

# Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

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# Introductions and Self-Care



- Considerations:**
- Self-care** and emotional security is a priority for all of us.
    - Take time for yourself if you need it during session.
  - Confidentiality** –we may bring examples of cases and our own experiences. Share what you feel comfortable to share with the group. Please respect the confidentiality of the group.

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# What is EBSA?



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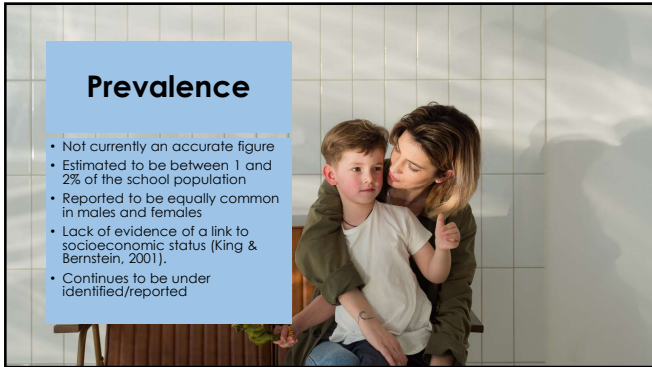
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**Prevalence**

- Not currently an accurate figure
- Estimated to be between 1 and 2% of the school population
- Reported to be equally common in males and females
- Lack of evidence of a link to socioeconomic status (King & Bernstein, 2001).
- Continues to be under identified/reported

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**Why understanding EBSA is important**

- More likely to have long term mental health difficulties.
- Associated with lower academic achievement.
- Lower sense of wellbeing
- More likely to drop out of school completely.
- Social difficulties

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**Impact of understanding on our use of language**

What language is used in your school around EBSA?  
 Is there a common language around this?  
 What would be the benefits of a common language?

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## How does EBSA develop?



What secondary factors could there be?

- Additional time with parents/carer.
- Academic pressures.
- Anxious situations at school.
- Less demands at home.
- Enjoyable/relaxing activities at home.

Somerset Educational Psychology Service, 2021

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## Risk factors for EBSA

School Factors	Family Factors	Child factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bullying (the most common school factor)</li> <li>Difficulties in specific subject</li> <li>Transition to secondary school, key stage or change of school</li> <li>Structure of the school day</li> <li>Academic demands/high levels of pressure and performance-orientated classrooms</li> <li>Transport or journey to school</li> <li>Exams</li> <li>Peer or staff relationship difficulties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Separation and divorce or change in family dynamic</li> <li>Parent physical and mental health problems</li> <li>Overprotective parenting style</li> <li>Dysfunctional family interactions</li> <li>Being the youngest child in the family</li> <li>Loss and Bereavement</li> <li>High levels of family stress</li> <li>Family history of EBSA</li> <li>Young carer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Temperamental style- reluctance to interact and withdrawal from unfamiliar settings, people or objects</li> <li>Fear of failure and poor self confidence</li> <li>Physical illness</li> <li>Age (5-6, 11-12 &amp; 13-14 years)</li> <li>Learning Difficulties, developmental problems or Autism Spectrum Condition if unidentified or unsupported</li> <li>Separation Anxiety from parent</li> <li>Traumatic events</li> </ul>

Somerset Educational Psychology Service, 2021

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## Creation of resilience

School factors	Family factors	Child factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing safety and security</li> <li>Having positive school experiences.</li> <li>Positive relationships with staff.</li> <li>Partnership working</li> <li>Person centred planning</li> <li>Positive experiences where they can do well.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feeling listened to and understood.</li> <li>Development of parenting skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased self esteem and self-efficacy</li> </ul>

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## Riley – Year 1

Riley has a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Condition. Riley had a positive experience in the Foundation Stage, and although he was reluctant to start school, a flexible timetable and child-centred curriculum meant that he was soon happily attending school on a fulltime basis. However, Riley has had difficulties adapting to the transition into Year 1. He has a **new teacher, a new curriculum, and a completely different daily routine**. In particular, Riley has found **eating his lunch with Key Stage 1** very challenging. He also finds the **new, and considerably bigger, playground overwhelming**. Before his school refusal behaviour started, Riley had become **extremely anxious in the run up to lunch time**, despite the fact that the school have made alternative arrangements for him. Riley's parents are very concerned about his absence, and are proactive working with the school to get Riley back into school.

1. EBSA – environment

2. EBSA – social / evaluation

3. Separation anxiety

4. Truancy

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## Blake – Year 8

Blake's attendance difficulties started since he started his new secondary school. Blake had difficulties making friends when transitioning to secondary school; **many of his friends from primary school attend another school on the other side of town**. When in Year 7 Blake reported to his parents that some of the **older children had been calling him names on the school bus**. Since joining secondary school Blake has become **increasingly anxious around others** and often **makes excuses not to see his friends from primary school on the weekends**. Blake's nan looks after him during his absence. Blake is **engaged in his learning** and will often research topics of his own interest and create project books. Blake's nan has suggested that they send these books into school for his teachers to see, but Blake is resistant because he **worries that they'll think the project books are "stupid" and "babyish"**.

1. EBSA – environment

2. EBSA – social / evaluation

3. Separation anxiety

4. Truancy

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## Push/Pull Factors

Push (towards attending school)	Pull (away from school. Home factors).
Pull (away from school. School factors).	Push (towards staying at home)/

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## CYP voices

"I wish my teacher knew that I am lonely because my mum is not around a lot and I don't have any friends to play with."

"I wish my teacher knew that sometimes when I'm not concentrating I am thinking about how I miss my nan."

"I wish my teacher knew that my Dad might get diagnosed with cancer this week and I am worried."

"I wish my teacher knew that I have ADHD and am different from everyone else in my class."

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## Supporting those with EBSA

Think: What are we already doing that is working well? What can we build on?

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## Psychological factors

- 1. Developing feelings of safety, security and belonging**
  - Consistent staff and learning spaces
  - Being removed from hostile peers
  - Access to small, quiet and welcoming spaces
- 2. Increased confidence, self-esteem and value of self**
  - Personalised rewards
  - Individual responsibilities
  - Opportunities to develop admiration from peers
- 3. Aspiration and motivation**
  - Discussing career aspirations
  - Work experience
  - Meaningful learning experiences

Joshua Seong / Verywell, 2022.

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## Assessment Cycle

**Assess**  
Gain a full understanding of the various aspects of play (links, school and family)

**Plan**  
Based on information gathered plan for a realistic small reintegration

**Do**  
Ensure resources and support is in place, good communication with school, family and others

**Review**  
Monitor the progress made and adjust the plan for next steps

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## Ways we can help gather info and plan interventions (assess and plan)

- Working collaboratively with home. Parents have often done a lot to get their CYP to the school. Avoid blame and understand that EBSA is complex.
- Keamey and Silverman (1990) found interventions were most successful when based on an individualised approach to EBSA.
- Using CYP views to inform planning. Use of person centred planning/ideal classroom activities/externalisation to elicit views and feelings around school.
- Make sure plans are realistic and achievable.
- Stick to the plan. If it is going well, don't be tempted to jump ahead.

Wellbeing cards

- Card sort activity developed by Gemma Holden
- Grounded in resilience research
- Can provide insight into child's experience of school
- Can form start of child-centred action plan.

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## Interventions-what is the driving force behind avoidance? (plan and do)

- Avoidance of things that cause anxiety.**  
Psychoeducation around worry and anxiety, and how this affects how we think/behaviour including relaxation strategies.  
Use of an exposure hierarchy (see previous slide).
- Escape of sticky social situations.**  
Social skills training, buddying or mentoring, role playing.
- Spending more time with parents/carers.**  
Work with parents or carers. Establish routines, focus on positive behaviour, make time for connection outside of school, rewards for attendance, reduce attention for non-attendance, help parents use problem solving.
- Having a better time at home!**  
Make school as stimulating as it can be, capitalise on interests, reduce attention for staying home and avoid rewarding with screen time etc...

More ideas at: [Emotionally Based School Avoidance | West Sussex Services for Schools](#)  
[Emotionally Based School Avoidance \(EBSA\) | Support Services for Education](#)

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Whole school approach to mental health. How does this fit in to your understanding of EBSA? How could this be used to effectively support EBSA approaches in your school? Consider auditing if useful.

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### Key ideas for supporting EBSA

- Consider relationship based approaches and developing mentally healthy school (Anna Freud).
- Remember that transitions can be tricky and help plan for these.
- Normalise anxiety and avoid over labelling the child as "different".
- Consider a "joined up" and possibly person centred planning approach.
- Consider the use of more targeted support, such as CBT or wider support networks for family and CYP.
- Use clear action planning and ensure that a reintegration plan is in place for the CYP.

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Any questions or thoughts to share?



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Feedback

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/PXFHT8S>



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**OPERATION ENCOMPASS** Teachers' Advice and Helpline

Children are now recognised as victims of domestic abuse.....  
Are you concerned about any of your children that may be experiencing domestic abuse?

Would you like FREE access to an Educational or Clinical Psychologist to talk through how you are supporting these children in your school?  
No paperwork  
No waiting  
No threshold  
But confidential | expert advice at no cost!

Call the advice and helpline 8 am to 1 pm, Monday to Friday

**0204 513 9990**

(charges at local rates)

Supported by the Home Office

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## Contact Details

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 0300 303 5233  
[www.psychologyassociates.org.uk](http://www.psychologyassociates.org.uk)

  
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A wide variety of free resources are available on our website and social media platforms.

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## References

Kearney, C.A., & Silverman, W.K. (1990). A Preliminary Analysis of a Functional Model of Assessment and Treatment for School Refusal Behavior. *Behavior Modification*, 14, 340 - 366.

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