SEND Newsletter

Understanding Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is when a child finds it difficult to attend school due to emotional distress such as anxiety, worry or feeling overwhelmed.

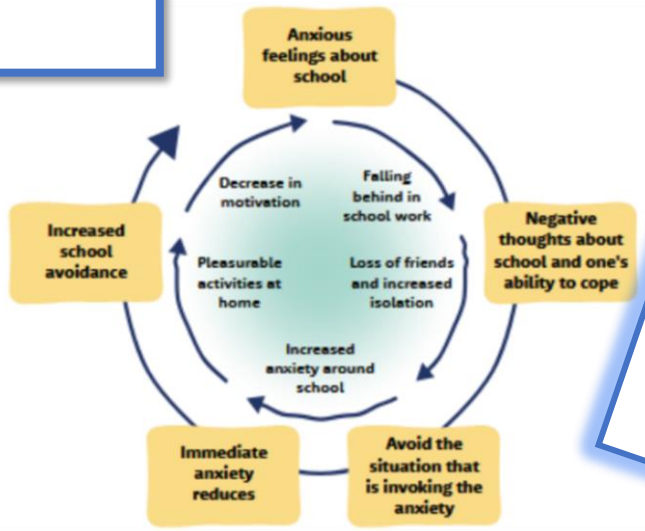
EBSA is not a diagnosis. It is a descriptive term used to help identify when a child's emotions are affecting their ability to attend school. "EBSA isn't about not wanting to learn. It's about a child feeling emotionally overwhelmed."

Parental Responsibility

School attendance is a legal parental responsibility. School staff can support children once they are here, but school cannot physically bring a child through the gates. There is no quick fix or magic strategy that replaces getting a child into school. Parents play a crucial role in helping children face worries and develop resilience.

"We're not asking you to remove anxiety. We're asking you to help your child move through it."

How EBSA Develops



"Anxiety reduces through exposure, not avoidance."

"Every day away from school can make the next day feel bigger and scarier."

The Ladder of Strength and Courage

The Ladder of Strength and Courage is a simple way to help children gradually face situations that make them feel anxious or worried.
It works by breaking down a difficult situation into small, manageable steps. Each step helps the child build confidence and develop the skills needed to cope with their worries.
This model is based on the idea of gradual exposure. Instead of avoiding something that causes anxiety, children practise facing it slowly and safely, one step at a time.

"I know this feels really hard. I can see you're worried. We are still going to school and I will help you."



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When Mornings Feel Very Difficult
It is important that adults remain calm and consistent. Children take emotional cues from the adults around them.

Sleep and School Attendance
Sleep plays a very important role in children's emotional wellbeing. When children do not get enough sleep, it can make worries and anxiety feel much bigger and harder to manage.

The **Sleep Charity** highlights that good sleep routines help children to:

- manage emotions more easily
- concentrate and learn in school
- feel calmer and more resilient
- cope better with challenges and worries

Poor sleep can lead to:

- increased anxiety
- difficulty waking in the morning
- low mood or irritability
- struggles with concentration
- school avoidance becoming more likely.

For children experiencing EBSA, **a consistent sleep routine is one of the most important things families can support at home.**

Top Tips for Healthy Sleep
The Sleep Charity recommends:
Keep a regular bedtime routine
Try to keep bedtimes and wake-up times similar every day, including weekends.
Reduce screen time before bed
Phones, tablets and gaming can make it harder for the brain to switch off. Try to stop screens at least **one hour before bedtime**.
Create a calm bedtime routine
Quiet activities such as reading, listening to music, or a bath can help children relax before sleep.
Make the bedroom sleep-friendly
Bedrooms should ideally be cool, dark and quiet.
Avoid late-night snacks or caffeine
Sugary drinks, chocolate and caffeine can affect sleep.
Encourage independence in sleep
Children should fall asleep in their own bed so they feel confident staying there through the night.

"Children borrow confidence from the adults supporting them."

What Should My Child's Attendance Be?
Regular attendance is extremely important for a child's learning, friendships and wellbeing.
The Department for Education expects children to attend school **at least 95% of the time**.
This means:

Attendance	What it means
100%	Excellent attendance
96–100%	Very good attendance
95%	Expected attendance
90–94%	Concerning – support may be needed
Below 90%	Persistent absence

A child with **90% attendance misses around 4 weeks of school each year.**

Children with **80% attendance miss around one day every week**, which can have a significant impact on learning, friendships and confidence.

If Your Child is Struggling with Sleep
If sleep is regularly affecting your child's wellbeing or school attendance, please speak with school so we can support you.

You can also find helpful advice and resources from **The Sleep Charity**:
https://thesleepcharity.org.uk

"Children don't need to feel ready before they attend school. Feeling ready often comes after the first few steps."

"Children learn courage from the adults who guide them."