TORBAY COUNCIL

Emotionally Based School Avoidance: Guidance for Torbay Educational Settings

April 2021

Contents

Version control

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Aims of this document.

This document is part of Torbay's local authority's response supporting schools' recovery from the Covid pandemic. It has been highlighted through the SEND section of Torbay Council that the lockdown may have led to some Children and Young People (CYP) experiencing anxiety returning to school which may have led to Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). The Educational Psychology Service have developed this guide to support schools and other educational settings, working with parents and carers to support young people with EBSA. This guidance has been planned to support early intervention for young people who may be experiencing EBSA return to school after long absences.

This guide is for all school staff from headteachers and members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), to teachers, teaching assistants, support staff and more. The whole school approaches section is particularly relevant and useful to members of SLT.

This document is partly based on research carried out by Kerrie Lissack (Trainee Educational Psychologist in Torbay) as part of her Doctorate in Educational, Child, and Community Psychology, and on the Recovery Plan developed by Staffordshire County Council and their document 'Emotionally Based School Avoidance: Guidance for Educational Settings'. The photographs in this document are copywrite free and are taken from Unsplash (www.unsplash.com)

Background and Context

1.1 Definitions of EBSA

Emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) is a term used to describe children who find it difficult to attend school. This is a term used to describe those children and young people (CYP) who find it difficult to attend school due to emotional reasons (including anxiety). This can lead them to being absent from school for extended periods of time (West Sussex Educational Psychology Service, 2018). Often there is a distinction between truancy and EBSA within the literature; however, it is useful to consider all non-attendance as having an emotional basis. Being absent from school can have far-reaching and significant impacts on CYP's social, emotional, cognitive, and personal development (Dannow et al., 2020). CYP missing school also has wider impacts upon society as it can impact an individual's long-term educational progress and life outcomes (Hughes et al., 2010, Kearney, 2002).

1.2 The Importance of Labels

The way practitioners label and conceptualise a child's school attendance difficulties is important because it can impact the interventions and support strategies we put in place for that child (Norwich, 1999; Rae, 2020). Using the term EBSA places emphasis on the emotional factors involved in a child's attendance difficulties. Other terms that are used to describe difficulties with attendance include:

- School phobia
- School refusal
- Extended school non-attendance
- Anxiety-based school non-attendance

It is important to begin to move away from terms such as 'school refusal' because this places emphasis on 'within-child' factors, i.e., the problem of attendance is viewed as something that is within the child's control and does not consider the environment or school factors that might be contributing to the child's attendance difficulties. The term 'school phobia' is also not helpful as this implies the child has a fear of the school itself which is not often true (Thambirajah et al., 2008). With these points in mind, the term EBSA will be used throughout this document. Children experiencing EBSA are normally absent from school due to underlying emotional upset or anxiety and their parents tend to be aware of their school non-attendance (Rae, 2020). Sometimes this type of absence from school will be obvious due to the child's presenting needs and long-standing non-attendance. However, other children might still be attending school but in a sporadic manner e.g., missing particular lessons or days (Rae, 2020).

1.3 Prevalence

Accurate prevalence of EBSA can be difficult to obtain as the way schools and local authorities define and record school non-attendance varies (Clissold, 2018). However, research suggests that

rates of EBSA range from 1% to 5% of the school population (Egger et al., 2003, Pellegrini, 2007, Elliott & Place, 2019), while Dannow et al. (2020) note that prevalence figures for school absenteeism have ranged from 6% to 23%. School absence due to emotional reasons is reported equally for both genders and there does not appear to be any strong evidence to suggest that there is a link to socioeconomic status or ethnicity (Pellegrini, 2007; Rae, 2020). Research has shown that non-attendance is more prevalent at times of key transitions between school phases (e.g., to secondary school) or following a period of illness (Kearney, 2019).

Understanding anxiety

The CYP charity, MIND (mind.org.uk), has defined anxiety as:

"Anxiety is what we feel when we are worried, tense or afraid-particularly about things that are about to happen, or which we think could happen in the future. Anxiety is a natural human response when we perceive that we are under threat. It can be experienced through our thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations".

When we experience anxiety, we may feel:

- Worrying thoughts, feelings that we are not good enough, or we cannot cope.
- Feeling anxious, panicking, or stressed out.
- Sensing a lack of control feeling or that we cannot cope with all we have to do.
- Feeling wobbly
- Not sleeping well
- Feeling hot
- Not having a good appetite
- Being easily distracted
- Our heart is racing.
- Our mouth is dry.
- Shaking
- Butterflies/cramps in the tummy

It is important to remember that everyone experiences anxiety at times, it is a biological response to deal with danger or a threat built into our DNA. A fierce creature may have threatened our ancestors, so, when our ancestors sensed danger their bodies (and our bodies now) responded by pumping adrenaline into the system to ready the body for fighting the creature, running away from it, or freezing still so we are not noticed-the 'flight, fight or freeze' reaction.

'Fight flight or freeze' may have been a useful response for the real danger of a bear or sabretooth tiger, however, today this reaction is not helpful when we experience this response on a day-to-day basis from other sources of worry. We understand this, when it happens over a prolonged period, as anxiety. Anxiety is common in young people; Young Minds, the CYP charity have said that one in six young people will experience a high level of anxiety during their school career. This means out of a class of 30 on average five young people will experience a high level of anxiety.

2.1 EBSA and anxiety

Anxiety is seen as one of the most significant factors associated with school non-attendance. Research indicates nearly 50% of school and non-attenders have an anxiety disorder (Maynard et al 2015). It is often the case that CYP have anxious thoughts associated with going to school and feel that they cannot cope with the demands of school, they may also display somatic (physical) symptoms of anxiety such as nausea. It is also known that a history of separation anxiety-overwhelming anxiety on being separated from a caregiver-is a 'red flag' for future EBSA. Parents may see behaviours such as not getting ready for school, unwillingness to leave home, reluctance to go into the school building. The behaviour may be more challenging, a young person may attempt to deal with their anxiety by becoming aggressive in an attempt to control the situation. If these behaviours resulted in not attending school, they may reinforce EBSA.
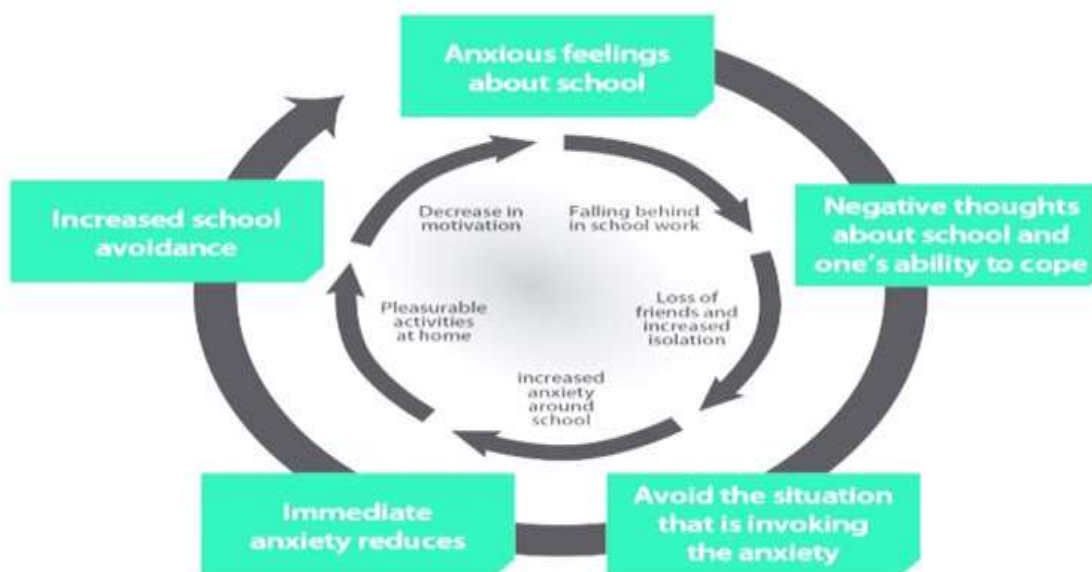
(Illustration is taken from 'supporting children with anxiety in the Covid pandemic' Tina Rae)

Tina Rae's Anxiety Model explained

1) Anxious feelings about school: the young person may have experienced some anxiety in school, perhaps a 'fight, flight or freeze' moment or a more general feeling of worry or anxiety about a school-based situation. When people have 'anxiety', they usually have both mental and physical symptoms. Anxiety can be related to a number of different areas such as:

- Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)
- Social anxiety
- Specific phobias
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and more

Anxious thoughts consist of unhelpful thinking where our mind fixates on a potential threat or uncertainty, and may take the form of scary thoughts, images and/or memories as well as an impending sense of doom. Unhelpful thinking patterns may include:

2) Negative thoughts about school: The anxious feelings are prolonged due to them being reinforced by a particular thought pattern about school. This is often an anticipation/contemplation of a threat (e.g., "The work at school will be too difficult for me"). Anxiety usually involves thinking about the future focusing negatively on anticipated future events (Borkovec, 2002). This thinking may involve:

- Threat scanning (when your mind searches the environment for what you fear; consciously or subconsciously)
- Catastrophising (when your mind jumps to worst-case scenarios)
- Hypothetical worries (which include 'what if' thoughts and are typically about things you do not have much control over)
- Emotional reasoning (when your mind tells you your emotions reflect reality)
- Fortune telling (when your mind interprets predictions as facts)

3) Avoid the situation that is provoking the anxiety: There are a number of signs and symptoms of anxiety. The most common thing we do when we are anxious is avoid the situation. This is especially seen in older children (e.g., avoidance of work tasks, certain lessons, social interactions, school, etc.). The key aspect of anxiety is worrying about a potential threat and individuals will do whatever they can to reduce these anxious thoughts/feelings. This is sometimes achieved through avoiding the feared situation altogether. Using avoidance techniques will instantly decrease an individual's anxiety, as they have managed to avoid a distressing situation.

4) Immediately anxiety is reduced: Although avoiding an anxiety-provoking situation produces immediate relief from the anxiety, it is only a short-term solution. This means that whilst it may seem like avoiding is the best thing to do at the time, the anxiety often returns the next time you face the situation and avoiding it will only psychologically reinforce the message that there is danger.

5) Increase school avoidance: The problem with avoidance is you never get to find out whether your fear about the situation and what would happen is actually true. For example, individuals can become over-sensitive, and this leads to an increased anticipation of the threat - the more the CYP avoids school, the scarier it becomes. Overtime, the anxiety cycle can evolve and the CYP might be avoiding school but can no longer remember what it was that made them anxious in the first place.

Anxiety around school attendance may be preceded by a change or a specific factor associated with school. These may include:

- Social anxiety around unstructured times
- Difficulty with classwork
- Exam anxiety
- Bullying
- Other CYP's poor behaviour
- Poor classroom management
- Separation anxiety
- Worry about getting into trouble.
- Change of routine or teacher.

It is important to identify particular factors that may be the source of anxiety. In addition, it is also important to explore with the CYP their feelings and thoughts around their ability to cope with these sources of anxiety. Research (Hayne and Rollings 2002) highlights that it is often young people's thoughts about how well they can cope in stressful situations that contribute to school non-attendance.

As well as the specific factors that 'push' CYP away from school, secondary 'pull' factors draw them to the home environment. Secondary factors which maintain EBSA can include:

- Less pressure and demands at home.
- Enjoyable/pleasurable activities at home
- Additional time with parents/carers

EBSA in a COVID-19 Context

Rae (2020, p.1) noted that EBSA is "not a new phenomenon associated with the coronavirus pandemic". However, the pandemic has served to highlight the anxiety and negative feelings that some CYP can feel with regards to attending school post-lockdown. During the school closures and lockdown, the prolonged period of absence from school for some children has resulted in difficulties with attending school again. Factors such as being away from friends; fearing they are behind in schoolwork, decreased motivation, and increased anxiety regarding catching COVID-19 may all influence children's ability to attend school. COVID-19 is a unique situation which has changed the ways schools operate. The new rules regarding social distancing represent a shift in the normal way of functioning for all schools. This can create uncertainty and unpredictability for both staff and children. Schools should be safe and nurturing places for children; the rules of social distancing and other safety measures in place may create difficulties or conflict for school staff [1]. Staff and children may feel a lack of control over the situation and therefore may experience uncomfortable feelings and emotions [1,2].

It can be useful to view EBSA as a continuum (Figure 2). These absences along the continuum can be viewed as being underpinned by anxiety or emotional responses to a challenging situation within the context of COVID-19. There will be children at the far end of the continuum who are experiencing extreme distress regarding the return to school, and there will be children at the near end who mildly anxious about going to school during the pandemic. Regardless of the pandemic, children who experience attendance difficulties during more 'normal' times will also likely be feeling many difficult emotions and challenging circumstances.
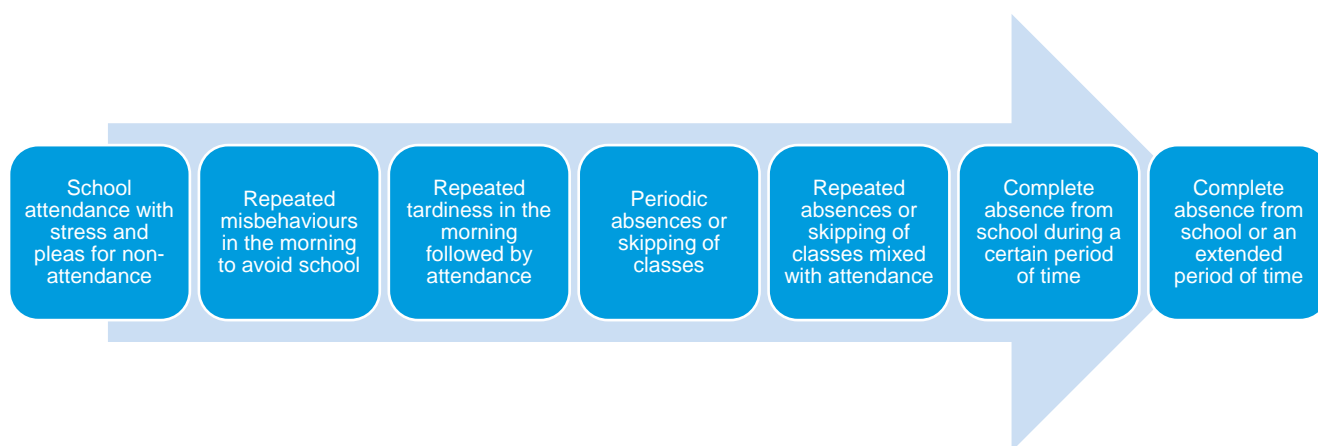

Figure 2: A spectrum of school attendance problems (Kearney, 2019, p. 4)

3.1 The challenge of returning to school after lockdown.

Some CYP will welcome the return to the routine and familiarity of school after the lockdown period, while other children may need some extra support and encouragement to know that school is a safe place to be (Rae, 2020). However, for some CYP the return to school will trigger anxiety and worry. Rae (2020) sets out specific challenges associated with the return to school for these CYP during the pandemic:

Separation anxiety

CYP have experienced a sustained period with their parents/cares at home. This might impact their ability to return to school because they have experienced less independence than normal. CYP may also have anxiety about their loved one's health and risk of catching the virus.

Social anxiety

For some CYP, lockdown and the limited social contact may have reduced their anxiety that they would normally experience in social environments such as school. These children may have thrived during lockdown and parents might have noticed a reduction in their anxiety. Therefore, a return to school might prompt feelings distress at the thought of transitioning back to an environment that causes them to feel anxious.

Generalised anxiety

Many CYP (and adults too!) can experience difficulties in coping with uncertainty. The changes to school life during the pandemic will have impacted these children's sense of safety and reduced their perceived ability to cope with the changes and levels of uncertainty. The return to school will bring more feelings of uncertainty and confusion for many children.

Health anxiety

CYP may experience overwhelming worries about their health and the health of their loved ones during the pandemic. The return to school might be difficult for these children because school represents a place where there are more people and more opportunities for the virus to be transmitted. This might be an extreme fear that CYP are unable to overcome, despite reassurances from the adults around them that school is safe.

Hygiene anxiety

The constant messages about maintaining hygiene with hand washing, cleaning, and distancing from other people might create a significant barrier for some CYP to return to school. CYP who might have already experienced symptoms of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder may also now experience even greater compulsions which will make their return to school life a challenge.

Understanding and Identifying EBSA

There are several models and frameworks that attempt to explain and understand why children might experience EBSA.

4.1 Risk factors

Early identification and intervention for CYP who may be 'at risk' of EBSA is critical. The table below provides known possible risk factors for EBSA (taken from multiple sources: Havik, et al. 2013; Thambirajah, et al., 2008; Kearney and Silverman, 1995; Rae, 2020, p. 6):

RISK FACTORS AT SCHOOL	RISK FACTORS AT HOME	CHILD-SPECIFIC FACTORS
Bullying (the most common school factor). Noise and organisation of the school setting. Unpredictable school environment leading to feelings of unsafety. Difficulties in a specific subject. Transition to secondary school, key stage or change in school. Teachers who are perceived as having an aggressive nature. Structure of the school day. Academic demands/high levels of pressure and performance-orientated classrooms.	Separation and divorce or change in the family dynamic. Siblings being at home, e.g., home educated, ill-health. Limited social interactions within the home. Parent physical and mental health problems. Absence of a parent. Overprotective parenting style. Dysfunctional family interactions. Being the youngest child in the family. Loss and bereavement; high levels of family stress.	Temperament style: reluctance to interact and withdrawal from unfamiliar settings, people, or objects. Fear of failure and poor self-confidence. Physical illness. Learning difficulties, developmental problems or ASC, if unidentified and/or unsupported. Separation anxiety from parent. Traumatic events. Fear of social and personal failure. Previous exclusions. Low self-confidence.

Transport or journey to school. Exams. Peer relationships – including elements of conflicts, anxiety, or isolation. Negative peer-student relationships.	Family history of mental health problems. Young carers.	

These risk factors interact and should not be viewed in isolation (Figure 3). The risks factors also occur at different levels (Pre-disposing, precipitating, and perpetuating), while there are also protective factors that might act to mitigate some of the risk factors. A useful model to consider here is the 'Five Ps Model' (Rae, 2020, p.16):

- The Problem
- The Predisposing factors (risk factors, background, etc.)
- The Precipitating factors (triggers)
- The Perpetuating factors (personal, family, environmental factors that sustain the problem)
- The Protective factors (personal, family, environmental factors that could help recovery).

Figure 3: Interaction of risk factors
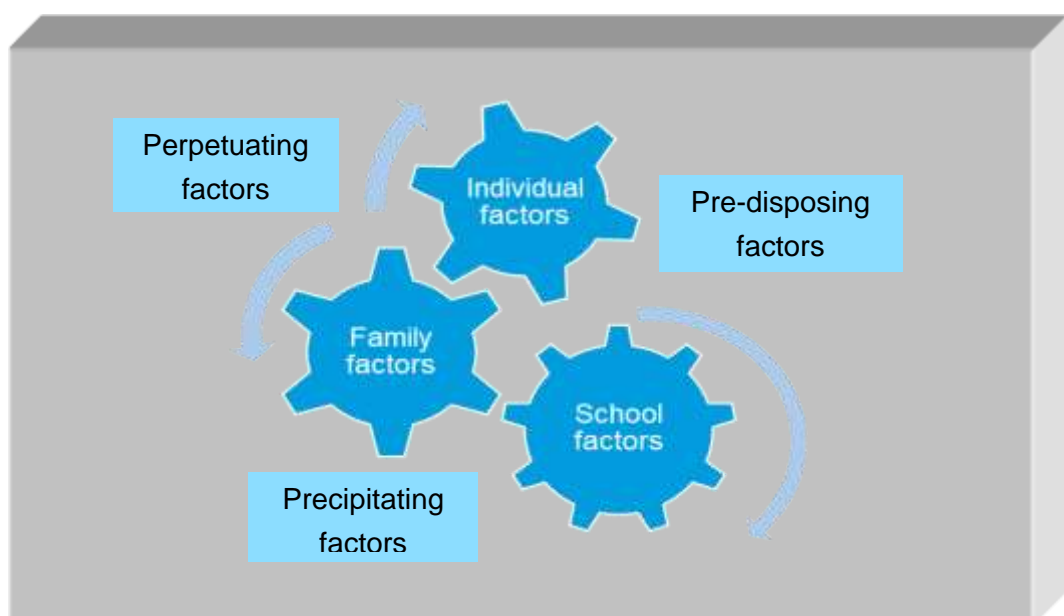
4.2 Protective factors

It is important to consider the protective factors that support the CYP. These can include the CYP's strengths, their family or school context, and focusing on previous successes so these can be built upon. The table below summarises the research on protective factors for EBSA:

INDIVIDUAL	FAMILIAL	SCHOOL
CYP'S strengths and interests	Positive relationships in the family and community	Willingness to work in partnership with family and support agencies.
CYP'S aspirations and ambitions	Willingness to work in partnership with the school and support agencies.	Positive relationships with peers and staff
CYP's motivation for change - increasing confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy	Positive parenting skills	Experiencing success in school
	Developing an understanding of CYP needs and feelings	Having a flexible approach
		Developing an understanding of CYP's needs and feelings

4.3 Push and Pull Factors

Another useful way to view EBSA is within the 'Push and Pull Factors' model. Thambirajah et al. (2008) state, "school refusal occurs when…. 'pull' factors that promote school non-attendance, overcome the 'push' factors that encourage attendance" (p.33). West Sussex Educational Psychology Service (2018) suggests it can also help understand 'risk and resilience' influences in terms of 'push' and 'pull' factors.

PULL FACTORS are those influencing factors that might pull a CYP AWAY from attending school.

PUSH FACTORS are those influencing factors that might push a CYP TOWARDS attending school.

PULL FACTORS

Separation anxiety

Hygiene worries

Family member unwell

Bereavement

PUSH FACTORS

Positive peer relationships

Enjoyment of lessons

Positive connection with a

Figure 4: Examples of PUSH and PULL factors involved in children's school attendance.

The push and pull factors are likely to be present across multiple systems and contexts within a child's life. It will be useful therefore to consider how the push and pull factors might be influencing a child's ability to attend school at each level.

The diagram below can be used with individual children to explore this further (adapted from Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council publication, 'Collaborative working to promote attendance and psychological wellbeing', p. 28):
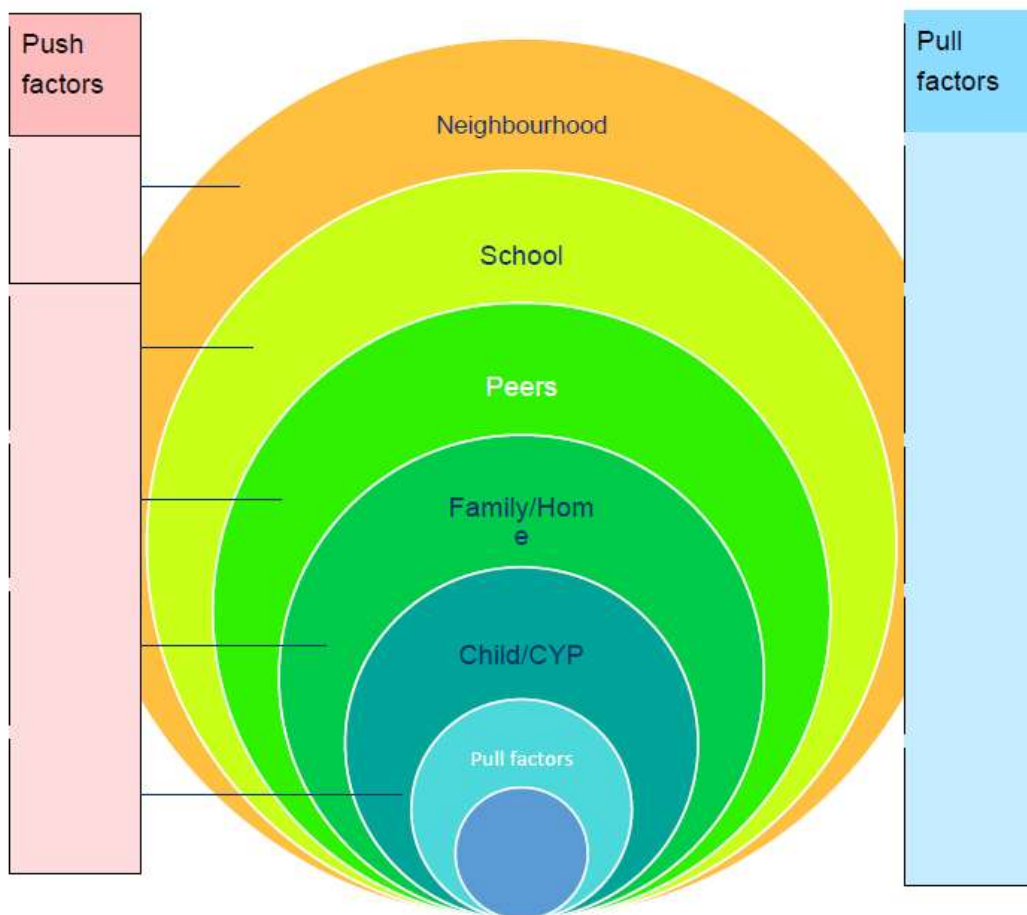
Figure 5: A framework to explore the push and pull model.

4.4 Functional Model of Non-attendance

When a child is experiencing difficulties in attending school, consideration needs to be given to the functions that might be maintaining their non-attendance and any unmet needs that avoiding school fulfils for them.

Kearney (2019) proposed that there are four main functions that non-attendance serves:

- To avoid school situations and objects (such as busy hallways) that cause negative emotions.
- To escape from aversive social situations (e.g., negative interactions with teachers or bullying or speaking in front of the class).
- To gain or pursue attention from others outside of school (e.g., staying at home to be near parents or engaging in out-of-school activities during school hours).
- To obtain or pursue tangible rewards outside of school (i.e., preferred activities, e.g., watching T.V., playing video games).

16

Non-attendance should be considered as a child's 'behaviour' and 'behaviour is communication'. Therefore, the following questions should be considered when a child is not attending school consistently:

Avoiding school is the solution to what problem for the CYP?

What are the CYP's non-attendance behaviours telling us about how they are feeling?

What are the CYP's non-attendance behaviours telling us about what they need?

What outcome is the CYP's non-attendance achieving from them?

If non-attendance behaviour functions to avoid school the school avoidance can be negatively reinforced. As the child avoids negative outcomes, their school avoidance behaviours will become strengthened (Figure 6).
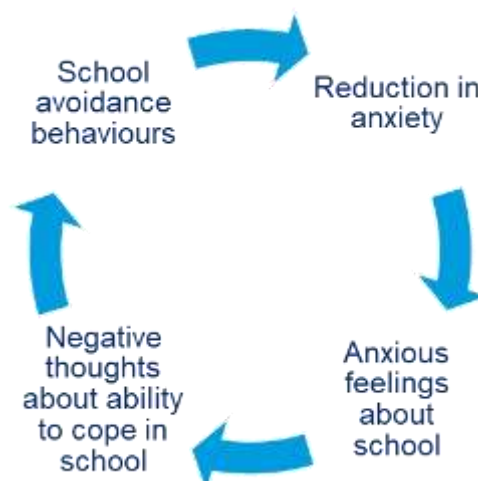
School avoidance behaviours → Reduction in anxiety → Anxious feelings about school → Negative thoughts about ability to cope in school → (cycle)

Figure 6. Negative reinforcement of non-attendance behaviours

If non-attendance behaviours functions to gain from being away from school, then school avoidance can be positively reinforced. As the child avoids school, their need is being met and therefore school avoidance increases. The example shown in Figure 7.
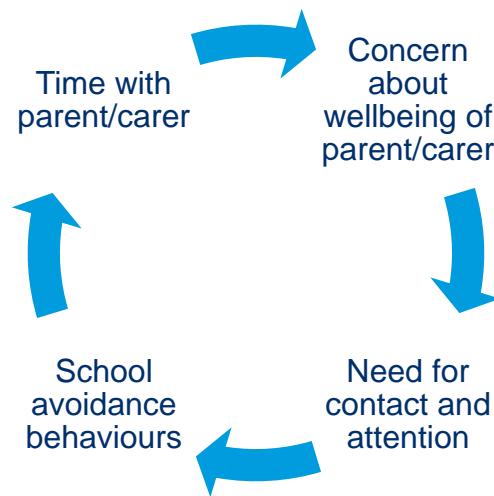
Figure 7. Positive reinforcement of non-attendance behaviours

With these complex interactions and contexts in mind, there should be a focus upon developing strong home-school partnerships and developing consistent communication between key staff at school and parents/carers at home. Information gathering to fully understand a child's EBSA will need to include the following:

- Consideration of risk and protective factors
- Exploration of the function of EBSA (by referring to the four functions of school non-attendance – Kearney, 2019).
- Identification of 'push' and 'pull' factors.

Resources to support information gathering with the child and family are provided in the appendices.

4.4 What might EBSA look like?

In cases of EBSA, there might be a combination of symptoms that indicate that a CYP is experiencing emotional distress in relation to attending school. While school staff might notice some of the following associated behaviours, it is important to recognise the individualised nature of attendance difficulties and that one child's presentation might be very different from another child.

Signs that a child might be experiencing the anxiety of distress with school attendance (or the return to school post-lockdown):

- Talking negatively about school
- Crying
- Pleading
- Becoming anxious on separation from caregiver
- Physical symptoms of anxiety (e.g., headaches, stomach aches), often on a Sunday night or a Monday morning, which may improve when the CYP stays home from school.
- Sharing worries about particular aspects of school
- Refusing to get ready for school or to leave the house.
- Difficulties sleeping
- Becoming distressed when school is talked about.
- Engaging in self-harming behaviours
- Becoming withdrawn, spending increasing amounts of time in their bedroom, avoiding trips outside of the home.

Research has consistently shown that early intervention for EBSA is key. Baker and Bishop (2015) argue that a support quick return to school where adaptations are made within the school and home environment is required. Implementation of an individualised support plan, informed by an analysis of the factors influencing EBSA, and developed in partnership by families, school staff and the CYP has been shown to have positive outcomes.

4.5 How can adults better understand the problem?1

CYP miss school for a variety of reasons, and it is important to understand the why a CYP is experiencing attendance difficulties before we can put in place the most appropriate support (Rae, 2020). To help children, we must first understand their difficulties in attending school. In the context of COVID-19, the child's worries may be linked to the threat of the virus. In other cases, a child may have had a particularly difficult lockdown experience which is impacting upon their ability to attend school.

- Take a child-centred approach and be inquisitive.
- Ensure close school-home communication and conversations with parents.
- Get to know the child's strengths, interests, and values.
- Consider different areas of safety: physical safety; emotional safety; social safety; cognitive safety.
- Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is a useful way to consider the different contexts in a child's life and how these could be influencing their attendance (figure 8).

Some evidenced-based approaches to supporting children are provided below. However, as mentioned above, it is important to remember that each child will have their own unique difficulties which need to be considered individually when implementing support.
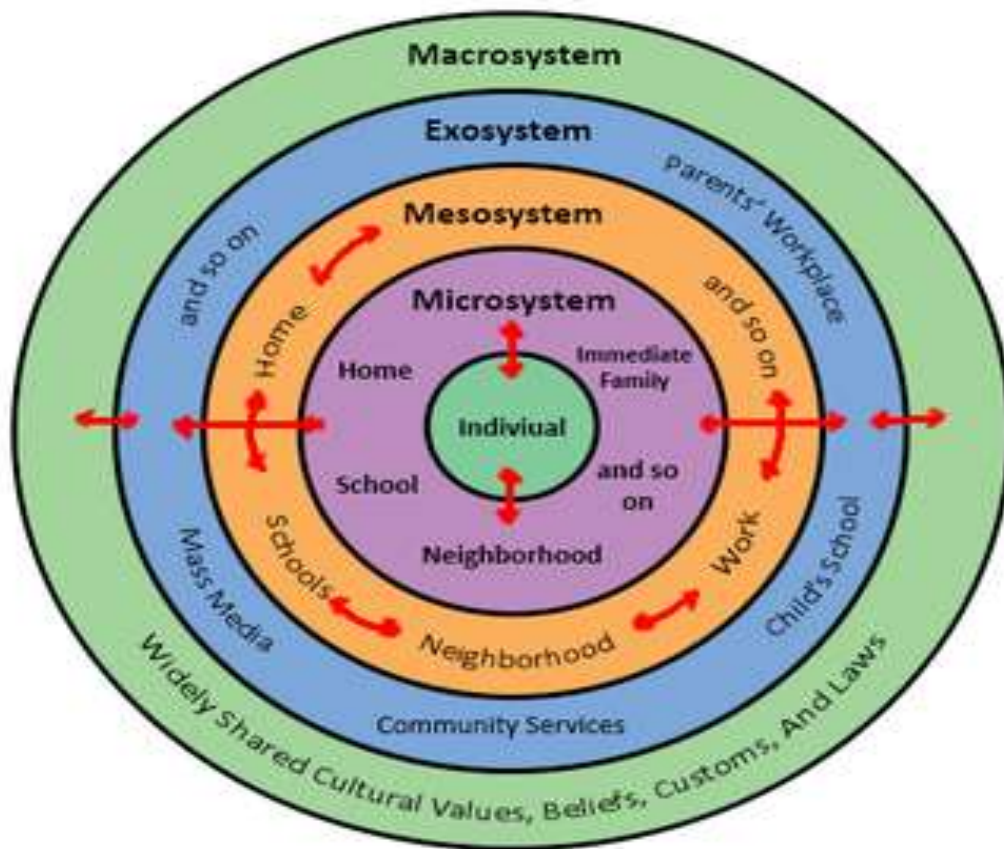

Figure 8: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory showing the child at the centre of a nested environments.

EBSA and Autistic Spectrum Condition

Anxiety is common in children with autism and this anxiety may worsen during adolescence because this is when children face increasingly complex social situations and often become more aware of their differences and interpersonal difficulties. Despite this, there is currently limited research into the association between children with autism and EBSA. Research that does exist recognises that increased anxiety in children with autism places them at greater risk of EBSA. Research has highlighted the ability of girls with autism to mask their autistic characteristics in school (Cook et al., 2018). This masking ability warrants careful consideration, particularly in girls who might be experiencing attendance difficulties. Thambirajah et al. (2008, p.34) report that "developmental problems such as ASD are sometimes a contributory factor [to non-attendance], especially when the problems are subtle and remain unidentified".

As with any child experiencing anxiety, the factors impacting levels of anxiety in those with ASC will be complex and varied. These might be associated with context blindness, executive functioning, limited theory of mind, difficulties processing language, and sensory processing differences (Ozsivadjian and Knott, 2016; Gaus, 2011; McLeod et al., 2015; Ting and Weiss, 2017). With regards to COVID-19, the uncertainty and changes within the school environment are likely to negatively impact on some children with ASC.

5.1 Changes in school environment and routines

CYP with autism can find change overwhelming. The changes in the school environment in response to the pandemic will take time for CYP to re-learn and settle into.

The following strategies might help CYP with such changes:

Trusted adult or a friend of the child could create a recording or photo tour of the school environment and the key places the child will be using each day e.g., their tutor room / classroom, the lunch hall, entrance, reception area etc. The video could be narrated with humour and reassurance while being personalised to the child. The photos or video can be emailed home and the parent could watch regularly with the child to explore any worries or fears about going to school. Follow up videos of more specific areas that the child may raise as worries could then be produced.

- Social Stories could be written that focus on anticipating change, validating concerns, and supporting a successful return which are personalised for the child. There are many of these available pre-written that can be adapted for personal use.

- Calendars and Countdown Charts can be used to give a chronological context to the return to school to help reduce anxiety about upcoming events.

- Simple practises to restart the 'school-going habit' perhaps accompanied by a visual chart* (e.g., donning school uniform, restocking the pencil case with new 'stuff', using the lunch box, walking past the school) could be encouraged and rehearsed, perhaps tied to dates on a Countdown Chart.

5.2 Relationships

The return to school after a period of absence (or post-lockdown) can create challenges for children with ASC (and other children) with regards to making friends, forming relationships, and integrating with groups. A long separation can create more barriers to forming these positive relationships which could create anxiety.

Below are some potential helpful strategies to consider when supporting the development of relationships:

- Social Stories focussed upon social difficulties known to have been previously encountered by the child. Establishing short affirmative steps to take immediately on return.

- Continuation of social skills training programmes on return to school. Some sessions might have to be re-run to account for anything that might have been forgotten after the period of non-attendance.

- Introduction of social support from peers e.g., through Circle of Friends, Lego' Therapy', peer buddy system.

- A trusted key adult to make consistent contact with child and parents/carers before return and daily thereafter. A consistent 'Meet and Greet' system could be put in place (perhaps as part of an 'early arrival' plan to ease school entry before most pupils arrive).

- Simple reward schemes for attendance or acknowledge 'good' days at school.

5.3 Emotion regulation

Returning to school after a period of non-attendance where a child with ASC has had limited social contact may prompt an increase in difficulties with emotional regulation. As the child has likely had fewer social interactions to manage, their emotional expression and control might have been adversely affected.

Some strategies to help children with emotional regulation might include:

- Regular monitoring and assessment of the CYP's emotional responses and presentation. Use well established simple techniques such as the Five Point Scale to assess how the child is feeling and responding. It is only by accessing the CYP's

own inner world that unique perceptions, thoughts and misconceptions, and fears (irrational or not) can be understood and acted upon.

- Teaching relaxation skills the CYP can call upon quickly in a challenging situation to help improve their self-management and independence. These can include specific bodily relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, imagery, Mindfulness or Yoga techniques. The opportunity to take simple physical exercise should not be overlooked.

- Use of Time Out cards, safe spaces / comfort zones, access to special toys and activities to allow the child to take time away from difficult situations when needed.

5.4 Sensory differences

CYP with ASC can experience many sensory difficulties within the school environment. These can be a hypersensitivity (heightened sensitivity to stimulation of the sense) or hyposensitivity (under-sensitive to stimulation which makes CYP want to seek out more sensory stimulation). Noise, light, temperature, texture, pressure, and taste, and often to overcrowding or chaotic environments can be factors that make the school environment an overwhelming place for a CYP. The post COVID-19 school environment may present unanticipated sensory challenges which the CYP reacts to adversely. For example, PPE, regular hand washing, and smells of sanitiser may upset CYP and trigger adverse emotional responses (and thus, potentially leading to school avoidance). It may be possible to compromise or desensitise in some instances, or it may be necessary to adapt some procedures in special circumstances to support the child in having more positive school experiences. The use of sensory rooms, fidget toys, music, ear defenders, pressure pads, textured toys etc might also be positive strategies for the CYP. An individualised and personalised approach should be taken by considering the views of the CYP themselves.

School and home working together to support EBSA.

In order to overcome early signs of EBSA it is recommended that there is strong links between the school and the young person's home. Information from a CYP's mother or father/carer will provide valuable information around what the young person may find difficult within their school. Asking parents to highlight early signs of anxiety around school attendance will be important to put in early intervention. The school will have developed a trusting relationship with the CYP's home, and this makes it easy to explore factors at home and at school which may contribute to EBSA. Section 5 'factors influencing EBSA' (check this) contains valuable resources that may be useful to start this discussion with home. This will need to be done sensitively and confidentially.

From this joint work with home an action plan (appendix 7) can be drawn up with the family. Maintenance of communication with home will be vital in order to put this plan into action. It may be that factors at home also need to change to support the young person which can be discussed with families in order for these joined up working to be productive.

7. The child's voice

In in order to overcome anxiety around school attendance it is imperative that the CYP is perspective is understood. This enables both professionals working with the CYP and the young person's family to gain insight into what they find difficult around school attendance. It may be surprising that what adults think could be very different from a young person's perspective. For example, one young person who was seen as sociable and friendly by adults, it was thought that they shall interaction was one of the 'pull' factors that supported school attendance. However, went spoken to by a psychologist they revealed that they were overwhelmed by social interaction and had significant anxiety around break times. By allowing this young person to attend a 'quiet club' during break time, a significant source of anxiety around school attendance was dealt with.

Trying to elicit a young person's views about sources of anxiety can be challenging and alternative ways of getting a young person to express their thoughts and feelings should be explored. Within appendix A, there is a card sorting exercise that is often proven useful, especially when a young person finds it difficult to speak directly about their anxieties.

A key adult who is trusted by the CYP will be important in helping the young person share their views, but also to encourage their participation in any action plan, the review of that plan as well as the next steps to take.

Approaches and strategies

Schools may feel like very different places now due to the COVID-19 restrictions and hygiene requirements. Therefore, as during more 'normal' times, a focus on creating a nurturing and relationship-based environment for children in schools will be key in promoting feelings of safety and belonging. Some key ideas for supporting children are provided in Box 1 below.

8.1 What does the research tell us?

- Early intervention is key: Research reiterates the importance of recognising difficulties early on [warning signs can include changes in attendance/punctuality; parental concerns; past anxiety difficulties; less engaged in schoolwork].

- Relationships, relationships, relationships: positive relationships between the child, their peers, and their teachers may help them to feel emotionally safe and secure in school.

- Working in collaboration: Any professionals supporting a family need to work together to ensure a 'joined.

8.2 Whole school approaches

It has been established that a whole school approach to EBSA is the most effective way of supporting young people who may be at risk of school avoidance. Both the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and Public Health England have emphasised several whole school approaches to develop CYP's emotional health and wellbeing

- Staff wellbeing prioritised-which has an effect on CYP's mental health and wellbeing.
- Close home-school liaison.
- A curriculum that promotes SEMH resilience and the understanding of wellbeing
- A whole school ethos which encourages and values diversity
- A school were student voice influences decision-making.
- A school where young people's wellbeing is monitored.
- Referral and targeted support for young people identified being in need.
- More information around whole school approaches can be found:
- 'Promoting Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing' document by Public Health England (2015) which can be accessed here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414908/Final_EHWB_draft_20_03_15.pdf
- Standing and approach to support.

Box 1: Key strategies for supporting children back to school.

Before children return to school, contact the child and the parents to arrange a meeting or conversation about the child's worries and needs.

⇨ Consider that a child's parent/s may be feeling worried and anxious too, and how the school might support parents through this e.g., acknowledge the difficult situation; give them information about safety measures in school; promote their own self-care.
⇨ Maintain regular communication with the child and parent/ carer and support them to address concerns that may be raised.
⇨ Provide parents with a key person in school that they can contact.
⇨ As much as possible, ensure a consistent and predictable approach. Support parents to establish a routine at home in the lead up to returning to school.
⇨ Focus on the positives, strengths and skills of the child.
⇨ Talk to children about what has gone well during lockdown.
⇨ "We're in this together" ethos: let children know it is normal to feel scared about the situation, adults are feeling scared too.
⇨ As much as possible, ensure predictability and routine: make clear to children what routines and expectations have remained the same in school and what the new changes are.
⇨ Welcome children to school each day and make them know how happy you are that they have made it.
⇨ A focus on relationship-building with staff and peers.
⇨ Focus on defining what success looks like for the child; work together to create child-centred goals that are achievable in small steps and celebrate small successes.
⇨ Create "If… then…" support with the child; something they can pick up and refer to when they feel worried or uncertain of what they can do to help themselves [1].
⇨ Teach the child/children calming and relaxation exercises.
⇨ Produce a 'Pupil Passport' for children to share relevant and key information with staff so that they are aware of a child's needs and what strategies they could draw upon.

Further suggestions for parents

As well as considering some of the strategies listed above at home too, parents might also find some of the following strategies helpful:

⇨ Create a consistent routine at home when it becomes closer to returning to school, e.g., bedtimes, morning routine.
⇨ If the child is willing, practise the route to school with their child.
⇨ Support your child to begin to name and list their worries. It might be useful to get them to draw their worries, rather than verbalise them as this can be difficult for some children.
⇨ A list of "I CANS" at home that you and your child can use to build a positive, stepped (small steps) approach to success [1].

8.3 Returning to school.

It is acknowledged that EBSA is a multi-dimensional and complicated difficulty that faces young people and there is not a 'one size fits all' approach that will be effective. What will be required is a 'person centred approach' and a 'assess, plan, do' cycle which involves the CYP, their family, their school, and their community (Figure 9). Nevertheless, there are some strategies/ that can be put in place by the young person, their family, their school, their peers and in the wider community. The following table lists many ideas which have shown to be very effective in numerous different circumstances.
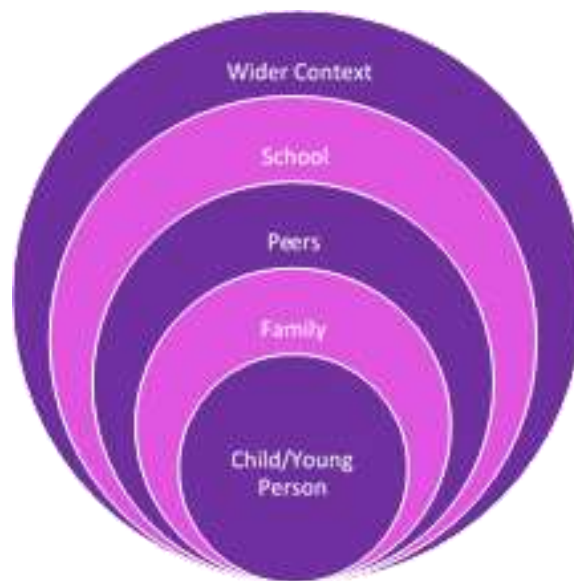

Figure 9: Involving all systems around the child to support them return to school.

Child/Young Person	Develop feelings of safety and belonging. This could be achieved through having consistent support staff and/or a small welcoming space with no pressure to talk but opportunities for interaction. Promote confidence, self-esteem and value through personalised rewards or responsibility.

	Promote aspiration and motivation by making learning meaningful and relevant. Build upon strengths and interests. Opportunities for positive experiences and opportunities to develop friendships. Taking an interest in the child or young person e.g., through personalised rewards and positive individualised feedback.
Family	Maintain regular communication with parents/carers and ensure that the relationship between school remains positive. Consider what support the family needs and refer to other support agencies as appropriate. Encourage the family to spend time together e.g., engaging in shared interests and activities.
Peers	A peer mentoring system to provide guidance and encouragement and reinforce attendance. Social provision for long-term non-attenders to enable them to establish or maintain peer relationships e.g., continued access to after school clubs. Support the pupil to make or maintain friendships with peers.
School	A strong pastoral system and identified senior member of staff to coordinate the response for a pupil with EBSA. A positive and nurturing environment with a person centred and solution focussed approach with a focus on listening to the child or young person's voice. Involve the pupil in the development of their support plan in order to promote their investment in it.

	A holistic view of students and a good understanding of the context surrounding the child or young person.
	Persistent and resilient school staff recognising it may take time, and strategies may not always work first time and/or may need to be adapted.
	Effective communication between staff and stress management systems for staff working with the pupil and opportunities to debrief as this work can be difficult.
	Identify a key adult/s for the pupil who has time to dedicate to building a genuine relationship and can support the pupil at times of high anxiety.
	A flexible and individualised approach including reintegration planned according to individual need such as a flexible and reduced timetable.
	Individualised support plans should be created for the young person based on their individual needs.
	An awareness of barriers to learning, making relevant adjustments, and reviewing strategies over time. Work should be achievable and delivered at an appropriate level.
	Opportunities to make a positive contribution such as increased participation at school.
	Opportunities for children and young people to express their views and feel listened to.
	Promotion of independence through giving choice and control and involving them in decision making through collaboratively developed realistic targets.
	Raising awareness of school non-attendance through staff training and ensuring a key member of staff is responsible for monitoring attendance, with the support of outside agencies.
	Enforcement of anti-bullying policies.
	Realistic plans with small steps, agree actions with all parties and keep them until the next review date.
	Access to a safe space with increased adult support who can then work on transitioning back into the main school.
	Consider how to support the journey to and from school, for example, being escorted to the school building by a family member and met at school by a member of staff or close peer to ease the transition.
Wider Context	A clear understanding of the role of external agencies and referral routes.

	Collaborative working between professionals. Utilising multi-agency working to consider the impact of the wider environment on the child.

Intervening Early

Schools and other settings should share information around the early signs of EBSA as indicated in part 4 of this booklet. School should be aware of other signs such as young people who are consistently late to school. It is also important to have good communication with the families of young people with EBSA, so they too can look for early signs of EBSA. Checklists included in the appendices can be shared with the home.

8.5. Transitions

Children and young people make many transitions throughout their educational career. Some transitions are significant, such as moving from primary school to secondary school. Other transitions may happen on a daily basis all of which can be difficult for a young person with EBSA. Some of these more minor transitions may include:

- Leaving the secure base of home every day to go to school, including leaving pets parents and positions.
- Making the journey to school and using transport
- Coming into school
- Coming into the classroom
- Moving from one classroom to another
- Leaving a teacher or another staff member and joining a number member of staff
- Moving between academic years

The following resources can be used to support transitions if a young person is identified as vulnerable around transition:

- Photo books-for new environments, people, and routines
- Transitional objects
- Social stories
- Transition visits
- All about me sessions
- Sharing information with the CYP a key adult to meet and greet the CYP.

The following information on supporting transitions was developed by Torbay Educational Psychologist Dr Debbie Mansfield, Dr Katie Atkins and Dr Liz Archer and focuses on the transition between Year 6 and Year 7, although it can be adapted and used in other transition situations.

The transition to secondary school can be a period of excitement and apprehension for all children, however in light of the current COVID-19 crisis some children may be especially vulnerable during this time of uncertainty. This may include (but is not limited to) children with

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), children who are 'Looked After', school non-attenders and children who are deemed to be Children in Need. Children of front-line key workers and children who have suffered bereavement may also temporarily fall under this category. These children may need additional support and individualised planning to ensure that they maintain good levels of wellbeing. However, the problem is likely to reach beyond the vulnerable group and extend to a wider range of children depending on their experiences.

Anxiety is heightened at the beginning of term for many children when they are uncertain what to expect. In addition to the usual anxiety related to transition, some children may be experiencing heightened anxiety due to the current crisis, highlighting the importance of a whole school approach to transition. It is likely that the new Year 7s will need a period of adjustment that has not been necessary in previous years. This is important in terms of reducing the long-term impact of the current situation and children's ability to settle into secondary education. At the beginning there may be difficulties' with re-establishing routines, including getting up for school in the morning. There will need to be a period of adjustment and time to re-establish school routines and expectations.

Children will have experienced very different situations whilst at home, in terms of learning and personal experiences. There may not have been the opportunity to say goodbyes to friends and school staff. Some children may have lost social contacts and find it more difficult to make new friends or re connect with old friends in the new setting. They may be worried about what to do if they have difficulty managing their emotions. Induction visits would usually successfully address some of these issues however in light of the current situation, more children are likely to experience uncertainty about some aspects of secondary school. We know from research that familiarity with the new environment and a greater degree of predictability about the structure of the school day in addition to knowing school staff and making new friends contributes to children's positive emotions about school. Therefore, preparation is key as well as social support and the opportunity to talk about transition and social and emotional issues.

Changes in behaviour, such as restlessness, being more disruptive than usual or becoming quieter, may be underpinned by stress and anxiety. Some children may need support to help manage their anxiety or low mood. It will be helpful to reassure children about what will stay the same in their lives, despite all the changes.

We know that transition is a process and not an event. Under current conditions we need to carefully think about and consider the processes we would have implemented for information exchanges with previous settings and parents and visits to the school. We have outlined some suggestions for transition support below.

Helping children to form friendships.

Evidence shows that social networks are a strong protective factor when considering young peoples' mental health. During current times, many young people will have lost contact with their school friends and will not have the opportunity to see them again prior to school starting. It would be helpful to the current Year 6 children to have the opportunity to communicate with their new

setting their social preferences for Year 7 tutor groups. This can be done by completing a simple online form, accessible from the school website, for example.

Getting to know their new school and teachers.

Ordinarily, children would be visiting their secondary school during the upcoming weeks, and would have opportunities to meet other children, teachers and become familiar with the setting. It is important that children are still provided with these opportunities, especially as their anxieties may be heightened. One way to facilitate this is via virtual means. Ideas include:

⇨ A virtual tour of the school aimed at all upcoming Year 7s. For example: the playground; maths block; dinner hall; safe spaces; student services. Ideally, separate tours would be delivered by different tutors/head of house to further provide the children with exposure to a key member of staff.

⇨ Videos from key members of staff.
  o General video to all new year 7s provided on the school website, for example. The video would act as a 'friendly welcome' and an introduction to the school ethos and principles. A brief description of uniform, daily timetable, clubs, and opportunities would be useful.

  o Targeted videos aimed at specific groups or individuals who are likely to require additional support to ensure a successful transition. These videos could be delivered by a key individual who will have an important role with these students e.g., pastoral lead, learning support. It would be useful for the key adult to talk about the different ways that they can support students and to explain how they can be reached within the school.

⇨ Q&A forum. Many Year 6 children will be missing the opportunity to ask a range of questions as uncertainty surrounding their new school grows. Virtual forums via the school website are a great way to provide children with the opportunity to ask questions, both via private messages and public forums.

Wellbeing support

All children will need to be made aware of how to ask for emotional support when they arrive at school. For example: placing a note in a box with a request to be contacted; to arrive at a particular location as a drop in or appointment basis. This information should be provided by a video detailing the location and who they can expect to find there.

Individual information

Children will have not only missed the opportunity to become more familiar with their new setting and teachers, but also missed out on the chance of letting their new teachers know about themselves. This can still be provided virtually by children being invited to complete a brief questionnaire or pen picture about their likes, dislikes, hobbies etc. See appendix.

Bridging activity

If children do not return to school until September, a joint teaching activity may be helpful. Joint teaching projects between primary and secondary subject teachers have previously been used in successful transitions. Simply using the same workbooks across the two years can also be positive. Gathering examples of the child's best work at primary school and passing this to the secondary school to be discussed in lessons can be another successful bridging activity between the schools - as long as the subject teachers in the receiving school are aware and have set time aside to explore this when the children join them in year 7.

Sharing of information between settings

As part of a successful extended transition package for an individual with identified additional needs, it will be very important that transition meetings between key staff members from both settings and parents/carers still go ahead. This can be facilitated virtually, ensuring parents are supported to access the technology to enable this. Where appropriate, the young people should be invited to attend a section of the meeting alongside their parents/carers.

Development of social and emotional skills and emotional literacy

Young people, as they mature, naturally will learn to respond to different emotional situations. For young people with EBSA needs the frequency and intensity of emotional situations is heightened. In addition, we also know that social situations can also provoke strong emotional responses contributing to their EBSA. For children with EBSA it may be more challenging to learn from different emotional situations as they feel a sense of being overwhelmed and find it difficult to respond and reflect due to the frequency and emotional intensity that they experience. Situations that a young person without EBSA will find easy to negotiate, for example, joining a group of friends in a game, may be very difficult for the child with EBSA as they may lack the social and emotional skills as well as feeling emotionally overwhelmed.

It is therefore important that child or young person with EBSA is supported with social and emotional development, as they may have gaps in their knowledge and understanding around social interaction and social understanding. For these reasons they also may be vulnerable to being bullied. In order to determine the extent of a young person's social and emotional development appendix X includes an emotional literacy checklist, which can be used to explore the extent of the young person's needs in this area. The following recommendations may be effective to support the young person with EBSA developing that social understanding:

- Emotional coaching
- Lego therapy
- Circle of friends
- Therapeutic storytelling
- Bibliotherapy

- Adult modelling of social situations and emotional responses

8.6 Helping the young person with EBSA express their thoughts and feelings.

It may be very difficult for a young person experiencing EBSA to express their feelings and thoughts. They might not understand it themselves. To support CYP who are experiencing anxiety/heightened emotions, it will be important for key adults to consider how best to support them in expressing and externalising their feelings and thoughts. This may need to be done in a creative way due to the challenges that the young person may experience revealing thoughts and emotions as these could be very painful for the CYP. The following approaches may be useful:

- A Key worker for check ins and for the CYP to discuss how things are going as well as their worries and thoughts.

- Artistic ways of externalising thoughts and emotions. Such as poetry, and art. See 'Drawing on Emotions' by Margo Sunderland.

- The use of a diary to record feelings and worries and emotions. This can be done with a physical diary or an app like Daylio. Physical diary can be used also to record thoughts and feelings.

- Walking and talking; the pressure of talking 1:1 with someone can be reduced if the conversation takes place while walking together in a confidential environment.

- Different methods for regulating/releasing emotions e.g., Mindfulness, breathing exercises, colouring, physical activity.

Strengths and interests

When faced with a situation that can be feel overwhelming and/or concerning there is often a focus on the negatives of the situation and/or the CYP's needs. Although a young person may feel overwhelmed by their EBSA, it is important to stress to them that they are not defined by their anxiety. It is important to highlight their strength and interests and that these are recognised and shared.

A few ideas that can support the development of strengths and interests:

- Make strengths or interests of focus of one-to-one sessions.
- Use an area that the young person is knowledgeable about and this can be incorporated within their lessons or education plan. Find opportunities for the young person to be an 'expert'.

- Ask people who know the young person to list their strengths.
- Record young person success in an achievement book which can be referred to.

Key messages in supporting the return to school.

✓ **Early intervention and identification -** anticipate problems and prepare the CYP for change. This should be personalised and targeted to the CYP in question.

✓ **Consistency and predictability:** provide consistent and predictable support for both the CYP and parents/carers.

✓ **Trusting relationships:** Develop positive relationships with CYP and parents/carers. Understand the situation using the child's voice and ensure everyone is on the 'same page'.

✓ **The individual child:** Gain the child's voice and ensure they have a key person that they trust who they can talk to. Monitor and use information to mentor and problem-solve together. Personalise the return to school.

Useful Resources

To support CYP with Autism Spectrum Condition (section 5)

STARS (Specialist Training in Autism and Raising Standards)

http://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-resources

STARS is a team of dedicated teachers and advisers working for Leeds education service. Their website resources are free to download.

They include:

- Social Stories
- Symbols
- Talking Mats
- Addressing Worries
- Transition Resources
- Quick Guides and Ideas for Parents and Professionals

National Autistic Society

https://www.autism.org.uk/services/helplines/coronavirus/resources.aspx

The main national charitable organisation for people with Autism that offers a vast range of resources, advice, and support.

WIDGIT Software

https://www.widgit.com

Widget is a leading commercial supplier of visual support material for helping in communication and programming with all children with special needs, including Autism. Their Autism Support Pack is a rich collection of visual materials, under headings such as:

- Routines: planners, calendars, count down charts,' now and next' formats
- Behaviour: prompt cards, reward charts,' keeping calm' posters
- Emotion: feelings flashcards, feelings strips, feelings board
- Social Interaction: communications cards, social stories

Books

- ***School Stress and Anxiety-how it can lead to School Refusal and impact on family life***. Autism education Trust (2020)
- ***Overcoming School Refusal***. Garfi,J. (2018) Australia: Australian Academic Press
- ***The New Social Story Book***. Gray,C. (2015) Arlington, TX: Future Horizons

Books about EBSA for Adults

- ***Understanding School Refusal: A Handbook for Professionals in Education, Health and Social Care.*** Thamirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008.
- ***Overcoming School Refusal: A Practical guide for counsellors, caseworkers and parents.*** Joanne Garfi, 2018.
- ***Understanding & Supporting Children & Young People with Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBS)***. Tina Rae, 2020.

Books for Working with CYP

- ***Starving the Anxiety/Anger Gremlin.*** Kate Collins.
- ***A Volcano in My Tummy***. Whitehouse and Pudney.
- ***The Incredible 5-Point Scale***. Buron and Curtis.
- ***Silly Billy***. Anthony Browne.
- ***How to catch a star.*** Oliver Jeffries.
- ***The Huge Bag of Worries***. Virgina Ironside.
- ***Moppy is ……. (angry, sad, scared).*** Asher and Scarfe.
- ***Everybody Feels…. (happy etc).*** Butterfield and Sterling.
- ***Have you filled a bucket today?***
- Range of books by Dr Karen Triesman - http://www.safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk/
- Range of books by Margot Sunderland.
- ***Think Good Feel Good.*** Paul Stallard.

Websites

- SCC Graduated Response Toolkit https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Education/Access-to-learning/Graduated-response-toolkit/Graduated-response.aspx
- http://www.safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk/
- https://www.theeducationpeople.org/events/supporting-children-with-anxiety-in-the-covid-19pandemic/
- https://www.nice.org.uk/ https://youngminds.org.uk/
- https://elearning.creativeeducation.co.uk/courses/support-children-who-are-anxious-to-attendschool/
- https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/
- https://www.emotioncoachinguk.com/
- For useful resources and information: https://notfineinschool.co.uk/

References

*The information in this guidance is developed from the current literature on school attendance difficulties and from online training on emotionally-based school avoidance and COVID-19 by 1Pooky Knightsmith (available from www.creativeeducation.co.uk).

Lauchlan, F. (2003). Responding to chronic non-attendance: A review of intervention approaches. Educational Psychology in Practice, 19 (2), 133–146

Thambirajah M,S., Grandison K.J. & De-Hayes L. (2008). Understanding School refusal: a handbook for professionals in education, health and social care. Jessica Kingsley.

Lucas,S., Insley,K. & Buckland, G. (2006). Nurture Group Principles and Curriculum Guidelines Helping Children to Achieve, NurtureUk

Gregory, I.R. & Purcell, A. (2014). Extended school non-attenders' views: Developing best practice. ducational Psychology in Practice, 30(1), 37-50.

https://schools.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/schools/files/folders/folders/documents/learnerengagement/coronavirus/EBSAGuidanceandTimeline.pdf

Appendices

Appendix 1: Checklist of signs for parents/carers

Part 1: Changes in attitude towards school

As children begin to re-attend, please tick any signs you have observed. This information can then be used to help you and school work together to plan your child's transition back to school and support attendance.

Part 1: Changes in attitude towards school	Tick
Persistent reluctance to engage in school related activities.	
Talking negatively about school	
Sharing worries about particular aspects of school	
Becoming distressed when school is talked about.	
Refusing to get ready for school.	
Worried about falling behind and/or catching up with school work.	
Part 2: Signs of Anxiety	
Has physical symptoms of anxiety: <table><tr><td>Headaches</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Stomach aches</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Low appetite</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Increased heart rate</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Difficulty concentrating</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Trembling</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Shortness of breath</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Difficulty sleeping</td><td></td></tr></table>	

Becoming anxious on separation from parent/carer	
Anxious about catching or passing on Covid-19.	41
Worried about family and friends becoming ill.	
Part 3: Changes in behaviour	
Becoming withdrawn: <table><tr><td>Spending increasing amount of time alone in their bedroom</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Avoiding trips outside of the home</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Reduced social 'contact' with family and friends</td><td></td></tr></table>	
Engaging in self-harming behaviours	
Checklist completed by………………………………………………………………….. For (name of child/young person)…………………………………………………….	

Appendix 2: Identifying CYP vulnerable to EBSA in the context of COVID-19 Screener for schools

CYP Name:

Part 1: Pre-school closure factors

Tick statements which are applicable. If one or more are ticked, the CYP may be 'at risk' of developing EBSA. It will be important to have a conversation about transition with Parents/Carers and the Child or Young Person. Attendance and punctuality need to be monitored.

A support plan was in place before school closure	☐
There are historical patterns of non-attendance and lateness	☐
Attendance was below 90% before school closure	☐
Social communication and interaction difficulties were identified	☐
There is a history of SEMH difficulties	☐

Part 2 Post- school closure and COVID-19 factors

Tick statements which are applicable to identify potential 'risk factors' for a young person. It will be important to consider the level of impact of the individual factor, or interactions of factors, on the risk of EBSA. The profile of risk and protective factors in the appendix is designed to support this thinking.

If a CYP is deemed to be 'at risk' of EBSA will be important to have a conversation about the transition with Parents/Carers and the Child or Young Person. Attendance and punctuality need to be monitored.

There has been a family bereavement	☐
There has been a death in the school community	☐
A close family member is in the vulnerable group	☐
Parents are keyworkers	☐
A close family member has been seriously ill	☐
A close family members Mental Health has declined	☐
There has been a change in family circumstances.	☐
Parental separation	☐
Parent or sibling has lost their job	☐
Living arrangements	☐
Services have become involved (e.g., Police, Social Care)	☐

The family have faced financial hardship ☐

Contact over the school closure period has been irregular ☐

Access to home learning activities has been limited (e.g., I.T.) ☐

Engagement with school activities has been lacking ☐

There has been a change in plans. ☐

Loss of apprenticeship ☐

Loss of college place ☐

Parents have raised concerns. ☐

Changes in behaviour ☐

Increased anxiety ☐

Social isolation ☐

Difficulties sleeping ☐

Safeguarding concerns have been raised (e.g., DA/DV) ☐

Profile completed on (date):

Profile completed by (name):

Appendix 3: Profile screening for vulnerable pupils at risk of long-term EBSA

Part 1: The 6 psychological needs for normal healthy child and adolescent learning and development

The 6 areas below are derived from research. They are the essential psychological needs for the healthy and successful child and adolescent learning and development. Scale (1 to 10) each of these needs to indicate a young person's overall vulnerability at risk of having EBSA needs. 'Scale scores' of 3 or below for each of these 6 areas of need indicates a pupil who is at a 'high level of risk' and 'vulnerability'.

N.B., It is also helpful to get both pupil and parent(s) to complete this screening process.

1. The need to feel emotionally and physically safe: This is the fundamental need of all young people to feel safe in their 'environment'. Initially, this is provided by parents or carers, and later by school and community.

1- -10
Extremely unsafe and insecure   Totally safe and secure

2. The need to belong: This is the emotional need for young people to feel that they 'belong'. It is initially provided by parents and family and later can be provided by friends, school and community and membership of sports teams, clubs, hobby groups or religious groups. The importance of 'belonging' is to feel accepted by 'significant others' who at times of distress and anxiety provide unconditional support and reassurance.

1- -10
Alone, isolated and belongs nowhere   Fully belongs in family and social groups

3. The need to have a positive 'sense of self' as a learner: This is the essential need for life-long learning. This process first develops within a family and is continued in nursery, school and community with the support of significant others e.g., friends, teachers, teacher assistants, social workers, mentors and community workers.

1- -10
A totally negative 'sense of self' as a learner   A strong positive 'sense of self' as a learner

4. The need to feel 'empowered': The 'empowering process' starts in infancy within a family setting and is nurtured in nursery, school and community. It involves a young person having a 'voice' that is listened to, respected and acted upon. This process is vital in developing a young person's self-confidence, independence and identity.

1- -10

Totally disempowered   Fully empowered

5. The need to make choices: This need is linked to the empowering process above and involves young people being given the opportunity and responsibility for making choices (and making mistakes) in their life. It can involve daily choices such as personal hygiene, eating habits, dress code, and lifestyle and educational choices, e.g., music, friends, school subjects, leaving home, career choosing a partner.

1- -10

Persistently makes Irresponsible choices   Mature and sensible choices

6. The need for enjoyment while learning: This need is arguably the psychological need that most defines us as 'human beings'. It is the 'enjoyment' or 'flow' experienced when using our skills and abilities to meet life's challenges and to achieve our personal goals and ambitions. This is a learning process that involves taking and accepting risks. It is not to be confused with leisure and pleasure.

1- -10

Experiences virtually no 'enjoyment' or 'flow'   Experiences optimum 'enjoyment' or 'flow'

Part 2

There are a number of additional risk factors research has identified that can contribute to a young person refusing to go to school. These are nominal i.e.; they are applicable or not applicable in a young person's life. Simply apply a ☐☐or ☐☐to the risk factors below:

Being in care ☐

Being in a single parent family ☐

Ineffective parental supervision ☐

Absence of positive male/female role models ☐

Excessive use of physical punishment or abuse by parents ☐

Frequent risk taking ☐

Impulsivity (ADHD) ☐

Poverty, ethnicity and social class ☐

Poor school attainments and literacy levels ☐

School disaffection and association with deviant peers ☐

7 or more ☐☐in Part 2 above indicates a young person is 'vulnerable and at 'risk'. If these findings are considered together with a vulnerable and at-risk assessment from Part 1 then a young person is extremely vulnerable and at 'high risk' of refusing to go to school.

Profile completed on (date):

Profile completed by (name):

CYP name:

Appendix 4: Push and Pull Factors – CYP Version

PULL FACTORS

Is there anything that makes you want to stay home?

Is there anything that makes you want to avoid school?

PUSH FACTORS

Is there anything that makes you want to come to school?

Is there anything that makes you want to avoid home?

Appendix 5: Risk and Protective Factors Checklists

CYP Name:	D.O.B:	Yr.:	Date:
Name of Person Completing this summary:			
Who contributed to this information (e.g., CYP, staff names, parents/carers, professionals)?			

Guidance

These checklists should be completed by staff, not presented to the CYP or parent/carer to complete. Some of the areas within this checklist need to be explored sensitively and in a supportive context. Staff can however use this as a framework when engaging in discussions with the CYP or parents/carers, to allow them to provide ratings that are based on richer information. The 'risk' and 'protective' factors card sorting activity can be used to help elicit the CYP's views in this area.

It would be beneficial to consider completing this checklist at future time points too e.g., reviews, timed intervals, to monitor the CYP's progress in response to support/intervention.

If there are any areas within the 'risk factors' checklist rated as 'low', staff should continue to monitor them and respond accordingly. For areas within the 'risk factors' checklist that are rated as 'med' or 'high', it would be appropriate for these to be explored further and included within the action plan/support.

The 'protective factors' checklist should be used to help identify the CYP's strengths and areas which can be drawn on to make their educational experience more

successful and positive. However, any 'low' ratings could indicate support in that area may be beneficial.

Level	Risk Factors	Risk Rating		
		Low	Med	High
Individual	Challenges with emotional self-awareness and self-regulation			
	Fear of social and personal failure			
	Previous exclusions			
	Separation needs			
	Social interaction anxiety			
	Low self-confidence			
	Worries about those at home			
	Fear of parental separation/loss of a parent			
	Over-dependence on parents/carers			
	Illness/health needs			
Family	Siblings being at home e.g., home educated, due to health needs			
	Limited social interactions within the home			
	Family dynamics			
	Loss			
	Frequent conflict			
	Overprotective/involved parents/carers			
	Family transitions – moving to a new house, divorce			
	Significant changes in the family			

	Mental Health needs with parents/carers			
	Absence of a parent			
	Child's anxiety causes stress easily in parents/carers			
School	Noise and organisation levels in the classroom			
	Unpredictability of environment leading to feelings of being unsafe and insecure			
	Consequences from staff being viewed as being unfair and harsh			
	Teachers who are perceived as having an aggressive nature			
	Peer relationships – including elements of conflict, isolation and anxiety			
	Poor communication which then leads to inconsistency.			
	Class sizes			
	Bullying			
	Transitions – secondary/change of school/class			
	Unidentified/unsupported learning needs			
	Poor relationships with staff			
	Activities the young person cannot cope with e.g., P.E., talking in front of peers			

Level	Protective Factors	Protective Rating		
		Low	Med	High
Individual	The CYP can identify their own strengths			
	The CYP can identify their own interests			

	The CYP wants the current situation to change			
	The CYP has a positive level of self-confidence			
	The CYP has a positive level of self-esteem			
	The CYP has a positive level of self-efficacy			
	The CYP has a positive level of emotional literacy			
Family	The family are developing an understanding of the CYP's needs and feelings			
	There are positive relationships in the family and/or community			
	The family are willing to work in partnership with school and support agencies			
	The parents/carers are showing good parenting skills			
School	The CYP has positive relationships with a member/s of staff			
	The CYP shows a willingness to work in partnership with family and support agencies			
	The CYP has positive relationships with peers			
	The CYP is experiencing success in school			
	The staff have a flexible approach			
	The staff are developing am understanding of the CYP's needs and feelings			

Appendix 6: Risk and Protective Factors Sorting Cards

CYP Name:	D.O.B:	Yr.:	Date:
Name of Person Completing this activity with the CYP:			

Guidance

This card sorting activity has been created to help gain the CYP's view of possible EBSA 'risk' and 'protective' factors which have been included in the corresponding checklist. Some of the statements have be reworded to make them more accessible and positive.

The activity should be carried out by an adult that the CYP has a positive and secure relationship with. It is important that enough time has been protected to complete this activity. It is possible that discussing some of these sensitive areas could lead the CYP to become upset, so there needs to be freedom to extend the session if required.

The CYP should be told that the aim of the activity it is to help staff explore if there are any areas that need support, but also to identify positives. Category headings, 'not true, sometimes true and often true', have been included, but these can be adapted to meet individual needs/situations. These headings should be placed in front of the CYP and discussed prior to beginning the activity. The adult should then pass the CYP each card and read it to them/explain its meaning. The CYP should then be asked to place each one under the heading they feel is most appropriate.

It is important that it is not just viewed as an activity to be ticked off; if there are any areas that need exploring further, this should take place. Staff should also ask questions to gain richer information e.g., if it asks about friends/teachers then ask the CYP which teacher/friend they are thinking of or ask why they have placed a particular card under a specific heading. The table included can be used to mark the

CYP's responses during the activity and note down any comments/discussion that takes place.

Once completed the information should be considered to identify areas of need/strength and the most appropriate support. The CYP should also be asked if they have any ideas what might make things better/easier e.g., if for 'I feel safe and secure in school' they responded with 'not true' then ask them if there is anything that makes them feel safe/anything adults can do to make them feel safer. It is important that any views are shared sensitively with parents/carers, so the support agreed is consistent across contexts, and outcomes can be worked towards collaboratively.

Level	Card No.	Risk Factor	Not true	Sometimes true	Often True	Additional exploration/comments
Individual	1	I find it easy to understand my feelings				
	2	I find it easy to talk to others about my feelings				
	3	I know how other people are feeling				
	4	I think I will do well in school				
	5	I think the work I do in school is good				
	6	I have a lot of friends				
	7	I like being around other children				
	8	I like talking to other children				
	9	I feel ok when I have to leave my parents/carers				

	10	I feel good about myself				
	11	I know my family are ok when I am in school				
	12	My parents/carers do too much for me				
Family	13	I spend a lot of time with my family				
	14	I can talk to my family				
	15	My family do activities together				
	16	My family get on well				
	17	There is something/somebody I have lost				
	18	My family do not argue				

	19	My parents/carers give me freedom				
	20	There have been some changes in my family				
	21	My parents/cares need help				
	22	I see my parents/carers as much as I want				
	23	My parents/carers are calm				
School	24	My classrooms are organised and quiet				
	25	I know what to expect in school				
	26	I feel safe and secure in school				

	27	My teacher is fair			
	28	My teacher is kind and calm			
	29	I get along well with my friends			
	30	Other students/children like me			
	31	There are some children who are unkind to me			
	32	I find learning easy			
	33	I like my teacher(s)			
	34	I like all activities in school			
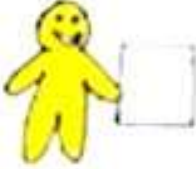
Not true

Sometimes True

Often True

I find it easy to understand my feelings. 1	I find it easy to talk to others about my feelings. 2	I know how other people are feeling. 3	I think I will do well in school. 4
I think the work I do in school is good. 5	I have a lot of friends. 6	I like being around other students/children 7	I like talking to other students/children. 8
I feel ok when I have to leave my parents/carers 9	I feel good about myself. 10	I know my family are ok when I am in school. 11	My parents/carers do too much for me 12

I spend a lot of time with my family.	I can talk to my family.	My family do activities together.	My family get on well.
13	14	15	16
There is something/somebody. I have lost.	My family do not argue.	My parents/carers give me freedom.	There have been some changes in my family.
17	18	19	20
My parents/carers need help.	I see my parents/carers as much as I want.	My parents/carers are calm.	My classrooms are organised.
21	22	23	24

I know what to expect in school. 25	I feel safe and secure in school. 26	My teacher is fair. 27	My teacher is kind and calm. 28
I get on well with my friends. 29	Other students/children like me. 30	There are some students/children who are unkind to me. 31	I find learning easy. 32
I like my teacher(s) 33	I like all activities in school 34		

Appendix 7: Profile of Risk and Protective Factors for…….(name)?

Level	Individual	Family	School
Risk Factors			

Protective Factors			

Appendix 8: What purpose does avoiding school serve for ………….(name)?

To avoid school related stressors:	To avoid social situations and/or activities:

To gain needed attention:	To engage in preferred activities:

Functional analysis completed on:
By:
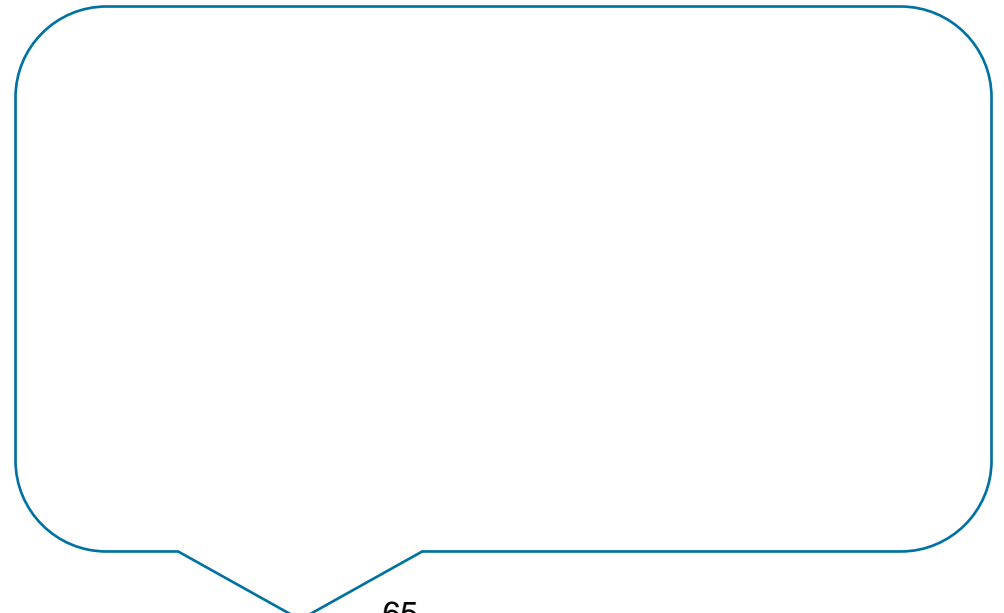
Appendix 9: What are………. 's (name) non-attendance behaviours communicating?

What is the CYP's non-attendance behaviour telling us about how they are feeling?

What is the CYP's non-attendance behaviour telling us about what they need?

I feel….

I need…

Appendix 10: EBSA Card Sorting Activities

Guidance

These card sorting activities have been created to help gain the CYP's views about their educational experience and current situation.

The activities should be carried out by an adult that the CYP has a positive and secure relationship with. It is important that enough time has been protected to complete these activities. It is possible that discussing some of these sensitive areas could lead the CYP to become upset, so there needs to be freedom to extend the session if required.

The CYP should be told that the aim of the activities e.g., it is to help staff explore if there are any areas that need support, but also to identify positives. Category headings have been included, but these can be adapted to meet individual needs/situations. These headings should be placed in front of the CYP and discussed prior to beginning the activities. The adult should then pass the CYP each card and read it to them/explain its meaning. The CYP should then be asked to place each one under the heading they feel is most appropriate.

It is important that it is not just viewed as an activity to be ticked off; if there are any areas that need exploring further, this should take place. Staff should also ask questions to gain richer information e.g., if it asks about friends/teachers then ask the CYP which teacher/friend they are thinking of or ask why they have placed a particular card under a specific heading. The record forms included can be used to mark the CYP's responses during the activity and note down any comments/discussion that takes place.

Once completed the information should be considered to identify areas of need/strength and the most appropriate support. The CYP should also be asked if they have any ideas what might make things better/easier e.g., if they place 'maths' under angry, ask if there were anything that would make maths move to happy. It is important that any views are shared sensitively with parents/carers, so the support agreed is consistent across contexts, and outcomes can be worked towards collaborative
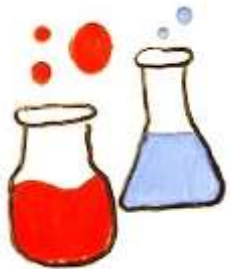
Spelling	**Reading**	**Writing**	**Phonics**	**Maths**	**English**
Science	**P.E**	**History**	**Geography**	**IT**	**Art**
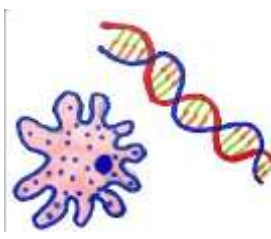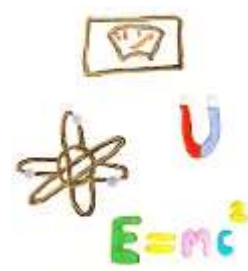
Music	**Languages**	**Biology**	**Chemistry**	**Physics**	**Drama**
Technology	**PSHE**	**Ethics and Philosophy**	**Intervention**	**Assembly**	**Form Time**

CYP Name:	D.O.B:	Yr.:	Date:

Name of Person Completing this activity with the CYP:

HAPPY	SAD	ANGRY

Additional Comments/Exploration

CYP Name:	D.O.B:	Yr.:	Date:

Name of Person Completing this activity with the CYP:

Easy	**OK**	**Hard**

Additional Comments/Exploration

I do not need…
Sometimes I need…
Lots of times/often I need…

to talk about my worries	to know what is going to happen	to know who will be in the classroom	easier work to do
someone to talk to	more time with my parents	help with social media	help with bullying
someone to make me feel safe			

time	quiet	help with my work	help with my friends
help with my emotions	adults to listen	friends to listen	instructions repeated
help with food	help with my uniform	equipment for school	help getting up in the morning
help at home	to sit near my friends	a quiet place to go	harder work to do

CYP Name:	D.O.B:	Yr.:	Date:
Name of Person Completing this activity with the CYP:			

I do not need.	Sometimes I need	Often, I need

Additional Comments/Exploration

Appendix 11: Summary of Information Gathering for CYP with EBSA Needs

CYP Name:	D.O.B:	Yr.:	Date:

Name of Person Completing this summary:
Who contributed to this information (e.g., CYP, staff names, parents/carers, professionals)?

Early Indicators For example: When were the first indicators of EBSA present? When did school avoidance first begin? What was being communicated by the CYP? Are there any incidents that occurred at the same time the EBSA started?
Patterns of EBSA For Example: Are there any patterns of non-attendance e.g., particular days, times, lessons that appear to be challenging for the CYP? Are there particular events that the CYP appears to be finding challenging e.g., school trips, free times, certain social circles, assembly? Are there particular relationships the CYP is finding challenging? Triggers within the home context e.g., when a parent is working at home?

Risk and Protective Factors

76

Push and Pull Factors Identified

Functions of the CYP School Avoidance

Other relevant information

Appendix 12: Individual Action Plan for CYP with EBSA Needs

CYP Name:	DOB:	Yr:	Date:

Name of Person completing this action plan:

Who contributed to this information (e.g., CYP, staff names, parents/carers/professionals)?

Agreed Review Date:

What are the CYP's strengths and interests?

Identified Need	Support/Action	Details

This document can be made available in other languages and formats.

For more information, please contact

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