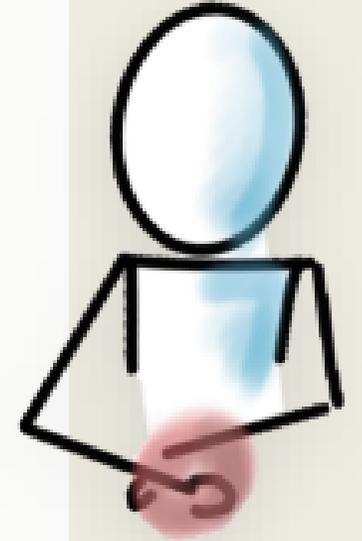


Is your child worried
about going to school?



Emotionally Based
EBSA
School Avoidance



Is your child worried about going to school?

We know that it is very important to try to help our children overcome these difficulties as soon as possible.

Absences mean that children miss out on learning and friendships, making it even more difficult when they come back.

What is EBSA?



Worrying or anxiety is a normal feeling that we all experience from time to time. It can even keep us safe from harm or help us perform in difficult situations.

Many children and young people worry about school. This is normal.

Anxieties are part of life and learning to deal with them is part of growing up.

However, sometimes anxiety or excessive worrying can become a problem especially when it stops people doing what they want or need to do.

WELLBEING IN EDUCATION



Sometimes anxiety and worries may lead to difficulties attending school.

If your child has high levels of anxiety and does not want to attend school, they may be experiencing what is known as Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA).

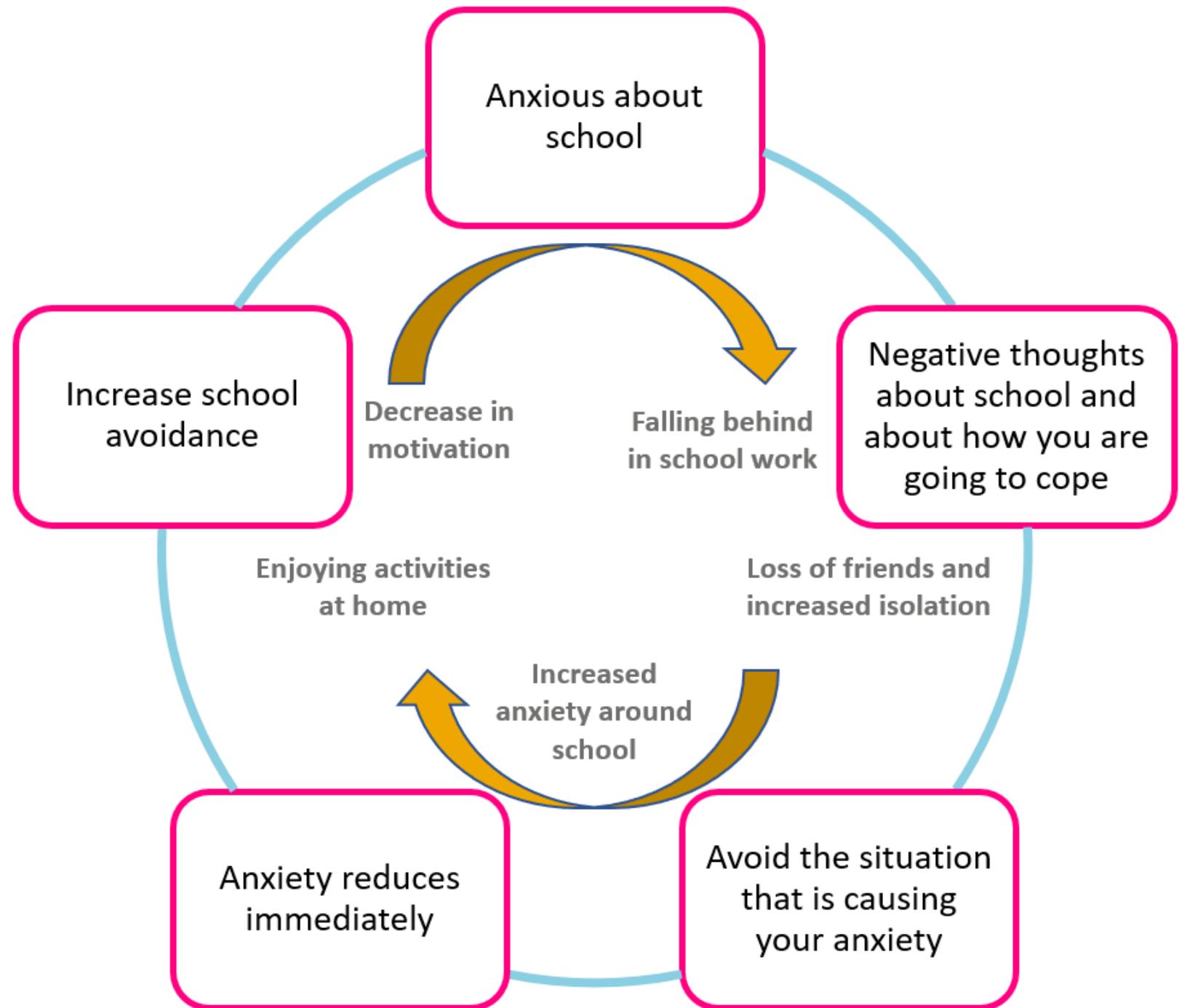
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Thanks to our colleagues in West Sussex for sharing this diagram showing how EBSA behaviours can develop.

The outside circle is the cycle of anxiety that can lead to school avoidance in the first place.

The inside circle shows the things that can keep non attendance going.

The longer the problems remain the more difficult it becomes to change the school avoiding behaviour.



Signs of EBSA



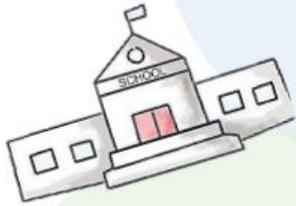
These could include:

- Fearfulness, anxiety, outbursts, or expression of negative feelings, when faced with the prospect of attending school.
- Your child may complain that they have abdominal pain, headache, sore throat, often with no signs of actual physical illness.
- They may complain of anxiety symptoms that include a racing heart, shaking, sweating, difficulty breathing, butterflies in the tummy or nausea, pins, and needles. The symptoms are typically worse on weekday mornings and absent at weekends and school holidays.

5 TIPS FOR FAMILIES

Have you noticed that your child...?

Is being overwhelmed by their emotions and this is making it very difficult to attend school?



Has a lot of tummy aches, headaches or other signs that might indicate anxiety?



Has experienced upsetting or difficult life events, for example a loss or a change that is making it harder for them to go to school?



Has sometimes found it difficult to attend, has a lot of time off, or is not going to school at all?

Is attending school but is really struggling: maybe they are finding it hard to separate from you or have worries that they can't put their finger on?



You are not alone...

To find support for you and your child, contact:

- School SENDCo / Family Support Liaison
- Emotional Wellbeing Hub 0345 600 2090

The rest of our 5 Tips for Families EBSA series has more things you can try straight away.



Noticing the signs of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)





Talking to your child about their worries

Any child currently avoiding school is likely to become anxious when they are asked to talk about their difficulties or returning to school.

A good place to start is to acknowledge that it may be difficult but that you would like to know what they think and feel. If they find it difficult to talk, you could ask them a specific question this might help them start to sort through their fears and feelings.

For example: What three things are you most worried about? Or What three things were you recently worried about? It is also important to focus on positives: What are the three best things about school?

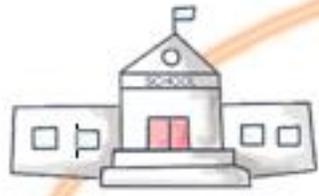


Talking to your child about their worries: continued...

Sometimes children may find it hard to tell you face to face, perhaps you could ask them to write it down, email or text you.

Some children also find it easier to draw how they are feeling. See next sheet for an activity that your child could complete; asking them to draw or write about what is worrying them (with your help as necessary).

We have also produced information booklets for children and young people. [Click here](#) to see more ideas for activities children and young people can do. Your child's school should be able to give you a copy.



School

Friendships



What is worrying me?
(write or draw your ideas under the headings)



Home and Family

Health



Concerns and Worries

Something else?...





What can you do?

One of the most important ways you can support your child is to calmly listen to them and acknowledge that their fears are real to them. [Click here](#) or see the next page for our 5 Tips for families sheet re answering anxious questions.

Remind them how important it is to attend school and reassure them that you and the school will work with them to make school a happier place for them.

Let the school know that there is a issue as soon as possible and work in partnership with the school to address the issue.

[Click here](#) to see our EBSA webpages. There are more resources aimed at helping you to support your child if they are experiencing anxious around attending school.

Answering Anxious Questions

5 TIPS FOR FAMILIES



Taking a minute for co-regulation will help you both feel calm: to put you in a better place to find answers to their question.

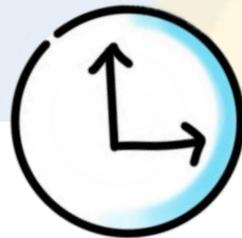
Be Curious

It's okay to explore deeper to develop understanding. This can help you find ways to problem solve together.



Time to Talk

Setting aside time to check in and talk about feelings can reduce worries building up.



Facts not Fiction

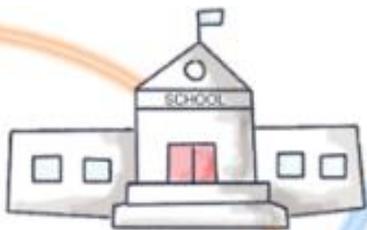
Being open and honest will reduce your child needing to fill in the gaps with their own assumptions and catastrophising.

Aim to accept your child's questions, feelings, or thoughts. **Validate** how they feel to show that you have heard them.



When attending a meeting to support your child or young person, it can be helpful to record your EBSA concerns in one place...

School



Home and Family



Friendships



Health



Something else?...



Family Concerns and Worries

[Click here for more resources](#)

A plan to support your child.....

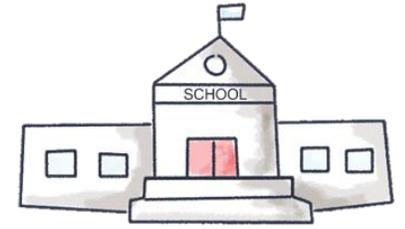
It is really important that all adults, at home and school, work together to agree a clear and consistent approach. [Click here](#) to see an example plan.

It is possible that at the beginning your child may show more unhappiness and you should prepare yourself for this possibility. It's important that the adults show a positive 'united front' and if you do have any concerns you should talk about this with the school staff involved. It is likely that there could be difficulties implementing the plan and these should be anticipated, and solutions found.

Try to keep optimistic. If your child fails to attend school on one day, start again the next day. It is also important to remember there is likely to be more difficulty after a school holiday, period of illness or after the weekend.

You may feel tempted to change schools, however research tells us that often difficulties will re-emerge in the new school and whenever possible it is normally better to try to resolve the issue in the current school.

What can you expect schools to do?



Listen carefully to you and your child. They should acknowledge the challenges faced by your child and you as their parent.

Maintain close contact with you and your child, even during extended periods of non-attendance.
An agreed member of staff should be named as a link person.

Work in partnership with you and your child to find out what difficulties your child is experiencing. Find ways of making school a happier place and improve their attendance.

Hold meetings to devise a plan in conjunction with you and your child.
The plan should include what the next steps will be.

Respond to any school-based needs.
This could include support with academic issues or support with social relationships, addressing issues such as e.g. bullying etc.

Consider the support your child might require upon arrival at school. This might include meeting with a friend at a specific place and time, using a quiet space to settle before school starts, engaging in a preferred activity or being given a responsibility such as a monitor role.

If difficulties persist the school should consider requesting involvement from other professionals.

[Click here](#) to see the Suffolk Guidance for Education Settings

Finally, as a parent or carer it can be really difficult to see your child unhappy.

[Click here](#) for some more ideas for parents or carers to consider

Make sure that you have someone to talk to too. This could be a friend, family member or an organisation such as those listed on the EBSA webpages.

Advice for Parents

5 TIPS FOR FAMILIES

Be kind to yourself – know you are doing the best you can and it's okay to take some time away from worries. Have time to do something you enjoy and recharge your batteries.

At the most difficult points, we know it takes every ounce of strength to stay calm, so it can be helpful to have some 'go to' **calming phrases**. You can make some up with your child at times when you are relaxed together.

Do try to communicate calmly, even if you don't feel calm. Good advice to follow is "SLOW, LOW, LOW" (slow down, lower volume, lower tone).

Setting aside clear time for learning, within usual school hours, will keep the **links with learning**, making it easier for them when they are in school.

Creating a plan together, that everyone agrees to, can help your child to be at school. Our 5 Tips Series has ideas to include in your plan.



Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)



The following link will take you to a useful resource shared by Dr Tina Rae on Twitter.

Tina is sharing her Sunday evening and Monday morning plans from one of her recent books about EBSA.

[Helping parents and carers who may also feel anxious trying to support their children back to school.](#)

Emotionally Based
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School Avoidance



These resources have been produced in partnership with education settings, families and colleagues across Suffolk.

For further information and resources please see the Suffolk County Council webpages:

www.suffolk.gov.uk/children-families-and-learning/wellbeing-for-education-return

www.suffolk.gov.uk/children-families-and-learning/pts