

Guidance for education settings – Part 2: What can we do to help when pupils are presenting with EBSA?

Guiding Principles for Supporting Pupils with EBSA

(adapted, with thanks, from Hertfordshire CC)

Intervene early

All staff should be aware of risk factors associated with EBSA, and know who to share concerns with as a first port of call; this should be reflected in school policy.

Begin monitoring attendance more closely if it drops below 94%.

Genuine, supportive conversations should be planned a.s.a.p. with pupil and parents / carers (together or separately dependent on situation) also key members of staff, to explore any worries and develop a better understanding of the 'whole picture'.

Based on the above, the pupil, parents / carers and relevant school staff should agree an action plan to address concerns; this should have 'positive and possible' SMART targets, and regular review dates, as part of an APDR cycle.

If there are concerns around being able to meet need, and / or the situation doesn't appear to be improving, relevant external professionals should be consulted for additional advice.

Work with the family throughout

As soon as concerns are raised, a designated member of school staff should reach out and establish contact with the parents / carers. Staff should be mindful that parents / carers may be worried about being judged or about getting into trouble or fined as a result of attendance issues. Requests for discussion should be sincerely supportive and solution focused in nature.

Identified member of staff should be a 'key contact' for parents / carers. Format and frequency of contact should be agreed upon, as well as realistic response times.

In conversation with the parent / carer, there should be a focus on the positives and the areas of progress, as well as noting and addressing the challenges and barriers.

Efforts by schools to continue working with and supporting pupils and their families, maintaining a sense of welcome and belonging to the school setting, will be particularly important if there is to be any hope of improving attendance.

Actively involve the pupil

The pupil should be supported to share their thoughts, feelings and concerns, and these should be captured and checked back with the pupil for accuracy, so that they don't have to continue to re-tell the same details. This sharing process may take place over several sessions, allowing interim reflection. It will be very important for the adult to convey non judgement and to employ good active listening skills.

The pupil should be actively involved in each step of the assess, plan, do, review cycle. They may have thoughts about intervention or support strategies that adults hadn't considered. Remember that pupils are more likely to engage in an action plan if they feel involved and part of the process.

Adults should be guided by a sincere desire to understand the pupil's perspective and reflections on their experiences. Trying to get a full understanding of how the pupil thinks and feels about what is going on in their school life, will be central to any effective support plan, irrespective of whether others share different views or perspectives on events.

Develop a personalised action plan

The action plan should address concerns in a specific rather than generic manner, so that the plan feels personalised and reflective of the individual's goals and needs.

The action plan should take into account the network of systems around the pupil, acknowledging what relationship and environmental changes can be made to affect positive change (i.e. not simply expecting the pupil themselves to be the focus for change).

The plan should meaningfully identify strengths that can be built upon: intervention often works better if it recognises and is built upon emerging strengths.

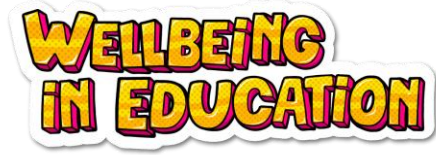
Review the action plan regularly

Accept that the journey towards a brighter future may not be 'smooth' and linear, but ensure that a sense of hope is always maintained.

Plan in frequent reviews and 'check ins' so that any concerns are more quickly addressed and any small steps of progress are quickly recognised and supported. Frequency of appropriate and agreed contact should also help to maintain positive relationships.

Plan in additional support ahead of times of transition or change, both for the pupil but also for those supporting them (these can be emotionally charged times for all involved). At such times the pupil may be more likely to show distress and it will help for all to be prepared for this and ready to support.

With core beliefs and values in mind, school settings should frame their graduated support for pupils displaying EBSA as part of the assess, plan, do, review (APDR) cycle.



Gain a full understanding of the various aspects at play (child, school, family) and what is underpinning the 'avoidance' (from all angles).

Assess

Plan

Based on the information gathered, make a plan for a realistic improvement to attendance / reintegration (small steps).

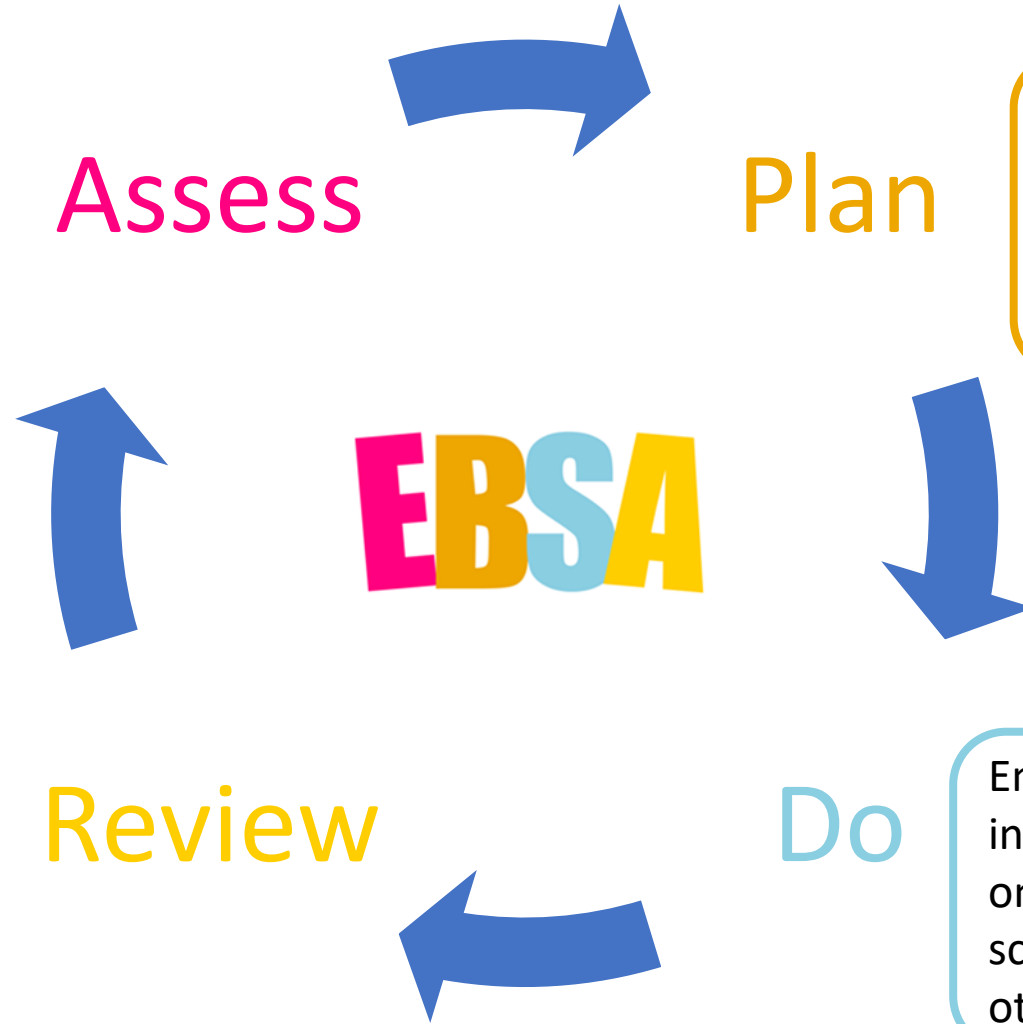
EBSA

Monitor the progress made and adjust the plan accordingly.

Review

Do

Ensure resources and support are / is in place and that there is good quality, ongoing communication between school, family, CYP and any relevant others.



What can education settings do to help when pupils are displaying EBSA?

Step 1: ASSESS

Take a child-centred, individualised approach. We know from experience that the reasons a child might be avoiding some or all of school are complex and personal. When a pupil is felt to be 'at risk' of school avoidance or is displaying elements of emotionally based avoidant behaviour, a first step for education settings should be **information gathering** to help build up a picture of what's going on for that **individual pupil**.

This will mean planning in some carefully managed conversations with the pupil themselves, giving enough time and space for them to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences, using active listening skills and potentially other creative methods (e.g. use of kinaesthetic materials to allow for more artistic representations of emotion, or use of visuals such as photograph cards to use as metaphors for feelings on a tricky topic) to help them to express what might be quite difficult for them to share verbally.

This initial picture from the pupil's point of view, can then be built upon by subsequent conversations with the parent / carer to allow them to share their opinions and experiences, and then also to gather in the views and experiences of staff who know the pupil.

This process of information gathering should be undertaken by staff who understand what it means to actively listen with an open mind, and who have the time and space to do so.

In some situations, it might work best for the pupil to share their thoughts alongside their parent or carer, because this is what will make them feel the most comfortable. In other situations, the opposite may be true.

Similarly in some settings it will work best for the same member of staff to be the one that gathers information from all parties, whereas in other situations, one member of staff might be best placed to talk to the parent, and another to talk to the pupil. This is part of working in accordance with person-centred practice, and in recognition of the importance of relationships (i.e. if you are going to talk openly about something difficult, you usually need to feel a sense of trust in the person who you're talking to). Where there are gaps in the picture (e.g. an uncertainty around how the pupil is coping at break and lunchtime) a next step might be to undertake some additional information gathering procedures (e.g. asking a member of staff to conduct a series of playground observations).



Step 1: ASSESS Initial assessment information.



For each area note down both the strengths and challenges within or around the child or young person (CYP).

We are not suggesting that the information below is gathered all in one go, nor from the same person. The process will need to be adapted according to presentation so that it feels well intentioned and supportive.

Area to explore	Possible related lines of enquiry for the pupil, their parent/carer and for key members of staff (this list is not exhaustive)
Getting to school	How does the CYP find their journey into school in the morning? Is getting to school easy or difficult for them? What works well for them in the morning as they prepare for arriving at school and what are the challenges?
	What does the parent / carer feel about the morning preparation for school? Does their CYP mostly get enough sleep? Do they eat breakfast? How much support or encouragement does the CYP need to get ready for school? How is the journey? And how is the 'goodbye' between parent/carer and CYP?
	What have staff noticed about the CYP's arrival into school in the morning? Is the CYP observed chatting to others on the playground? Do they usually arrive on time? Do they typically arrive in school with everything they need?
Academic attainment & progress	What does the CYP think and feel about their attainment and progress across the curriculum? What are their curriculum interests? What motivates them? What are their short and long term hopes or aspirations? Do they think they are capable of reaching their goals? Do they have a good awareness of their own strengths and challenges? What do they feel about themselves as a learner?
	What does the parent / carer feel about their CYP's attainment and progress? Are they concerned or pleased? Do they feel their CYP is motivated to talk about their learning and / or to do any set homework? Do they think their CYP is a confident and engaged learner? Is being in school 'easy enough' or very effortful for their CYP? Are there any health concerns impacting on progress? Or sensory or other physical factors that are impacting on their progress (e.g. ability to concentrate)? Can they think of recent examples of their CYP showing pride in something they've done in school? Does their CYP have a sense of achievement in something they do outside of school? What topics does their CYP show interest in?
	What do key members of staff think about the CYP's attainment and progress? Any areas of strength or challenge in any curriculum subject? Do they appear engaged in class? Does the CYP contribute to discussion? Do they generally seem well in class? How do they manage both independent and paired or group tasks? Do examples spring to mind of particular efforts the CYP has or hasn't made? How does the CYP respond to praise?
Relationships in school	What does the CYP think about their friendships in school? Do they have a sense of belonging? Are they comfortable working with peers in every class? How are they finding break and lunch times? And what does the CYP feel about the staff they see regularly? Do they feel liked / accepted / welcomed / 'seen' or noticed by staff? Are there any exceptions to this? Who would they turn to in school if they needed adult support with something?
	What does the parent / carer feel about their CYP's friendships? Are they aware of them socialising and if so, how often? Do they seem to have sincere and reciprocal friendships? Do school staff speak warmly of their CYP? Are they aware of any tricky relations between their CYP and any school staff?
	How do staff feel the CYP manages paired or group work in class? Does the CYP appear liked by their peers? How do they manage break and lunch times? Do they seem to have adequate social skills to make and manage friendships?
Relationships outside of school	Does the CYP have any worries about their family? Or other close figure outside of school? If the CYP had some worries who would they share them with?
	Is the parent / carer aware of anything going on at home that might be impacting on the CYP and their engagement with school? Is everyone physically and mentally 'well enough' to have a sense of 'coping' with the day to day? Do they have neighbourhood friends? Do they spend much time connecting with others 'virtually' from home (e.g. either via social media or gaming consoles)?
	Is any member of staff aware of any relationships for this CYP outside of school that might be impacting on / influencing them in school?

Step 1: ASSESS - continued

In addition to finding out more about any challenges, barriers or areas of concern, assessment should also include some solution focused lines of enquiry. Some examples might be:

- What the child or young person (CYP) feels is working well in their lives at present and what enables / has enabled this.
- What is felt to be even a small positive within school (attainments, friendships, relations with specific teachers or lessons).
- Times when the CYP has managed to get into school and what was different about those times.
- The most helpful thing that they (CYP or parent/carer) or someone else has done in dealing with the problem so far and how this was helpful.
- Other examples of times the CYP has found something difficult and has felt able to address this difficulty, take some actions and gain a subsequent sense of progress.
- What has helped in the past when other things have been difficult in school?



What can we do to help when pupils are displaying EBSA?

Step 2: PLAN

Once it is felt that a good enough picture has been captured from the pupil's point of view, as well as that of their parent or carer, and from key members of staff, this should then form the basis of a plan around positive and possible next steps.

Having an overview of the whole picture and the various factors involved should enable potential hypotheses to be formed around what is impacting on the CYP's engagement with school, and therefore where efforts should be targeted in terms of intervention.

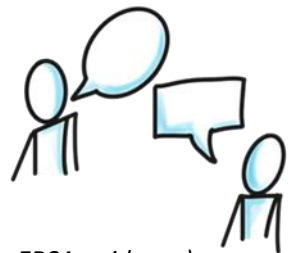


What can we do to help when pupils are displaying EBSA?

Step 2: PLAN

Recommended considerations and guiding principles in terms of planning

- Actively involve the pupil and their parent / carer as the plan is written, implemented and reviewed.
- Ensure that targets or next steps are realistic and achievable (overly ambitious plans are likely to fail).
- Ensure that targets or next steps are planned gradually, and that the pupil is not rushed into something before they are properly prepared for it.
- Try to maintain perseverance and a sense of hope and optimism for the CYP and those supporting them (accepting that new challenges may arise but continuing to work to find solutions to them).
- Anticipate challenges and proactively plan in additional support ahead of them (e.g. around times of transition such as towards the end of a holiday / start of a new term).
- Ensure that *all* staff working with the pupil are aware of the plan and of the strategies needed to try and make it work (including supply teachers).
- Try to find a way of maintaining attendance for the CYP, and where a period of absence has extended, aim to find suitable conditions for their return to school at the earliest opportunity.
- Reach out to parents where a period of pupil absence has extended, either via a home visit, or a series of phone calls as agreed with the parent, so as to maintain contact and continue relationship building; convey the message that the pupil is *still* a part of the school.
- Ensure that once a plan is drawn up, all parties feel able to agree to sticking to the actions until the next review period.
- Ensure the CYP has access to an identified member of staff who can be approached if anxiety becomes temporarily overwhelming in school.
- Agree with the CYP whether they would like regular 'check ins' from a member of staff throughout the day.
- Identify a safe place or base in school that the CYP can go to if needed, along with a plan around how this will be used.



What can we do to help when pupils are displaying EBSA?

Steps 3 and 4: DO & REVIEW

Interventions should be guided by the information gathered in the assessment process, targeted at the apparent causes of the CYP's emotional challenge, in a holistic way and with an overview of how different factors interplay with and influence each other.

The following grid is included here just to give some examples of how different sources of worry might be tackled via different types of intervention work (e.g. with the CYP, the family and with the school).

Please note that the grid is only intended as a basic *sample* of both causes and interventions.

Steps 3 and 4: DO & REVIEW

	Cause of worry	Intervention strategy (child)	Intervention strategy (home)	Intervention strategy (education setting)
Within child factors	<p>Sensory sensitivities causing significant discomfort</p> <p>Poor social understanding and / or social skills, creating friendship difficulties</p> <p>Anxious temperament / quick to experience panic, with resultant over reliance on predictability and routines</p>	<p>Talking to the CYP to gather in the details around this (e.g sensory profiling) and planning in development of coping strategies</p> <p>Proactively teaching social understanding and giving opportunities to practice social skills within a safe space</p> <p>Work with an adult (e.g. ELSA) to learn breathing techniques and / or mindfulness practices</p>	<p>Checking back with parent / carer about sensory profile at home – what helps to calm the CYP at home?</p> <p>Supporting the family to access suitable extra-curricular clubs to facilitate socialising outside of school</p> <p>Teaching breathing practices to parent / carer so they can support this at home; Working with the parent / carer to reduce their own anxiety so that they can better contain that of their child</p>	<p>Environmental adaptations to manage sensory stimuli; provision of space to calm in case of sensory overload</p> <p>Galvanising the support of pupils using inclusive practices such as Circle of Friends; Using peer buddies to support play during break times</p> <p>Using visual schedules and giving warning for any changes where possible; Proactively planning in additional support at known times of change and transition</p>
Within family factors	<p>Parent / carer is poorly or vulnerable in some way and CYP doesn't like leaving them</p> <p>The home environment is unpredictable and disorganised and doesn't provide a secure and reliably safe base.</p>	<p>Giving the CYP a supportive space in which to share their worries and giving appropriate reassurance; Proactive work on developing resilience and overcoming adversity</p> <p>As above; use competency profiling to develop a CYP's sense of inner strength.</p> <p>Support the CYP to look for 'signs of safety'</p>	<p>Helping the family to develop their support network; Signposting the family to appropriate additional sources of support</p> <p>As above; Eliciting appropriate support from outside agencies; refer for Video Interaction Guidance or other attachment aware intervention for the family</p>	<p>Member of staff assigned as 'key worker' to facilitate the 'saying goodbye to parent / carer' ritual each morning; Key worker agrees 'touching base' procedure with CYP on days when they are feeling more 'emotionally wobbly'</p> <p>Member of staff assigned as 'key worker' to give a sense of reliability and safety; Key worker supports CYP to 'decompress' and calm when they arrive in school, ensure they've had breakfast and that they have all they need for the school day.</p>
Within school factors	<p>CYP is being bullied</p> <p>CYP is finding lessons too difficult</p>	<p>Work with the CYP to better understand what's happened and of the impact on them; Work to re-build confidence and self-esteem; Use of role play to practice different responses to bullying behaviour</p> <p>Work with the CYP to address learning needs and strategies they can employ to help themselves progress; Use of Growth Mindset materials</p>	<p>Work with the parent / carer to reassure them that the issue is being properly dealt with</p> <p>Discuss with the parent / carer to share understanding and approach</p>	<p>Consider restorative justice approaches; Use buddy mentors to help monitor unstructured times; Work with the 'bullies' to develop understanding and empathy</p> <p>Ensure learning needs are properly understood via careful assessment; Review differentiation approaches used in class</p>