# 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 | Red  Amber  Green (RAG)  What is working well? | Example sources of support | What do we want to achieve? What needs to happen? | Lead person & review  date |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 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 controllable  A 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:\TEMP\Children%20Emotionally%20Based%20School%20Avoidance%20EBSA.pdf)  [Young People - Emotionally Based School Avoidance.pdf](file:///C:\TEMP\Young%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 plan  The 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/) |  |  |