

# Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)

TA Academy 13.11.25

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# Plan for today

Attendance Matters



Every Day Counts...

What is EBSNA?

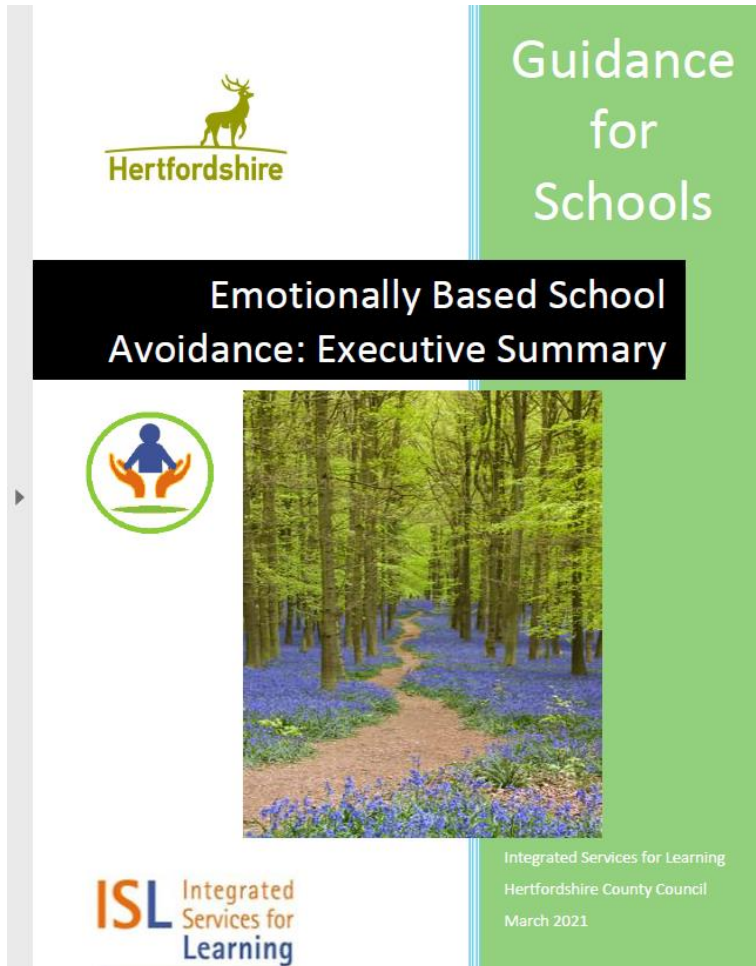
Understanding EBSNA & risk factors

EBSNA Framework

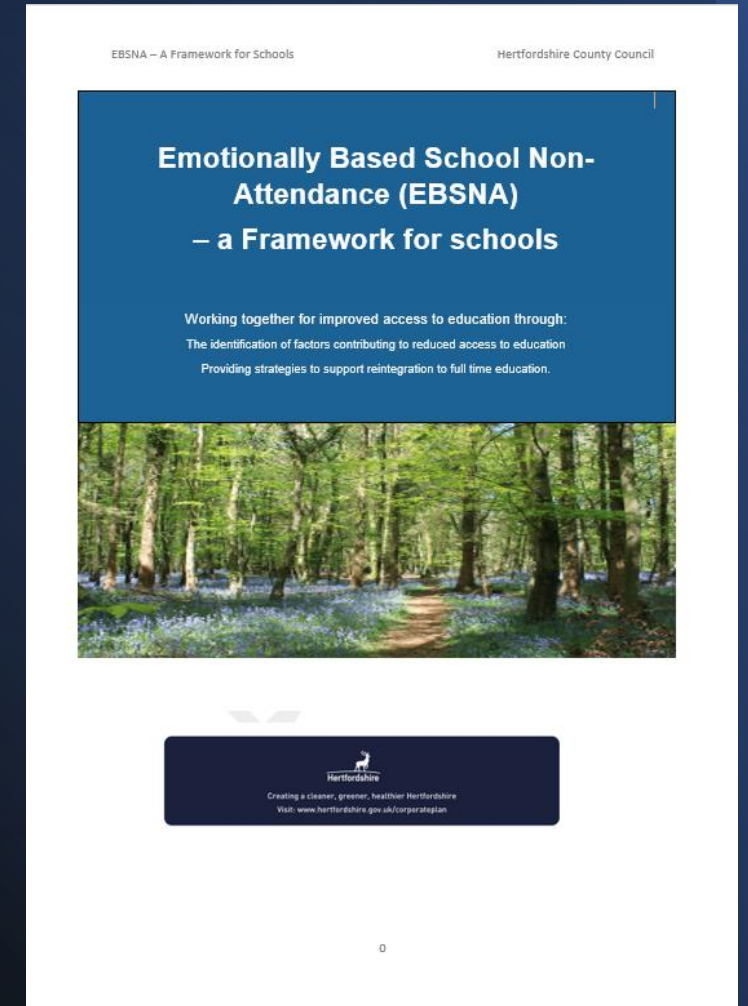
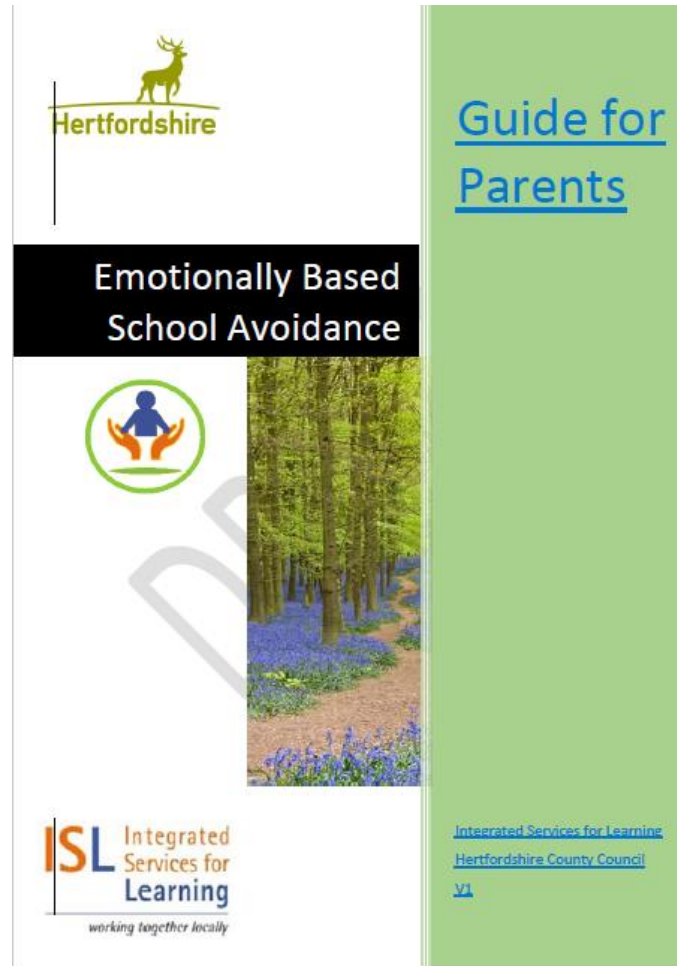
Strategies to support

# Guidance documents

Under review – being replaced by the new framework for schools



Currently being updated



What do you think of when you hear  
EBSNA?

# What is EBSNA?

Umbrella term used to describe a group of CYP who experience significant and enduring challenges in attending school due to emotional factors

More than a young persons perceived dislike for school

Rooted in emotional and physical distress that can escalate to an extent that the child or young person does not feel able to attend school at all

# Importance of language

“

"The naming is the key problem. Kids aren't AVOIDING school, they are struggling with something and the result is they can't face it. The goal of all the documentation seems to focus on attendance. If the child attends then everyone is happy. There needs to be more focus on understanding the problem, more focus on listening to the child, and the parent."

[What language should we use when talking about school absence? - Barriers to Education](#)

Phrase	Try this instead...	Why?
Child with EBSA or 'EBSA child'	Child experiencing emotionally based school absence (EBSA) or emotionally based school non-attendance (EBSNA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides hope for change</li> <li>Moves away from a fixed label</li> <li>Shows that needs can change over time / are transient</li> </ul>
School refuser /School phobic	Child experiencing anxiety about attending school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shows an understanding that the child's presentation is underpinned by anxiety</li> <li>More sensitive to the sustaining maintenance factors</li> </ul>
Not engaging	Doesn't feel safe yet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moves away from a 'within child' approach to a 'with child' approach (co-production / supportive adjustments)</li> <li>Compassion instead of blame</li> <li>Connection rather than disconnection</li> </ul>
Behaviour/Risk Management plan	Anxiety /Wellbeing support plan/Emotional Safety Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shows an understanding that the child's presentation is underpinned by anxiety</li> <li>Feelings orientated over behaviour and validates</li> </ul>
Attention Seeking	Connection Needing/Seeking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>External behaviour as communicating an internal need</li> <li>Meeting emotional and relational need rather than presenting behaviour</li> </ul>



# Understanding EBSNA and recent context

- 21% of all school age children are persistently absent, missing 10% of the school year which is up 83% since 2019
- 2% of all school age children are severely absent, missing 50% or more of the school year which is up 53% since 2019 (Government data for mainstream schools and NHS statistics November 2023)
- Happens for lots of different reasons
- Need for individualised response
- Early intervention is key
- Fight/flight response



# Context in Hertfordshire 23/24

## Persistent absence:

- In Hertfordshire in 2023/24 17.3% of pupils were recorded as persistently absent, which shows a reduction from 2022/23 (19.2%).
- Defined as missing 10% or more of possible school days.


## Severe absence:

- The proportion of children in Hertfordshire in 2023/24 who missed more than 50% of school days was 1.9%, which shows a small increase from 2022/23 (1.7%).

## Reasons for absence:

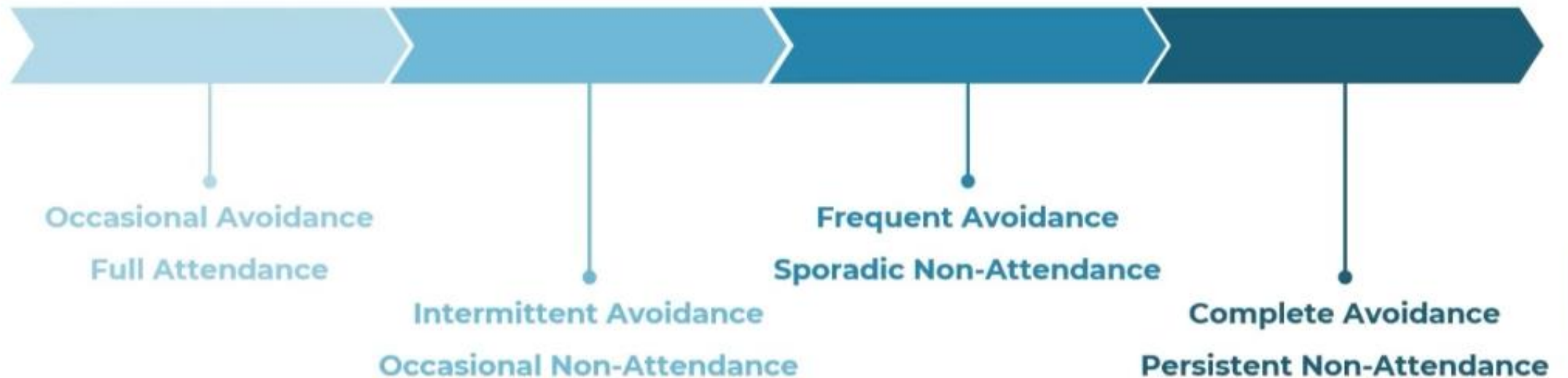
- In 2023/24 the highest rate of absence was recorded as authorised illness (3.7%).





Children can be  
attending school  
consistently and still  
be experiencing  
EBSNA

# EBSA as a spectrum of needs



# What are the main reasons why CYP become emotionally distressed about attending school?

Kearney & Silverman  
model (1990)

“

“I have seen clearly that children aren't absent from school because they don't want to learn ... they are desperate to learn but everyday thousands of children find themselves without the support that they need to engage in education and attend school.”

**DAME RACHEL DE SOUZA**  
THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER FOR ENGLAND

The child wants to avoid things at school that make them feel overwhelmingly anxious or sad.

The child wants to avoid difficult social situations or being evaluated

The child wants to stay close to parents / caregivers

The child engages in rewarding activities while at home during the school day (e.g. gaming)



- “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: pg. 33)

EBSNA occurs when..

# Push and Pull factors

<b>Push towards attending school</b>  Academically able Enjoys certain lessons Peer/adult relationships	<b>Pull away from attending school (home factors)</b>  Family bereavement Familiar environment
<b>Pull away from attending school (school factors)</b>  Environmental factors (noise, busy) Social factors (peers) Adult relationships Learning factors (lesson difficulty)	<b>Push towards staying at home</b>  Family at home Sibling context Predictable routine Environmental safety

# Risk Factors



# Possible Risk Factors

## Individual



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Age (key ages are 5-6, 11-12 and 13-14)

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Trauma / Adverse Childhood experiences  
'ACES'

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Separation anxiety

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Unidentified or identified SEND

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Social communication differences / autism

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Anxiety, depression, mental health needs

## School



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Bullying

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Academic Demands / Exams

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Peer / staff relationship difficulties

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Transitions

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Lack of reasonable adjustments

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Transport

## Family



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Parental ill-health/mental health needs

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Loss / bereavement

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Family history of EBSNA

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Being a young carer

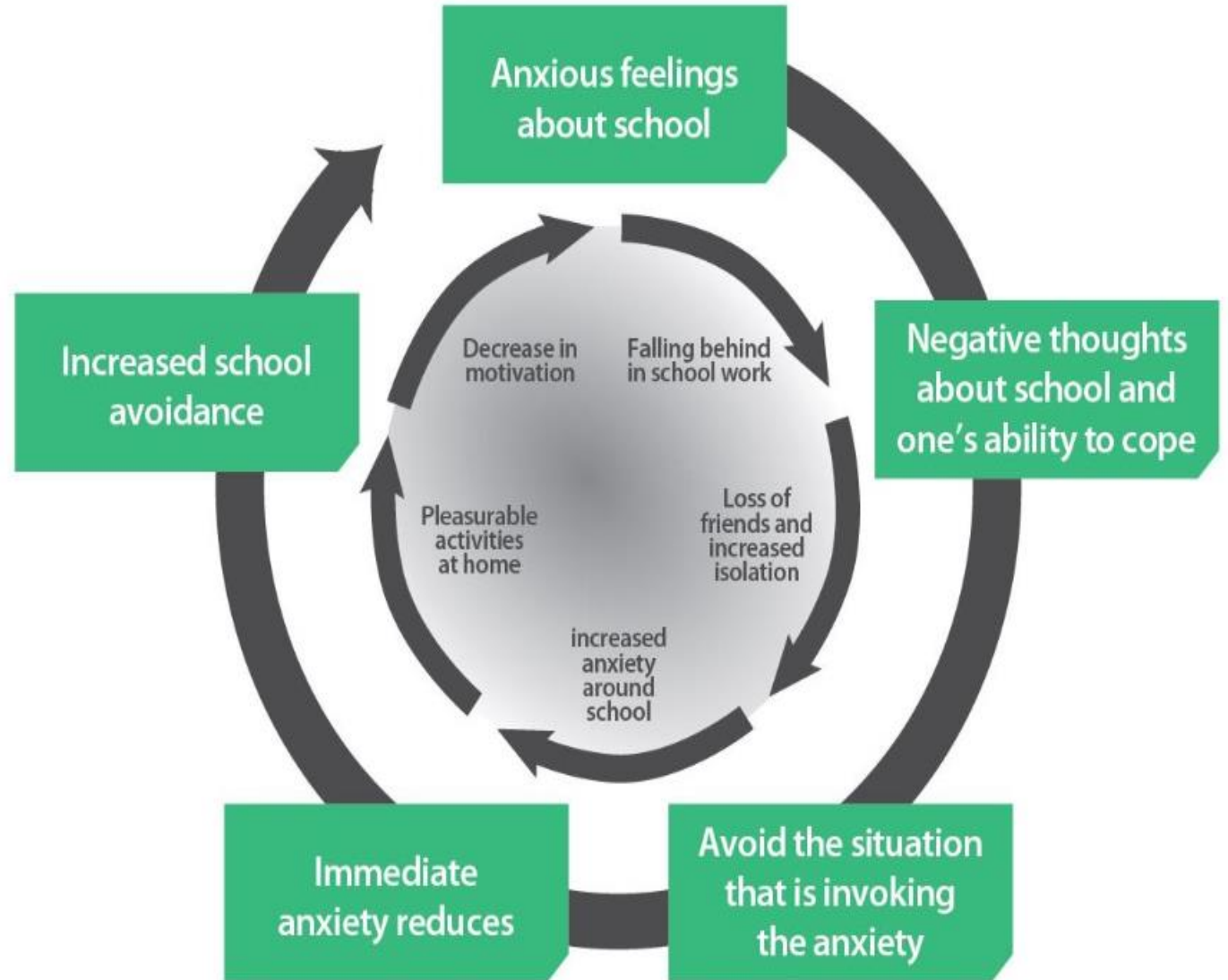
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Changes in home context (divorce, separation,  
parent/carer illness)

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Family stressors (financial, domestic abuse)

# Cycle of Maintenance



# Early Warning Signs

Being persistently late to school

CYPs complaining of illness to avoid attending school

Behaviour designed to instigate ejection from class

Behaviour changes that indicate anxiety in school

Difficulties attending some or all lessons

Increased absences which may or may not show a pattern (e.g. certain days, lessons)

# How schools can support CYP experiencing EBSNA

## Guiding Principles working with individual CYP

Intervene

- Intervene early

Work

- Work with the family throughout

Involve

- Actively involve the pupil

Develop

- Develop a personalised, holistic action plan

Review

- Review the actions regularly

## Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) – a Framework for schools

Working together for improved access to education through:

The identification of factors contributing to reduced access to education

Providing strategies to support reintegration to full time education.



Creating a cleaner, greener, healthier Hertfordshire  
Visit: [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/corporateplan](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/corporateplan)

# Young Person's Form

## EBSNA Framework: Gathering Young Person's Views

Remember to use an approach to gain views that is suitable for the young person's age and ability. A combination of approaches could be used. Use an individualised approach and omit any questions that you feel are not appropriate. Please see guidance notes and additional resources in the Appendix.

Young person's full name	
Date of birth	
School	
School year	
Date of completion	

### My Strengths

What do you think you are good at? What activities do you enjoy?

What makes it easier for you to come and stay in school?

Who are your friends?

If you could name one adult you trust at school, who would it be?

What is stopping me from going to/staying in school?		
Worry	Sensory factors - I find these things hard:	
Crowds	<input type="checkbox"/> The fabric of school uniform	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being bullied	<input type="checkbox"/> Being too close to others	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having a panic attack	<input type="checkbox"/> Some smells at school	<input type="checkbox"/>
Getting to and from school	<input type="checkbox"/> Noise	<input type="checkbox"/>
Getting into trouble	<input type="checkbox"/> Moving between lessons	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doing badly in lessons	<input type="checkbox"/> Bright lighting	<input type="checkbox"/>
Socialising with other people	<input type="checkbox"/> Something else in the school environment:	
Something else:		

Fitting in	School work and teachers	
I feel I am being bullied	<input type="checkbox"/> I find the work too easy	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am worried about what people think of me	<input type="checkbox"/> I find the work too hard	<input type="checkbox"/>

Things at home	
I am worried that my parent or carer is not well	<input type="checkbox"/>
My parent or carer worries about me not being well	<input type="checkbox"/>
I do not always feel safe at home	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have had a death in our family	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have had stressful things to cope with at home	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have had a big change in our family (e.g., new baby, new parent, new step-siblings/brothers, parents separated)	<input type="checkbox"/>
I look after my parent/carer or brothers and sisters	<input type="checkbox"/>
There are lots of problems where we live	<input type="checkbox"/>
My parent or carer finds it hard to get me to school in the mornings	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel really worried about being away from my parent or carer	<input type="checkbox"/>
I do not think school is important	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you want to explain more:	

Do any of these other things stop me getting back to school?	
When I am off school, I can use my phone, play computer games, watch TV	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have friends who are also off school	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have a brother or sister who are at home during the day	<input type="checkbox"/>
I work and earn money while I am out of school	<input type="checkbox"/>

I get extra attention from, and time with my parent or carer	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can completely control my environment at home (e.g., what I wear, who I see, when I go to bed or get up, what I eat, routines)	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am involved in gang activities	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am part of a radical religious or nationalist group	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am in a relationship with someone much older than me	<input type="checkbox"/>
I do a lot of online gaming and have friends through it	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am learning what I need to online or through a friend or family member	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel that school is pointless	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you want to explain more:	

Things that make it harder to go back to school	
I don't know how to explain to friends why I have been away	<input type="checkbox"/>
I worry about facing my teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>
I worry that if I get into school, they won't let me leave if I need to	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't feel safe at home (if yes, important to explore further)	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't think I can catch up with the schoolwork that I missed	<input type="checkbox"/>
I go to bed too late or sleep badly and have trouble waking up early. I feel tired and sometimes catch up with sleep during the day	<input type="checkbox"/>



### Action planning

Address all issues identified as contributing factors, although focus on those that have been identified as being the most significant according to the young person and parent(s)/carer. Please see accompanying guidance notes for support in the next section, when planning strategies. It is important to build on strengths and what is going well. Look for exceptions and factors that are supporting attendance. **It is important that the action plan is shared with all school staff who have contact with the young person, so everyone is aware of the support strategies.**

Child Name:	School professional responsible for the Assess, Plan, Do Review (APDR) Process:	
Issues/Factor (ASSESS)	Support Strategy (who/what/where/when) (PLAN & DO)	Evaluate Impact of intervention and Outcomes (REVIEW)

	Date started:	Date of review:
	Date started:	Date of review:
	Date strategy started:	Date of review:
Child/Young Person's Views:		
Parent(s)/Carer Views:		

**Available to Learn**

## **Esteem**

Positive classroom culture (good feedback, time for reflection)

## **Belonging**


Forming relationships (adult role models, friends, peers)

## **Safety**

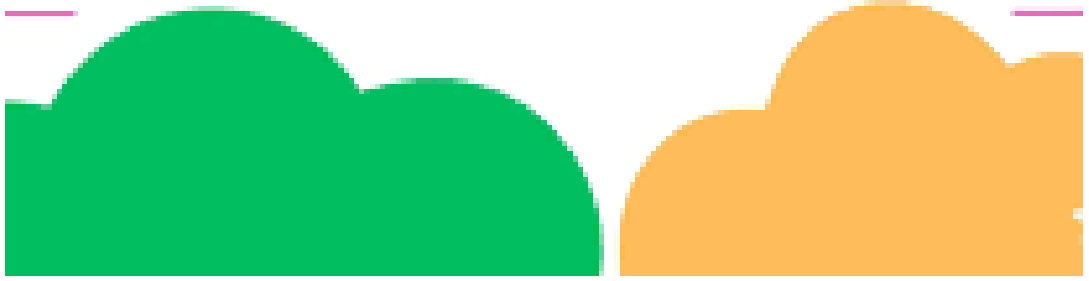
Emotional and physical safety (clear school and class routines, access to trusted adults, knows its ok to take risks)

## **Physiological**

Basic needs are met (eats breakfast, has clean clothes, safe place to go home, can sleep)



**If children feel safe,  
they can take risks, ask  
questions, make  
mistakes, learn to trust,  
share their feelings, and  
grow!**



What can we do?

# Collecting the Voice of the Child

- Take a holistic approach which considers multiple factors.
- Consider who it is with, when and where
- What is the child's preference for talking about their views (e.g. writing, drawing, talking)

## **Consider which tools/techniques the child would respond to:**

- Risk and Resilience Card Sorting Activities
- Ideal School
- Scaling
- Questionnaires

# Risk and Resilience Cards

- [Videos \(schoolwellbeingcards.co.uk\)](https://schoolwellbeingcards.co.uk)





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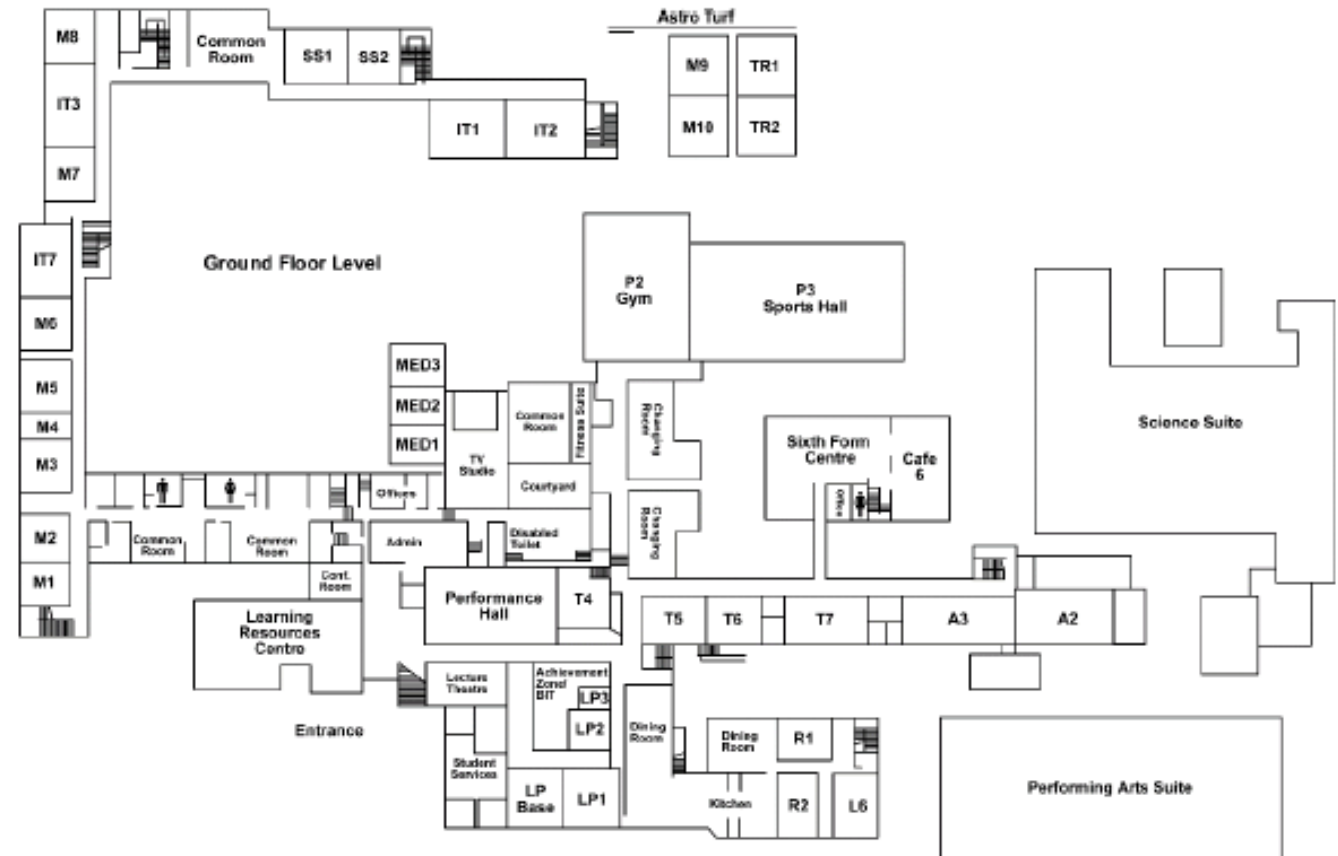
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Scaling



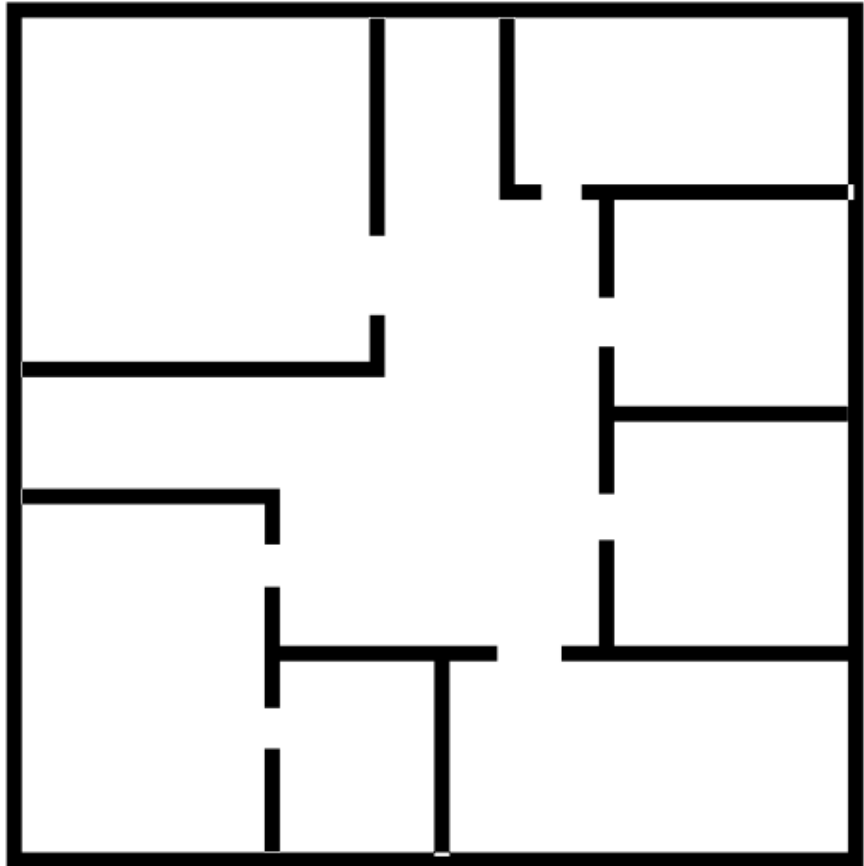
# Landscape of Fear



# MY ANXIETY MAP

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



I enjoy being in this place. I feel safe here.



I feel okay in this place, I don't mind it here.



I would rather not be in this place it makes me feel a bit stressed or anxious.



I do not like being in this place I feel very stressed or anxious and unsafe.

## Another example of the Landscape of Fear

- This website has lots of helpful tools to collect the CYP's views and to work through with them:

[Welcome to Barriers to Education](https://barrierstoeducation.co.uk/)



DR EMILIA MISHEVA

# AUTISM: WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

A guide for newly-  
diagnosed young  
people



DR EMILIA MISHEVA

# UNDERSTANDING AUTISM

A guide for parents  
and professionals



## Contents

### Introduction

1. Masking/camouflaging
2. Externalising vs internalising emotions
3. Autistic Burnout
4. Special interests and monotropism
5. Autistic joy
6. Sensory processing differences: Hyper and hyposensitivity
7. Sleep differences
8. Interoception
9. Propognasia
10. Routines, structure and predictability
11. Anxiety
12. Hyperempathy
13. Social communication differences
14. Alexithymia
15. Strong sense of justice and fairness
16. Autistic inertia
17. Executive functioning
18. Diagnostic overshadowing
19. Autistic meltdowns
20. Autistic shutdowns

Recommended reading and resources

Any other tools you have  
used which you found  
helpful?



Strategies to implement as  
part of your Action Plan

# Strategies likely to be relevant for all children with EBSNA

1

Allocate the CYP key adults in school

2

Have clear consistent routines for warmly welcoming the CYP to school

3

Ensure the CYP knows what will happen during the day, including what will happen in unstructured times

4

Ensure a calm start to the day



# Strategies likely to be relevant for all children with EBSNA

05

Make a plan in advance with the CYP about what they can do if they become worried.

06

Build the CYP's confidence in their ability to manage their worries

07

Teach the CYP how to recognize, understand, label, express and regulate their feelings.

08

Proactively adapt the environment to reduce triggers for anxiety.

# Strategies likely to be relevant for all children with EBSNA

09

Develop the CYP's motivation to be in school.

10

Keep in contact with students who are not attending school at all;

11

Share the document "Emotionally Based School Avoidance: A Guide for Parents and Carers" with families – currently being updated

# Some ideas of helpful activities and resources from the School Guidance

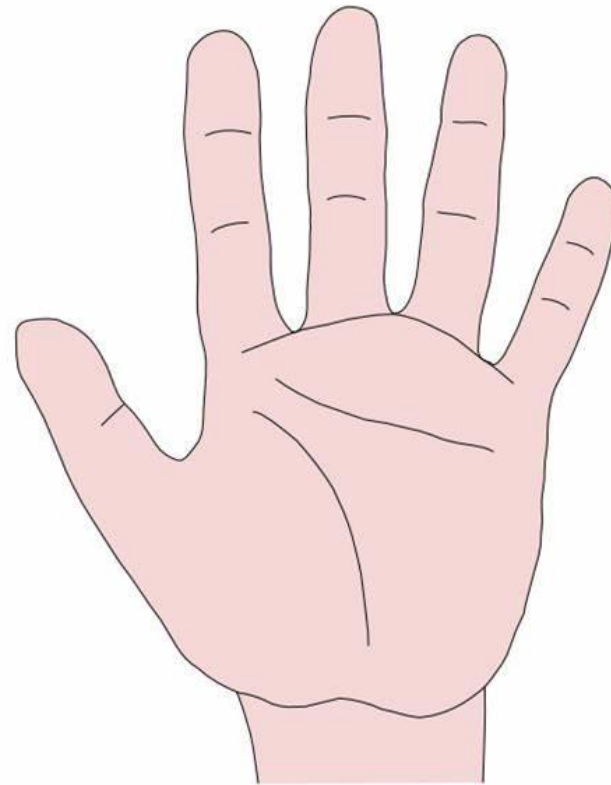
- Teaching calming strategies (appendix 17)
- Grounding exercises/activities (appendix 17)
- Mindfulness and Imagery (appendix 17)
- Teach the young person to identify what they feel like when they are anxious/ body mapping (appendix 18)
- Psychoeducation around the “fight or flight” response (appendix 19 and page 39-41 of EHCNA framework)
- Psychoeducation around how avoidance makes fear stronger and the anxiety maintenance cycle (appendix 20 and page 42 of EBSNA framework)
- Emotional Literacy (appendix 22)
- Problem solving (appendix 23)
- Emotion Coaching (appendix 31)
- Zones of Regulation (ZoR)
- Externalising the anxiety (appendix 10)
- Exposure or Anxiety Ladders (Gradual desensitisation)
- Nurture groups or smaller pastoral-focused classes within the wider school community

# The Toolkit: Tools to Help Schools Support CYPs to Manage their Anxiety

## Teaching calming strategies

- CYP need to be taught how to use self-calming strategies
- Different self-calming strategies work for different people, and different strategies are likely to work at different levels of emotional overwhelm
- CYP involved in guiding ideas for calming strategies
- Self-calming strategies can be separated into the following categories:
  - Sensory strategies for calming
  - Breathing techniques
  - Grounding
  - Mindfulness and imagery

## Examples of calming strategies



Take 5 Breathing



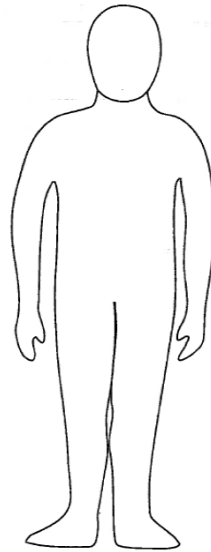
The Grounding Chair

## Body mapping activity

Teach the CYP  
to identify  
what they feel  
like when they  
are anxious

Start by saying something like:

“There are changes to our body that let us know we’re scared or worried. What do you notice when you’re feeling scared? How do you know when you’re scared?”



Fast / racing heart	Sweating
Shaking	Feeling dizzy
Trembling	Feeling sick
Tight muscles	Headache
Pain in chest	Tightness in throat



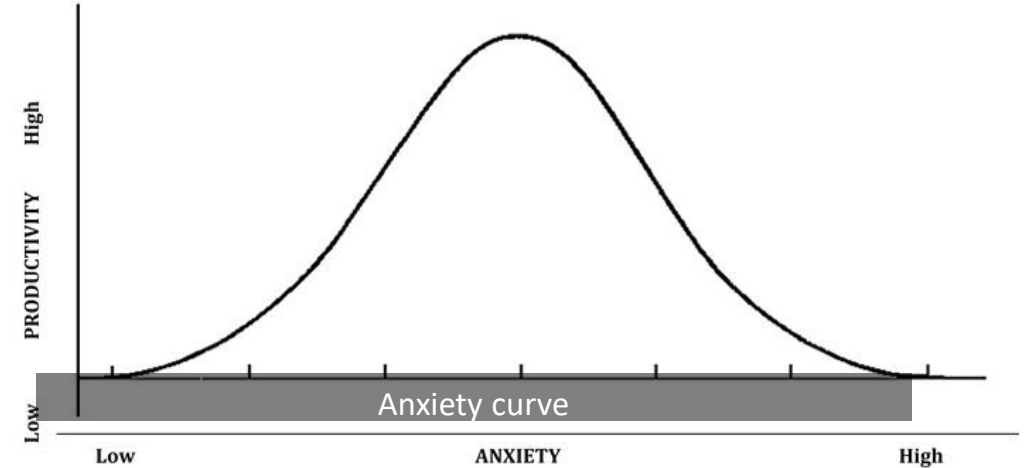




# Teach the CYP about the “fight or flight” response

## What Anxious CYPs Need to Know:

- Everyone experiences anxiety and often anxiety is a healthy and helpful response.
- Sometimes our body thinks things are dangerous, even when they are not
- Because our body **thinks** we’re in danger, it produces adrenaline. This makes our heart race, our hands go sweaty, we feel sick etc.
- This is a false alarm. There is no real danger and we don’t need to run away or fight
- The physical feelings we have are uncomfortable, but they are temporary and harmless
- As we learn that these sensations are a normal response to our body sending out a “false alarm”, that the feelings will pass and they do no harm, we will begin to pay less attention to them.



## Fight or Flight<sup>31</sup>



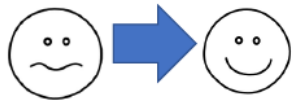
Imagine a hungry lion came into the room right now. What would happen to your body right now? What kind of sensations would you have?



This kind of fear is really helpful. It lets us know something dangerous is happening and it sends messages around our body that makes our heart pump faster and our muscles get stronger.



It gets our bodies ready to run away or fight. Feeling scared is normal and sometimes really helpful!



Those feelings cannot hurt us, even though they don't feel very nice. They don't last forever. They go away as soon as the danger is passed.



The same thing can happen to our bodies when we think about something scary or when we think something bad will happen, even if there is no real danger. You can have scary feelings without having a lion in the room. You just need to think about the lion.

<sup>31</sup> Script from "Exposure Therapy for Treating Anxiety in Children and Adolescents" by Raggi et al.

**FALSE  
ALARM**



We call this a "false alarm". Our body's alarm sounds, and we get lots of scared feelings, but there is no actual danger. It's like a practice fire alarm going off.



Our thoughts are really powerful! But thoughts can also help us calm down. For example, we can remind ourselves that we're safe and that the feelings in our body will go away and can't hurt us.

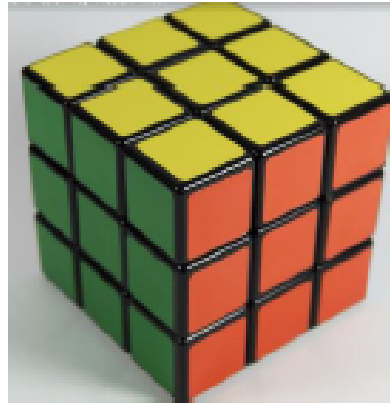


You can learn how to take control of your scary thoughts and use calm thinking to help your body relax.

Identifying  
triggers,  
teaching how  
thoughts,  
feelings and  
actions link  
together



# Problem solving



Some worries are realistic, in which case, the best approach is to encourage the CYP to problem solve to see if they can resolve some of their own difficulties.

The stages in problem solving are:

- Identify what the problem is
- Generating a list of possible solutions (e.g. ask 'how could you handle that?')
- Evaluating the pros and cons of each solution
- Deciding on the best solution (i.e. which is manageable and most likely to work).

The CYP may need support to implement the chosen solution effectively. This could be done through role play or rehearsal with an adult.

Once they have implemented the solution, reflect with the CYP on what has gone well and what they could do next time that might make the solution even better (e.g. 'what do you think you could you do differently next time?').

# Any Questions?



# Feedback form -TA Academy Training Session - EBSNA Framework