **Loss of routine:** sleep, eating, self-care and daily structure become disrupted.
- **Reduced confidence:** the child or young person has fewer opportunities to experience coping or success.
- **Comfort and regulation at home:** home may feel safer, calmer and more manageable than school.
- **Unmet needs remain unmet:** sensory, learning, communication, emotional or relational needs continue without effective adjustment.

These maintaining factors should not be used to blame children, young people or parent/carers. Instead, they help adults understand why returning to school can become harder over time and why early, relational and needs-led support is so important.

Understanding risk and protective factors

EBSA is rarely explained by one event or difficulty. It is usually shaped by the interaction of factors across the child or young person, their family, school and wider context.

Risk factors are circumstances that may increase pressure, reduce access to education or make distress more likely. **Protective factors** are strengths,

relationships, experiences and adjustments that can support safety, belonging, regulation and engagement.

Risk factors should not be treated as causes or used to predict that a child or young person will experience EBSA. Their impact will vary depending on the individual, the wider context and the protective factors available.

Factors may also change over time. For example:

- A transition may be manageable when it is carefully prepared but overwhelming when it is unexpected
- A trusted adult may reduce the impact of difficult peer relationships or uncertainty
- A child or young person's interests and strengths may provide an important route back into relationships and learning
- Poverty, discrimination, instability or limited access to services may increase barriers beyond the control of the child, family or school
- An environment that does not meet sensory, communication or learning needs may increase distress, while appropriate adjustments may improve access and belonging

Risk factors may include	Protective factors may include
• Unmet learning needs or unidentified SEN • Neurodivergence without appropriate environmental adaptations • Sensory overwhelm or difficulty managing the school environment • Bullying, peer conflict or social isolation • Academic pressure or fear of failure • Difficult relationships with adults in school • Transitions, changes in routine or uncertainty • Previous exclusion, isolation or punitive responses • Mental health needs, trauma, bereavement or significant stress • Health needs, pain, fatigue or sleep difficulties	• A trusted adult who knows the child or young person well • A strong sense of belonging and connection in school • Predictable routines and clear communication • Reasonable adjustments that reduce sensory, social or learning demands • Flexible, relational and restorative approaches • Parent/carers who feel listened to and included • Early identification and timely support • Opportunities for pupil voice and genuine choice • Strengths, interests and identity being recognised • Positive peer relationships

Risk factors may include	Protective factors may include
• Family stress, financial hardship, housing insecurity or caring responsibilities • Experiences of racism, discrimination, or cultural misunderstanding • Reduced trust between home and school • Limited access to timely support	• Safe spaces that are used proactively and not as exclusion • Coordinated support across school, family and service • Progress measured through wellbeing, engagement and access to learning, not attendance alone

Figure 3: Understanding risk and protective factors

The factors shown in Figure 3 are not exhaustive. Assessment should consider:

- Which pressures or barriers are currently having the greatest impact
- Which strengths, relationships and resources are already helping
- Whether factors are present across home, school or the wider community
- What adults, environments or systems can change
- What additional protective factors could be strengthened
- How the balance between risk and protection may have changed over time

Support should not focus only on reducing risk. Strengthening protective factors can help children and young people feel safer, more understood and increasingly able to engage with education.

Understanding the continuum of EBSA

The continuum is not a fixed pathway. Children and young people may move between different patterns as their needs, circumstances and support change. Difficulties may also look different across the school day, week or academic year.

Emerging difficulties	Within-school or increasing difficulties	Significantly reduced attendance	Prolonged or entrenched EBSA
Increased worry, physical symptoms or distress linked to school	Regular lateness, difficulty entering or increased reliance on support	Attendance for selected days, lessons or parts of the day	Prolonged or complete absence from education

Emerging difficulties	Within-school or increasing difficulties	Significantly reduced attendance	Prolonged or entrenched EBSA
Changes in sleep, routines, behaviour or emotional wellbeing	Avoidance of particular lessons, spaces, people or transitions	Significant distress before, during or after attempts to attend	Reduced connection with school, peers, learning and daily routines
Attendance may remain high despite increased effort or exhaustion	Time spent in corridors, support spaces or outside lessons	Increasing anxiety about returning, falling behind or being noticed	Contact with school or conversations about education may feel overwhelming
Early changes may be more visible at home than at school	Recorded attendance may not reflect meaningful access to learning	Recovery following attendance may require considerable time and energy	Reconnection may require a recovery-focused and coordinated approach

Children and young people do not need to reach a particular point on the continuum before support is offered. Early signs, within-school difficulties and the impact of attendance on wellbeing should all prompt curiosity, assessment and proportionate support.

The continuum describes how EBSA may present and change over time. The next section introduces the WARMTH principles that should shape support at every point on the continuum; the tiered model that follows describes the level and type of support that may be required.

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Guiding Principles: WARMTH

5. Guiding principles: WARMTH

Section summary:

- Barnet's approach to EBSA and barriers to attendance is underpinned by WARMTH principles
- WARMTH supports adults to respond in ways that are compassionate, inclusive, relational and needs-led
- These principles should inform support at every level: universal whole-school practice, targeted early intervention and enhanced support for entrenched EBSA

Within this guidance, WARMTH is used alongside a tiered model of support. The tiered model helps schools and professionals identify the level of support required. WARMTH describes how that support should feel and be delivered.

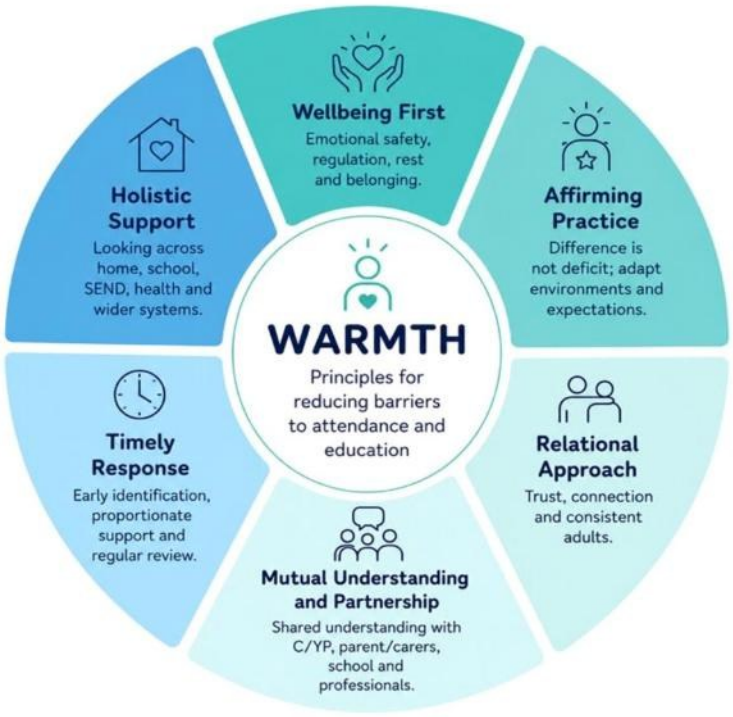


Figure 4: WARMTH principles underpinning Barnet's approach to EBSA and barriers to attendance.

The six WARMTH principles should be considered together. They are not separate interventions or a sequence to work through. Instead, they provide a shared foundation for understanding barriers, planning support and working alongside children, young people and parent/carers.

1. Wellbeing First

Children and young people are more able to access learning when they feel emotionally and physically safe. For those experiencing EBSA, wellbeing should not be treated as separate from attendance; it is central to it.

A Wellbeing First approach means considering the child or young person's emotional safety, regulation, mental health, rest, sensory needs and sense of belonging before increasing demands. For some children and young people, particularly those experiencing entrenched EBSA or burnout, recovery and reconnection may need to come before attendance-focused planning.

In practice, this means asking:

- What helps this child or young person feel safe, calm and connected?
- What demands are currently exceeding their capacity?
- How can we reduce distress while maintaining connection with school?
- How will we know that wellbeing is improving?

2. Affirming Practice

Affirming practice recognises that children and young people experience, communicate and learn in different ways. Difference should not be understood as deficit. Support should be grounded in the child or young person's needs, strengths, identity and preferences, with environments and expectations adapted where needed.

This is particularly important for neurodivergent children and young people, those with SEN, and those whose experiences are shaped by culture, language, race, gender, sexuality, disability, poverty or other aspects of identity and context.

Affirming practice also requires awareness of emotional culturality. There is no single universal way to express, understand or respond to distress. Adults should remain curious about the language, beliefs and meanings held by the child or young person and their family, rather than interpreting differences as avoidance, denial or unwillingness to engage.

In practice, this means asking:

- What are this child or young person's strengths, interests and preferred ways of communicating?
- What adjustments are needed in the environment, relationships, routines or curriculum?
- Are we expecting the child or young person to mask, cope or conform in ways that are not sustainable?

- How can we support belonging without asking the child or young person to change who they are?
- How might culture, faith, language, identity or previous experiences of education influence how this child or family understands and communicates distress?

3. Relational Approach

Relationships are central to supporting EBSA and barriers to attendance. A trusted adult can help a child or young person feel seen, safe and understood. A Relational Approach is often the foundation that makes support possible. For many children and young people experiencing EBSA, school may have become associated with fear, shame, pressure, failure or disconnection. Rebuilding trust takes time, consistency and curiosity.

In practice, this means asking:

- Who does this child or young person feel safest with?
- How are trusted relationships being maintained during absence or reduced attendance?
- How are adults communicating warmth, curiosity and belief in the child or young person?
- Are responses to distress helping to build trust, or increasing shame and pressure?

4. Mutual Understanding and Partnership

EBSA support is most effective when children, young people, parent/carers, schools and professionals work together to develop a shared understanding. Parent/carers often hold important knowledge about early signs, triggers, strengths and what support feels manageable at home. Children and young people should be meaningfully involved in decisions that affect them, in ways that feel safe and accessible.

A partnership approach avoids blame and recognises that everyone involved may be under pressure. The aim is to move from separate interpretations of the problem towards a shared formulation and coordinated plan.

In practice, this means asking:

- What does the child or young person think is getting in the way?
- What have parent/carers noticed at home?
- What has school noticed across different times, spaces and relationships?
- Do all adults have a shared understanding of the barriers and next steps?
- Are messages to the family consistent, compassionate and clear?

5. Timely Response

Early identification and timely support can prevent barriers to attendance becoming more entrenched. Small signs of distress should be taken seriously, particularly where there are patterns in absence, changes in behaviour, physical symptoms, reduced engagement, or differences between home and school presentation. A timely response does not mean rushing a child or young person back before they are ready. It means responding early, thoughtfully and proportionately, before difficulties escalate.

In practice, this means asking:

- What are the early indicators that this child or young person is struggling?
- Who will notice and respond when patterns begin to emerge?
- What can be adjusted now to reduce barriers?
- How quickly can we bring together the right people to plan support?
- Are reviews happening often enough to adapt support when needed?

6. Holistic Support

Barriers to attendance are rarely caused by one factor alone. Support should consider the interaction between the child or young person, school, home, peers, community, health, SEN, culture and wider systems.

A holistic approach avoids narrow explanations and asks what needs to change across the child or young person's environment. This may include adjustments to learning, sensory demands, relationships, routines, communication, family support, transport, health needs, community connection or access to specialist services.

In practice, this means asking:

- What barriers are present across home, school and wider systems?
- Are we considering learning, sensory, emotional, relational, health and family factors?
- What support is already working and how can this be strengthened?
- Who else needs to be involved?
- Are we measuring progress through wellbeing, belonging, engagement and access to education, not attendance alone?

WARMTH reminds us that effective EBSA support is not only about what adults do, but how they do it. Support should help children and young people feel safe, understood, affirmed and connected. When wellbeing, relationships and belonging are prioritised, attendance can become an outcome of support rather than the starting demand.

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Components of effective Whole School Systems

6. Components of effective whole school systems for supporting EBSA

Section summary:

- Whole school systems which prioritise staff wellbeing, parent/carer partnership, gaining children/young people's views, Continued Professional Development (CPD), effective SEMH curriculum and timely provision support EBSA.
- Auditing school systems are effective for supporting EBSA at whole school levels.
- Attachment aware relational and emotional regulation policies are more effective for children and young people experiencing EBSA than traditional behaviourist reward/sanction approaches.

It is recommended that when considering how the school ethos, curriculum, provision and environment supports children and young people experiencing EBSA, the school Senior Leadership Team/EBSA leads consider using an **EBSA audit (Appendix 5).** This will enable reflection on strengths and areas of development within the current school system and inform next steps.

Key components in school systems for supporting EBSA

- Committed and inclusive senior leadership team.
- All staff working within school are valued.
- Continued Professional Development (CPD) opportunities for all staff in the area of SEMH (including EBSA).
- Importance of pupil voice recognised.
- Effective partnership working with parents/carers and external agencies
- Clear policies on attendance, behaviour, bullying and transition.

- Curriculum includes teaching of resilience, emotional expression and regulation.
- Presence of a Restorative Ethos in school.
- Curriculum appropriately differentiated for individual needs.
- Clear roles and responsibilities for the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) and emotional wellbeing leads.
- A member of SLT responsible for over-seeing arrangements for ESBA.
- A core group of staff who have knowledge and experience supporting pupils experiencing EBSA.
- Clear systems in place for early identification of EBSA.
- Provision of interventions within a graduated response-assess, plan, do & review.
- Timely referral for initiating assessment when signs of EBSA first become detected.[5]

As part of an audit of whole staff provision to support students experiencing EBSA, it is helpful to review school policies. It is good practice in schools to develop an 'EBSA policy' which outlines roles of staff responsibilities, ethos, process of Assess, Plan, Do, Review (APDR), available reasonable adjustments for children and young people experiencing EBSA and professional services who could support.

Behaviour policies

When considering whole school systems, it is also helpful to review existing behaviour policies. It is known from research that while behaviourist approaches i.e. where rewards are given for positive behaviours and sanctions are given for

[5] Bowlby (1988) described how a **secure base** is provided through a relationship with one of more sensitive and responsive attachment figures who meet the C/YPs needs and to whom the C/YP can turn as a safe haven, when upset or anxious. The concept of a secure base is essential to our understanding of relationship formation and child development. It links attachment and exploration and provides the base of a secure attachment. We all need a secure base in life. School is an important secure base for all children and young people, but for some, it may be the only secure base that they have experienced and therefore is vital.[5]

Bowlby, J (1988) A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development.

breaches of the school behaviour policy can work for some children and young people, they are not successful with all.

This is especially true for children and young people experiencing EBSA or those who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). For children and young people who experience high levels of anxiety in the school environment or those who have experienced trauma and loss, behaviourist approaches could lead to increasing anxiety and the breakdown of important relationships in school.

Research has shown that adopting an attachment-aware, **relational behaviour** policy can be more effective for supporting children and young people's emotional regulation and managing behaviour in the school environment. School staff and professionals can refer to the Brighton and Hove (2018) guidance on 'Developing an Attachment Aware Behaviour Regulation Policy' to consider adaptations to existing behaviour policies. Developing an Attachment Aware Behaviour Regulation Policy.pdf (brighton-hove.gov.uk) Professional services including the Inclusion Advisory Team (IAT) and the Educational Psychology Team in BELS can also support Senior Leaders with reviewing and adapting school behaviour processes if requested.

It is also important to note that supporting emotional regulation strategies does not just need to be within targeted intervention sessions with the child/young person but can be embedded in the school environment throughout the school day.

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A tiered approach to EBSA

and barriers to attendance

7. A tiered approach to EBSA and barriers to attendance

Section summary:

- Support for EBSA and barriers to attendance should be organised through a graduated, tiered approach
- Universal support promotes belonging, wellbeing and inclusion for all children and young people
- Targeted support responds early when barriers begin to emerge
- Enhanced support is increasingly individualised and coordinated and may require multi-agency involvement
- Children and young people's perspectives should inform understanding, planning and review at every tier
- The WARMTH principles should underpin support across all tiers

A tiered approach helps schools and services respond proportionately to the needs of children and young people. It supports early identification, reduces the risk of barriers becoming more entrenched and helps ensure that support is timely, proportionate, and coordinated.

The tiers should not be understood as rigid stages or thresholds that a child or young person must move through before receiving support. Support may be needed across more than one tier at the same time, and plans should be adapted as needs and circumstances change.

The tiered model describes the level and type of support required. The WARMTH principles describe how that support should feel and be delivered.

The tiered model broadly aligns with the direction of national inclusion and SEND reform, which emphasises stronger universal provision alongside increasingly personalised support. The tiers in this guidance are specific to EBSA and barriers to attendance and do not represent SEND eligibility thresholds.

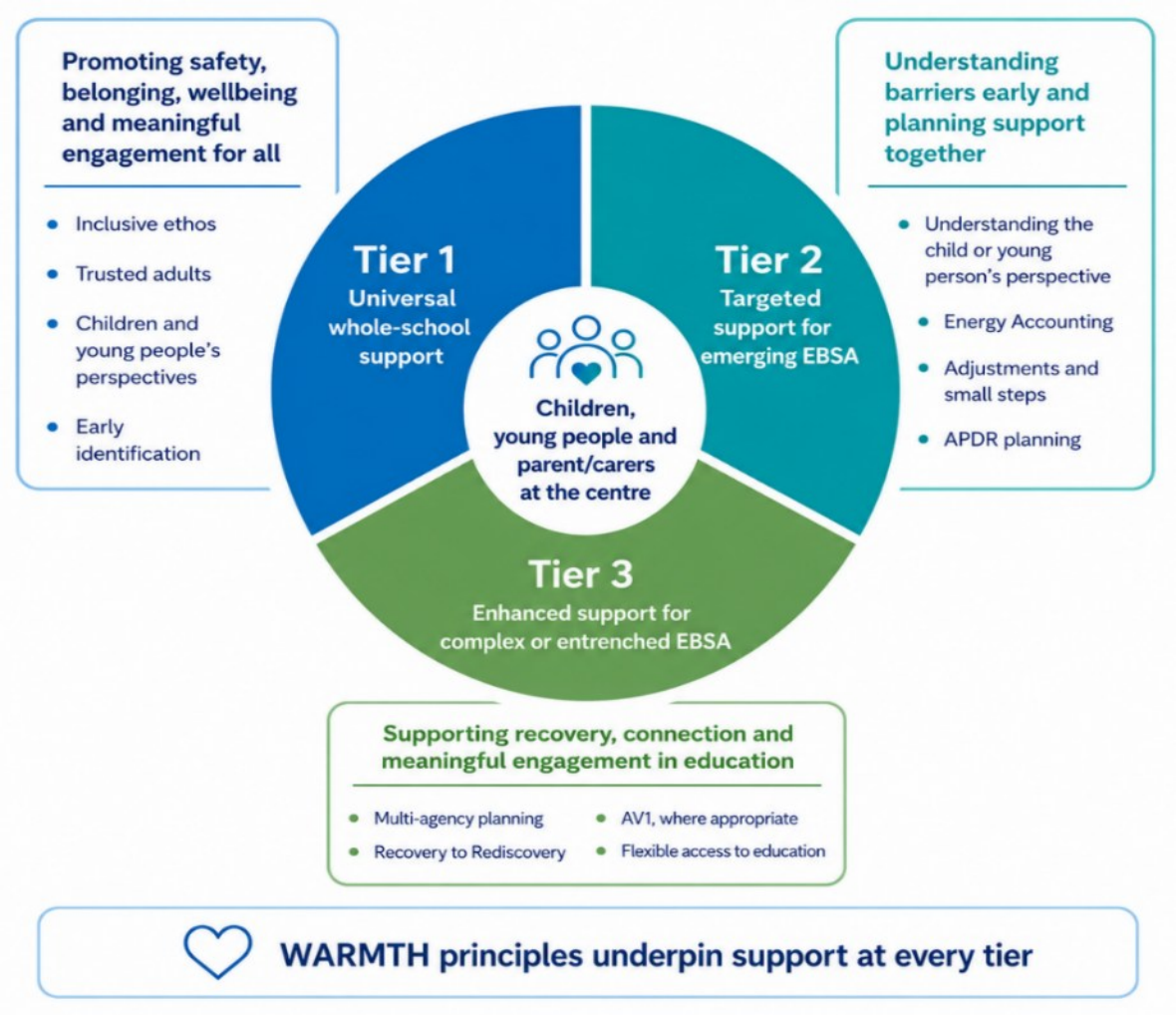


Figure 5: A tiered approach to supporting EBSA and barriers to attendance

Understanding the child or young person's perspective across all tiers

The child or young person's perspective should inform support at every tier. However, being asked to explain difficult experiences may itself feel demanding, particularly during periods of distress.

Adults should:

- Offer choices about how, when and with whom the child or young person communicates
- Use low-pressure methods such as writing, drawing, observation, visual tools or communication through a trusted adult
- Allow additional processing time and opportunities to respond later
- Avoid repeated direct questioning or requiring the child or young person to retell their experiences

- Recognise that silence, uncertainty or limited participation do not mean that the child or young person has no perspective
- Notice behaviour, patterns and changes in engagement as possible forms of communication
- Check that their understanding is accurate rather than making assumptions
- Show how the child or young person's perspective has influenced the support offered

Where the child or young person is not yet able to communicate their views directly, adults should develop a provisional understanding using observations and information from people who know them well. This should remain open to review as trust develops and further information becomes available.

The aim is not simply to collect pupil voice, but to enable the child or young person to influence what happens in ways that feel safe, accessible and manageable.

Tier 1: Universal whole-school support

Purpose

To create inclusive, predictable and relational environments that promote safety, belonging and meaningful participation, while identifying emerging barriers early

Support may include

- A whole-school ethos that is relational, inclusive, neuroaffirming and culturally responsive
- Accessible teaching, communication and reasonable adjustments that anticipate a range of needs
- Consistent opportunities to build trusted relationships with adults
- Predictable routines and proactive support for everyday transitions, including arrival, movement between lessons, unstructured times and unexpected changes
- Environments that consider sensory needs and provide opportunities for regulation and recovery
- Flexible and restorative responses to behaviour that explore what may be communicated
- Universal support for emotional literacy, wellbeing and help-seeking
- Active approaches to belonging, peer relationships, bullying and discrimination

- Partnership with children, young people and parent(s)/carer(s) when developing policies and support
- Systems for noticing changes in attendance, lesson access, engagement, wellbeing and behaviour
- Regular review of behaviour, removal, suspension and exclusion data to identify patterns, disproportionality and unmet need
- Staff development that builds a shared understanding of EBSA and barriers to education
- Early reflection where a child or young person begins to show signs of distress, even where attendance remains high

Universal support should reduce avoidable barriers for all children and young people rather than waiting for difficulties to become established. It provides the foundation on which targeted and enhanced support can build.

Tier 2: Targeted support for emerging EBSA

Purpose

To respond early with personalised support where barriers are beginning to affect wellbeing, attendance, lesson access or engagement

Support may include

- A named adult responsible for coordinating communication and support
- A shared assessment bringing together the child or young person's perspective, parent/carer information and school observations
- Exploration of learning, sensory, communication, relational, emotional, health and environmental needs
- A written support plan with a small number of clear priorities, responsibilities and review dates
- Personalised reasonable adjustments to routines, communication, environments, expectations or lesson access
- Predictable check-ins and access to a trusted adult or regulated space
- Support for particular lessons, transitions, social times or parts of the school day
- Personalised preparation for transitions that regularly increase uncertainty, sensory demands or emotional pressure

- Low-pressure and accessible ways for the child or young person to communicate their experiences
- Use of Energy Accounting or similar tools to understand demands, capacity, recovery and what supports regulation
- Gradual and manageable steps towards increased access, developed with the child or young person
- Consistent communication between home and school, including shared language where helpful
- Early involvement from SEND, pastoral, attendance, health or other relevant professionals
- Monitoring of wellbeing, belonging, engagement and access to learning alongside attendance
- Regular review of what is helping, what is increasing pressure and whether a different level of support is required

Targeted support should address the barriers identified rather than focus only on increasing attendance. Support should be implemented consistently and reviewed before assuming that the child, young person or parent/carers are not engaging.

Tier 3: Enhanced support for long term or entrenched EBSA

Purpose

To support emotional recovery, safety, connection and meaningful access to education where barriers have become persistent, complex or entrenched

Support may include

- A coordinated plan with clearly agreed roles across school, family and involved services
- A named adult or professional responsible for coordinating communication and support
- The Moving from Recovery to Rediscovery model (Holder, 2024) as the central framework for planning in Barnet
- Low-pressure and accessible ways of maintaining the child or young person's perspective within planning
- Temporary adaptation of demands, routines and expectations where these are contributing to distress, overload or burnout

- Safe, predictable and manageable connection with trusted adults, peers, learning and the wider school community
- Support for parent(s)/carer(s) and consideration of the impact on the wider family
- Flexible access to suitable education while full-time attendance is not currently manageable
- Specialist or therapeutic input where this addresses an identified need and is coordinated with educational support
- Opportunities for learning and connection that build on the child or young person's strengths, interests and preferred ways of participating
- Planning developed with the child or young person and responsive to their communication, preferences and readiness
- Regular review of emotional safety, wellbeing, belonging, access to education and attendance
- Careful preparation for reintegration, transition or the next phase of education

Movement between tiers

Children and young people may move between levels of support over time. Progress is rarely linear, and an increase in distress should prompt review rather than blame.

Schools and professionals should consider:

- Are the barriers and the child or young person's perspective sufficiently understood?
- Has the agreed support been implemented consistently?
- What is helping and what is increasing pressure?
- Is a different level or type of support required?
- Are progress and wellbeing being considered alongside attendance?
- Does support need to involve additional professionals or services?

The aim is not to move children and young people through a fixed sequence of interventions. It is to ensure that the right support is offered at the right time, at the right level and in a way that remains relational, affirming and responsive.

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Working together
with children, young people and parents/carers

8. Working together with children, young people and parent/carers

Section summary:

- Children, young people, parent(s)/carer(s) and school staff may each hold different parts of the picture
- Support should be based on a shared understanding rather than one fixed explanation
- Communication should be clear, predictable and coordinated
- Difficulties engaging should prompt curiosity and adaptation
- Contact during absence should maintain safety, trust and connection

Building a shared understanding

Children, young people, parent(s)/carer(s) and school staff may observe different parts of the child or young person's experience.

A child or young person may appear settled in school but experience significant anxiety, exhaustion or distress at home. Parent(s)/carer(s) may notice changes in sleep, routines or emotional regulation, while school staff may identify patterns linked to particular lessons, environments, relationships or transitions.

These perspectives are not necessarily contradictory. Bringing them together can support a fuller understanding of the barriers affecting access to education.

Differences may also reflect emotional culturality. School staff and parent(s)/carer(s) may have different understandings of anxiety, emotional expression, adult authority, educational expectations or when professional support should be sought. These differences should be explored respectfully rather than understood as evidence that one perspective is less valid.

Schools, families and professionals should consider:

- What the child or young person has communicated directly or indirectly?
- What language does the child or family use to describe what is happening?

- Are there cultural, faith, family or community perspectives that adults need to understand?
- What previous experiences may affect trust in school or professional services?
- What patterns are emerging across home and school?
- When and where they appear safest or most distressed?
- Which demands, environments or uncertainties increase pressure?
- What is already helping?
- What adults, environments or systems may need to change?
- What would represent a small but meaningful next step?

The purpose is not to decide whose account is correct. It is to develop a shared understanding that informs support and remains open to review.

Communication and shared planning

Clear and predictable communication can reduce uncertainty and prevent children, young people and parent(s)/carer(s) from having to repeat information.

Schools should agree:

- A named point of contact
- The preferred method and frequency of communication
- How the child or young person would like to contribute
- Who will coordinate information from involved professionals
- What actions have been agreed and who is responsible
- When the plan will be reviewed
- Who should be contacted if circumstances change

Meetings should focus on developing shared understanding and agreeing manageable actions rather than only reviewing attendance figures.

A brief written summary should be shared after the meeting so that everyone understands:

- What has been agreed
- What will happen next
- Who is responsible for each action

- How progress will be understood
- When the plan will be reviewed

A practical structure for planning and review meetings is provided in **Appendices 3B and 3C**.

Creating a shared script

Agreeing shared language can help children, young people and parent(s)/carer(s) receive calm and consistent messages from different members of staff.

Shared scripts may be particularly helpful during arrival, telephone calls, difficult transitions, plan reviews and conversations following absence.

Scripts should be flexible and personalised rather than used as fixed responses.

Examples include:

"We can see that today feels difficult. Let's think together about what might make it more manageable."

"You do not need to explain everything right now. We can find another way or another time to understand what is happening."

"Our aim is to understand what is getting in the way and what we can change or adapt."

"We will keep the plan under review and change it if it is increasing pressure or not helping."

Agreeing a small number of shared phrases can reduce conflicting messages and support a consistent school response.

When Engagement is Difficult

Children, young people or parent(s)/carer(s) may find communication, meetings or offers of support difficult to manage. This should prompt curiosity about possible barriers before being interpreted as unwillingness to engage.

Barriers may include:

- Work or caring responsibilities
- Language, literacy or communication needs
- Disability or additional support needs
- Limited access to technology or transport
- Uncertainty about the purpose of contact
- Previous experiences of education or professional services

- Worry about blame or possible consequences
- Communication that feels frequent, formal or overwhelming
- A breakdown in trust

Schools should consider adapting the timing, frequency, format or person making contact, using interpretation or accessible information where needed, and involving a trusted professional where appropriate.

Where engagement remains limited, schools should continue to act in the child or young person's best interests, record support offered and seek advice from relevant services.

Maintaining relational contact during absence

Children and young people experiencing prolonged absence remain members of their school community.

The support plan should identify:

- A named adult responsible for maintaining contact
- How the child or young person prefers to communicate
- How often contact will be offered
- How contact and attempted contact will be recorded
- When arrangements will be reviewed

This guidance recommends that direct contact is usually offered at least weekly during term time.

Contact should be low pressure and relational. Its purpose is to maintain safety, trust and connection rather than repeatedly asking the child or young person to explain their absence or commit to returning.

Contact arrangements should sit alongside the school's safeguarding procedures. See **Safeguarding during EBSA-related absence** for guidance on responding where welfare cannot be established or concerns increase.

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Supporting Early Intervention

9. Supporting early intervention for EBSA: Assess, Plan, Do and Review (APDR)

Section summary:

- Assessment of risk ('push') and protective ('push') factors for EBSA is essential prior to provision planning, including gaining the views of children/young people, parents/carers and school staff.
- Although it can be tempting to identify simple solutions for EBSA, EBSA is often due to an interaction of factors and requires careful analysis and planning.
- Bespoke and carefully planned intervention is essential for supporting successful outcomes.
- EBSA support plans require regular review.

It is important to note, that APDR processes outlined below are drawn on research which has explored early intervention and support increasing attendance/a return to school at the earliest opportunity.

Although there is no universally acknowledged definition of early intervention for EBSA, it is our view in Barnet that an early intervention process is appropriate for children and young people who have recently started to experience EBSA, when their attendance to school may have started to be impacted and where attending school is not having a significant, detrimental impact on their mental health.

For children and young people who experience long term/entrenched EBSA, we would recommend reviewing the Dr Jerricah Holder's 2024 model for long term/entrenched EBSA (Moving from Recovery to Rediscovery) after this section.

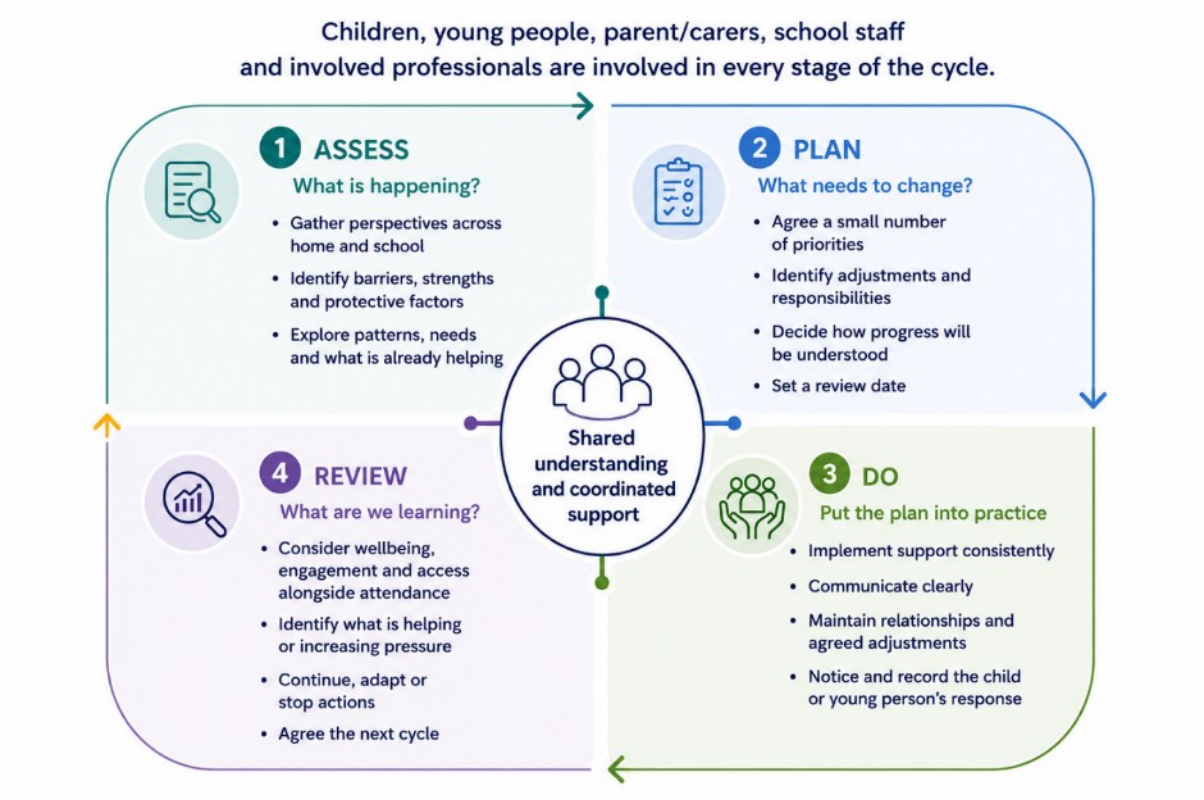


Figure 6: Assess, Plan, Do, Review Cycle

Assess

In cases where children and young people are experiencing EBSA, it is important that a key member of staff in school, who are part of a core group of staff experienced in supporting EBSA, holds the case and works through the stages of APDR in collaboration with other members of school staff, parent(s)/carer(s), children/young people and other professionals who might be involved.

- Thambirajah et al. (2008) state the main aims of assessment are to:
- Confirm that the child/young person is displaying Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) as opposed to another reason for school absence for example, medical absence, difficulties with travelling to school, supporting family with caring/employment activities etc.
- To assess the extent and severity of a) school absence b) anxiety
- To gather information regarding the various school, home and C/YP factors that may be contributing to the EBSA
- To integrate the available information to arrive at a practical working hypothesis as a prelude to planning effective interventions.

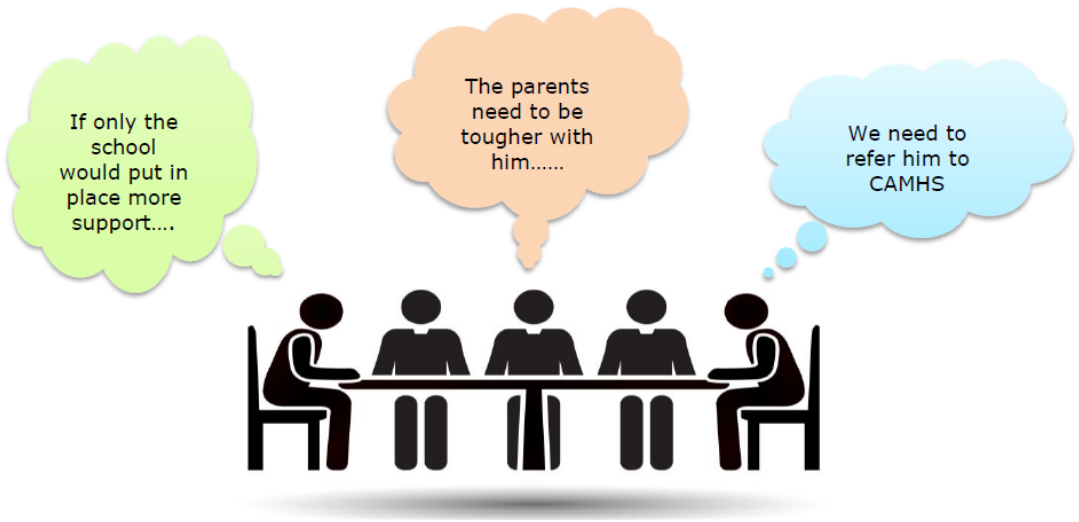


Figure 7: EBSA- the importance of collaboration

Discussing EBSA can be a highly emotive topic for children, young people, families, school staff and professionals. It is often tempting to try and locate a simple reason and solution for EBSA. However, EBSA is often due to an interaction of factors and trying to find simple causation and solutions can encourage blaming which can increase anxiety.

Parents/carers may feel blamed for absences, feel their parenting is being criticised, fear getting into trouble or even being prosecuted. Children and young people may feel guilty or scared they will be forced to attend school.

School staff or professionals may feel blamed for 'not doing enough' to support the child/young person in the school environment. Although concerns can be valid, it is important that key staff, families and children/young people work together respectfully and collaboratively to support the best possible outcomes for the child/young person experiencing EBSA.

Gaining the views of children/young people

Prior to creating a jointly agreed EBSA Support Plan, it is important to gain the child/young person's views about a) the level of anxiety they are experiencing and b) their views about the reasons for their anxiety (if they are able to express this). It is important to consider age, language level and emotional literacy when choosing tools to gain their views. It is also important to consider the context and relationship dynamics which the child/young person is experiencing to support their feelings of safety and connection within these discussions. Please refer to **Appendix 2: Tools for Gathering the Child or Young Person's Perspective** for a range of tools which can be used. **Appendix 2** also contains guidance regarding gaining views of children and young people who experience complex communication needs.

If the child/young person is able to express their views verbally and directly, the following points could be helpful to facilitate this conversation:

- Acknowledge that it might be difficult to talk about, but you would like to know what they think and feel
- Empathise with the child/young person's emotional experience
- Some examples of activities or questions could include: "think about your thoughts and feelings about school, what would these look like if they could be drawn?" "what name would you give the feeling you experience when you think about school?" "if it was a thing what would it look like? What would it say" "How does the...get in the way of you attending school? When is...in charge and when are you in charge?" Ask them to draw how their body feels when they are worried.

Gaining the views of parents/carers

In addition to gaining the views of the child/young person, it is essential that prior to creating an EBSA support plan, a key adult in school takes time to gain the views of parent(s)/carer(s) of the child/young person experiencing EBSA. It is widely acknowledged in research literature, that anxiety can present differently in different contexts. It is also widely acknowledged that some children/young people communicate anxiety in the home environment, where they feel comfortable to express their emotions, but mask their anxiety in the school environment. Parents/carers will have valuable information regarding developmental and educational history, how EBSA presents in the home/community context, risk/protective, triggers for EBSA and strategies which the C/YP benefits from or has benefitted from previously.

Areas to cover	Example questions
Developmental and educational history	What was the C/YP like as a young child? Can you tell me about their early experiences at school? The primary school, at the start of secondary school?
Strengths, interests and aspirations	What are they good at? What do they like doing? Do they have hopes for the future? Do they know what they want their life to be like when they are an adult?

Any potential changes or losses within the family or C/YPs life?	Can you tell me about your family? Who is in it, who is like whom, who is the C/YP closest to? Have there been any changes within the family recently or any significant events that happened in their lives? (You could ask them to draw a family tree/genogram)
Relationships	Do they talk about any other children? What do they say? Do they talk about any adults within school? What do they say? Who do they get on with? Who do they not get on with?
Academic progress	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 the school should ask if they have any concerns or if the child has spoken about difficulties with learning.
The C/YPs view- their specific fears/worries	Have they spoken to you about what they find difficult about school? What do they say?
The C/YPs views- what is going well in school	Have they mentioned anything that is going well in school- (for example, teachers, lessons, friends)
Behaviour and symptoms of anxiety	When the C/YP feels worried what does it look like? What do they say?
Typical day- when they go to school and when they don't go to school	Please describe a typical day when the C/YP gets up to when they go to bed...and when they don't go to school?
Impact on various members of the family	How does their non-attendance impact on you? And on other members of the family? How do you cope with the situation?
Parent/carer view on the reasons for the EBSA	Why do you think the C/YP has difficulty attending school?
Exceptions to the problem	Have there been times when they managed to attend school? Why do you think that was?
Previous attempts to address EBSA	What has been the most helpful thing that someone has done to manage the EBSA so far? What has helped in the past when things have been difficult? What strategies have been the most helpful so far in managing their anxiety?

Gaining the views of staff

It is essential that the allocated key person in school seeks information from members of staff who work most closely with the child/young person. Each member of staff may have valuable information to help identify triggers for anxiety and strategies they respond positively to. In particular it is important to seek out the views of any members of staff the child/young person speaks positively about and any member of staff where relationships may be more difficult.

Area to address	Example questions
The C/YPs strengths	What is their favourite subject? What do they enjoy the most about school? What are their interests?
What is going well	What strategies do you think have been most helpful so far? Who has made a positive difference?
School views about EBSA	What do you think are the reasons that the C/YP feels anxious at school? Have you noticed any patterns of attendance/non-attendance?
Relationships with staff	What is your relationship with the C/YP like? What staff members do they get on with best? Have you noticed any difficult relationships with staff members? What do you think is important to the C/YP when interacting with adults?
Relationship with peers	Who is the C/YP friends with? What are their friendships like? How do they interact with other students? Have they experienced any friendship difficulties or bullying in school?
Academic progress and response to learning	How is the C/YP currently engaging in learning? Which areas are they currently making progress in and which are they finding challenging? Has there been any recent changes in their progress/attainment? What strategies do they find helpful to support learning?
Emotional wellbeing	How does the C/YP communicate emotional dysregulation in school? What times are they commonly dysregulated? What support do they respond well to in the context of emotional expression, wellbeing?

Exploring further support	In your view, what components would be helpful to incorporate into the C/YP's support plan?

Plan

Following the assessment process, it is important that the key adult, with key staff members, parent(s)/carer(s), the child/young person and any key professionals in their network jointly identify key pull (risk factors) and push (protective factors) to inform action planning.

Pull away from attending school (risk factors)		
Are there school factors that currently pull the C/YP away from attending school?	Are there family factors that currently pull the C/YP away from attending school?	Are there pupil factors that currently pull the C/YP away from attending school

What might we be able to do to reduce or remove the identified pull factors?

Push towards attending school (protective factors)		
Are there school factors that push the C/YP towards attending school more often?	Are there family factors that push the C/YP towards attending school more often?	Are there pupil factors that push the pupil towards attending school more often?

What might we be able to do to stabilise, increase, strengthen or extend the identified push factors?

Formulation and integration of various factors

- What are people's understanding of why the child/young person is experiencing EBSA?
- Are there any differences of views?
- What risk factors have been identified? (school, home, child factors)
- What strengths have been identified that can be built upon?
- What contexts contribute to anxiety and avoidance being used as a coping strategy? Is avoidance used:
    - To avoid situations or aspects of the physical environment that elicit high levels of anxiety?
    - To avoid difficult social situations?
    - To spend more time with significant others?

As previously mentioned, although it can be tempting to look for one reason/aspect of the school environment which has triggered EBSA, EBSA is usually related to a combination of interrelated factors.

DO (Next Steps/Plan)

After the assessment and analysis process an EBSA Support Plan should be made (please refer to **Appendix 3 for example EBSA Support Plan Templates and Appendix 4 for worked examples.)** An EBSA Support Plan should be held by a key adult in school but should be co-produced with the child/young person, parent(s)/carer(s) and any other key staff/appropriate professional agencies who are involved.

As each child/young person experiencing EBSA has different protective and risk factors, each EBSA plan will be different based on the assessment. What works for one child/young person will not necessarily work for another.

The plan should be realistic and achievable. If a child/young person's attendance is low, increases should be gradual. A part-time timetable may be necessary as part of the process but should be temporary and regularly reviewed. For further guidance regarding part-time timetables, please refer to the Attendance and Statutory Responsibilities section of this guidance.

At the start of the plan a child/young person is likely to feel more distress and all should be aware of this due to the use of avoidance as a coping strategy to manage feelings of anxiety. The plan should aim to reduce the 'pull factors' away from school and increase the 'push factors' towards school, with provision of reasonable adjustments within the child/young person's environment and while

supporting them to use alternative, healthy coping strategies to manage feelings of anxiety. An individual and flexible approach based on identified needs and contexts which trigger anxiety is necessary.

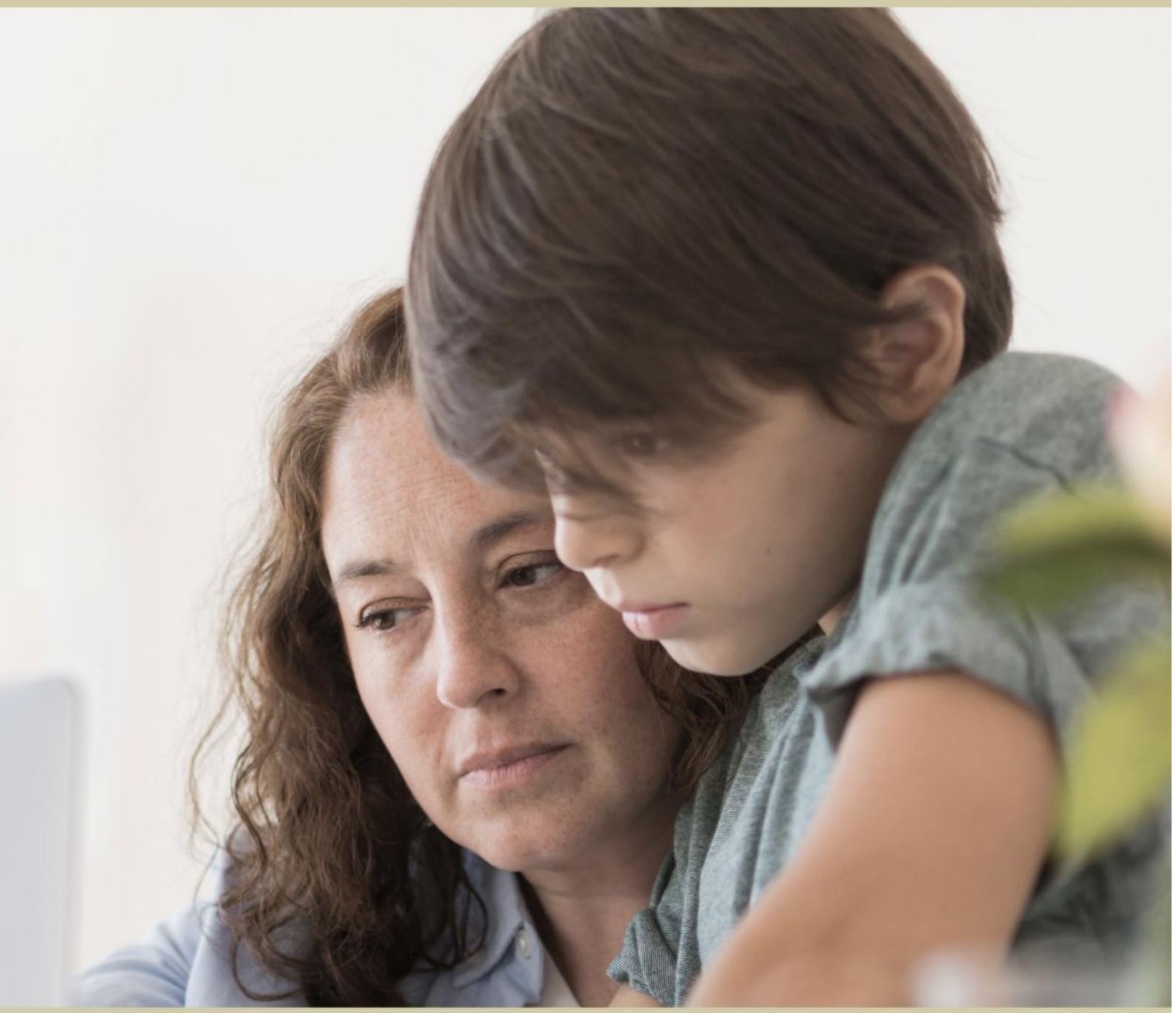
Optimism is important- if a child/young person does not attend school one day start the plan again the next day. Once actions are agreed, stick to the plan and what has been agreed for that week. Even if things seem to be going well, pushing things further can increase anxiety and reduce trust.

Key elements of any EBSA Support Plan

- Direct telephone contact between parent(s)/carer(s) and key adults in school. Agree expectations regarding frequency of contact and set realistic response times.
- Early home visits if appropriate to develop relational trust and gain views.
- All parties to agree to actions and keep to them until the next review period
- A personalised programme for each child/young person
- Ensuring the child/young person has access to an identified member of staff who can be approached if anxiety becomes temporarily overwhelming in school (i.e. a key adult),
- Ensuring all staff (including temporary/seasonal staff) are informed about the child/young person's needs, particularly during changes of classes/key stages
- Identifying a safe place or base in school that the child/young person can go to if needed

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Provision

10. Provision

Intervention and strategies

Although each child/young person experiencing EBSA is different, what they have in common is that they use avoidance as a coping strategy to manage difficult emotions.

It is important to tailor the intervention plan to the areas which the child/young person is trying to avoid, to reduce the 'pull factors' away from school and to increase the 'push factors' towards attending school.

It is possible that the child/young person is using avoidance for one or more of the functions outlined below and a bespoke intervention plan should therefore target areas identified through assessment/formulation.

The child/young person is using avoidance as a coping strategy to avoid situations that elicit negative feelings or high levels of stress

If a C/YP is experiencing EBSA to avoid situations that elicit anxiety, it should be considered how a C/YP can be supported to manage these situations, in a way which supports them to experience success, while utilising strategies and resources to support them to feel more emotionally regulated while doing so. This can be achieved through the use of an avoidance hierarchy or through the ladder of strength and courage below. It is important that each step is planned gradually with the C/YP and that they are supported through each step, through supporting them to utilise coping strategies for example, deep breathing, grounding, positive self talk, relaxation and/or visualisation and that they are encouraged to utilise resources in their environment to support their emotional regulation for example, seeking support from a key adult/buddy, using time out card if required or accessing safe base if required. Examples of emotional regulation strategies have been included in the appendix section of this guidance.

At this stage, it is also important to consider aspects of the C/YPs sensory environment which could be triggering feelings of anxiety and to provide reasonable adaptations which could be made to support C/YP at each stage. Consider times of the day where the C/YP requires adaptations to reduce sensory stimuli or where they require increased sensory input.

Example Avoidance Hierarchy

Most feared
Going into lunch hall without best friend (support)
Going into lunch hall without best friend (support)
Going to PE lesson
Going into next two favourite lessons
Going into favourite lesson
Joining in a small group activity
Staying in the resource base
Entering the school going into the Reception area
Entering the school when the school is closed
Standing outside when the school is closed
Least feared

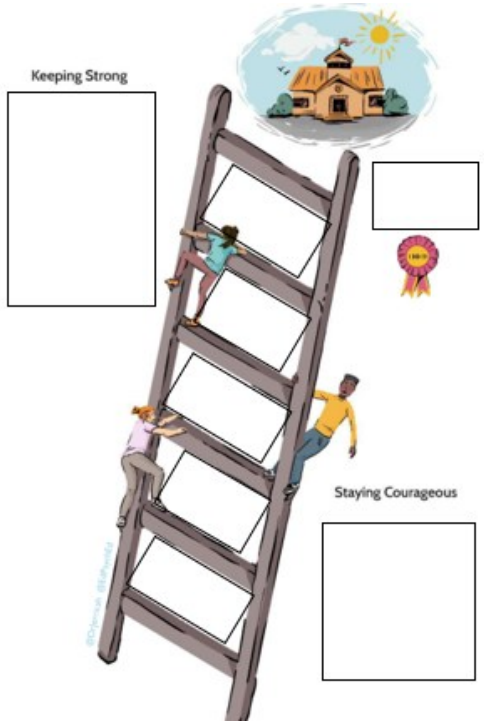


Figure 8: Ladder of strength and courage (Dr Jerricah Holder, 2024)

The child/young person is using avoidance as a coping strategy to avoid stressful social situations.

Consider:

- The C/YP's relationships with staff (consider which the child/young person gets on with particularly well and consider how other adults can adopt approaches used by these adults)
- The C/YPs relationships with peers (if they would like to expand their social circle consider how the C/YP might be supported in this area for example, through involvement in naturally occurring activities/clubs in their areas of interest, circle of friends intervention etc).
- It has been identified through research that bullying is the most commonly occurring school factor related to EBSA. If bullying has been identified through assessment, support the C/YP in this area through the school anti-bullying policy and use of Restorative Practice.

Times when the social demands placed on the child/young person are heightened. For example: break and lunch time, paired/group work, school trips and consider what support could be incorporated during these times of high social demand.

The child/young person is using avoidance to avoid learning activities/environments.

Consider:

- Does the child/young person experience learning differences?
- Have they missed out on learning opportunities?
- How are the teachers adapting learning?
- What provision is the C/YP receiving to support their learning and academic progress? Is the provision effective and do they require increased support?
- Provision to support home learning and organisation

Consider support the C/YP will require during periods of high academic demand for example, assessments and exams

The child/young person is using avoidance to seek connection with significant others (for example, change in family dynamic, concerned about the wellbeing of a parent)

Intervention may include:

- Support the caregiver(s) to support emotional regulation before school and to establish positive routines
- Establish positive and individual time for the caregiver to spend with the child/young person outside school hours
- If the child/young person is concerned about the wellbeing of a parent/carer, consider how they might be supported
- Support positive secondary attachment relationships in the school environment to create a 'secure base' within school.

If the child/young person is a young carer for a parent, consider additional support they might access in the community for example, through the Barnet Early Help Team or Barnet Young Carers | supporting all young carers in Barnet

Supporting Emotional Regulation

Please refer to **Appendix 6** for a range of activities which could be used to support emotional regulation at home and in school. It is important to note that strategies which individuals find helpful to regulate emotion are personal and vary across individuals. It can be useful to practice emotional regulation activities when a child or young person is feeling calm and to rate the usefulness of each activity, to support to build a bank of strategies they can use when experiencing emotional dysregulation.

Review

It is essential that any plan is regularly reviewed. It is helpful to review progress against baseline targets agreed through EBSA support plans. There should be set dates for reviewing how any support plan is progressing and key adults to attend review meetings. Any baseline data should be reviewed. The review should identify and celebrate any progress made, review whether any further information has come to light to help inform clear next steps. Next steps could include:

- Maintaining the current support plan
- Setting new outcomes and/or actions with the child/young person, school and parent(s)/carer(s)
- Identifying that further consultation with other agencies needs to occur which may, if necessary, lead to requesting involvement from other services

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Transitions

11. Transitions

Section summary:

- Transitions are identified as a key school factor which can increase EBSA
- Effective transition planning for children/young people at risk of or experiencing EBSA is essential at each transition point

Good Practice for transition planning

It is well documented in the research literature that transitions in educational phases can correlate with increased EBSA. During transitions children/young people experience significant changes including changes to school ethos, school size, timetabling, teaching styles, level of demand of academic expectations, workload and relationships as all transitions require adjustment to a new environment, which can increase levels of anxiety.

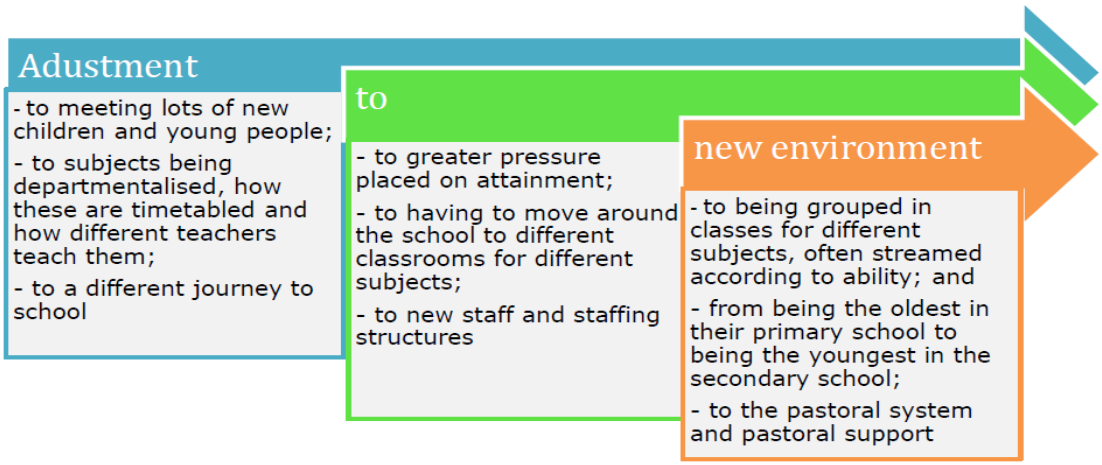


Figure 8: Transitions and adjustment to new environment [6]

Robust and carefully planned transition planning is important for children/young people experiencing EBSA at all stages. Research has shown that primary to secondary transition can be particularly stressful for children/young people experiencing EBSA. Consideration of the following checklist can be helpful for planning effective transition.

[6] Emotionally Based School Avoidance | West Sussex Services for Schools

- ☐ Effective exchange of information (both pastoral and academic) from primary to secondary school.
- ☐ For feeder school to flag any recent or historical EBSA, even if the issues were mild and attendance is now fine
- ☐ For secondary schools to specifically ask this information on any transition gathering forms
- ☐ Good communication with the young person and their parent(s)/carer(s)
- ☐ Provide practical information to support predictability of the new environment. Create a transition booklet with the young person about new schedule, teachers, classroom etc.
- ☐ For familiar school staff to discuss with the young person and their parent(s)/carer(s) what they are looking forward to an what they are worried about and this should be individually addressed for example, through 'What If' cards (see example below).
- ☐ A few short one-to-one sessions with the new staff may be helpful to lay the foundations for a strong positive relationship

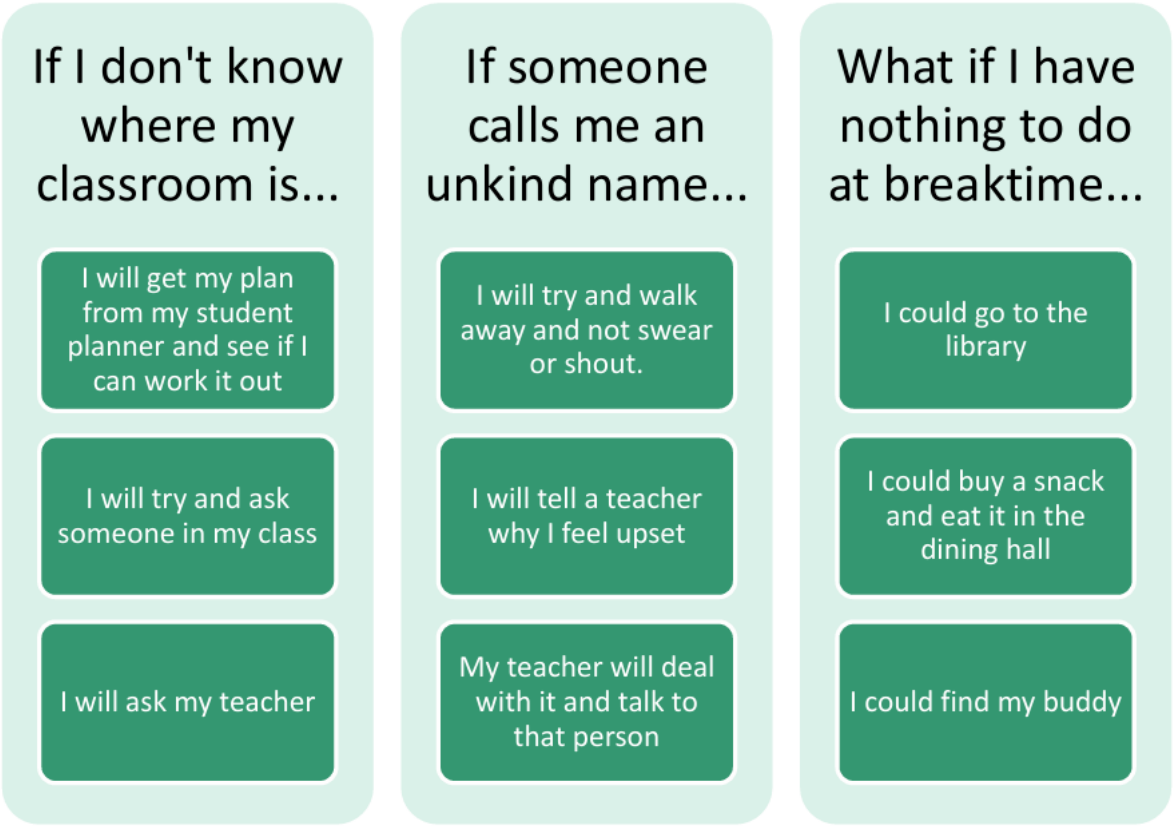


Figure 9: 'What if?' cards to support transition (with thanks to West Sussex Educational Psychology Team)

12. Long-term/Entrenched EBSA – Moving from Recovery to Rediscovery (Dr Jerricah Holder, 2024)

Section summary:

The 'Moving from Recovery to Rediscovery Model' recommends a five-stage process for supporting C/YP experiencing long term/entrenched EBSA

- Step 1: Respite- the child/young person is provided time for psychological recovery.
- Step 2: Reduce the pressure- the pressure of attending school is relieved.
- Step 3: Reconnecting through safe relationships- re-engagement with trusted relationships is prioritised
- Step 4: Rediscovering their sense of curiosity- the child/young person is encouraged to re-engage with their interests.

Earlier in the guidance it was indicated that some children and young people experience long term or 'entrenched' EBSA. Some children and young people in Barnet may not have experienced school for weeks, months or even years. It may have also been identified that attending school at the current time would likely to have a significant, detrimental impact on their mental health. It is important to note that most of the research literature in this field is targeted to early intervention and guidance may be subject to change. Currently, a psychological model which has been recommended is Dr Jerricah Holder's 2024 model: Moving from Recovery to Rediscovery.

For children and young people experiencing long term/entrenched EBSA, it may be appropriate to engage in this approach prior to engaging in the APDR process outlined above. It is recommended that school staff seek advice from key professionals in the child/young person's network prior to using the approach outlined below. It is recommended that weekly review takes place with the child/young person's parent(s)/carer(s) and that weekly check ins take place between a trusted key adult in school and the child/young person without

communicated expectations to return to school. A weekly email or text might be preferable to a phone call/virtual or face to face meeting in Stages 1 and 2).

Although this approach is recommended for children and young people experiencing long term or entrenched EBSA, principles can also be helpful for supporting recovery at natural times of non-attendance e.g. during school holidays for children and young people who are at earlier stages of EBSA.

Respite and Recovery

- Allow time to recover from effects of high levels of anxiety/burnout.
- Can allow time for this over school holidays if appropriate.

Rationale: Reduced pressure to attend school during the Covid-19 pandemic had a positive impact for some children, young people and families experiencing EBSA. Anxiety was reduced due to the absence of exposure to anxiety provoking situations within the school environment and families experienced less distress (Morrissette, 2021[7]; Sawyer, 2022[8]).

At this stage, it is important to consider Kaufman's Sailboat Metaphor (2020)[9], which builds on Maslow's premise of the Hierarchy of Needs. This metaphor outlines that individuals require safety and security to support growth and movement. This stage focuses on replenishing the basic needs of the child/young person Primarily, rest. The child/young person is likely to have been using a lot of their energy worrying about or fighting their school attendance. This stage gives the opportunity to recover from this.

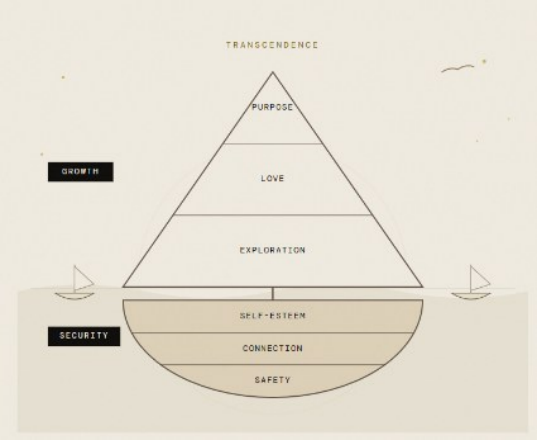


Figure 10: Kaufman's Sailboat Metaphor illustration.

[7] Morrissette, M. (2021). School Closures and Social Anxiety During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 60(1), 6-7

[8] Sawyer, R (2022) Parents' views on EBSNA: A solution-based exploration into successful reintegration. Doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia

[9] Kaufman, S (2020) Transcend: the New Science of Self-Actualisation. New York: Tarcher Perigee

Reducing the Pressure

- Relieve all pressure to attend school. While recovering, C/YP may be averse to any mention of education. Accept the resistance.
- Remove any set timeframe that has been put in place.
- Collaborate with parent(s)/carer(s) on this approach.

Rationale: Reducing the pressure on the child/young person to attend school allows for repairs in relationships to be made. It removes a barrier which leads to better quality contact between adult and the child/young person and encourages a sense of safety in the relationship. Change can be facilitated through this strong, safe relationship (Heyne & Brouwer-Bourghuis, 2022).[10]

Neilson and Bond (2023)[11] found that for autistic children and young people, externally imposed timeframes were contributing factors to non-attendance. Time away from school was viewed as a supportive factor by autistic children and young people experiencing EBSA, which encouraged attendance in the long term.

Reconnecting through Safe Relationships

- Identify safe relationships in school based on a previous positive relationship the child/young person had at school. These could include a positive adult relationship or peer support networks.
- Facilitate and encourage re engagement with these safe relationships. This may look like home visits, regular online/phone check-ins with someone at school that the child/young person trusts or online group work with their peers.
- Ask the child/young person questions such as: Who do they feel they can talk to at school about their worries? Who do they believe cares about them at school?
- A sociogram can be a useful tool at this stage with gaining insight into their peer relationships (see gaining C/YPs views section in **Appendix 2**).

Rationale: Establishing strong and safe relationships with the child/young person promotes their sense of safety around school and provides an opportunity for them

[10] Heyne, D., & Brouwer-Borghuis, M. (2022). Signposts for School Refusal Interventions, Based on the Views of Stakeholders. *Continuity in Education*, 3(1), 25-40.

[11] Neilson, C., & Bond, C. (2023) 'After a long period of being in hibernation- these little green shoots were growing.' Lived experiences of effective support for autistic young people who have experienced extended nonattendance. *Jorsen,* 24 (2), 269-83

to share their views around school. Re-engagement with school can be facilitated through this safe relationship (Neilson & Bond, 2023[12]; Sawyer, 2022[13]).

A collaborative approach between the child/young person, families and school is more likely to have a positive impact on attendance than punitive consequences. It has also been found that a collaborative approach fosters a sense of belonging and connection at school (Lenhoff et al., 2022).[14]

Rediscovering their Sense of Curiosity

- Focus on the child/young person's **strengths**, interests, and curiosities to encourage intrinsic motivation for learning. Refer to the Gaining the Views of Children and Young People section of this guidance.
- Explore times of the school day the child/young person previously enjoyed using the Rag Method (where the school timetable is colour coding using red-anxious/uncomfortable, amber-comfortable and green-enjoyable) or the Ideal School Method (outlined in Gaining Views of CYP section).
- These views and interest will be important for developing their re-engagement plan.
- Prioritise engagement with learning over attendance at school.
- This could be facilitated by somebody the child/young person has a positive, safe relationship with, through regular online or phone check-ins with the child/young person or through home visits.

Rationale: If a child/young person is involved in developing their own plan, it will be more likely to be successful (Preece & Howley, 2018).[15]

Re engagement with the World

Consider where the child/young person is on the Cycle of Change regarding returning to education.

[12] Neilson, C., & Bond, C. (2023) 'After a long period of being in hibernation- these little green shoots were growing.' Lived experiences of effective support for autistic young people who have experienced extended nonattendance. *Jorsen,* 24 (2), 269-83

[13] Sawyer, Rachel (2022) Parents' views on EBSNA: A solution-based exploration into successful reintegration. Doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia.

[14] Lenhoff, S. W., Edwards, E. B., Claiborne, J., Singer, J., & French, K. R. (2022). A collaborative problem-solving approach to improving district attendance policy. Educational Policy, 36(6), 1464–1506

[15] David Preece & Marie Howley (2018) An approach to supporting young people with autism spectrum disorder and high anxiety to re-engage with formal education – the impact on young people and their families, International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 23:4, 468-481

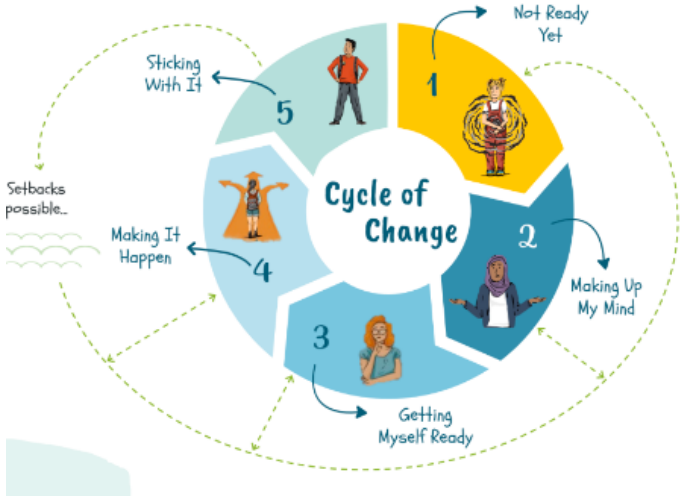


Figure 11: Cycle of Change by Dr Cathy Atkinson, adapted by Jerricah Holder (2024)

Motivational interviewing (MI) may be helpful in encouraging CYP to shift from one stage of the Cycle of Change to the next. This link provided by Dr Jerricah Holder of The EdPsychEd Team outlines how MI can be used at each stage of the cycle EdPsychEd | Supporting CYP Experiencing EBSA - MI Resource Pack.

When the CYP is ready, begin to plan a graduated approach to returning to school. Refer to the APDR section of this guidance. The Ladder of Strength and Courage may also be a useful tool to use here to break down the gradual return to school. It can also be used to break down the school day.

- The initial steps towards re-engagement with learning should be small and simple. It is important that the C/YP has the opportunity to master each level of the plan before moving on as this will positively affect their self-esteem. Like the Cycle of Change, this will not be a linear process and setbacks will be possible throughout.
- Continuously revise the plan and collaborate with the C/YP and family to monitor its progress and make changes when they are necessary.
- Developing a social script may be helpful at this stage. This is a script that the C/YP can use to explain their absence from school to their peers when they return to school if this is something the C/YP is worried about.
- Always remember that the priority is the social, emotional and mental health of the C/YP.

Rationale: This gradual exposure to education allows the CYP to build up resilience and learn that their anxiety is manageable (Kearney & Silverman, 1990).[16]

[16] Kearney, C. A., Silverman, W. K. (1990). A preliminary analysis of a functional model of assessment and treatment for school refusal behavior. Behavior Modification, 14(3), 340–366.

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Safeguarding

13. Safeguarding during EBSA-related absence

Section summary:

- Repeated or prolonged absence may increase vulnerability and reduce access to trusted adults and protective relationships
- EBSA, low attendance or limited parent/carer engagement do not, by themselves, demonstrate abuse, neglect or a failure of parenting
- Schools should maintain proportionate contact and respond promptly where welfare cannot be established
- Safeguarding concerns should be considered separately from the assessment of barriers to attendance
- The Designated Safeguarding Lead should review changes in risk, communication or circumstances
- Barnet safeguarding and Family Support pathways should be used where additional advice, support or protection is required
- Concerns, decisions, contact and actions should be recorded clearly

Bringing responsibilities together

Children and young people of compulsory school age are entitled to a full-time education. Schools also have responsibilities to safeguard pupils, record attendance accurately, make reasonable adjustments and identify and support special educational needs.

These responsibilities should be considered together rather than treated as competing priorities. A supportive response to EBSA does not remove attendance or safeguarding duties. Equally, attendance procedures should be applied alongside efforts to understand and reduce the barriers making education difficult to access.

Current statutory attendance guidance expects schools to listen to and understand barriers, agree and regularly review support with pupils and families, and increase the level of support where absence intensifies.

Safeguarding during absence

Repeated or prolonged absence can be a warning sign of a range of safeguarding concerns. It may also increase a child or young person's vulnerability by reducing contact with trusted adults and protective relationships. Schools should have clear procedures for responding to children who are absent from education, particularly where absence is repeated or prolonged.

However, EBSA, low attendance or limited parent/carer engagement do not, by themselves, demonstrate abuse, neglect or a failure of parenting. Safeguarding decisions should be based on concerns about the child or young person's welfare and the wider information available.

Attendance concerns and safeguarding concerns

Attendance support should consider:

- What barriers are affecting access to education
- What support, adjustments or changes are required
- Whether agreed actions have been implemented
- How wellbeing, engagement and access are changing
- Whether further educational, health or family support is needed

Safeguarding assessment should consider:

- Whether the child or young person's welfare can be established
- Whether absence is unexpected, unexplained or inconsistent with the information available
- Changes in presentation, circumstances or communication
- Concerns about abuse, neglect, exploitation, self-harm or mental health
- Whether the child or young person is known to children's social care or other safeguarding services
- Whether existing risks may be increasing during absence

An attendance concern and a safeguarding concern may coexist, but one should not automatically be assumed from the other.

Responding to concerns

Schools should follow their usual procedures for identifying and following up unexplained absence. Current statutory guidance expects schools to contact parent(s)/carer(s) on the first day where a reason has not been provided and to make further contact where absence continues without explanation.

During prolonged EBSA-related absence, schools should:

- Maintain agreed, low-pressure contact with the child or young person and parent(s)/carer(s)
- Record contact, attempted contact and relevant information received
- Ensure that the Designated Safeguarding Lead is aware of emerging or increasing concerns
- Share relevant information with involved professionals where appropriate
- Review whether the frequency or method of contact remains sufficient
- Follow local safeguarding procedures where welfare cannot be established or concerns about harm arise

The Designated Safeguarding Lead should review the situation where:

- The child or young person's whereabouts are unclear
- Reliable information about their welfare cannot be obtained
- Contact has unexpectedly stopped
- Their circumstances or presentation have changed
- There are concerns about abuse, neglect, exploitation, self-harm or significant mental health needs
- Absence may be increasing risks already identified through a child in need, child protection or care plan

The school should then determine whether further enquiries, a welfare visit, multi-agency advice or a referral to children's social care is required. Decisions and the reasons for them should be recorded.

Further guidance on maintaining relational contact is provided in Working together with children, young people and parent**(s)**/carer**(s)**.

Barnet safeguarding and support pathways

Schools should follow their safeguarding procedures and consult the Designated Safeguarding Lead where there are concerns about a child or young person's safety or welfare.

In Barnet:

Where a child or young person is at immediate risk of harm, contact the police on **999**

Urgent welfare concerns should be discussed with the Barnet Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub on **020 8359 4066**

Outside MASH operating hours, concerns requiring an immediate response should be reported to the Emergency Duty Team on **020 8359 2000**

Where a family would benefit from coordinated support and there are no safeguarding concerns, a Family Support/Early Help request Barnet Local Offer: Part-time timetables for children and young people of compulsory school age may be considered with the agreement of the family

Where a referral is made, schools should record the concern, advice received, actions taken and arrangements for ongoing support.

The links and contact details above were checked against Barnet Council's current safeguarding and Family Support (previously Early Help) information.

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Attendance & Statutory Responsibilities

14. Attendance and statutory responsibilities (Department for Education, 2026)

Section summary:

- EBSA should be supported alongside schools' attendance, SEND and educational responsibilities
- EBSA is not an attendance code, and each session should be recorded according to the circumstances
- Attendance records should be supplemented by information about lesson access, engagement, support and educational provision
- Temporary part-time timetables should be exceptional, time-limited and regularly reviewed
- Reasonable adjustments, SEN Support and EHC processes should be considered without waiting for a diagnosis or further deterioration in attendance
- Barnet should be involved promptly where the school cannot provide suitable education and Section 19 arrangements may be required
- Formal attendance intervention should be individual and proportionate, taking account of identified barriers and support provided
- Schools should record provision, implementation, decisions and review arrangements clearly

Accurate attendance recording and use of attendance codes

The attendance register is a legal record. **EBSA is not a national attendance code**, and there is no single code that should be applied to every EBSA-related absence.

Schools should record each morning and afternoon session according to whether the pupil was present and, where they were absent, the primary reason they were unable to attend. Different codes may therefore be appropriate across different sessions or periods of absence.

Schools should:

- Establish the reason for each absence rather than use EBSA as a catch-all explanation
- Apply the code that most accurately reflects the circumstances of the individual session
- Avoid automatically recording all EBSA-related absence as either authorised or unauthorised
- Update the register when further information establishes the correct reason for absence
- Keep additional records of lesson access, engagement and support, as these may not be visible through registration data
- Seek advice where the correct code is unclear

Attendance and lateness

A pupil who is physically present when the register is taken should be recorded as attending.

- Code L is used where the pupil arrives after registration begins but before the register closes and is statistically recorded as attending
- Code U is used where the pupil arrives after the register closes and no authorised reason applies
- Where the reason for arriving after registration meets the criteria for another authorised absence code, the more appropriate code should be used

A pupil may be recorded as present while spending significant time outside lessons or being unable to access learning. Schools should therefore monitor lesson attendance, participation and time spent in support spaces alongside the statutory register.

Code I: Illness

Code I may be used where the pupil is unable to attend because of physical or mental-health-related illness.

EBSA should not automatically be recorded as illness. Schools should consider whether illness is the primary reason the pupil is unable to attend during the session in question.

Medical evidence should not routinely be required, and schools should not operate blanket policies requiring it. Evidence may be requested where there is genuine and reasonable doubt or where it is needed to understand prolonged or recurring health-related absence and identify appropriate support. Schools should remain flexible about the forms of evidence they accept.

Code C2: Temporary part-time timetable

Code C2 is used for agreed sessions when a compulsory-school-age pupil is not expected to attend because they are following an approved temporary part-time timetable.

Where the pupil misses a session they were expected to attend, the code reflecting the reason for absence should be used instead.

Further guidance on introducing and reviewing a temporary part-time timetable is provided later in this section.

Codes N and O

Code N is a temporary code used where the reason for absence has not been established before the register closes.

Schools must follow up unexplained or unexpected absence and amend Code N when the reason becomes known. Code N should not remain on the register for more than five school days. Where the reason cannot be established within this period, it must be changed to **Code O**.

Code O is used where no reason has been established or where the reason given does not meet the criteria for an authorised absence code. It should not be used automatically because the absence is associated with EBSA.

Education taking place away from school

Where a pupil is accessing education at another setting, the correct code will depend on how the provision has been arranged.

This may include:

- **Code K** for qualifying educational provision arranged by the local authority
- **Code B** for a qualifying approved and supervised educational activity arranged by the school

- **Code D** where the pupil is dual registered and is scheduled to attend the other school

Schools should have arrangements for confirming whether the pupil attended the provision. Where they did not attend as expected, the appropriate absence code should be recorded.

Temporary part-time timetables

In exceptional circumstances, a temporary part-time timetable may be appropriate where it is in the child or young person's best interests and forms part of an individualised support or reintegration plan. It should not be used to manage behaviour, address staffing pressures or operate as an informal exclusion.

Before introducing a part-time timetable, schools should:

- Explore barriers to full-time education and consider reasonable adjustments
- Involve the child or young person and obtain parent/carer agreement
- Agree the sessions the child or young person is expected to attend
- Record the purpose, support, responsibilities and proposed end date
- Set regular review dates
- Consider safeguarding, SEND and supervision arrangements
- Identify how access to education will be increased where appropriate

The arrangement should remain in place for the shortest time necessary and be reviewed where it is not helping the child or young person access suitable education.

Where the child or young person has a social worker or EHCP, relevant professionals and Barnet should be involved in planning and review.

Attendance during a temporary part-time timetable should be recorded in line with the **Code C2 guidance outlined earlier in this section**.

All Schools should notify Barnet when a pupil is put on a part time timetable. Further information on how to complete this can be found here Barnet Local Offer: Part-time timetables for children and young people of compulsory school age.

Section 19: education where a child cannot attend school

Section 19 of the Education Act 1996 places a duty on the local authority to arrange suitable education for a child of compulsory school age who, because of illness, exclusion or another reason, would not otherwise receive it. The education

should normally be full time and suitable for the child or young person's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs.

Section 19 does not apply automatically because a child or young person is experiencing EBSA or has reached a particular attendance percentage. Schools should consider:

- Whether the child or young person is currently receiving suitable education
- Whether suitable education can be provided through adjustments and an individualised plan
- Whether local authority arrangements may be required

What schools are expected to do

Schools should:

- Begin support as soon as barriers to education are identified
- Use Assess, Plan, Do, Review to understand needs and implement support
- Monitor the education accessed rather than attendance figures alone
- Maintain communication with the child or young person and parent(s)/carer(s)
- Record provision, adjustments, implementation and review
- Contact Barnet promptly where the school cannot provide suitable education

Schools should not wait until 15 days have already been missed before seeking advice. Where it becomes clear that a child or young person will be unable to attend because of physical or mental health needs for 15 school days or more, either consecutively or cumulatively, the local authority should arrange suitable alternative provision. The 15-day point is not a waiting period during which the child or young person should be left without suitable education.

Information to bring together

Schools should provide:

The child or young person's and parent(s)/carer(s)' perspectives

- Attendance, lesson-access and engagement information
- Identified strengths, needs and barriers
- Relevant health, SEND, safeguarding and professional information
- Provision and adjustments offered, including their implementation and impact
- Details of the education currently available and plans for ongoing connection and review

A diagnosis or one particular form of medical evidence should not be treated as an automatic requirement. Available evidence should be considered collectively to identify suitable provision.

While Barnet considers the need for provision

The school remains responsible for supporting the child or young person and should:

- Continue appropriate educational provision and reasonable adjustments
- Maintain relational and safeguarding contact
- Share curriculum information with any education provider
- Include the child or young person and parent(s)/carer(s) in planning
- Support access to examinations where relevant
- Contribute to regular reviews
- Plan for sustainable reintegration or transition where appropriate

Section 19 provision does not automatically replace the child or young person's school placement, SEN Support or EHCP. These processes should be considered alongside one another where needs are ongoing or complex.

Schools and parent/carers can access Barnet Local Offer information and advice, including Section 19 support. The Local Offer advises parent/carers to speak to the school initially and provides access to Barnet's Section 19 officer for further advice.

Accessing Section 19 support in Barnet

Barnet uses the **Pupil Placement and Medical Needs Panel (PPMP) referral** where a child or young person may require alternative provision because health needs prevent them from accessing suitable education through their school.

Schools should seek advice and submit a referral as soon as it becomes clear that they cannot provide suitable education. They should not wait for absence to reach a particular duration where this is already evident.

The referral should draw together the assessment, provision, adjustments and review information outlined above. Making a referral does not itself determine that the Section 19 duty applies and does not replace the school's ongoing educational, SEND or safeguarding responsibilities.

Further information and the referral guidance are available on the Barnet school attendance page.

Remote education and alternative arrangements

A pupil who is absent from school but accessing remote education must still be recorded as absent using the most appropriate absence code.

Where remote education or AV1 is part of an EBSA support plan, schools should record engagement, access to learning and progress separately from the attendance register. Remote education should form part of a wider plan and should not replace consideration of reasonable adjustments and appropriate access to education.

Recording access, support and decision-making

The statutory attendance register does not provide a complete picture of a child or young person's access to education. Schools should also record:

- Lessons, activities and education accessed
- Time spent outside lessons or in support spaces
- Engagement with remote or off-site provision
- Identified barriers and perspectives
- Support and adjustments offered
- Whether agreed actions were implemented
- Contact and attempts to engage
- Progress across wellbeing, belonging, learning and attendance
- Advice sought, decisions made and review arrangements

These records should supplement rather than replace the statutory attendance register and should avoid language that attributes blame to the child or young person or parent/carers.

Where schools are uncertain about coding or attendance procedures, they should consult the current Department for Education guidance and seek advice from the **Barnet Education Welfare Team**.

Reasonable adjustments, SEN Support and EHC processes

Where EBSA may be linked to disability or special educational needs, schools should consider reasonable adjustments and SEN Support without waiting for a diagnosis or for attendance to deteriorate further. Support should be developed and reviewed through Assess, Plan, Do, Review.

Schools should consider whether:

- Identified barriers can be reduced through ordinarily available provision and reasonable adjustments
- SEN Support is required
- Agreed provision has been implemented consistently

- An EHC needs assessment may be needed where provision beyond SEN Support could be required
- An existing EHCP requires review because needs, provision or access to education have changed

Attendance percentage should not be used as the sole measure of need or progress.

Further information is available through:

- Barnet Local Offer: SEN Support
- Barnet Local Offer: Education, Health and Care Plans
- Barnet SEN and Assessment resources for SENCos

Barnet attendance and Education Welfare pathways

Formal attendance intervention should be considered individually and proportionately, taking account of the barriers identified, support and adjustments offered, and whether these have been implemented consistently. It should not replace suitable educational provision or a supportive response to EBSA.

Schools should follow the attendance support route agreed for their setting. This may involve a named **Education Welfare Officer**.

Barnet's Education Welfare Team works with schools, parent(s)/carer(s) and other professionals to identify attendance concerns early, understand contributing factors and coordinate support. The team can also advise where formal attendance procedures may be under consideration.

Schools should seek advice where:

- Attendance concerns are becoming persistent or increasingly complex
- There is uncertainty about attendance procedures or recording
- Support has been reviewed but the child or young person is still not accessing suitable education
- School, parent(s)/carer(s) or involved professionals hold different understandings of the attendance concerns
- Formal attendance intervention is being considered in an EBSA-related case

Advice should complement, rather than replace, Assess, Plan, Do, Review and any relevant SEND, health or safeguarding processes.

Further information and current contact routes are available through Barnet Council: School attendance

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Multi-agency working
and professional roles

15. Multi-agency working and professional roles

Section summary:

- Schools should begin support when barriers are identified rather than wait for another service to become involved
- Multi-agency working may be needed where barriers extend across education, health, family or wider circumstances
- Children, young people and parent(s)/carer(s) should experience one coordinated plan rather than separate professional processes
- Roles, responsibilities, communication arrangements and review dates should be clearly agreed
- Professional involvement should strengthen the school's Assess, Plan, Do, Review process rather than replace it
- Safeguarding, SEND, attendance and Section 19 pathways should be considered alongside one another where relevant

When multi-agency working may be needed

Many children and young people experiencing EBSA can be supported through coordinated school-based provision developed with the child or young person and parent/carers.

Additional professional involvement may be helpful where:

- Barriers are persistent, increasing or complex
- Needs extend across education, health, family or wider circumstances
- The school requires further advice to understand needs or develop provision
- There are concerns about mental or physical health
- The family would benefit from coordinated Family Support
- Safeguarding concerns have been identified

- The child or young person is not receiving suitable education
- Existing professional plans or assessments need to be coordinated

A referral or waiting list should not delay reasonable adjustments, SEN Support or other actions that are within the school's control.

Coordinating support

Multi-agency involvement should contribute to one shared understanding and coordinated plan. Wherever possible, there should be a named person responsible for coordinating the process.

The plan should clarify:

- What each professional or service has been asked to contribute
- Which actions remain the responsibility of the school
- How the child or young person and parent(s)/carer(s) will participate
- How information will be shared
- Who will communicate updates
- How different professional recommendations will be brought together
- When progress and provision will be reviewed
- What will happen if circumstances or risk change

Professionals should avoid requiring children, young people and parent(s)/carer(s) to repeatedly retell difficult experiences. Existing information should be used appropriately, while recognising that understanding may change over time.

Professional pathways and services who can offer support to C/YP experiencing EBSA

Barnet Educational Psychology Team	
Educational Psychologists (EPs) work in nurseries, schools,colleges and projects (Barnet Virtual School, Youth Justice Team, Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce (APST), and specialist social care team Risk Outside the Home, ROTH) to improve outcomes for C/YP. EPs support settings at an organisational (whole school/system level), group and individual level. For further information about the Barnet EP service, please see: Barnet Local Offer: Home / Info and Advice / How to get help / How specialist education services can help / Educational psychology / EP: Professionals Page	The EP is a traded service and support at a whole school/group/individual level for EBSA can be requested by school Headteachers/SENCos or key professionals within projects. The EPT also deliver a BELS funded (free to Barnet schools) project to provide systemic support for EBSA. Components of support include planning support, whole school CPD, bespoke CPD, psychoeducation/reflective support spaces for parents/carers, reflective spaces for school staff, intervention support and policy development. Further information: Please contact educationalpsychology@barnet.gov.uk for further details about EPT offer. Please contact EBSAProject@barnet.gov.uk for further information about the EBSA project.

Autism Advisory Team	
A team of qualified teachers and specialist practitioners who support Autistic children and young people. They aim to ensure that children have the opportunity to reach their full potential in all areas of development including academic, social and emotional wellbeing. They work to support Barnet mainstream schools (primary and secondary) by offering: • A variety of autism specific training and workshop packages schools and parents • School visits - including joint observations and feedback meetings to develop individual SEN plans according to children's needs.	Further information: Please see Barnet Local Offer :: Home / Info and Advice / How to get help / How specialist education services can help / Autism Advisory Team or contact the team please email autism.team@barnet.gov.uk for further information about how the Autism Advisory Team can support autistic C/YP experiencing EBSA. The Autism Leading Edge Group have developed bespoke guidance for Autistic children and young

• Bespoke support and advice in implementing autism specific strategies. • Attendance at key professionals meetings. • Targeted support during key transition periods; reception year in mainstream primary schools and mainstream secondary school transition.	people experiencing EBSA/Barriers to Setting Attendance: 2381-barnet-ebsa-information-parents-carers

Inclusion Advisory Team

The Inclusion Advisory Team (IAT) provides specialist support from advisory teachers and experienced SEN professionals for Early Years and all Key Stages. The team consists of advisory teachers who specialise in supporting schools and settings to enable the successful inclusion of children and young people with SEND and to achieve the best possible outcomes for children, young people and their families. They offer support in the following ways: • Advice and strategic support for SEND. • Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs (SEMH). • Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). • Core Curriculum Support. • Support with development of Alternative Provision pathways and Relational Behaviour Policies.	IAT is a traded service and can only be accessed by schools. If a school has concerns around an individual child with EBSA, they can request a consultation with IAT (either including staff and parents or just staff). IAT may also carry out observations and gather the child/young person's views. IAT vary their approach depending on the child/young person and their surrounding environment. Further information: Please see Barnet Local Offer :: Home / Info and Advice / How to get help / How specialist education services can help / Inclusion Advisory Team (IAT) for further information.

Family Support (previously Child and Family Early Help)

Barnet Family Support provide help and support to children, young people, and their families from before birth to 19 (or 25 if they have special educations needs or a disability). They are made up of a network of services which work together to support families. Family Support work through facilitating access to the services best suited to each family, as early as possible. They direct families to Universal Services that are accessible for everyone. A more targeted /specialist support can be offered. If a	Making a referral: Further information about support available can be found here: https://www.barnet.gov.uk/children-and-families/early-help-children-young-people-

family requires a more in-depth assessment of their strengths and needs as well as a clear plan, a referral can be made through the Family Support referral pathway.	and-families/make-referral-early-help-team

SENDIASS	
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS). SENDIASS offer confidential and impartial information, advice and support to young people aged 0-25 with special needs or disabilities and their parents/carers.	SENDIASS can signpost families to relevant services for advice and support and provide information about Barnet's Local offer. Parents/Carers can contact SENDIASS by Telephone on 020 8359 7637 or by email: SendIASS@barnet.gov.uk . Lines are open Monday to Thursday from 9am to 5.15pm and Friday from 9am to 5pm. Barnet Local Offer :: Home / Organisations / Barnet Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS)

Barnet Integrated Clinical Service (BICS)	
BICS provide mild to moderate mental health services to children, young people and families in the borough. They support with social, emotional and mental health needs. They offer consultation and a range of individual and family evidence-based interventions, alongside groups and workshops. After an assessment with one of their practitioners, they will agree what type of support would be most helpful. This might be using their own pathways or signposting to another service.	If the assessment concludes that the presentation is EBSA alone, support is likely to be focussed on anxiety or low mood. This support may be individually with the young person or with the family or a combination of both. However, if the mental health concerns are higher risk, more long term and entrenched, BICS may suggest a CAMHS referral. BICS also run workshops for parents/carers and educational professionals. Please note, BICS do not offer neurodevelopmental assessments for ADHD and/or Autism. Where required and appropriate, assessment in this area is carried out by Paediatrics or CAMHS, depending on the age of the C/YP. For information about parent/carer training offered by BICS, please refer to: Online Bics family minds workshops for parents and carers | Barnet Council You can make a referral to BICS by following this link: Make a referral to BICS | Barnet Council

CAMHS	
The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service offers assessment, and a range of therapeutic interventions for children who are experiencing emotional, development and behavioural needs and their families. The service is delivered by multidisciplinary team which offer consultation, assessment, and treatment. They can also advise and consult professionals working in a variety of agency settings with children, young people and their families.	Referrals are accepted by GPs, Health Visitors, Social Workers, schools and educational/family services professionals. Further information: Please see Barnet CAMHS (behcamhs.nhs.uk) for additional information.

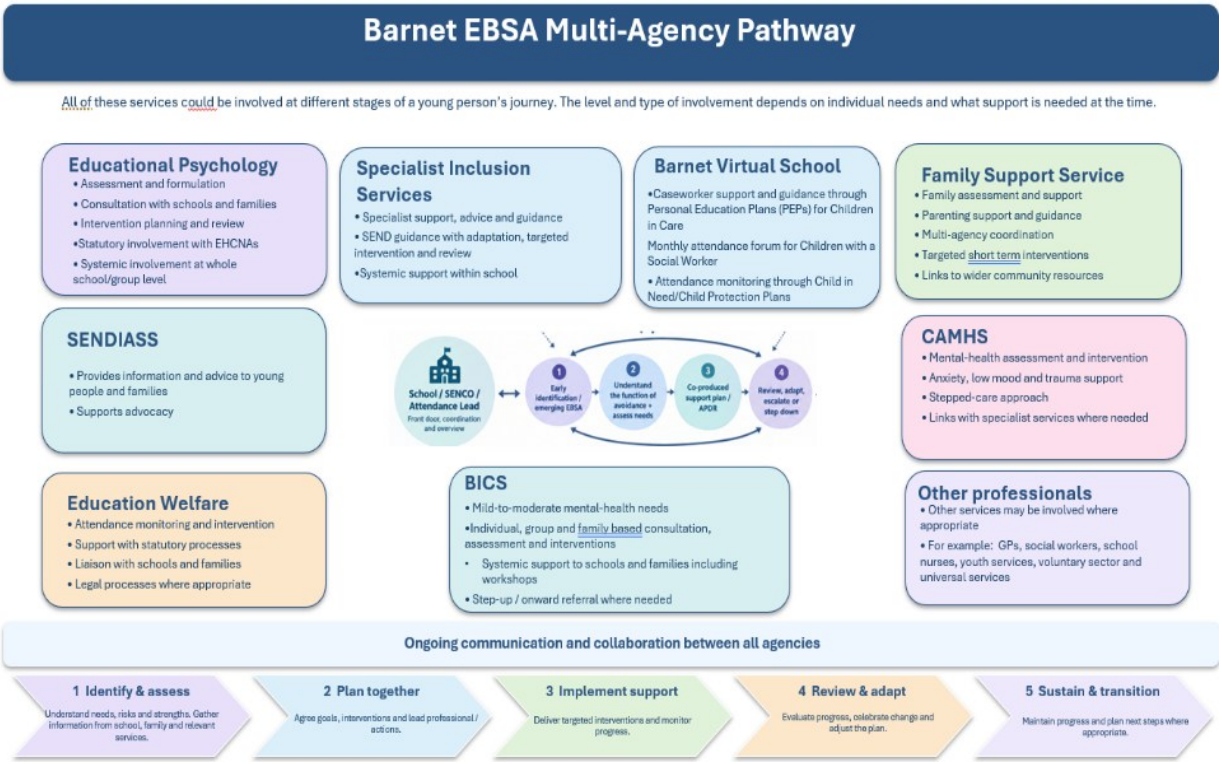
The Educational Welfare Team	
A school may refer a case to the Educational Welfare team once a child or young person has had a certain number of 'unauthorised absences. Parents/carers will receive an initial letter from an educational welfare officer (EWO) and if parents/carers then contact the team, they will facilitate meetings with the family exploring the barriers for attending school for the child/young person.	The Educational Welfare Team are a traded service, meaning they can only be accessed through schools. If involvement is sought, the educational welfare team in Barnet can provide advice for supporting EBSA. The educational welfare team in Barnet also check in with home educators to review their curriculum each year. The Education Welfare Team also co-ordinate the Barnet Pupil Placement and Medical Needs Panel, which includes co-ordinating support with Alternative Provision Pathways where deemed necessary and appropriate. Please see School attendance | Barnet Council for further information.

Barnet Virtual School	
Barnet Virtual School (VS) supports the education of all young people who are looked after by the borough of Barnet and all those who have been previously looked after up to the age of 25. The VS acts as local authority champions to promote the progress and educational attainment of C/YP who are or who have been looked after so they achieve the best educational outcomes possible. The VS also has strategic duties for all children with a social	Further information: For further information about the Children with a Social Worker Attendance forum, please contact nicola.axford@barnet.gov.uk For further information about the Virtual school: www.barnetvs.org Contact details:

worker. The VS and Education Welfare Team have developed a Children with a Social Worker Attendance Forum, to identify and support those children on Plans who are severely persistently absent from school and where cases appear to be stuck and where strategies used by school have been unsuccessful. Forum members from across the local authority work together with schools to create a plan to address the barriers to attendance.	02083594534 Barnet.virtualschool@barnet.gov.uk

Universal Health Services

Barnet has a vast range of health services for children and young people aged 0-25 years including General Practitioners (GPs), pharmacists, dental services, optometrists and hospital services-available to everyone based on the individual's health needs. To find your nearest GP, dentist or pharmacist, enter your postcode on the NHS Choices search page. Where children and young people need more support, specific services are available including: • Community paediatric service • Community children's nurses • CAMHS • Children's integrated therapies (speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy)	Further information: Please see Barnet Local Offer :: Home / Info and Advice / Health for additional information



16. Signposting and resources

Barnet EBSA Project

The Barnet EBSA Project is delivered by the Educational Psychology Team and is free for Barnet schools. Support is available across early intervention, within-school EBSA and entrenched EBSA.

Please contact **EBSAProject@barnet.gov.uk** for further information.

Educational Psychology

Barnet Educational Psychologists support settings at organisational, group and individual levels through consultation, assessment, planning and training.

Barnet Local Offer: Educational Psychology

School attendance and Education Welfare

Barnet's Education Welfare service can advise schools where attendance concerns are persistent or complex, there is uncertainty about attendance procedures, or formal intervention is being considered.

Barnet Council: School attendance

Section 19 and Pupil Placement Medical Needs

Where a school cannot provide suitable education because of a child or young person's health needs, it should seek advice about Barnet's Pupil Placement Medical Needs referral route.

Barnet Council: School attendance

Family Support Hubs

Family Support (previously Early Help) may be appropriate where a child, young person or family would benefit from coordinated support and there is not an immediate safeguarding concern.

- **Barnet Early Help**
- **Make an Early Help request**
- **Best Start Family Hubs**

Barnet's Family Support services support children, young people and families through locality-based and community provision.

BICS and mental health support

Barnet Integrated Clinical Services supports children and young people experiencing mild to moderate mental health and emotional wellbeing needs. Schools should use current criteria and referral routes when considering whether BICS or specialist CAMHS support may be appropriate.

- **BICS information and referrals**
- **Young people's mental health services in Barnet**

BICS accepts referrals for difficulties including anxiety affecting school attendance, but is not an emergency or crisis service.

Safeguarding

Schools should follow their safeguarding procedures and consult the Designated Safeguarding Lead where there are concerns about safety or welfare.

- **Barnet MASH and safeguarding referrals**
- **Barnet safeguarding and out-of-hours information**

Immediate danger should be reported to the police on **999**. Urgent welfare concerns can be discussed with Barnet MASH on **020 8359 4066**. Outside operating hours, the Emergency Duty Team can be contacted on **020 8359 2000**.

Barnet Local Offer and SENDIASS

The Barnet Local Offer provides information about SEND support, services, EHC processes and preparation for adulthood.

Barnet SENDIASS provides free, confidential and impartial information, advice and support to children and young people with SEND and their parent/carers.

- **Barnet Local Offer**
- **Barnet SENDIASS**

National guidance

Schools should refer to the most recent versions of:

- **Working Together to Improve School Attendance**
- **SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years**
- **Education for children with health needs who cannot attend school**
- **Equality Act 2010: advice for schools**
- **Keeping Children Safe in Education**

The July 2026 attendance guidance is statutory. Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 comes into force on 1 September 2026

17. Useful tools and further reading

Local supplementary guidance

- **Supporting EBSA in the Jewish Community**
  A supplementary leaflet developed for Jewish schools and communities. It explores cultural and contextual risk and protective factors that may be particularly relevant for children and young people attending Jewish schools.
- **Barnet Autism Advisory Team: Supporting autistic children and young people experiencing EBSA**
  Neuroaffirming guidance developed to support schools in understanding autism-related barriers to education and identifying adjustments that promote safety, communication, regulation, belonging and sustainable engagement

EBSA-specific guidance and tools

- **West Sussex Educational Psychology Service: Emotionally Based School Avoidance**
  Guidance and practical materials for schools and professionals, alongside information for children and young people and parent/carers
- **School Wellbeing Risk and Resilience Cards**
  A child-centred card-sorting tool developed by Dr Jerricah Holder to explore

barriers, strengths, risk factors and protective factors related to school wellbeing and attendance
Commercial resource

- **Energy Accounting**
  A neuroaffirming framework developed by Maja Toudal for exploring demands, energy use, regulation and the activities or adjustments that replenish energy
  Commercial resource, with information about the approach available online

Relational and emotion-focused approaches

- **Emotion Coaching UK: resources for professionals and parent/carers**
  Resources to support adults to recognise, validate and respond to emotions while maintaining appropriate boundaries
- **An Introduction to Emotion Coaching with Dr Nina Robinson**
  An introductory webinar exploring Emotion Coaching and its application in educational settings
- **Oxfordshire: Using PACE in School**
  Guidance on using Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy to support relational and trauma-informed practice
- **Brighton and Hove: Developing an Attachment-Aware Behaviour Regulation Policy**
  Guidance to support schools in reviewing behaviour policies through a relational, attachment-aware and regulation-focused lens

Emotional regulation and wellbeing

- **Beacon House Therapeutic Services and Trauma Team: resources**
  Accessible resources relating to trauma, attachment, sensory processing, emotional regulation and relationships
- **ELSA Support**
  Free and paid resources for Emotional Literacy Support Assistants and other school staff supporting emotional literacy, relationships, anxiety and wellbeing
- **Anna Freud: Mentally Healthy Schools**
  Quality-assured resources, lesson materials and guidance to support mental health and wellbeing across schools and colleges
- **Anna Freud: Five Steps to Mental Health and Wellbeing**
  A free framework to support the development and review of a whole-setting approach to mental health and wellbeing

Neuroaffirming practice and transitions

- **Neuroinclusive Education Network**
  Resources for education settings covering inclusive practice, communication, participation and support for autistic children and young people

Glossary of terms:

APDR:	Assess Plan Do and Review
BICS:	Barnet Integrated Clinical Service
C/YP:	Child or Young Person
CAMHS:	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
EBSA:	Emotionally Based School Avoidance
EP:	Educational Psychologist
IAT:	Inclusion Advisory Service
SEMH:	Social Emotional and Mental Health
SEN:	Special Educational Needs
SENDIASS:	Special Educational Needs Information Advice and Support Service

Guidance review

This guidance will be reviewed by the SEMH Leading Edge Group annually. It will also be reviewed as required to reflect changes in the research literature.

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Appendices

Appendices

Appendix 1: EBSA response pathway (checklist for school staff)

This pathway provides an overview of the steps schools should take when concerns about EBSA or barriers to attendance emerge.

It is not a rigid sequence or a set of thresholds. Some steps may happen together, and safeguarding, health or educational concerns may require immediate action at any point.

Step 1: Notice and respond early

Step 2: Identify a co-ordinator

Step 3: Develop a shared understanding

Step 4: Agree a support plan

Step 5: Implement consistently

Step 6: Review implementation and progress

Step 7: Continue, adapt or increase support

At every step

Schools should:

- Apply the WARMTH principles
- Keep the child or young person's perspective central
- Work collaboratively with parent(s)/carer(s)
- Respond without blame or assumptions about intent
- Consider neurodivergence, SEND, disability, culture and wider context
- Maintain safeguarding and relational contact
- Record decisions, provision and implementation
- Understand progress through wellbeing and access to education alongside attendance

Step 1: Notice and respond early

Notice changes in:

- Emotional wellbeing or physical symptoms

- Attendance, punctuality or patterns of absence
- Access to lessons and learning
- Time spent outside classrooms
- Behaviour, communication or relationships
- Distress before, during or after school
- Energy, exhaustion or recovery following attendance

Begin support when concerns emerge rather than waiting for attendance to deteriorate further.

Step 2: Identify a coordinator

Agree a named member of staff who will:

- Coordinate communication and planning
- Act as the main contact for parent(s)/carer(s)
- Ensure the child or young person knows who they can approach
- Bring together information from staff and professionals
- Monitor agreed actions and review dates
- Reduce repeated or conflicting communication

Step 3: Develop a shared understanding

Gather information from:

- The child or young person using accessible and low-pressure methods
- Parent/carers
- Staff who know the child or young person across different settings
- Attendance, lesson-access and engagement records
- Existing assessments, plans and involved professionals

Explore:

- The barriers currently having the greatest impact
- Strengths, interests, trusted relationships and protective factors
- Learning, sensory, communication, relational, emotional and health needs
- Differences between home and school presentation

- What has already been tried, whether it was implemented as intended and for sufficient time, and how the child or young person responded
- How emotional culturality may influence how distress is expressed or understood
- What adults, environments and systems may need to change

The shared understanding should remain provisional and open to review.

See Appendix 2 for tools to support gathering the child or young person's perspective.

Step 4: Agree a support plan

Use Assess, Plan, Do, Review to agree:

- The child or young person's preferred ways of communicating and being involved
- Safeguarding and welfare-contact arrangements
- No more than three immediate priorities
- Reasonable adjustments and changes to the environment
- Support for safety, regulation, belonging and learning
- What adults will do differently
- What education the child or young person can currently access
- Who is responsible for each action
- One meaningful and manageable next step towards safety, connection, learning or participation, where appropriate
- How home and school will communicate
- How progress will be recognised
- A clear review date
- What will happen if an agreed step is not manageable
- Circumstances that would trigger an earlier review

Support should address the barriers identified rather than focus only on increasing attendance.

See Appendices 3A–3E for guidance and templates for creating and reviewing an EBSA support plan.

Step 5: Implement consistently

Ensure that:

- Relevant staff understand the plan
- Adjustments are available when and where they are needed
- Communication is predictable and coordinated
- The child or young person is not repeatedly asked to explain their needs
- Contact remains relational and low pressure during absence
- Opportunities for regulation and recovery are protected
- Suitable learning remains available
- Actions and barriers to implementation are recorded

The plan should be implemented consistently before conclusions are drawn about its impact.

Step 6: Review implementation and progress

At the agreed review, consider:

- Which actions were implemented as planned
- What helped the child or young person feel safer or more able to engage
- What increased pressure or was not manageable
- Whether the original understanding remains accurate
- What the child or young person and parent/carers are communicating now
- Progress in wellbeing, belonging, relationships and communication
- Access to lessons, learning and meaningful activity
- Changes in attendance and punctuality
- Whether the current level of support remains appropriate
- Whether actions have been in place consistently and for sufficient time to assess their impact

A lack of increased attendance does not necessarily mean that no progress has been made.

Step 7: Continue, adapt or increase support

Following review, decide whether to:

- Continue actions that are helping
- Change or stop actions that are increasing pressure
- Explore barriers that are not yet sufficiently understood
- Strengthen reasonable adjustments or SEN Support
- Involve additional professionals or services
- Increase or change the intensity of support, including targeted or enhanced support where appropriate
- Use the ***Moving from Recovery to Rediscovery model*** where difficulties are entrenched
- Seek advice from Barnet where a child or young person cannot attend school and would otherwise not receive suitable education
- Consider whether Section 19, an EHC needs assessment or a review of existing SEND provision may be required

Further professional involvement should contribute to one coordinated plan rather than creating separate processes.

Appendix 2: Tools for gathering the child or young person's perspective

The aim is not simply to collect pupil voice, but to enable the child or young person to influence the understanding, support and decisions that affect them.

Gathering their perspective should be an ongoing process rather than a single conversation or completed activity. Different approaches may be needed over time as trust, circumstances and communication preferences change.

The tools in this appendix should be used flexibly. Children and young people do not need to complete every activity, and no single tool will provide a complete understanding.

Using the tools

Children and young people should be offered choices about:

- How they communicate
- When and where activities take place
- Who supports them
- Whether they take part alone or with a trusted adult
- Whether they respond immediately or return to the activity later
- Which tools or activities feel most manageable

Perspectives may be communicated through:

- Conversation
- Writing or drawing
- Visual or card-sorting activities
- Play, creative activities or digital tools
- Alternative or augmentative communication
- Observation of behaviour, engagement and responses across different contexts
- Communication through a trusted adult
- Information previously shared

Before using a tool, adults should:

- Explain why the activity is being offered and how the information will be used

- Choose a time and place where the child or young person feels as safe and regulated as possible
- Avoid repeated questioning or asking them to retell difficult experiences
- Use language that is clear, accessible and appropriate to the individual
- Allow processing time, pauses and opportunities to respond later
- Accept uncertainty, silence or "I don't know" without increasing pressure
- Check that their interpretation is accurate rather than making assumptions
- Show how the child or young person's perspective has influenced the plan

A child or young person may be able to recognise or communicate feelings when regulated but find this much harder during periods of distress or overwhelm. Their ability to take part at a particular moment should not be understood as evidence that they do not have a perspective.

Where direct participation is not currently manageable, adults may develop a provisional understanding using observations and information from people who know the child or young person well. This should remain open to review, and accessible opportunities to contribute should continue to be offered.

Information gathered through these tools should be considered alongside perspectives from parent/carers, school staff and involved professionals and used to inform Assess, Plan, Do, Review.

Scaling and visual supports

Scaling and visual approaches can help children and young people communicate how different situations, activities and parts of the school day affect them. They may be particularly helpful where spoken discussion feels difficult or where the child or young person benefits from visual structure.

Approaches may include:

- Colour-coding a timetable using colours chosen by the child or young person
- Rating situations from comfortable to overwhelming
- Using emotion thermometers, visual scales or body maps
- Sorting activities, spaces or experiences into helpful, difficult or unsure
- Comparing how a situation feels before, during and afterwards
- Using photographs, symbols, drawings or digital tools
- Identifying which parts of the day require the most effort or recovery

Adults should explore what each colour, number, word or symbol means to the individual rather than assuming it has a fixed meaning.

Questions might include:

- What makes this part of the day feel easier or harder?
- Who or what helps?
- Is there anything that would make it more manageable?
- Does it feel different on different days?
- How much energy does it use?
- How do you feel afterwards?

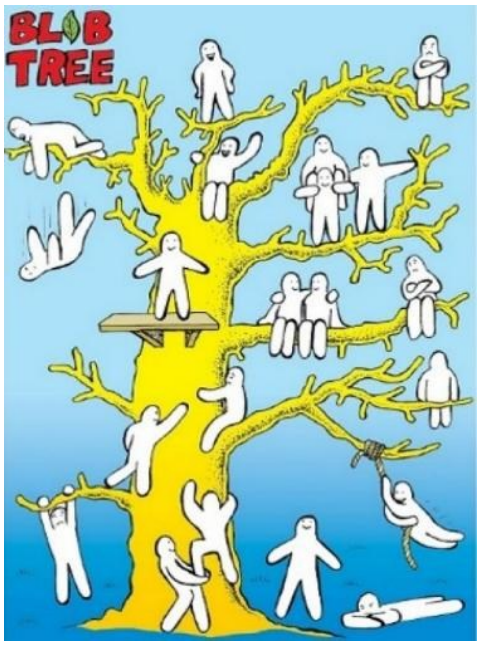
The **School Wellbeing Risk and Resilience Cards** may also support children and young people to explore experiences that affect safety, belonging, wellbeing and access to education.

Structured measures such as the **Spence Children's Anxiety Scale** may provide additional information about anxiety when used appropriately. They should not replace broader exploration of the child or young person's perspective or be treated as diagnostic tools.

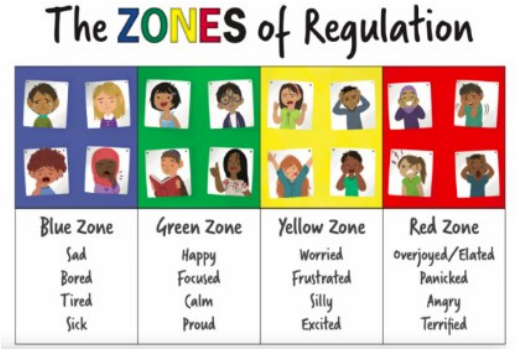
Scaling should support curiosity and planning rather than be used to test whether the child or young person is ready to attend. The information gathered should help adults identify patterns, protective factors and practical changes that could reduce barriers.

Examples of scaling and visual approaches:









Mapping the school day and environment

Mapping the school day can help identify patterns that may be missed when attendance is considered as a single overall figure.

The child or young person might explore:

- Leaving home and travelling to school
- Arrival and entering the building
- Registration
- Particular lessons, teachers or subjects
- Moving between rooms
- Break and lunchtime
- Busy, noisy or unpredictable spaces
- Changes to routines or staffing
- Unstructured or social times
- Leaving school and recovering afterwards

This may be completed using:

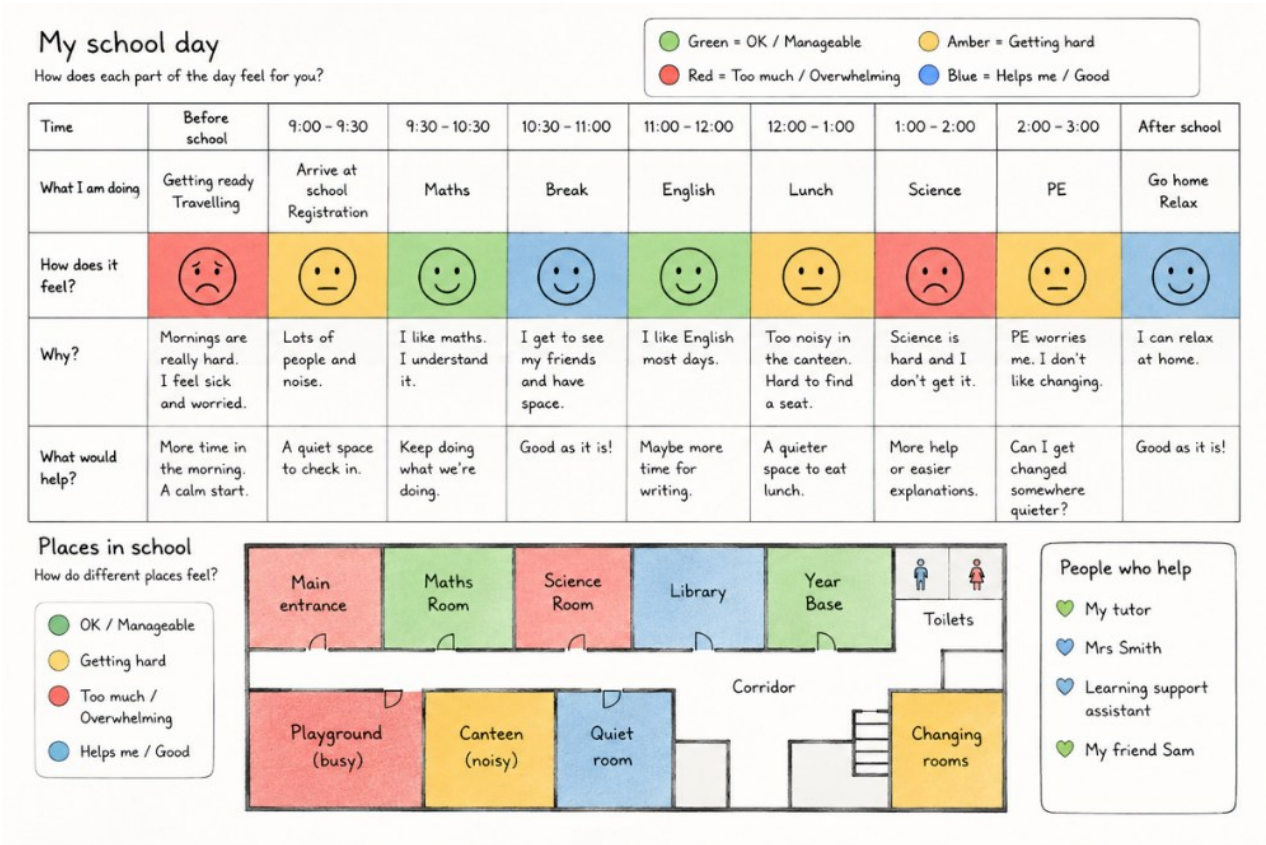
- A timetable annotated with words, colours, symbols or ratings
- A map of the school
- Photographs of key spaces
- A timeline of the day
- Cards representing different activities, people or environments
- A digital document or presentation

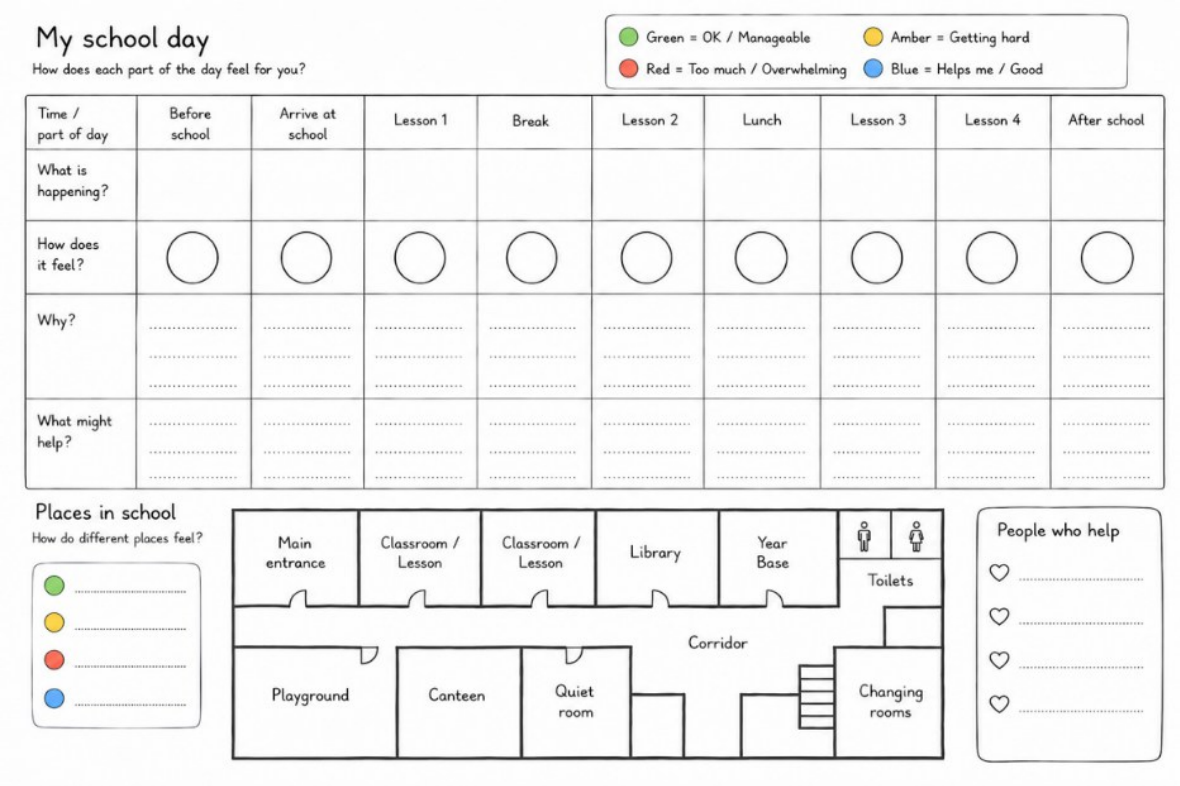
Adults should explore both barriers and protective factors by asking:

- When and where do you feel most comfortable?
- Which parts of the day use the most energy?
- Are there particular people, spaces or activities that help?
- What makes a difficult part of the day more manageable?
- What happens before or after the difficulty?
- Are there times when the same situation feels different?
- What could adults change or prepare differently?

The aim is not simply to identify situations the child or young person finds difficult. The information should help adults understand what contributes to safety, belonging and access, and which adjustments may reduce pressure across the school day.

Example:





Gaining views about relationships and belonging

Sociograms can help develop an understanding of the child or young person's relationships, sources of support and sense of belonging within school.

Traditionally, sociograms map patterns within a peer group, such as who children choose to work or spend time with. For individual EBSA planning, they should be adapted carefully so that the child or young person's own perspective remains central and unnecessary peer nomination is avoided.

A child-led sociogram or relationship map can help explore:

- Who the child or young person feels safest with
- Who they can approach for help
- Which adults or peers they trust
- Which relationships feel difficult or unpredictable
- Where they experience belonging or isolation
- Which connections they would like to strengthen
- Whether there are concerns about bullying, conflict, discrimination or exclusion

The child or young person might:

- Place names, photographs or symbols closer to or further away from themselves

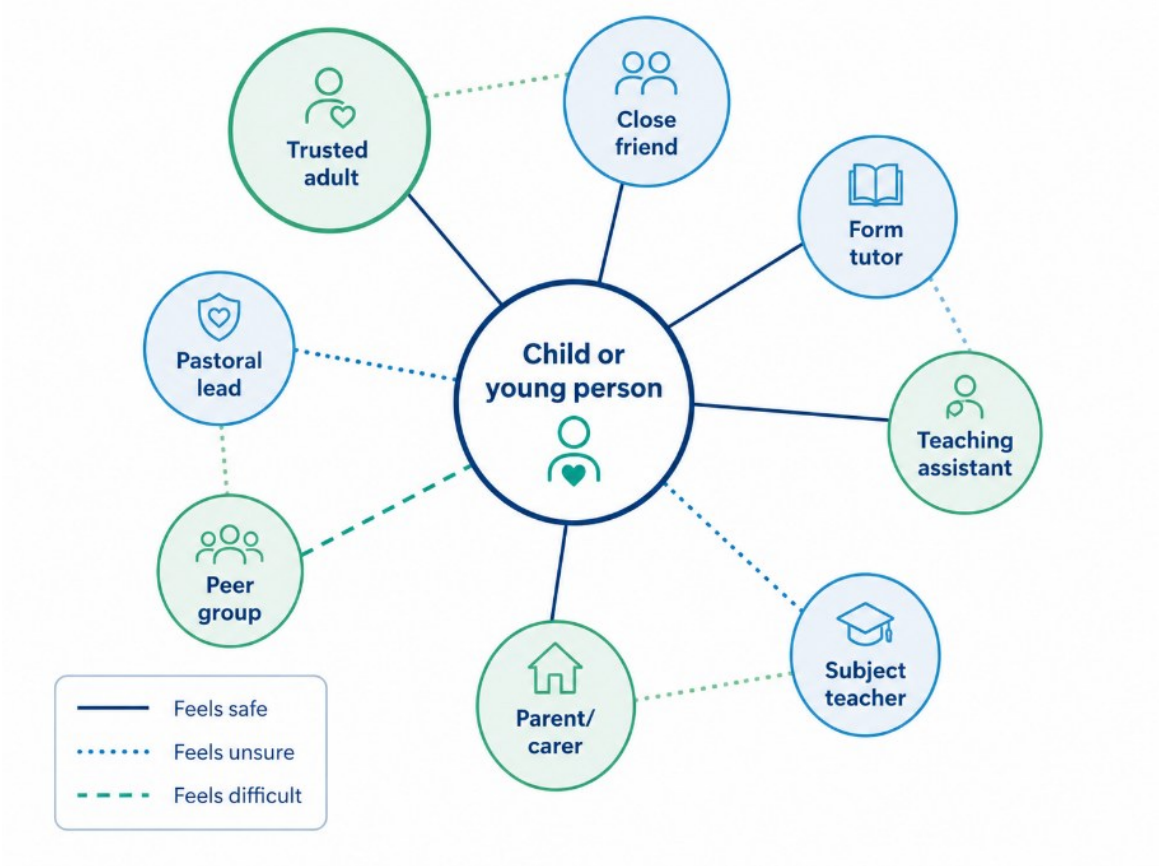
- Use colours, shapes or lines to show how different relationships feel
- Identify who they would go to in different situations
- Show which people form part of their support network
- Indicate who they would like involved in planning or review

Questions might include:

- Who helps you feel safe or understood?
- Who is easiest to talk to?
- Who would you go to if something felt difficult?
- Is there anyone you feel unsure around or try to avoid?
- Where do you feel most included?
- Are there relationships you would like adults to help repair or strengthen?

The purpose is not to judge relationships or produce a fixed picture of the child or young person's social world. It is to identify existing sources of safety and belonging, areas of relational difficulty and possible actions to strengthen support.

Example:



The Ideal School (Williams and Hanke, 2007)

The **Ideal School Technique** is a Personal Construct Psychology activity commonly used by Educational Psychologists to explore how a child or young person understands and experiences school.

The activity usually involves asking the child or young person to describe or create:

- Their ideal school
- A non-ideal school
- Their current school

They may be invited to think about:

- What the school environment looks and feels like
- What adults and other children are like
- How people communicate
- What happens in lessons
- What break and lunchtime are like
- How changes and transitions are managed
- What support is available
- How they would feel in each school

The child or young person can then consider where their current school sits between the ideal and non-ideal schools.

The activity can be completed through:

- Drawing
- Writing
- Collage
- Building with blocks or construction materials
- Digital drawing or presentation tools
- Minecraft or another familiar creative platform
- Talking through ideas with a trusted adult

Questions might include:

- What would adults do in your ideal school?

- What would lessons be like?
- Where could you go if you needed space or support?
- What would happen if something felt difficult?
- How would people know when you needed help?
- What would make you feel that you belonged?
- What would be different from your current school?
- Is there anything from your ideal school that could happen now?

The purpose is not to create an unrealistic version of school. It is to understand the child or young person's values, expectations and experiences and identify practical changes that could move their current educational experience closer to what feels safe, accessible and meaningful.

Adults should remain curious about the meaning behind each feature rather than assuming why it has been included. The child or young person's ideas should be reflected in planning wherever possible.

Adapted from Williams and Hanke (2007).

Energy Accounting (Toudal and Attwood, 2024)

Energy Accounting can help children and young people explore which experiences use energy and which support regulation, recovery or enjoyment.

The approach is based on the idea that everyone has a limited and changing amount of energy available across the day. Different activities, environments, relationships and demands may either use energy or help restore it.

The child or young person might identify:

- Activities, places or people that drain energy
- Activities, relationships or interests that restore energy
- Times of day when energy is usually higher or lower
- Demands that feel manageable on their own but become overwhelming when combined
- What helps them recover during or after the school day
- What makes it harder to recover
- Adjustments that could create a more sustainable balance

This may be explored through:

- A simple deposits and withdrawals chart
- Colour-coding a school timetable
- Sorting activities into energy-giving, energy-using or mixed
- Rating how much energy different activities require
- Comparing energy before, during and after parts of the day
- Drawing an energy battery or tank
- Using symbols, pictures or digital tools

Questions might include:

- What uses the most energy?
- What helps you feel more settled or recharged?
- Are there times when lots of small demands build up?
- Which activities are worth the energy because they are important or enjoyable?
- What helps you recover afterwards?
- What could adults change to reduce unnecessary energy use?
- Where could more opportunities for rest, regulation or choice be built in?

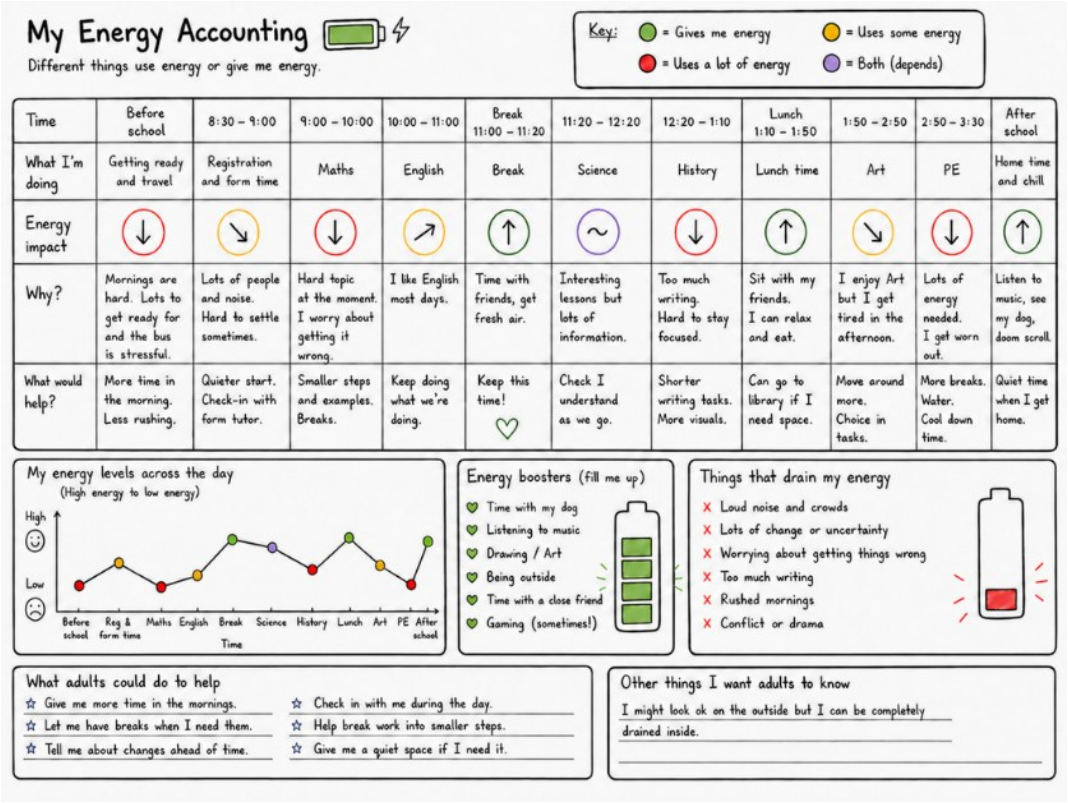
Adults should avoid treating energy as fixed or assuming that the same activity will always have the same impact. Energy may change according to sleep, health, sensory demands, uncertainty, relationships, previous experiences and the cumulative demands of the day.

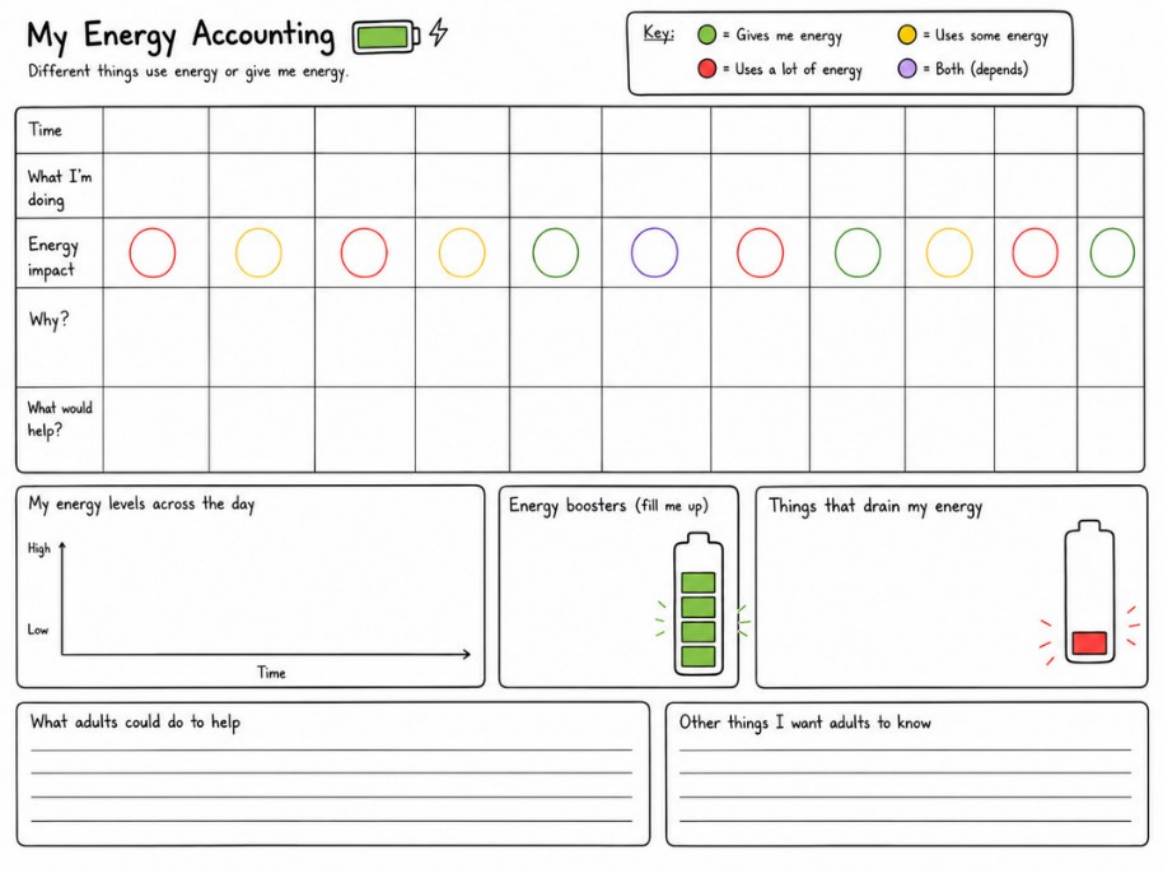
The purpose is not to remove every demand. It is to understand which demands are necessary, which can be adapted, and what support is needed to make participation more sustainable.

Barnet's **Secondary Energy Accounting Attendance Plan** provides a practical template for exploring demands, participation, communication and adjustments with secondary-aged children and young people.

Examples:


ENERGY TAKERS
-People pleasing
-Too much screen time/ social media
-Fear, doubt, stress
-Overthinking
-Clutter and mess
-Dehydration
-Not eating enough
-Junk food
-Overworking
-No exercise
-Sitting for too long
-Living in the past
-Living mindlessly/on autopilot mode
-Setting unrealistic goals
ENERGY GIVERS
selfcarexpress
-Sunlight
-Nourishing food
-Exercise
-Water/hydration
-Fresh air
-Music
-Prayer/meditation
-Deep breaths
-Love and intimacy
-Meaningful connections
-Self care
-Positive affirmations
-Proper rest/sleep
-Mindfulness
-Art/creativity
-Living in the present moment


My Energy Accounting
Different things use energy or give me energy.
Key: = Gives me energy = Uses some energy = Uses a lot of energy = Both (depends)
Time | Before school | 8:30 – 9:00 | 9:00 – 10:00 | 10:00 – 11:00 | Break 11:00 – 11:20 | 11:20 – 12:20 | 12:20 – 1:10 | Lunch 1:10 – 1:50 | 1:50 – 2:50 | 2:50 – 3:30 | After school
What I'm doing | Getting ready and travel | Registration and form time | Maths | English | Break | Science | History | Lunch time | Art | PE | Home time and chill
Energy impact
Why? | Mornings are hard. Lots to get ready for and the bus is stressful. | Lots of people and noise. Hard to settle sometimes. | Hard topic at the moment. I worry about getting it wrong. | I like English most days. | Time with friends, get fresh air. | Interesting lessons but lots of information. | Too much writing. Hard to stay focused. | Sit with my friends. I can relax and eat. | I enjoy Art but I get tired in the afternoon. | Lots of energy needed. I get worn out. | Listen to music, see my dog, doom scroll.
What would help? | More time in the morning. Less rushing. | Quieter start. Check-in with form tutor. | Smaller steps and examples. Breaks. | Keep doing what we're doing. | Keep this time! | Check I understand as we go. | Shorter writing tasks. More visuals. | Can go to library if I need space. | Move around more. Choice in tasks. | More breaks. Water. Cool down time. | Quiet time when I get home.
My energy levels across the day
(High energy to low energy)
High
Low
Before school
Reg & form time
Maths
English
Break
Science
History
Lunch
Art
PE
After school
Time
Energy boosters (fill me up)
Time with my dog
Listening to music
Drawing / Art
Being outside
Time with a close friend
Gaming (sometimes!)
Things that drain my energy
Loud noise and crowds
Lots of change or uncertainty
Worrying about getting things wrong
Too much writing
Rushed mornings
Conflict or drama
What adults could do to help
Give me more time in the mornings.
Let me have breaks when I need them.
Tell me about changes ahead of time.
Check in with me during the day.
Help break work into smaller steps.
Give me a quiet space if I need it.
Other things I want adults to know
I might look ok on the outside but I can be completely drained inside.



Adapted from Toudal and Attwood (2024).

Guidance for supporting Children and Young People with Complex Communication Needs at Risk of EBSA (with thanks to Luci Rose and the BELS Autism Advisory Service)

Local Context

Increasingly within Barnet, children and young people (CYP) with complex communication support needs are educated within mainstream schools. Some CYP experience significant difficulties developing functional spoken language and may rely on a range of communication methods, including Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).

Complex communication support needs (CCSN) refer to significant difficulties with understanding and/or expressing communication through spoken language alone. CYP may rely on a range of communication methods, including AAC, gesture, movement, symbols, signs, objects, photographs and communication partners.

Communication, Participation and Children's Rights

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that children and young people have the right to:

- Express their views freely on matters affecting them.
- Have their views listened to and taken seriously.
- Participate in decisions about their lives.
- Communicate their views in ways that are appropriate to their communication strengths and needs.

For some CYP, communication may occur through:

- AAC systems and communication aids
- Makaton and signing
- Choice boards and visual supports
- Objects of reference
- Showing, bringing, leading and sharing
- Selecting and rejecting
- Body language, facial expression and movement
- Engagement with people, activities and environments

Communication is not limited to speech. Difficulties demonstrating knowledge, answering questions or participating in conversations do not necessarily reflect cognitive ability or understanding.

Common AAC approaches used in mainstream settings include:

Low-Tech AAC	Mid- Tech AAC	High-Tech AAC
• Core boards • PECS • Communication books • Choice boards • Visual timetables • Now-and-Next boards	• BIGmack • Talking Buttons • Talking Tiles • GoTalk devices	• TD Snap • Proloquo2Go • Grid for iPad • Dedicated speech-generating devices

CYP may access AAC through:

- Direct touch
- Eye gaze
- Switch access
- Scanning
- Joysticks
- Partner-assisted scanning

Many CYP also benefit from literacy-based AAC, including alphabet boards, keyboards and spelling systems.

Communication and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

There are strong links between Article 12 and understanding emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA).

Listening to the Child or Young Person's Perspective

When a child or young person struggles to attend school, adults should ask:

"What is this child or young person communicating about their experience of school?"

The message may be:

- "School feels overwhelming."

- "I do not feel safe."
- "I cannot manage uncertainty."
- "I am exhausted from masking."
- "I do not feel that I belong."

Distress and Attendance as Communication

Patterns of attendance, avoidance or distress can themselves provide important information about a child or young person's experience of school. Indicators may include:

- Anxiety before school
- Physical symptoms
- Distress during transitions
- Withdrawal or shutdown
- Repeated attempts to avoid school

These behaviours should not be viewed simply as non-compliance. They may indicate unmet needs, barriers or distress within the school environment. Understanding the meaning of these behaviours requires careful observation across contexts and collaboration with families and professionals who know the child or young person well

Lundy's Model of Participation

Meaningful participation involves four elements:

Element	What it means
Space	Opportunities to participate in accessible ways
Voice	Appropriate communication supports are available
Audience	Someone listens and seeks to understand
Influence	What is communicated informs decisions and actions

For children and young people with complex communication needs, all four elements are essential.

Practical Approaches

Intensive Interaction

Intensive Interaction is a child-led approach that promotes:

- Engagement
- Communication
- Social connection
- Responsiveness

Communication Passports

Communication passports provide a concise profile of how a child or young person communicates, what is important to them and how others can best support meaningful interaction and participation.

A communication passport may include:

- Preferred communication methods
- How the child or young person expresses preferences and refusals
- Signs of anxiety or distress
- AAC systems used
- Sensory needs
- Interests and strengths
- Helpful support strategies
- Information from families and key adults

When gathering information, practitioners may use:

- Talking Mats principles
- Photographs
- Objects of reference
- Talking Buttons
- Choice-making activities
- Communication observations across contexts

Interpretations should be tentative and informed by families and adults who know the child or young person well.

Key Messages for Practitioners

- Every child and young person has the right to be heard.
- Communication may occur through speech, AAC, behaviour, engagement and relationships.
- Attendance difficulties may communicate unmet needs or barriers within the school environment.
- Understanding communication requires observation across contexts and collaboration with families and professionals who know the child or young person well.
- A lack of speech should never be equated with a lack of understanding, opinions or intelligence.
- The goal is not only to listen to children and young people, but also to ensure that their views influence decisions that affect them.

Conclusion

Children and young people with complex communication needs have the same rights as their peers to express views, influence decisions and participate in their education. Effective listening requires curiosity, observation, collaboration and a commitment to understanding communication in all its forms. By recognising communication beyond speech, practitioners can better understand the experiences of children and young people at risk of emotionally based school avoidance and ensure their voices inform support and decision-making.

Appendix 3: Creating and reviewing an EBSA support plan

Appendix 3 brings together the guidance and materials needed to create and review one coordinated support plan. Appendix 3C is the main staff and professional record. Appendix 3D or 3E can be used to share the plan with the child or young person in the format that is most accessible to them. These are not separate plans, but different ways of representing the same agreed understanding, actions and review arrangements.

Appendix 3A: Creating and reviewing an EBSA support plan

From understanding to action

Gathering the child or young person's perspective is only useful if it leads to meaningful change. Their perspective should be considered alongside information from their parent/carers, school staff and any involved professionals to develop a shared understanding and coordinated plan.

An EBSA support plan is not simply a timetable or a set of attendance targets. It should identify:

- What may be making engagement and attendance difficult
- The child or young person's strengths, interests and aspirations
- What helps them feel safer, more connected and able to engage
- What adults and systems will do differently
- How suitable education will remain accessible
- How progress will be reviewed

The plan should be developed *with* the child or young person and their parent/carers. This does not mean that everyone must attend the same meeting. Information can be gathered beforehand using the child or young person's preferred communication methods.

The planning cycle

Stage	What this involves
Access: Listen	Gather the perspectives of the child or young person, their parent/carers, school staff and involved professionals.
Access: Understand together	Identify strengths, protective factors, barriers, unmet needs, patterns and sources of pressure. Acknowledge where perspectives differ.
Plan	Agree a small number of meaningful priorities and identify the adjustments, support and adult actions required.

Do	Put the agreed actions in place consistently and allow sufficient time for them to have an impact.
Review	Consider what has changed, what has been learned and what should continue, change, reduce or stop.

Different perspectives do not need to be resolved before support can begin. They should be recorded respectfully and explored with curiosity.

Agreeing priorities

The plan should focus on a small number of priorities informed by the shared understanding. These might include:

- Reducing distress and supporting recovery
- Strengthening a trusted relationship
- Making part of the school day or environment feel safer
- Reducing sensory, social or academic barriers
- Increasing access to suitable learning
- Supporting communication and self-advocacy
- Reconnecting with interests, peers or the wider community
- Improving communication between home, school and other services

Improved attendance may be a hoped-for longer-term outcome, but it should not be the only measure of progress.

Turning priorities into actions

Each action should clearly record:

- What will happen
- Who is responsible
- When or how often it will happen
- How it will be communicated to the child or young person
- How the team will know whether it is helping

Actions should describe what adults will do, rather than placing responsibility solely on the child or young person.

For example:

Rather than: Sam will attend registration every morning.
Consider: A named adult will meet Sam at the quiet entrance and accompany them to an agreed space. Sam can use their exit card if they become overwhelmed.

The plan should also include:

- The child or young person's preferred ways of communicating and being involved
- Reasonable adjustments and environmental changes
- Arrangements for accessing suitable education
- Communication between home, school and other services
- Safeguarding and welfare-contact arrangements
- What will happen if an agreed step is not manageable
- A review date and circumstances that would trigger an earlier review

Reviewing the plan

Progress should be considered more broadly than attendance alone. Reviews might explore changes in:

- Emotional and physical wellbeing
- Felt safety
- Trust and relationships
- Communication
- Engagement with interests and everyday activities
- Access to learning
- Participation in school or the wider community
- Attendance, where this is a meaningful and appropriate indicator

If a step is not manageable, this should be treated as useful information about the pace, environment, expectations or support required. The plan should be adjusted rather than responding automatically with increased pressure, sanctions or the withdrawal of support.

The plan is a living document. Each review should clearly record what will continue, what will change and when progress will next be reviewed.

Appendix 3B: Planning and review meetings

This structure can be adapted for an initial planning meeting or a review. Meetings should be collaborative, focused and proportionate to the child or young person's needs.

The child or young person should be supported to contribute in a way that feels accessible and manageable. They may wish to attend all or part of the meeting, communicate through a trusted adult, or share their perspective beforehand using one of the tools in Appendix 2. Their involvement should not depend on attending a formal meeting.

Before the meeting

The named coordinator should:

- Agree who needs to contribute and avoid involving more people than necessary
- Gather the child or young person's perspective using their preferred communication methods
- Invite the parent/carers to share their observations, concerns and priorities
- Gather relevant information from school staff and involved professionals
- Review attendance and engagement patterns alongside information about wellbeing, relationships, learning and the environment
- Identify any urgent safeguarding, health or educational concerns requiring action
- Explain the purpose and structure of the meeting in advance
- Share information in an accessible format and allow sufficient time for preparation

Suggested meeting structure

1. Welcome and purpose

- Introduce everyone and clarify their role
- Explain the purpose of the meeting
- Agree how the child or young person's perspective will be represented
- Acknowledge that participants may hold different perspectives
- Confirm the time available and what the meeting needs to achieve

A helpful opening might be:

The purpose of this meeting is to develop a shared understanding of what is making engagement and attendance difficult and agree what we can do to reduce those barriers. We do not need to agree on every detail before support can begin.

2. Begin with strengths

Consider:

- What is important to the child or young person?
- What are their strengths, interests and aspirations?
- When and where do they feel most comfortable or engaged?
- Which people, relationships or activities support them?
- What is currently going well, even if it appears small?

Beginning with strengths helps ensure that the plan is not defined only by difficulties or absence.

3. Share perspectives

Invite contributions from:

- The child or young person
- Their parent/carers
- School staff
- Involved professionals, where relevant

Explore:

- What is currently happening?
- When is engagement or attendance easier or more difficult?
- What changes have been noticed over time?
- What does the child or young person communicate through their words, behaviour or patterns of engagement?
- What has already been tried?
- Was the support implemented consistently and for sufficient time?
- How did the child or young person respond?

Different perspectives should be recorded respectfully. The meeting should avoid becoming focused on determining whose account is correct.

4. Develop a shared understanding

Bring the available information together to consider:

- The barriers affecting engagement, attendance and access to learning
- SEND, health, sensory, communication or emotional needs
- Relational, environmental, academic, family or wider contextual factors

- Sources of pressure or distress
- Protective factors and available support
- What appears to maintain or reduce the difficulties
- What may need to change around the child or young person

Summarise this in a short, non-blaming shared-understanding statement.

For example:

Maya wants to learn and remain connected to school. Unpredictable lessons, busy transitions and anxiety about being questioned in front of others are currently increasing her distress. Spending time in the pastoral area helps Maya remain on site, but she needs greater predictability, trusted support and adjustments within lessons to make classroom participation more manageable.

5. Agree priorities and actions

Identify a small number of meaningful priorities. For each priority, agree:

- What adults will do
- Who is responsible
- When and how often it will happen
- How it will be explained to the child or young person
- What adjustments or resources are needed
- How suitable education will remain accessible
- How the team will notice whether the action is helping
- What will happen if the action or agreed step is not manageable

Actions should be specific, achievable and linked directly to the shared understanding. Avoid creating a long list of actions that cannot be implemented consistently.

6. Agree coordination and communication

Record:

- The named coordinator
- The child or young person's preferred method of communication
- How and when home and school will communicate
- Who will update relevant staff
- How information will be shared without requiring the family to repeat their experiences
- Safeguarding and welfare-contact arrangements
- Any support or advice required from other services

Contact should be predictable and purposeful. Its frequency should meet safeguarding and support needs without creating additional pressure for the child or family.

7. Agree how progress will be reviewed

Agree:

- What progress may look like beyond attendance
- How the child or young person's experience will be gathered
- What information will be reviewed
- The review date
- Who should contribute to the review
- What circumstances would trigger an earlier review

Possible indicators of progress include changes in wellbeing, felt safety, trust, communication, access to learning, participation, relationships and recovery following activity.

At a review meeting

A review should consider:

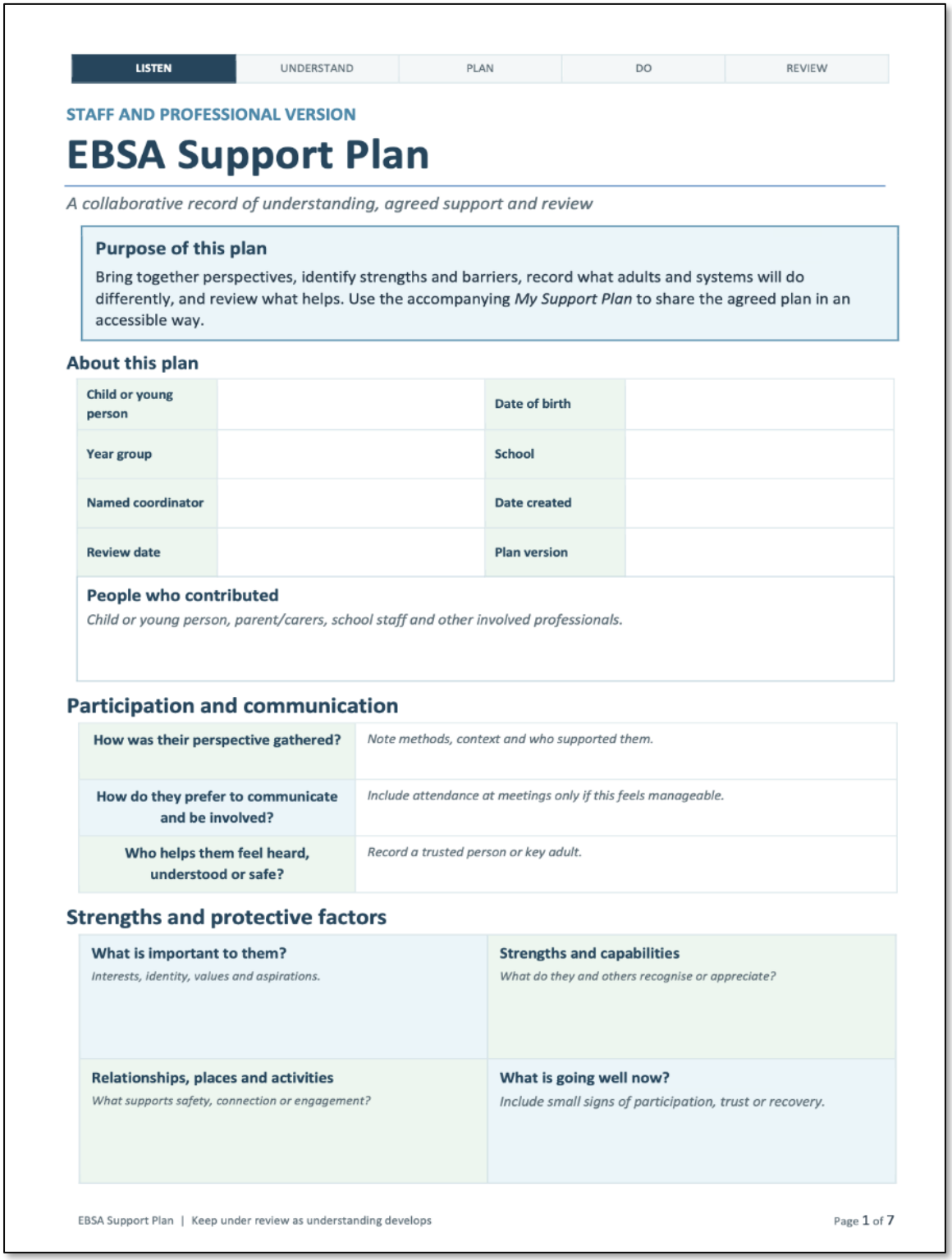
- Which actions were completed
- Whether they were implemented consistently and for sufficient time
- What the child or young person and their parent/carers experienced
- What has improved, remained the same or become more difficult
- What the team has learned about barriers and helpful support
- Whether any action unintentionally increased pressure
- What should continue, change, reduce or stop
- Whether the shared understanding and priorities need updating

An unsuccessful step should be treated as information about the support, timing, environment or level of demand. It should not automatically result in sanctions, increased pressure or withdrawal of support.

The meeting should end with a clear summary of the agreed actions, responsibilities and review arrangements. The updated plan should be shared promptly in an accessible format.

Appendix 3C: EBSA Support Plan - staff and professional version

This template is designed to help the team move from gathering information towards a shared understanding and a small number of specific, coordinated actions. It should be reviewed and updated as understanding develops.



LISTEN | UNDERSTAND | PLAN | DO | REVIEW

STAFF AND PROFESSIONAL VERSION

EBSA Support Plan

A collaborative record of understanding, agreed support and review

Purpose of this plan

Bring together perspectives, identify strengths and barriers, record what adults and systems will do differently, and review what helps. Use the accompanying *My Support Plan* to share the agreed plan in an accessible way.

About this plan

Child or young person		**Date of birth**	
Year group		**School**	
Named coordinator		**Date created**	
Review date		**Plan version**	

People who contributed

Child or young person, parent/carers, school staff and other involved professionals.

Participation and communication

How was their perspective gathered?	*Note methods, context and who supported them.*
How do they prefer to communicate and be involved?	*Include attendance at meetings only if this feels manageable.*
Who helps them feel heard, understood or safe?	*Record a trusted person or key adult.*

Strengths and protective factors

What is important to them? *Interests, identity, values and aspirations.*	**Strengths and capabilities** *What do they and others recognise or appreciate?*
Relationships, places and activities *What supports safety, connection or engagement?*	**What is going well now?** *Include small signs of participation, trust or recovery.*

EBSA Support Plan | Keep under review as understanding develops

Page 1 of 7

LISTEN | **UNDERSTAND** | PLAN | DO | REVIEW

EBSA SUPPORT PLAN | SECTION 2

Bringing together perspectives

Invite each person to share what they notice, what is going well and what they believe may help. Different perspectives can be recorded respectfully without requiring everyone to agree.

Keep the child or young person's perspective visible

Their contribution may come from the accompanying *My Support Plan,* another pupil-voice tool, a trusted adult or their patterns of communication and engagement. It does not depend on attending a formal meeting.

Child or young person

What is going well, important or helpful from their perspective?	*What feels difficult, creates barriers or needs to change? What might help?*

Parent/carers

What is going well? What do they notice at home or around transitions?	*What barriers or concerns do they identify? What lowers demand or supports recovery?*

School staff

When and where is engagement more possible? Which relationships or adjustments help?	*What barriers are staff noticing? What can be changed in routines, teaching or the environment?*

Other involved professionals

What strengths, needs or helpful approaches are relevant?	*What additional advice, coordination or provision may be required?*

LISTEN | **UNDERSTAND** | PLAN | DO | REVIEW

EBSA SUPPORT PLAN | SECTION 3

Understanding patterns and learning from support

Look beyond attendance figures to identify the conditions that make engagement easier or harder. Patterns can help the team decide what needs to change around the child or young person.

What helps or reduces pressure?	What increases pressure or distress?
When and where is engagement easier? What supports safety, connection, communication, regulation or learning?	*When and where is engagement harder? What demands, situations or uncertainties may contribute?*

Needs, barriers and wider context

Use the spaces below to note relevant factors.

Sensory, physical and environmental	**Social, relational and belonging**
Communication, interaction and predictability	**Learning, executive functioning, health and wider context**

Relevant changes or wider circumstances

Consider recent events, transitions, family context, peer experiences and community factors.

What has already been tried?

Record whether support was implemented consistently and for sufficient time. An unhelpful step is information, not evidence that the child or family has failed.

Support or adjustment	How and when was it used?	Child or young person's experience and what we learned
	Include consistency, duration and any variation.	
	Include consistency, duration and any variation.	
	Include consistency, duration and any variation.	

EBSA Support Plan | Keep under review as understanding develops

Page 3 of 7

LISTEN | **UNDERSTAND** | PLAN | DO | REVIEW

EBSA SUPPORT PLAN | SECTION 4

Our shared understanding and priorities

Bring the available information together into a concise, non-blaming explanation. The shared understanding should make the next actions feel logical and proportionate.

Our shared-understanding statement

Briefly describe what matters to the child or young person; the barriers affecting engagement, attendance or access to learning; what appears to increase or reduce distress; protective factors; and what may need to change around them.

Differences we still need to explore

Record unresolved differences or missing information without delaying helpful support.

Priorities

Agree no more than three meaningful priorities. These should reflect what matters to the child or young person and what adults can realistically influence.

Priority	Why this matters to the child or young person	What helpful change may look or feel like
1.		
2.		
3.		

Link to the accessible plan

Where appropriate, use the accompanying My Support Plan to show the child or young person what the team is working on and what adults have promised to do.

EBSA Support Plan | Keep under review as understanding develops

Page 4 of 7

LISTEN | UNDERSTAND | **PLAN** | DO | REVIEW

EBSA SUPPORT PLAN | SECTION 5

Agreed actions and adjustments

Actions should describe what adults and systems will do, rather than placing responsibility solely on the child or young person. Keep the list short enough to implement consistently.

Make actions specific

For each action, name the lead person, timing, how it will be explained, and how the team will notice whether it is helping. Link every action to the shared understanding and priorities.

What will adults or systems do?	Who leads?	When / how often?	How will the child or young person know?	How will we know whether it is helping?
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				

Implementation

Resources or advice required *What must be arranged so the actions can happen consistently?*	**Keeping the child or young person informed** *Who will explain changes, in what format, and when?*
Informing relevant staff *How will staff know what has been agreed without unnecessary information sharing?*	**If an action cannot be implemented** *Pause and reduce pressure. Review timing, expectations and support, then agree an alternative.*

EBSA Support Plan | Keep under review as understanding develops

Page 5 of 7

LISTEN | UNDERSTAND | PLAN | **DO** | REVIEW

EBSA SUPPORT PLAN | SECTION 6

Access to education, coordination and welfare

Agree how suitable education will remain accessible while barriers are addressed, and make communication predictable so the child, family and staff do not have to repeatedly rebuild the plan.

Access to suitable education

How will learning remain accessible now?	*Include where, when and with whom learning or educational activity will be available.*
What adjustments are needed?	*Consider content, amount, format, timing, location, communication, sensory and relational support.*
How will access be monitored and reviewed?	*Include the child or young person's experience, not only work completed.*

Coordination and communication

Named coordinator	
Main contact for the child or young person	
Main contact for parent/carers	
How and when will home and school communicate?	*Make contact predictable, purposeful and manageable.*
How will involved services coordinate support?	*Avoid requiring the family to repeat their experiences.*

Safeguarding and welfare contact

What contact is needed, by whom and how often?	
How will contact be made manageable?	*Agree the method, timing and trusted person where possible.*
What happens if contact cannot be established or concerns increase?	*Record proportionate safeguarding action and escalation arrangements.*

LISTEN	UNDERSTAND	PLAN	DO	REVIEW

EBSA SUPPORT PLAN | SECTION 7

Reviewing progress

Review the quality and impact of support, not only attendance. Use the child or young person's experience to decide what should continue, change, reduce or stop. Treat an unmanageable step as learning and update the shared understanding before increasing demand.

How will we notice progress?

Tick or highlight the areas that matter for this plan. Add individual indicators where helpful.

☐ Emotional or physical wellbeing	☐ Felt safety
☐ Trust and relationships	☐ Communication and self-advocacy
☐ Engagement with interests and everyday activity	☐ Access to learning
☐ Participation in school or the wider community	☐ Attendance, where meaningful and appropriate
☐ Recovery following activity or challenge	☐ Other:

Review arrangements

How will the child or young person's experience be gathered?	**Who will contribute to the review?**
Review date	**What would trigger an earlier review?**

Review summary

Continue	Change	Reduce or stop	New learning / next steps

Plan shared with

Name or role	Date	Method or format

EBSA Support Plan | Keep under review as understanding develops

Page 7 of 7

Appendix 3D: My Support Plan - visual and supported version

This visual and supported booklet may be helpful for children and young people who prefer shorter prompts and visual ways of sharing their views.

MY SUPPORT PLAN

This is me

This page helps adults remember who I am, not only what is difficult. I can draw, write, add pictures or tell someone. I can skip any part.

My name	Date

Draw or add your photo in the middle.



Things I enjoy or feel proud of	People and places that matter to me
Draw, write, add pictures or tell someone.	*Who or where helps me feel safe, understood or like myself?*

Things other people appreciate about me

A family member, friend or adult can add a kind word, picture or short message.

I like to tell or show people things by...

Circle, tick or point. I can choose more than one.

○ Talking	○ Drawing or writing	○ Choosing or showing	○ Other _____

This plan belongs to me. I can ask to change or add to it.

MY SUPPORT PLAN

What we are working on together

This is the part of the plan we are focusing on now. A grown-up can write my words, or I can. I can also draw, choose pictures or tell someone.



1

Right now...

One thing that feels difficult or needs to change is...

2

I would like...

A helpful change might look or feel like...

3

We are starting with...

The first small and manageable change we will try together is...

If our first step feels too much, we can pause and change the plan.

This plan belongs to me. I can ask to change or add to it.

MY SUPPORT PLAN

How adults will help

This page tells me who will help and what adults have agreed to do. The detailed plan is kept by the adults supporting me.

My key adult

Draw or add a photo	**Their name is...**	**I can ask or show I need help by...**

Adults have agreed to...

Write up to three clear ways adults will make things safer or more manageable.

1	
2	
3	

If something feels too much...

Adults will...

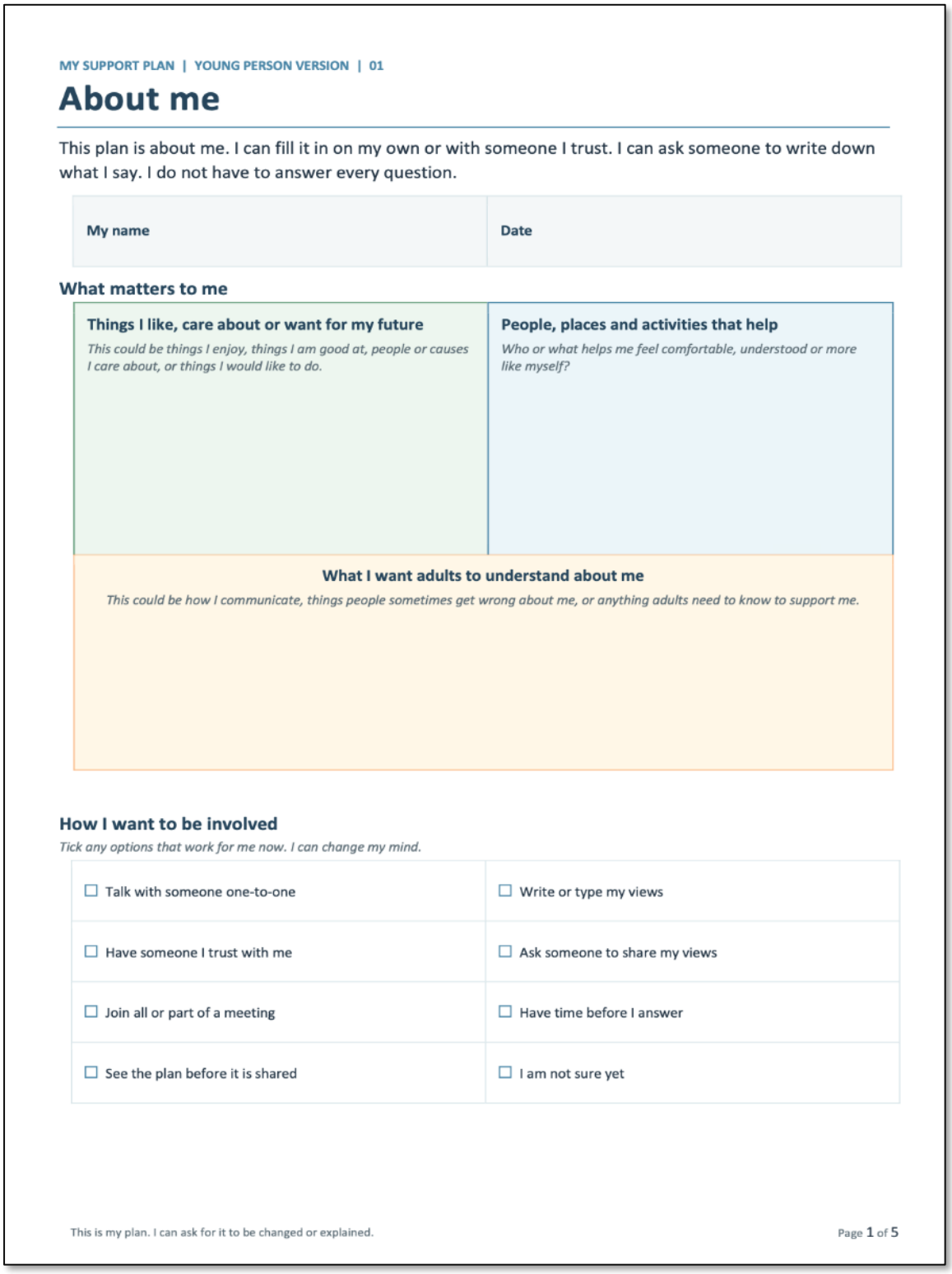
lower the pressure, help me feel safe and agree another way forward.

We will look at this plan together again on:

This plan belongs to me. I can ask to change or add to it.

Appendix 3E: My Support Plan - young person version

This version helps young people understand and contribute to their support plan. It summarises what matters to them, what everyone is working towards and what adults have agreed to do. It can be completed independently or with support from a trusted adult.



MY SUPPORT PLAN | YOUNG PERSON VERSION | 01

About me

This plan is about me. I can fill it in on my own or with someone I trust. I can ask someone to write down what I say. I do not have to answer every question.

My name	Date

What matters to me

Things I like, care about or want for my future *This could be things I enjoy, things I am good at, people or causes I care about, or things I would like to do.*	People, places and activities that help *Who or what helps me feel comfortable, understood or more like myself?*

What I want adults to understand about me

This could be how I communicate, things people sometimes get wrong about me, or anything adults need to know to support me.

How I want to be involved

Tick any options that work for me now. I can change my mind.

☐ Talk with someone one-to-one	☐ Write or type my views
☐ Have someone I trust with me	☐ Ask someone to share my views
☐ Join all or part of a meeting	☐ Have time before I answer
☐ See the plan before it is shared	☐ I am not sure yet

This is my plan. I can ask for it to be changed or explained.

Page 1 of 5

MY SUPPORT PLAN | YOUNG PERSON VERSION | 02

What we know so far

This page brings together what we know right now about what is going on. It is not a final answer. I can change it, add to it or say when I do not agree.

Right now...

What is going on for me? What do I most want adults to know?

What makes things easier or harder

Things that make it easier

People, places, routines, changes or ways of learning that help.

Things that make it harder

People, places, work, noise, changes, uncertainty or other things that add pressure.

When it feels easier or harder

Are there certain times, places or situations that make a difference? What usually happens before or after a difficult time?

How adults might know it is becoming too much

What might adults notice, even if I do not say it out loud?

What adults should not assume

Something adults might get wrong about what they see or hear.

This is my plan. I can ask for it to be changed or explained.

Page 2 of 5

MY SUPPORT PLAN | YOUNG PERSON VERSION | 03

What we are working on together

We will choose a few changes that matter most right now. Better attendance might be one change, but it is not the only sign that the plan is helping.

The main change I would like to see

If this plan was helping, what would feel different at school, at home or in my day?

What we will start with

Choose up to three things to work on. We can change these later.

1	**We want to...** *Why is this important to me? What would a small positive change look like?*
2	**We want to...** *Why is this important to me? What would a small positive change look like?*
3	**We want to...** *Why is this important to me? What would a small positive change look like?*

Adults have agreed to...

These are things adults will do to help. I do not have to manage everything on my own.

1	
2	
3	

My key adult

The adult I can go to is...	I can contact them by...	If they are not there, I can go to...

This is my plan. I can ask for it to be changed or explained.

Page 3 of 5

MY SUPPORT PLAN | YOUNG PERSON VERSION | 04

When things feel too much and checking the plan

If a step feels too much, that does not mean I have failed. It helps adults understand what needs to change. They will lower the pressure, help me feel safe and adjust the plan.

If something feels too much

I can let someone know by...	Adults will respond by...
For example, talking, texting, using a card or signal, showing it in my behaviour or asking someone I trust to help.	*What adults will do straight away, what they will avoid doing, and how we will choose the next step.*

What I can do instead

What learning or activity can I do if the original plan feels too much? This should not be a punishment.

How we will know the plan is helping

Tick the changes that matter to me. Small changes count.

☐ Feeling better in my body or emotions	☐ Feeling safer
☐ Trusting people more	☐ Asking for or showing what I need
☐ Enjoying interests or everyday activities	☐ Being able to learn
☐ Joining in at school or in the community	☐ Attending more, if this is one of my goals

Checking the plan

We will check the plan on...	We will check it sooner if...
I want to take part by...	**Afterwards, I will find out what was agreed by...**

This is my plan. I can ask for it to be changed or explained.

Page 4 of 5

MY SUPPORT PLAN | YOUNG PERSON VERSION | 05 | OPTIONAL

My week for now

Use this page only if seeing the week helps me know what to expect. The plan can change. It is not a contract or a test. The main plan should explain what support and learning I can access.

What I need to know before the week begins

Any changes, travel plans, who I will see, where I will go or anything else that will help me know what to expect.

Weekly overview

Add only what is useful to me.

Day	What is planned	Where / who with	What we will do if this feels too much
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			

Across the week

Learning or activities I can do

What will I be able to do? How will I do it? What changes or support will help?

How I will hear about changes

Who will tell me? How will they tell me? How much warning can they give me?

Anything else that would make this week easier

This could include rest, travel, noise, light, time with friends or time to recover after difficult things.

This is my plan. I can ask for it to be changed or explained.

Page 5 of 5

Appendix 4: Worked examples

These fictional examples show how the guidance may be applied at different points on the EBSA continuum. Appendix 4A uses Assess, Plan, Do, Review for within-school EBSA. Appendix 4B shows how ***Moving from Recovery to Rediscovery*** (Holder, 2024) may guide support where barriers have become entrenched. They are illustrative and should not be followed as fixed programmes.

Appendix 4A: Worked example of Assess, Plan, Do, Review for within-school EBSA

This fictional example illustrates how Assess, Plan, Do, Review may be used when a child or young person is attending school but experiencing significant barriers to lessons and learning.

It is not intended as a fixed plan or a model that should be applied to every child or young person.

Background

Maya is in Year 8 and attends school most days. Her recorded attendance is 96%, but staff have noticed that she:

- Frequently arrives late to lessons
- Spends increasing amounts of time in the toilets or pastoral area
- Finds it particularly difficult to enter maths and science
- Sometimes leaves lessons without permission
- Becomes quiet or stops responding when adults ask her to return
- Has received detentions for lateness and one internal removal after being unable to enter a lesson

Staff initially understood Maya's behaviour as avoidance of work and difficulty following expectations.

Parent/carers reported that Maya often experienced stomach aches before school and was exhausted and tearful after returning home. She frequently went straight to her room and needed several hours before she could speak about her day.

Assess

A named pastoral lead coordinated the assessment.

Gathering Maya's perspective

Maya found direct questions difficult and often responded with "I don't know". She was offered several ways to communicate.

These included:

- A school-day map showing which lessons, spaces and times felt manageable or difficult
- Energy Accounting to identify activities and environments that used or restored energy
- Card sorting to explore what increased pressure and what helped
- Written sentence starters completed with a trusted teaching assistant
- Opportunities to add information after the conversation rather than respond immediately

Maya identified that:

- Crowded corridors made it difficult to arrive at lessons calmly
- She worried about entering after other pupils were already seated
- She was frightened that teachers would ask why she was late
- She found it difficult when asked questions without warning
- She had fallen behind in maths and worried that other pupils would notice
- Lunchtime noise and social demands left her with little energy for afternoon lessons
- The pastoral area felt safe because she knew what would happen there
- Drawing, quiet spaces and contact with one teaching assistant helped her regulate

Gathering information from parent/carers

Parent/carers described Maya's difficulties using the language of pressure, tiredness and physical discomfort rather than anxiety.

The school explored this respectfully and did not insist that the family use particular emotional language. Together, they agreed that Maya appeared to experience significant pressure during the school day, which was sometimes communicated through stomach aches, withdrawal and difficulty entering lessons.

Parent/carers reported:

- Disturbed sleep before particular school days
- Stomach aches on mornings when Maya had maths
- Exhaustion and reduced communication after school
- Worry about sanctions and falling behind
- A need for significant recovery following attendance

Gathering information from school

Staff reviewed:

- Lesson-attendance records
- Lateness and time spent outside lessons
- Patterns in visits to the pastoral area
- Behaviour and sanction records
- Maya's engagement across different subjects
- Existing SEN information and classroom support

The review showed that Maya was most likely to leave or miss lessons:

- Following busy transitions
- After lunchtime
- Where instructions were given verbally and quickly
- Where she expected to be questioned publicly
- When she did not understand the work
- Following an unexpected change of teacher or classroom

Maya engaged more consistently in art and English, where tasks were displayed clearly and staff allowed additional processing time.

Shared understanding

The team agreed:

Maya is attending school but is finding it difficult to access some lessons because busy transitions, uncertainty, learning demands and fear of being noticed are creating significant pressure. Leaving lessons and using the pastoral area appear to help her reduce distress in the short term. Her strengths include creativity, strong engagement with visual tasks and a trusting relationship with her teaching assistant.

The team recognised that sanctions for lateness and leaving lessons had not reduced the barriers and may have increased Maya's anxiety about returning.

Plan

Three priorities were agreed for the first four-week cycle.

Priority 1: Make transitions more manageable

The school agreed to:

- Allow Maya to leave lunch and selected lessons five minutes early
- Identify a quieter route to maths and science
- Ensure that she could enter without being questioned publicly
- Provide advance notice of known room or staffing changes

- Agree a calm script for staff to use if Maya arrived late

The agreed script was:

"It is good to see you. Your first task is on the desk and we can talk later if we need to."

Priority 2: Increase predictability and access to learning

Maths and science staff agreed to:

- Display the lesson structure and first task before Maya entered
- Avoid asking Maya questions without warning
- Check her understanding privately
- Break larger tasks into smaller stages
- Provide brief catch-up support without drawing attention to missed learning
- Offer written instructions alongside verbal explanations
- Identify essential work rather than sending all missed tasks home

The SENCO agreed to explore whether unidentified learning or processing needs were contributing to the difficulty.

Priority 3: Support regulation while maintaining access to learning

Maya chose a discreet help card as one way to show that she needed support. Adults agreed to:

- Respond to the help card calmly, without asking Maya to explain in front of others
- Ensure that an agreed nearby quiet space was available
- Offer a flexible regulation break, with the length guided by Maya's current needs rather than fixed in advance
- Make a short regulating activity available if Maya wanted it
- Check in discreetly and support a return to the lesson when this felt manageable
- If returning was not manageable, agree how Maya could access suitable learning without increasing pressure and review what had made the lesson difficult

The quiet space was intended to support regulation and continued access to learning. It was not intended to become the only place Maya could access when lessons felt difficult.

If a return was not manageable, staff would treat this as information about the barrier, pace or support required, rather than automatically as misconduct.

The agreed actions, responsibilities and review arrangements were recorded in the EBSA Support Plan - staff and professional version (Appendix 3C). The key parts were shared with Maya in an accessible format using My Support Plan – young

person version (Appendix 3E), including what adults would do, how she could ask for help and what would happen if a step was not manageable.

Do

The pastoral lead coordinated implementation and made sure relevant staff understood the actions they were responsible for.

Implementation included:

- Briefing maths, science, pastoral and lunchtime staff
- Checking that supply staff could access essential information
- Sharing the accessible young-person version of the plan with Maya and checking that it reflected what had been agreed
- Practising the quiet transition route with her
- Introducing the help card before expecting her to use it
- Checking in with Maya twice each week
- Agreeing one weekly update between school and parent/carers
- Recording lesson access, use of adjustments and recovery alongside attendance
- Reviewing whether sanctions related to the identified barriers remained appropriate

The coordinator checked implementation during the first week rather than waiting until the formal review.

It became clear that one science teacher had not received the plan. This was addressed immediately, as Maya's difficulty in that lesson could not be used to judge the plan's effectiveness before the agreed support was available.

Review

The plan was reviewed after four weeks with Maya, parent/carers and relevant staff.

What had been implemented

- The early transition arrangement was used consistently
- Maths and science lesson structures were provided visually
- Most staff used the agreed arrival script
- Maya used the help card on four occasions
- Flexible regulation breaks were available
- Parent/carer communication took place weekly

Progress

Maya's overall attendance remained similar. However:

- Access to maths and science increased
- Time spent in the toilets and pastoral area reduced
- Maya entered lessons more often without adult prompting
- She used the help card before leaving on several occasions
- Distress about arriving late reduced
- Parent/carers reported fewer evening shutdowns
- Maya began telling the teaching assistant when she did not understand a task
- No further internal removal was used

These changes were understood as meaningful progress even though Maya was not yet accessing every lesson consistently.

What remained difficult

- Afternoon lessons following lunch remained challenging
- Unexpected staff changes continued to increase distress
- Maya remained worried about gaps in her maths knowledge
- The quiet space was sometimes unavailable
- Some staff still asked Maya to explain her lateness in front of peers

Next cycle

The team agreed to:

- Continue the successful transition and communication adjustments
- Identify a consistent alternative quiet space
- Provide structured maths catch-up with a trusted adult
- Introduce a quieter lunchtime option on selected days
- Ensure supply staff receive the essential plan
- Remind staff that conversations about lateness should take place privately
- Continue exploring learning, sensory and processing needs through SEN Support
- Review progress again after four weeks

The next step was not to increase demands automatically. It was to strengthen the consistency of the adjustments and support Maya to access afternoon learning more sustainably.

Appendix 4B: Worked example of support for entrenched EBSA through *Moving from Recovery to Rediscovery*

This fictional example illustrates how the ***Moving from Recovery to Rediscovery*** model may guide support when barriers to education have become persistent and complex.

It is not intended as a fixed programme or timetable. The stages may overlap, and a child or young person may move between them as their needs, circumstances and capacity change.

Background

Zain is in Year 9. He is autistic and receives SEN Support for sensory and communication needs. He has not attended school for four months, following a longer period of reduced attendance.

Before his absence, Zain:

- Found busy corridors, changes of staff and unstructured times increasingly overwhelming
- Frequently spent lessons in the pastoral area
- Became exhausted and withdrawn after school
- Worried about falling behind and being noticed when entering lessons late
- Found it difficult to explain what was wrong when distressed
- Gradually stopped taking part in activities he had previously enjoyed

Several reduced timetables and phased-return plans had been attempted. These focused mainly on getting Zain through the school entrance. Some agreed adjustments were not consistently available, and each unsuccessful attempt increased his anxiety about trying again.

School regularly telephoned home and sent work from each subject. Although this was intended to maintain contact and learning, Zain experienced the amount of communication and unfinished work as further evidence that he could not catch up. He stopped opening school emails and became distressed when returning to school was discussed.

Zain's parent/carers were worried about his wellbeing and education. They also felt under pressure to persuade him to attend and were concerned that professionals understood the situation as a problem within the family.

Gathering perspectives

Zain did not feel able to attend a meeting or answer questions face to face. The SENCO agreed with him and his parent/carers that:

- Questions would be sent in advance
- Zain could respond through short messages, drawings or by speaking to his parent/carers
- He did not have to answer every question
- Adults would not use his responses to introduce an unexpected return date
- A trusted adult would check that the plan reflected what he had communicated

Zain shared:

- "I don't want to be asked every day when I'm going back."
- "There is too much to catch up on."
- "I miss the art room and one friend."
- "I don't want everyone asking where I've been."
- "Sometimes I don't know if adults mean what they say."

His parent/carers described disrupted sleep, reduced appetite, headaches and periods of withdrawal. They noticed that Zain appeared calmer when there were no school-related conversations and that he continued to enjoy digital drawing, caring for the family dog and short walks with his older sister.

School staff identified Zain's creativity, humour, visual problem-solving skills and previous trusting relationship with his art teacher as important strengths.

Shared understanding

The team agreed:

Zain appears to be recovering from a sustained period of sensory, social and academic pressure. Previous attempts to increase attendance did not sufficiently reduce the barriers he was experiencing. Inconsistent adjustments, accumulated schoolwork and repeated conversations about returning have contributed to reduced trust and increased distress.

Zain's current non-attendance does not mean that he has lost interest in learning or relationships. He continues to show curiosity through digital art and values his connection with selected people. Support should initially prioritise recovery, reduced pressure and the rebuilding of trust while maintaining access to suitable education.

The SENCO was identified as the plan coordinator. The agreed actions and responsibilities were recorded in the **EBSA Support Plan - staff and professional version** (Appendix 3C). The key parts were shared with Zain using **My Support Plan - young person version** (Appendix 3E).

Respite and recovery

The initial focus was to reduce sustained distress and create the conditions for recovery.

Adults agreed to:

- Pause repeated questions about when Zain would return
- Replace contact from several staff members with one predictable weekly message from the SENCO
- Agree welfare-contact arrangements with Zain and his parent/carers while continuing to respond to any safeguarding concerns
- Avoid unplanned telephone calls, meetings or home visits unless required to respond to an immediate concern
- Stop sending accumulated work or lists of missed tasks
- Make learning available without presenting it as something Zain needed to complete before returning
- Review Zain's sensory, communication and learning needs
- Consider whether further SEND, health or statutory assessment was required
- Check in with parent/carers weekly and review the plan formally after four weeks

The school continued to communicate that Zain remained a valued member of the school community. Contact did not depend on him completing work or discussing attendance.

At the first review, Zain had not returned to school. However, his parent/carers reported that:

- His sleep and eating had become more predictable
- He was spending more time with family
- He had restarted short walks with his sister
- He was drawing again
- He was less distressed when a school message arrived
- He had read, although not replied to, several messages from the SENCO

These changes were recognised as meaningful early progress.

Reducing the pressure

The next focus was to identify and change demands that were continuing to prevent recovery or engagement.

The team agreed to:

- Make clear that Zain would not be expected to complete all missed work
- Replace work from multiple subjects with a small, optional menu of activities
- Remove deadlines and public assessment from the initial learning offer
- Coordinate professional contact so that Zain and his family were not managing several separate conversations
- Avoid setting a return date before the barriers and required adjustments had been explored
- Review expectations relating to uniform, transitions, timetable, homework and entry to the school site
- Agree how questions from peers and staff would be managed
- Ensure parent/carers were not positioned as responsible for persuading Zain to attend
- Review whether suitable education was currently accessible and seek further advice if it could not be provided

With reduced pressure, Zain was able to identify more specifically what worried him. He explained that he feared being questioned about his absence, seeing unfinished work and being expected to return immediately to a full timetable.

This information was used to shape the next part of the plan.

Reconnecting through safe relationships

Zain chose his former art teacher as the person he would most like to hear from.

The art teacher sent one brief message each week. The messages:

- Focused on shared interests rather than attendance
- Did not require a response
- Avoided questions about returning
- Reassured Zain that he remained welcome
- Offered choices about future contact

Zain initially read the messages without replying. He later responded with an image and then asked whether he could speak to the teacher online with his camera turned off.

With Zain's agreement:

- A short online conversation was arranged
- His parent/carer remained nearby
- The conversation focused on art and the changes to the art room
- No return plan was introduced
- Zain chose when the conversation ended
- A trusted peer sent him an occasional message without asking about his absence

The school also acknowledged that some earlier actions had increased pressure and that agreed adjustments had not always been available. This helped communicate that responsibility for change did not rest with Zain alone.

On one occasion, another member of staff asked Zain during an online conversation when he expected to return. Zain withdrew from contact for the following week. The team treated this as information about the importance of consistent communication. The SENCO apologised, reminded staff of the agreed approach and returned to the previous level of contact.

Rediscovering curiosity

As Zain's trust and energy increased, the plan began to include more opportunities for interest-led learning.

Zain chose to develop a digital-art project based on animals and imaginary environments.

Adults agreed to:

- Provide access to relevant art and computing resources
- Offer short activities that could be completed in different ways
- Avoid deadlines, grades or expectations that work must be shared
- Recognise learning taking place at home and in the community
- Offer contact with a member of staff who understood the project
- Let Zain decide whether and when he wanted feedback
- Continue opportunities for rest and activities unrelated to school

Zain began sharing some of his drawings with the art teacher. He later joined a short online art session and visited a local library with his sister to find materials for his project.

At review, Zain said that the project "felt like doing something, not catching up." The team understood this as an important shift from experiencing education primarily as pressure towards experiencing curiosity, choice and success.

Re-engagement with the world

Zain was not asked to return immediately to his previous timetable. When he indicated that he might like to see the art room, the team planned one manageable visit.

Before the visit, adults agreed:

- Zain would enter through a quieter entrance
- The visit would take place after most pupils had left
- His art teacher would meet him
- No additional adults would join unexpectedly
- No work would need to be completed
- Zain could leave at any point without having to explain
- Parent/carers would not be asked to persuade him to stay
- The team would review the impact before proposing another step

Zain visited the art room for approximately 20 minutes. He looked at the changes to the room, spoke briefly with his teacher and chose some materials to take home.

The team did not automatically increase expectations because this visit had been completed. When a second visit felt unmanageable the following week, the plan returned to online contact and interest-led activity. Adults explored what had changed and learned that Zain had slept poorly and had become worried that the visit would lead immediately to a timetable.

After further review, Zain chose to:

- Continue one short online learning session each week
- Visit the art room at a quiet time when manageable
- Maintain contact with his trusted peer
- Explore a small off-site creative activity
- Receive clear information about any future proposed changes
- Continue considering, with the team, which educational pathway could provide sustainable access to learning

Re-engagement was understood as increasing Zain's connection with relationships, interests, learning and the wider community. It was not limited to being present in the school building.

Review

Over the following months, Zain's recorded school attendance remained low. However:

- His wellbeing and daily routine improved
- School-related contact caused less distress
- He communicated more openly about what helped and what increased pressure
- Trust with his art teacher and SENCO strengthened
- He reconnected with a peer
- He regularly engaged in digital-art activities
- He began accessing short periods of suitable learning
- He made several visits to the school site
- He became more able to say when a proposed step felt too much
- Parent/carers reported feeling listened to and less responsible for managing the situation alone

Some barriers remained. Busy school periods, larger groups, academic uncertainty and unexpected change continued to cause significant distress. The team therefore agreed to:

- Maintain the adjustments that were helping
- Avoid increasing the timetable solely because an individual visit had been successful
- Continue reviewing Zain's SEND and educational provision
- Strengthen staff understanding of the agreed communication approach
- Coordinate school, family and professional involvement
- Seek further local-authority involvement if suitable education could not be secured
- Continue using wellbeing, trust, communication, engagement and access to learning alongside attendance when reviewing progress

The example demonstrates that reduced pressure is not the withdrawal of education or support. It is an active process of changing the conditions around the young person so that recovery, connection, curiosity and sustainable participation can become possible.

Appendix 5: whole school EBSA audit (with thanks to Dr Jerricah Holder)

Whole School Audit

By Dr Jerricah Holder

School
Click here to enter school.

Date of initial Audit: Click or tap here to add date.

Review of Audit: Click or tap here to add date.

The EBSA Horizons Whole School Audit is an assessment and reflective tool to demonstrate thinking and the development of school practice over time. The intention of the tool is to create long term systemic change in the provision and support for children who experience Emotionally Based School Avoidance.

Please read each statement and use the self-evaluation tool to mark on the scale of 1-5 current practice within school (with 5 being the most desirable score). At the end of each section, there is a space to share next steps through a strengths-based approach of 'Even Better If'. The audit should be completed in collaboration with school staff and members of the pastoral and senior leadership team (where possible) and reviewed at the end of each term during which progress can also be recorded on the scale.

School Context and Best Hopes from completing the audit:

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Raising Awareness

1. The school has an EBSA Horizons Practitioner(s), who is/are involved in the planning of provision for CYP experiencing EBSA, and support colleagues.

1 2 3 4 5

What makes school at this stage? i.e. what makes it better than one point lower?

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Even Better If... i.e. what would one point better look like?

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2. There are/has been continuous professional development opportunities for staff to increase knowledge and understanding around EBSA.

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Even Better If... i.e. what would one point better look like?

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3. Staff across the school are able to identify children within the classroom who may be at risk, or showing the early warning signs of EBSA, as well as those who display more entrenched patterns.

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4. The language of EBSA is used consistently across the school community and with families.

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Early Identification

Staff know who the school's EBSA Horizons Practitioner is and are aware to whom they should report any concerns.

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The EBSA Risk & Resilience Profiles are utilised to identify children who may be at risk of EBSA, including those at key transition points as well as to identify children who are currently experiencing EBSA.

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There are clear policies on attendance and how non-attendance due to EBSA should be categorised and marked, acknowledging the likely corresponding social emotional and mental health needs.

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School staff are aware of the strategies and provision in place to support a child experiencing EBSA and able to discuss these with the EBSA Horizons Practitioner.

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Even Better If... i.e. what would one point better look like?

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Child-Centred Approach

The child's voice is actively sought and attempts are made to understand the EBSA, including pertinent risk and resilience factors, from the perspective of the child.



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Associated strategies, interventions and reintegration plans, are co-collaborated with the child and aligned with the strengths and needs identified by the child and their family.



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Reintegration plans follow the principles of a graduated return to school and a member of staff has been identified to provide the child with the time, attention and compassionate care required to support resilience.



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The wider curriculum includes teaching around emotional well-being, mental health, resilience and coping strategies on a small group or individual basis.



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Multi-Agency Response

There is close liaison between home and school and a member of school staff has been designated to liaise with the family regarding the child's experience of EBSA.



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Staff are aware of the role of external agencies and local arrangements with regard to supporting children experiencing EBSA.



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Where possible (and appropriate) support is enlisted from Educational Psychologists, and/or health and social care colleagues to support the child to return to school and/or attend school more consistently.



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There are regular meetings involving the family and professional network, to review provision and strategies, and to assess whether these remain appropriate/successful.



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Appendix 6: Supporting Emotional Regulation

Guided breathing activities

To begin with, sit in a comfortable chair with your feet on the floor and your hands resting comfortably either on the arms of the chair or in your lap. Close your eyes. Take a slow, long breath in through your nose. Feel your belly expand like a balloon as you breathe in. Hold it for five seconds: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Then release it slowly through your mouth. Feel you belly collapse like a balloon losing its air. Again, take a slow, long breath in through your nose and feel your stomach expand. Hold it for five seconds: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Then exhale slowly through your mouth. One more time: take a slow, long breath in through your mouth. Now begin to take a slow, long breaths without holding them, and continue to breathe smoothly for the rest of this exercise.



Milkshake breathing

Get a plastic cup with a straw. Fill the cup 1/3 full with water. Ensure the C/YP breathes in deeply through their nose and breathes out slowly through the straw. Encourage them to blow small bubbles in the cup very gently. Practice at least five times.

Guided visualisation

With your eyes closed, imagine that you enter your safe place using all of your senses to ground yourself in the scene. First, look around using your imaginary sense of sight. What does this place look like? Is it daytime or nighttime? Is it sunny or cloudy? Notice all the details. Are you alone or are there other people or animals? What are they doing? If you're outside, look up and notice the sky. Look out at the horizon. If you're inside, notice what the walls and furniture look like. Is the room light or dark? Choose something soothing to look at. Then continue look for a few seconds using your imaginary sense of sight.



Next, use your imaginary sense of hearing. What do you hear? Do you hear other people or animals? Do you hear music? Do you hear the wind or the ocean? Choose something soothing to hear. Then listen for a few seconds using your imaginary sense of hearing.

Then use your imaginary sense of smell. If you're inside, what does it smell like? Does it smell fresh? Do you have a fire burning that you can smell? Or, if you're outside, can you

smell the air, the grass, the ocean, or the flowers? Choose the smell something in your scene. Then take a few seconds to use your imaginary sense of smell.

Next, notice if you can feel anything with your imaginary sense of touch. What are you sitting or standing on in your scene? Can you feel the wind? Can you feel something you're touching in the scene? Choose to touch something soothing in your scene. Then take a few seconds to use your imaginary sense of touch.

Last, use your imaginary sense of taste. Are you eating or drinking anything in this scene? Choose something soothing to taste. Then take a few seconds to use your imaginary sense of touch.

Now take a few more seconds to explore your safe place using all your imaginary senses. Recognize how safe and relaxed you feel here. Remember that you can come back to this place in your imagination whenever you need to feel safe and relaxed. You can come back whenever you're feeling sad, angry, restless, or in pain. Look around one last time to remember what it looks like.

Now keep your eyes closed and return your focus to your breathing. Again, take some slow, long breaths in through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Then, when you feel ready, open your eyes and return your focus to the room



Mindfulness based meditations – This form of intervention has been found to reduce anxiety and stress in children. A useful resource that includes mindfulness based meditations for children of different ages can be found here: https://www.smilingmind.com.au/ .

Progressive Muscle relaxation exercises - Progressive Muscle Relaxation Exercises encourage the C/YP to tense up each of their muscles and then relax them. A useful script that could be used can be found here: https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/progressive-muscle-relaxation-script.pdf

It is important to note that different individuals find different emotional regulation strategies helpful. What works for one C/YP will not necessarily work for another. Additionally, some strategies could be overwhelming for C/YP who find it difficult to experience their senses in the present moment. It can be helpful to introduce C/YP to a range of strategies through intervention sessions and explore which ones work for them.