EBSA

EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL AVOIDANCE GUIDANCE

STRATEGY & TOOLKIT

Developed by
Lancashire Educational
Psychology Service

lancashire.gov.uk

Lancashire County Council

Comms: 8280

EBSA

EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL AVOIDANCE GUIDANCE

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Introduction

This guidance has been produced by Lancashire Educational Psychology Service and is based on the current evidence base/best practice guidance, as well as understanding of our local context, regarding supportive strategies associated with positive outcomes for pupils with Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). This has been developed as part of an action research project and incorporates the views and experiences of Lancashire pupils, parents/carers and educational settings.

Definition

A number of terms have been used to refer to students who do experience anxiety relating to school including: anxiety related non-attendance, school refusal behaviour (Kearney & Silverman, 2014). West Sussex Educational Psychology Service introduced the term **'Emotionally Based School Avoidance'** referencing:

> "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"
>
> (West Sussex Educational Psychology Service, 2014; pg. 4)

Prevalence of EBSA

In the UK, the prevalence rate for individuals who experience attendance difficulties is estimated to be between 1-5% (Katz et al., 2016). Key transition points within education have been noted as periods where school avoidance behaviours are likely to occur, between 5-6 years and 11-13 years (Pellegrini, 2007). The onset of such behaviours is perceived to be **gradual** (Gulliford & Miller, 2015).

Research suggests that pupils with **special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)**, and those from **lower socio-economic backgrounds** are more likely to experience attendance difficulties (Gee, 2018). Young people who experience difficulties around attending schools are also seen to be more likely to experience **emotional and mental health difficulties**, such as anxiety disorders and depression (Ek & Eriksson, 2013; Finning et al., 2019). Practice based evidence suggests that anxieties experienced by individuals

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with **Autism Spectrum Disorder** put them at increased risk of EBSA. This can be attributed to difficulties these individuals experience around aversive social situations, the sometimes unpredictable nature of schools and anxiety around the school environment.

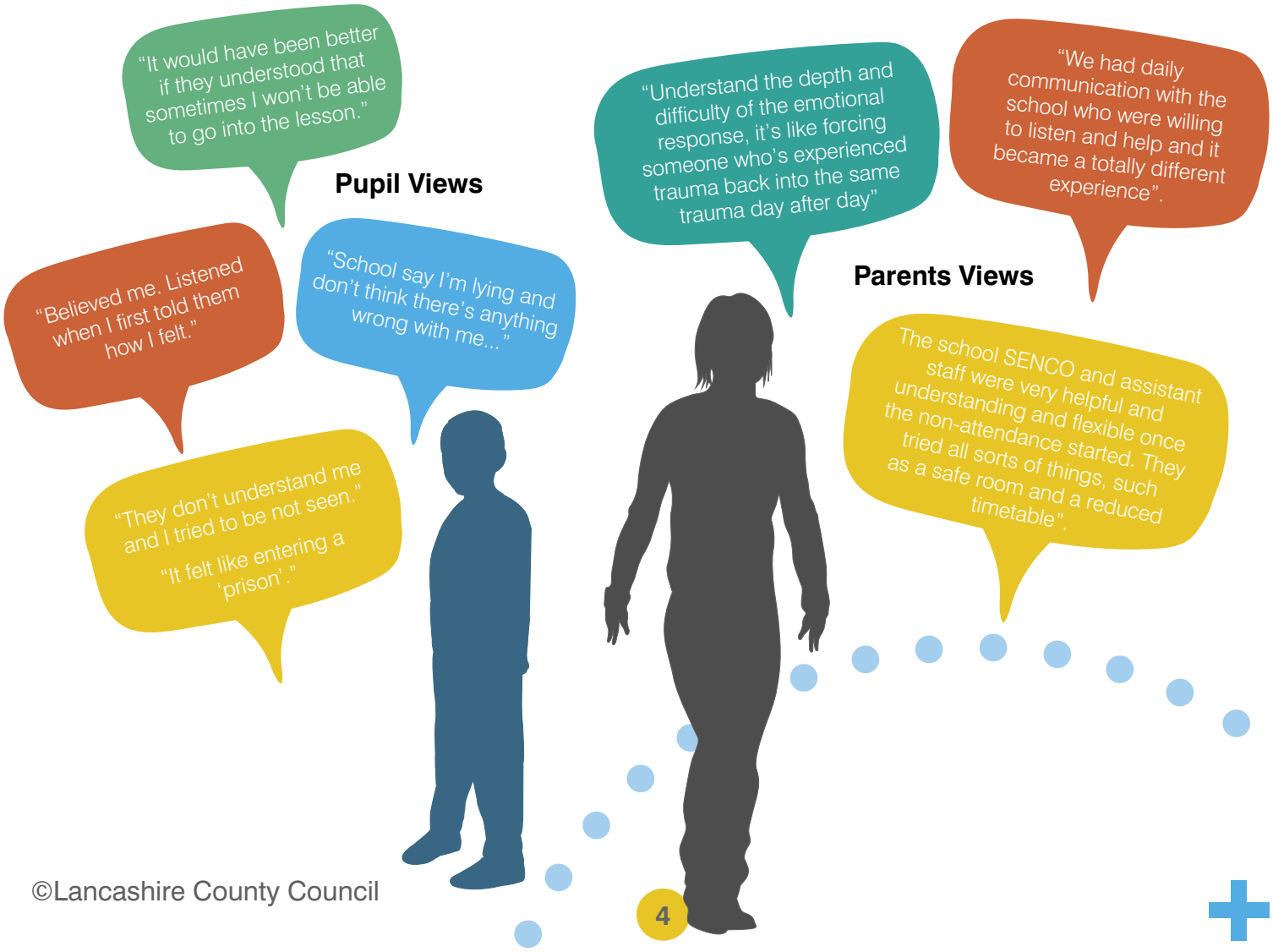
The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated this problem. In a survey conducted during the academic year 2020-21, **97.2% of Lancashire educational settings reported some level of concern** about this issue within their setting.

Outcomes for pupils with low attendance

Children and young people who are absent from school for significant period of their education are considered disadvantaged; with of those who miss more than 50% of their education, only 3% achieve five A*-C grades at GCSE (DfE, 2011). There is also an increased risk of this group not being in education, training or employment in the long term (Attwood & Croll, 2015).

Lancashire Context: Parent/Carer & Child Views

We sought the views of parents/carers and of pupils in Lancashire who have lived experience of Emotionally Based School Avoidance. The most important factor cited by parents/carers and pupils themselves was of Relationships (home-school and pupil-staff), as well as Understanding and feeling listened to by school staff. The need to adopt a Flexible, Individualised, Child-centred Approach at an Early Intervention stage is emphasised.



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Supporting young people experiencing EBSA

EBSA 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, p.33).

Before making a plan to support a young person experiencing EBSA, families and professionals must first understand the **function of the behaviour**. Kearney and Silverman (1995) proposed a model for school non-attendance identifying four categories for these behaviours:

1. **Avoidance of the school setting:** this could include anxiety around the environment e.g. the corridors, a test, work or a particular teacher.
2. **Escape from aversive social situations:** often as a result of unsatisfactory relationships with peers or staff or finding difficulty in navigating social situations.
3. **Attention seeking or separation anxiety behaviour:** a young person could want to stay at home with an important other.
4. **Rewarding experiences outside of school:** staying at home provides opportunity to engage in preferred activities e.g. playing video games, meeting friends.

If there is a lack of understanding around a young person’s needs, this can lead to a delay in support or inappropriate support (Baker & Bishop, 2015). Schools use of punitive and legal actions against non-attendance has also been noted as a barrier to effective intervention (Clissold, 2018)

Collaborative working between professionals and professionals’ knowledge and skills are supportive of increased attendance levels (Nuttall & Woods, 2013). Teacher approaches, peer connections and the whole school context have also been identified as prominent factors in support the successful reintegration of students experiencing EBSA (Nuttall & Woods, 2013).

There is a common misconception that the issue of EBSA is located solely within-child or as relating to factors within the home. Research highlights the importance looking holistically at each case to appreciate the complex interplay between the range of factors contributing to EBSA including at the child, home and school level (Gregory & Purcell, 2014). Nuttall & Woods (2013) presented an ecosystemic model to support understanding of these complex factors in an effort to support effective intervention (see Figure 1).

In addition to considering factors at different levels influencing EBSA behaviours, research has highlighted the importance of working with each individual child or young person to ascertain their views as part of the assessment and intervention process, as means of increasing understanding of potential risk factors and supporting factors (Gregory & Purcell, 2014; Lucy & Reay, 2000; Nuttall & Woods, 2013).

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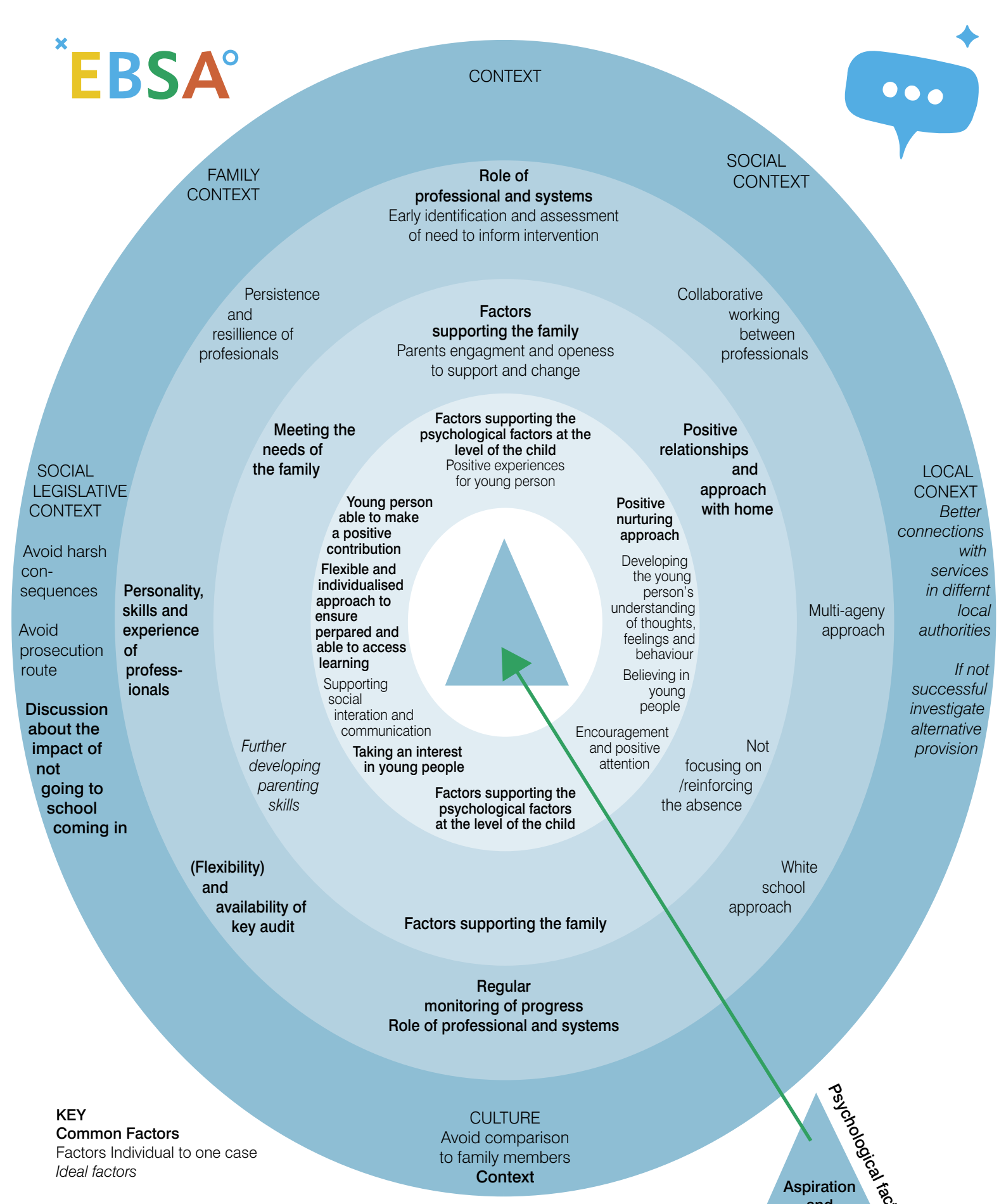

Ecological Model of Successful Reintergration

(Nuttal & Woods, 2013)

EBSA

Summary of Implications for Best Practice:

The evidence base and understanding of our local context in Lancashire has identified key elements of support:

- **Complexity:** EBSA is often complex and multi-faceted. Research typically shows that EBSA is the result of a combination of predisposing 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 behaviours of EBSA can present in a variety of ways for different pupils.

- **Understand Barriers to School Attendance:** It is essential to understand the **factors** contributing to a pupil's school non-attendance. Lack of understanding around a young person's needs can lead to delayed or inappropriate support. A plan to support a young person experiencing EBSA must be based on families and professionals **first understanding the function, i.e. the purpose, of the behaviour.** Assessment which seeks to recognise risk and resilience factors, as well as push and pull factors, is necessary to support effective intervention which should have the aim of reducing **risk** and increasing **protective** factors.

- **Early identification & intervention:** The onset of EBSA behaviours is often perceived to be **gradual**. Therefore, **early identification & intervention** is essential.

- **Home-School Communication:** ensure ongoing, open **communication** between school and parents/carers, as well as school and the pupil. It is essential that pupils, as well as parents/carers, feel listened to and understood. Identify a **key person** for pupil and family contact.

- **Pupil views:** Working with each individual child or young person to ascertain their views as part of the assessment and intervention process is important as means of increasing understanding of risk factors and supporting factors.

- **Flexible, individualised approach:** bespoke interventions should be linked to identified function(s) & needs. Common supportive measures include: a **key adult** for regular contact/check-ins; flexible **timetable**; a **safe place** in school; **peer support**/ buddying; arrangements for **transport**; sending work home if needed.

- **Gradual, stepped plan:** a **rapid return to school** should be planned at the **earliest opportunity** alongside good **support** and **adaptations** within the school environment. NB: It is essential that this plan should be **gradual** and based on **incremental, small steps, taking parent/carer and pupil views** into consideration. Beware attempting 'too much, too soon' as this can cause setbacks for the pupil in the reintegration plan.

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- **Transitions: Key transition points** within education have been noted as periods where school avoidance behaviours are likely to occur, i.e. between 5-6 years and 11-13 years. Therefore, pupils who have associated risk factors for EBSA within these educational stages are seen as priority groups.

- **Risk factors:** Increased risk factors include the following:
  - Presence of Autism Spectrum Disorder
  - Pupils with SEN/disabilities
  - Lower socio-economic background

- **Multi-agency working:** Collaborative working between professionals with clear professional roles and responsibilities, as well as professionals' knowledge and skills are supportive of increased attendance levels. The Lancashire Multi-Agency Flowchart for Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) sets out the professional roles and responsibilities of schools and external agencies within Lancashire in supporting with and responding to this issue. Emotionally Based School Avoidance Training for Schools via the SENDCo Network is recommended here (See Appendix A).

- **Whole-school approaches:** Teacher approaches, peer connections and the whole school context have also been identified as prominent factors in supporting the successful reintegration of students experiencing EBSA. Intervention at the **whole-school/universal** level as well as the individual/child level is therefore essential. Use of audits for whole-school practice is recommended to work at the preventative level (See Appendix B).

- **Categorising absence:** Mechanisms for categorising school absence which provide insight into the many reasons pupils can find it difficult to attend school are important to consider.

- **Punitive measures:** Use of punitive and legal actions against non-attendance have been noted as a barrier to effective intervention.

- **Graduated Response:** It is essential that schools apply a graduated response to identified EBSA issues and implement Plan-Do-Review Cycles based on the Lancashire Multi-Agency Flowchart for Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) (See Appendix A).

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Lancashire EBSA Toolkit for Schools:

- It is essential that schools apply a **graduated response** to identified EBSA issues and implement **Plan-Do-Review Cycles** based on the **Lancashire Multi-Agency Flowchart for Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)** (See Appendix A).

The following training and resources are now available to support Lancashire schools in responding to this issue:

Universal Provision:

Schools EBSA Training: Lancashire Educational Psychology Service is pleased to now offer online, on demand training for Lancashire schools on Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), hosted by Lancashire Professional Development Service (LPDS).
<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/lpds/publications/details/?id=1210

This training is an update to previous schools training and has been designed to be accessed by school staff at a time and place that is convenient for them.
This training is divided into two sections:

Part 1:

- What is Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)?
- EBSA in Lancashire (Understanding our local context)
- Understanding EBSA (Knowledge and psychology of EBSA)

Part 2:

- What Works? (Supporting a return to school; use of evidence-based assessment & intervention resources to respond to this issue)
- Lancashire EBSA Strategy& Toolkit (Supporting application of a range of practical resources included as part of this training)
- Case Study (example of good practice for schools)
- Next steps

Early Identification Assessment & Intervention Resources

- **The ATTEND Framework:** this is an evidence-based tool developed by Dr Adele Tobias (Educational Psychologist at Brighton & Hove) which aims to identify all the contributing factors involved when school attendance drops below 90%. This resource facilitates home-school communication, gathering pupil views, gathering parent/carer views, and gathering staff/professionals' views as a means to support information gathering, action planning, and developing intervention. It is not intended as an open checklist but a way to provide a **structure** to frame a conversation with a family within a trusting and **collaborative** relationship. It includes the following:

- ATTEND Form for Professionals
- ATTEND Form for Parents/Carers
- ATTEND Form for Students (Y5+)
- Card sort (for pupils younger than Y5)

The ATTEND framework is now being provided to Lancashire schools as part of the Schools EBSA Training programme (see above). The ATTEND framework is part of the **Lancashire Multi-Agency Flowchart for Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)** (See Appendix A). Completed ATTEND forms/Action Plans can be used to inform agency referrals, including for Early Help and Pupil Attendance Support Team (PAST).

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- Use Target Monitoring Evaluation (TME) form to set SMART targets relating to the EBSA issue (See Appendix C). This form is to be completed by school staff, ideally in collaboration with parents/carers and/or the pupil. A date for review should be agreed within a 2-week period.

  Up to 3 targets can be agreed. These should link directly to desired outcomes and intervention plans. These should be done in collaboration by the school with the pupil and family involved. These should therefore relate to goals that have been identified as important by families and young people, rather than determined by professionals. It is helpful for schools to adopt a collaborative approach to this and ask, 'What needs to change?' The initial target-setting activity and the review should be completed as part of the action planning process by a person who knows the family and young person well (e.g. a head of year, or pastoral lead in school). It should be used in tandem with the ATTEND framework and resources provided by the Lancashire EBSA Guidance (Strategy & Toolkit).

Further Individual Assessment & Intervention Resources

- **Card Sort: Function of School Avoidance**
  This card sort activity, based on a School Refusal Assessment Scale developed by Kearney (2002), has been devised as a tool to support greater understanding of a young person's school avoidance. By asking a CYP to sort the 24 statements or by talking about each one, mentors may find that using the cards can support an understanding of the function of the school avoidance behaviour (See Appendix D)

- **Mapping the Landscape:** this is an assessment activity for use with individual pupils who experience emotionally based school avoidance. (See Appendix E). A series of scaling activities are carried out with the pupil to assess their feelings of anxiety across the physical, social and learning environments of their educational setting. This should have the aim of informing intervention planning. Guidance for staff to support with this activity is also is provided.

- **Laddering Approaches:** For some pupils who are working on a gradual reintegration package, it can be helpful to put together a step-by-step plan that gradually, over time, exposes them to the situations that are anxiety provoking. This gives the individual some control over the plan and hopefully helps them to feel more confident as each step is achieved. Developing an anxiety or exposure ladder with the young person can be helpful. The individual would be asked to identify the situation in school which they are most worried about, for instance going back into a mainstream lesson and then less fearful situations working down the ladder. On the bottom rung of the ladder would be the situation that the pupil feels least fearful or worried about. This would be a useful starting point for any subsequent plan with each step being consolidated before moving on. Guidance, templates and examples are provided to support with this activity. (See Appendix F).

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- **Y6-Y7 Transition Support for pupils at risk of non-attendance:** Research has shown that peaks in the number of pupils with EBSA correspond with transition in educational phases. Pupils who experience higher levels of anxiety or who have experienced loss and separation may be vulnerable to developing or experience an exacerbation of EBSA behaviours. Practical supports information is provided (See Appendix G). It is advisable that this is provided to pupils as a proactive, preventative measure in advance of transition phases within education, particularly the transition from primary-secondary school.

Schools may also wish to note that this schools training offer and the Lancashire EBSA Guidance (Strategy & Toolkit) closely aligns with the (September 2022) DfE Guidance on "https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance" Working together to improve school attendance including the following key elements:

- Ensuring staff have adequate training on attendance
- Early intervention
- Building strong relationships with families, listen to and understand barriers to attendance and work with families to remove them
- Multi-disciplinary support for families

Schools may also wish to refer to the recently issued 'Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance: guidance for schools' https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1136965/Summary_of_responsibilities_where_a_mental_health_issue_is_affecting_attendance.pdf and effective case examples.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Lancashire Multi-Agency Flowchart for Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Appendix B: Whole School Audit

Appendix C: Target Monitoring Evaluation (TME)

Appendix D: Card Sort: Function of School Avoidance

Appendix E: Mapping the Landscape

Appendix F: Laddering Approaches

Appendix G: Y6-Y7 Transition Support for pupils at risk of non-attendance:

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Appendix A

Lancashire Multi-Agency Flowchart for Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Universal Provision: All schools can access online, on demand training on EBSA from Lancashire Educational Psychology Service via LPDS. All schools should carry out a **whole school audit** (See Appendix B)

Early Identification & Intervention

Follow **School Attendance Policy** to resolve concerns If required, discuss the case with the allocated School Attendance Support Worker / School Attendance Consultant to gain support /advice re next steps.'

Persistent attendance concerns indicate emotionally-based absence (**identified** by attendance dropping below 90% that is not explained by other contextual information)

ATTEND Framework and Action Plan collaboratively completed and recorded by school staff, parents/carers & pupil to assess and support with factors contributing to school non-attendance. Review progress with parents/carers & pupil **within 2 weeks** and refer to decision point.

Use Target Monitoring Evaluation (See Appendix C) to set SMART, individualised short-term targets to be achieved. School to consider Early Help Assessment & involvement of **Community Senior Family Support Worker** (CFW)

Success Criteria Met/Issue resolved: Attendance to be closely monitored

Review/Decision Point

Ongoing absence still a concern. Further assessment & intervention needed

Assessment & Intervention & Initial Referrals to External Agencies

Use of further Individual **Assessment & Intervention** resources within the Lancashire EBSA Guidance (Strategy & Toolkit) ; consider unmet SEND needs

Schools to consider Specialist Teaching Inclusion Support and/or Educational Psychologist consultation offer (e.g., to support with interpreting assessment information & action planning)

Reference to Local Offer for additional support

School to seek advice, guidance & support to explore wider contextual factors/family needs with **Community Senior Family Support Worker (SFSW)**. This may include guidance & signposting to appropriate **mental health services in schools and/or** CFW Emotional Health & Wellbeing Support (Level 2). Where thresholds are met for **Family Intensive Support (Level 3)**, referral will be made via the One Front Door

Schools to consider how access to education will be facilitated to reduce anxiety about missed learning (e.g., arrangements to send schoolwork home; online learning systems)
Timescale to **review progress** agreed (NB: **maximum of 4 weeks**)
Schools to consider attending a termly EBSA Strategy Implementation & Coaching session for further support and anonymous case discussion with educational psychologists and school colleagues.

Success Criteria Met/Issue resolved: Attendance to be closely monitored

Review/Decision Point

No progress evident: Ongoing absence still a concern

Multi-agency Support/Review & Next Steps

Referral to EBSA multi-agency team: School representative to request problem-solving discussion with multi-agency team (NB: evidence of graduated response required) (Email:ebsa@lancashire.gov.uk)

Schools with concerns about trends of EBSA should consider **Team Around the School & Settings (TASS)** support (Email tas@lancashire.gov.uk)

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Appendix B

Whole school systems for promotion of emotional well-being and prevention of EBSA			
	Whole School Provision Currently Available	In Need of Development	Comments/Next Steps (Including by Whom and When)
School Culture and Ethos			
Committed and inclusive senior management team - values all students and allows them to feel a sense of belonging			
All staff working within school are valued. Clear protocols regarding emotional support and stress management for staff including supervision			
Continuous professional development for all staff which makes clear the promotion of positive emotional health and wellbeing is everybody's responsibility (incl. EBSA) (Please list)			
The importance of pupil voice and viewing the child holistically are approaches which are embedded within the culture of the school.			
Recognition of the importance of communication and partnership working with parents and external agencies			
School systems. policy and practice			
Clear policies on attendance, behaviour, bullying, equality and transition which sets out the responsibilities for all and the support in place			
Curriculum includes the teaching of resilience, coping and social skills.			
Curriculum appropriately differentiated according to individual need			

With thanks to West Sussex County Council Educational Psychology Service EBSA Guidance

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Appendix B continued

Whole school systems for promotion of emotional well-being and prevention of EBSA			
	Whole School Provision Currently Available	In Need of Development	Comments/Next Steps (Including by Whom and When)
Promotion of supportive literature regarding emotional well-being and mental health for young people and parents.			
Clear roles and responsibilities for SENCo and emotional wellbeing leads.			
A member of senior staff is responsible for over-seeing arrangements for EBSA students			
Clear systems in place for the early identification of school avoidance (What systems are in place? How is information shared with relevant members of staff?)			
Nominated member of who has a responsibility to investigate and act on concerns			
Access to evidence-based provision to support with EBSA (e.g. safe places within the school, key person)			
Staff are aware as to whom they should convey any concerns regarding EBSA (How is this conveyed?)			
Provision of interventions within a graduated response - assess, plan, do & review			
Staff are aware of the role of other agencies and local arrangements with regard to assessing and supporting students experiencing EBSA (Is there a central list of partner agencies who link with school to support EBSA cases, e.g., 'My School Contacts' on Schools Portal? Is this list readily accessible for school staff? Who maintains this list (i.e., can it be updated?)			
All staff are aware of specific strategies and programmes in place to support those experiencing EBSA			

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Appendix C

Target Monitoring Evaluation (TME) Guidance

1. This evaluation form (on the next page) is to be completed by school staff, ideally in collaboration with parents/carers and/or the pupil. A date for review should be agreed within a 2-week period.

2. Up to 3 targets can be agreed. These should link directly to desired outcomes and intervention plans. These should be done in collaboration by the school with the pupil and family involved. These should therefore relate to goals that have been identified as important by families and young people, rather than determined by professionals. It is helpful for schools to adopt a collaborative approach to this and ask, 'What needs to change?' The initial target-setting activity and the review should be completed as part of the action planning process by a person who knows the family and young person well (e.g. a head of year, or pastoral lead in school). It should be used in tandem with the ATTEND framework and resources provided in the Lancashire EBSA Guidance (Strategy & Toolkit).

3. The descriptor of the baseline level should be defined first. This should be a brief but detailed behavioural description of where the child is in relation to their achievement of this goal. The baseline descriptor is a rated on a scale from 1-10 to reflect the current level of the child, whereby the number is circled and marked with a B. This will usually be at the lower end of the scale (around 2 or 3).

4. Expected progress in each of the targets by the agreed review date is then described. The level of attainment expected by the review date (at the end of the intervention) is defined as a target and written in the space above the shaded box. The consultee is asked to allocate a rating in the scale to indicate the expected level. This should be circled and marked with an E. This will be higher than the baseline, usually between 6 &8, or lower if a smaller increase is expected.

5. At the review, a score is allocated for the level achieved, circled and marked with an A. A score above the expected level than (E) indicates more progress than expected, below this, less than expected.

Example:

Target 1: John will attend school for one preferred lesson per day (i.e. PE, computers, construction)

Descriptor of baseline level: John is not currently attending school but speaks to a member of staff on the phone once per week

Baseline Level (prior to intervention): 2

Rating 1 (2) B 3 4 5 (6) E 7 8 9 10

Expected level (following intervention): 6-7

Descriptor of expected level: John is coming into school and meeting with his key adult for an hour per day (9-10am).

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Appendix C continued

Child/Young Person:	Date target set:
People present:	Date of review:
EP:	School:

Target 1: _____

Rating:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Descriptor of baseline level:	
Descriptor of expected level:	
Descriptor of level achieved:	

Target 2: _____

Rating:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Descriptor of baseline level:	
Descriptor of expected level:	
Descriptor of level achieved:	

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Appendix C continued

Target 3: _____

Rating:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Descriptor of baseline level:	
Descriptor of expected level:	
Descriptor of level achieved:	

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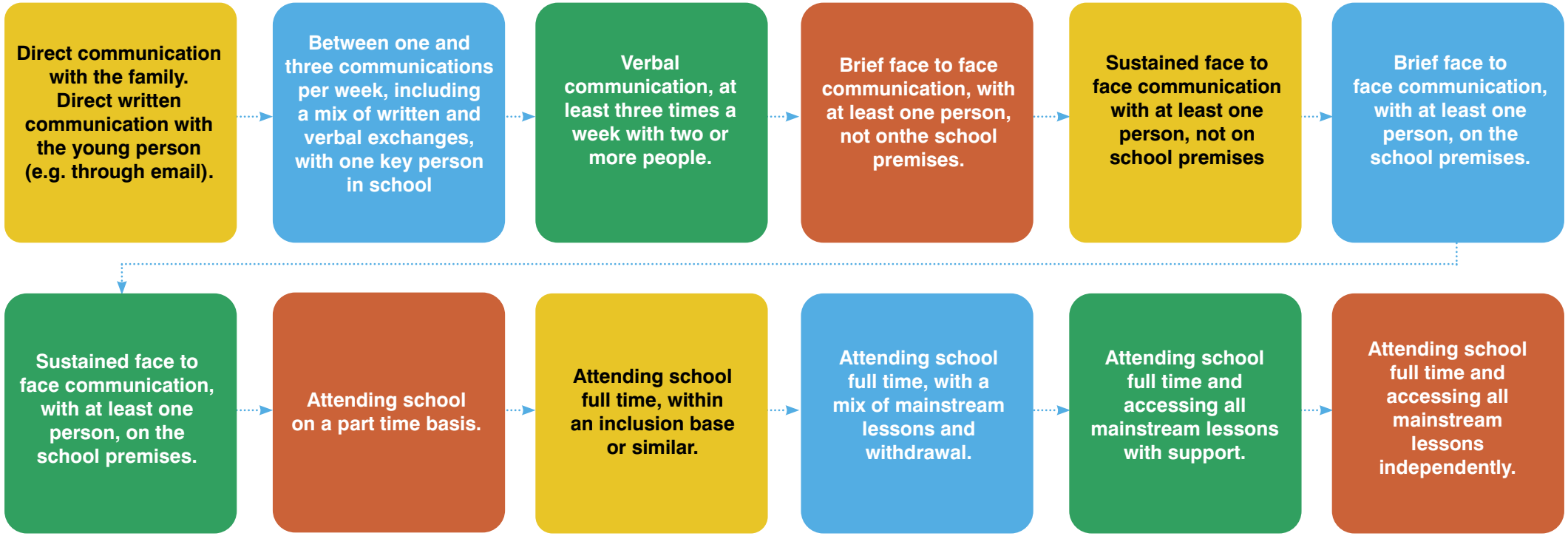
Examples of Targets for EBSA



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Case Study Example

Target 1 (Week 1):
Daily email contact with key adult at school.

Target 2 (Week 2):
Josh will be able to put on his uniform and walk past school during school hours at least once; daily email contact with key adult will continue.

Target 3 (Week 3):
Josh will have at least one contact (possibly via email, phone call or video call, depending on his preference) with at least two trusted members of staff.

Target 4:
Josh to visit school at an after-school timing to meet with key adult in Student Support Base. Josh empowered to determine the duration of this.

Target 5: During Easter holidays, Josh to attempt walking past school supported by his mother.

Target 6:
In the first week(s) of summer term, Josh to have one after school visit and 1-2 visits during school hours; by the third visit, for Josh to attempt some manageable work with a focus on 'catching up' missed/previously learned work.

Target 7:
Josh to have after school visits (1-3) as an aim of having more regular visits to school which can then be built up over time to daily.

Target 8:
Revisit previous target of Josh accessing after school time visits (1-3) then gradually increase again to afternoon timings during school hours.

Target 9:
Josh to consistently access school from 12pm or 11am timings. Josh to access lunchtime outside with peers. Josh to access a PE lesson or maths or science lesson.

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EBSA

EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL AVOIDANCE GUIDANCE

Appendix D

Card Sort:
Function of School Avoidance

This card sort activity, based on a School Refusal Assessment Scale developed by Kearney (2002), has been devised by Sheffield EPS as a tool to support staff to develop a greater understanding of a young person's school avoidance. The 24 statements are colour-coded by the function of behaviour identified by Kearney and Silverman (1990). By asking a pupil to sort the statements or by talking about each one, mentors may find that using the cards can support an understanding of the function of the school avoidance behaviour.

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Comms: 8280

Blue, Function 1: To avoid something or situations that elicits negative feelings or high levels of stress or anxiety (e.g. fear of the toilets; the noise in the playground; lots of people moving all together in the corridors between classes, tests/ exams)

Red, Function 2: To escape difficult social situations (e.g. feeling left out at playtime, reading out loud in class or other public speaking/group task, working as part of a group)

Green, Function 3: To get attention from or spend more time with significant others at home (e.g. change in family dynamic, concerned about the well-being of parent)

Yellow, Function 4: To spend more time out of school as it is more fun or stimulating (e.g. watch tv, go shopping, play computer games, hang out with friends).

How the statements could be used with a pupil:

- Cut up the statements
- Ask the pupil to sort the statements into three groups, shown on the white cards: A bit like me, most like me and least like me
- Using the key below, consider if any patterns are noticeable and whether some functions are more prevalent than others
- If the pupil is comfortable, discuss the statements to help build a richer picture

Consider together how this information can help to plan the next steps

Sheffield Educational Psychology Service 2020

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I have bad feelings about going to school because I'm afraid of something related to school (e.g. tests, school bus, teacher, fire alarm)

I stay away from school because it is hard to speak with the other kids at school

I would rather be with my parent(s) than go to school

When I am not in school during the week (Monday to Friday). I leave the house and do something fun

I stay away from school because I will feel sad or depressed if I go.

I stay away from school because I feel embarrassed in front of other people at school

I think about my parent(s) or family when in school

When I am not in school during the week (Monday to Friday). I talk to or see other people (other than my family)

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EBSA

I feel worse at school (e.g. scared, nervous, sad) compared to how I feel at home with friends

EBSA

I stay away from school because I do not have many friends there

EBSA

I would rather be with my parent(s) than go to school

EBSA

When I am not in school during the week (Monday to Friday). I enjoy doing different things (e.g. being with friends, going places)

EBSA

I have bad feelings about school (e.g. scared, nervous, sad) when I think about school on Saturday or Sunday

EBSA

I stay away from places in school (e.g. hallways, places where certain groups of people are) where I would have to talk to someone

EBSA

I would rather be taught by my parents at home than by my teacher at school

EBSA

I stay away from school because I want to have fun outside of school

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EBSA

If I had less bad feelings (e.g. scared, nervous, sad) about school, it would be easier for me to go to school

If it were easier for me to make new friends, it would be easier for me to go to school

It would be easier for me to go to school if my parents went with me

It would be easier for me to go to school if I could do more things I like to do more things I like to do after school hours (e.g. being with friends)

I have bad feelings about school (e.g. scared, nervous, sad) compared to other kids of my age

I often stay away from people in school compared to other kids of my age

I would like to be home with my parents more than other kids my age would

I would rather be doing fun things outside of school more than most kids of my age

EBSA

Most like me

EBSA

A bit like me

EBSA

Least like me

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Appendix E

Instructions for staff:

The Physical Environment

Equipment required:

- Map of the school: showing all areas labelled, e.g. include outside space, bike sheds, toilets, corridors, stairs, hall, resourced provision, SEN base, etc.
- Coloured highlighter pens: red, yellow, green.

The Social Environment:

Explain the task carefully to the pupil so that they understand that some social encounters can be positive but others may cause anxiety. Check they understand the rating scales and how to complete them.

The Learning Environment:

When the pupil has rated their subjects, choose one that has been rated as a 5 and one that has been rated as a 1 or 2. How the pupil describes what makes their experiences different for these two subjects can be used to explore their personal constructs and give some insights into triggers for anxiety.

Example: What makes maths a good lesson for you, and worries you about science?

Laddering Activity (example statements)	
Score 1 or 2	Score 4 or 5
Science	Maths
• We have to get into groups or find a partner to work with • The teacher sometimes changes his mind and takes us out of the classroom to find things • The lab smells.	• We sit at our tables • I have a set place at the side of the class • People do not talk or mess about • The teacher does not shout

Working in class
Explain to the students that different lessons involve different ways of writing and some we find more comfortable than others. Ask them to think about these ways of working and rate them using the 1-5 scale.

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PRIMARY

Pupil version

Mapping the Landscape of Your School

1. The Physical Environment

- Look carefully at the map of your school
- Use the highlighter pens to mark how the areas on the map make you feel.
  Green = I feel calm and relaxed in this space
  Yellow = I feel anxious/uncomfortable in this space
  Red = I would like to avoid this space as it makes me very anxious

- For the areas that you have coloured red, what makes you feel unsafe?

- What might the school do to help you feel safer in your 'red' areas?

Thank you for colouring the map.

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2. The Social Environment

During the school day children work with their class and talk to other children and adults. Sometimes this can be fun but sometimes we can feel anxious about being with other people. What things that you do with other people make you happy or upset you?

1	2	3	4	5
I avoid this If I can	I am very anxious about this	I feel anxious/ uncomfortable about this	I feel comfortable about this	I enjoy this

1 Coming into school in the morning.	1 2 3 4 5
2 Hanging up my coat or putting my bag in the cloakroom	1 2 3 4 5
3 Going into the classroom when the children are all moving round	1 2 3 4 5
4 Finding my job to do when I come in	1 2 3 4 5
5 Finding a place where I can sit	1 2 3 4 5
6 Carpet times	1 2 3 4 5
7 Lining up with my class	1 2 3 4 5
8 Choosing times	1 2 3 4 5
9 Going out to play	1 2 3 4 5
10 Sitting in the dining hall with other children	1 2 3 4 5
11 Changing for PE	1 2 3 4 5
12 Joining in with games, PE, dance	1 2 3 4 5

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EBSA

Working in class

Classes involve different ways of working and some we will find more comfortable than others.
Use the 5 point rating scale to indicate how you feel about different things that happen in classes.

1	2	3	4	5
I avoid this If I can	I am very anxious about this	I feel anxious/ uncomfortable about this	I feel comfortable about this	I enjoy this

1 Answering questions in class	1 2 3 4 5
2 Listening when the teacher explains what we are going to do	1 2 3 4 5
3 Following instructions.	1 2 3 4 5
4 Knowing what to do to start a task.	1 2 3 4 5
5 Working on my own.	1 2 3 4 5
6 Working with a learning partner.	1 2 3 4 5
7 Working in a group.	1 2 3 4 5
8 Asking a teacher for help when I have not understood something.	1 2 3 4 5
9 Working in a quiet class.	1 2 3 4 5
10 Working when other children are messing about.	1 2 3 4 5
11 Reading aloud in class	1 2 3 4 5
12 Written work – handwriting	1 2 3 4 5

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Working in class continued

1	2	3	4	5
I avoid this If I can	I am very anxious about this	I feel anxious/ uncomfortable about this	I feel comfortable about this	I enjoy this

13 Recording what I have done in pictures, diagrams or graphs.	1 2 3 4 5
14 Using the computer to record what I have done	1 2 3 4 5
15 When the teacher tells off other children	1 2 3 4 5
16 When the teacher is marking my work	1 2 3 4 5
17 When I go into class and my usual teacher is not there	1 2 3 4 5
18 Making sure that I have all the books and equipment I need for the task	1 2 3 4 5
19 When I have an LSA supporting me in class	1 2 3 4 5
20 When I have to stop what I am doing before I have finished	1 2 3 4 5
21 When the teacher uses pictures, diagrams, videos, etc to help to explain things	1 2 3 4 5
22 Homework	1 2 3 4 5
23 Sharing equipment in practical lessons, e.g. art or DT.	1 2 3 4 5
24 When other children try to distract me.	1 2 3 4 5
25. Class tests and assessments	1 2 3 4 5

Look at your rating about what happens in class. Can you describe your ideal class/lesson.

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3. The Learning Environment

Subject Preferences

Many different subjects are taught in school and some we find easier and more interesting than others. Rate the subjects on the list on a scale of 1 – 5.

e.g. If you really enjoy maths …

List of subjects	Rating
Maths	5

My subject ratings are ….

Subject	Rating	Subject	Rating
Science		Art	
ICT		DT	
Reading		Geography	
PE/Games		French	
Drama		Spanish	
Topic work		Other language	
RE		Dance	
Maths		Music	

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SECONDARY

Student version

Mapping the Landscape of Your School

1. The Physical Environment

- Look carefully at the map of your school
- Use the highlighter pens to mark how the areas on the map make you feel.
  Green = I feel calm and relaxed in this space
  Yellow = I feel anxious/uncomfortable in this space
  Red = I would like to avoid this space as it makes me very anxious

- For the areas that you have coloured red, are there any circumstances, e.g. time of day, which make you feel more safe?

- What might the school do to help you feel safer in your 'red' areas?

Thank you for colouring the map.

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2. The Social Environment

During the school day we are expected to work with and talk to both adults and other students. Sometimes these social situations can be pleasant but at other times they may cause us anxiety. Some social situations are described below. Mark on the rating scale to show how you feel about them, e.g.

1	2	3	4	5
I avoid this If I can	I am very anxious about this	I feel anxious/ uncomfortable about this	I feel comfortable about this	I enjoy this

1 Greeting other students in the tutor group in the morning.	1 2 3 4 5
2 Walking down corridors at less changeover time.	1 2 3 4 5
3 Lining up to go into the classroom before a lesson.	1 2 3 4 5
4 In class, if there is no teacher in the room.	1 2 3 4 5
5 Waiting to go into the canteen for lunch.	1 2 3 4 5
6 Buying food in the canteen.	1 2 3 4 5
7 Sitting in the canteen	1 2 3 4 5
8 Break times when I have to go out with the other students	1 2 3 4 5
9 Changing for PE	1 2 3 4 5
10 Taking part in PE, games	1 2 3 4 5
11 Talking to subject teachers	1 2 3 4 5
12 Talking to support staff/ staff in RP	1 2 3 4 5

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Working in class continued

13 Getting to school and home from school:

Walk

Bus

Taxi

14 Talking to other students in my tutor group

15 Talking to classmates

For the situations that you find most difficult – please write down what would make them easier for you.

What could make a difference….	
Situation	**Idea**
•	
•	
•	
•	
•	

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3. The Learning Environment

Subject Preferences

Many different subjects are taught in school and some we find easier and more interesting than others. Rate the subjects on the list on a scale of 1 – 5.

1 I avoid this subject

2 I do not like this subject

3 this is ok

4 I like this subject

5 I really enjoy this subject

e.g. If you really enjoy maths …

List of subjects	Rating
Maths	5

My subject ratings are ….

Subject	Rating	Subject	Rating
Science		Art	
ICT		DT	
Reading		Geography	
PE/Games		French	
Drama		Spanish	
Topic work		Other language	
RE		Dance	
Maths		Music	

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EBSA

Classes involve different ways of working and some we will find more comfortable than others.
Use the 5 point rating scale to indicate how you feel about different things that happen in classes.

1	2	3	4	5
I avoid this If I can	I am very anxious about this	I feel anxious/ uncomfortable about this	I feel comfortable about this	I enjoy this

1	Answering questions in class	1	2	3	4	5
2	Listening when the teacher explains what we are going to do in the lesson.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Following instructions.	1	2	3	4	5
4	knowing what to do to start a task.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Working on my own.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Working with a learning partner.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Working in a group.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Asking a teacher for help when I have not understood something.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Working in a quiet class	1	2	3	4	5
10	Working when other students are messing about.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Reading aloud in class.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Written work – handwriting.	1	2	3	4	5

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13 Recording what I have done using pictures, diagrams or graphs	1 2 3 4 5
14 Using the computer to record what I have done	1 2 3 4 5
15 When the teacher tells off other students	1 2 3 4 5
16 When the teacher is giving back our homework	1 2 3 4 5
17 When the teacher is marking my work	1 2 3 4 5
18 When I go into class and my usual teacher is not there, but a cover	1 2 3 4 5
19 When our class has been moved to a different room	1 2 3 4 5
20 Making sure that I have all the books and equipment I need for the class	1 2 3 4 5
21 Writing down homework so that I can understand what to do when I get home	1 2 3 4 5
22 When I have an LSA supporting me in class	1 2 3 4 5
23 When I have to stop what I am doing before I have finished	1 2 3 4 5
24 When the teacher writes down what we have to do as well as telling us	1 2 3 4 5

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25. When the teacher uses pictures, diagrams, videos, etc to help to explain things.	1 2 3 4 5
26 Homework.	1 2 3 4 5
27 Sharing equipment in practical lessons, e.g. art or DT.	1 2 3 4 5
28 When other students try to distract me.	1 2 3 4 5
29 When the teacher introduces a new topic I know little or nothing about	1 2 3 4 5
30 Class tests and assessments	1 2 3 4 5

Look at your rating about what happens in class. Can you describe your ideal class/lesson.

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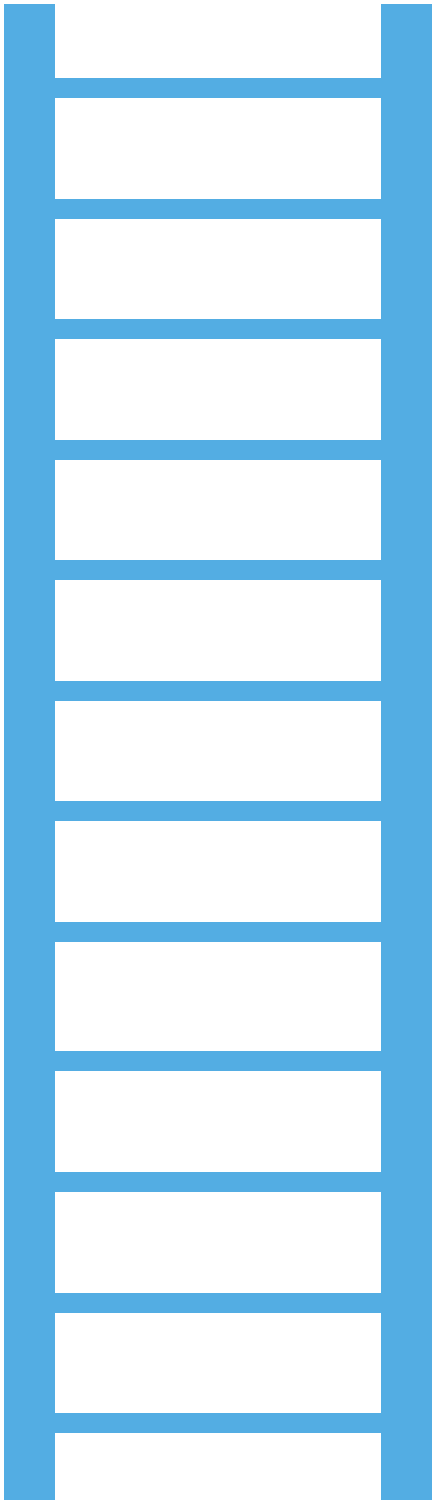
Appendix F

Ladder template



Most worried about

Not so worried about

With thanks to Derbyshire Educational Psychology Service and Cheshire West & Chester Educational Psychology Service

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Appendix F continued

Laddering Approaches

Planned Return

When developing an Action Plan to support the reintegration of a pupil to the educational setting, depending on the level of anxiety the pupil is displaying and the length of time they have been out of school, the following possibilities should be considered:

1. a return to school on a full timetable
2. implementation of a part time timetable with a gradual return
3. consultation with CAMHS and other agencies which may, if necessary, lead to a referral for out of school tuition as part of a reintegration plan

All pupils of compulsory school age are entitled to a full-time education and parents have a legal duty to ensure that their child attends school on a regular basis.
However, the DfE guidance on Working together to improve school attendance (2022) states that:

> ‘n very exceptional circumstances, where it is in a pupil’s best interests, there may be a need for a temporary part-time timetable to meet their individual needs ’

The advice is clear that a part-time timetable should not be considered a long-term solution but rather as part of a reintegration package of support.

Any return to school plan should recognise that EBSA is unique to each pupil.
There also needs to be recognition by those involved with the pupil that sometimes there is no ‘quick fix’ to EBSA. A flexible approach that incorporates the views of all
involved and most importantly, the views of the young person, is required. Everyone, school staff and parents, need to share the expectation that the plan, once agreed, will work.

For some young people, who are working on a gradual reintegration package, it can be helpful to put together a step-by-step plan that gradually, over time, exposes them to the situations that are anxiety provoking. This gives the individual some control over the plan and hopefully helps them to feel more confident as each step is achieved.

The plan will be different for each individual but should start with a first step that is achievable. Through discussion with parents and the pupil it should be possible to identify situations that are more anxiety provoking for the individual than others and therefore would need to be addressed at a later stage and as the pupil’s confidence and comfort levels improve.

It is anticipated that over time, with gradual and supported access to school and specific situations, the child’s anxiety and fears will decrease through a process of habituation and exposure.

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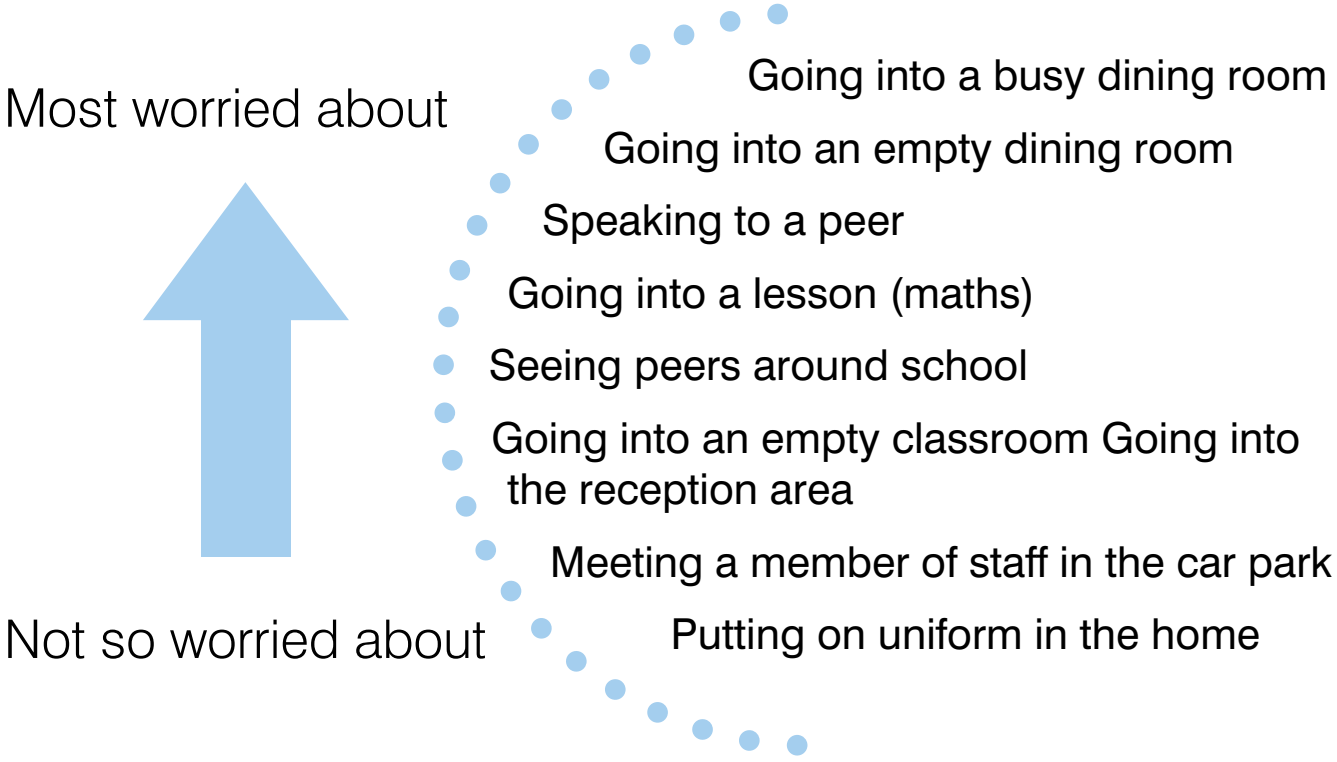
Appendix F continued

Parents, carers and the pupil will need to be made aware that initially the individual's anxiety is likely to increase as they are faced with the prospect of going back into school. This is normal and to be expected.

Developing an anxiety or exposure ladder with the pupil can be helpful. The individual would be asked to identify the situation in school which they are most worried about, for instance going back into a mainstream lesson and then less fearful situations, working down the ladder. On the bottom rung of the ladder would be the situation that the pupil feels least fearful or worried about.

This would be a useful starting point for any subsequent plan with each step being consolidated before moving on.

A blank ladder template and examples have been included below. Each ladder will, of course, reflect the particular thoughts and feelings of the individual pupil.



It can be helpful, for some pupils, to start off by going into the school building, for instance into the reception or office area for a period of time before building up to attendance at specific lessons or less structured times of the day. In some cases, it may be helpful for pupils to be met by a member of staff in the school car park or reception area to support the transition between parent and school.

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Appendix F continued

It is important for each step on the plan to be consolidated before moving on and the plan therefore has to be under constant review with staff liaising with the pupil, parents and other members of staff. The plan will need to be adjusted in relation to practical arrangements, how the pupil appears to be reacting and coping, and feedback from parents.

Further considerations

A guide published by Anxiety UK looking at anxiety in the context of school suggests that the following issues need to be considered as part of the reintegration process:

- where are they most comfortable sitting in class
- which teachers and members of staff they feel most comfortable with
- how they find it easiest to enter the room
- who they have to support them
- whether or not they can cope with being asked questions in class
- how they get from class to class
- where they feel comfortable in school if they cannot get into class.

They also suggest that use of, and access to, toilets and eating in front of people in the dining hall can be sources of anxiety and therefore will need to be a consideration for some young people. Some pupils may express a fear around peers, or indeed adults, asking questions about their absence once they re-join the class. School staff can prepare pupils for this by thinking together about appropriate responses or scripts and actually rehearsing ways in which the individual can manage the situation. Likewise, adults can support pupils by helping them develop positive, alternative thoughts which emphasis
the individual's capacity to cope.

Heyne and Rollings (2002) suggest that some pupils will find it hard to generate coping statements and should be given the opinion of choosing from a pre-prepared list.

Examples are included below.

Negative	Coping
I can't do it	I managed it yesterday, I can do it. It will get easier.
It's too much	I'm okay, I just need to take it one step at a time. There are people who will help me.
I'm useless at math	There are people in the lesson I can ask for help. I'm not expected to know everything or to catch up straight away.

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Appendix F continued

Laddering activity: this activity requires pupils to think about different situations related to attending school that they are most or least worried about. Provide the pupil with a range of activity statements / situations which reflect their current school experience and daily life. Statements should be tailored to each pupil. Include some 'blank' cards to add further situations should they come up in conversation with the pupil. Ask the pupil to sort the situations according to those they feel 'most worried about', or most bothered about (common responses are 'leaving the house' or 'going into a named lesson'), and those they feel least / not so worried about, or are not really a bother for them. Ask the pupil to order the statements from the top to the bottom of the ladder (from most worried about to least worried about). The laddering activity is a useful starting point for planning support and in identifying small step goals we might first need to address to help the pupil to manage their feelings / specific situations, and to build up their school attendance. Addressing situations the pupil is least worried about should be worked on first. Each step on the plan should be consolidated before moving onto the next. (See example laddering activity). Each ladder should be personalised to the pupil, including use of pictures or modified with symbols as appropriate to the pupil's needs.

Laddering Activity (example statements)	
Going into a busy dining hall	Meeting a member of staff in the school car park
Going into an empty dining hall	Putting my uniform on at home
Speaking to another pupil	PE lessons
Going into a lesson (eg. Maths)	Going into a lesson (eg. English)
Seeing pupils around school	Lunch time
Going into an empty classroom	Break time
Going into the reception area /walking into the school building	Travelling to school
The smell of …	Leaving the house
The noise in/on …	Teachers asking me a question
Getting a question wrong	Getting something wrong
Other pupils asking me questions	Understanding what I need to do
Understanding what the teacher means	School rules, such as…
Going to the toilets	Seeing my friends in school

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Appendix G

Transition Support

Literature has shown that peaks in the number of young people with EBSA correspond with transition in educational phases. This is not surprising as young people face significant changes.

Most children adjust to these changes over time. However young people who experience higher levels of anxiety or who have experienced loss and separation may be vulnerable to developing or experience an exacerbation of EBSA behaviours. It is important that schools and parents provide appropriate support and any vulnerable young people are flagged up early by the feeder school and an individual approach is taken.

Good transition practice involves effective exchange of information both pastoral and academic from primary to secondary school. **It is crucially important if feeder schools flag up any early separation difficulties and past EBSA even if the issues were mild and attendance is now fine.** It is advised that secondary schools should specifically ask this information on any transition gathering forms.

Good transition also involves good communication with the young person and their parents/carers. Key to this is giving the pupil and their parents practical information. Practical supports for key information is provided below. It is advisable that this is provided to pupils as a proactive, preventative measure in advance of the transition from primary-secondary school.

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Appendix G continued

Key information required	Practical supports
Travel to school – how will they get there	Go through journey to school, practice this, identify any companions
Key people in school	Give a simplified structure chart, provide photos, identify a key person
Environment	Layout of school – Provide maps, give tours, quiz, colour code subjects to building areas
Structure of the day timetables, break and lunchtime systems	Provide timetables, colour code these, break and lunchtime systems
Social time – supporting social interactions and those more vulnerable, bullying policies	Identify how pupils will be supported to make new friendships, access to supported social activities
Academic demands – how lessons are structured. Homework	Give information about how lessons are structured, homework expectations
Support systems in place – pastoral SEN support	Set out how young people will be supported provide one-page profile
Equipment needed	Provide checklist for each day

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Appendix G continued

If I don't know where my classroom is...

- I will get my plan from my student planner and see if I can work it out
- I will try and ask someone in my class
- I will ask my teacher

If someone calls me an unkind name...

- I will try and walk away and not swear or shout
- I will tell a teacher why I feel upset
- My teacher will deal with it and talk to that person

What if I have nothing to do at breaktime...

- I could go to the library
- I could buy a snack and eat it in the dining hall
- I could find my buddy

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Appendix G continued

Strategies to support vulnerable pupils at transition

- ✓ Assign a member of staff as a "mentor" to help in times of 'crisis' (for example to call upon if pupil becomes anxious over losing dinner money). The same person could be the home- school liaison
- ✓ Person centred One Page Profile/Pupil Passport
- ✓ Provide a map of the new school building; colour code subjects and classrooms; highlight important areas e.g. dining hall, locker, hall, form room
- ✓ Make the timetable easy to use for the individual
  Create daily checklists so the correct items are taken to/ from school according to daily activities
- ✓ Create a user- friendly diary for organising homework
  Set up a "buddy-system" with a designated peer/ group to help the individual move between classes
- ✓ Plan for a consistent approach between all lessons. A staff communication system (in diary form) may be useful to pass on information. Remember to consider an Education Support Plan or Pupil Profile
- ✓ Make provision for a 'chill out /safe space' for an individual to withdraw to when necessary
- ✓ Consider procedures for break and lunchtimes which can often be the most stressful time of the day. Options include a "circle of friends" or a lunch club as a way to structure these times. However, be vigilant about bullying.

With thanks to West Sussex Educational Psychology Service and Cheshire West & Chester Educational Psychology Service

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EBSA

EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL AVOIDANCE GUIDANCE

Developed by Lancashire Educational Psychology Service EBSA Working Group:

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(with thanks to Brighton & Hove Educational Psychology Service; Cheshire West & Cheshire Educational Psychology Service; Derbyshire Educational Psychology Service; West Sussex Educational Psychology Service); Sheffield Educational Psychology Service

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