Darlington Educational Psychology Service

Emotionally Based School Avoidance

Good practice guidance for schools to support understanding, assessment, and response.

DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Darlington
Educational Psychology
Service

Contents

Introduction

This guidance has been produced by Darlington Educational Psychology Service (EPS) to support Darlington schools to respond proactively, thoroughly and sensitively in cases of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). The guidance provides schools with an evidence-based process and accompanying tools and resources for analysing potential factors underpinning EBSA. Information gathered can then be used to develop a bespoke intervention plan to support the individual child re-engage with education.

Research surrounding EBSA is rich and wide ranging and there are a range of documents and resources available to schools. In producing this guidance, Darlington EPS has sought to scrutinise what exists and develop it further to produce accessible and concise information for schools, in order to enable rapid implementation of collaborative support.

Information has been considered from a range of Educational Psychology Services, including West Sussex, Sheffield and Lancashire. The EPS also valued the input of Darlington Headteachers and wider Senior Leaders in relation to how to make this guidance as useful and influential as possible.

Understanding Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

What is EBSA?

EBSA is a broad umbrella term which is used to describe a group of children and young people who experience severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences. In comparison to previously used terms such as 'school refusal,' EBSA highlights the impact of unmet emotional needs on school attendance, with these unmet needs forming the basis of planned intervention. EBSA is considered distinctly different to truanting in that it concerns specific emotional distress about attending school.

The 2022 Attendance Audit undertaken by the Children's Commissioner suggested that 1 in 4 pupils are persistently absent from school. This has more than doubled since 2019. Persistent absence is more prevalent in secondary schools, where for many it is rooted in emotional causes. EBSA is reported to be equally common in males and females.

The impact of EBSA is well-documented and includes reduced academic attainment; decreased social opportunities, limited employment opportunities and mental health difficulties in the future.

Why does EBSA happen?

There are likely to be various contributing factors for why a young person may be finding it difficult to attend school. It is well recognised in the research literature that EBSA is often underpinned by a number of complex and interlinked factors associated with the young person, the family, and the school environment (Thambirajah et al, 2008).

Research suggests that there are four key functions for school avoidance (Kearney & Silverman, 1990). These are:

- To avoid uncomfortable feelings brought on by attending school such as anxiety or low mood
- To avoid situations that might be stressful such as academic demands, social pressures, and/or aspects of the school environment
- To reduce separation anxiety or to gain attention from significant others, for example parents or other family members
- To seek rewarding actions outside of school such as going shopping or playing computer games

Although it is likely that factors leading to EBSA are complex and intertwined, it may be that one of the four areas above can be seen as being the more dominant underlying reason for difficulties in attendance. Understanding this can support intervention.

The role of anxiety

The emotional difficulty that typically underpins EBSA is anxiety (Elliott & Place, 2019; Maynard et al, 2015). Anxiety is a normal human emotion with innumerable triggers, but it does not typically impact school attendance. It is when feelings of anxiety are greater than perceived levels of support that a cycle of maladaptive thoughts and feelings directly associated with school, or projected on to it, may commence and lead to EBSA.
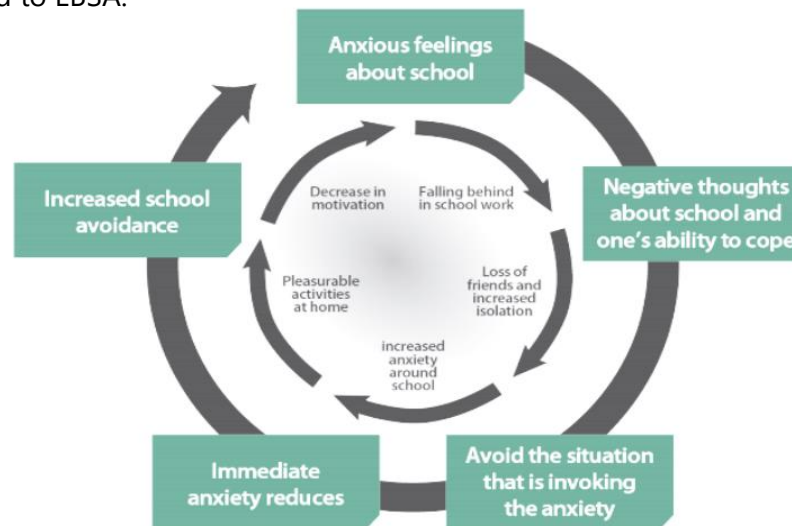
Figure 1: Taken from 'Supporting children with Anxiety in the COVID-19 Pandemic' by Dr Tina Rae

What are the core components of a school-based response to EBSA?

This guidance is grounded in four key factors deemed to be associated with positive outcomes in cases of EBSA (Baker and Bishop, 2015). These are:

- ► Intervening early
- ► A collaborative response, including families, school staff and the young person
- ► Working flexibly, paying attention to the individual case and functions served by non-attendance
- ► Rapid reengagement with school, alongside good quality support and adaptations within the school environment

This guidance provides a model and tools for responding to EBSA that takes into account these four factors, whilst also recognising that for some children, EBSA is longstanding. It is hoped that the document provides guidance for practitioners at *any* point during the process of supporting a child to return to school. Although EBSA is a complex and often emotive issue, positive outcomes are achievable through collaboration and positive working relationships that can work to promote curiosity, avoid blame and maintain the wellbeing of all involved.
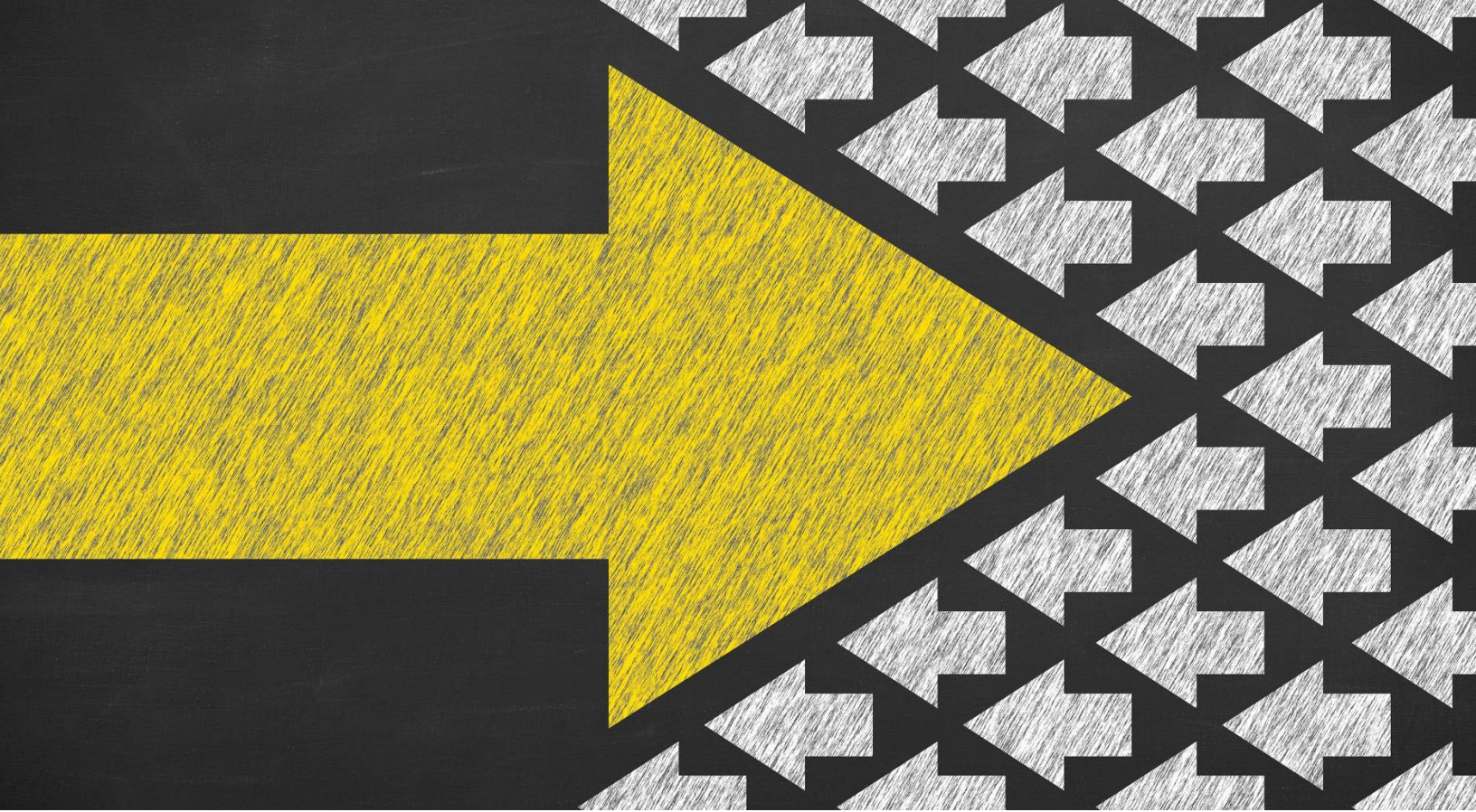
What are the underlying factors and influences of EBSA?

The ability to plan and deliver a supportive and effective response to EBSA requires involved adults, such as parents / carers and school staff, to believe in and commit to positive change. Their commitment to understanding the potential factors underpinning and associated with EBSA is fundamental to the child 'signing up' to change and positive outcomes being achieved.

Change is a process and can be daunting. As such, some initial reticence from all involved is to be expected. Increasing knowledge and understanding of the situation is an effective way to develop recognition of the concern and collaboration in finding solutions.

In cases of EBSA or identified risk of EBSA, there is often the temptation to try and locate a simple reason and solution for the behaviour, such as the parent needing to take a firmer approach, the school needing to put more support in place or a referral to an external agency to be made. EBSA is typically, however, a **complex interaction of factors that need to be understood in order to enable an appropriate, personalised response.**

Educational Psychologists recommend a comprehensive assessment of predisposing and perpetuating factors at an individual, family, school and community level. This should be achieved through detailed information gathering from relevant school staff, parents / carers and the child or young person themselves. The analysis of this information will enable identification of factors which **pull** the child away from school and factors that **push** them towards it. These factors can then be considered within a personalised intervention plan.

Understanding Push and Pull factors in cases of EBSA

Factors that 'pull' the child away from school and factors that 'push' them towards it can be grounded in both individual, home and school contexts. Research suggests that 'pull' factors constitute 'risks' that may overwhelm the emotional resources of the child, eliciting anxiety, unless counter-balanced by protective factors in the child's life and perceived high levels of support (push factors.) EBSA is most likely to occur when the 'risks' are greater than the protective factors, and when feelings of anxiety are greater than perceived support to attend school.

School staff should note that in responding to EBSA it is crucial to consider the child's *perception* of their ability to cope, as even when protective / push factors are numerous, if the child does not have the belief that these factors can support them, their effect will be reduced.

Potential 'PUSH' factors (towards school)

- *Being academically able*
- *Having friends and positive relationships with staff*
- *Enjoying particular subjects and extracurricular activities*
- *Wanting space away from siblings*

I believe...

- *Struggling with schoolwork, curriculum and timetable*
- *Experiencing difficulties with peers and/ or feeling bullied*
- *Feeling sensory overload in the school environment*
- *Parental illness and caring responsibilities*
- *Domestic abuse at home*
- *Change in family dynamics*
- *Not having attended school for a period of time (e.g. illness, holiday, shielding)*
- *Difficult transition between settings*
- *Having siblings who also experience EBSA.*
- *Difficult transitions between settings. Research indicates that the first two years of secondary education can be particularly challenging.*

Potential 'PULL' factors (away from school, towards home)

An effective school response in cases of EBSA

Stage 1: Identifying and Understanding Risk Factors

Stage 2: Facilitating and Listening to the Child's Voice

Stage 3: Analysis of Underlying Reasons

Stage 4: Developing an Intervention Plan

Schools have an important role in the prevention, early identification, and continued management of EBSA. Staff in school can identify attendance difficulties, liaise with others, carry out assessments, and coordinate a rapid reengagement in education for the young person.

As many children continue to attend school whilst experiencing EBSA, EBSA can be best understood as a continuum ranging from full school attendance to occasional, intermittent, frequent and complete avoidance.
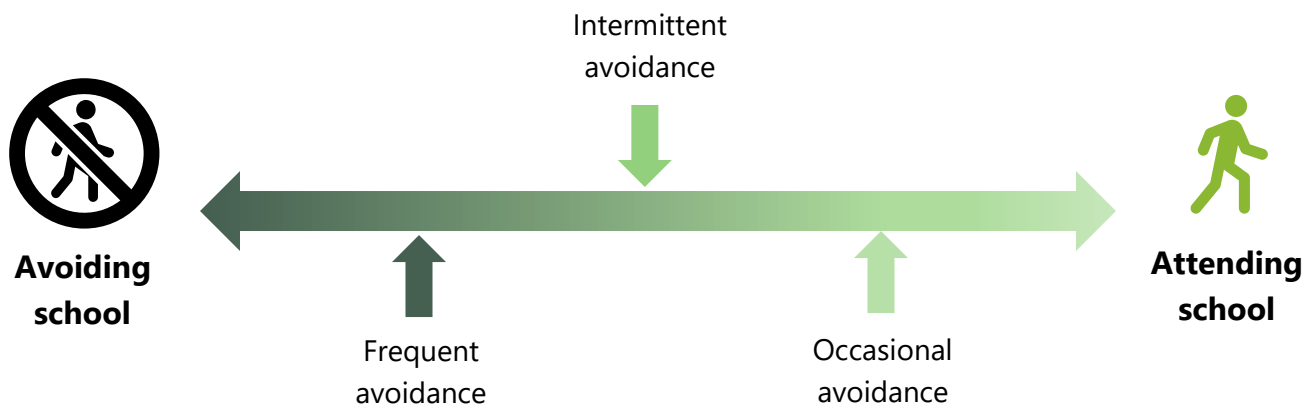
Much of the research and support tends to focus at the far end of the continuum, when children are completely avoiding school. Schools should therefore consider their processes to determine EBSA at the earliest stage, to prevent the situation becoming further entrenched and to facilitate rapid re-engagement. When difficulties with school attendance have been identified, relevant school staff should arrange a time to speak with the pupil's parents/carers as soon as possible in order to gather further information regarding the nature, duration and severity of the difficulties.

Schools can use the <u>Profile of Risk Factors</u> or <u>Parent / Carer Conversation Framework</u> to support a broad ranging and thorough conversation.

Profile of Risk Factors

The intention of the profile of risk factors is to open a proactive conversation with parents / carers regarding the possible impact of significant events and experiences on their child's emotional wellbeing, which may therefore be contributing to reduced attendance. The profiling tool is not a questionnaire, but to be considered as part of an objective conversation in which gentle probing and questioning can support the best judgements in terms of the significance of an event on the child.

During the process of completing the profile, it may be useful to note factors associated with particular items, such as:

► this has been an issue in the past, but doesn't seem to be now
► this has been an issue in the past, and seems to have persisted over time

Items are not quantified by a typical rating scale. This is because it may be that one single item (e.g. death of a parent) is so important it cannot be rated numerically in the same way other items might be rated. Its influence could be proportionately much greater than a rating scale could accommodate. As such, notes on the key items of importance should be made.

Parent / Carer Conversation Framework

The parent / carer conversation framework can be used as a prompt and / or structure for an information gathering meeting with parents/carers. There is no precise process for asking the questions, and therefore they should be used flexibly to support the discussion. Overall, the process should aim to move away from blame or labelling, and instead provide time for curiosity about factors influencing EBSA. **It is important to acknowledge that EBSA is typically multifactorial; it is often not possible to identify one precise reason for the problem.** Conversations should be focused on change and working toward positive solutions, pinpointing what works well and exceptions to the problem.

TOOL 1: Profile of risk factors

(adapted from West Sussex EPS Emotionally Based School Avoidance Good Practice Guidance for Schools and Support Agencies)

TOOL 2: Parent / Carer Conversation Framework

(adapted from West Sussex EPS Emotionally Based School Avoidance Good Practice Guidance for Schools and Support Agencies)

Stage 2: Facilitating and Listening to the Child's Voice

In developing an understanding of the underlying – and likely multiple – factors contributing to EBSA, it is important that the child's voice is heard and therefore feeds directly into intervention planning. Inevitably, for a child presenting with EBSA, any discussion of the return to school will raise their level of anxiety. Therefore, it is important that the adult undertaking the work clearly communicates empathy and understanding regarding potential difficulty, in addition to showing interest in what the child thinks and feels. It is important that the child's views are heard, validated, and that their anxieties are not dismissed.

This adult should ideally be a person that the child already knows and perhaps has had a relationship with previously. Members of staff who are typically involved in discipline may not be the most appropriate. The venue in which pupil views are gathered should also be considered carefully. It may be that the pupil will visit a specific area of school to work with a familiar member of staff, or it may be that a more 'neutral' venue away from school is more appropriate. In situations where the child will not leave their home, school staff could carry out a home visit. It is recommended where possible that the child or young person has the opportunity to contribute their views independently of their parents / carers.

Schools can use the Functions of EBSA Cards or the Functions of EBSA: Pupil Questionnaire to support the development of a deeper understanding of the factors that pull the child away from school and factors that push them towards it. The questionnaire may be best utilised should the child be unwilling to work with an adult such that their views need to be sought remotely.

Only one of these activities needs to be completed. The aim is to provide an empowering experience for the child, enabling their views to be sufficiently heard. The activities are designed to support a collaborative interaction between the adult and the child and should not be viewed as a quick 'tick-box' exercise. The statements are intended to provide a flexible structure, so that the child does not feel overwhelmed, but to allow scope for the discussion of wider issues. The use of statements under four groups should provide insight into potential root causes.

TOOL 3: Functions of EBSA Cards

TOOL 4: Functions of EBSA Questionnaire

Stage 3: Analysis of Underlying Reasons

The intention of the work carried out throughout stages 1 and 2 is to gather a wealth of information regarding the past and present experiences of the child and their family which may have precipitated, and be perpetuating, EBSA. Information about protective factors in the child's life will also have been obtained. Relevant school staff should now work together, including parents / carers as appropriate, to carefully interrogate all information gathered. Staff should collaborate to ensure that a broad, open-minded position is maintained in recognition that EBSA is likely multi-factorial, rather than being rooted in one specific element of the child and family's story. The aim is to deduce the specific push and pull factors affecting the child, which in turn can be used as the basis for a bespoke intervention plan. **School staff can use the Analysis of push, pull and protective factors grid to document discussion outcomes.**

TOOL 5: Analysis of push and pull factors

Stage 4: Developing an Intervention Plan

Achieving relative clarity in relation to the push and pull factors underpinning EBSA enables the development of a bespoke intervention plan, grounded in the unique experiences of the child and their family and taking into account any protective factors available to the child. EBSA is often complex, and whilst it is important to have high aspirations for a rapid return to full attendance, it is also important to be realistic and set achievable targets for the young person.

Key features of an effective intervention plan for EBSA are:

- A focus on a return to engaging with school as soon as possible
- A flexible return plan that proceeds gradually and takes into account the complexity and longevity of EBSA
- Recognition that full integration into all aspects of school life may not happen quickly
- Realistic, achievable small steps towards desired outcomes that are co-produced with everyone involved
- Direct, regular contact (ideally daily) between school (an identified key person) and the family
- Preparedness for set-backs and so to revisit earlier steps towards desired outcomes if necessary
- A clear plan-do-review process

TOOL 6: Personal Intervention Plan

Schools may wish to use the Personal Intervention Plan template in order to clearly document desired outcomes and agreed steps.

The information contained within the Personal Intervention Plan, culminating from the comprehensive assessment process, may be adapted into a pupil plan that feels more child-centered and where the child can experience some ownership. An example is included within the 'Additional Tools and Resources' section at the end of this document.

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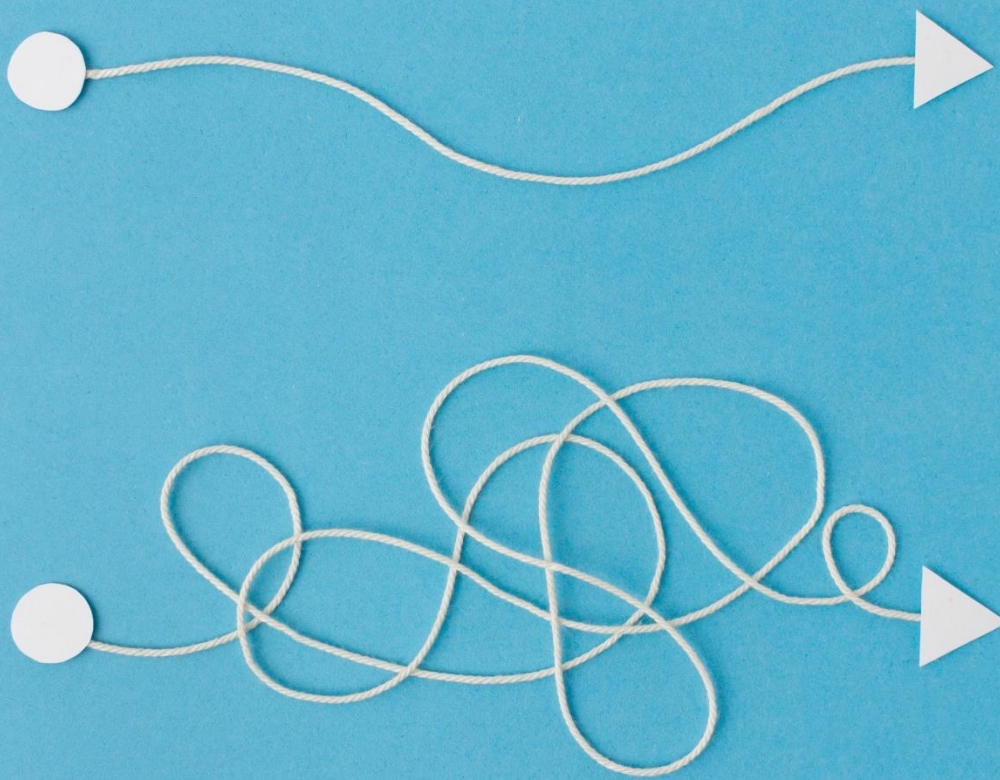
Responding to limited progress

There may be occasions where an intervention plan has been thoroughly developed and consistently implemented over time, but progress remains limited and concerns remain. At such times, the following considerations may be helpful:

Revisit stages 1-3 of the EBSA assessment process to explore whether there have been any changes or identify emergence of additional underlying factors not previously identified

Reconsider the small steps towards desired outcomes and whether they remain achievable or require adjustment

Explore whether there are underlying learning needs or issues in relation to curriculum access that have not been identified

Consider appropriateness of referrals to other agencies such as Educational Psychology, CAMHS, Building Stronger Families.

Reflect on wider school factors. We know that EBSA is less likely to occur when schools focus on relationship building and helping their pupils feel greater connections and belonging.

Directory of Tools

▶ **TOOL 1: Profile of risk factors**

▶ **TOOL 2: Parent / Carer Conversation Framework**

▶ **TOOL 3: Functions of EBSA Cards**

▶ **TOOL 4: Functions of EBSA Questionnaire**

▶ **TOOL 5: Analysis of push and pull factors**

▶ **TOOL 6: Personal Intervention Plan**

TOOL 1: Profile of Risk Factors

	Level of impact				
	High	**Medium**	**Low**	**Not an issue**	**Unknown**
Loss and Change					
Death of a parent, relative, friend					
Death of a pet					
Sudden traumatic event					
Sudden separation from parent					
Ongoing developmental trauma					
Moving house, school, area					
Loss of classmate					
Parent, sibling or friend illness (mental and / or physical)					
Adverse childhood experiences (ACES)					
Family Dynamic					
Parenting challenges and management					
Birth of a new child					

Parental separation					
Parents arguing/fighting					
Practical difficulties bringing the child to school					
Sibling rivalry at home					
Being the youngest child in the family					
Family history of EBSA					
Being a young carer					
Family history of EBSA, most notably siblings					
Personal and social communication					
Being neurodiverse e.g. having a diagnosis of Autism					
Experiencing bullying					
Few friends/friendship issues					
Speaking English as an additional language					
Limited leisure interests					

Curriculum / Learning issues					
Low levels of literacy					
PE and/or games issues					
General learning difficulties					
Subject specific difficulties					
Staff that struggle to connect with pupil / problematic relationships with staff					
Problems keeping up in lessons					
Academic pressure and demand (including exams)					
Psychological Wellbeing					
Often seems tired					
Low self esteem and / or confidence					
Low mood					
Appears anxious					
Keeps feelings to themselves					
Fear of failure					
Frequent reporting of psychosomatic symptoms					
Points of significance					

TOOL 2: Parent / Carer Conversation Framework

Developmental & educational history	What was X like as a younger child? Tell me about X's experiences at school (nursery, primary, secondary, including transitions)
Strengths	What do you notice X is good at? What does X enjoy doing? What are X's hopes for the future?
Structures and changes within the family	Who is in X's family? Who does X live with? Who is X most like / closest to? Have there been any changes or losses within the family during X's life? Are any likely in the future? Has anything very difficult happened to the family? Have any of X's siblings experienced EBSA?
Typical day	What does a typical school day for X look like from waking up to going to bed? When X doesn't go to school what does the day look like? What is a typical day for other family members like when X is at school and when X isn't at school?
Relationships	Does X seem to have any friends? Does s/he speak about any other children? Who does X get on with and not get on with? How does X respond to conflicts / difficulties with other children?
Presenting behaviour and feelings	How do you think X is feeling at the moment? When X is anxious / worried, what does that tend to look like? Can X tell you about how s/he feels? Has X spoken to you about what is difficult at school? What do you think X finds difficult about attending school? If other family members were here, what would they say?
Exceptions	Can you tell me about times when X is not experiencing feelings of anxiety / worry? Have you noticed times in the past when X seems to have been coping better? What has been different about these times? Have there been any times when things seem to have been going better for X?
Previous attempts to address the problem	What approaches / strategies have helped in the past when things have been difficult? Are there any things that really haven't worked? What has been the most helpful thing that someone else has done to support you with X's attendance?

TOOL 3: Functions of EBSA Cards

Each card includes a factor that may pull the child away from school push them towards it. The cards are organised into 4 colour coded groups based upon the 'function' of the EBSA associated behaviour detailed on the card.

Function 1 (Blue):

- To avoid something or situations that elicits negative feelings or high levels of stress or anxiety (e.g., fear of the toilets; the noise in the playground; lots of people moving all together in the corridors between classes, tests/ exams)

Function 2 (Red):

- To escape difficult social situations (e.g., feeling left out at playtime, reading out loud in class or other public speaking/group task, working as part of a group)

Function 3 (Green):

- To get attention from or spend more time with significant others at home (e.g., change in family dynamic, concerned about the well-being of parent)

Function 4 (Yellow):

- To spend more time out of school as it is more fun or stimulating (e.g., watch tv, go shopping, play computer games, hang out with friends).

Directions:

1. Print and cut out each statement card. Print a copy of the 'additional notes page' provided.
2. Keep the cards in their colour groups rather than shuffling them up. By taking each colour group in turn rather than mixing them up, a fluid and more detailed conversation about each area is encouraged
3. Sit next to the child and position the three heading cards (like me, a bit like me and not like me) on the table, with space under each for the positioning of further cards
4. Select a colour group. Read out of each of the cards, each time asking the child to place them under which heading they think fits them best. Maintain a position of natural curiosity, enquiring with the child about the rationale for their decision and their experiences in relation to what is on the card. Jot down the information they provide on the additional notes page. Alternatively, you may want to capture additional comments made by the child on post-its and attach these to the relevant statement card
5. Once all cards are sorted, take a photograph for analysis and your records
6. Use the 'Making Sense Sheet' to identify key themes

EBSA Statement Cards

Like me	A bit like me	Not like me

I have bad feelings about going to school because I am afraid of something at school (e.g. tests, school bus)

I feel worse at school than I do at home

I worry about doing the work when I go to school

I have bad feelings when I think about going to school

I don't feel comfortable in the school environment

I find it hard to speak to the other kids at school

I sometimes feel like I don't belong in school

I don't have many friends at school

I avoid places in school where I would have to talk to someone

I worry about break times at school

I think about my parents/carers and family when I'm in school

I feel worried about things at home

My parents/carers need me to be at home

I would rather be with my family than go to school

I worry about being away from my parents/carers

If I stay at home, I get to leave the house and do something fun

I have fun doing other things in the house if I stay at home

If I stay at home, I can talk to/hang out with friends

If I stay at home, I feel relaxed and calm

When I am at home, I do not worry about missing school

Card Sort Additional Notes

Blue

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Red

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Green

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Yellow

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EBSA Tools – Darlington Educational Psychology Service

Functions of EBSA: Making Sense Sheet

Count how many statements of each colour fell into each category, and enter the totals into the table below:

	Totals		
	Like Me	**A Bit Like Me**	**Like Me**
Blue			
Red			
Green			
Yellow			

Which colour area featured the most in the 'Most Like Me' group?

………

- **If mostly blue:** it is likely the child is avoiding school to avoid something or situations that elicits negative feelings or high levels of stress or anxiety
- **If mostly red:** it is likely the child is avoiding school to escape difficult social situations
- **If mostly green:** it is likely the child is avoiding school to get attention from or spend more time with significant others at home
- **If mostly yellow:** it is likely the child is avoiding school to spend more time out of school as it is more fun or stimulating

Please Note: It is likely that there will be a combination of the above factors. You may need to consider which issues are most pertinent from a range of areas.

Considering the most featured area, what additional insight has this given you in relation to the factors underlying the child's EBSA? How does it relate to what has been learned from risk factor analysis and parent / carer consultation?

………

………

………

………

………

………

TOOL 4: Functions of EBSA Questionnaire

Pupil Questionnaire

Read each statement below and indicate your response on the right by putting a tick in the correct box. Add any additional comments for each of the coloured sections below

Work through each section in order, reading each statement and asking the child to circle whether they think the statement is 'Like Me', 'A Bit Like Me' or 'Not Like Me'

Work through each coloured group of statements systematically so that deeper discussion about the area can be supported. Capture pertinent comments within the space provided for additional information

Upon completion, use the 'Making Sense Sheet' on the previous page to identify key themes.

Statement	Like Me	A Bit Like me	Not Like Me
I have bad feelings about going to school because I am afraid of something at school (e.g., tests, school bus, teacher, fire alarm)			
I worry about doing the work when I go to school			
I feel worse at school than I do at home			
I have bad feelings when I think about going to school			
I don't feel comfortable in the school environment			
Additional Information			

I find it hard to speak to the other kids at school			
I worry about break times at school			
I don't have many friends at school			
I avoid places in school where I would have to talk to someone			
I sometimes feel like I don't belong in school			
Additional Information			
I think about my parents/carers and family when I'm at school			
I would rather be with my family than go to school			
I feel worried about things at home			
My parents/carers and family need me to be at home			

I worry about being away from my parents/carers			

Additional Information

If I stay at home, I get to leave the house and do something fun			
If I stay at home, I can talk to/hang out with friends			
I can have fun doing other things in the house if I stay at home			
If I stay at home, I feel relaxed and calm			
When I am at home, I do not worry about missing school			

Additional Information

TOOL 5: Analysis of Push and Pull Factors

PUSH FACTORS *E.g. Interest in particular subjects, sustaining friendships, seeing the school pet*	
PULL FACTORS *E.g. Concerns about the safety of a parent at home, sibling has more time at home with parent, academic difficulties*	

TOOL 6: Personal Intervention Plan

Pupil Name:	Dob:	Year Group:	Date of Plan:
Names of people contributing to plan:			
Agreed review date:			

Identified need *(What are identified push / pull factors telling us?)*	Support / Action needed *(Think about small steps; consider protective factors)*	What will this look like? *(Who will do what & when will they do it?)*	Review *(What has gone well? What has not gone well? Consider exceptions)*

Additional tools and resources

► **When the function of EBSA is to avoid uncomfortable feelings brought on by attending school and by situations that may be stressful, intervention may include:**

- Identification of key adults and how they will be accessed, along with easily accessible safe spaces and adjustments to support coping with environmental stressors, e.g. early leaver pass, planned activities during unstructured times and alternative entrance / exit
- Review of current academic demands and timetable; consideration of increased adult support in lessons and pre and post teaching for key work missed
- Identification and / or development of peer support, e.g. buddying, friendship groups, peer mentoring
- Psychoeducation about anxiety and how it affects our thinking, feelings and behaviour, including teaching that avoidance of feared situations makes the fear intensify
- Identification, teaching and practice of anxiety management and coping techniques e.g. breathing, visualisation and mindfulness (see Darlington EPS Recovery Curriculum for ideas)
- Using cognitive behaviour therapy techniques to reframe thinking, e.g. challenging negative thoughts and goal setting (Resources such as 'Think Good Feel Good' by Paul Stallard or 'Starving the Anxiety Gremlin' by Kate Collins-Donnelly may be useful)
- Gradual, step by step, re-exposure to school using avoidance hierarchy (ladder) created with the child/ young person, ranging from least feared school situations to most feared. An effective approach is to show the child cards that depict the different elements of the school day that have been highlighted as potentially anxiety provoking through the assessment process and ask them to sort them from the least feared, to the most. Examples of these elements are provided at the end of this section. Intervention should commence with a focus on developing the ability to cope with the least feared situation.

Most feared e.g. dinner hall

Least feared e.g. English class

► **When the function of EBSA is to reduce separation anxiety or spend more time with significant others, intervention may include:**

- Working in collaboration with parents / carers to create scripts for responding to school avoidance behaviours such as physical complaints and tantrums
- Acknowledging children's feelings and making links to their behaviour, e.g. '*I think you may be feeling sick because you are worried about school tomorrow. Let's think what we can do to help you feel better about this*'.
- Establishing consistent morning routines at home and school
- Using transitional objects (chosen possessions belonging to parent / carer that offer comfort and connection) to reassure and highlight to children that the time they spend in school is temporary and they will be reunited with their caregiver at home-time
- Working in collaboration with parents / carers to identify when they can spend time individually with their child outside of school hours, doing something together that feels positive
- Establishment of appropriate and proportionate rewards and consequences in response to school attendance

► **When the function of EBSA is to seek rewarding actions outside school, for example, going shopping or playing computer games, intervention may include:**

- Consideration of how to make school as motivating and stimulating as possible, building lessons and work around children's strengths and interests
- Collaboration with parents / carers to agree consistent structures and expectations in cases where home learning is undertaken. For example, removal of stimulating activities such as computer games and phones during school hours, encouraging children to wear their uniform at home to complete their work
- Increasing rewards for school attendance and disincentives for non-attendance, for example, laptop time, internet access, phone credit, time with friends

Avoidance Hierarchy (Ladder) elements

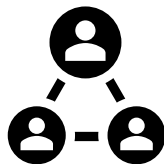| |
|---|
| Putting my uniform on at home |
| Travelling to school |
| Entering the school reception area / walking into the building |
| Lining up for lessons |
| Walking along an empty school corridor |
| Walking along a busy school corridor |
| Going into an empty dining hall |
| Entering a busy dining hall |
| Meeting a member of school staff in the car park |
| Meeting a member of school staff by myself in their classroom or office |
| Seeing my friends in school |
| Speaking to another pupil |
| Seeing pupils around school |
| Break time |
| Going to the toilets |
| Lunchtime |
| Going into an empty classroom |
| Going into a lesson (create cards to include a range of different subjects |
| Completing work in lessons |
| Answering questions in class |
| Taking part in PE lessons |

> **Safety Scripts**
>
> Children and young people learn and take their cues from the behaviour they see modelled around them. Research evidence highlights strong links between parent/carer anxiety and anxiety in their children. Therefore, in responding to EBSA it is important that parents/carers are supported to have confidence in the process of their child returning to school and are equipped to communicate this confidence to them, whilst remaining warm and empathic. As 'in the moment' it can be difficult to find language that is positive and helpful, the development of a safety script that all key adults can use may be useful. Furthermore, the use of shared, repetitive language can also be reassuring, calming and grounding at times when emotions and anxiety are heightened.

The following safety script is an example that uses narrative and cognitive behavioural psychological principles. Ideally, school staff should collaborate with parents / carers to produce a bespoke script, as the sense of ownership this promotes is likely to encourage implementation. The safety script should be modified depending on the age and stage of the child / young person, as well as their emotional readiness and receptivity.

► *'When we experience change, we can feel lots of different emotions. These can include nervousness, excitement, fear or frustration.*

► *These are all completely normal feelings to have and will be shared by lots of people including adults!*

► *It is my job as your parent/ carer/ key adult/ teacher to help you attend school. You have coped with changes **before** e.g. moving year groups and schools, so you can be successful again!*

► *Let us think about all the things you can do to relax and feel calm e.g. deep breaths, visualising a safe, happy place, repeating a positive affirmation like 'I am strong and capable' and remembering specific examples of when you have overcome challenges in the past.*

► *When you get into school you will have a chance to do X. You can also speak with your key person during morning break and lunch.*

► *I know it feels difficult but this feeling will only last for a short while. Anxiety goes up and then comes back down again in waves.*

► *When you are at school, I will be safe and well at home/ work and will be thinking of you. I will see you when school is over. You have got this! **Transitional objects may be used here.***

► *You are doing great. I am so proud of you.*

Individual Pupil Plan

Information gathered throughout the assessment process that has informed, and been included within, the Personal Intervention Plan can be adapted to form a more 'child friendly' version. This promotes a sense of ownership over the process of change for the child or young person and in doing so, further enables them to feel heard.

Pupil Support Plan

Name:	Year group:
Date:	

At school these things can worry me:

*

*

*

When I start to feel worried or upset, I notice that I:

*

*

Other people will notice that I:

*

*

The things that are important to me / that I enjoy at school are:

-
-
-

My key adult(s) in school are:……………………………………………………………………..
When / were I can speak to them is:

-
-
-

At the moment my timetable looks like:

(Identify what the structure of the day is; how it will work for the child)

Day	Morning	Break	Lunch	Afternoon
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				

Other changes to my day are:
(identify any other changes to routines, transitions, teacher approaches etc)

Things that I can do to make myself feel better in school:

-
-
-

Things that school staff and my friends can do to help me feel better in school:

-
-
-

Things my family can do to help me feel better attending and being at school:

-
-
-

Places in the school I can go to where I feel safe and supported:

This plan will be reviewed regularly so that it remains helpful.
Review date:

My signature	Key adult's signature	Parent signature

Other people who have access to the plan are:

Notes Page

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Contact Information

Darlington EPS are happy to be contacted with any questions, queries and feedback regarding the content, accessibility, use and impact of this document. Feedback can be shared with Educational Psychologists in school and / or directed to:

Helen Ellison, Head of Education Partnerships, 01325 405886 helen.ellison@darlington.gov.uk

Sarah Tighe, Principal Educational Psychologist, 01325 405735 sarah.tighe@darlington.gov.uk

Niamh Wherity, Senior Educational Psychologist, 01325 406745 niamh.wherity@darlington.gov.uk