

Supporting and Including parents when implementing EBSA support

What is EBSA?

EBSA (Emotionally-based school avoidance) can be defined as the following (Berg, 1969).

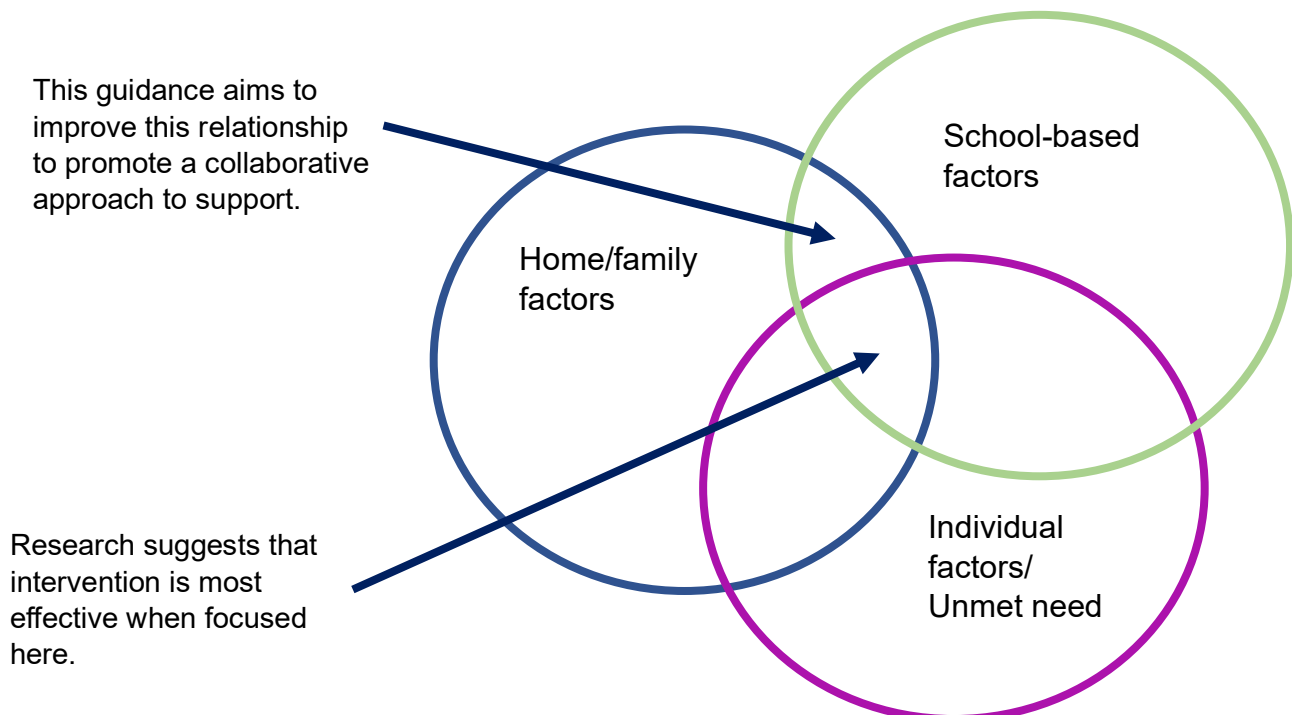
- Regular non-attendance or disengagement from school and/or lessons.
- Experience of severe negative emotions (e.g. distress/anxiety) at the prospect of attending school.
- Knowledge and 'reasonable endeavours' from parents.
- Absence of anti-social behaviours (except towards those encouraging school attendance)

It is a multi-faceted, wide-ranging and often long-term difficulty, with each case having individual causal and maintaining factors. Whilst EBSA can sometimes be triggered by an individual event (e.g. bereavement/ traumatic experience/ medical difficulty), the emotions driving the non-attendance often build over time, with non-attendance being the symptom rather than the initial difficulty itself.

Research suggests that working collaboratively with families and intervening early is the best way to support EBSA, highlighting the importance of close communication with parents long before involving external professionals.

This guidance aims to support settings to consider how to involve parents in EBSA identification, planning and support, with a focus on maintaining trusted relationships and providing support to families during this challenging time.

Please consider this guidance alongside the EBSA resources listed on the PT&S website.



The Suffolk EBSA Resources consider how EBSA can be supported through the 'graduated response' in line with the SEND Code of Practice, using an '**Assess, Plan, Do, Review**' approach. This guidance aims to support school staff to include parents at each stage of this process, including key things to consider.

Identifying CYP at risk of EBSA

This section refers to the identification a of EBSA-related difficulties within school, ideally taking place at the first sign of anxiety or non-attendance. Identifying these needs early consistently produce more positive outcomes.

Please also refer to the 'Whole School Audit Tool' [School Self-Audit EBSA - revised.docx \(sharepoint.com\)](#) to consider universal approaches to supporting EBSA.

Monitoring. A dedicated team of staff within school should take responsibility for monitoring those at risk of attendance difficulties, using the risk factors outlined in the EBSA resources (link). At the first sign of attendance

Regular communication. It is important to maintain trusted relationships with parents, especially those experiencing attendance difficulties or with an identified SEN. Offering a key point of contact, with regular meetings/catch ups will be crucial to maintain connections and good information sharing.

Raising concerns. Research suggests that parents are often the first to notice their child's difficulties with anxiety, due to the role of 'masking' within school. Having a clear and accessible way for parents to raise concerns with a key member of staff will be important to implement early intervention.

Information sharing. Offering information around EBSA and wellbeing on the school website will help parents to access information when attempting to support their child and maintain trust in the school.

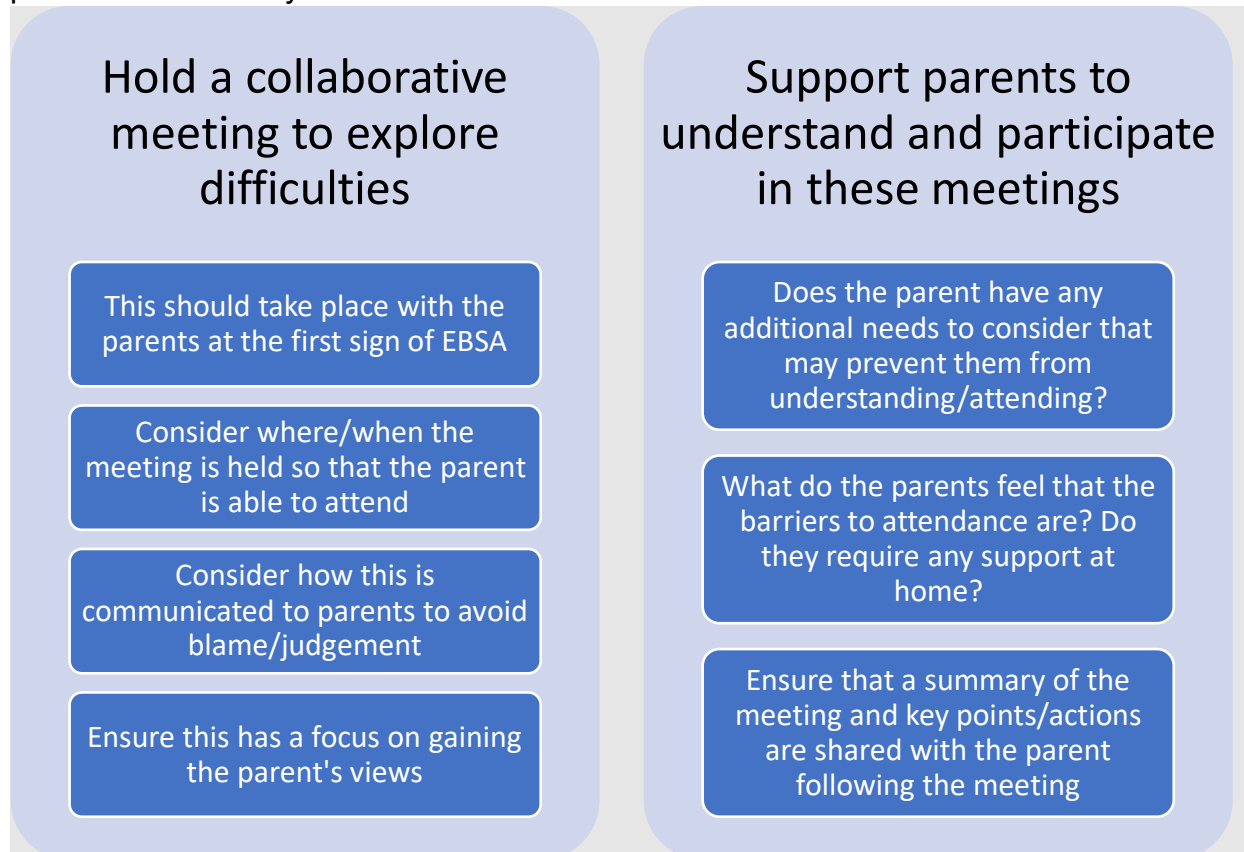
Viewing EBSA as SEN. Although individuals with SEN, or diagnoses such as 'Autism Spectrum Disorder' are statistically more likely to experience EBSA, a range of factors can contribute. Instead, viewing and treating EBSA as a 'social, emotional or mental health need' is important to promote action planning and early intervention.

Knowing the signs of anxiety. Staff should receive training or access CPD on the signs of anxiety and EBSA to support them to have conversations with parents on this topic. Avoiding terms such as 'school refusal' is also important to maintain parental trust and confidence.

ASSESS

When a child or young person is displaying anxiety around attending school or particular lessons, the first step should be to gather information around what is happening for that young person. This includes gathering pupil voice about school, including what works well for them, and what they find more challenging/anxiety provoking. **For more information on how to do this, please visit this link [Suffolk slides on seeking pupil views.pptx \(sharepoint.com\)](#).**

Research highlights the importance of including parents in this process, with many CYP finding it difficult to share their views independently. This places the parent in a position of advocacy for their child.



PLAN

Once you have gained the voice of the child and the parent, you can begin to develop an agreed action plan based on the child's individual needs and/or difficulties.

Remember: EBSA is a heterogenous and multi-faceted difficulty, so what caused or helped with one child's non-attendance may not necessarily help with another.

The action plan should be developed in collaboration with the parent (and CYP), with research suggesting that this works best when it incorporates parent and pupil voice.

Some possible agreed actions may include:

- Identifying an adult within school to build relationship with the pupil, who can greet the child at the start of the school day and act as a point of contact.
- Considering adjustments to the classroom or sensory environment.
- Identifying a 'safe space' within school for the pupil to approach when overwhelmed.
- Creating methods for the child to communicate their anxiety or need for support within school.
- Additional support in the mornings or during key transitions.
- Adjustments to learning (e.g. not attending particular lessons, having work sent home, different ways of communicating with class teachers).
- Using the child's interests to improve their experience of school and sense of belonging.

Please also refer to the 'EBSA Adjustments Checklist' for further ideas, information and support when action-planning for EBSA-related difficulties.

Key points to remember when action-planning:

- Each child will have a different plan depending on their needs/circumstances.
- Ensure that parents have a copy of the plan, and that the child's approval has been gained before implementing any action.
- Set a review date in a reasonable timeframe (e.g. 4-6 weeks) to allow time for the actions to be fully implemented (often these can take time to embed).
- SMART targets can be useful to support measuring progress.
- Ensure that all key members of staff have a copy of the plan with clear actions for each relevant staff member.

DO

Whilst implementing the agreed action plan, it is important to maintain parental trust and communication throughout.

Please consider the following:

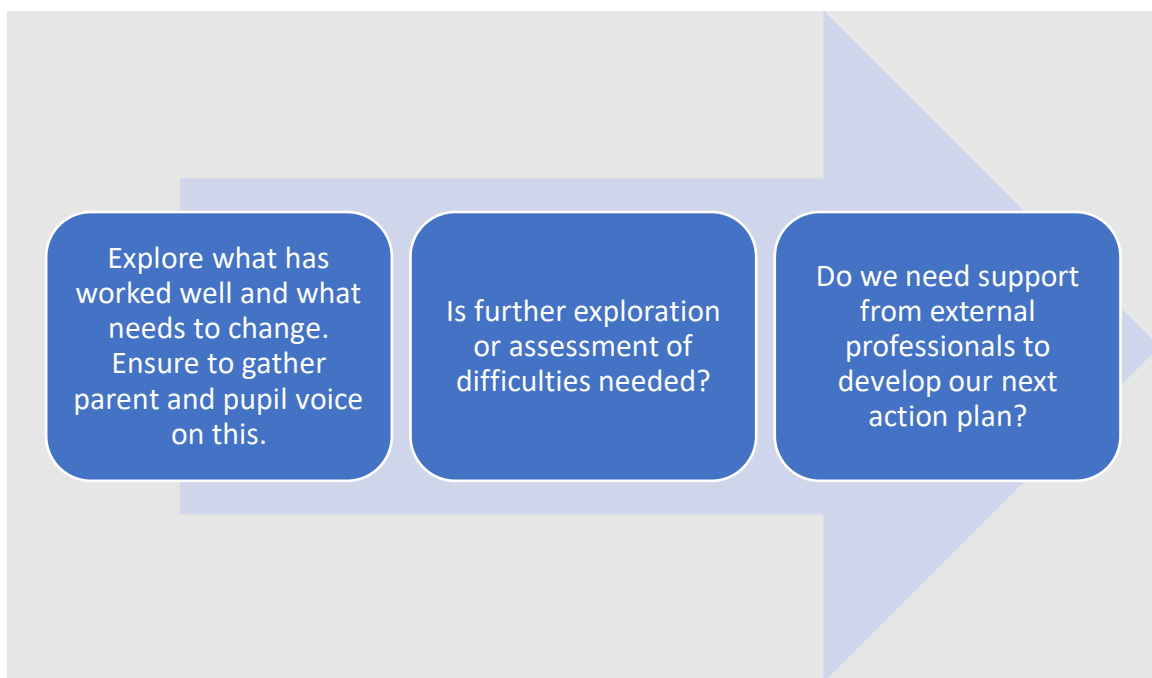
- Maintaining consistent communication with parents (and pupils) through agreed weekly phone calls/video meetings, emails, or a home/school communication book. Ideally this should be completed by a team of consistent adults.

- Keeping parents (and pupils) to up date with any unexpected changes (e.g. staff changes, illnesses, or changes to timetables) and provide clear explanations where possible.
- Ensure to share successes and positives as well as challenges.
- Inform office staff about pupil's ongoing difficulties, to increase understanding, avoid repetition/ perceived judgment, and ensure that a 'friendly face' is present at the start of the school day.
- Ensure that parents have access to further information and support if needed (more information listed below).

REVIEW

Hold a review meeting in collaboration with parents to ensure that they feel included in the process. Ensure that this is organised in advance with the parents and includes key members of staff/ involved professionals.

Where possible, do not make changes to the agreed action plan without consulting with the parents **and** pupil to maintain trust and consistency. This includes when implementing a part-time timetable, with research suggesting that this only works when gradual increases are agreed across all involved parties.



Key points to consider:

- Parents may prefer a remote or video meeting to allow for work commitments and/or travel.
- Parents needs and confidence may change over time, and therefore options to share views ahead of the meeting, or have an advocate/family member also attend should continue to be available.
- All agreed actions and next steps should be created in collaboration with the parent and pupil.
- You may require multiple cycles of 'APDR' to create a successful action plan.

- Parents may need support to understand the role of different professionals and to access the referral processes.
- Reviews may need to be moved forward if the situation changes.

Supporting Parents and Signposting Information

Research highlights the challenges that families face when experiencing EBSA, both emotionally and practically. This includes impact upon work commitments, mental health and family routines.

Having advice, information and support available to parents helps to maintain trusting relationships, as well as empowering them to support their child within the family home and advocate for their needs.

You will find a helpful document containing links to lots of sources of possible support for parent and carers here: [Signposting Support.docx \(sharepoint.com\)](#)