# Reducing Emotionally Based School Avoidance - guidance for Head Teachers and Senior Leaders

*Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is a broad umbrella term used to describe a group of children and young people who have severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences from school.*

(Emotionally Based School Avoidance: Good practice guidance for schools and support agencies. West Sussex Educational Psychology Service

Updated January 2022 [Emotionally Based School Avoidance | West Sussex Services for Schools](https://schools.westsussex.gov.uk/Page/10483))

Although official figures relating to the prevalence of EBSA are not available nationally, following partial closure of educational settings during the COVID-19 pandemic, along with other Local Authorities, we have noticed a rise in requests for support service involvement for children and young people presenting with anxiety in relation to school attendance.

EBSA is often complex and multi-faceted. EBSA is the result of a combination of predisposing factors and maintaining factors which are largely unique to the individual child, their family and school context, and which interact with a particular trigger. Triggers commonly include: transition between primary and secondary school; loss or bereavement within the family; a change in friendship groups or bullying. Many pupils may find it harder to return to school following a prolonged absence, due to illness or a school holiday. The signs and associated responses of EBSA can present in a variety of ways for different pupils.

This guidance document has been prepared in order to: -

1. Summarise the best practice implications for settings of findings from the EBSA research
2. Demonstrate how the best practice implications for EBSA link to [leading and develop](https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/whole-school-approach/england/showcasing-activity-for-ofsted/)ing a whole-school approach to support mental health and wellbeing (Education inspection framework - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
3. Link best practice indicators to sources of support, guidance and training
4. Provide a best practice audit tool to identify areas for further development

References:

Nuttall, C. & Woods, K. (2013). Effective intervention for school refusal behaviour. Educational Psychology in Practice, 29(4), 347-366.

Kearney, C. A. & Silverman, W. K. (1995). Family environment of youngsters with school refusal behaviour: a synopsis with implications for assessment and treatment. American Journal of Family Therapy.23, 59-72.

Gulliford, A., & Miller, A. (2015). Coping with life by coping with school? School refusal in young people. In T. Cline, A. Gulliford, & S. Birch (Eds.), Educational Psychology: Topics in Applied Psychology (2nd ed., pp. 283–305). Routledge.

# Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) Best Practice Guidance Tool

[Promoting children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1020249/Promoting_children_and_young_people_s_mental_health_and_wellbeing.pdf)

| How does this link to Public Health England’s 8 principles to promoting a whole school or college approach to mental health and wellbeing? | Best practice indicators for EBSA | RedAmberGreen (RAG) What is working well? | Example sources of support | What do we want to achieve? What needs to happen? | Lead person & reviewdate |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Leadership and management that supports and champions efforts to promote emotional health and wellbeing | A whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing is actively promoted by the senior leadership team |  | Wigan EPS Senior Mental Health Lead Training[Select a course | Senior Mental Health Leads (leedsbeckett.ac.uk)](https://smhl.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/SelectCourse?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIzLyNqI3z-QIVD-3tCh0UEQ0fEAAYBCAAEgI2jPD_BwE)Emotionally Friendly Schools [Home | Emotionally Friendly Settings](https://www.emotionallyfriendly.co.uk/) |  |  |
| Identifying need and monitoring the impact of interventions | Attendance monitoring systems are in place to ensure that patterns and concerns are identified at the earliest possible stage |  | Wendi?[Improving attendance: good practice for schools and multi-academy trusts - Case study - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/improving-attendance-good-practice-for-schools-and-multi-academy-trusts) |  |  |
| Working with parents and carers | A clear message has been sent to all parents / carers to support them in noticing the early signs of EBSA and who to contact in school |  | <https://www.wigan.gov.uk/pub/SchoolDownloads/EBSA-parent-information-sheet.pptx>[School Anxiety and Refusal | Parents' Guide to Support | YoungMinds](https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/school-anxiety-and-refusal/) |  |  |
| Curriculum teaching and learning to promote resilience and support social and emotional learning | Children and young people access curriculum teaching about anxiety which presents normal but challenging stressors and associated physiological responses as helpful and controllableA transition programme is available to support all children and young people through periods of loss and change - big feelings associated with loss and change are normalised through the social and emotional learning curriculum |  | [Anxiety Webinar for Young People - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkqTXCB3P-A) (CAMHS Link Team)<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/moving-up-the-transition-to-secondary-school/>[Training & Events | Be Wigan | Services for Schools](https://be.wigan.gov.uk/Training) EPS Transition Training |  |  |
| An ethos and environment that promotes respect and values diversity | The physical school environment is designed to evoke feelings of calm, nurture and wellbeing and quiet spaces are available – children and young people have been consulted on this |  | [Targeted Education Support Service (TESS) (wigan.gov.uk)](https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Education/Educational-support/TESS.aspx) |  |  |
| Staff development to support their own wellbeing and that of students | Staff have accessed training on EBSA and have an awareness of how to notice the early signs and intervene |  | <https://www.wigan.gov.uk/pub/SchoolDownloads/EBSA-with-audio.pptx><https://www.wigan.gov.uk/pub/SchoolDownloads/EBSA-school-information-sheet.pptx>[Training & Events | Be Wigan | Services for Schools](https://be.wigan.gov.uk/Training) EPS EBSA training |  |  |
| Enabling student voice to influence decisions | From the earliest stage, the voice of the child is sought - the child is actively involved in identifying strategies to support them to manage in school, and they are supported to attend or contribute to meetings |  | [Training & Events | Be Wigan | Services for Schools](https://be.wigan.gov.uk/Training) EPS Talking Mats training<https://www.wigan.gov.uk/pub/SchoolDownloads/EBSA-younger-person-sheet.pptx><https://www.wigan.gov.uk/pub/SchoolDownloads/EBSA-young-person-sheet.pptx>[Children Emotionally Based School Avoidance EBSA.pdf](file:///C%3A%5CTEMP%5CChildren%20Emotionally%20Based%20School%20Avoidance%20EBSA.pdf)[Young People - Emotionally Based School Avoidance.pdf](file:///C%3A%5CTEMP%5CYoung%20People%20-%20Emotionally%20Based%20School%20Avoidance.pdf) |  |  |
| Targeted support and appropriate referral | Groups of children and young people potentially at risk during any transition / change are identified early and provided with additional support e.g. Children Looked After (CLA), children with autism, children with SEND |  | [Emotionally Based School Avoidance | West Sussex Services for Schools](https://schools.westsussex.gov.uk/Page/10483) EBSA guidance document pp.37-40[Training & Events | Be Wigan | Services for Schools](https://be.wigan.gov.uk/Training) EPS Transition Training |  |  |
|  | There are buddy systems and peer support mechanisms in place to reduce potential for social isolation in school |  | [Targeted Education Support Service (TESS) (wigan.gov.uk)](https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Education/Educational-support/TESS.aspx) |  |  |
|  | As soon as concern is raised, a two-way home- school collaboration begins, facilitated through Earliest Help - the format and frequency of contact is agreed and clarified early |  | [Thresholds of Need (wiganlscb.com)](https://www.wiganlscb.com/Professionals/Thresholds-of-Need-in-Wigan.aspx) |  |  |
|  | Following early identification, school- based assessment (involving the child / young person, parents / carers and key staff) explores factors leading to, triggering and maintaining the difficulties, exploring all four areas of the SEND code of practice |  | [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25)[Training & Events | Be Wigan | Services for Schools](https://be.wigan.gov.uk/Training) Graduated approach training[Emotionally Based School Avoidance | West Sussex Services for Schools](https://schools.westsussex.gov.uk/Page/10483) EBSA guidance document pp.19-24 |  |  |
|  | As part of a Graduated Approach, external agency involvement and collaboration begins early  |  | [Targeted Education Support Service (TESS) (wigan.gov.uk)](https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Education/Educational-support/TESS.aspx)[Educational psychology (wigan.gov.uk)](https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Education/Educational-support/Education-Psychology.aspx) |  |  |
|  | A key adult is available to co-ordinate the development and frequent review of a personalised, strength-based action planThe plan will: -* address the specific issues identified during the assessment
* emphasise routine and detail small, incremental steps towards increased attendance and engagement
* prioritise learning and social inclusion
* include planning for potential setbacks and challenges
* include provision for teaching / coaching in skills for coping and self-management (breathing techniques, mindfulness, balanced thinking strategies)

The plan may need to: -* include bespoke arrangements for journeys to and from school
* introduce some flexibility into the timetable
* introduce some temporary blended, off-site or pre-teaching learning opportunities
 |  | [Emotionally Based School Avoidance | West Sussex Services for Schools](https://schools.westsussex.gov.uk/Page/10483) EBSA guidance document pp.24-26 |  |  |
|  | Staff working closely with children and young people presenting with EBSA receive support and supervision  |  | [ten-ways-to-support-school-staff-wellbeing.pdf (annafreud.org)](https://www.annafreud.org/media/12876/ten-ways-to-support-school-staff-wellbeing.pdf)[Solution Circles | Group Solutions | Circle Solutions (inclusive-solutions.com)](https://inclusive-solutions.com/circles/solution-circles/) |  |  |
|  | Children / young people in school presenting with EBSA have regular access to a designated key adult who is skilled in providing person-centred mentoring for the child / young person  |  | [Person-centred Thinking Tools | HSA | Consultancy | Training (helensandersonassociates.co.uk)](http://helensandersonassociates.co.uk/person-centred-practice/person-centred-thinking-tools/)Emotionally Friendly Schools manual section 3: Exploring the child / young person’s world [Home | Emotionally Friendly Settings](https://www.emotionallyfriendly.co.uk/) |  |  |