Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA): Toolkit for Schools and Educational Settings
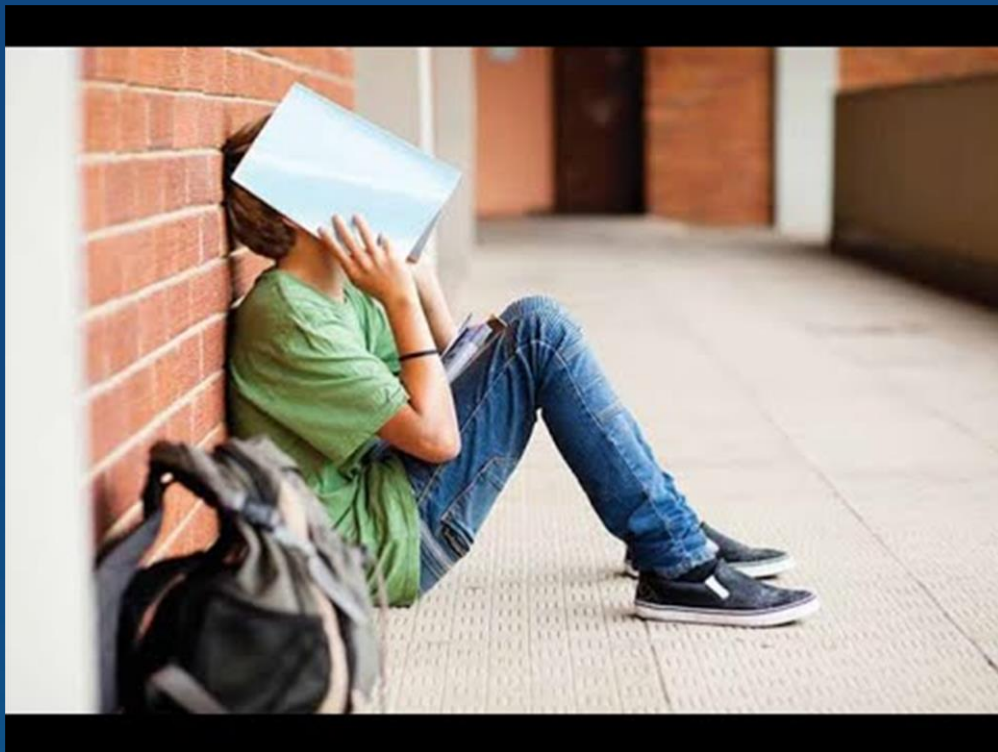
South Gloucestershire Educational Psychology Service, 2023

Contents

1. Introduction

South Gloucestershire Educational Psychology Service has produced this guidance by drawing on the current evidence base and information from the literature and from other Educational Psychology Services (EPS). In particular, we would like to acknowledge West Sussex EPS, the Community EPS from Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, Wakefield EPS, Salford EPS and Sheffield EPS. We would like to thank the school staff and South Glos Parents and Carers who have provided valuable feedback during the development of this resource.

This guidance toolkit has been written for school staff and other professionals with the aim of providing information and guidance on how to support children, young people and their families experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). This toolkit is designed to support professionals to recognise and respond to the continuum of EBSA needs, focusing on preventative and early intervention approaches as well as more complex situations.

EBSA is a 'broad umbrella term used to describe a group of children and young people who have severe difficulty attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences from school' (West Sussex EPS 2018). Terminology varies in the literature and it is recognised that there are tensions over the most suitable terminology. South Glos. Has decided to use the term EBSA in preference to other terminology, e.g., 'School Phobia', 'School Refusal' and 'Emotionally Based School Avoidance' as this seems to be the most commonly used term. However, we recognise that often 'avoidance' is an emotional response to an aversive situation rather than a conscious choice.

It is well documented that school non-attendance is associated with negative later life outcomes, such as difficulties with employment, development of life skills and greater association with psychiatric difficulties (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014; Thambirajah, Grandison & De-Hayes, 2008).

Although it is difficult to predict the prevalence of EBSA, available research estimates it impacts 1-5% of the school population (Pellegrini, 2007; Elliott & Place, 2019). However, this figure might reflect the most complex cases within the continuum of EBSA where there is complete absence for an extended period. EBSA may be emerging and/or evident within a wider population within the continuum.
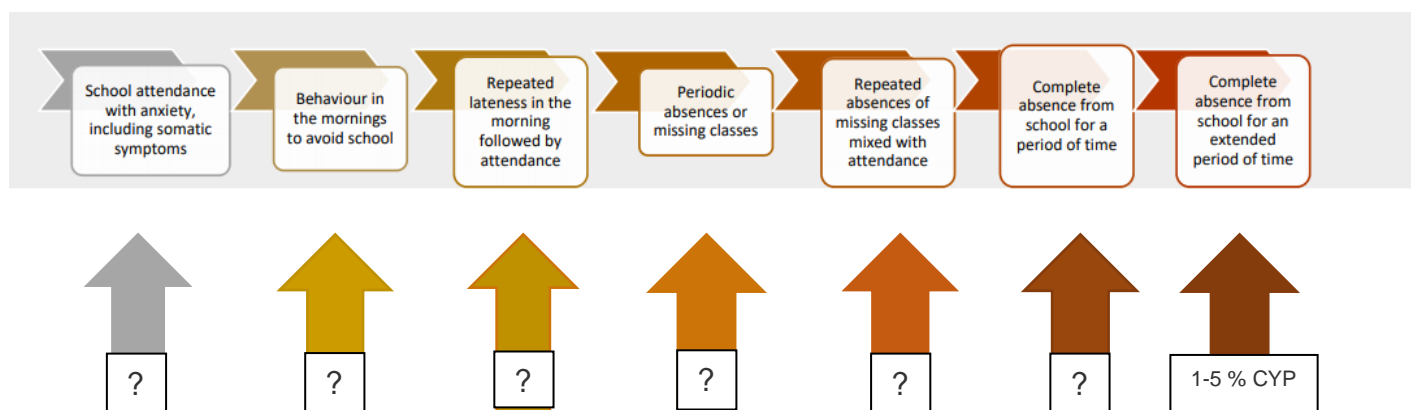
This diagram highlights that, in addition to those CYP not attending for extended periods of time, there are many other children who experience an aversion to aspects of the school experience. For example, an aversion to attending specific lessons or feeling overwhelmed in busy environments.

South Glos. are aware of the following factors and data demonstrating the prevalence of EBSA within our local communities:

- Implementation of reduced school timetables
- Parental feedback Surveys
- Elective Home Education (approx. 444 CYP)
- Requests for professional involvement/EHCNa
- General attendance figures for all, SEN/EHCP CYP

In line with national good practice, the South Glos. approach to supporting children and young people who experience EBSA is underpinned by the following principles associated with positive outcomes:

Early intervention

Working with parents and school staff as well as the CYP

A focus on a rapid return to school alongside intervention, support and adaptations within the school and home environment

Working flexibly with a focus on understanding the function of the CYP's avoidance behaviour
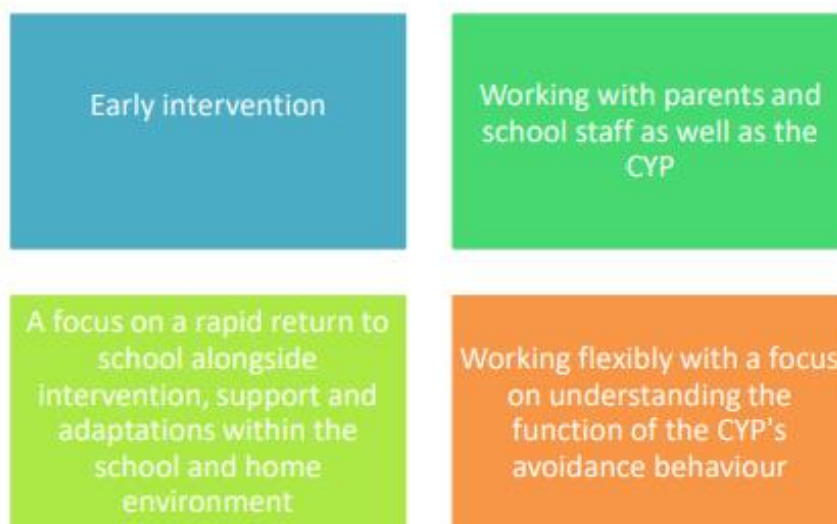
Factors associated with positive outcomes for successful reintegration (Baker & Bishop, 2015)

In addition, South Glos. EPS recognises that every CYP is unique, and strategies and support need to be personalised based on their individual situation and experiences. Within the South Glos. Way: A SEND and inclusion toolkit for South Gloucestershire education settings and professionals, the Graduated Approach includes the use of a four-part cycle of 'Assess, Plan, Do and Review' (APDR). Through this cycle, earlier decisions and actions are revisited, refined and revised with a growing understanding of the child or young person's needs and of what supports the child or young person in making good progress and securing good outcomes. It draws on more detailed approaches, more frequent reviews and more specialist expertise in successive cycles in order to match interventions to an individual child or young person's needs. Those experiencing EBSA should be supported via the Graduated Approach and APDR cycle.

Assess

Plan

Do

Review

Desired Outcome

2. Understanding Emotionally Based School Avoidance

EBSA is different from absence relating to physical illness and truancy. Most young people experiencing EBSA can be highly anxious and show significant distress associated with attending school and/or engaging in aspects of the school experience. In many instances, CYP want to participate in their education even though they feel unable to do so. Parents are often aware of their child's school related anxiety, even when this is not apparent to school staff. Often, the young person's anxiety will reduce during weekends or school holidays.

Difficulties children have in articulating their distress and the struggles that parents/carers and school staff have in understanding the young person's emotional experience of school are often key barriers in identifying and supporting young people at risk of EBSA (Thambirajah et al., 2008). For some young people, the distress may be obvious in their presentation and chronic non-attendance. For others, however, these difficulties may not be so easily identifiable. These young people may demonstrate sporadic attendance, missing the odd day here and there or particular lessons, or may only be able to attend school when provided with a high level of support and a modified timetable.

Prevalence & Causes

As the emotional component of EBSA is difficult to measure, an accurate picture of the prevalence of EBSA nationally is not known but it is likely to be much higher than the 1-5% estimate referenced in the Introduction. Current research indicates that there are no significant links between EBSA and gender, with an equal prevalence of males and females experiencing difficulties (Ingles et al, 2015; Kearney, 2008). In addition, there does not appear to be a link between EBSA and socioeconomic status (King & Bernstein, 2001). The literature suggests that EBSA prevalence is higher amongst secondary-aged students (Elliott, 1999; Gulliford & Miller, 2015) with rises around periods of transition between school phases (King & Bernstein, 2001). The onset of emotionally based school avoidance may be sudden or gradual.

EBSA is a complex issue and it is likely that several factors, rather than one single cause, contribute to a young person finding attending or engaging in school life difficult. Each child and situation is unique. Some factors are complex and interlinked, e.g., including the young person, the family and the school environment (Thambirajah et al 2008).

To be able to support CYP who are struggling to attend or engage with aspects of school, we need to try to understand the functions of the behaviour and consider what might underly the CYPs aversion.

Kearney and Silverman (1990) identified that school non-attendance usually serves one of four functions:

Function 1 To avoid uncomfortable feelings brought on by attending school, e.g., anxiety or low mood	**Function 2** To avoid situations that might be stressful, e.g., academic demands, social pressures and/or aspects of the school environment
Function 3 To reduce separation anxiety or to gain attention from significant others, e.g., parents or family members	**Function 4** To pursue tangible reinforcers outside of school, e.g., going shopping or playing computer games.

Often difficulties with attending or engaging in aspects of school are associated with a complex interplay of functions rather than a single function.

Anxiety and EBSA

Anxiety is recognised as a significant component of EBSA. Anxiety is a normal part of our human experience, and short-lived and lower levels of anxiety can be useful to us as stress responses linked to survival. However, heightened and sustained levels of anxiety can interfere with everyday life and can have a significant impact on our functioning. Recent data highlights the increase in mental health difficulties in children and young people in the UK:

Rates of probable mental disorders have increased since 2017. In 2020, one in six (16.0%) children aged 5 to 16 years were identified as having a probable mental disorder, increasing from one in nine (10.8%) in 2017. The increase was evident in both boys and girls	The likelihood of a probable mental disorder increased with age with a noticeable difference in gender for the older age group (17 to 22 years); 27.2% of young women and 13.3% of young men were identified as having a probable mental disorder

Mental Health of Children and Young People, 2020: Wave 1 follow up to the 2017 survey

When anxiety is linked to school avoidance, a child or young person may experience anxious and fearful thoughts around attending school and their ability to cope with school. These

feelings may also be accompanied by physiological symptoms of anxiety such as nausea, vomiting, shaking, sweating etc, and may start the night before, or even a few days before school. In order to avoid these overwhelming emotions and the fear associated with school attendance the young person may withdraw from the situation, refusing to get ready for school or to leave the house or enter the school. The young person may also turn to hostile behaviours as a means to avoid the threatening situation and to try and control what feels like a very 'out-of-control' situation (Thambirajah et al., 2008). These behaviours, and the avoidance of school, may then contribute to the maintenance of EBSA over time. Heyne and Rollings (2002) suggest that it is crucial to consider the child's perceptions of their ability to cope, including perceived social and academic competence, as negative thoughts about one's ability to cope can lead to further feelings of worry and if left unaddressed, may undermine attempts to improve attendance.
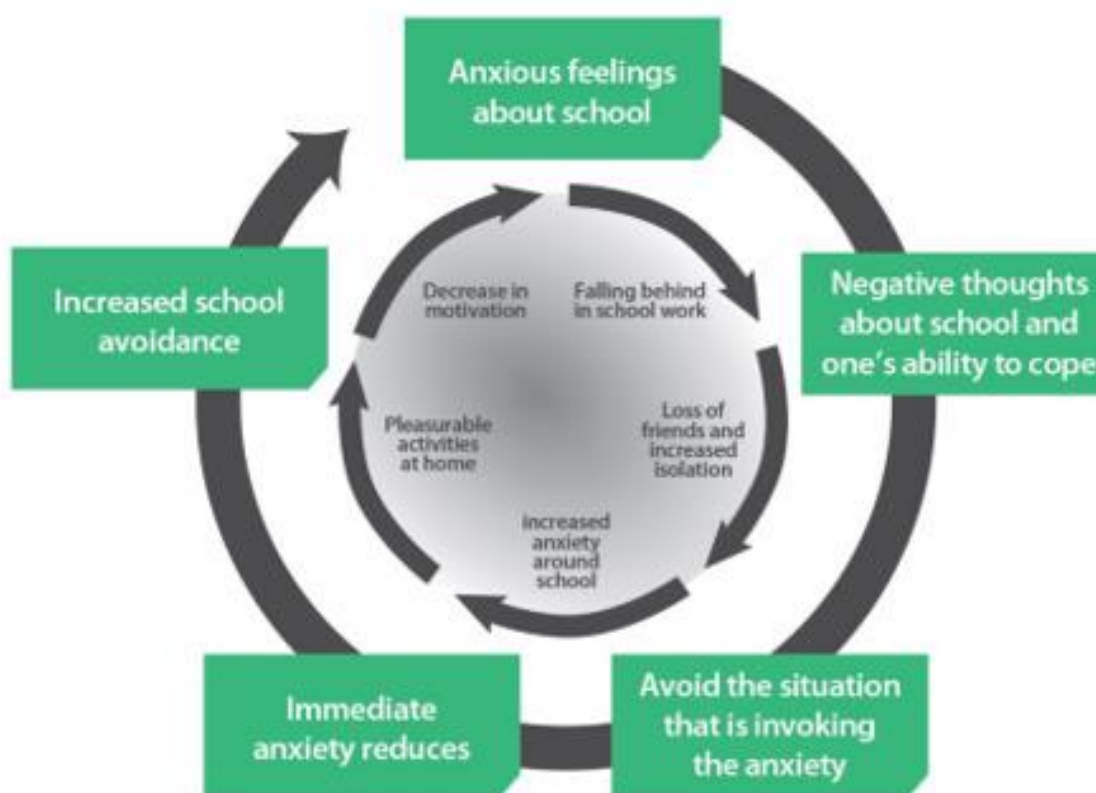

Diagram showing the initial anxiety causing the non-attendance and the secondary maintenance factors (West Sussex EBSA guidance 2018)

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3. Whole School Approaches

In order to enable children and young people to flourish and to prevent issues such as EBSA it is vital that schools have a broader whole school approach to emotional wellbeing and mental health. The eight principles of a whole school approach are key areas where schools can take action to embed a whole school approach to promoting emotional health and wellbeing. These actions are informed by evidence and practitioner's feedback about what works. They build on what many schools and colleges are doing already but if applied consistently and comprehensively will help protect and promote student emotional health and wellbeing.

kentresiliencehub.org.uk

The DFE recognises that in order to help their pupils succeed schools have to play a role in supporting them to be resilient and mentally healthy. OFSTED have highlighted how students themselves say they want to learn more about how to keep themselves emotionally healthy. Moreover, schools have a duty to promote the wellbeing of students. The National institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) advises that primary and secondary schools should be supported to adopt a comprehensive whole school approach to promoting the social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people. Such an approach moves beyond learning and teaching to pervade all aspects of the life of a school and has been found effective in bringing about and sustaining health benefits.

Whole School Good Practice and EBSA

Any successful work with an individual needs to be embedded in whole school systems. General good practice for promoting emotional well-being and positive mental health also applies to EBSA. The figure below outlines the culture, structures, resources and practice within a school that can promote wellbeing of staff and young people, with particular reference to EBSA. A Whole School Audit can be found in Appendix 1 and weblinks to whole school resources are contained in Section 9 - Contacts and Resources.

Whole school systems for promotion of emotional well-being and prevention of EBSA

- Committed and inclusive senior management team - values all pupils 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 (including EBSA)
- 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 partnership working with parents and external agencies
- Clear policies on attendance, behaviour, bullying 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
- Promotion of supportive literature 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. Nominated member of who has a responsibility to investigate and act on concerns
- Provision of interventions within a graduated response - assess, plan, do & review. Working with external agencies when necessary. Use of Early Help Plans using an holistic approach
- Access to indicated provision e.g safe places within the school, key person. All staff are aware of specific strategies and programmes in place to support those experiencing EBSA

4. Risk and Resilience Factors

EBSA occurs when:

> 'stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience and when 'pull' factors that promote school non-attendance overcome 'push' factors that encourage attendance'

<div align="right">Thrambiraja et al, 2008: pg33</div>

Risk

There are some well documented factors that place a child at greater risk of developing EBSA. It is usually a combination of predisposing factors interacting with a change in circumstances or triggering events which lead to the pattern of behaviour described as EBSA. The predisposing risk factors may be present in the nature of the school, the child's family or the child themselves.
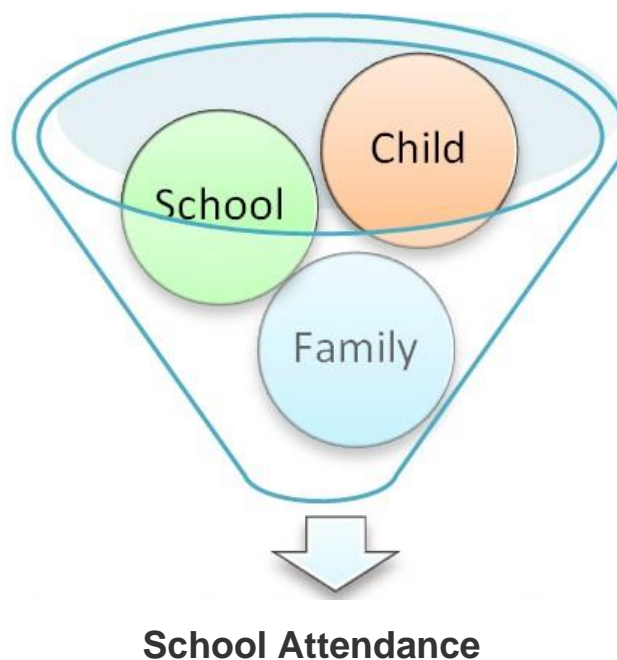
School Attendance

School Attendance

The exact nature of the predisposing vulnerability and the precipitating events will vary according to an individual child's unique set of characteristics, circumstances and experiences, but it is still possible to identify factors associated with that vulnerability and the potential triggers leading to EBSA. Being alert to these factors in relation to an absence from school can act as an early warning system enabling preventative action to be taken.

Factors associated with vulnerability of EBSA

| School Factors	Family Factors	Child factors
Bullying (the most common school factor)	Separation and divorce or change in family dynamic	Temperamental style- reluctance to interact and withdrawal from unfamiliar settings, people or objects
Difficulties in specific subject	Parent physical and mental health problems	Fear of failure and poor self confidence
Transition to secondary school, key stage or change of school	Overprotective parenting style	Physical illness
Structure of the school day	Dysfunctional family interactions	Age (5-6, 11-12 & 13-14 years)
Academic demands/high levels of pressure and performance-orientated classrooms	Being the youngest child in the family	Learning Difficulties, developmental problems or Autism Spectrum Condition if unidentified or unsupported
Transport or journey to school	Loss and Bereavement	Separation Anxiety from parent
Exams	High levels of family stress	Traumatic events
Peer or staff relationship difficulties	Family history of EBSA	
	Young carer	

Resilience

When working with individuals it is really important to also identify and build areas of strength or resilience of the child, family and school which may help to 'protect' the child and promote school attendance.

This may include:

- Developing ambition, aspiration and motivation
- Increasing confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, value in themselves
- Developing feelings of safety, security and a sense of belonging
- Having positive experiences where they can succeed
- Holding positive relationships with peers or staff
- Feeling listened to and understood
- Understanding the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviour
- Willingness to work in partnership between school, family and external professionals
- Developing parenting skills and understanding
- Flexibility of approaches within school, person centred listening to the voice of the child

The balance of 'Push' and 'Pull' Factors
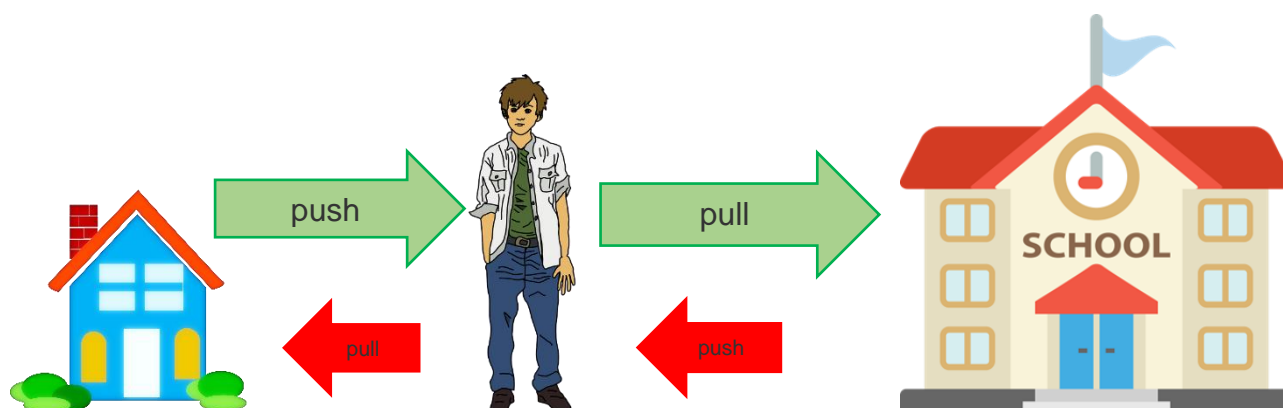
It is important to consider the balance between push and pull factors that occurs for the child/young person so that push and pull factors towards school attendance can be fostered, whilst push and pull factors that promote staying at home are reduced.

Transition

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 at these transition points.
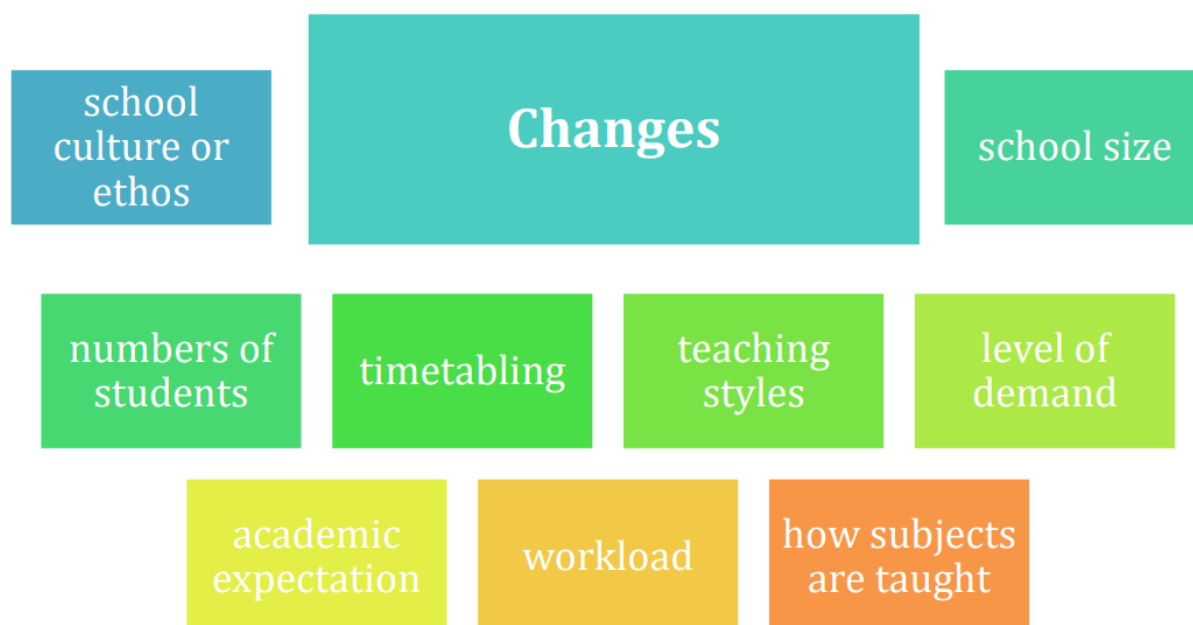
Successful transition involves the young person being supported to be able to manage their new physical, academic and social environment. Most children adjust to these changes

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 important for feeder schools to flag up any early separation difficulties and past EBSA even if the issues were mild and attendance now seems fine. We advise 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. Key to this is giving the young people and their parents practical information.

Key Information Required	Practical Supports
Travel to school — how will they get there	Go through journey to school, practise this, identify any companions, , provide social stories (e.g. how to use public transport safely)
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, explain break and lunch time systems and/ or zones for different year groups
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, identify key adults they can raise concerns with
Academic demands — how lessons are structured. Homework	Give information about how lessons are structured, homework expectations
Support systems in place — pastoral and SEND support	Set out how young people will be supported (e.g. provide one page profiles)
Equipment needed	Provide checklist for each day

Whilst significant phase transitions can be a risk factor, seemingly less significant transitions, for example changing class groups when commencing GCSEs could also be a risk for some CYP.

EBSA and Autism

It is well documented that anxiety and dysregulated stress-management are common in autistic children and that this may worsen during adolescence, as young people face increasingly complex social interactions and often become more aware of their differences to their neuro-typical peers. Around 40% of autistic children, adolescents and adults are thought to have at least one and often more anxiety disorders (van Steensel et al. 2011.) As yet, there is little research into the prevalence of those with autism and EBSA but evidence and experience suggest that due to the anxieties that autistic children and young people experience they are at increased risk of EBSA.

The factors which influence levels of anxiety in those who are autistic, as with any child, are multiple and often complex; associated with context blindness, executive functioning, limited theory of mind, difficulties processing language, focus on detail, sensory processing differences. Research also considers intolerance of uncertainty (IU) as a key contributing factor to anxiety in autistic individuals (Maisel et al 2016). It is important to appreciate that anxiety may not simply be a part of autism but an independently co-occurring disorder that can be addressed and treated in its own right. This is important because accurately identifying anxiety can provide an opportunity to bring about significant improvements in an individual's quality of life and daily functioning. The diagram below, shows how 'Intolerance of Uncertainty' is central in anxiety disorders in autism.
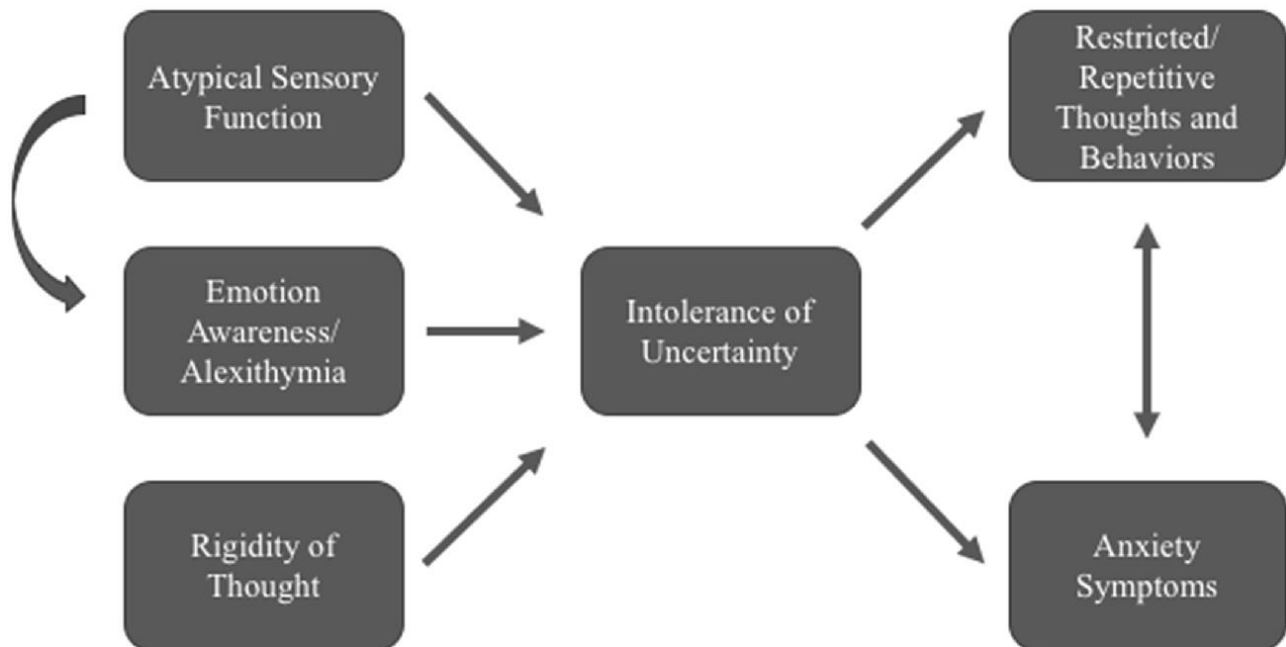
Sensory, Emotional and Cognitive Contributions to Anxiety in Autism Spectrum Disorders, South & Rodgers, 2017: Frontiers | Sensory, Emotional and Cognitive Contributions to Anxiety in Autism Spectrum Disorders (frontiersin.org)

5. Support, Guidance and Statutory Processes

The legal framework

The law entitles every child of statutory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of the parents to make sure that their child receives an education either by attendance at school or by education otherwise than at school.

When a parent decides to register their child at a school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure that their child attends school regularly. This means that their child must attend on every day that the school is open to pupils, in line with the rules of the school. There are a small number of circumstances when absence is allowed, such as being too ill to attend or, in exceptional circumstances, having been given permission for an absence in advance by the school.

The new DfE guidance [Working together to improve school attendance (publishing.service.gov.uk)](#) clarifies the expectations placed on parents/carers, schools, academy trustees/governing bodies and Local Authorities in relation to school attendance. The Secretary of State has committed to this guidance becoming statutory as soon as parliamentary time allows (no sooner than September 2023).

The DfE guidance [Summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance (publishing.service.gov.uk)](#) (February 2023) further clarifies these roles in relation to pupils displaying any social, emotional or mental health issues that is affecting their attendance, whether or not they have a diagnosed mental health need, disability or special educational need.

Coding absences

Where a pupil of compulsory school age cannot attend school due to illness (both physical and mental health related), schools must record the absence as authorised (code 'I' – illness).

In the majority of cases parents/carers' notification that their child is ill can be accepted without question or concern. The DfE guidance [Working together to improve school attendance (publishing.service.gov.uk)](#) states that,

'Schools should not routinely request that parents provide medical evidence to support illness. Schools are advised not to request medical evidence unnecessarily as it places additional pressure on health professionals, their staff and their appointments system

particularly if the illness is one that does not require treatment by a health professional. Only where the school has a genuine and reasonable doubt about the authenticity of the illness should medical evidence be requested to support the absence.'

However, in instances of long-term or repeated absences for the same reason, seeking medical evidence will be appropriate to assist in assessing whether the child requires additional support to help them to attend more regularly, and whether the illness is likely to prevent the child from attending for extended periods of time. In these circumstances, the Headteacher may wish to consider writing to the pupil's GP (with the parents/carers written consent) sharing their concerns in relation to the pupil's attendance and, where appropriate, sharing the current support plan, to inform actions to support attendance.

Setting work and remote learning

Attendance is essential for pupils to get the most of their school experience, including for their attainment, wellbeing and wider life chances. Setting work (or remote learning) for a pupil to complete at home should not be considered as an equal alternative to attending school. Therefore schools should consider this on a case-by-case basis and only as a last resort where the alternative would be no education.

The setting of work or remote learning should be part of a plan to reintegrate the pupil back to school, with the aim being that the pupil returns to in-person education with the appropriate support in place to meet their needs. It must only be done where it is judged that setting work or providing remote learning would not adversely affect the pupil's return to school.

Schools must set a time limit as to when the plan will be reviewed with the pupil and parents/carers and, if appropriate, with a relevant medical or other professional. If the pupil has a social worker, they should also be involved in the decision and review.

Pupils who are absent from school and completing work set by the school or remote learning still need to be marked as absent in the register, in line with the Education (Pupil Registration)(England) Regulations 2006 and Working together to improve school attendance (publishing.service.gov.uk).

Further guidance in relation to remote learning can be found below:

Providing remote education: non-statutory guidance for schools (publishing.service.gov.uk)

Safeguarding and remote education - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Part-time timetables

All pupils of compulsory school age are entitled to a full-time education. The use of a part-time (reduced) timetable should be an **exceptional measure** in any school and used only where it is in a pupil's best interests. For example, where a medical condition prevents a pupil from attending full-time education and a part-time timetable is considered as part of a re-integration package.

If the pupil's parents/carers are not in agreement, a part-time timetable cannot be put in place as this could be an unlawful exclusion. In this situation, the school should explore other interventions as part of the support plan.

A part-time timetable must only be in place for the shortest time necessary and must not be treated as a long-term solution. Any pastoral support programme or other agreement should have a time limit by which point the pupil is expected to attend fulltime, either at school or alternative provision.

A part-time timetable is a formal arrangement and schools are advised to gain written consent from parents/carers. There must be formal arrangements in place for regularly reviewing the part-time timetable with the pupil and their parents/carers.

In agreeing to a part-time timetable, the school has agreed to a pupil being absent from school for part of the week or day and therefore must treat absence as authorised (with sessions that the pupil is not expected to attend being coded 'C' – other authorised circumstances).

Legal intervention

In line with the DfE guidance [Working together to improve school attendance (publishing.service.gov.uk)](publishing.service.gov.uk) taking forward attendance prosecution should only be considered where all other options have been exhausted or deemed inappropriate.

Where in-school support and/or external specialist support has been facilitated but not engaged with voluntarily, the LA and school will work together to formalise support or to enforce attendance through legal intervention. Legal intervention may include a parenting contract or, as an outcome of the legal attendance process, an Education Supervision Order or punitive action such as a fixed penalty notice or prosecution in the magistrates court under S444(1) or (1a) of the 1996 Education Act.

Punitive action will only be taken where a pupil's absence is not due to legitimate medical reasons.

6. Assess

It is important that there is a shared understanding and awareness of EBSA indicators, so that CYP at risk of EBSA can be identified as early as possible so that effective support can be put in place. It may be that young people present with few or many different indicators of EBSA. Please see the table below which outlines some possible early indicators of EBSA (those you may notice before the CYP's patterns of behaviour become entrenched) and indicators of EBSA (those you may notice once the CYP's patterns of behaviour are more established). In order to recognise the possible indicators of EBSA it is important that staff members remain curious about the CYP's behaviour, try to refrain from making assumptions and share information with colleagues to establish a holistic picture.

Early Indicators of EBSA:

• Sporadic attendance and/or lateness
• Parent reporting that the CYP does not want to come to school
• Physical signs of stress believed to be linked to stress (e.g., stomach ache, sickness, headache) or complaining of feeling ill
• Behavioural changes or fluctuations, e.g., interactions with others, reduced motivation and engagement in learning tasks.

Indicators of EBSA:

• Periods of prolonged absence
• Persistent lateness
• Parent/carer is unable to support CYP to attend school
• Identifiable patterns within non-school attendance e.g., specific days, subjects, staff members
• Providing minor reasons for school absences
• CYP experiences anxiety in relation to home factors e.g., parental separation, divorce, conflict, loss, bereavement
• CYP displays greater reliance upon family members e.g., separation anxiety, increased proximity
• Concerns around academic progress due to non-school attendance / missed education
• CYP displays increased anxiety in relation to their learning and/or poor self-concept as a learner
• Low self-esteem and/or lack of confidence
• Struggling in relation to peer relationships and/or social situations
• Physical signs of stress believed to be linked to stress (e.g., stomachache, sickness, headache) or complaining of feeling ill

Where significant risks of EBSA are identified, it is really important to gather further information from the young person, parent and school staff involved with the young person and put into place strategies to support them as soon as possible. Swift action can prevent EBSA from becoming entrenched and result in much better outcomes. School should follow a thorough Assess, Plan, Do and Review cycle (APDR) placing the young person at the heart of the planning and interventions.


Information Gathering and Analysis

Once a difficulty has been identified there should be a prompt exploration into the reasons for the difficulties. In order for any intervention or support plan to be successful it is essential to gain an understanding of the various aspects causing and maintaining the EBSA behaviours.

It is often tempting to try to locate a simple reason and simple solution for the behaviour.

However, it is often an interaction of a number of factors and trying to find simple causation often encourages blame, which can cause individuals to become anxious and defensive. Parents may feel blamed for the absences, feel that their parenting skills are being criticised and they may be fearful that they will get into trouble or even prosecuted for non-attendance. Children may feel guilty or scared that they will be forced to attend school.
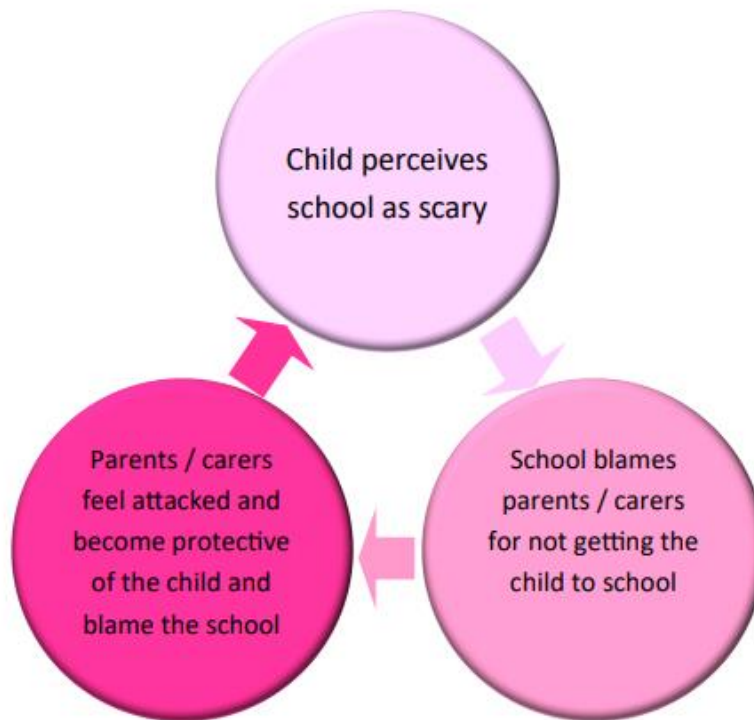
Salford City Council

Each person may have a different perspective on EBSA and have a different story to tell. It is essential that different people's views are respected and differences in views are acknowledged. When there is a difference of views it is often more helpful to focus on how the behaviour is occurring rather than why. Everybody's perspective on the situation needs to be valued and respected.

Due to the complex nature of EBSA no fixed 'assessment process' can be followed. However, in all cases it is essential the views of the young person, the family and key school personnel are gathered and listened to.

There are a variety of tools that can be used to gather information from CYP, parent carers, family, staff etc. Some of these are described below and additional resources can be found in Appendices as indicated. The aim of these resources is to build up a rich picture of the factors affecting the CYP's anxiety and/or attendance so that appropriate and supportive strategies can be developed further.

Working with the Child/Young Person

Once it has been identified that a CYP is displaying indicators of EBSA, it is important that staff begin to gather further information regarding the CYP's thoughts, feelings and wishes so that any support or intervention can be tailored and personalised accordingly. Remember that any child currently avoiding school will become anxious when asked to discuss returning: they are managing their feelings of anxiety by employing avoidant behaviour, so any talk about going back will raise their anxiety as you are proposing taking away their coping mechanism. A good place to start is to acknowledge that it will be difficult, but you would like to know how they think and feel. It is important that the adult working with them does not dismiss anxieties or worries.

A range of tools are available to help schools and professionals' access CYP views regarding school. Some example resources are included below, and additional resources/information are available in Appendix 2. The approaches taken will depend on the child's age, level of understanding and language. Even if they are able, often children find it difficult to verbalise what they are thinking and feeling, and they may prefer to draw their responses or indicate them using visual prompts. The examples below can be effective ways for gathering the CYP's perspective to supplement approaches already available in school.

RAG (Red, Amber, Green) Activities

A tool often used by adults working with students showing school anxiety is to offer CYP the opportunity to review their timetable and places around school, identifying which lessons and areas are associated with a lot, some, or no anxiety. Using a red, amber and green anxiety code may help. Bear in mind that some CYP may experience anxiety just by thinking about some lessons / lunchtimes / break times / transition to or from school and may need the support of an empathetic adult during this activity. Exploration of the issues arising from this can provide useful information.
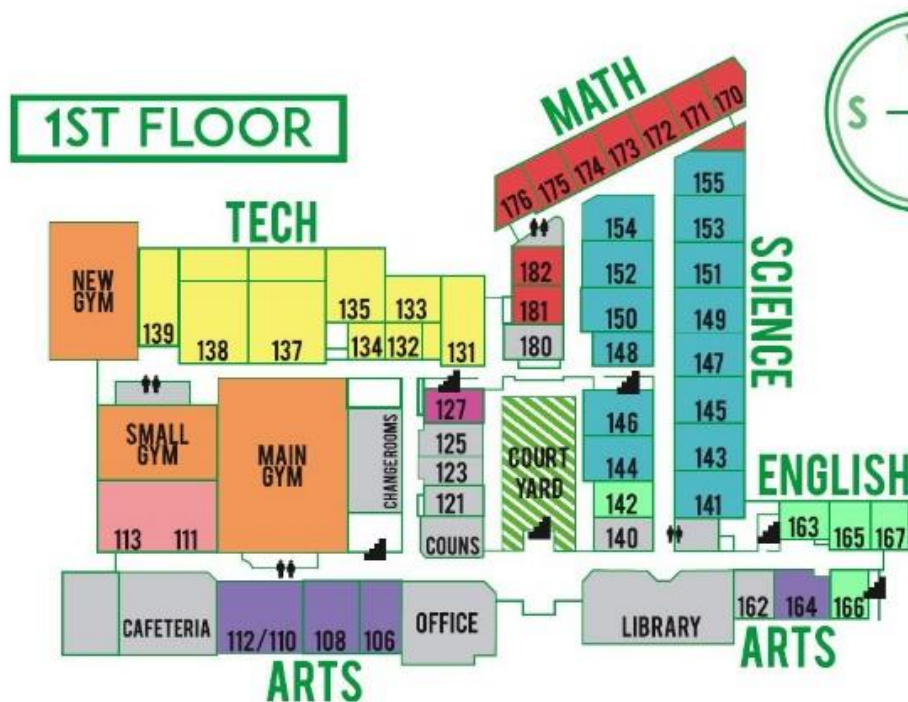
Collaboratively agree upon a code; for example:
Green = I am happy here or I enjoy this subject
Amber = I feel ok here or I find this subject alright
Red = I feel uncomfortable here or I do not enjoy this subject

These approaches grounded in Personal Construct Psychology can be used to gain an insight into which features of the school (people, environment, lessons etc.) the young people would like to change and why. This activity can be undertaken using Lego, play equipment and/or drawing. A prompt sheet for use of the approach with Lego can be found here: "Ideal Classroom" with Personal Construct Psychology and Lego® - Prompt Sheet Faye Morgan-Rose (wordpress.com).

Further information on this technique can be found here: Drawing the Ideal Safe School: an optimistic approach to returning to school - edpsy.org.uk
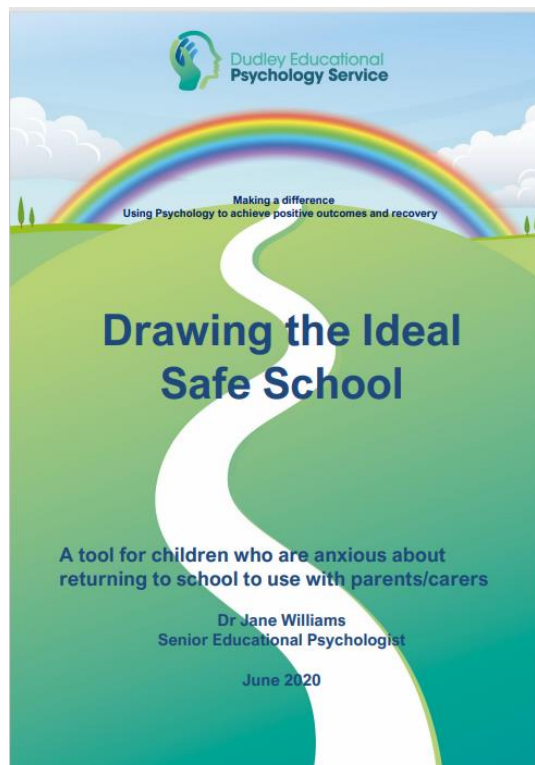
School Stress Survey

This short survey can be used to help the young person identify potential triggers in the school day and environment. The full survey can be found in Appendix 2 or visit https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/school-stress-survey-6386627

School Wellbeing Cards – West Sussex Educational Psychology Service

These cards can be used to flexibly explore the young person's perception of themselves in relation to school and identify school, child and family factors, functions of EBSA and strength and resilience factors which informs a support plan for the young person. They, along with tutorials explaining how they can be used, can be found here: School Wellbeing Risk and Resilience Card Set (schoolwellbeingcards.co.uk)

This approach to gathering the CYPs views on their educational journey can help to identify key factors that need to be incorporated into school support plans – See Appendix 2.4
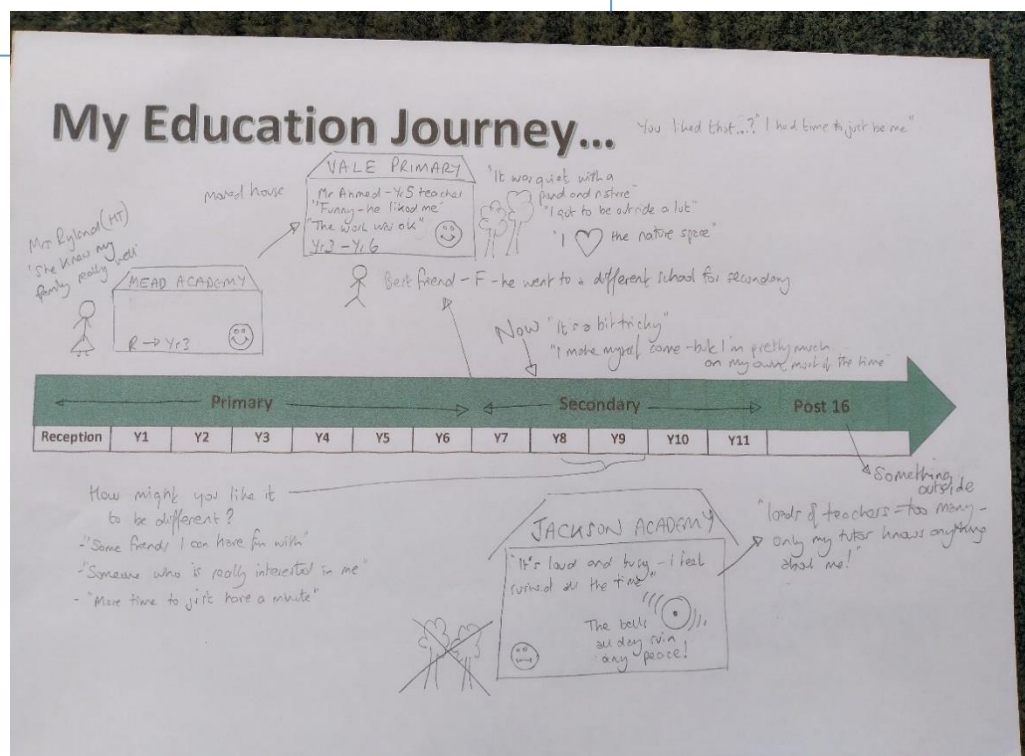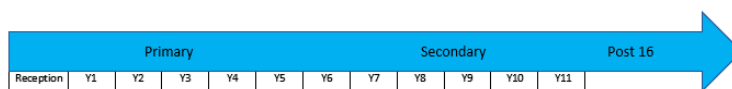
Working with Families/Carers

Parents/carers are likely to find it difficult to talk about the concerns they have and the difficulties they experience in trying to get their child into school. It is important that school take time to build a collaborative partnership working together in the best interests of the child. Sometimes parents/carers may have had similar experiences to their child and may experience their own anxieties around school, making it especially difficult for them. During the initial meeting it is important to gather background information, establish the current situation and the parent/carer's views. Questions should be sensitive and the person asking should employ active listening skills, examples of questions can be found in the table below.
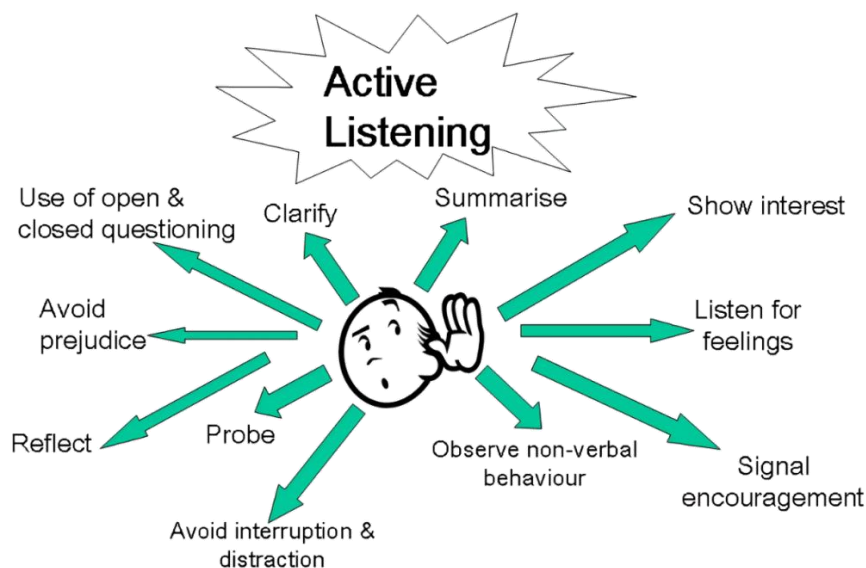
Areas to Cover	Example Questions
Developmental and Educational History	What were they like as a young child? Can you tell me about their early experiences at school? The primary school, at the start of secondary school?
Strengths, interests and aspirations	What are they good at? What do they like doing? Do they have any hopes for the future? Do they know what they want their life to be like when they are an adult?
Any potential changes or losses within the family or child's life	Can you tell me about your family? Who is in it, who is like whom? Who is s/he closest to? Have there been any changes within the family recently? (You could ask them to draw a family tree/ genogram).
Relationships	Do they talk about any other children? What do they say? Do they talk about any adults within school? What do they say? Who do they get on with…who don't they get on with?
Academic progress	School should be aware if the young person has identified SEN needs and should ask about these needs and the support in place. If there is no identified SEN school should ask if they have any

	concerns, or if the child has spoken about difficulties
The child's view - What are their specific fears/worries?	Have they spoken to you about what they find difficult about school? What do they say?
The child's views - What is going well in school?	Have they mentioned anything that is going well in school? (e.g., teachers, lessons, friends)
Behaviour and symptoms of anxiety	When they are worried what does it look like? What do they say they are feeling?
Typical day – when they go to school and when they don't go to school	Please describe a typical day when they go to school from the moment they get up until they go to bed……. and when they don't go to school? What do they do when they do not go to school? What do other family members do?
Impact on various members of the family	How does their non-attendance impact on you? And on other family members? Who is better at dealing with the situation? Why?
Parental views on the reasons for the EBSA	Why do you think they have difficulty attending school? (ask each parent/carer separately) If (other parent/ sibling/Grandparent) were here what would they say? Are there any differences of views about the reasons and what should be done within the family?
Exceptions to the problem	Have there been times when they managed to get into school? What was different about those times?
Previous attempts to address the problem	What has been the most helpful thing that someone else has done in dealing with the problem so far? What has helped in the past when things have been difficult? What strategies have been most helpful so far in managing their anxiety?

It is advised that regular contact is made with parents/carers and that school staff should identify who will be the key person to communicate with parents/carers and agree how they will do this. Working with parents/carers is essential to successful outcomes. Whilst the focus is on the child, it is also important to remember that parents/carers may need their own support. Families may wish to consider whether an Early Help Assessment and Plan (EHAP) would be helpful to identify whole family strengths and challenges, (Refer to section 9 - Contacts and Resources).

Working with School Staff

It is essential that representatives from schools seek information from members of staff who work most closely with the child or young person. We all respond differently according to the environment, situations or task and with different people. Each member of staff may have valuable information to help identify triggers for anxiety and strategies the young person responds positively to. In particular it is important to seek out the views of any members of

staff the young person speaks positively about and any member of staff where relationships may be more difficult. Key information to gather should cover:

• The young person's strengths

• What is going well

• Any difficulties they have noticed

• Peer relationships

• Relationships with adults

• Response to academic tasks

• If they have witnessed emotional distress what did this look like and what caused it

• What support or differentiation is put in place and how the young person responds to this

• Any ideas for further support

An example of a 'Round Robin' form can be found in Appendix 4 - Information gathering from school. It is also essential to consider whether the child has unidentified special educational needs, medical needs or a disability. If they are not already involved, school staff should consult with the school's special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO).

7. Plan

Interpreting the Information and Action Planning

Following the gathering of information from the child, family, school and any other professional(s) involved it is essential that this information is gathered together and 'sense' is made of it. This will provide an overview of the whole picture and the various factors involved are considered and potential hypothesis are formed. These should then inform the school support plan and actions to be taken.
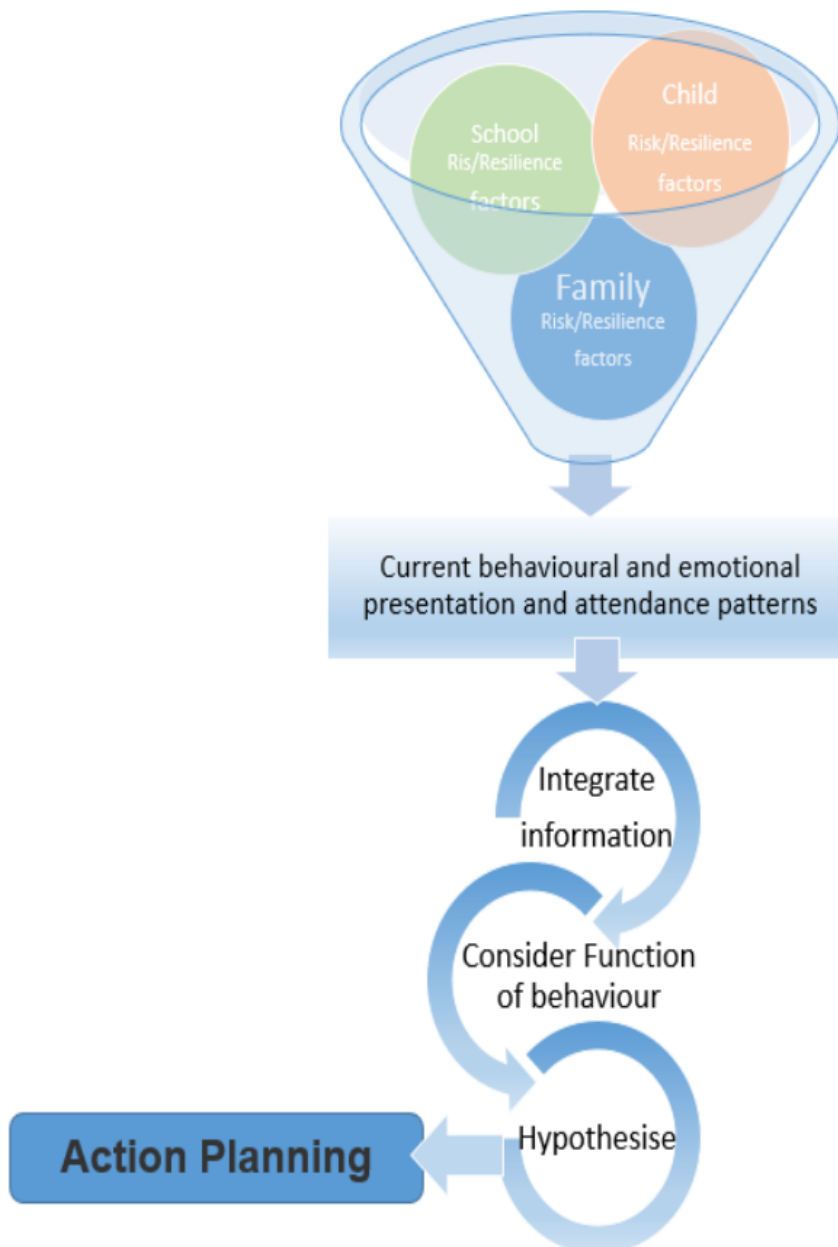
Appendix 5 provides a template for information gathering to help collate, integrate and analyse the Information gathered from a variety of sources.

Action Planning

After the information gathering, integration and analysis process has occurred a plan should be made to support the child or young person to support their school participation and attendance. All plans need to be created collaboratively with parents, the child/young person and any other appropriate agencies. All parties need to be signed up to what is agreed in the plan. Each plan will be different according to the actions indicated by the assessment and what worked with one young person will not necessarily work with another.

The plans should always:

- be realistic and achievable; an overly ambitious plan is likely to fail.

- aim to reintegrate/engage the young person in their education, whilst supporting their emotional needs.

- be gradual with small incremental steps and recognition by all involved that a 'quick fix' is not always possible.

A part time timetable may be necessary as part of this process, (refer to Section 5) but this should always be temporary and not seen as a long-term option as all young people are entitled to a full-time education. Carefully planned and monitored variations to a CYPs timetable can help to sustain engagement and participation.

Schools should:

- take an individual, flexible and creative approach to the young person's needs.

- ensure all staff who come into contact with the CYP are aware of the support plan and any adaptations to normal routines or expectations that are in place to support the child.

- ensure regular direct contact between the CYP, family and key staff

Appendix 5 provides an example of a My Return to School Support Plan produced by West Sussex EPS.

8. **Do**

Implementing the agreed plan

Everyone involved should be aware that:

- there may be difficulties implementing the plan and these should be anticipated and solutions found.

- an optimistic approach should be taken, and that working together can help to overcome small setbacks.

School staff and parents need to:

- appreciate that there is likely to be more difficulty after a school holiday, period of illness or after the weekend.

- recognise that at the start of a reintegration plan the CYP may show more anxiety.

- stick to the plan as it has been agreed with the CYP.

- work together and stay united, sharing any concerns about the plan and its implementation away from the child/young person.

Interventions and strategies

Interventions should be bespoke to the individual and based upon the information which was gathered in the Assess and Plan stages of the APDR.

For simplicity, approaches that could be used are organised according to the 4 functions identified by Kearney and Silverman (1990)

Function 1	**Function 2**
To avoid uncomfortable feelings brought on by attending school, e.g. anxiety or low mood	To avoid situations that might be stressful, e.g. academic demands, social pressures and/or aspects of the school environment

Function 3	**Function 4**
To reduce separation anxiety or to gain attention from significant others, e.g. parents or family members	To pursue tangible reinforcers outside of school, e.g. going shopping or playing computer games.

Approaches to consider when avoidance is associated with Function 1

To avoid something or situations that elicits negative feelings or high levels of stress and 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)

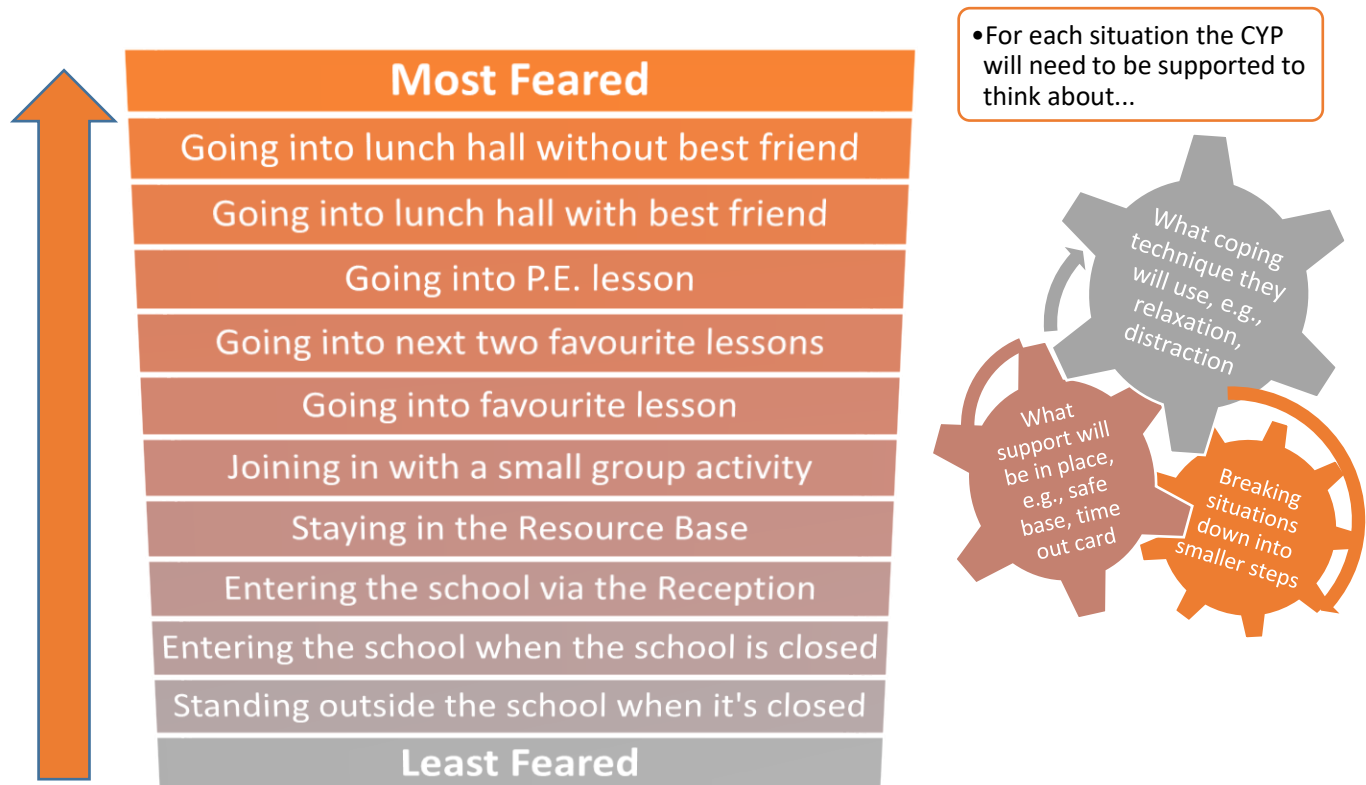✓ Interventions should include learning about anxiety and worrying, how it affects our thinking, feeling and behaviour and how avoidance of the feared situation makes things worse. The child should be taught anxiety management techniques and this may involve approaches underpinned by CBT principles as well as exploring a range of anxiety management tools (See Appendix 7).
✓ The child should be taught how to notice their worrying thoughts and then how to challenge them, if appropriate.
✓ Adults should show understanding of the worry as well as confidence in the young person being able to cope over time (with small steps and the support needed).
✓ There should be a gradual re-exposure to school setting using the anxiety/avoidance hierarchy created with the young person from least feared school situations to most feared.
✓ School should consider the provision of safe spaces that pupils can go to, such as pastoral zone, and library, these may be less stigmatising for some pupils than learning support area for some pupils.
✓ School should consider approaches to manage the intensity of exposure to anxiety inducing situations which could include staggered starts, working in quieter areas, initially attending during quieter/less busy times.

Resources to support CYP with understanding and managing their anxiety are contained in Appendix 7.

Anxiety/Avoidance Hierarchy

Most Feared
Going into lunch hall without best friend
Going into lunch hall with best friend
Going into P.E. lesson
Going into next two favourite lessons
Going into favourite lesson
Joining in with a small group activity
Staying in the Resource Base
Entering the school via the Reception
Entering the school when the school is closed
Standing outside the school when it's closed
Least Feared

• For each situation the CYP will need to be supported to think about...

What coping technique they will use, e.g., relaxation, distraction

What support will be in place, e.g., safe base, time out card

Breaking situations down into smaller steps

Approaches to consider when avoidance is associated with Function 2

To escape difficult social situations (e.g., feeling left out at playtimes, reading out loud in class, working in a group, worrying about academic evaluations) As with function 1, interventions should focus on learning about anxiety, as well as providing opportunities to practice in real life social contexts in order to build the CYP confidence and coping skills.
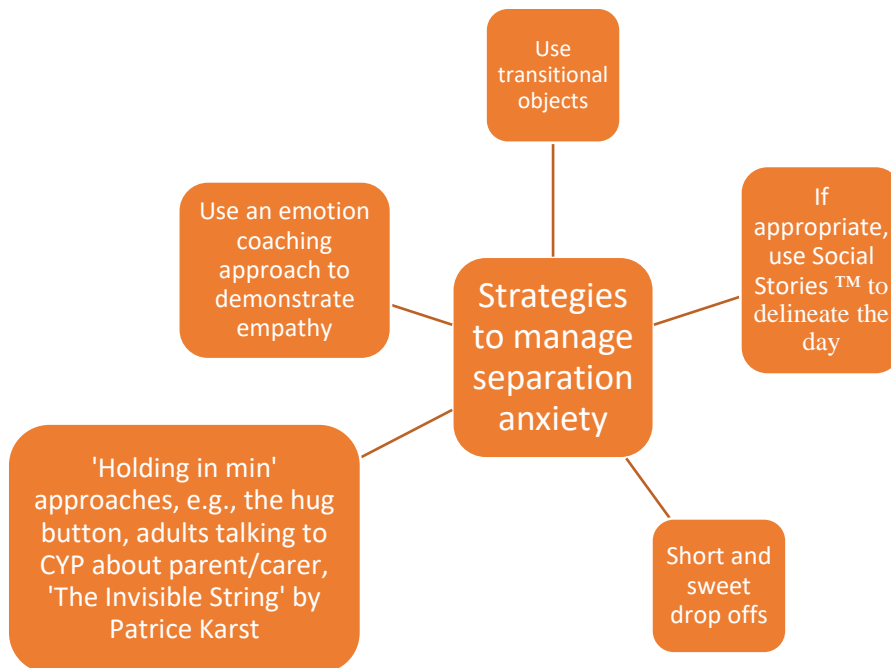
✓ Anxiety management techniques and behavioural experiments to test out their anxiety around particular situations. Gradually increase the time or complexity of the situational demand to increase confidence and mastery of reduced avoidance behaviour.
✓ Increase understanding of social anxiety and the aspects of social interaction that they find worrying or difficult.
✓ Role play of situations that they find difficult to build confidence, and to gain a sense of self-efficacy.
✓ Access to social skills modelling and targeted intervention to 'teach' skills.
✓ Practical support for social inclusion e.g., Circle of Friends, Buddy systems, lunchtime clubs and structured group activities.
✓ Structured group task, such as paired work and activities in which roles are clearly defined within the classroom.
✓ Access to catch up tutoring and pre-teaching (online or face-to-face)

Approaches to consider when avoidance is associated with Function 3

To gain attention from, or to spend more time with significant others (e.g., change in family dynamics, concerned about the wellbeing of a parent/carer). Interventions will need to include close liaison with parent/cares to support them to manage the pre-transition stage, as well as transitional objects and/or strategies to reduce anxiety brought about by the separation from family.

- ✓ Focus on the child's sense of belonging and connection to school e.g., spend additional time welcoming back, video calls prior to transition.
- ✓ Provide a secondary attachment figure at school, someone that the child can build a relationship with and meet regularly e.g., "meet & greet", mentoring time.
- ✓ Consider allowing phone calls for a period to check-in with family members.
- ✓ Consider use of a 'transitional object' that supports the child to know that parent/carers are holding them in mind even though they are not physically present. Gradually increase tolerance for time away from parents/carers.
- ✓ Use of a visual timetable that indicates what will happen next and when the child will see the parent/carer again.
- ✓ Consider initiating projects that can be done at home and then brought into school for completion so that the child has a sense of continuity even on days when they do not feel able to attend.

Strategies to manage separation anxiety:

- Use transitional objects
- If appropriate, use Social Stories ™ to delineate the day
- Short and sweet drop offs
- 'Holding in min' approaches, e.g., the hug button, adults talking to CYP about parent/carer, 'The Invisible String' by Patrice Karst
- Use an emotion coaching approach to demonstrate empathy

Approaches to consider when avoidance is associated with Function 4

To spend more time out of school as it is more fun or stimulating (watch tv, go shopping, play computer games, hang out with friends). Intervention would usually include:
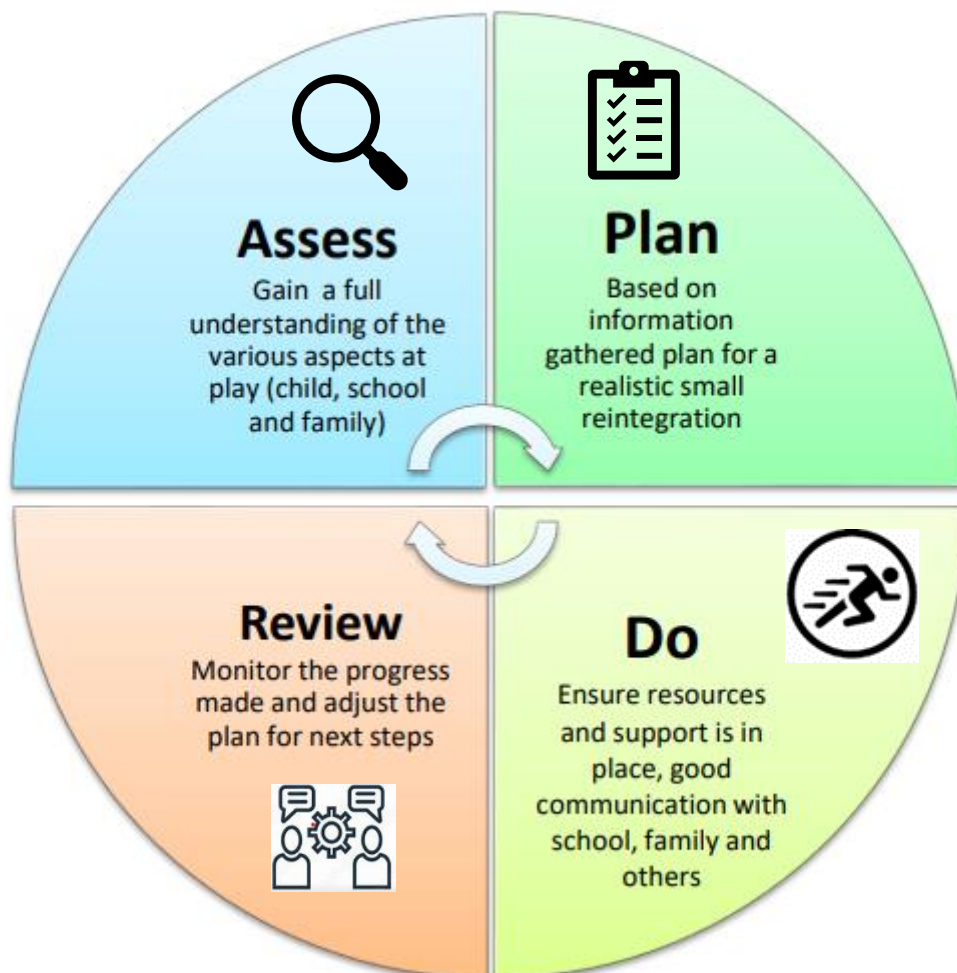
- ✓ Make school as stimulating as possible, find out the child or young person's interests and incorporate these into the work completed in school.
- ✓ Increasing "rewards" for attendance and disincentives for non-attendance.
- ✓ Limit the attention a child receives during non-attendance.
- ✓ If possible, reduce access to the more stimulating activity.
- ✓ Support their travel to and from school.
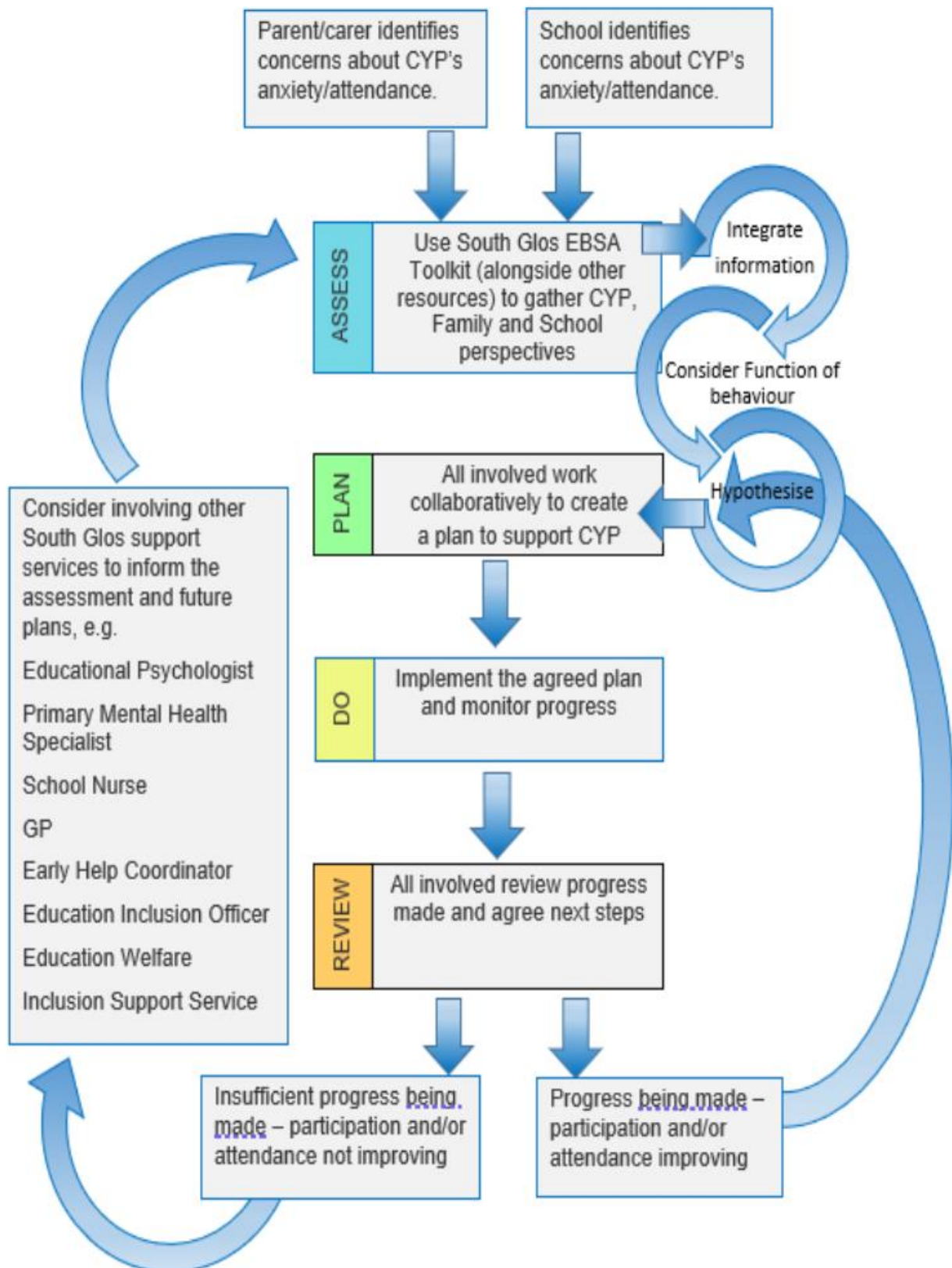- ✓ Teach them how to refuse offers from peers.

9. Review

It is essential that any plan is regularly reviewed. The frequency of reviews will be determined and agreed by those involved based on the outcomes and anticipated progress in response to the plan. This could range from weekly to termly reviews. There should be set dates for reviewing how any support plan is progressing with key personnel to attend identified and invited to attend. It is essential that the child/young people and parents are actively involved in the review. The review should identify and celebrate any progress made and review whether further information has come to light to help inform future steps. These next steps can include:

    • consolidating and maintaining the current support plan,

    • setting new outcomes and/or actions for the young person, school and parents.

    • Identifying that further consultation with other agencies needs to occur which may, if necessary, lead to a referral to other services.

Process Map for EBSA Cases

Parent/carer identifies concerns about CYP's anxiety/attendance.

School identifies concerns about CYP's anxiety/attendance.

ASSESS — Use South Glos EBSA Toolkit (alongside other resources) to gather CYP, Family and School perspectives

Integrate information

Consider Function of behaviour

Hypothesise

PLAN — All involved work collaboratively to create a plan to support CYP

Consider involving other South Glos support services to inform the assessment and future plans, e.g.

Educational Psychologist

Primary Mental Health Specialist

School Nurse

GP

Early Help Coordinator

Education Inclusion Officer

Education Welfare

Inclusion Support Service

DO — Implement the agreed plan and monitor progress

REVIEW — All involved review progress made and agree next steps

Insufficient progress being made – participation and/or attendance not improving

Progress being made – participation and/or attendance improving

10. Contacts and Resources

Organisations

Not Fine in School - Not Fine in School - School Refusal, School Attendance

 - Includes useful Support sections for Families, Young People, Professionals

Square Peg - news | squarepeg (teamsquarepeg.org)

Schools

Access and Response Team ART - Tel: 01454 864680

Compass - Compass | South Gloucestershire (southglos.gov.uk)

Mentally Healthy Schools/**Anna Freud – National Centre for children and Families** - brings together quality-assured information, advice and resources to help schools understand and promote children's mental health and wellbeing. Aims to increase staff awareness, knowledge and confidence to help support pupils. www.annafreud.org www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/

Includes:

> **Classroom wellbeing toolkit:** Classroom wellbeing toolkit : Mentally Healthy Schools

> **Auditing tools - 5 Steps to Mental Health and Wellbeing** – A framework for Schools and FE colleges

> Auditing your school and implementing change: Mentally Healthy Schools

> 5 Steps to Mental Health and Wellbeing (annafreud.org)

South Glos. Mind-you - Mind you | A mental health and emotional wellbeing hub for young people in South Gloucestershire (southglos.gov.uk)

Square Pegs; **Inclusivity, compassion and fitting in – a guide for schools.** Ian Gilbert, Fran Morgan and Ellie Costello**.**

Parents and Carers

South Glos Parent Carers CIC - offers a range of services to parent carers, including support sessions, webinars and training events, stay & play group, and a supportive, private Facebook community. We work with parents and professionals to improve services, and outcomes for children with SEND, living in South Gloucestershire. www.sgpc.org.uk email team@sglospc.org.uk

SAY – Send and You - provides Special Educational Needs and Disability Information
SAY – Send and You

Jigsaw Thornbury – A charity offering support to families who have children with additional needs or disability. Jigsaw Thornbury

Incredible Kids - support Parents/carers and run activities for children and young people with additional needs Incredible Kids

School is not my enemy – A film giving a perspective from a young student struggling with school attendance. School is not my enemy (English) on Vimeo

Walk in my shoes – A film by Erin an Autistic teenager giving insights into her experience of school Walk in My Shoes - The Donaldson Trust (donaldsons.org.uk)

I can't not won't: A story about a child who couldn't go to school, by Eliza Fricker.

I Can't Go to School: The School Non-Attender's Workbook by Suzy Rowland.

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www.edpsyched.co.uk/ebsa-horizons

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The Community EPS from Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council https://www.solihull.gov.uk/Children-and-family-support/localoffer/Emotionally-Based-School-Non-Attendance

Wakefield Educational Psychology Service - Wakefield EBSA school/setting and practitioner guidance

Sheffield Educational Psychology Service - EBSA Guidance for professionals working with families and young people.

Salford City Council – Emotionally Based School Avoidance – Good Practice guidance for schools and support agencies

Anna Freud/Early Intervention Framework - Classroom wellbeing toolkit: Simple ways to support secondary students' mental health.

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Mental Health of Children and Young People, 2020: Wave 1 follow up to the 2017 survey

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Whole School Audit

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 (including EBSA)			
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			

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.			
Nominated member of who has a responsibility to investigate and act on concerns			
Staff are aware as to whom they should convey any concerns regarding EBSA.			
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.			
Access to indicated provision e.g., safe places within the school, key person.			
All staff are aware of specific strategies and programmes in place to support those experiencing EBSA			

(West Sussex EPS)

Appendix 2 – Resources for gathering CYP views

Appendix 2.1 – School Stress Survey

School Stress Survey – Instructions

Administration

1. Ask the student to meet with a teacher, mentor or teaching assistant they are familiar with.

2. The member of staff goes through each item in sequence and asks the student to rate themselves, by highlighting or putting a cross through the *best fit* answer.

3. With each item, the member of staff also asks the student to identify reasons. The student is unlikely to find this easy – questions such as *"What happens during this part of the day?"*, *"What do you see?"*, *"What do you hear?"* are more likely to elicit a response rather than *"Why did you put this?"* Make a note of any indicative words / phrases such as 'teacher shouting', 'swearing', 'queuing up', 'too busy' etc. on the recording sheet.

   If the student identifies another student as causing stress, write their name as initials to maintain confidentiality.

4. At the end of the items, it may also be useful to ask students to undertake a similar rating activity with their timetable to identify any subjects / peer groups they may find stressful. These can also be noted on the recording sheet.

5. Finally, ask the students if there is anything else that they find particularly easy and enjoyable or particularly 'annoying', 'difficult' etc. about school. These can also be noted on the recording sheet.

Scoring
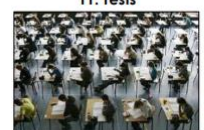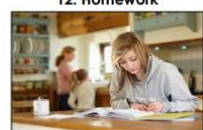
The scoring below is not an exact science – it is based on averages / a 'rule of thumb' rather than standardisation.

12 → 18	19 → 36	37 → 48
High and regular stress levels. Student will require additional support in managing their day-today stress levels.	Specific points of stress that may need further attention. Possibility that the student is 'masking' high stress levels.	Based on the answers given, student appears to generally have low day-to-day stress levels in school.

www.HumansNotRobots.co.uk

School Stress Survey

School Stress Survey – Recording Sheet

Item	Score ☹=1 😐=2 ☺=4	Indicative Words / Phrases
1. Getting Up & Ready		
2. Journey To & From		
3. Assembly		
4. Corridors		
5. Written Work		
6. Break Times		
7. Teacher Q&A		
8. Team / Group Work		
9. Lunch Times		
10. 1 to 1 with Adults		
11. Tests		
12. Homework		
Total Score:		

Timetable Issues	
Other Issues	

Appendix 2.2 – Miracle Question and Scaling activity

The Miracle Question is an approach used in Solution Focused therapy to explore a preferred future and what would need to change to move closer to this.

This approach could be used by a trusted mentor to explore a child or young person's experience of their difficulties associated with school.

I want you to imagine that after our session, you go home, have dinner, do all of your usual tasks and go to sleep. When you wake up in the morning, the problem that bought you here today has disappeared. You won't know that it has disappeared because you were asleep while the miracle happened. When you wake up the next morning, how are you going to start discovering that the miracle happened? ... What else are you going to notice? What will you see/hear? How will you feel? How will you act? What will be different? What will you be doing that is different? How will you respond when x happens?

Miracle question

I want you to imagine that after our session, you go home, have dinner, do all of your usual tasks and go to sleep. When you wake up in the morning, the problem that bought you here today has disappeared. You won't know that it has disappeared because you were asleep while the miracle happened.
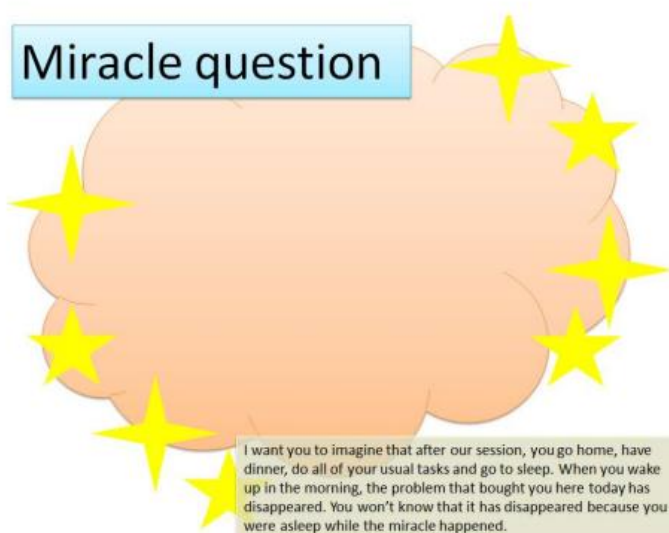
Scaling
Once the miracle day has been explored, the mentor can then begin to ask scaling questions.

_____

0   10

On a scale where 0 is the worst things have ever been, and 10 is this miracle day, where are you now?

Where would it need to be for you to know that the problem has gone away?

What will be the first things that will let you know you are 1 point higher.

The mentor can then ask: what would be stopping you from moving one point down the scale? What would make you move one point up the scale? Where would be good enough? What would this day look like?

Appendix 2.3 - Landscape of Fear

Described in the West Sussex Educational Psychology Guidance:

The Landscape of Fear is a tool designed by Kate Ripley to explore the child and young person's sources of anxiety in the physical, social and learning environments of school. The CYP is presented with a black and white map of the school and asked to colour the code the areas they feel: relaxed (green), that they are functioning reasonably well (yellow) or are most worried/anxious (red)

Example map:

Appendix 2.4 – My Education Journey…

My Education Journey...

			Primary						Secondary			Post 16
Reception	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	
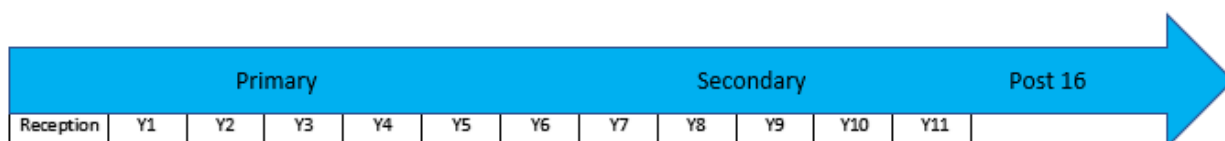
Using a timeline to capture the voice of the young person…

- Present the image above (or an equivalent hand drawn image) and explain that you're seeking to understand a bit more about the young person's experiences of school and education so far.

- Negotiate who will illustrate/annotate the timeline with the young person. (Could be the CYP/Adult/joint effort)

- Use sketched images, key words or phrases to plot with the young person their perspective on their experiences. This does not need to be completed sequentially. Starting with the present and going backwards can also work well.

- Follow the young person's lead and consider exploring and using prompts around:

  - The schools they've attended and the transitions between them

  - Their likes and preferences within different settings

  - Things they dislike/found challenging/wished might have been different

  - Approaches they value

  - The changes in their friendships/relationships

- Any variations in their connection with school over time – participation /attendance/relationships - and any events and background factors that may have led to these

- Key people that they were/are connected to and why

- How they felt/feel about key points of their journey

- Their thoughts on the next steps and hopes for their future

- Consider the key themes that have emerged through the discussion to inform ideas for support planning and approaches that could then be implemented.

Example:
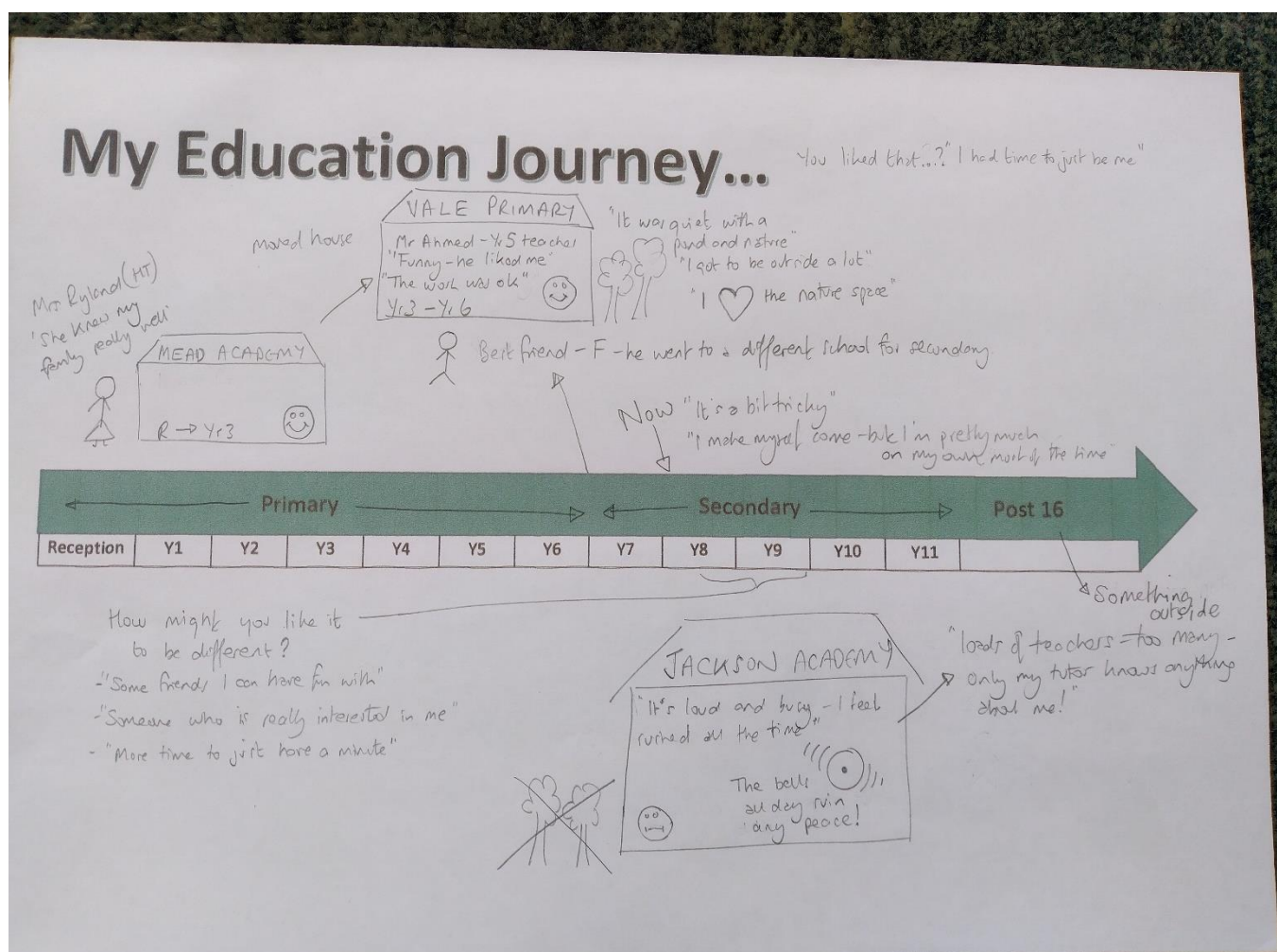
Key themes in this example – friendships, connections with staff – 'feeling known', intensity of environment – noise, pace, access to nature.

Appendix 3 – Information Gathering from Parents

Information Gathering from parents with prompts

School staff may find it helpful to use these themes and question prompts during the initial meeting with parents. Sensitivity and active listening skills will be crucial at this stage.

Theme	Possible questions
Family dynamics It can be helpful to gain an understanding the young person's life journey and significant events which may have impacted upon their lived experiences.	• Could you describe your family? Or draw your family tree? • Who is X closest to in the family? Has this always been the case? • Have there been any changes within the family recently? Or are there any upcoming changes in the near future? • Was anything different in your family at the time that you noticed X's difficulties increasing? • Have there been any significant life events that X has experienced? Or any important losses/bereavements/long-term illness? • When X does not attend school, how does this impact upon the family? What are you doing if X does not go to school?
Strengths, interests and aspirations	• What is X good at? What do they like doing? • Do they have any hopes for the future? Do they know what they want their life to be like when they are an adult?
Developmental and educational history	• What was X like as a young child? • Can you tell me about their early experiences at school? The primary school, at the start of secondary school?
Relationships	• Does X talk about any other children? What does s/he say? • Does X talk about any adults within school? What does s/he say? • Who does X get on with...who doesn't X get on with? • Does X interact with other students out of school? • Which friendship groups are significant?
Academic progress	• School should be aware if the young person has identified SEN needs and should ask about these needs and the support in place. • If there is no identified SEN school should ask if they have any concerns, or if the child has spoken about difficulties.
Behaviour and symptoms of anxiety	• When X is worried what does it look like? • What do they say they are feeling? • Is X's sleeping and eating affected?
The child's view – fears and worries	• Has X spoken to you about what X finds difficult about school? What do they say?
The child's view – going well in school	• Has X mentioned anything that is going well in school? (e.g.teachers, lessons, friends)
Typical day	• What does a typical day look like for X / yourself when they do/do not attend school? • Take me through it, what happens from the moment they wake, to the moment they sleep...
Parental views on the reasons for EBSA	• Why do you think X has difficulty attending school? (ask each parent separately) • If (other parent/ sibling/Grandparent) were here what would they say? • Are there any differences of views about the reasons and what should be done within the family?
Exceptions These questions can help shift the focus away from the presenting problem, to consider aspects within a situation which are working well or supporting the young person not to get worse.	• Tell me about the times when X is not feeling X • Tell me about the times when X is feeling less X • Tell me about the times when X has coped well • Tell me about the days/times of day when you think something has gone well for X. What is different during these times? • Tell me about the times when X has managed to go to school. What was different about these times? • Tell me what other people have done that has been useful/helpful for X.
Previous attempts to address the problem	• What has helped in the past when things have been difficult? • What strategies have been most helpful so far in managing their anxiety?

Appendix 4 - Information Gathering from School Staff – Round Robin

_____ is currently experiencing difficulties attending school which we feel may be due to emotional distress. We would like to gain a picture of how they are in school. As an adult who works with _____ please complete the questionnaire below.
Your name _____ **Lesson/activity** _____
Please describe _____.
What are _____'s strengths?
What is going well for _____?
What does _____ find difficult?
How does _____ get on with their peers?
How does _____ get on with you and other adults?

Is _____ engaged and motivated with their learning. Are they making progress? If not, why not?

Have you observed any emotional difficulties at school, what have these been, when did/do they occur?

What support do you provide for _____. How do they respond to this?

What is your understanding of _____'s attendance problems?

What do you think would help _____ in school?

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Appendix 5 – Integration and Action Planning Documents - EdPychEd

Action Planning

EBSA

Child's Name		Date of Birth (Year)	
School		Parent / Carer	

Description of the Emotionally Based School Avoidance

(e.g., current rate of attendance, patterns in non-attendance, is the school avoidance new or just emerging, or has the CYP experienced similar difficulties in the past?)

Summary of Risk Factors, which will need to be targeted and reduced

Child	School	Home

Functional Analysis – Identify Key Functions

☐ **Function 1** – To avoid situations that elicit negative affect or provoke high levels of anxiety, so avoiding school to avoid these unpleasant or uncomfortable feelings.

☐ **Function 2** – To escape aversive social situations or negative appraisals by others, so avoiding school to reduce social anxiety or social pressures.

☐ **Function 3** – To reduce separation anxiety, so avoiding school to spend time at home with a significant parent/carer or other family members.

☐ **Function 4** – To pursue rewarding experiences outside of school, so avoiding school in order to engage in pleasurable activities at home or in the community.

Action Planning

EBSA

Summary of Resilience Factors, which will need to be strengthened and harnessed

Child	School	Home

Formulation & Integration

Child

School   Home

Next Steps

✓
✓
✓
✓
✓
✓

Appendix 6 – Examples of support plan formats

Example 1

[6.2-My-Support-Plan.docx (live.com)](live.com)

Example 2

Support Plan

Name	Date

At school these things can make me feel upset

My school support person/(s) is/are:

Details of checking in with my school support person (When, where)

Until _____ my return to school plan includes the following changes to my attendance

(Identify any changes to days or time they come in)

Changes to my timetable include

(Identify any changes needed and what should happen/ where they should go instead)

Any other changes include:

(Identify any other changes to routines (break, lunch times, changes between lessons etc) to classroom expectations (not expected to read aloud, work in pairs etc) homework

When I start to get upset, I notice these things about myself

When I start to get upset, others notice these things about me

Things I can do to make myself feel better when I'm at school

Things that other people (staff and friends) can do to help me feel better when I'm at school

Things that my family can do to support me to attend school

Places in the school where I can go to where I feel safe and supported

This plan will be reviewed regularly so that it remains helpful.
Review date:

My signature	School support persons' signature	Parent signature

Other people who have access to the plan are?

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Appendix 7 – Anxiety management and CBT based approaches

Think Good - Feel Good: A Cognitive Behavioural Workbook for Children and Young People, by Paul Stallard

A Clinicians Guide to Think Good: Feel Good: Using CBT with children and Young People by Paul Stallard

What to do when you worry too much: A kids guide to overcoming anxiety by Dawn Huebner

Starving the Anxiety Gremlin by Kate Collins-Donnelly

The Homunculi Approach to Social and Emotional Wellbeing: A Flexible CBT Programme for Young People on the Autism Spectrum or with Behavioural Difficulties by Anne Greig and Tommy Mackay

Don't Worry, Be Happy: A Child's Guide to Dealing with Feeling Anxious by Poppy O'Neil

No Worries! Mindful Kids: An activity book for children who sometimes feel anxious or stressed

The Thriving Adolescent: Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Positive Psychology to Help Teens Manage Emotions, Achieve Goals, and Build Connection by Louise Hayes