

WORKING WITH EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL AVOIDANCE (EBSA)

BY THE PSYCHOLOGY IN SCHOOLS TEAM

WHAT IS EMOTIONALLY - BASED SCHOOL AVOIDANCE (EBSA)?

EBSA is the term used when students have severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors.

“School refusal occurs when stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience and when ‘pull’ factors that promote school non-attendance overcome the ‘push’ factors that encourage attendance” (Thambirajah et al, 2008)

WHAT CAUSES EBSA?



- The current pandemic
- Pre Covid-19 factors which may contribute to school avoidance include:

Pupil factors

Family factors

School factors

Behavior is like an iceberg

What you see...

Am I safe?
Am I loved?
Do I matter?
I feel angry.
I feel sad.
I feel scared.
I feel hungry or tired.
I am feeling overwhelmed.
I have developmental delays.
I can't communicate any other way!
I feel overstimulated. I have sensory needs.
I need understanding or help!

(What they're really saying)

www.consciousdiscipline.com

www.ignitelearningllc.blogspot.com

- Be **curious**: what might lie beneath the surface?
- There is likely to be lots going on for the young person that we may just not be aware of

Factors associated with vulnerability of EBSA

School Factors

Bullying (the most common school factor)

Difficulties in specific subject

Transition to secondary school, key stage or change of school

Structure of the school day

Academic demands/high levels of pressure and performance- orientated classrooms

Transport or journey to school

Exams

Peer or staff relationship difficulties

Family Factors

Separation and divorce or change in family dynamic

Parent physical and mental health problems

Overprotective parenting style

Dysfunctional family interactions

Being the youngest child in the family

Loss and Bereavement

High levels of family stress

Family history of EBSA

Young carer

Child Factors

Temperamental style- reluctance to interact and withdrawal from unfamiliar settings, people or objects

Fear of failure and poor self confidence

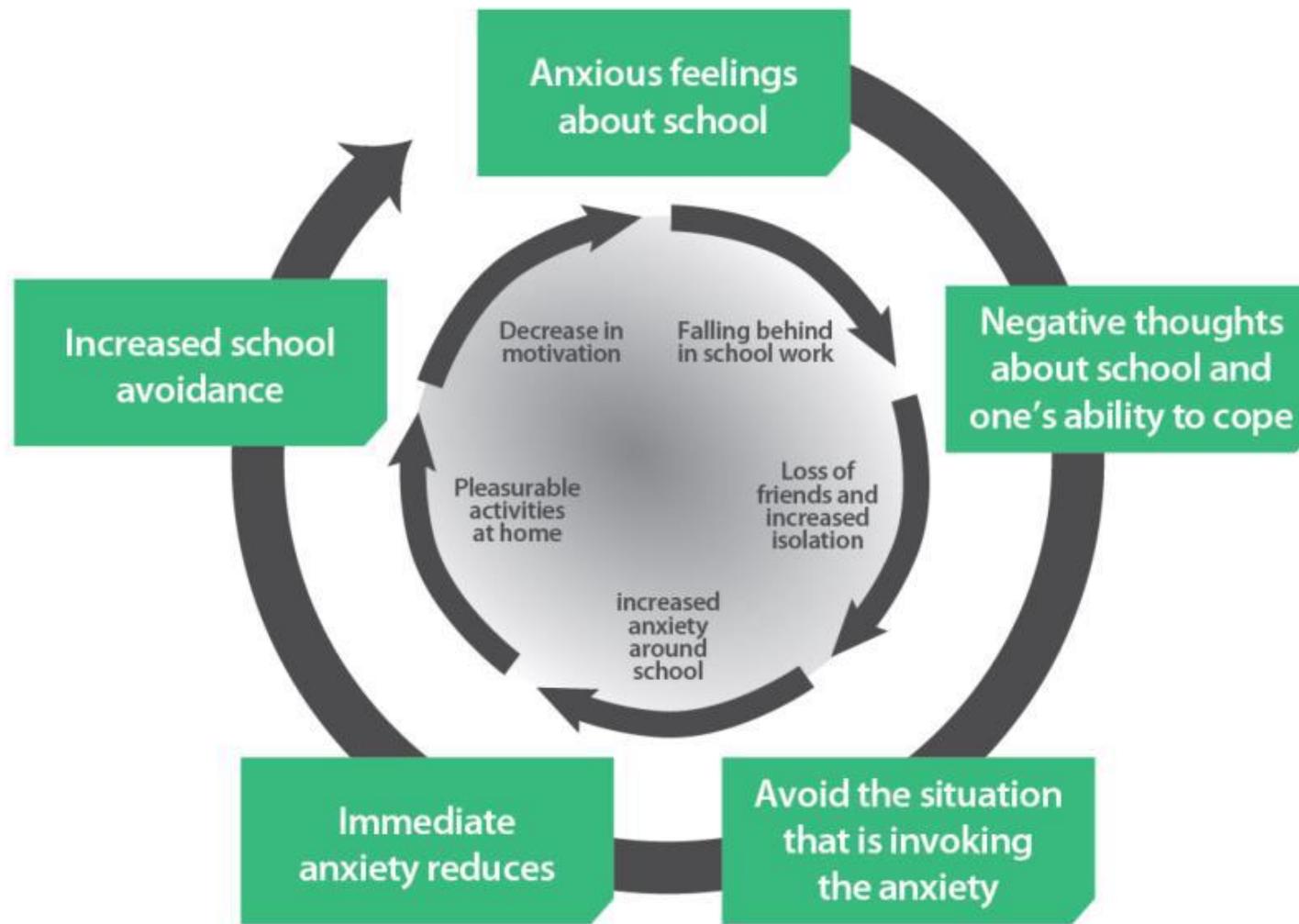
Physical illness

Age (5-6, 11-12 & 13-14 years)

Learning Difficulties, developmental problems or Autism Spectrum Condition if unidentified or unsupported

Separation Anxiety from parent

Traumatic events

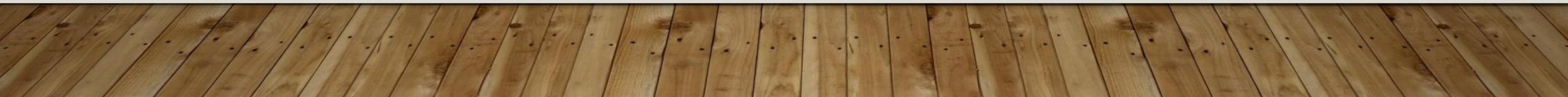


ASSESSMENT OF EBSA

When a young person comes into the clinic this is an important opportunity to help them feel listened to and empowered to seek support and make positive changes

- ‘Thank you for coming in today and sharing’
- ‘It sounds like it has been really tough’
- ‘I can see you are struggling and we want to help support you’

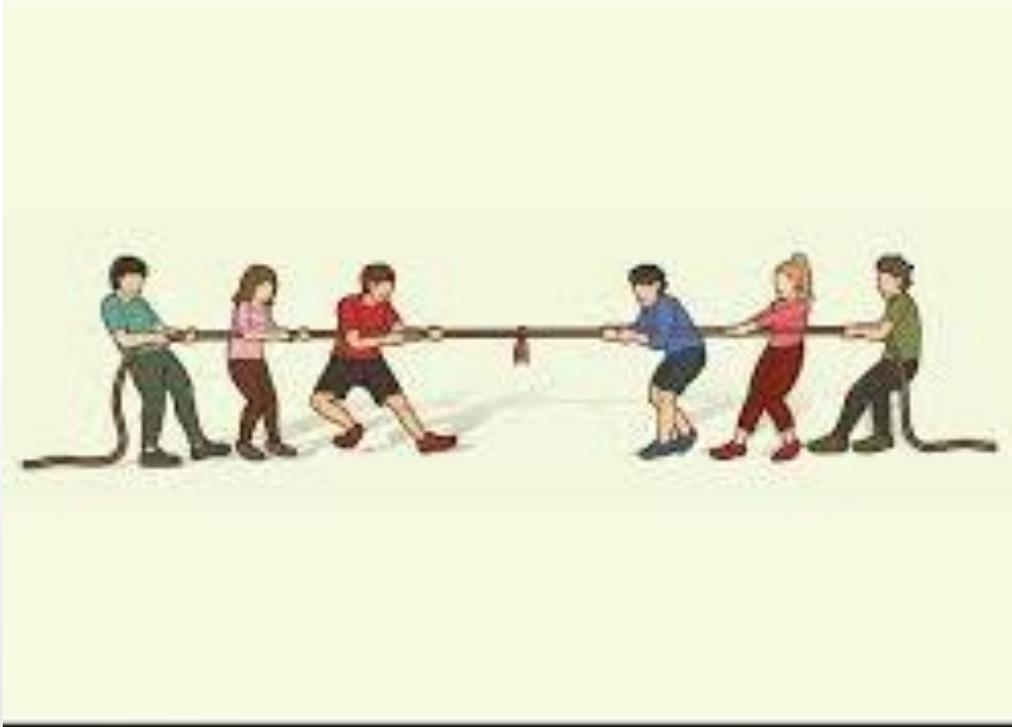
Key areas to gain information on:

- Emotions underlying and maintaining school avoidance
 - Any additional SEND needs
 - Push and pull factors around coming to school
 - ‘Trusted adults’ at school and at home
 - Current helpful coping strategies and unhelpful strategies
- 

WHAT CAN HELP?

1. Address the issues that are causing /feeding into the school avoidance, look at push and pull factors
2. Prepare the student to face their fears by teaching ways to cope with anxiety:
 - Understand what is happening with their body's alert system
 - Relaxation techniques
3. Help make a plan for gradually getting back to school
4. Share strategies with carers/key school staff so they can support the pupil to use these

PUSH AND PULL FACTORS



- Reduce those which pull them away from school
- Increase the factors that push them towards school

HOW TO INCREASE 'PUSH' FACTORS



Develop ambition and motivation (values)



Increasing confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, value in themselves



Develop feelings of safety, security and a sense of belonging



Having positive experiences where they can succeed



Hold positive relationships with peers, staff & other professionals

DEVELOP ANXIETY MANAGEMENT SKILLS

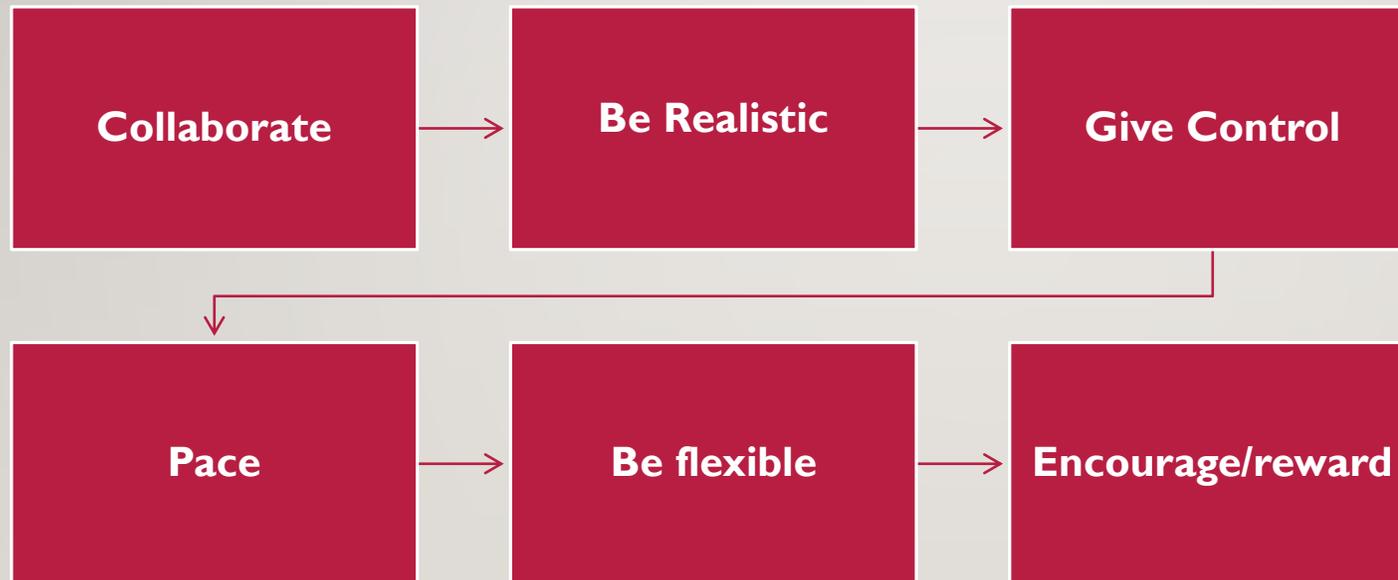
Draw on coping skills and strategies they already know help or have used before

- Relaxation- breathing techniques (box breathing), 5 senses grounding activity
- Mindfulness
- Positive coping statements and images

For more information for young people on these strategies:

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-to-make-a-self-soothe-box/>

MAKING A SUCCESSFUL GRADED EXPOSURE PLAN



COMMUNICATING WITH SCHOOL, PARENTS AND CARERS

- Using the network of support around a young person is vital to supporting with EBSA
- Team work
- ***Parents/carers may have a role with:***
 - Helping young person develop coping skills and practicing these
 - Avoiding the common traps of reassurance and colluding, and providing supportive encouragement to gradually face fears
 - Increasing the push factors and motivators

COMMUNICATING WITH SCHOOL, PARENTS AND CARERS

School may have a role with:

- Gaining valuable information
- Removing or reducing barriers
- Increasing push factors and motivators
- Friendship issues and bullying
- Supporting a graduated plan
- Reinforcing wellbeing strategies at school
- Safeguarding/wellbeing lead; Attendance officer; EWO; school can support referrals for inclusion/CISS/Ed psych

SUMMARY

01

Intervene Early

02

Environment

- Create a predictable, positive and compassionate environment

03

Work together

- Work with YP, family, all key school staff / other agencies

FURTHER INFORMATION ON EBSA

West Sussex resources – great for further detail about understanding the problem, working with the student, family and other staff, and ideas where there are additional needs

- [guidance on working with EBSA](#)

USEFUL TOOLKITS

- For toolkits for communicating with young people and for education staff, see:

<https://www.lpft.nhs.uk/young-people/lincolnshire/professionals/how-can-i-help>

- For a guide to support emotional regulation in the classroom, see:

<https://www.family-action.org.uk/content/uploads/2020/07/Toolkit-for-Regulation.pdf>

USEFUL RESOURCES: (SOUTH WEST YORKSHIRE NHS TRUST)

The Child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) have developed some great resources for children, young people and parents/carers.

For children and young people:

- [Going back to school – a guide for children and young people](#)
- [Supporting a friend through loss – a guide for children and young people](#)
- [Managing friendships and relationships – a guide for children](#)
- [Managing friendships and relationships – a guide for teenagers/young people](#)
- [Managing separation anxiety after coronavirus – a quick guide for children and young people](#)
- [School after lockdown – a guide for primary school students](#)
- [Transitioning from lockdown to a ‘new normal’ – a guide for 11-14 year olds](#)
- [Transitioning from lockdown to a ‘new normal’ a guide for 14+ year olds](#)