

# Emotional based school avoidance



**Information for parent/carers**

**Wiltshire Educational Psychology Service  
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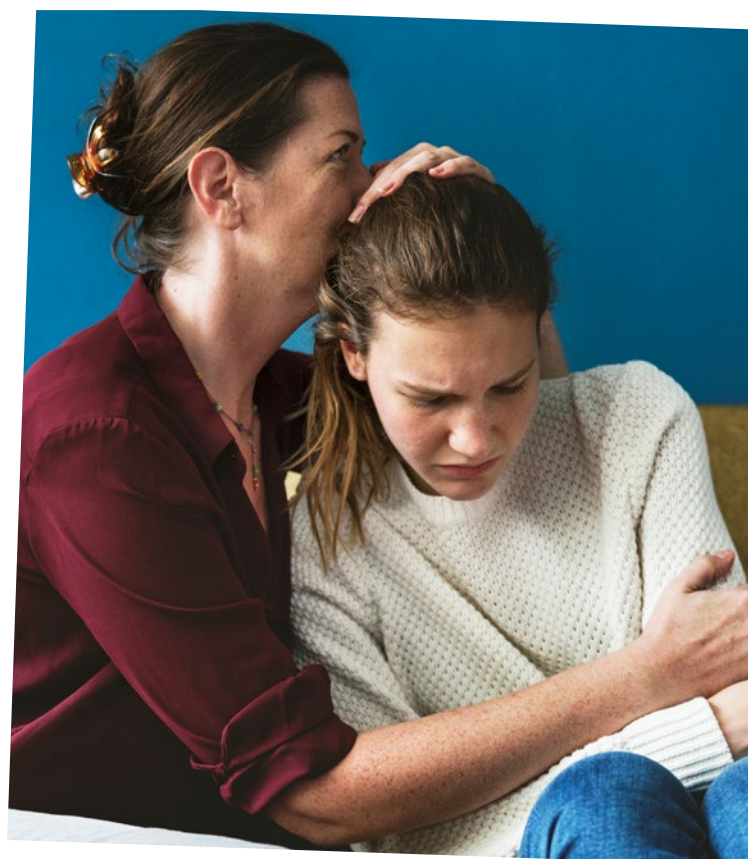
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## What is emotionally based school avoidance?

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is the phrase used to describe children who are not attending school or who are finding it very difficult to go to school due to emotionally reasons.

Worrying or anxiety are normal feelings that we all experience from time to time. Worry only becomes a problem when it stops people doing what they want or need to do. Many children and young people worry about school. This is normal. Learning to deal with anxieties is part of growing up.

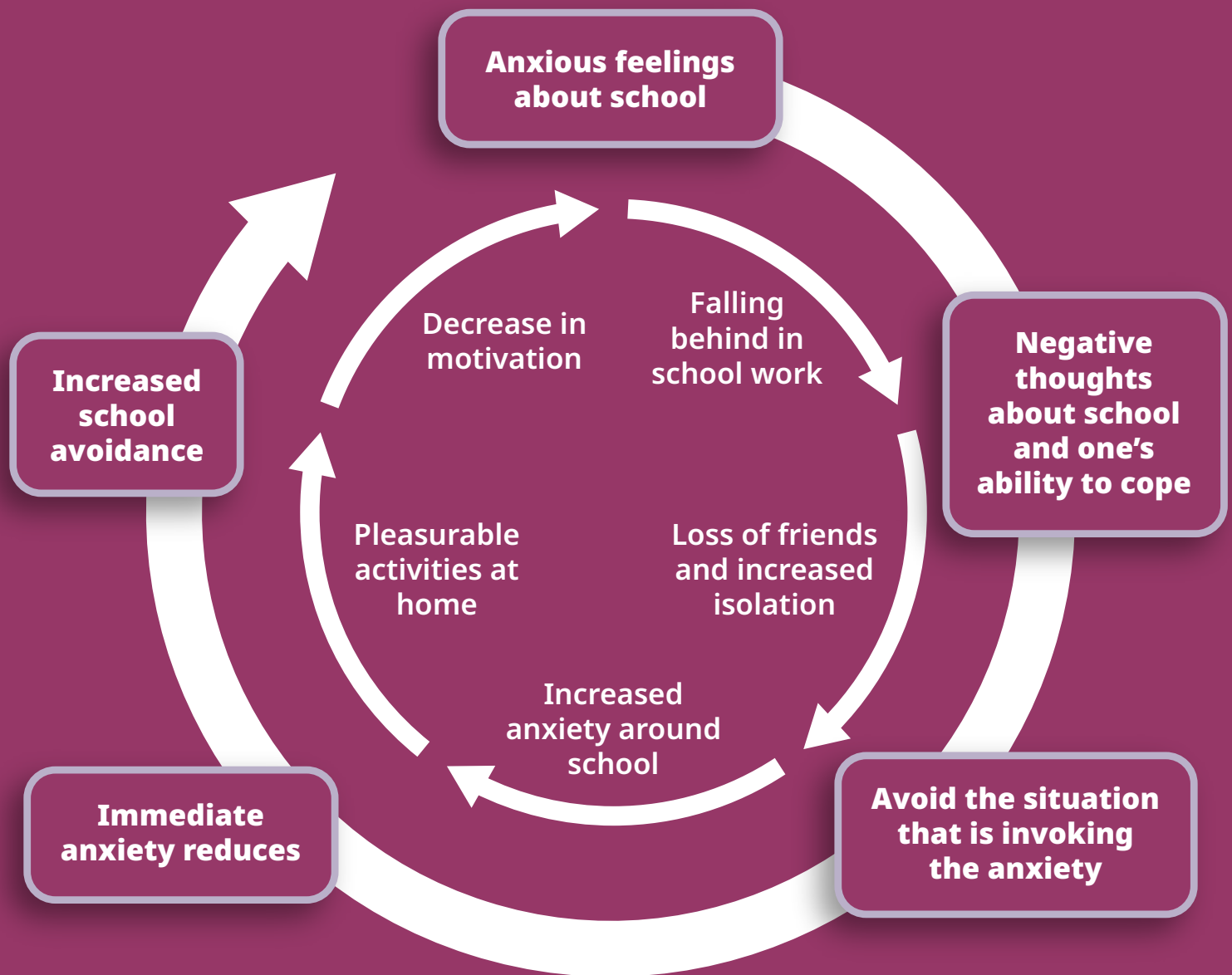
However, some children find that they worry so much that it stops them from feeling able to go to school. When high levels of anxiety stop a child from attending school, this may be called Emotionally Based School avoidance (EBSA).



## Is your child worried about going to school?

If your child is very worried about school, it may feel 'kinder' to just keep them at home for a short period. However, the more time they spend away from school, the more difficult it becomes to return. It is best to ask for support early so that your child returns to school as soon as possible.

The diagram shows how EBSA behaviour quickly develops:



The longer your child stays at home, the more difficult it is to change the school avoiding behaviour. Its best to ask for support early to help your child return to school.



## Signs of EBSA

This might include:

- Complaining of tummy ache, headaches, sickness, when there is no evidence of actual physical illness.
- Poor sleep, especially on weekdays.
- More upset than usual, 'tantrums', expression of fears or worries.
- Signs of anxiety: breathlessness, feeling sick, 'butterflies' in the tummy, sweaty palms.



## What should you do?

- Calmly listen to your child's worries. Let them know that you understand. Gently remind them that school is important but reassure them that you will help to make school feel a happier place for them.
- Let the school know as soon as possible that there is a problem. Work with the school as quickly as possible to make a plan together to address the problem.
- Make sure that your child has a chance to tell adults how they are feeling and that they are involved in making the plan. You can make a plan based on small steps. A plan is much more likely to succeed if your child has been involved in identifying and agreeing next steps.
- Make sure you show a 'united' front with school. It will help your child to feel that everyone is positive and working together.

If you do have any concerns, it's best to talk to school staff about these, away from your child.

- Try to stay optimistic; if your child struggles one day, treat the next day as a 'fresh start'. Be prepared for some challenges, for example your child may experience more difficulty after holidays or weekends.

It is understandable to want to improve things as quickly as possible. However, your child is much more likely to succeed if plans are broken down into small, realistic steps that can be built on over time. This will help to gradually rebuild their confidence attending school. It is likely to take time for your child to progress, especially if they have been out of school for a long period.

It might feel tempting to move your child to another school. However, research tells us that the problem is very likely to re-emerge in the next school so it is much better to try and resolve the issue in your child's current school.

As a parent, it can be really difficult to see your child struggling. Try to make sure you have someone supportive to talk to. This might be a friend or family member, or one of the organisations listed at the end of this leaflet.



## What can you expect the school to do?

- Listen to you and your child and take your child's anxieties seriously.
- Keep in regular close contact with you and your child during periods when your child is not in school. An agreed member of staff should be named as a link person.
- Work with you and your child to listen to find out about the difficulties they face and to find ways of making school a happier place for them, improving their attendance.
- Hold meetings to make a plan, alongside you and your child that will help them to return to school. The plan should identify the small steps your child will take towards improving their attendance, as well as the support they will be given to help.
- Address any school-based issues, for example related to: support with school work, peer relationships or bullying, which may be affecting their attendance.
- Think about the support your child might need on arrival to school, to make this transition easier for them. This might include, meeting with a friend at a specific time and place, going to a quiet area of the school to settle before joining the class, engaging in a preferred activity or finding a special role such as a monitor.
- Providing short 'check-ins' with your child during the school day. This might be from the school's ELSA (if they have one) or from another trusted adult in the school. This will help them to feel supported and to address any issues quickly.
- If difficulties persist, the school might involve other professionals.

## Talking to your child about their worries

It can be very difficult for children to talk about their worries. A good place to start is to acknowledge that they are finding things hard

and to explain that you want to know how they are feeling so that you can help them better. Try to choose a time when your child is at their most relaxed, this might be on a walk with you, on a journey in the car, or doing an activity at home they enjoy.

### These are some ideas to help

You might find it helps to ask your child a specific question. Try to ask about times when things are better, as well as difficulties:

What are the three most difficult things about going to school?

What are the three best things in school?

What three things are you most worried about?

When do you feel your most relaxed and happy (when does 'worry' go away?)

If your child finds it hard to talk, try drawing:

Can you draw me a picture that shows how you're feeling about school?

Can you draw me a picture that shows what you're worried about in school?

Can you draw a picture to show me your worries?

Can you draw a picture that shows school as you'd like it to be?

Some children can find it hard to do these activities face to face. You could offer for them to email/ text/ write it down and leave it for you to look at another time, if that helps.

We have also provided information booklets for children and young people. These have some ideas for activities children and young people can do. Your child's school should be able to give you a copy or you can download it from our Right Choice Educational Psychology page: [rightchoice.wiltshire.gov.uk](http://rightchoice.wiltshire.gov.uk)

## Further sources of support

### Wiltshire's Local Offer

The Local Offer provides information on what support services are available in Wiltshire for children and young people with additional needs and their parents.

[www.wiltshirelocaloffer.org.uk](http://www.wiltshirelocaloffer.org.uk)

Wiltshire Special Educational Needs and Disability Information and Advice Support Service (SENDIASS)

The Wiltshire SENDIASS provide impartial information, advice and support to parents and carers of children who have a special educational need and/ or disability.

**Phone:** 01225 307455

**Email:** [wisa@kids.org.uk](mailto:wisa@kids.org.uk)

**Website:** Wiltshire SENDIASS | KIDS

### Young Minds

A charity focussed on wellbeing and mental health of young people. They publish a range of information for parents. They also have a parent helpline. [Youngminds.org.uk](http://Youngminds.org.uk)

### Barnardo's Health Minds Wiltshire

This website has lots of information, practical tips and advice for parents about young people's emotional wellbeing.

[www.onyourmind.org.uk](http://www.onyourmind.org.uk)

### Your Child's School

We have produced guidance for schools to help them support children experiencing EBSA.

### Wiltshire Educational Psychology Service

We have produced an EBSA presentation for families to watch online, along with information documents aimed at children and young people.

All documents can be accessed on Wiltshire Educational Psychology Service's Right Choice page (click on the resources link): [rightchoice.wiltshire.gov.uk/Page/9920](http://rightchoice.wiltshire.gov.uk/Page/9920)

### Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)

CAMHS help children, young people and their families across Swindon, Wiltshire, Bath & NE Somerset who are experiencing more severe, complex and persistent mental health difficulties.

You can find out more information about this service and how to access support here: [www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/service\\_description/swbnes-camhs-community](http://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/service_description/swbnes-camhs-community)

## Further Resources

### Anxiety

- Information about Anxiety from Young Minds: [youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/anxiety](https://www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/anxiety)
- The Anxious Child: a booklet for parents and carers wanting to know more about anxiety in children and young people. [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/anxious-child](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/anxious-child)
- Overcoming Your Child's Fears and Worries: A Self-help Guide using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques by Cathy Cresswell and Lucy Willetts

### General Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Literature

- Parent survival Guide [youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-survival-guide](https://www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-survival-guide)
- Dealing with Feeling by Tina Rae
- I am special by Peter Vermeulon. Jessica Kingsley Publisher
- A Volcano in My Tummy by Elaine Whitehouse and Warwick Pudney

### Support for families

- Square Peg: [www.teamsquarepeg.org](https://www.teamsquarepeg.org)
- Not fine in school: [notfineinschool.co.uk](https://notfineinschool.co.uk)

### Books for younger children

- The Goodnight Caterpillar: A relaxation story for kids by Lori Lite
- Huge Bag of Worries by Virginia Ironside
- The Koala that Could by Rachel Bright
- Owl Babies by Martin Wadell
- How to Catch a Star by Oliver Jeffers
- The Boy and the Bear by Lori Lite
- Starting School by Janet Ahlberg
- Back to School What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety by Dawn Heubner
- Tortoise by Lucy M. George
- Giraffes Can't Dance by Giles Andreae

All photography is stock photography posed by models.

## Useful Apps for young people available to download

### Chill Panda:

An app to help you learn to relax, manage your worries and improve your wellbeing.

### NHS GO:

NHS Go is a confidential health advice and information service for 16-25 year olds.

### Headspace:

A meditation app to help you practice meditation and mindfulness.

### For me:

A ChildLine App to get advice and support on a range of topics, including helping with anxiety

### SAM App:

Designed to help you understand and manage anxiety

### MindShift™ CBT:

Designed to help you to learn, relax, be more mindful and use active steps to take charge of your anxiety.