



# Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Information for parents and carers



**west  
sussex  
county  
council**

## What is EBSA?

Worrying or anxiety is a normal feeling that we all experience from time to time. It can even keep us safe from harm or help us perform in difficult situations. However, sometimes anxiety or excessive worrying can become a problem especially when it stops people doing what they want or need to do.

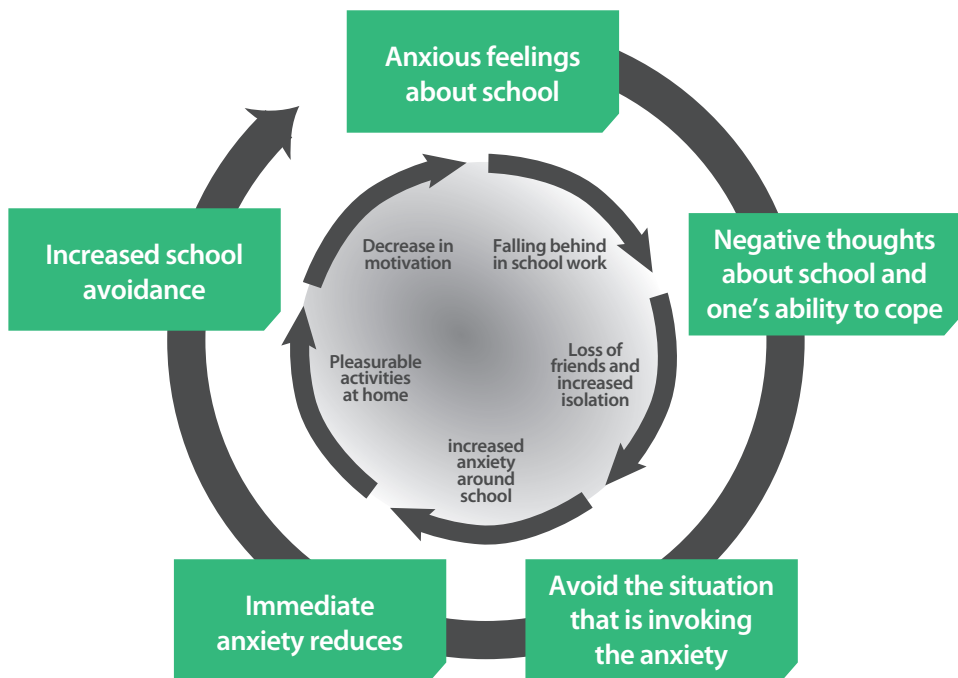
Many children and young people worry about school. This is normal. Anxieties are part of life and learning to deal with them is part of growing up. However sometimes a child's worries may lead to difficulties attending school. If your child has high levels of anxiety and does not want to attend school they may be experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA).



# Is your child worried about going to school?

It is very important to try to help children and young people overcome these difficulties as soon as possible. Absences mean that children miss out on learning and friendships, making it even more difficult when they come back.

The diagram below shows how EBSA behaviours can develop.



The longer the problems remain unaddressed the more difficult it becomes to change the school avoiding behaviour.

## Signs of EBSA

These could include:

- Fearfulness, anxiety, tantrums or expression of negative feelings, when faced with the prospect of attending school.
- They may complain that they have abdominal pain, headache, sore throat, often with no signs of actual physical illness.
- Complain of anxiety symptoms that include a racing heart, shaking, sweating, difficulty breathing, butterflies in the tummy or nausea, pins and needles.

The symptoms are typically worse on weekday mornings and absent at weekends and school holidays.

## What should you do?

One of the most important ways you can support your child is to calmly listen to them and acknowledge that their fears are real to them. Remind them how important it is to attend school and reassure them that you and the school will work with them to make school a happier place for them.

Tell the school there is a problem as soon as possible and work in partnership with the school to address the issue. A plan should be made with the school to help your child . Towards the beginning of initiating the plan your child may show more unhappiness and you should prepare yourself for this.

It is really important that all adults both at home and school work together to agree a firm and consistent approach. Any concerns about the plan should not be shared with your child and a positive 'united front' is recommended.

It is likely that there may be difficulties implementing the plan and these should be anticipated and solutions found. You should try to keep an optimistic approach, if your child fails to attend school on one day, start again the next day. It is also important to remember there is likely to be more difficulty after a school holiday, period of illness or after the weekend.

You may feel tempted to change schools, however research tells us that often difficulties will re-emerge in the new school and whenever possible it is normally better to try to resolve the issue in the current school.

Finally, as a parent it can be really difficult to see your child unhappy. Make sure that you have someone to talk to too. This could be a friend, family member or an organisation such as those listed at the end of this leaflet.



## What can you expect the school to do?

- Listen carefully to you and your child. They should acknowledge the challenges faced by your child and you as their parent.
- Maintain close contact with you and your child, even during extended periods of non-attendance. An agreed member of staff should be named as a link person.
- Work in partnership with you and your child to find out what difficulties your child is experiencing and find ways of making school a happier place and improve their attendance.
- Hold meetings to devise a plan in conjunction with you and your child. The plan should include what the next steps will be.
- Respond to any school-based needs, such as academic support, dealing with bullying or support with social relationships.
- Consider the support your child might require upon arrival at school. This might include meeting with a friend at a specific place and time, using a quiet space to settle before school starts, engaging in a preferred activity or being given a responsibility such as a monitor role.
- If difficulties persist the school should consider requesting involvement from other professionals.
- The school should refer to the West Sussex EBSA Guidance Document.

# Talking to your child about their worries

Any child currently avoiding school is likely to become anxious when they are asked to talk about their difficulties or returning to school. A good place to start is to acknowledge that it may be difficult but that you would like to know what they think and feel. If they find it difficult to talk, you could ask them a specific question this might help them start to sort through their fears and feelings. For example:

What three things are you most worried about?  
Or What three things were you recently worried about?

It is also important to focus on positives:  
What are the three best things about school?

Sometimes children may find it hard to tell you face to face, perhaps you could ask them to write it down, email or text you. Some children also find it easier to draw how they are feeling.

**We have also produced information booklets for children and young people. These have some ideas for activities children and young people can do. Your child's school should be able to give you a copy.**



# Further sources of support

## **SENDIAS**

The West Sussex SEND Information, Advice and Support Service provides impartial information, advice and support to parents and carers of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They offer a Helpline from 9am to 4pm: 0330 222 8555

**Website :** <https://westsussex.local-offer.org/services/7>

**Email:** [send.ias@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:send.ias@westsussex.gov.uk)

## **Youngminds**

A charity championing the wellbeing and mental health of young people. They publish a range of information for parents. They also have a parent helpline. Calls are free Mon-Fri from 9:30am to 4pm 0808 802 5544

**Website:** <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/>

**This leaflet was written by the West Sussex Educational Psychology Service. Further copies can be downloaded from the West Sussex Local Offer <https://westsussex.local-offer.org/>**

