



Communication and Interaction Team

Is your child anxious about attending school?

EBSA Guidance for Parents



This guidance is a supplement to the main Hampshire County Council EBSA guidance

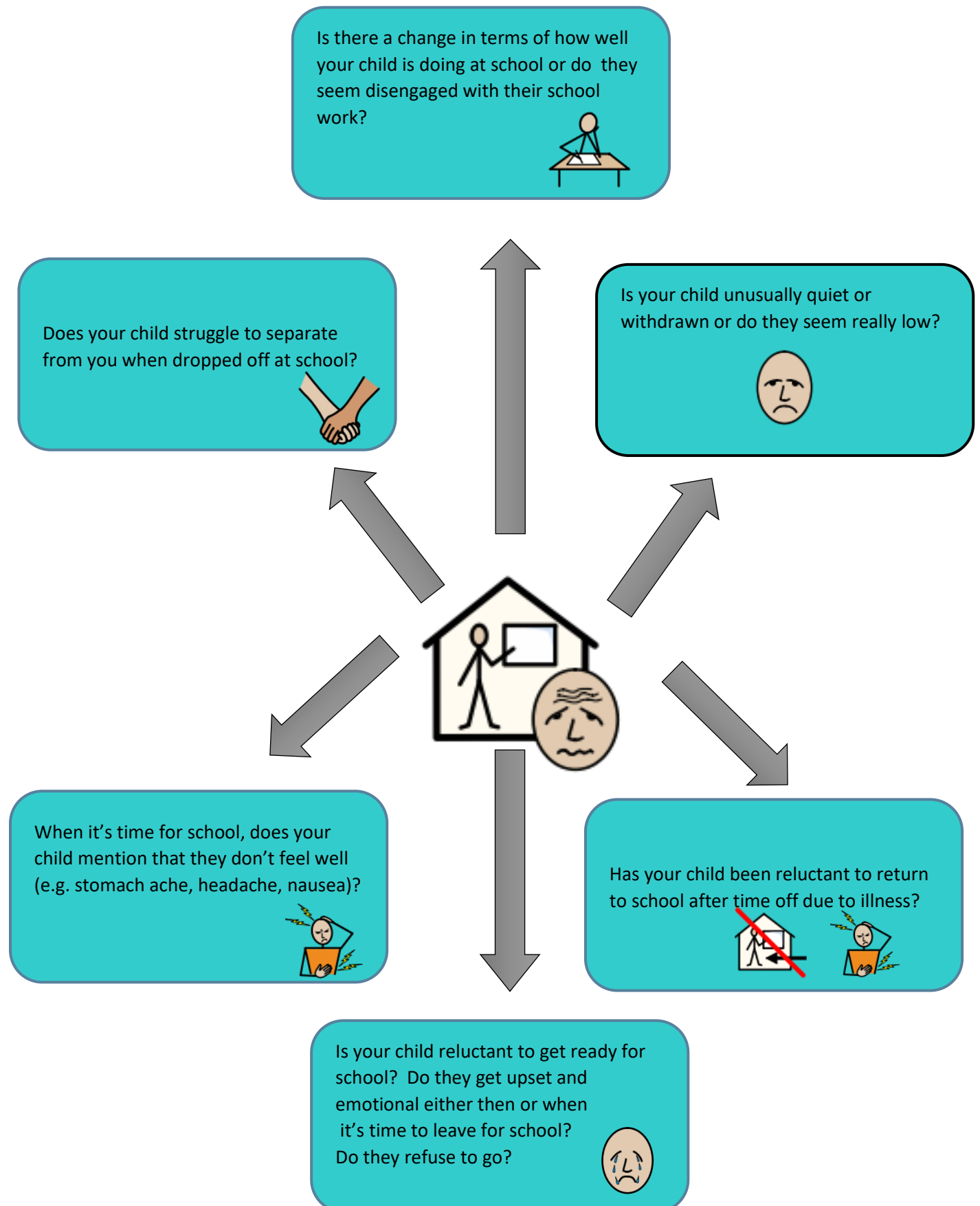
This guidance has specifically been written to support parents of Child and Young People (CYP) with communication and interaction needs, who are having difficulty attending school. It covers strategies for supporting these pupils day to day and should be read in conjunction with the other EBSA documents produced by Hampshire County Council.

[EBSA-good-practice-guidance.pdf \(hants.gov.uk\)](https://hants.gov.uk/ebsa-good-practice-guidance.pdf)

[EBSA-Parents-and-Carers-Information.pdf \(hants.gov.uk\)](https://hants.gov.uk/ebsa-parents-and-carers-information.pdf)

Signs your child might be anxious about attending school

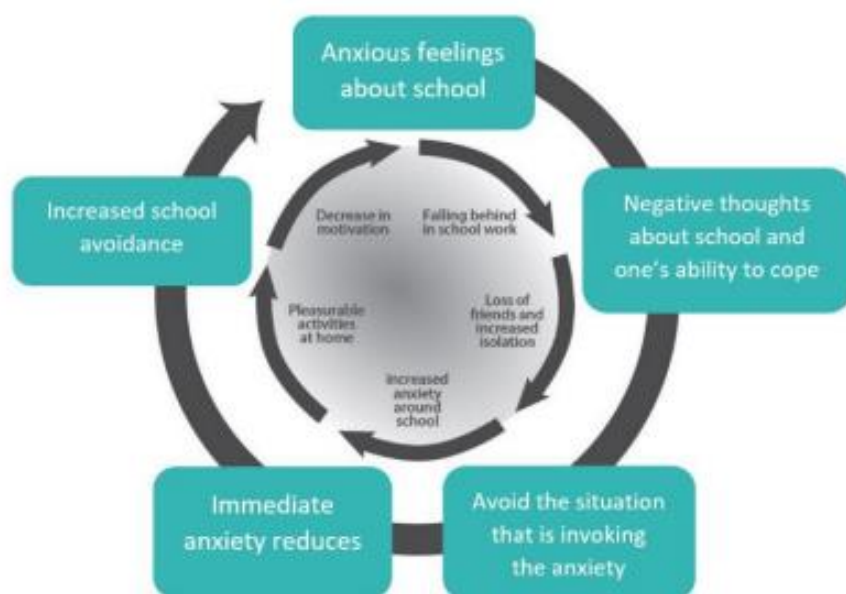
If your child is anxious about attending school, they may not be able to say it but they can show it.



What is EBSA?

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is 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. (*Emotionally Based School Avoidance Hampshire County Council good practice guidance for schools and other support agencies Jan 2021*).

The diagram below show the cycles of thoughts and feelings that may initially lead to school avoidance behaviours and over time maintain these. As the behaviours continue, they can become interlinked.



**Taken from HCC
EBSA document
(2021)**

Every child is different and there can be a variety of factors which contribute to attendance difficulties. Examples of factors which increase a CYP's ability to attend school are shown in the table below as 'push' factors and those which reduce it, making it more likely the child won't want to attend, are referred to as pull factors.

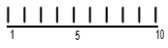
Examples of push and pull factors

Push factors – towards attending school	Pull factors – away from attending school
Positive relationships with peers and staff	Illness of parent or other close family member
Needs identified and met	Enjoying the safety/flexibility of the home routine
Having a sense of belonging	Unmet sensory needs
Parent working so the child needs to attend school	Difficulties with social relationships with adults and peers
Motivation and desire to achieve goals	Difficulties with emotional regulation
Able to self-regulate	Concerns about exams

How can parents help?

Talking to your child

- Sit down with your child to explore why they are reluctant to attend school.
- If they can't explain easily, try



- Drawing a number line from 1-10 and asking them where they would put each of their subjects on that scale. Explore which subjects they are finding easy/ which ones are difficult.
- Ask them what they do at break and lunch time – where do they go/who do they spend time with?
- How do they feel when they arrive at school and when they change lessons? (They can draw to explain if they find it hard to put into words)
- Which friends and adults do they get on well with? Is there anyone they are not getting on well with?
- Are they worried about anything at home?
- Encourage them to think of positive things about school as well as discussing their worries
- Validate how your child is feeling so that they feel heard
- Reassure your child that you will work with the school to address their worries and concerns.

Talking to the school



- Speak to your child's form tutor/class teacher, SENCo or Head of Year
- Allow time for the school to speak to your child about their difficulties
- Agree a support plan with the school (and involve your child in this).
- Check what support the school can offer your child to manage their emotional difficulties if your child isn't already accessing this (e.g. support from a trained emotional literacy support assistant (ELSA) or support from a counsellor if the school has one).

What should a support plan include?

Arrangements for:



- The start and end of the day
- Break and lunch time
- Any adjustments to your child's existing timetable
- Support in lessons
- Any interventions
- Support from friends
- A key adult and a safe space for your child to speak to if they have any concerns
- Homework expectations / opportunities for online learning if on a part-time timetable
- Any other useful information
- A date to review these arrangements

Things to discuss when devising a support plan

What support might your child need on arrival at school? e.g.



- a quieter start by arriving a few minutes before/after everyone else
- meet a friend or an adult at a particular place
- an opportunity to do a job on arrival at school, or engage in a preferred activity
- a chance to talk through the upcoming day including preparing for any changes/discussing any worries

Does your child need any further support in these areas?



- accessing the curriculum
- discussing and managing emotions
- social relationships
- maintaining their focus and concentration
- transitions between lessons
- unstructured times (break, lunch time)
- assembly and/or tutor time
- organisation
- sensory difficulties (e.g. difficulties with wearing school uniform, sensitivity to noise)
- tests and exams
- homework

What support is available for parents and carers?



Ask the school to identify a link member of staff to liaise with regarding your child's attendance

- Agree a date for the next review meeting and the frequency of the meetings
- Agree the protocol for contacting the school if there are difficulties getting your child into school i.e. should you phone/email? What will happen if your child is late to school?

Be prepared for thing not to go smoothly to start with once the support plan is in place and for your child to show continued or even increased signs of distress. It's important for all adults to show a united, consistent approach, so talk to the school if you have concerns. If your child fails to attend school one day, be optimistic and try again the following day. Be aware too that returning to school after the weekend or the holidays may be particularly difficult.

Supporting your child at home

The night before school



- Ensure your child has packed their bag
- Ensure they have got their clothes ready for the morning
- Talk through arrangements for the day and any concerns they may have (it may be helpful if the school provides a bespoke visual timetable to take home)
- Ensure the child has a good bedtime routine

In the morning



- Allow plenty of time for them to get ready
- A visual prompt sheet may be useful to remind them of their morning routine
- Revisit arrangements for the day
- Use calming strategies (e.g. breathing, mindfulness) if needed
- Allow plenty of time to get to school
- Consider allowing the CYP to take a transitional object to school – something which provides a link between home and school e.g. photo of a family member or pet, a keyring belonging to parents, a soft toy etc.

Arrival at school



- Try to drop off your child following the routine and leave promptly
- If your child is older and walks to school by themselves can they arrange for a friend to call for them in the morning so that they can walk in together?
- Email or phone the school to alert them to anything which has happened at home the day before.

When your child arrives home



- Include time to rest and relax
- Provide an opportunity to talk through the day if your child wants to
- Encourage the child to identify 2 things which went well and one thing which could have gone better.
- Offer support with homework if needed and it's been agreed your child is doing this

Helping your child to develop and maintain friendships

It's important that your child still has opportunities to make friends and spend time with them, especially if they are struggling to attend school, are spending less time in mainstream lessons and/or have a reduced timetable.

Develop this by:



- Encouraging them to see friends at home
- Encouraging them to join in activities outside of school e.g. sports, scouts, guides etc
- Explore joining a club at school related to their interests e.g. music, football. Having this to look forward to on a particular day may help with their attendance.



Learning at home:

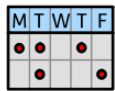
There may be times when your child is doing school work at home because either:

- It hasn't been possible to get them into school at all
- They are following a part-time timetable in school and have also been set some work to do at home

The following strategies will help to support your child when learning at home:



- Encourage them to get up and get ready at the usual time, even if they aren't going into school until later/ aren't able to go into school at all. If they struggle to get ready independently, draw or print off picture reminders of what they need to do e.g. wash, dress, eat breakfast, brush teeth).



- Allocate time for your child's learning during normal school hours. Talk through the timetable for the day with your child.
 - What subjects will they be doing?
 - Is the CYP expected to log onto any live lessons at school/watch any pre-recorded sessions?
 - Are they having any 1:1 online sessions with a member of school staff?
 - Will they be in school for any lessons?



- Ensure the child has somewhere quiet to work away from distractions.



- If your child has difficulty getting organised, ask/help them to make a checklist of equipment they may need for home learning e.g. books, paper, pencils, rulers etc. Your child can then be responsible for ensuring they have all this equipment ready at the start of the day before home learning begins.



- Before your child starts, break down the first task into small steps. Draw and/or write these steps down and check the child understands they start (ask them to explain to you what they have to do rather than simply asking if they understand – they may say 'yes' even when that isn't the case).



- Check your child's understanding of any unfamiliar words.



- If your child struggles with their work, encourage them to ask for help and specify exactly what they need help with. Raise their awareness of what strategies help them e.g. list of key words and pictures, having someone to read the text to them, planning key paragraphs of a story on post-it notes before they start writing etc.



- Think about how long your child can focus for and build in regular breaks – offer a choice of activities during these times. Try a timer (sand timers can be particularly helpful, especially for younger children – both for tasks and break times).

Dealing with setbacks

If your child won't go into school on a particular day



- Try to remain calm yourself
- Encourage the use of calming strategies including mindfulness and breathing exercises (see Resources section below)
- Phone the school to discuss the difficulties and make new arrangements e.g. coming in later than planned, staying for a shorter time, spending time with an adult away from main lessons.
- Share the new plan with the child
- If the child is at home during school hours, encourage them to complete some school work (even if you agree to just a small amount) rather than just spending time on their electronic devices or to watching TV.

If there's no improvement or your child's anxieties about attending school are increasing

- Review and adjust the support plan with the school and your child.
 - Look for patterns – i.e. is attendance more difficult on certain days and what could be the reason for this?
 - Are there any new factors at home or school which are contributing to the difficulties?
 - Does your child need a reduced timetable if this isn't already in place?
 - In conjunction with the school, establish a baseline of what your child can manage consistently and work up from that (see the example of the laddering approach below).
- Consider whether a referral is needed to an outside agency (e.g. CAMHS).

MOST FEARED



LEAST FEARED



Remember:

- Some steps may need to be broken down further
- Discuss with the CYP what support will be needed for each step (e.g. adult support in class, time out card, access to key adult, safe space).

Resources and further sources of help

Books for adults

- *Overcoming School Refusal: A Practical guide for counsellors, caseworkers and parents.* Joanne Garfi, 2018.
- *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
- *Overcoming Your Child's Fears and Worries: A Self-help Guide using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques* by Cathy Cresswell and Lucy Willetts
- *Promoting emotional resilience toolkit* KAN-Emotional-resilience-toolkit.pdf (hbtg.org.uk) (for professionals and parents to share with children and young people)

Books for Older children and Young People

- *Starving the Anxiety Gremlin: A Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Workbook on Anxiety Management for Young People* by Kate Collins-Donnelly
- *What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety* by Dawn Heubner
- *Anxiety self-help guide – Mood Juice* [MOODJUICE - Anxiety - Self-help Guide \(mcgill.ca\)](http://MOODJUICE-Anxiety-Self-help-Guide(mcgill.ca))
- *Think Good, Feel Good: A Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Workbook for Children and Young People* by Paul Stallard
- *Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life for Teens* by Joseph V. Ciarrochi, Louise Hayes and Ann Bailey
- *Stuff That Sucks: Accepting What You Can't Change and Committing to What You Can* by Ben Sedley

Books for younger children

- *How to catch a star* by Oliver Jeffries
- *Everybody Feels.... (happy etc)* by Butterfield and Sterling.
- *Moppy is (angry, sad, scared)* by Jane Asher and Gerald Scarfe.
- *Have you filled your bucket today?* by Carol McCloud and David Messing
- *Mighty Moe* by Lacey Woloshyn [Mighty Moe1.pdf \(dq5pwpg1q8ru0.cloudfront.net\)](http://MightyMoe1.pdf(dq5pwpg1q8ru0.cloudfront.net))
- *A Volcano in my tummy – Eliane Whitehouse & Warwick Pudney (suitable for ages 6 – 13years)*

Websites

Kooth [Kooth-FAQs-1.pdf \(hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk\)](http://Kooth-FAQs-1.pdf(hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk))- free online wellbeing service for children and young people in need of support with mental health.

CAMHS [Parents & Carers – CAMHS \(hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk\)](http://Parents&Carers-CAMHS(hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk))

Young Minds – offers support both to children and young people with mental health difficulties and also to their parents and carers [Parents Mental Health Support | Advice for Your Child | YoungMinds](http://ParentsMentalHealthSupport|AdviceforYourChild|YoungMinds)

Square Peg www.teamsquarepeg.org – a social enterprise set up in 2019 to effect change for children who struggle to attend school and their families.

Not fine in school www.notfineinschool.org.uk – a parent-led organisation offering support to families with children who are having difficulty attending school.

MindEd for families has online advice and information from trusted sources and will help you to understand and identify early issues and best support your child.

www.minded.org.uk/families/index.html#/

Hampshire Youth Access Home - HYA (hampshireyouthaccess.org.uk) a partnership of 11 leading agencies providing counselling, information, advice, and support to children and young people aged 5 to 17 across Hampshire. The organisation also gives advice and information to anyone concerned about a child or young person's wellbeing.

Chat Health

Hampshire Chat Health service run by the 0-19 Public Health Nursing Service (Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust).

Chat Health 5-19 - anonymous text support service for parents/carers of children aged 5-19 years 07507 332417

Chat Health 11-19 – anonymous text support service for children and young people aged 11-19 years. 07507 332160

www.hampshirehealthyfamilies.org.uk

Calming strategies

Breathing techniques [Breathing Techniques – CAMHS \(hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk\)](http://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk)

Mindfulness [Mindfulness – CAMHS \(hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk\)](http://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk)