

EBSA Strategies and Tool Kit for Primary Schools

This summary document has been produced by Brighter Futures for Children and is based on the current evidence-based literature, best practice guidance and information sourced from different Educational Psychology (EPS) services across UK. We would like to acknowledge Sheffield EPS, Staffordshire EPS, Lancashire EPS, West Sussex EPS, and Kirklees EPS. A more comprehensive guidance and references can be found in our centralised document titled “EBSA Guidance and Tool Kits”.

Aim/Purpose

The purpose of this of the summary document is to offer educational settings, a range of evidence-based strategies and tool kits which can be adopted to support children and young people (CYP) with Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). The guidance puts a particular emphasis towards strengthening the CYP’s sense of belonging and connection to school along with increasing the ‘push’ towards attendance through a trauma informed approach, systemic multi-agency working, environmental changes, and provision of additional support. It is acknowledged that EBSA is a complex area of need where multi-agency approach, acknowledging the voice of the child, family and professionals is recommended. The scope of the current document is to support early and effective intervention for the EBSA population; aiming to prevent EBSA needs from escalating further and promoting positive outcomes for CYP and families.

Definition

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) has been conceptualised as **“a pattern of absence where reluctance, or refusal, to attend or stay in educational settings is rooted in anxiety or fear. This may be the result of an interplay between personal, family, school or wider environmental issues. It is not a diagnosis, but a special educational need.”**

Signs of EBSA

Your child may present with the following signs:

- Crying
- Pleading
- Fearfulness
- Anxiety
- Outbursts
- Expression of negative feelings
- Complaints of anxiety symptoms including, racing heart, shaking, sweating, difficulty breathing etc.
- Refusal to get ready for school or to leave the house
- Rumination and worry around school-related issues
- Sleep problems
- Psychosomatic illnesses (i.e. headache/tummy ache occurring when no underlying medical cause can be found).
- Defensive aggression (i.e. may display when feeling ‘out-of-control’) etc.

Normalising Anxiety:

“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.”

Worrying or anxious feelings are normal feelings that we all experience. These feelings are evolutionary; they can keep us safe from harm or even help us perform in difficult situations. Anxieties are part of life and learning to deal with them is part of growing up.

There are many young people and children who worry about school, and this is very normal. However, some excessive worrying can become an issue especially when it stops young people doing what they want or need to do. From some young people, this may lead to difficulties to attending school.

If a CYP experiences high levels of anxiety and does not want to attend school, they may be specifically experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA).

The role of schools in supporting child/young person

Schools should take a preventative measure towards EBSA, with a focus on early intervention and prevention. It is important to identify the early warning signs of EBSA, if unaddressed, the EBSA behaviours can become entrenched making it difficult to intervene once the child has been out of education for some time. We advocate for a rapid return to school at the earliest opportunity, as the longer the CYP is out of school, the more entrenched the avoidance behaviour and anxiety can become. EBSA can also extend to other areas of the CYP's life where they find themselves in a situation where they are isolated from any protective factors that a supportive school setting can provide. It's important to aim to get CYP back into school as soon as possible but with the provision of increased support, and a good understanding of their needs.

This document lists some screening tools and audits that can be adopted by schools to support their planning, and to identify CYP who may be at risk of EBSA.

Strategies

For school-based strategies, a particular focus is needed towards strengthening the child's sense of belonging and connection at school and increasing the push towards school-attendance through environmental changes and provision of additional support.

Make a commitment to connection and belonging e.g. spend additional time welcoming back, video calls prior to transition, special jobs and responsibilities

Provision of a secondary attachment figure – someone the CYP can build a trusted relationship with over time at school.

RAG (red Amber Green) the school environment to review hotspots and areas requiring support, as well as areas that feel manageable

Targeted support to reduce areas of particularly high anxiety e.g. "meet and greet", peers to walk to school with

Support to identify positive aspects of school (e.g. favoured lessons/teachers) which could provide basis for return.

A 'safe space' to escape to when feeling overwhelmed and access to 'calming toolkits' to aid regulation.

Complete a friendship audit to review pre-existing friendships as well as friendship opportunities (e.g. Sociograms)

Practical support to develop friendships e.g. Circle of Friends, Buddy systems, lunchtime clubs and structured activities.

Access to catch up tutoring and pre-teaching (online or face-to-face) so that the child feels more confident re-entering the classroom.

Support the CYP to prepare a script that they can use when other children ask them why they have not been attending school.

Further Recommendations

- Provide a flexible and personalised, small-step plan based on the CYP needs.
- Ensure Graduated response approaches with child voice at the centre of the support provision.
- Gather, acknowledge, and validate child view whilst promoting attendance.
- Gather holistic view of CYP, parents and staff to ensure a good understanding of the function of EBSA.
- Ensure awareness of CYP needs and the barriers to their learning and consideration of the needs of the whole family.
- Involve CYP in the development of their support plan.
- Establish a strong pastoral support system: key adult/s for CYP who has allocated time to build rapport with the CYP and support the pupil at times of high anxiety (co-regulation).
- Carry out regular home visits (if appropriate).
- Access to a safe space at times of high anxiety.
- Nominated staff members to welcome CYP upon arrival.
- Monitor wellbeing with regular check ins with key staff.
- Rapport building and regular communication with parents/carers, and other professionals working with the CYP; Multi agency working
- Provide a sense of normality and consistency when the CYP is in school and avoid asking where the child has been.
- Provide a clear, predictable, and consistent environment
- Allocate staff to co-ordinate the support and communication for the CYP.
- Provide opportunities for CYP to build positive relationship with peers.
- Ensure a Whole school approach; Staff training on SEND, EBSA and Anxiety

Tool kit

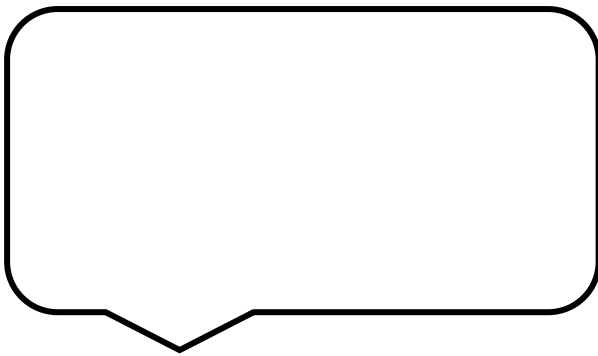
My 'Can-Do' Cards (Primary)

Record the things that you can do now on the cards.

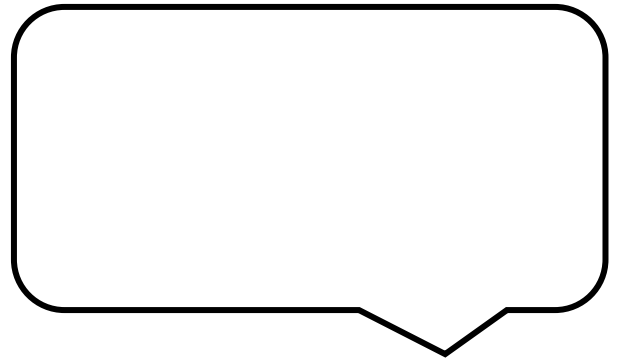
Draw yourself doing them in the speech bubbles.

If you can't do them now, don't worry. You can't do them yet!

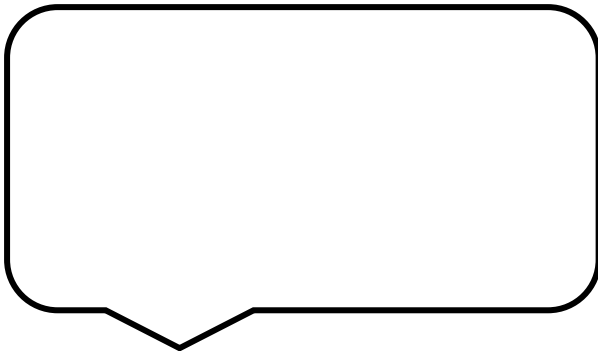
Use the blank cards to add some more things you might be able to do in the future and then think about when you might be able to do them.



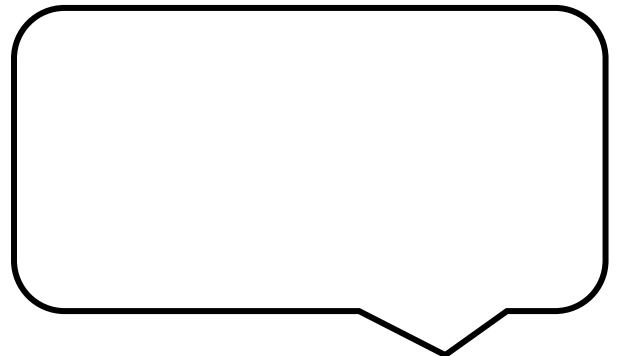
*I can talk about
going to school*



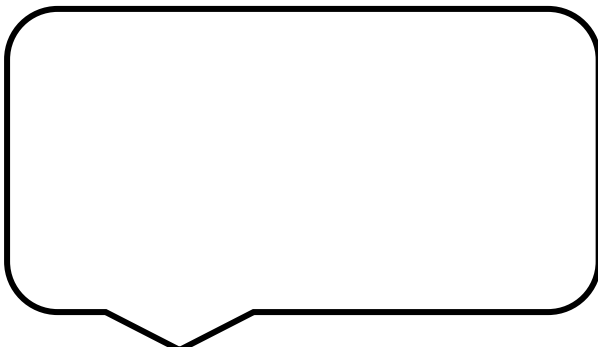
*I can walk past my
school*



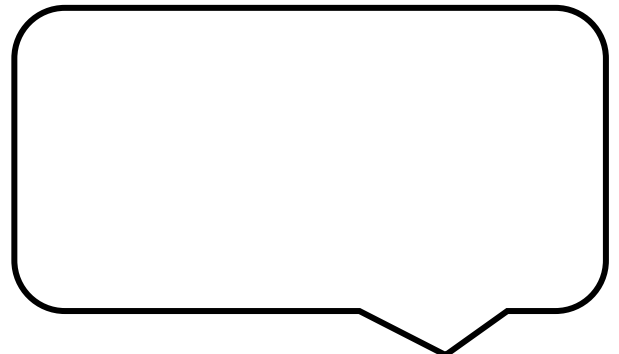
*I can try on my
school clothes*



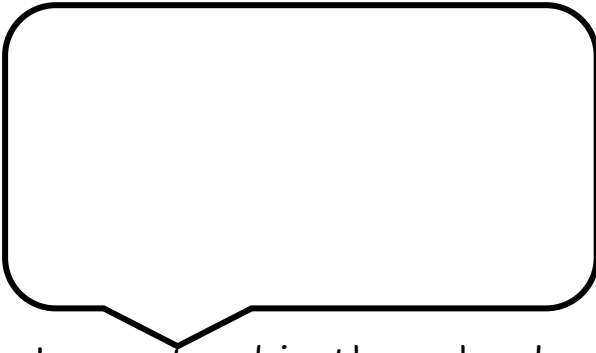
*I can look at the
school website*



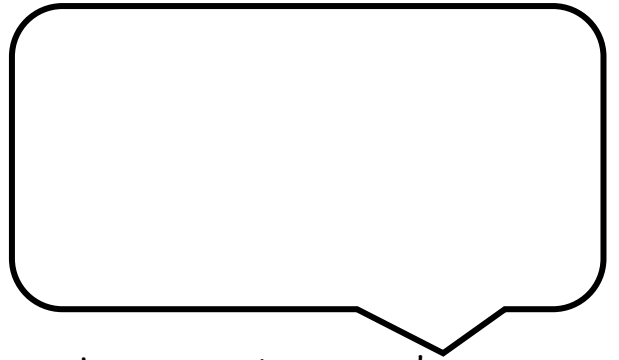
*I can talk to my
friends from school*



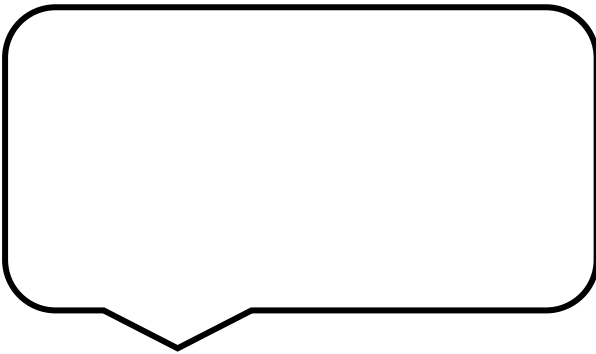
*I can send a message
or a picture to my
teacher*



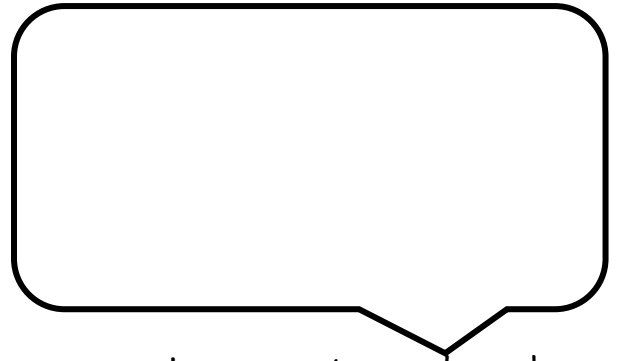
I can stand in the school entrance for a few minutes and then go home.



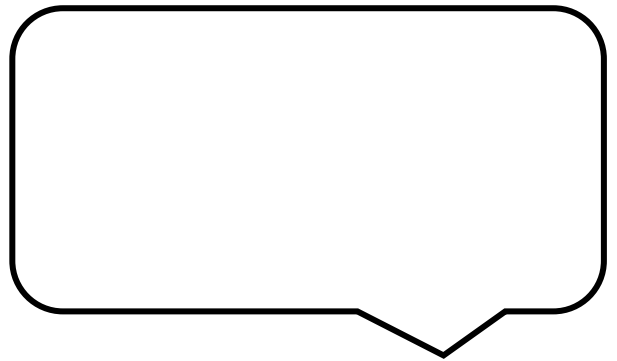
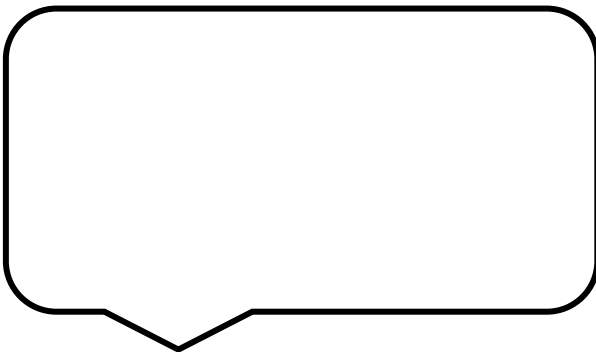
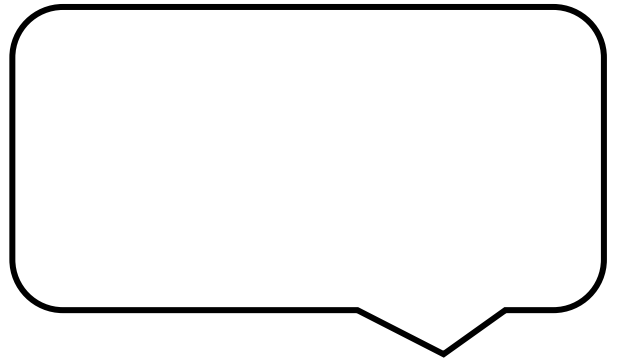
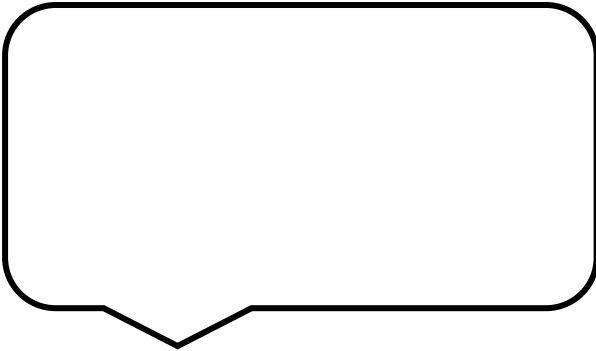
I can go to my classroom after school to say hello to my teacher



I can stay in school for one lesson



I can eat my lunch at school



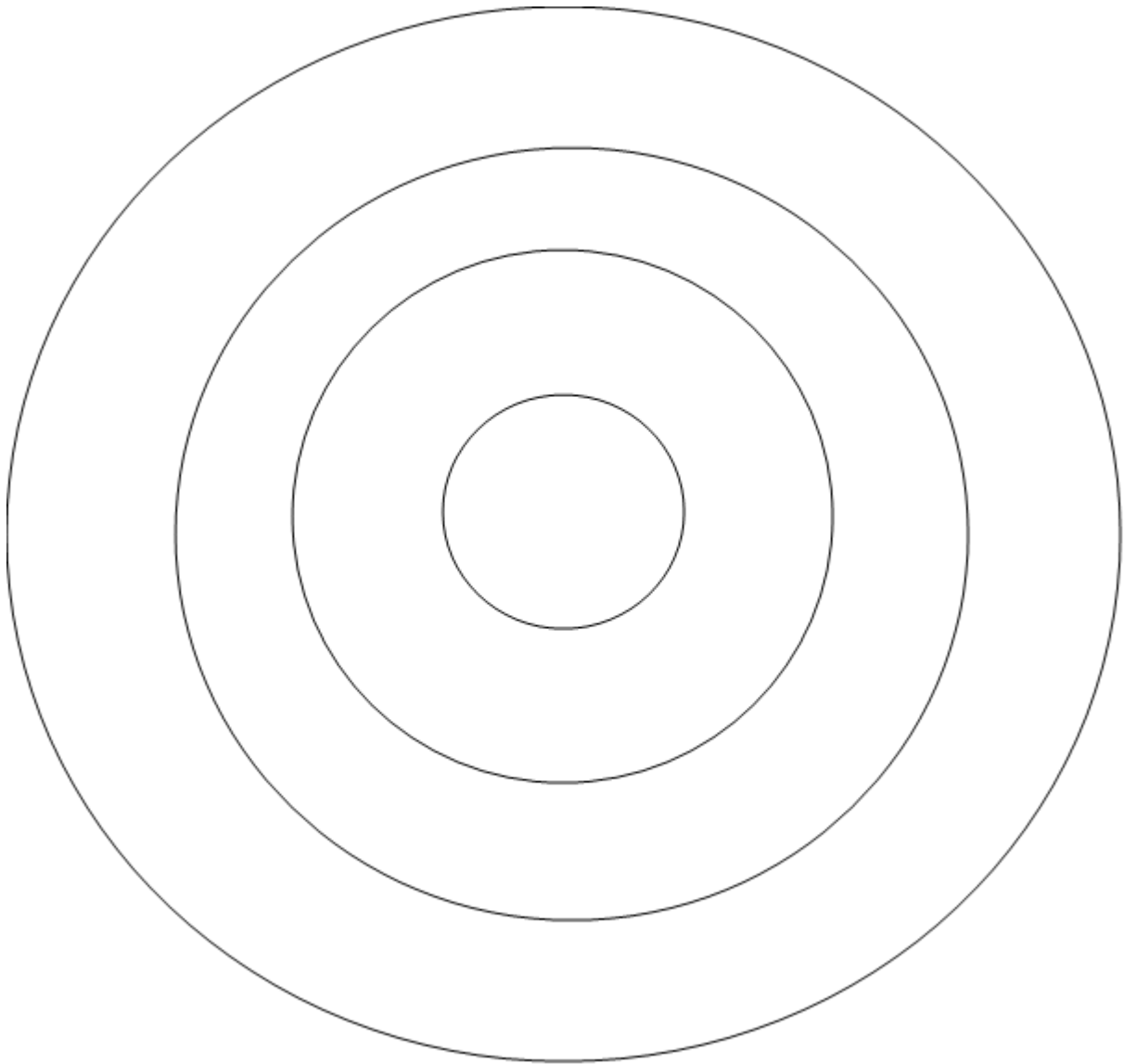
My Circle of Support (Primary)

Write the names of all the people in your life who can and do give you support, using the circles on the next page.

1. Start by writing the names of those closest to you in the centre circle.
2. In the next circle put those less close, but still very important – your friends?
3. In the next circle write the names of any groups or teams you are part of
4. Then move out to the final circle and put the names of people who are paid to support you – teachers, doctors, nurses?

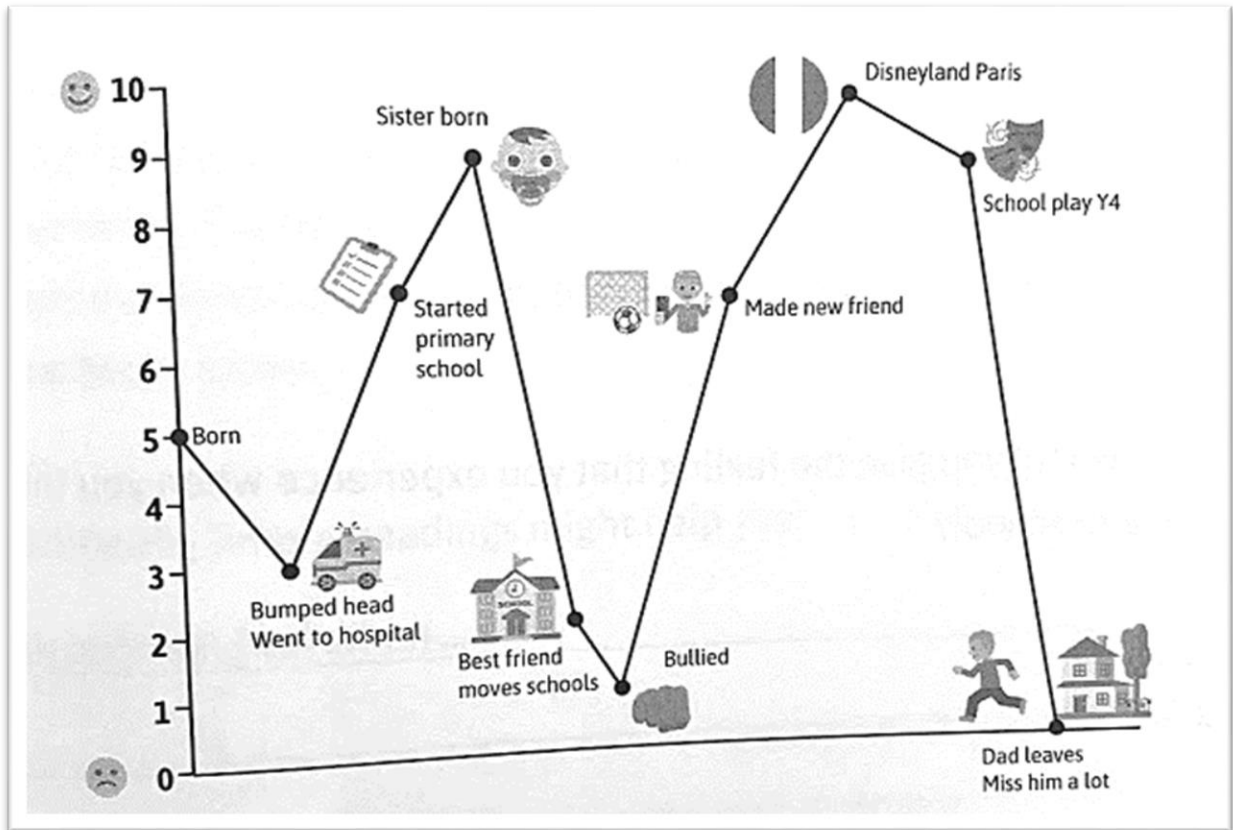
Name all these important people and record how and why they are such a support.

Remember to thank them and also to keep them close.



My Life Graph

A life graph can help us tell our 'story so far' and then think about what we want in the future.



Draw out your own,
Include all the highs and lows.
What were the happy moments?
What were the "not so good" moments?

Page Break

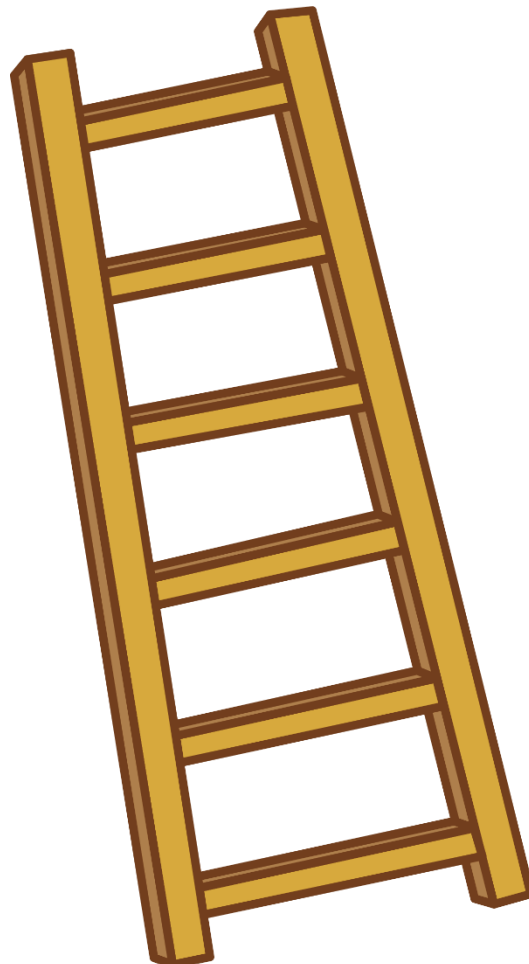




Worry Ladder (Primary)

We can all help ourselves to manage fears and worries by making a 'Worry Ladder'. Use the image of the ladder to write down all the gentle, easy steps you think you could take to face and conquer your fear. You can write each step on each rung. Begin at the easiest step at the bottom of the ladder.

What could you do right now? What small step can you take? Then build up very, very slowly, noticing and celebrating every step of the way. What will happen is that you will see over time that it is okay to be with the feared objects or in the feared situation, like the classroom - that fears and worries are not there forever and that we can do something about them.





My Pupil Passport (Primary)

With the help of the person supporting you, design your own pupil passport.

- 1** Find a photo of yourself and stick it to the front of her folded a four piece of card.
- 2** Then record your name, your date of birth and the name of your class teacher on the front.
- 3** Next put down some information that you think might be helpful for your teacher to know.

The following simple headings might help you:

I work and feel best when...

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Things I find difficult...

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Things you can do to help...

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____



My Anxiety Playlist (Primary)

Music can help to calm and soothe us. Make up your own playlist. Use music as a calming strategy when you're feeling anxious. Try this over a week and see the difference it can make.

My List

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____
- 7 _____
- 8 _____
- 9 _____
- 10 _____



Time to Talk (Primary)

Make a list of all the people you can talk to about your feelings:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

What makes those people special?

Name	
<i>They listen well</i>	
<i>They make me feel loved</i>	
<i>They are there when I need them</i>	
<i>They make me feel happy</i>	
<i>They make me feel calm</i>	
<i>Something else</i>	

What words might you use if you needed to talk to them about your feelings?

Name	
<i>I'm feeling worried</i>	
<i>I need to talk to you about something important</i>	
<i>I need your help</i>	
<i>I feel sad</i>	
<i>Something else</i>	

How do you feel when you've talked to someone about how you feel?

Happy? Calm? Relieved? Sad? Worried? Loved?

Transitional object (Primary age)

A transitional object is something that can be used to remind your child that you continue to think about them and are connected to them even though you are apart.

Examples of transitional objects include: a bracelet; a photo of you; a note in your child's lunchbox; a cuddly toy or other comforter; or a small item of clothing belonging to you. Equally, it could be something intangible, like a kiss (or something else) or perfume sprayed on your child's shirt. You and your child could also take the same thing to school and to work to show that you are thinking about each other (e.g. a special button sewn inside a jumper).

