



# EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL AVOIDANCE

## Parent Guidance - Easy read

This guide provides advice to parents or carers of children and young people. It focuses on emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA).



Cambridgeshire  
County Council

**What is EBSA?**

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**Understanding  
your child's  
anxiety**

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**Exploring the  
functions of your  
child's behaviour**

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**Further support  
Services and  
contacts**

### **SEND SERVICES 0-25**

Huntingdonshire area

[SEND0-  
25HUNTS@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:SEND0-25HUNTS@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)

East Cambridgeshire and Fenland  
Area

[SEND0-  
25ECF@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:SEND0-25ECF@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)

South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge  
City Area

[SEND0-  
25SCC@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:SEND0-25SCC@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)



## **What is Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)?**

When your child feels they have no other option but to avoid school, or parts of school, because they are feeling overwhelmed and distressed by their environment.

It is how your child is trying to cope – it is NOT their choice or their fault.

You and your child are not alone in this, and there is help available.

## **Understanding your child's anxiety**

Anxiety is a feeling of worry, fear, or unease and can present in different ways in children.

Common signs can include:

Avoidance of certain people, places, or activities.

Excessive worry and fears about everyday situations.

Difficulty sleeping or nightmares.

Physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches and/or sweating.

Excessive distress when separated from parents or caregivers.



## The cycle of avoidance and anxiety maintenance

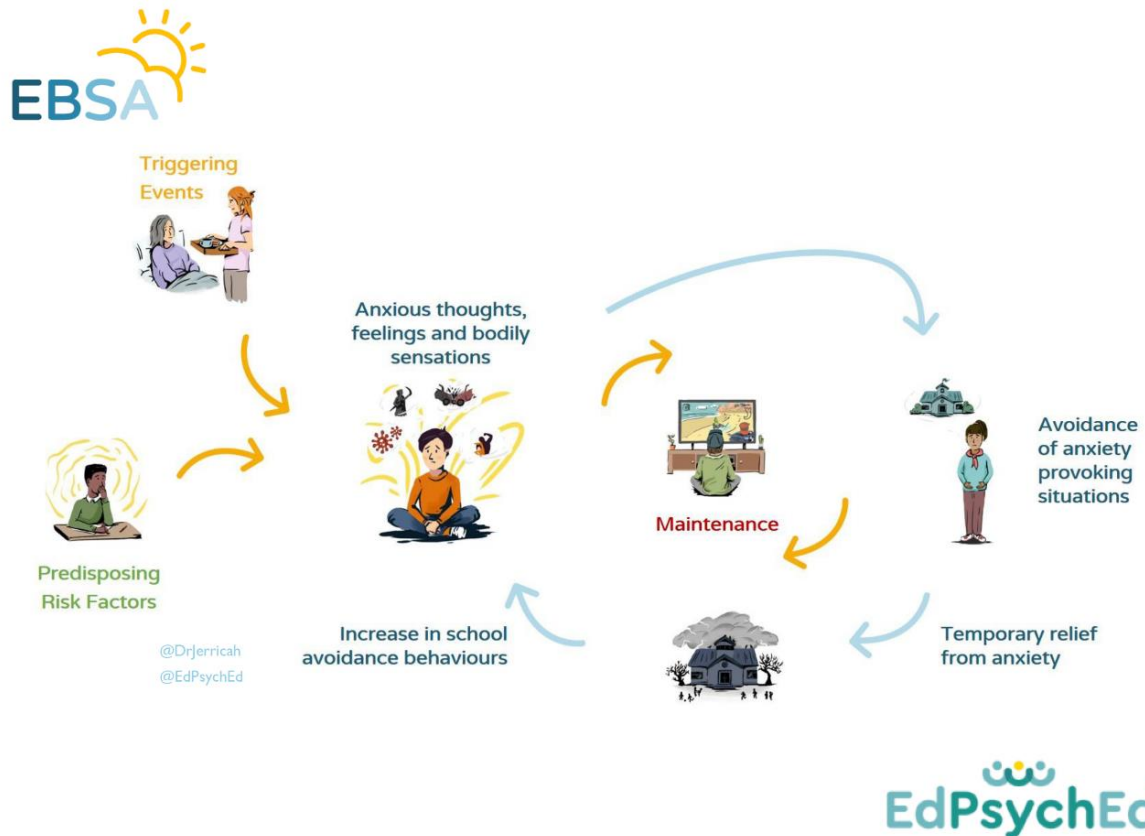


Figure 1:EBSA Anxiety maintenance cycles (developed by Ed Psych Ed)

Your child starts feeling anxious about something at school.

Avoiding school gives them short-term relief from the anxiety.

The next time, the anxiety feels bigger.

So your child continues avoiding because they want to feel relieved again.

The next time, the anxiety feels even bigger!

And so the cycle continues... if left unsupported.

## Why is this important?

Children who frequently miss school struggle to catch up on lessons. This can worry them, which then makes it difficult for them to return the longer they are out of class/school.

When children do not go to school, they might feel lonely or like they are missing out. They may worry about how other children will react to their absence and that they will be asked questions that they cannot answer (e.g., "where have you been?" / "why have you not been in school?").

## Some reasons why your child might be avoiding school

To escape from something that they find distressing.

To spend additional time with you or another family member in the home - they might be feeling worried that something bad will happen to a loved one whilst they are at school.

To avoid the risk of failing or receiving criticism about their work.

Because home is fun and feels safer to them.



This is **not** a behaviour children choose; it's a coping mechanism to manage their emotions.

## ‘Push away’ and ‘Pull to’ Factors

**Push Away Factors (Risk Factors)** – these are difficult and emotional experiences that might make your child feel they can’t attend school.

**Pull To Factors (Resilience Factors)** - these are the positive experiences that draw your child towards either the home or school environment.

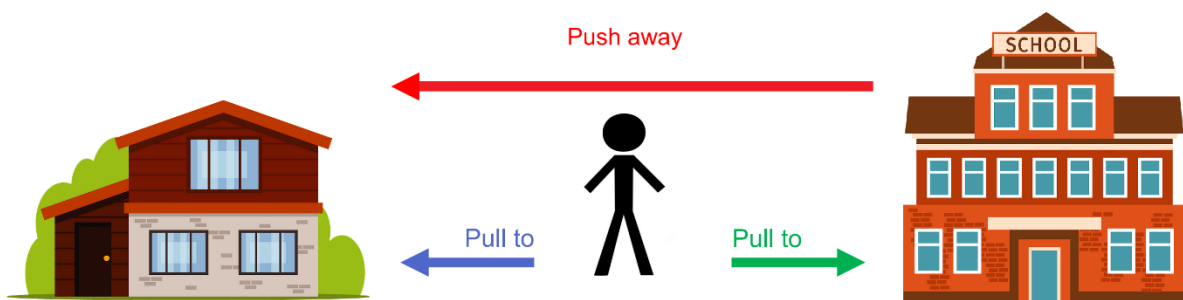


Figure 2: 'Push away' and 'Pull to' factors.

EXAMPLES	In the School Environment	In the Home Environment
<b>Push Away Factors</b> – difficult and emotional experiences that might make your child feel they can't attend school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The work is too hard.</li> <li>Your child feels like they do not fit in.</li> <li>The environment is too noisy/busy.</li> <li>They are being bullied.</li> <li>They feel misunderstood.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parental/sibling illness</li> <li>Worrying that something might happen to a loved one at home.</li> <li>Family bereavement</li> </ul>
<b>Pull To Factors</b> – positive experiences that draw your child towards either the home or school environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feeling connected to their peers</li> <li>Enjoying certain classes or activities.</li> <li>Having a supportive teacher.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feeling safe at home.</li> <li>Spending more time with caregivers and loved ones.</li> </ul>

Every child is unique, having had different experiences. Therefore, the impact of risk and resilience factors varies. Identifying these factors helps you understand your child's emotions. Addressing these factors also contributes to their emotional development and overall well-being

We will all work together to help explore your child's risk or resilience factors. Communicating about risk and resilience factors can help ensure that the right support is put in place for your child and family.





## How can you support your child?

EBSA can be a challenging issue for children and their parents. Your child's fear and anxiety are real and they need your support. Here are some tips on how to support your child at home with EBSA:

Listen and validate your child's feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let them know that their feelings are okay.</li> <li>• Talk about what causes their worries and anxiety about going to school.</li> <li>• Show them how to handle stress and anxiety in healthy ways.</li> <li>• Give them time to talk - can be done in short bursts over time.</li> </ul>
Reflect on your child's feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help identify the <b>push away</b> and <b>pull to</b> factors.</li> <li>• Communicate these with school staff.</li> <li>• Help your child identify strategies they can use at home to manage their anxiety.</li> </ul>
Work with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to build a good relationship with your child's teacher.</li> <li>• Refer to the EBSA Toolkit on the Learn Together website.</li> <li>• Communicate with school staff about what you think will make school more positive for your child.</li> <li>• Support your child where you can with the work provided by school - staff should be working with you by providing learning opportunities at home, marking work, and providing feedback, and meeting regularly to support your child's return to school.</li> </ul>
Build a support network and be kind to yourself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage your child to build a support network of friends, family, and trusted adults in and out of school.</li> <li>• Where possible, access other support networks or groups to help remind you to be kind to yourself and to look after yourself. Know that you are doing the best you can and it's okay to take some time away from worries. Have time to do something you enjoy and recharge your batteries.</li> </ul>
Try to keep to the school routine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect on current routines at home (e.g., bedtime, Sunday evenings, morning school routine, after-school etc.).</li> <li>• If your child is currently not attending school, set aside a clear time for learning within the usual school hours.</li> <li>• Limit access to gaming and watching TV during school hours – although there are circumstances in which this could be helpfully used in short bursts (e.g., to regulate your child or to watch educational material to support with their schooling at home).</li> </ul>

## **EBSA and the Law**

### Key documents:

[Summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

[Support for pupils where a mental health issue is affecting attendance: effective practice examples \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

### Key points raised:







## **Further support services and contacts**

- **Pinpoint** – Run by parents for parents to help Cambridgeshire’s parents and carers who have children with SEND and additional needs. Website: [pinpoint-cambs.org.uk](https://pinpoint-cambs.org.uk)
- **SENDIASS** - offers impartial and confidential information, advice and support to parents and carers who have a child with special educational needs, or a disability, or have concerns that their child has special educational needs. Website: [SEND Information, Advice and Support Service \(SENDIASS\)](#)
- **SEND Service 0-25** – is a local authority multi-disciplinary service that provides targeted support and aims to help meet the needs of children within the local community. Website: [SEND Service 0-25 - Cambridgeshire County Council](#)
- **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust- (CPFT)-** This service offers adult mental health support. Their aim is to make psychological therapies more accessible to people experiencing common mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. The psychological therapies offered are approved by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Adults can self-refer [NHS Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Talking Therapies | CPFT NHS Trust](#)
- **YOUnited** – offers a range of support including therapies, counselling, and guided self-help. Referrals can only be made by a GP or any professional working with children. Website: [YOUnited | CPFT NHS Trust](#)
- **Young minds** - A charity championing the wellbeing and mental health of young people. They publish a range of information for parents. They also have a parent helpline. Calls are free Mon-Fri from 9:30am to 4pm 0808 802 5544 Website: [Young Minds](#)
- **How Are You (H.A.Y.) Cambridgeshire and Peterborough** – This is a website that details various activities, courses and groups across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to boost your wellbeing. Website: [How Are You Cambridgeshire and Peterborough | H.A.Y. Home \(haycambspboro.co.uk\)](#)
- **Kooth / Qwell - Kooth** is an anonymous website which helps children and young people to feel safe and confident in exploring their concerns and while seeking professional support. For additional contacts and services, please refer to the Kooth website. Children and young people aged between 11 and 25. Website: [Kooth for Children & Young People](#). There is also a platform for anyone over the age of 18+, which offers similar professional support for mental health and emotional wellbeing. Website: [Qwell](#)