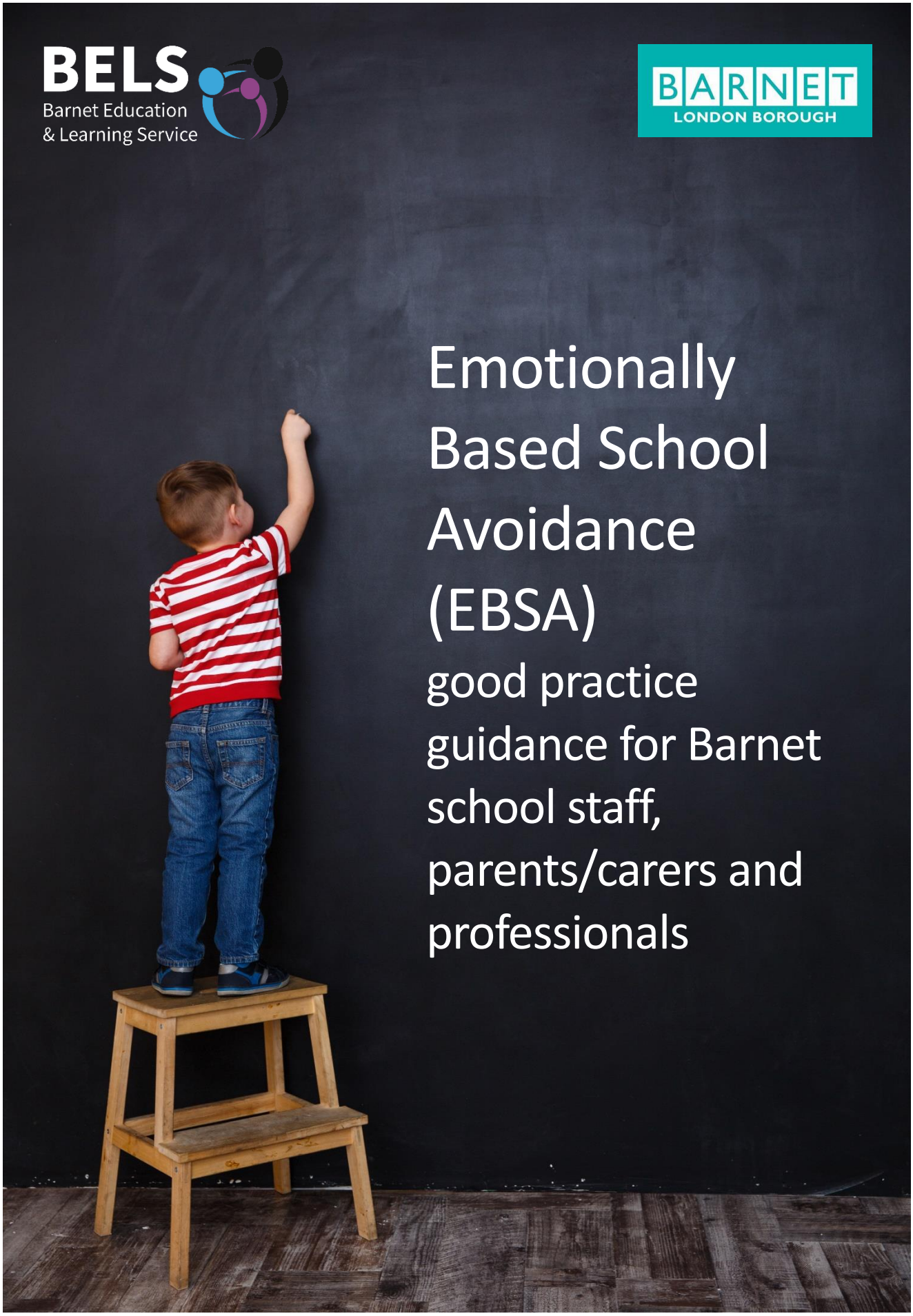
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Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

good practice guidance for Barnet school staff, parents/carers and professionals

September 2024

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 and will be reviewed on an annual basis and updated as required to reflect developments in the research literature.

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We would like to thank Educational Psychology colleagues in the West Sussex Educational Psychology Team and Dr Jerricah Holder (Educational Psychologist) whose excellent guidance and Continued Professional Development inspired the group to create EBSA guidance to support the needs of our local community.

Contents

Main guidance

Terminology, prevalence and rationale for guidance

EBSA Risk and Resilience Factors

Professional services who can offer support for EBSA

The importance of whole school systems for supporting EBSA

Supporting EBSA through Early Intervention: Assess, Plan, Do and Review

- Gaining views of Children/Young People, Parents/Carers and school staff
- Developing a summary/formulation for EBSA
- Intervention
- Review

The importance of transitions

Supporting children and young people experiencing long term/entrenched EBSA

Signposting to helpful resources

Appendices

Appendix 1: example EBSA audit to explore whole school systems

Appendix 2: example EBSA support plan for younger children

Appendix 3: example EBSA support plan for older children

Terminology, prevalence and rationale for guidance

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.'

Prevalence data has indicated that EBSA impacts between 1-5% of the student population, although the true prevalence is likely to be higher.

Terminology

EBSA is characterised by a significant difficulty attending school as a result of emotional factors.

Every child/young person's (C/YP) experience of EBSA is different, what is common will be their high levels of anxiety.

Some C/YP will understand and be able to articulate their emotions. They might be able to pinpoint exactly what it is about attending school that causes feelings of anxiety. Others may not yet be able to express their emotions or reasons for their anxiety and their anxiety may be communicated through their behaviour.

The C/YP may communicate this through externalised behaviour (where they communicate through verbal/vocalising/physical behaviour directed externally), internalised behaviour (where the C/YP might appear quiet/withdrawn) or through psychosomatic symptoms (headache, stomach ache, nausea etc).

We use the term 'EBSA' rather than 'school refusal' (previously commonly referred to in research literature) as refusal implies that the C/YP has control over their school anxiety and or that they do not want to attend. The terms EBSA and Emotionally Based Non-Attendance (EBSNA) are used interchangeably in the research literature. The term Emotionally Based Barriers to Setting Attendance (EBBSA) is also sometimes preferred. For the purpose of this guidance the term 'EBSA' has been used as it refers to the coping strategy (avoidance) which children and young people use in the context of anxiety related to school.

We know from research and experience that often C/YP people do want to attend school but lack the resources, coping mechanisms, support and provision within their environment to do so.

It is important to note that terminology is subject to change over time and not all C/YP who experience needs in this area will relate to the term 'EBSA.' This highlights the importance of gaining the views of C/YP and members of the school community regarding use of preferred terminology/language use in this area.

It is also important to note that while we feel that using the term 'EBSA' can be helpful in identifying needs and implementing carefully planned provision to meet those needs, EBSA is not a diagnostic term and we do not intend on 'EBSA' being used in this way.

What EBSA might look like

Some commonly occurring signs of EBSA are presented below. It is important to note this is not an exhaustive list. It is also widely acknowledged that some C/YP might engage in masking/social camouflaging behaviour within the school environment, which might make it difficult to identify signs of EBSA. It is important to note that in these cases, there might be a difference in emotional presentation between different contexts and parents/carers might be able to identify signs of EBSA in the home environment which are not yet present in the school environment.

- Difficulty attending school with periods of prolonged absence
- Sporadic absence, perhaps due to minor illness
- Patterns in absences for example, particular days and/or subjects, after weekends or holidays
- Reluctance to attend school trips
- Reluctance to leave home
- Reduced participation in lessons
- Changes in behaviour during homework for example, increased levels of stress
- Increased requests to use the toilet
- Anxiety about the safety/welfare of family members
- Social isolation/avoidance of peers
- Emotional outbursts with presentations of fear, anger or sadness
- Low mood and sense of isolation
- Difficulties concentrating in school and low academic progress
- Physical changes for example, sweating, sickness, aching limbs, headaches, abdominal pain, weight gain and/or weight loss
- Reduced appetite/missing meals in school
- Reported difficulties reported outside of the school environment for example, changes in self-care, eating, sleeping, expressing fear the evening before school.

Prevalence of EBSA

Before the Covid 19 pandemic, the limited research available suggested the prevalence of EBSA in the UK population was between 1 and 5 percent (Pellegrini, 20071, Elliot & Place, 20192). The Barnet pupil population in 2023/2024 was 70,404, 5% of this would mean up to 3,520 pupils in Barnet were missing school due to EBSA.

The House of Commons research briefing in February 2024 noted 22.5% of pupils in England are persistently absent (defined as missing more than 10% of school)[3] and indicated that there has been an increase in persistent school absences post COVID0-19 Pandemic.

Many believe that the true prevalence of EBSA is underestimated due to difficulties capturing prevalence data in this area. Some of the difficulties in this area are included below.

- EBSA can manifest differently for different students: whilst some C/YP people are unable to come to school at all, others enter the setting but miss numerous lessons and a third sub-group maintain good attendance at the expense of their mental health. Those in the third category are the least likely to be identified.
- Staff require training, time and support to unpick the range of home and school factors impacting a child and consider whether a young person is experiencing EBSA or has low attendance for other reasons. High workload and stress can make professionals and school staff more likely to attribute non-attendance to other factors e.g. medical illness or truancy.
- It can also be difficult to capture the true prevalence of EBSA as there can be difficulties in capturing EBSA as a primary reason for non-attendance in the cohort of C/YP being electively home educated and young people who are demonstrating anxiety through externalising behaviour.

Rationale for guidance

A 'School Anxiety' Barnet multi-agency working group was previously formed in 2012 and as part of this group guidance for schools, professionals and families was shared and most recently updated in 2017. In light of new research in this area, increased prevalence of EBSA within our local community and a significant increase in requests for the involvement of professional services across Barnet since the COVID-19 pandemic, we felt that new guidance, informed by current evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence was both timely and essential

[1] Pellegrini D. (2007) School non-attendance: definitions, meanings, responses, interventions, Educational Psychology in Practice, 23, 1, 63-77
[2] Elliott JG & Place M, 2019, Practitioner Review: School refusal: developments in conceptualisation and treatment since 2000. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry
[3] Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2022/23 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

How EBSA can develop, Risk and Resilience 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 resilience or 'pull' factors.
- Bullying has been identified as the most common school factor
- Research has indicted that early intervention is six times more likely to lead to positive outcomes for children and young people
- Long term/entrenched non-attendance can lead to long term impact on children/young people's future education or employment aspirations and their social, emotional and mental health.

Figure 1: The anxious cycle and EBSA4

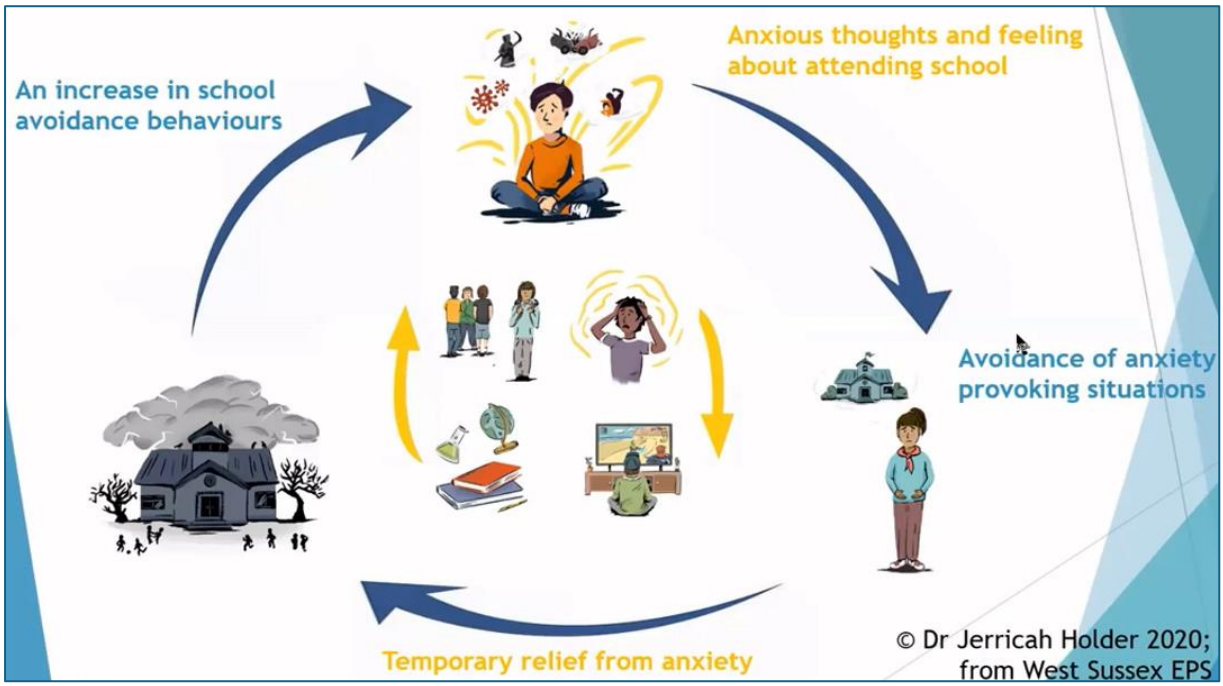


Figure 1 above, shows how EBSA can develop over time. It is important to note that anxiety **serves a function**, as do all of our emotions and a certain level of anxiety in everyday life is expected. Anxiety develops from an 'adaptive' or 'healthy' response to 'maladaptive' or 'unhealthy' when it impacts our ability to function in our everyday life.

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

It also shows how initially, the C/YP experiences challenging feelings about attending school which could be linked to learning, peer relationships or separating from a parent/carer. The C/YP may ruminate on these ideas - the more they think about them the bigger they can get. They may begin to 'find' more and more evidence to support their anxious views and perhaps struggle to attend to or think about alternative narratives, such as what for example, makes them feel safe or what they enjoy about school.

In the absence of other coping strategies/alternative resources to draw upon to manage the anxiety, the C/YP uses avoidance. Their attendance to school/lessons/extracurricular activities within the school environment may start to reduce. Avoiding the situation provides them with **temporary** relief.

However, this relief from the anxiety is only short term. The anxiety has not been managed and the fears continue to grow. So, the next time the C/YP is presented with an anxiety provoking situation (going to school, social situations, separating from parents/carers) the anxiety can feel much worse. The C/YP also begins to question their ability to cope. Thinking errors may increase, for example, catastrophizing (making predictions about worst case scenarios) and so the cycle continues. The C/YP's school avoidance becomes more entrenched.

Figure 1 also shows some of the secondary (maintenance) factors. These are not the initial drivers of the EBSA but factors which maintain it. Once the C/YP is not in school:

- They miss out on social opportunities (they can become disconnected or isolated from their friends) and therefore lose their sense of belonging becoming more anxious about socialising. They might also feel worried about explaining their school absence to peers and/or school staff.
- They miss out on learning which can create anxiety around how they will catch up/manage to access the learning in class.
- They may have found that the time at home was less stressful as they didn't have to manage the sensory, emotional, social and academic demands of school.
- They may have had positive emotional regulation or attachment for example, more time watching TV or playing games and/or individual time with caregivers while siblings are at school.

EBSA Risk and Resilience factors

Table 1: Common predisposing risk factors

School Factors	Home Factors	C/YP Factors
• Bullying (identified from research as the most common school factor). • Difficulties in specific subject(s). • Transitions (early years to Reception, primary to secondary, secondary to post-16, key stage or change of school). • Academic demands/high levels of pressure and performance-orientated classrooms. • Transport or journey to school. • Peer of staff relationship difficulties. • The sensory environment.	• Developmental trauma, loss or bereavement (please note, Looked After Children are at significantly higher risk of EBSA). • Parent/carer physical or mental health needs. • Being a young carer. • A family history of EBSA (parents/carers/siblings). • High levels of family stress.	• Low self-confidence as a learner. • Age (relating to key points of transition for example, 11-12 years). • Learning needs or neurodevelopmental differences, most notably Autism and/or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) if needs are not met). • Separation anxiety from parents (which could be related to home risk factors).

Table 2: Resilience factors

Resilience factors
• Developing ambition, aspiration and motivation. • Increasing confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, value in themselves. • Developing feelings of safety, security and a sense of belonging and connectedness where the C/YP feels cared for and understood. • Having positive experiences where they can succeed. • For adults to build trusting relationships/a Secure Base with children/young person where promises are kept. • Holding positive relationships with peers or staff. • Robust Personal, Social and Emotional Education curriculum which supports C/YP to learn about expression and regulation of emotions.

- Provision of evidence-based Social, Emotional and Mental Health Provision in school.
- Understanding the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviour.
- Willingness to work in partnership between school, family and external professionals with regular, collaborative and responsive communication, allowing schools to work in partnership with parents/carers and professionals in the C/YP's network.
- Parenting support through provision of workshops and/or support networks.
- Flexibility of approaches within school, person centred listening to the voice of the C/YP.

Why is early intervention important?

It is known from research that maladaptive anxiety negatively impacts the emotional wellbeing of C/YP, affecting their self-esteem and confidence. Long term consequences of long term/entrenched EBSA can include long term mental health needs, poor social relationships, physical health needs, increased risk of engaging in risk-taking behaviour and YP being Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) following secondary education. It is also known that the impact of EBSA on the wellbeing of the wider family can be significant and long lasting. Research suggests early intervention is more likely to produce successful outcomes for children and young people rather than when they have reached the more entrenced stages of non-attendance (for example, Baker and Bishop, 2015).[5]

[5] Baker, M & Bishop, F. (2015). Out of school: a phenomenological exploration of non-attendance. Educational Psychology in Practice, 31: 4, 354-368.

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

It is important to note that in line with guidance related to the importance of early intervention, schools can request involvement from services when EBSA is first detected, rather than requesting involvement at later stages of non-attendance.

Table 3: Professional support available and contact details.

Professional service	How the service can support EBSA
Barnet Educational Psychology Team	
Educational Psychologists (EPs) work in nurseries, schools,colleges and projects (Barnet Virtual School, Youth Justice Team and specialist social care team REACH) 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 will also be delivering an EBSA Schools Project and parent/carer EBSA support group in 2024/2025. ***Further information:*** Please contact educationalpsychology@barnet.gov.uk for further details.
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	***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

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. • 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.	Team can support autistic C/YP experiencing EBSA. The Autism Leading Edge Group are currently developing an information leaflet, co-produced with members of the autistic community, to accompany this guidance with guidance on how to support Autistic C/YP experiencing EBSA.

Inclusion Advisory Service

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).	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.

• Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). • Core Curriculum Support.	

Early Help

Barnet Early Help 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. Early Help work through facilitating access to the services best suited to each case, as early as possible, before they require social care intervention. They direct families to Universal Services that are accessible for everyone. A more targeted /specialist support can be offered through the Universal Plus referral pathway. If a 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 Early Help referral pathway.	***Making a referral:*** Parents /Carers and Professionals can make a referral online: https://www.barnet.gov.uk/children-and-families/early-help-children-young-people-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 behavioural, social, emotional and mental health difficulties. They offer 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. They can be accessed through the Eventbrite link on their event page. 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. 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	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.

settings with children, young people and their families.	

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. 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 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.	***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: 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

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 behavioural regulation policies are more effective for supporting C/YP experiencing EBSA than traditional behaviourist reward/sanction approaches.

It is recommended that when considering how the school ethos, curriculum, provision and environment supports C/YP experiencing EBSA, the school Senior Leadership Teams consider using an EBSA audit (Appendix 1). This will enable to senior leadership team to consider strengths and areas of development within the current school system and inform its action plan. School staff may wish to seek advice from professional services as listed in Table 3 above. For example, research suggests the key components below are present in effective whole school systems for supporting EBSA.

Table 4: Key components in schools' systems for support EBSA

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 C/YP 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.[6]

As part of an audit of whole staff provision to support students experiencing EBSA, it is helpful to review school policies. It is best 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 C/YP 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 breaches of the school behaviour policy can work for some C/YP, they are not successful with all. This is especially true for C/YP experiencing EBSA or those who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)- traumatic life experiences that occur before the age of 18. For C/YP who experience high levels of anxiety in the school environment or those who have experienced developmental trauma and loss, behaviourist approaches often service to re-traumatise them and do not teach them how to express their emotions in a more appropriate manner.

Research has shown that adopting an attachment-aware, **relational behaviour** policy can be more effective for supporting C/YP'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 in Barnet referred to above 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

[6] 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.[6]

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

school environment throughout the school day. Universal approaches which are helpful and which are commonly used in Barnet schools can include Zones of Regulation The Zones of Regulation | A Curriculum For Emotional Regulation and Emotion Coaching Emotion Coaching: Workshop for Parents and Teachers - YouTube

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

Section summary:

- Assessment of risk ('push') and resilience ('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 C/YP who have recently started to experience EBSA, when their attendance to school may have started to be impacted and where attending school would not have a significant, detrimental impact on their mental health. For C/YP who experience long term/entrenched EBSA or when attending school at the current time would have a significant, detrimental impact on their mental health, 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 2: Assess, Plan, Do, Review Cycle



Assess

In cases where C/YP 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, parents/carers, children/young people and other professionals who might be involved.

Thambirajah et al. (2008)[7] 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, difficulties with travelling to school, supporting family with 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 3: EBSA- the importance of collaboration



Discussing EBSA can be a highly emotive topic for C/YP, 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 solutions and trying to find simple causation can encourage blaming which can increase anxiety. Parents/carers may feel blamed for absences, feel

[7] Thambirajah M,S., Grandison K.J., and De-Hayes L. (2008) Understanding School refusal: a handbook for professionals in education, Health and Social Care. Jessica Kingsley, London, UK

their parenting is being criticised, fear getting into trouble or even being prosecuted. C/YP 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 C/YPs 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 the C/YP's 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 C/YP is experiencing to support the C/YPs feelings of safety and connection within these discussions.

If the C/YP 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 C/YP and validate emotions they are experience, without promoting the EBSA
- 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.

Scaling and visual supports

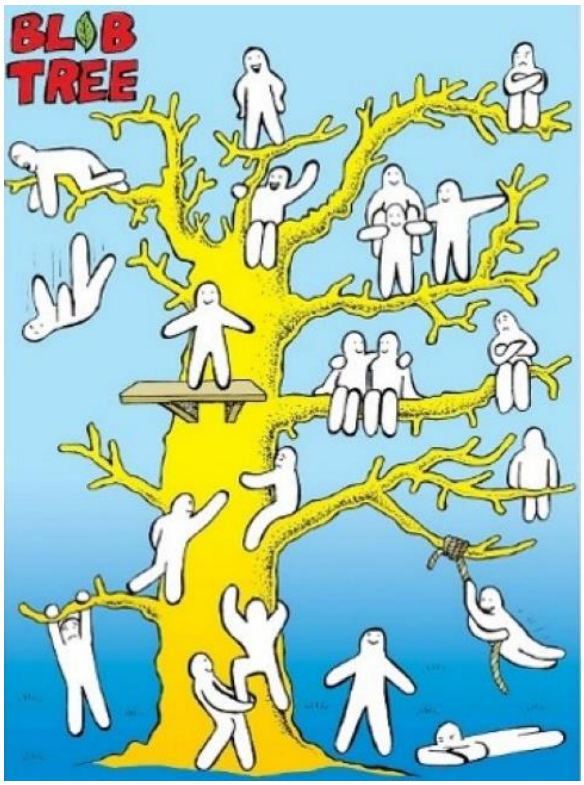
Scaling and visuals can be helpful tools to explore a range of situations which trigger anxiety related in C/YP and can be helpful information which can be drawn upon when moving to the planning stage. Use of colours (green/amber/red) or colours from the Zones of Regulation could be used to colour code their school timetables/activities/times of the day to communicate their emotions. The Spence Child Anxiety Scale (SCAS) is a freely available resource which could be used to ascertain baseline levels of anxiety SCAS CHILD – Download Scale - The Spence Children's Anxiety Scale (scaswebsite.com) and a scaling tool is also provided ins example 'EBSA Support Plans' in Appendix 2 and 3. Emotion thermometers, emotion wheels, tools from Zones of Regulation The Zones of

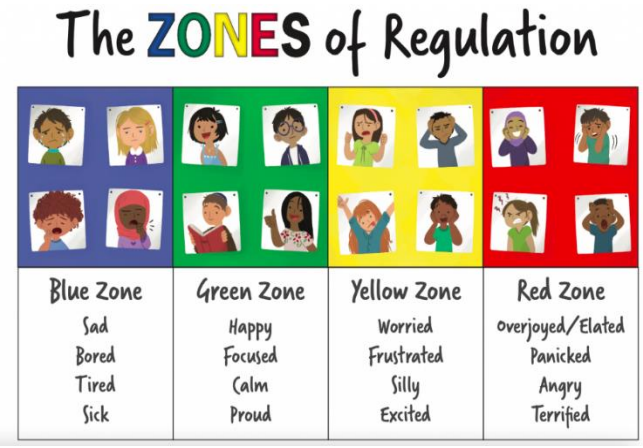
Regulation | A Curriculum For Emotional Regulation or the Blob Tree can also be helpful tools when gaining the views of younger children or C/YP who require visual support with emotional literacy. The School Wellbeing Cards by Dr Jerricah Holder are a useful tool for gaining insight into the reasons behind EBSA. This resource helps to identify risk and resilience factors for the C/YP More information on these can be found here School Wellbeing Risk and Resilience Card Set (schoolwellbeingcards.co.uk).

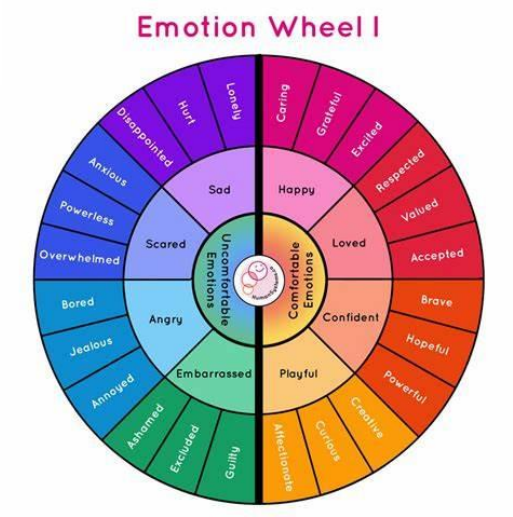
It is important to note that even when C/YP possess skills with recognising and understanding emotions when in a regulated state, they might find this more challenging to do so when emotionally heightened and it is therefore helpful to choose a time and space where the C/YP feels safe and regulated.

Figure 4: examples of visual emotional literacy tools





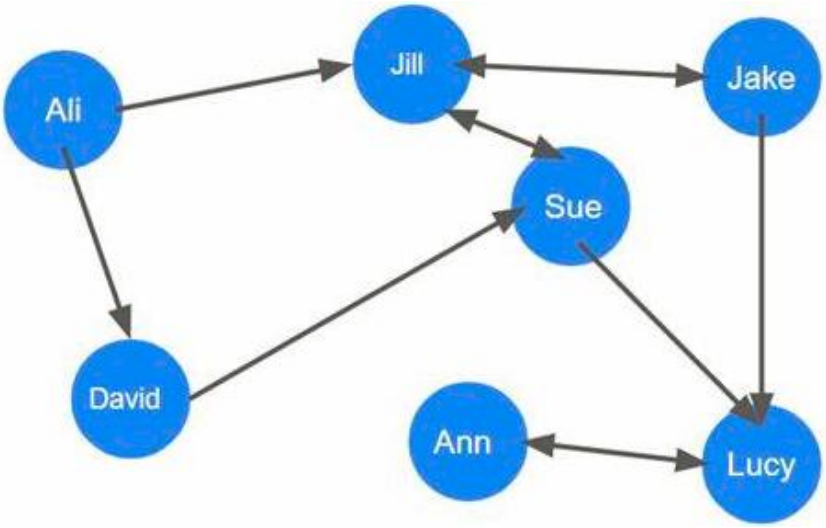




Gaining views about relationships

Sociograms are useful for gaining an understanding of the C/YPs peer relationships. Ask them to select three peers they would most like to do a group project with and ask the CYP's peers to do the same. Based on these answers, you can create a diagram that looks like the one below. This can give you a better idea of a support network that may already exist for the C/YP. A lack of interconnecting circles can indicate a lack of social support in the school environment, which can inform provision planning in this area.

Figure 5: example sociogram



The Ideal School

The Ideal School Technique[8] is a Personal Construct Technique, commonly used by Educational Psychologists, to explore a C/YPs constructs about school.

The technique initially involves asking C/YP to draw and describe their 'Ideal School' (this could be a real school or one they have imagined) and they are asked questions about C/YP, staff members, the physical environment and how they would feel in that environment.

They are then asked to repeat the activity for their 'Non Ideal School.' Finally, they are asked to draw and describe their current school and asked their view about where they would scale their current school between their 'Ideal' and 'Non Ideal' school.

Not only is this activity effective in exploring C/YP's views about school, but it can be helpful to gain an insight into provision/adaptations which can be made to support movement towards the 'ideal' school environment.

Research which has explored the use of this tool for gaining C/YPs views has indicated that technology can be effective to support a C/YPs sense of safety and engagement for example, a C/YP might prefer to construct their ideal/non ideal school using Minecraft.

Energy Accounting

A tool, commonly recommended by the Barnet Autism Advisory Team, is Energy Accounting.

Energy Accounting is a tool with the underlying premise that individuals have a set amount of energy over the course of a day or week, which will vary across different people.

Some activities will provide 'deposits' into a C/YPs energy stores for example, time alone in a safe space whether others for example, masking/social camouflaging or tests will withdraw from the energy stores.

When energy stores become too low, a C/YP could feel anxious, overwhelmed, fatigued or experience low mood.

Using energy accounting can present a helpful way of exploring a C/YPs perception of energy accounting within the school environment.

Please see Autism Level UP! for additional tools which could be used.

[8] Drawing-the-Ideal-School.pdf (nelincs.gov.uk)



Figure 6: example of a visual way of gaining C/YPs views about activities which add deposits to or drain energy reserves

Gaining the views of parents/carers

In addition to gaining the views of C/YP, it is essential that prior to creating an EBSA support plan, a key adult in school takes time to gain the views of parents/carers of the C/YP experiencing EBSA. It is widely acknowledged in research literature, that C/YPs anxiety can present differently in different contexts. It is also widely acknowledged that some C/YP present with EBSA 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/resilience factors, commonly referred to 'push'/'pull' factors, triggers for EBSA and strategies which the C/YP benefits from or has benefitted from previously.

Table 5: example questions for gaining parent/carer views

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 C/YP. Each member of staff may have valuable information to help identify triggers for anxiety and strategies the C/YP responds positively to. In particular it is important to seek out the views of any members of staff the C/YP speaks positively about and any member of staff where relationships may be more difficult.

Table 6: Example questions for gaining staff views

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 YP's support plan?

Plan

Following the assessment process, it is important that the key adult, with key staff members, parents/carers, the C/YP and any key professionals in the C/YPs network jointly identify key pull (risk factors) and push (protective factors) to inform action planning.

Table 7: Tool to explore push/pull factors

Pull away from attending school		
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
Push towards attending school		
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 reduce or remove the identified pull factors?

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 C/YP is experiencing EBSA?
- Are there any differences of views?
- What risk factors have been identified? (school, home, C/YP factors)
- What strengths have been identified that can be built upon?
- What is the function of the EBSA? Is it?
    - To avoid situations or aspects of the physical environment that elicit high levels of anxiety?
    - To escape 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 2 and 3 for example templates for younger and older children). An EBSA Support Plan should be held by a key adult in school but should be co-produced with the C/YP, parents/carers and any other key staff/appropriate professional agencies who are involved.

As each C/YP with EBSA has different protective and risk factors, each EBSA plan will be different based on the assessment. What works for one C/YP will not necessarily work for another.

The plan should be realistic and achievable. If a C/YP's attendance is low, increases should be gradual. A part time timetable may be necessary as part of the process but should be temporary.

At the start of the plan a C/YP 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 C/YPs environment and while supporting the C/YP to use alternative, healthy coping strategies to manage feelings of anxiety. An individual and flexible approach based on the C/YPs needs is necessary.

Optimism is important- if a C/YP does not attend school one day start the plan again the next day. Once actions are agreed with the C/YP, 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/carer and key workers in school. Agree expectations regarding frequency of contact and set realistic response times.
- Early home visits if appropriate to discuss the C/YP's EBSA
- All parties to agree to actions and keep to them until the next review period
- A personalised programme for each C/YP person
- Ensuring the C/YP 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 C/YPs needs, particularly during changes of classes/key stages
- Identifying a safe place or base in school that the C/YP can go to if needed
- Consideration of family support
- The presence of intervention to support the child/young person manage feelings of anxiety.

- School key staff member to be aware of management strategies. Reiteration of supportive means, i.e. relationship building / maintaining, good communication, trusted staff and spaces.
- Consideration of the school environment and adaptations that need to be made.

Provision

Intervention and strategies

Although each C/YP 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 C/YP 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 C/YP 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.

Function 1) to avoid situations that elicit negative feelings or high levels of stress

If a C/YP is experiencing EBSA to serve a function 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. Please see examples of Emotional Regulation strategies below.

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. Consider adaptations that can be made to uniform if the C/YP is avers to textures of clothing.

Table 8: 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

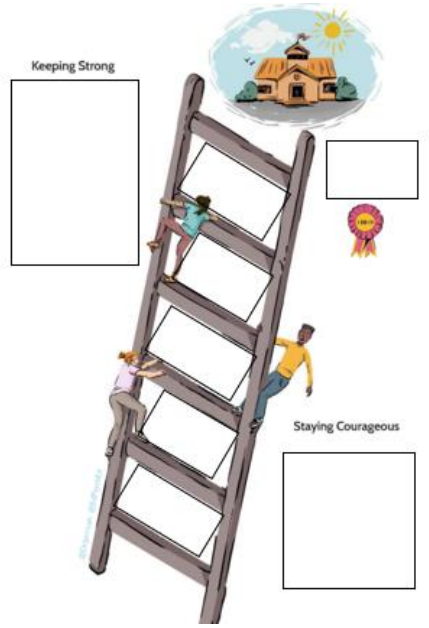


Figure 7: Ladder of strength and courage (Dr Jerricah Holder, 2024)

Function 2) avoidance of 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 consider 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.

Function 3) Avoidance of learning

Consider:

- Does the child/young person have learning needs?
- Have they missed out on learning opportunities?
- How are the teachers differentiating?
- 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

Function 4) to seek attachment with significant others (for example, change in family dynamic, concerned about the wellbeing of a parent)

Intervention may include:

- Support the caregiver to manage the avoidance behaviours such as emotional dysregulation or physical/somatic symptoms in the morning and support them to establish a positive routine
- 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 feel reassured
- 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

Emotional Regulation activities examples

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



Figure 8: example grounding exercise

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.

Review

It is essential that any plan is regularly reviewed. It is helpful to review progress against baseline targets (please see Appendix 2 and 3 for examples which could be used for younger and older children). There should be set dates for reviewing how any support plan is progressing and key adults to attend review meetings. Any baseline data (C/YP, parent/carer, staff) 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 parents/carers
- Identifying that further consultation with other agencies needs to occur which may, if necessary, lead to a referral to other services

Transitions

Section summary:

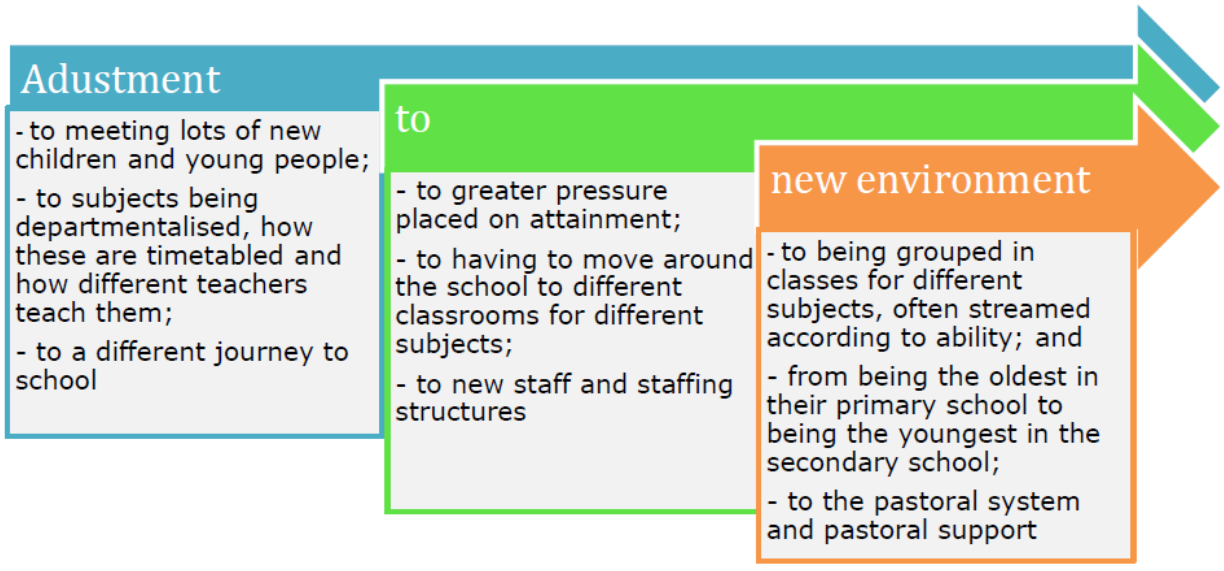
- Transitions are identified as a key school factor which can increase EBSA

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 C/YP 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 9: Transitions and adjustment to new environment [9]



Good practice for supporting transitions

Robust and carefully planned transition planning is important for C/YP experiencing EBSA at all stages. Research has shown that primary to secondary transition can be particularly stressful for C/YP

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

experiencing EBSA. Consideration of the following checklist can be helpful for planning effective transition.

- ☐ 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 parents/carers
- ☐ 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 parents/carers 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

Long-term/Entrenched EBSA – Moving from Recovery to Rediscovery (Dr Jerricah Holder, 2024)[10]

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.
- Step 5: Re-engagement with the world- a gentle, graduated return to education is facilitated.

Earlier in the guidance it was indicated that some C/YP experience long term or 'entrenched' EBSA. Some C/YP 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 C/YP 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 C/YPs network prior to using the approach outlined below. Additionally, it is not possible to provide set timeframes for how long each stage would last as each C/YP experiencing EBSA will be different. Therefore, it is recommended that weekly review takes place with the C/YP's parents/carers and that weekly check ins take place between a trusted key adult in school and the C/YP 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).

Moving from Recovery to Rediscovery is a five-stage process. Before embarking on this journey with the C/YP it is important to accept that the priority is the social, emotional and mental health of the C/YP. The goal at this point is not school attendance, it is supporting the SEMH needs of the C/YP.

[10] Holder, J. (2023) Moving from Recovery to Rediscovery. EdPsychEd

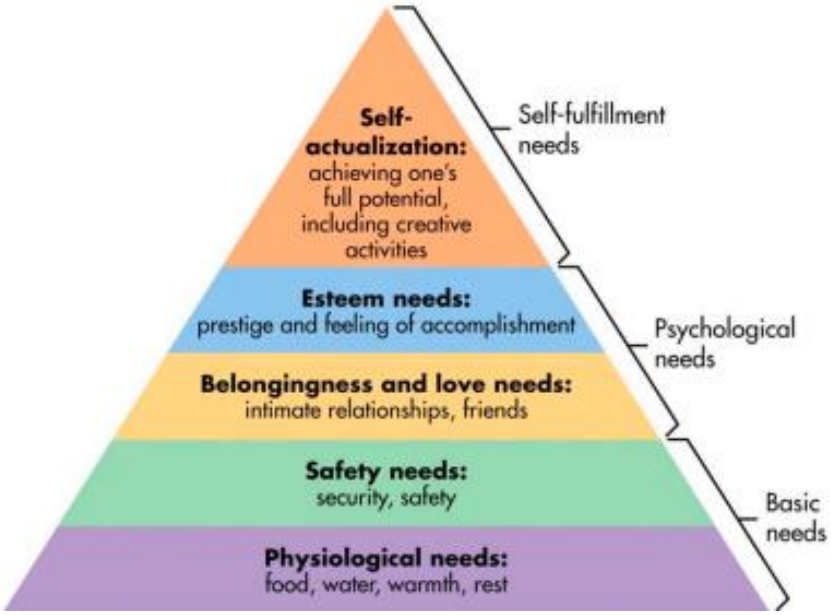
Respite and Recovery

- Allow time to recover form 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 C/YP 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[11]; Sawyer, 2022[12]).

At this stage, it is important to consider Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs[13]. Maslow suggested that we cannot progress to the next level of the pyramid until the needs below it have been met. This stage focuses on replenishing the basic needs of the C/YP. Primarily, rest. The C/YP 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: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



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.

[11] 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
[12] Sawyer, R (2022) Parents' views on EBSNA: A solution-based exploration into successful reintegration. Doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia
[13] Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50* (4), 370-96.

- Collaborate with parents/carers on this approach.

Rationale: Reducing the pressure on the C/YP to attend school allows for repairs in the adult/C/YP relationships to be made. It removes a barrier which leads to better quality contact between adult and C/YP and encourages a sense of safety in the relationship for the C/YP. Change can be facilitated through this strong, safe relationship (Heyne & Brouwer-Bourghuis, 2022).[14]

Neilson and Bond (2023)[15] found that for autistic C/YP, externally imposed timeframes were contributing factors to non-attendance. Time away from school was viewed as a supportive factor by autistic C/YP 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 C/YP 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 C/YP trusts or online group work with their peers.
- Ask the C/YP 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 the C/YP's peer relationships (see gaining C/YPs views section).

Rationale: Establishing strong and safe relationships with C/YP promotes their sense of safety around school and provides an opportunity for them to share their views around school. Re-engagement with school can be facilitated through this safe relationship (Neilson & Bond, 2023[16]; Sawyer, 2022[17]).

A collaborative approach between C/YP, 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 for all C/YP at school (Lenhoff et al., 2022).[18]

[14] Heyne, D., & Brouwer-Borghuis, M. (2022). Signposts for School Refusal Interventions, Based on the Views of Stakeholders. *Continuity in Education*, 3(1), 25-40.
[15] 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
[16] 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
[17] Sawyer, Rachel (2022) Parents' views on EBSNA: A solution-based exploration into successful reintegration. Doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia.
[18] 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

Rediscovering their Sense of Curiosity

- Focus on the C/YPs **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 C/YP 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 C/YP has a positive, safe relationship with, through regular online or phone check-ins with the C/YP or through home visits.

Rationale: If a C/YP is involved in developing their own plan, it will be more likely to be successful (Preece & Howley, 2018).[19]

Re engagement with the World

Consider where the C/YP is on the Cycle of Change regarding returning to education.

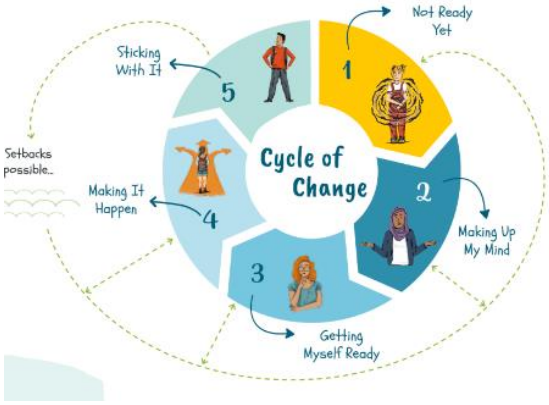


Figure 11: Cycle of Change by Dr Cathy Atkinson, adapted by Jerricah Holder (2024)

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.

[19] 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

When the CYP is ready, begin to plan a graduated approach to returning to school. Refer to Function 1 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).[20]

Useful Resources

- West Sussex Educational Psychology Team guidance for schools, parents/carers, children/young people and professionals: Emotionally Based School Avoidance | West Sussex Services for Schools
- Barnet Local Offer: provides information about professional services in Barnet, training workshops/events, information for SENCOs/school staff and parents/carers Barnet Local Offer :: Home
- Brighton and Hove guidance on how to develop an Attachment Aware Behaviour Regulation Policy Developing an Attachment Aware Behaviour Regulation Policy.pdf (brighton-hove.gov.uk)
- Zones of Regulation The Zones of Regulation | A Curriculum For Emotional Regulation
- Dr Jerricah Holder's School Wellbeing cards School Wellbeing Risk and Resilience Card Set (schoolwellbeingcards.co.uk)
- Webinar by Dr Nina Robinson (Senior Educational Psychologist)- an Introduction to Emotion Coaching https://youtu.be/J2oTdr-3jVw?si=clQNd0xDXF6kPUs0
- Using Playfulness, Acceptance, Compassion Empathy (PACE) in school Using PACE in School (oxfordshire.gov.uk)

[20] 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.

- Beacon House Therapeutic Services and Trauma Team website: Home (beaconhouse.org.uk)
- Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) website: Resources for Emotional Literacy Support Assistants - ELSA Support (elsa-support.co.uk)

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.

Appendix 1: whole school EBSA audit (with thanks to 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?

Click or tap here to enter text.

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

Click or tap here to enter text.

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



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



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

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Early Identification

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



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

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

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4. 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.

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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Child-Centred Approach

1. 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.

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. 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.

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

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

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Multi-Agency Response

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

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

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

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

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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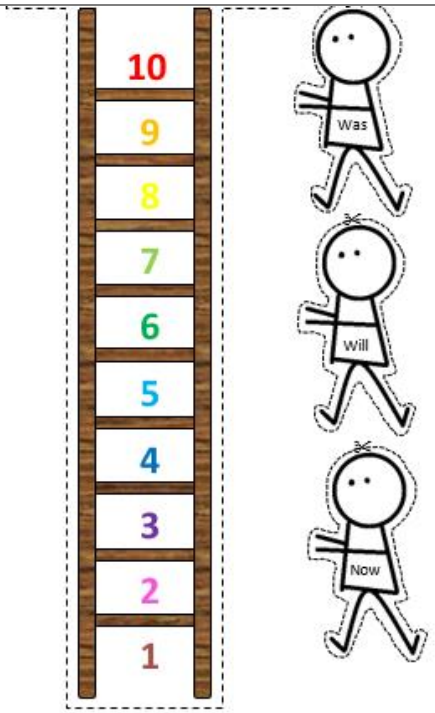
Appendix 2 : Example EBSA Support Plan for younger children

My Support Plan
Name: Date:
At school these things can make me feel upset: 
I like these things at school: 
My key adult(s) in school is:

Where I can speak to my key adult: When I can speak to my key adult:
Until _____my support plan includes the following changes to my attendance:
(Identify any changes to days or times they come in)
Changes to my timetable include:
Identify any other changes to routines (break, lunch times, changes between lessons etc), classroom expectations (not to read aloud, no cold calling, work in pairs etc) or homework

Adaptations to physical environment include:
Identify any changes to physical environment (for example, access to low arousal safe space), access to sensory resources/strategies (for example, time out card, toilet pass, entering lessons earlier/later, alternative space at lunch/break time, sensory resources in school etc)
When I start to get upset, I notice these things about myself:
When I start to get upset, others notice these things about me:

Things I can do which make me feel better in school:
Places in the school I can go where I feel safe and supported:
My target: …… …… ……



I was on step …… because……

……

I think I will be on step…… because……

……

I am now on step…….. because……

……

This plan will be reviewed regularly so that it's helpful

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Review date:</td></tr>
<tr><td>My signature:</td><td>Key adult’s signature:</td><td>Parent(s)/Carer(s) signature(s):</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Other people who have access to the plan are:</td></tr>
</table>

Appendix 3: Example EBSA Support Plan for older children

My Support Plan
Name: Date:
At school these things can make me feel upset:
I like these things at school:
My key adult(s) in school is:

Where I can speak to my key adult: When I can speak to my key adult:
Until _____my support plan includes the following changes to my attendance:
(Identify any changes to days or times they come in)
Changes to my timetable include:

Identify any other changes to routines (break, lunch times, changes between lessons etc), classroom expectations (not to read aloud, no cold calling, work in pairs etc) or homework
Adaptations to physical environment include:
Identify any changes to physical environment (for example, access to low arousal safe space), access to sensory resources/strategies (for example, time out card, toilet pass, entering lessons earlier/later, alternative space at lunch/break time, sensory resources in school etc)
When I start to get upset, I notice these things about myself:

When I start to get upset, others notice these things about me:
Things I can do which make me feel better in school:
Places in the school I can go where I feel safe and supported:

Targeted Outcomes

Targeted Outcome	
Baseline	
Expected	
Achieved	
Rating: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	

Targeted Outcome	
Baseline	
Expected	
Achieved	
Rating: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	

Targeted Outcome	
Baseline	
Expected	
Achieved	
Rating: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	

This plan will be reviewed regularly so that it's helpful

Review date:

My signature:	Key adult's signature:	Parent(s)/Carer(s) signature(s):
Other people who have access to the plan are:		