

## EBSA Strategies and Tool Kit for Secondary 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

CYP 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

## Toolkit

- The following appendix includes a range of primary and secondary school tools that can be used to work with the CYP to support their return to school plan.
- [EBSA-good-practice-guidance.pdf \(hants.gov.uk\)](#) – whole school audit page 58
- Staff voice [EBSA-good-practice-guidance.pdf \(hants.gov.uk\)](#) page 51

### My Pupil Passport (Primary/Secondary)

*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 Wellbeing Plan (Secondary)

*Making a plan for your wellbeing and setting realistic mental health goals is always a useful thing to do, but particularly so when you are at a transition point in your life. Start by thinking about the five key elements to emotional wellbeing:*



**Connect-** *This is to be social and to try to connect with someone each day. Call or meet up with someone who makes you feel good. Be active- 30 minutes of activity each day is said to keep your emotional wellbeing protected.*



**Keep Learning-** *Reflect each day on one thing that you learned that day it may be about any topic. Did you learn a key facts in history? Did you learn about the chemical reaction? Did you learn what is important to a friend? What do you know today that you did not know yesterday?*



**Give-** *This keeps happy hormones active in our minds and bodies try it think of ways you can give and who to. It may be giving your time to read with the younger sibling, giving help to an older person, or a gift to a friend.*



**Be Mindful-** *Being mindful is about enjoying the time here and now, not wishing you were somewhere else or thinking what is for dinner. We know that appreciating what we sense in the present moment encourages our bodies to work better.*

### First

*you can start by writing down one thing you have done today and one thing you plan to do tomorrow in each of the areas above will stop remember- we will not make changes and keep improving our mental health unless we set goals and make a well being plan.*

### Second

*Then think about setting specific goals for each of the five key elements to emotional wellbeing writes a goal for each of the five elements. Make sure that they are SMART!*

*SMART is an acronym that stands for:*



**Specific-** *very clear (e.g, I will keep active every day).*



**Measurable-** *I will time myself for 30 minutes every day doing my jogging around the park.*



**Achievable-** *I can do this as I have the time after school and my friend has agreed to do this with me it is not too hard to do.*



**Realistic and Relevant-** *It is relevant to keeping me in good mental health and I know that I can achieve it.*



**Time-limited-** *Set a date when you will review your progress in each of the five key elements*

*Finally, agree a date when you will review your progress with someone who is important to you and has your best interests at heart*

### My Anxiety Playlist (Primary/Secondary)

*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 \_\_\_\_\_

### Letter to My Future Self (Secondary)

Write a letter to your future self. Once your letter is written, you will put it away in a drawer cupboard for at least six months- a good place to pick is somewhere you will need to clear out when you move, but not for at least six months! Take paper and a pen and begin to think about what you want to say to yourself in six- or 12-months' time. Ask yourself:

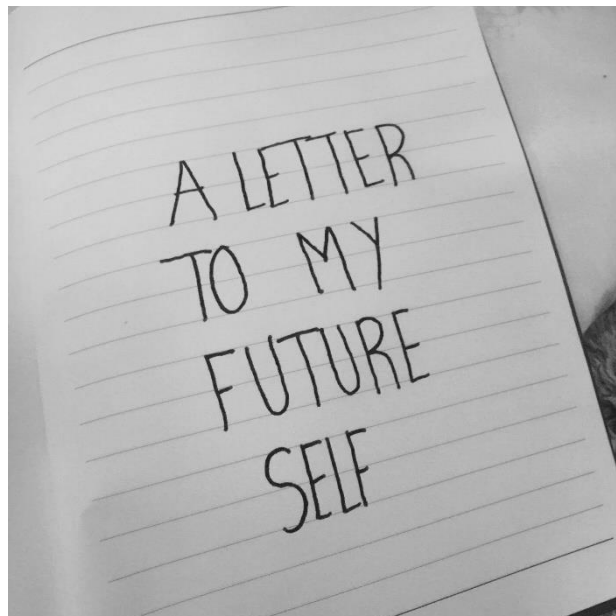
- Who am I today?
- What are my goals? What are my dreams? What makes me happy? What makes me unhappy? What am I struggling with?

Then think about where you hope to be in six- or 12-months' time:

- Where will I be then?
- What will my hopes and goals be?
- What will I have achieved?
- Where will I have focused my efforts and energy?
- What or who will make me happy?
- What did I used to struggle with, but don't anymore?

Next write all the great things that you have in your life. Remind your future self about the things in your life that make you happy. You might write about your hobbies, your interests, your friends, your pets, your family your, your interests - whatever you feel is important. Write this down so that in six- or twelve-months' time you do not forget to reflect on the special things in your life now.

Now, hide the letter in a safe place.



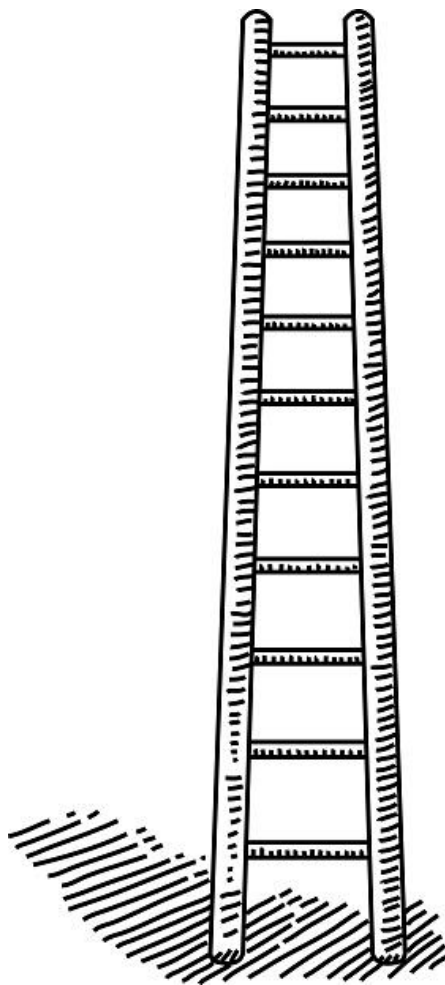


### Making an Anxiety Ladder (Secondary)

*We can all help ourselves to manage fears and anxieties by making an anxiety ladder. This involves working out as many gentle steps as possible to build up an exposure to the feared thing, which might be returning to school or staying in a classroom. For example, if you're afraid of spiders, the bottom rung of the ladder might be hearing about a spider or looking at a picture of one.*

*Draw a ladder with ten or more rungs on it and then write down all the gentle, easy steps you could think you could take to face and conquer your fear. You can write each step on each rung. Begin at the bottom, easiest step on the ladder and build up very, very slowly, noticing and celebrating each step of the way.*

*What will happen is that you will build up good evidence over time that it is okay to be with the feared object from the feared situation like the classroom- **that fears are not there forever and that we can do something about them.***



### Time to Talk (Primary/Secondary)

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

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

4 \_\_\_\_\_

5 \_\_\_\_\_

*What makes those people special?*

<b>Name</b>	
<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?*

<b>Name</b>	
<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?*

## Challenging my Negative Automatic Thoughts (NATs) (Secondary)

- *We all have negative thoughts.*
- *We listen to our thoughts a lot.*
- *We often accept negative thoughts as the truth without really challenging them.*
- *These thoughts can become loud and it becomes harder to hear the positive thoughts.*
- *The more we listen to them, the more uncomfortable and down we feel in the less we do- it's a TRAP!*

*Identify an NAT that you experience and then ask:*

- *What is the evidence for this thought?*
- *What is the evidence against this thought?*
- *What would my best friend say if I if they heard my thought?*
- *What would my teacher say if they heard my thought?*
- *What would my parents or carers say if they heard my thought?*
- *What would I say to my best friend if they had this same thought?*
- *Am I making mistakes? For example, blowing it up and forgetting my strengths or good points, self-blaming or predicting failure, or thinking that I can mind- read what others are thinking?*