

Emotionally Based School Avoidance Guidance for Parents and Carers



What is Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)?

In Redbridge, we define EBSA as a difficulty attending an educational setting due to emotional reasons. We recognise that there are often multiple factors that contribute to school avoidance.

We do not locate the problem of attendance difficulties within the child or family. This is why we use the term *avoidance* rather than *refusal*, *struggling to* rather than *won't*.

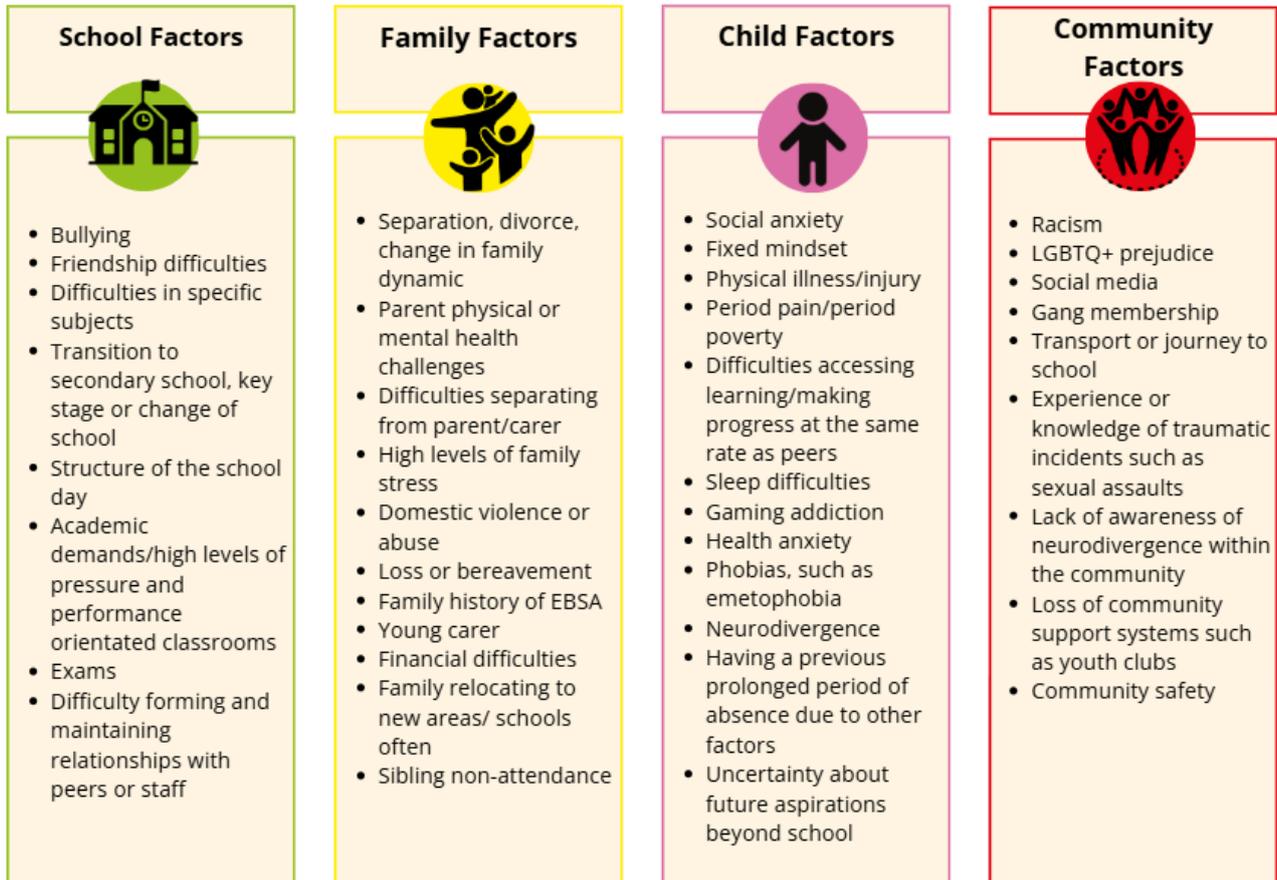
EBSA can present as a prolonged period not attending school though it can look different for different children and may also involve:

- Periods of absence followed by attendance (e.g. not attending for 1 week and then returning before being off again)
- A pattern of non-attendance on certain days
- Inconsistent attendance (e.g. 2 days off per week)
- Persistent, significant lateness (e.g. only attending in the afternoon)

Why does EBSA happen?

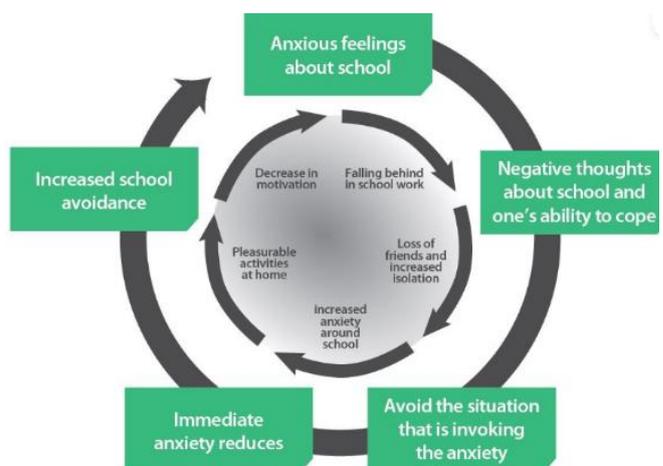
Contributing Factors

For most children there are lots of reasons why they struggle to attend school. Below are some factors that may increase a child's vulnerability to developing difficulties with attending. There may also be other things that contribute to your child's difficulties.



The cycle of avoidance

When children avoid school, their anxious feelings reduce in the short term. The more time they are away from school, the higher their anxiety will get in the long term. The main way to tackle anxiety is to break this cycle of avoidance by taking small steps towards doing the things that make them feel anxious. Anxiety will be high initially but will reduce the more exposure they have.



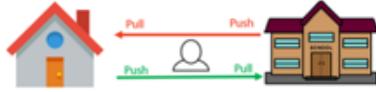
Push and pull factors

Every child's reasons for struggling to go into school will be different. We can use the push/pull factors grid to understand why a child might be struggling.

- Anxious about dad's health
- Watches TV at home most days

- Worried about 'failing' GCSEs
- Incident of bullying in Year 7

In the red boxes, we record factors that are pushing young people away from school and pulling them towards staying at home (i.e. risk factors).



- Dad really wants them to attend

- Wants to do A levels
- Likes Head of Year
- Has a friend at school

In the green boxes, we record factors that may push young people away from home and pull them into school (resilience factors).

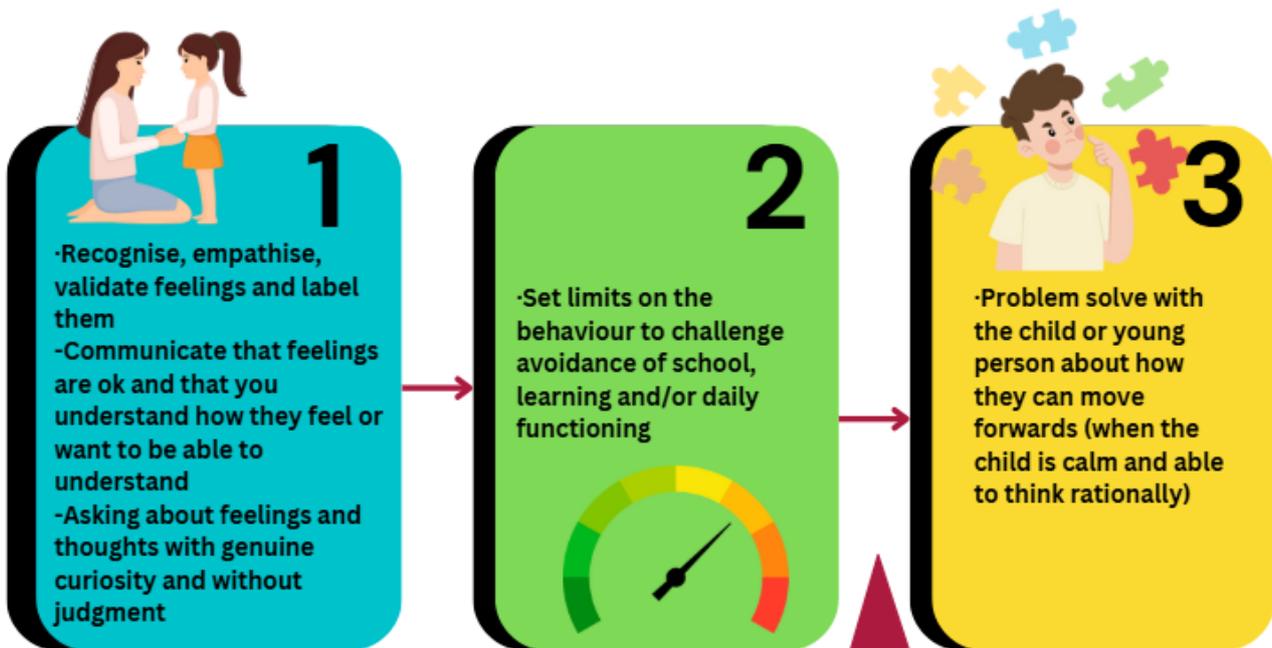
How can you support your child?

Helping a child who's struggling to attend school can be very difficult for parents and carers. The strategies below can be helpful ways to support your child at home and with the return to school but it's important to also be kind to yourself and take some time for yourself when you can.

Emotion Coaching

Using Emotion Coaching can be a helpful way to guide conversations and plans made with your child.

Emotion coaching prioritises empathising with emotions before setting boundaries and limits on behaviours. It aims to provide both empathy and guidance by supporting young people to problem solve and make a change so that they can challenge their anxiety.



I can see how difficult coming into school is for you. I really want to understand how school feels for you right now- can you help me understand how you're feeling? School, learning and being outside is a part of life so we need to find a way to help you with that. We need to take steps to helping you make progress- what would be a good first step?

Positive relationship strategies

<p>1</p>  <p>Have a clear routine for the morning that you work through step by step. Using pictures to support the routine might also be helpful.</p>	<p>2</p>  <p>Be mindful of your own reactions. Remain as calm as possible and try not to communicate your own concerns or worries verbally or non-verbally. You might need to take some timeout!</p>	<p>3</p>  <p>Keep a daily routine that involves learning activities, scheduled breaks and other purposeful daily activities at home so there is a difference between school and after school hours.</p>
<p>4</p>  <p>Keep elements of the day the same and routine, in the morning, evening and during the day if not at school.</p>	<p>5</p>  <p>Move through levels of challenge around attending or doing school work gradually, in small steps.</p>	<p>6</p>  <p>Avoid confrontation and heated discussions by remembering 'slow, low, low'; slow speed, low tone, low volume, when speaking.</p>
<p>7</p>  <p>Communicate to your child that you believe that they can cope with taking the next step to overcoming anxiety.</p>	<p>8</p>  <p>Help your child come up with solutions for 'what if' problems. The more they can come up with themselves, the more likely they are to do them.</p>	<p>9</p>  <p>Help your child learn regulation strategies such as deep breathing, using fidget toys and distraction techniques such as colour counting (see appendix).</p>

Helping your child feel safe

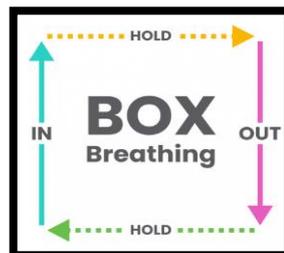
<p>1</p>  <p>Try to understand how your child is feeling and why they're struggling. Give them time to think and don't ask too many questions in one go.</p>	<p>2</p>  <p>Ask questions rather than giving answers and reassurance. For example: 'What are you worried will happen?'</p>	<p>3</p>  <p>Try to ensure that your child sees positive, encouraging interactions between parents/carers and school.</p>
<p>4</p>  <p>Give your child a small object from you or from home that they can take into school to keep until they give it back to you at the end of the day.</p>	<p>5</p>  <p>Reward and positively affirm small steps of progress to recognise when your child has faced their fears.</p>	<p>6</p>  <p>Plan 'special time' where you can spend quality time with your child after they've been to school. Let your child choose and lead what you do.</p>

Appendix 1: Regulation Strategies

The strategies below can be used to help children feel calmer when they are overwhelmed, stressed or worried. It's best to practice them with your child when they're calm so that they can use them in times of distress.

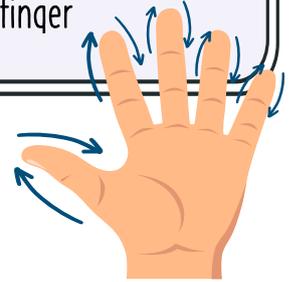
Box Breathing

- Start at the bottom left corner
- Breathe in for 4 seconds
- Hold your breathe for 4 seconds
- Release for 4 seconds
- Hold the out breathe for 4 seconds



Finger Breathing

- Start at the bottom of your thumb
- Trace up your thumb for 4 seconds whilst breathing in
- Breathe out for 4 seconds as you trace down your thumb
- Continue with each finger



5, 4, 3, 2, 1

- 5** Things you can see 
- 4** Things you can touch 
- 3** Things you can hear 
- 2** Things you can smell 
- 1** Things you can taste 

Colour Counting

- Pick a colour in the space you are in
- Look around the room and count as many objects/things that are your chosen colour
- Repeat as many times as you need to support regulation

