

# Emotionally-Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

## Information for parents and carers

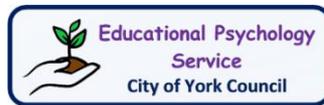
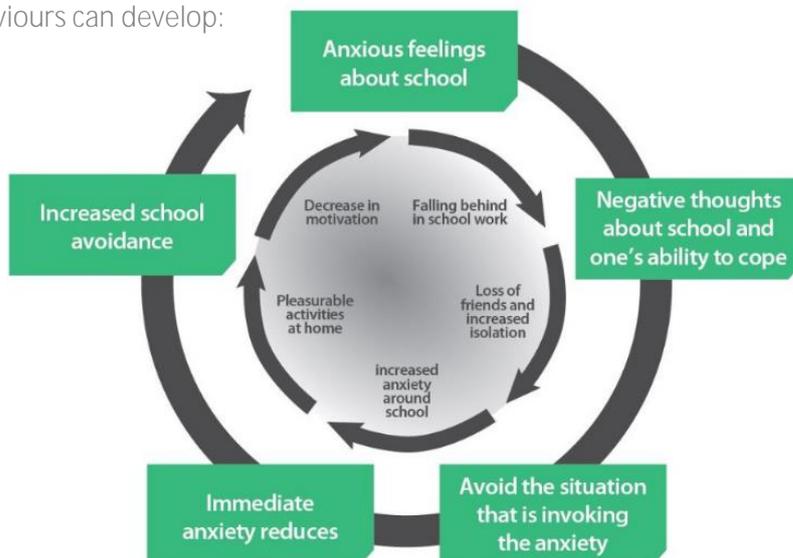
### What is EBSA?

Worrying or anxiety is a normal feeling that we all experience from time to time. 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 natural. Anxieties are part of life and learning to manage 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).*

It is very important to try to help children and young people overcome these difficulties **as soon as possible**. Absence means that children miss out on learning and friendships, making it even more difficult when they go back to school. The longer the problems remain unaddressed, the more difficult it becomes to change the school avoiding behaviour.

The diagram shows how EBSA behaviours can develop:



### What might I notice?

**Signs of EBSA** could include:

- Fearfulness, anxiety, outbursts or expression of negative feelings, when faced with the prospect of attending school.
- They may complain that they have abdominal pain, headache and/or sore throat, often with no signs of actual physical illness.
- Complaints of anxiety symptoms that include a racing heart, shaking, sweating, difficulty breathing, and 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 I do?

**Listen** to your child **and acknowledge** that their fears are real to them.

**Remind** them how **important** it is to attend school. 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**. Work in **partnership** with the school to address the issues using a firm, consistent approach.

**A plan should be made with the school to help your child.** When starting out on the plan, your child may initially feel more uncomfortable and you should prepare yourself for this.

Any concerns about the plan should **not** be shared with your child; a **positive 'united front'** is important.

Difficulties implementing the plan should be expected and it is best to try to keep an **optimistic** approach. If your child fails to attend school on one day, start again the next day. Expect more difficulties after a weekend, holiday or illness.

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

**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 overleaf.

## Further support

### **Local Offer for SEND**

See [www.yor-ok.org.uk/localoffer](http://www.yor-ok.org.uk/localoffer) to find out what is available in York for children & young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and their families. <https://www.facebook.com/yorklocaloffer/>

### **Educational Psychology (EP) Support Line**

A confidential telephone support service open to all parents/carers of children with additional needs or SEND, living in the City of York. See [www.yor-ok.org.uk/parent-carer-support-line.htm](http://www.yor-ok.org.uk/parent-carer-support-line.htm) for further information.

### **SENDIASS**

Offers confidential and impartial advice to parents and carers of children and young people who may have a special educational need or disability. Phone: 01904 554312 / Email: [YorkSENDIASS@york.gov.uk](mailto:YorkSENDIASS@york.gov.uk) / Website: [www.yor-ok.org.uk/SENDIASS](http://www.yor-ok.org.uk/SENDIASS)

### **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>

## 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?'*

It is also important to focus on positives:

*'What are the three best things about school?'*

Sometimes children find it hard to talk face to face so 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 an information booklet for children and young people. The booklet has some ideas for activities children and young people can do to explore and share their views.

## What can I 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 or carer.

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 to find ways of making school a happier place, thereby improving their attendance.

Hold meetings to devise a plan in conjunction with you and your child. The plan should include what the next small steps will be.

Respond to any school-based needs such as academic support, dealing with bullying, or supporting 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 may request involvement from other professionals.

The school can refer to the CYC 'EBSA Leaflet for Schools'.

This document was produced by City of York Educational Psychology Service (EPS) with the permission of West Sussex EPS who originally developed this guidance.