



Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Information for parents and carers

What is EBSA?

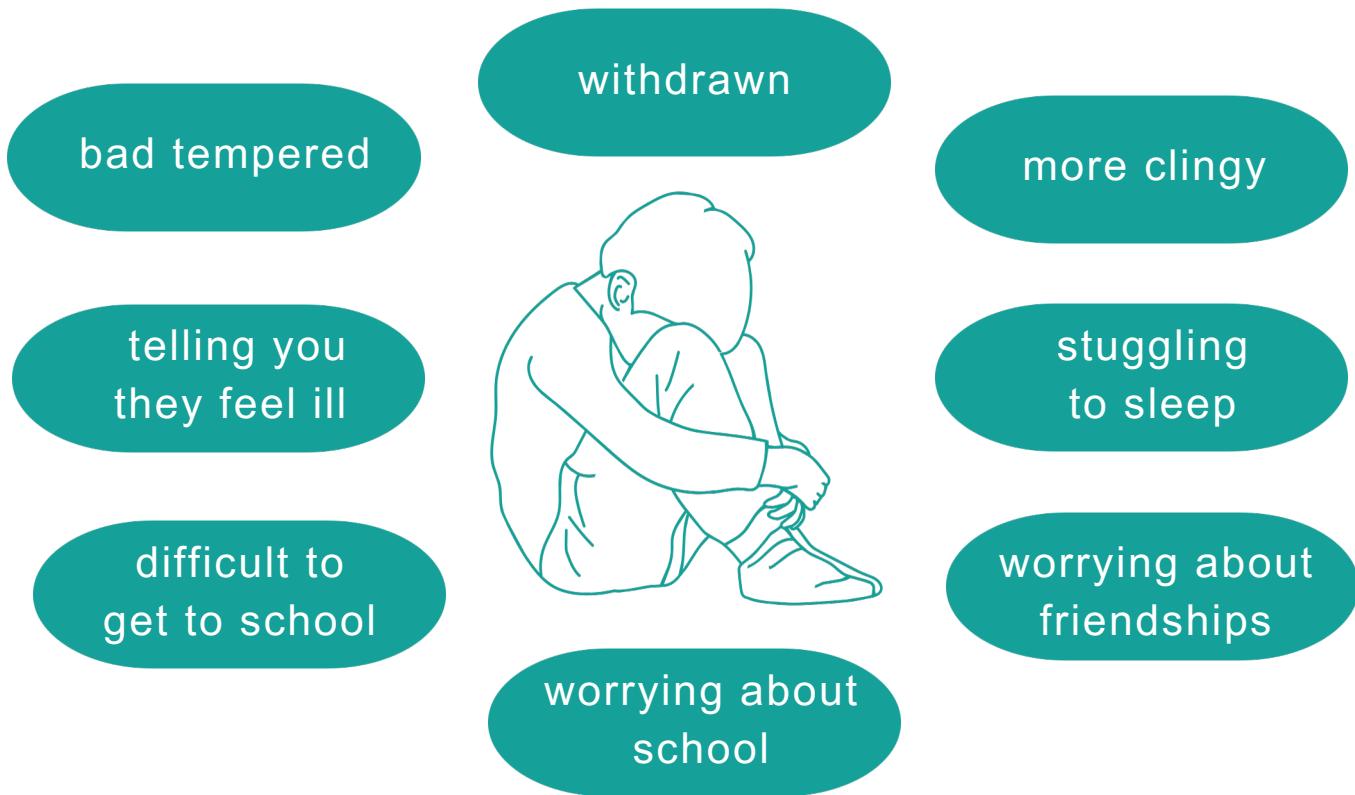
Worrying or anxiety is a normal feeling that we all experience from time to time. It can even keep us safe from harm or help us perform in difficult situations. However, sometimes anxiety or excessive worrying can become a problem, especially when it stops people doing what they want or need to do.

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 these worries may lead to difficulties attending school. When a young person has lots of worried feelings and does not want to attend school they may be experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). We take a broad definition of EBSA. If a child has high levels of anxiety, difficulties attending certain classes, struggles with engaging with parts of the school day and/or does not want to attend school, they may be experiencing EBSA.

EBSA is not a medical diagnosis but a way of understanding that there is something causing a young person to feel worry and that this is impacting how they feel about attending school.



Things you may have noticed about your child



How can I help my child?

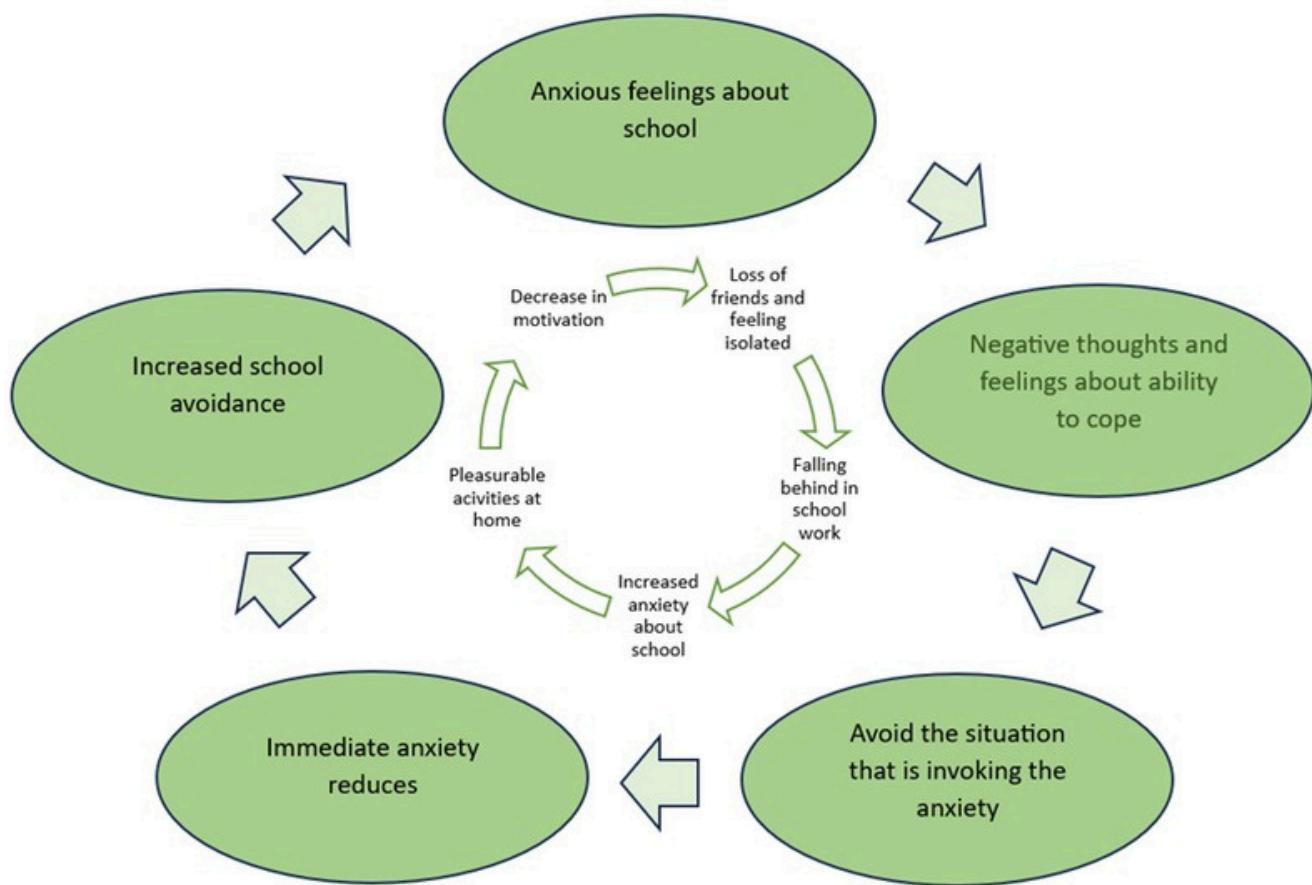
It can feel 'kinder' for a child or young person to avoid the situation that is causing them to feel worried or anxious.

However, the more time they spend out of school, the stronger these feelings become and the harder it will be for them to return.

It is best to intervene and support a return to school as soon as possible.



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. This is why it is important to understand the factors that may be impacting a child's feelings about school so that support can be put in place.

It is important that encouragement to attend school occurs alongside the right kind of support and adjustments to address the cause of the worry.



What should I do?

Create space to listen to your child

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. It is important to accept their feelings. Be curious and non-judgmental, as this will mean your child will be more likely to be able to open up about what they are finding difficult about school.

Whilst it is important to acknowledge their feelings and worries as real, it is also important to remain positive about school attendance and to reassure them that you and the school will work with them to make school feel like a happier place.

What you could say...

I've noticed you've seemed worried about going into school a few days this week. It can feel hard to do something when we are feeling worried. It's important to understand how we can help you so that you can feel happier about going to school again.

A podcast by Dr Pooky Knight-Smith has some useful ideas about how to talk to your child to help understand what might be happening for them. [PARENTING | How to Get to the Heart of Your Child's Issues \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJyfjyfjyf)



Work together with your child's school

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. It is really important that all adults, both at home and school, work together to agree a supportive and consistent approach. If you have any concerns about the plan, share these with the school privately and try to maintain a positive 'united front' with the school.

Work with your child's school to support your child to have a voice

Your child's school has access to local guidance which includes resources to work with young people to find out what might be causing them to feel worries about school. It may be that your child tells you different things at home, or you know an adult who they respond well to in school. Share this information with school so that your child's views can be heard. Research shows that generally people are more likely to follow a plan they are involved in making. Young people experiencing EBSA have reported that they want to be listened to.

Talk about strengths as well as worries

As well as focussing on finding out about your child's worries, try to find out about what things are going well in school, or what makes a school day feel better sometimes. Working on these strengths can really help to support school attendance.



Keep going! Be persistent, consistent and hopeful

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.

Look after yourself

As a parent it can be really difficult to see your child unhappy. It can also put a lot of strain on your relationship with your child, if you are the one that has to get them to school everyday.

Our stress and worries as parents can impact on how our children feel. Some young people who experience EBSA talk about feeling guilt for causing their parents stress. It is natural for parents to feel stressed in this kind of situation and if you have someone to talk to, this can help you and your child. This could be a friend, family member or an organisation such as those listed at the end of this leaflet.

Remember you are doing your best in a difficult situation.



What can I expect from school?

Schools should:

- Listen carefully to you and your child and acknowledge the challenges faced by your child and you as their parent/carer.
- Maintain close contact with you and your child, especially 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 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, SEND needs, 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 local EBSA Guidance



Further sources of support

Support for young people – Healthy Minds online information service which provides information to young people about well-being and has details about local services.

Bradford SENIASS provides free, confidential, and impartial information advice and support to children and young people aged 0-25 with SEND and their families in the Bradford district. Young people can also access the service independently. Parents, carers and young people can get in touch directly on 01274513300 or email BradfordSENDIASS@barnardos.org.uk

Youngminds is 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.

This leaflet has been adapted from a leaflet originally written by the West Sussex Educational Psychology Service, who kindly gave Bradford Educational Psychology Team permission to adapt it to fit the needs of our Local Authority

The wording in this publication can be made available in other formats such as large print. Please call: 01274 439500