

# Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Information for parents and carers



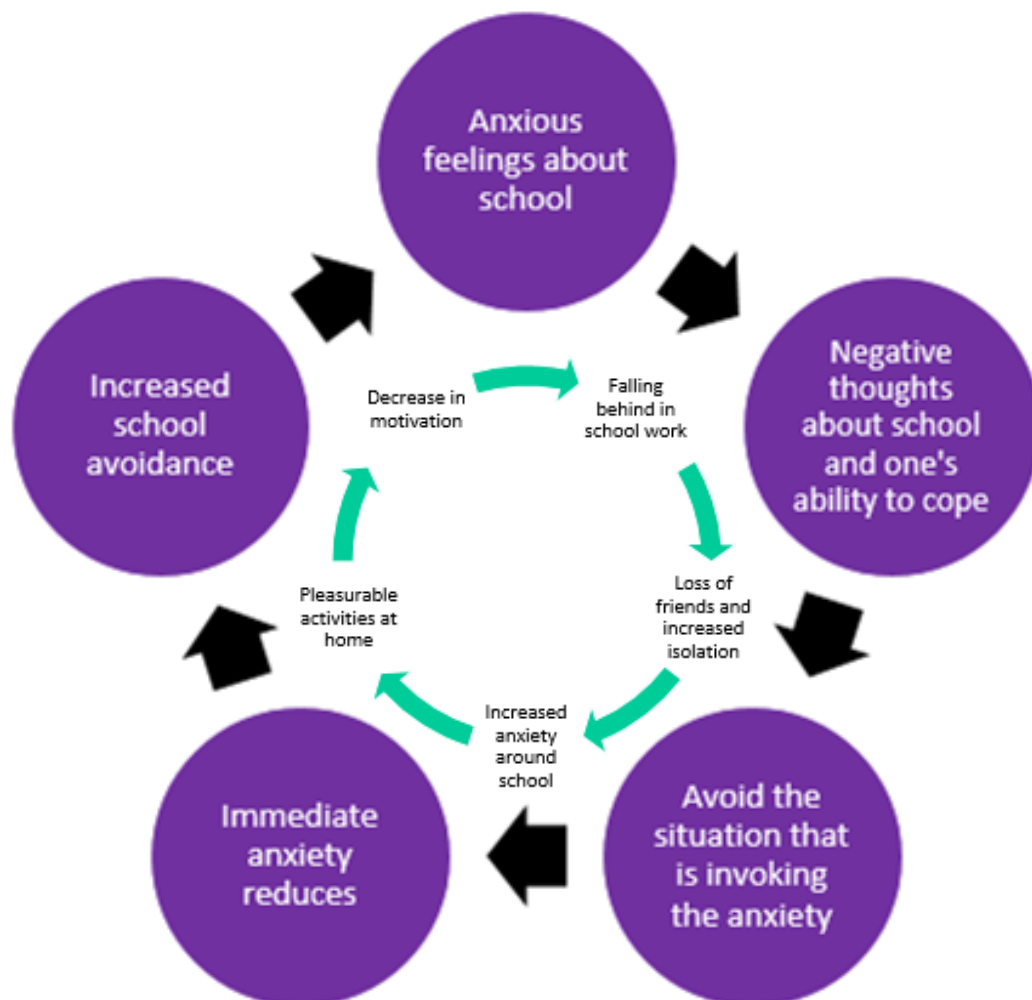
## What is EBSA?

Many children and young people worry about school. This is normal. Anxieties are part of life and learning to deal with them is part of growing up. However sometimes a child's worries may lead to difficulties attending school. If your child has high levels of anxiety and does not want to attend school they may be experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA).

# Is your child worried about going to school?

It is very important to try to help children and young people overcome these difficulties as soon as possible. Absences mean that children miss out on learning and friendships, making it even more difficult when they come back.

The diagram below shows how EBSA behaviours can develop.



The longer the problems remain unaddressed the more difficult it becomes to change the school avoiding behaviour.

# Signs of EBSA

## These could include:

- Fearfulness, anxiety, tantrums or expression of negative feelings, when faced with the prospect of attending school.
- They may complain that they have abdominal pain, headache, and sore throat, often with no signs of actual physical illness.
- Complain of anxiety symptoms that include a racing heart, shaking, sweating, difficulty breathing, and butterflies in the tummy or nausea, pins and needles.

The symptoms are typically worse on weekday mornings and absent at weekends and school holidays.



## What should you do?

One of the most important ways you can support your child is to calmly **listen to them and acknowledge that their fears are real to them.** Remind them how important it is to attend school and reassure them that you and the school will work with them to make school a happier place for them.

**Tell the school** there is a problem as soon as possible and work in partnership with the school to address the issue. **A plan should be made** with the school to

help your child. Towards the beginning of initiating the plan your child may show more unhappiness and you should prepare yourself for this.

It is really important that all adults both at home and school **work together** to agree a firm and consistent approach. Any concerns about the plan should not be shared with your child and a positive 'united front' is recommended.

It is likely that there may be difficulties implementing the plan and these should be anticipated and solutions found. You should try to keep an **optimistic approach**, if your child fails to attend school on one day, start again the next day.

It is also important to remember there is likely to be more difficulty after a school holiday, period of illness or after the weekend.

You may feel tempted to change schools, however research tells us that often difficulties will re-emerge in the new school and whenever possible it is normally better to try to **resolve the issue** in the current school.

Finally, as a parent it can be really difficult to see your child unhappy. Make sure that **you have someone to talk to too**. This could be a friend, family member or an organisation such as those listed at the end of this leaflet.

# What can the school do to support you?

- Listen carefully to you and your child. They should acknowledge the challenges faced by your child and you as their parent.
- Maintain close contact with you and your child, even during extended periods of non-attendance. An agreed member of staff should be named as a link person.
- Work in partnership with you and your child to find out what difficulties your child is experiencing and find ways of making school a happier place and improve their attendance.
- Hold meetings to devise a plan in conjunction with you and your child. The plan should include what the next steps will be **and a time line**.
- Respond to any school-based needs, such as academic support, dealing with bullying or support with social relationships.
- Consider the support your child might require upon arrival at school. This might include meeting with a friend at a specific place and time, using a quiet space to settle before school starts, engaging in a preferred activity or being given a responsibility such as a monitor role.
- If difficulties persist the school will talk with you about referring to other agencies for additional support. These services can further explore the difficulties and support you around how to identify EBSA triggers and how you and the school play a role in the cycle. They can then advise and assist you and school in supporting your child with the transition from home back into school.
- The school should refer to the Conwy County Borough Council EBSA Guidance Document.

# Talking to your child about their worries

Any child currently avoiding school is likely to become anxious when they are asked to talk about their difficulties or returning to school.

## Practical ways to work with your child to manage their anxiety:

These are things that you can try together. **TIPP** skills can help change yours or your child's body chemistry to help physically calm down

<b>T</b>	<b>Temperature</b>	Splash cold water on your face Hold an ice cube in your hand
<b>I</b>	<b>Intense exercise</b>	Do some jumping jacks Sprint really fast round the garden
<b>P</b>	<b>Paced breathing</b>	Try the square breathing method: breathe in, hold, breathe out, hold – for 4 seconds each
<b>P</b>	<b>Paired muscle relaxation</b>	Try tensing and relaxing your muscles

**ACCEPTS** can help distract you or your child in moments of feeling very distressed

<b>A</b>	<b>Activities</b>	Take part in activities that require concentration such as a hobby, a chore or work
<b>C</b>	<b>Contributing</b>	Focus on others – volunteer or do a good deed
<b>C</b>	<b>Comparisons</b>	Compare how you are feeling now to a time when you felt worse or different
<b>E</b>	<b>Emotions</b>	Try to create a competing emotion. If you feel anxious, try doing something relaxing like listening to music
<b>P</b>	<b>Pushing away</b>	Try to distance yourself from negative thoughts – imagine them as clouds and blowing them away in your mind
<b>T</b>	<b>Thoughts</b>	Try to focus on thoughts instead of emotions – count to 20 or read a book
<b>S</b>	<b>Sensations</b>	Do something that has an intense physical feeling such as eating a sour sweet or splashing your face with cold water

**Grounding** can help bring you or your child back to the present moment and out of being overwhelmed by thoughts. One way to do this is to name...

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste OR one positive quality you have

**When talking to a worried child it is important to remember the following,**

<b>Be calm</b>	Especially if your child is angry or highly emotional.
<b>Be close</b>	Physically close in an age appropriate way. Even if this means just being in the same room.
<b>Be connected</b>	If your child is comfortable with eye contact, try to make some even if saying nothing.
<b>Be reassuring</b>	Explain that you can see it's tough for them but that you will help – if you know what they are worrying about you could reassure them about that.
<b>Be present</b>	Give them your complete attention and suggest that you try to breathe together to help them calm or perhaps listen to something calming together.
<b>Be a listener</b>	They may be able to tell you what they are thinking or worrying about – listen even if their worries seem 'small' to you

## TOP TIPS

1. Routine is key!! Try to get a routine established as soon as possible. Bedtime, mealtimes, morning are important
2. Calm adults mean calm(er) children. Try to manage your own emotions when talking in front of the children about the return to school.
3. Stay positive – each day is a new day.
4. Reassure and answer questions. Have a look at your school's website for any videos showing what to expect.
5. Focus on the positives. What will your child enjoy and benefit from in going to school? Think of 3 things together.





# Further sources of support

## Conwy Family Centres

Conwy has 5 family centres and are available for families to access support and to work with families to identify and address needs and give advice.

Contact [familycentres@conwy.gov.uk](mailto:familycentres@conwy.gov.uk) to find your nearest family centre

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvcQykb7m1w&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvcQykb7m1w&feature=emb_title)

## Conwy Mind

Mind is a national mental health charity concerned with the needs and rights of mentally distressed people and their families.

<https://conwymind.org.uk/>

## Youngminds

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: <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/>

## Education Service

Contact Conwy Education Services for further advice and support. Phone: 01492 575031 (Mon-Thurs 9-5pm; Fri 9-4:45pm)

Website: <https://www.conwy.gov.uk/en/Resident/Education-and-Families/Contact-us.aspx>

### **Solihull Online Learning for Parents**

This is an online course available for parents of children from bump to 19 years. The course covers a range of topics, it is flexible and it is free for families in North Wales.

Website: <https://www.conwy.gov.uk/en/Resident/Social-Care-and-Wellbeing/Children-and-families/assets/documents/Flashcard-1v1.jpg>

### **SNAP Cymru**

Provides information, advice and support for parents, children and young people who have, or may have, additional learning needs or disabilities.

Website: <https://www.snapcymru.org/>

### **Action for Children**

Provide advice for parents on a range of topics.

Website:

[https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/?\\_ga=2.37093280.1870612471.1614259508-925271718.1598282442](https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/?_ga=2.37093280.1870612471.1614259508-925271718.1598282442)

### **Cruse Bereavement Service**

Offer support to families who have been bereaved. Helpline: 0808 808 1677 (Mon-Fri 9:30-5pm; Tues, Wed & Thurs 9:30-8pm; Weekends 10-2pm)

Website: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/>

### **Barnardo's**

Provide support for families, young people and children

Website: <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/helping-families>



## TGP Cymru

**Provide advocacy support for families, children and young people experiencing difficulties accessing appropriate services**

**Website: <https://www.tgpcymru.org.uk/who-we-are/>**



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Produced by Conwy Educational Psychology Service, Conwy School Based Counselling, Conwy Youth Service, Conwy TRAC Service, Conwy Education Welfare Service and Conwy Family Centres.