

St Polycarp's Catholic Primary School



Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) Guidance

EBSA Guidance for parents and carers:

From time to time, your child may experience anxiety coming into school. Or you may find this is a common experience that you and your child face regularly. It may be a case, that your child is experiencing what is known as EBSA (Emotionally Based School Avoidance). The purpose of this guidance is to help build children's resilience. It provides you with information as to what EBSA is, and if you are experiencing this with your child, what you can do to help.

This Guidance should be read in conjunction with:

http://www.stpolycarps.surrey.sch.uk/docs/policies/Attendance_Policy_2022-23.pdf

http://www.stpolycarps.surrey.sch.uk/docs/policies/Xavier_Supporting_Children_with_Health_Needs_who_Cannot_Attend_School_Policy.pdf

http://www.stpolycarps.surrey.sch.uk/docs/policies/Xavier_Supporting_Pupils_with_Medical_Conditions_Policy.pdf

Understanding EBSA:

All children will display a certain level of worry or anxiety at times, and this is normal. A certain level of anxiety can be a healthy strategy that we all use as a coping mechanism, it can even keep us safe from harm, in some cases managing our anxiety can help to build our resilience and even perform better in difficult situations. However, sometimes anxieties can develop, and instead of anxieties helping us, they can lead to withdrawing from different types of activities including after school clubs, visiting friends as well as withdrawing from school.

If your child has high levels of anxiety and does not want to attend school, they may be experiencing what is known as Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA).

EBSA is not:

- truancy
- deliberate non-attendance.
- refusal to attend school

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1. Factors that influence EBSA:

Factors that influence EBSA, according to research, include the four functions of school non-attendance. These are:

1. to avoid uncomfortable feelings brought on by attending school, such as anxiety or low mood. This may include not feeling connected or a sense of belongingness to school.
2. to avoid situations that may be stressful, such as academic demands, social pressures and/or aspects of the school environment.
3. to reduce separation anxiety or to gain attention from significant others, such as parents or other family members.
4. to pursue physical rewards outside of school, such as going shopping or playing computer games during school time.

Recognising which function/s apply to your child can help you to support them.

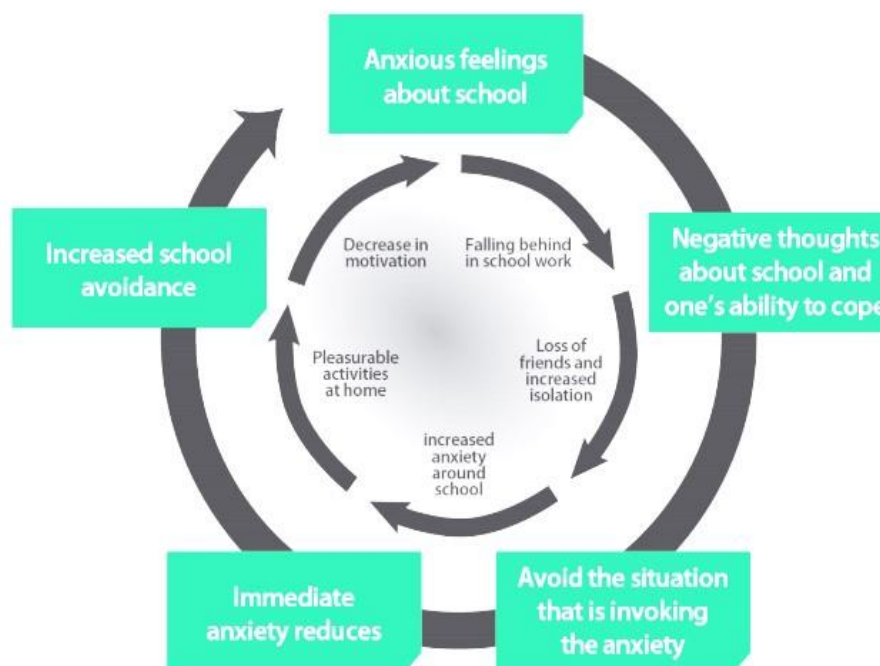


Figure 1: Taken from 'Supporting children with Anxiety in the COVID-19 Pandemic' by Dr Tina Rae

2. Anxiety and EBSA (and what this looks like):

Anxiety has been identified as a key factor that will affect EBSA for a child or young person. When the anxiety is linked to school and not attending school, your child's feelings may escalate to a level where they fear school and therefore find that they are in a position where they cannot cope. They may experience heightened emotional responses that may be distressing for you and your child. This may present itself as thoughts, feelings, behaviours or even physical symptoms including stomach pains and sickness. It may be a case that the symptoms are worse on weekday mornings before school and are less or absent at the weekends and during the school holidays.

You can find out more about anxiety and how to support your child on Surrey Mindworks <https://www.mindworks-surrey.org/>

Supporting your child

Your class teacher and pastoral team at St Polycarp's will work together to support your child with anxiety when they are at school, but they cannot support them when they return home after the school day or in the morning before school starts. At these times, you can address worries at home, listening to your child and validating your child's anxieties without judgement will help to support your child and move forward. Emotion Coaching is an effective way to communicate with your child and provide a 'high guidance and high empathy approach'. Close collaboration with your child and school is likely to lead to the best outcome for your child.

(Link to an emotion coaching webinar - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFmudedDtgY>)



Think of the last time
that you felt really
angry...

3. Identifying EBSA:

Early signs of EBSA have been identified as the following behaviours:

- Talking negatively about school
- Becoming anxious on separation from caregiver
- Physical symptoms of anxiety (e.g., headaches, stomach aches), often on a Sunday night or a Monday morning, which may improve when your child stays home from school
- Sharing worries about aspects of school
- Refusing to get ready for school
- Difficulties sleeping
- Becoming distressed when school is talked about
- Engaging in self-harming behaviours
- Becoming withdrawn, spending increasing amounts of time in their bedroom, avoiding trips outside of the home

If you are experiencing any of these early signs, it may be worth communicating with your child and trying to find where the 'pinch points' are in your child's day. This can range from getting up in the morning to going to bed at night. At school, trained members of staff can also carry out a similar activity to help your child with some of the feelings that are leading to more anxiety. Remember to communicate with school, early identification will help to support your child.

An example:

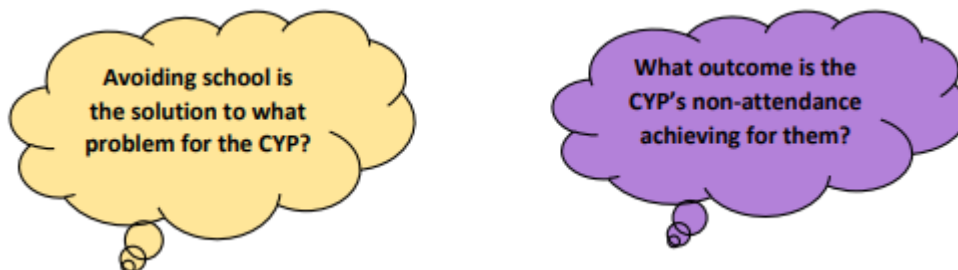
Factor influencing EBSA: Your child identifies that they don't want to separate from you in the morning. This is one of the four factors that influences EBSA.

Behaviour associated with the identified EBSA: Taking a long time to get dressed, complaining of stomach pains in the morning, delaying leaving the house. This is worse on a Monday morning.

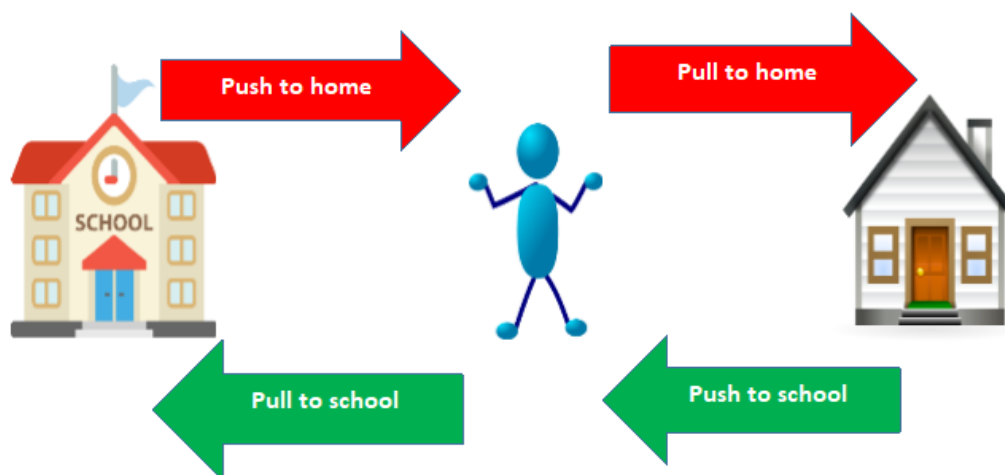
How to support this: Use emotion coaching approaches to communicate and guide your child. Try to find a solution that your child feels safe and happy to do. For instance, you could try separation activities such as giving your child a special item from you that they keep with them to help them separate from you. Be consistent, if it doesn't work straight away, it doesn't mean that it isn't going to work.

4. Push and Pull Factors:

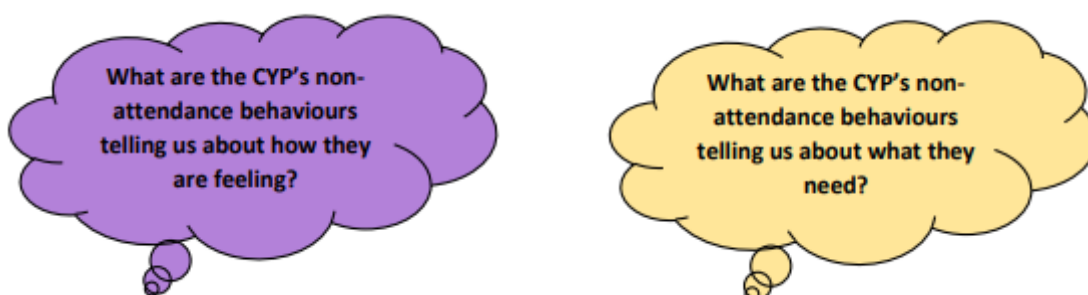
If you are experiencing EBSA with your child, you may be in a cycle of 'push and pull' with your child. The pull to home will be greater than the push to school.



The diagram below explains the 'push and pull' cycle:



It can also be useful to consider what your child is trying to communicate to the grown-ups supporting your child:



If you feel that you are in a cycle of 'push and pull' with your child, it is important (if you haven't already done so), that you speak to your class teacher who will be able to advise you on your next steps. This may lead to a course of ELSA for your child, or further meetings with a member of the pastoral team to work with you to move forward.

An example of attempting to change the 'push and pull cycle' could be to work with your child and class teacher offering activities that are going to provide interest to your child at times that your child finds uncomfortable in school. For instance: Your child may have already communicated that a certain point in the day creates feelings that may provoke anxiety, your teacher will be able to work with you and your child to offer a different activity for your child at these times.

5. Motivating Change stages:

5.1: Stages of change, maintaining change, motivating change:

To move forward from a cycle of non-attendance, heightened anxiety and their associated behaviours, there is an identified clear link, and it involves three parts: The child at the heart of all the decision making, collaboration and an agreed plan between the child, school, and home. (Please find attached the document from Surrey County Council explaining Stages of Change.)

It may be a case that your child takes a while to move through each stage, and this is OK.

The important part is to continue to work through the agreed/action plan and be consistent.

5.2 What school can do to help:

What St Polycarp's role is to support you and your child:

- Identify a key member of staff to take the lead in supporting your child.
- Gather information from you, your child, and staff to find out why your child is worried about going to school.
- Make an assessment to find out what is making your child's attendance difficult.
- Work with you to your child to come up with a plan to support your child to manage their worries and feel better about coming to school.

External professionals:

Sometimes, St Polycarp's may need further support to help your child in overcoming their anxiety around attending school. If this is required, this will be carried out on a case to case basis and you and your child will be involved in each part of the process.

5.3 What you can do to help:

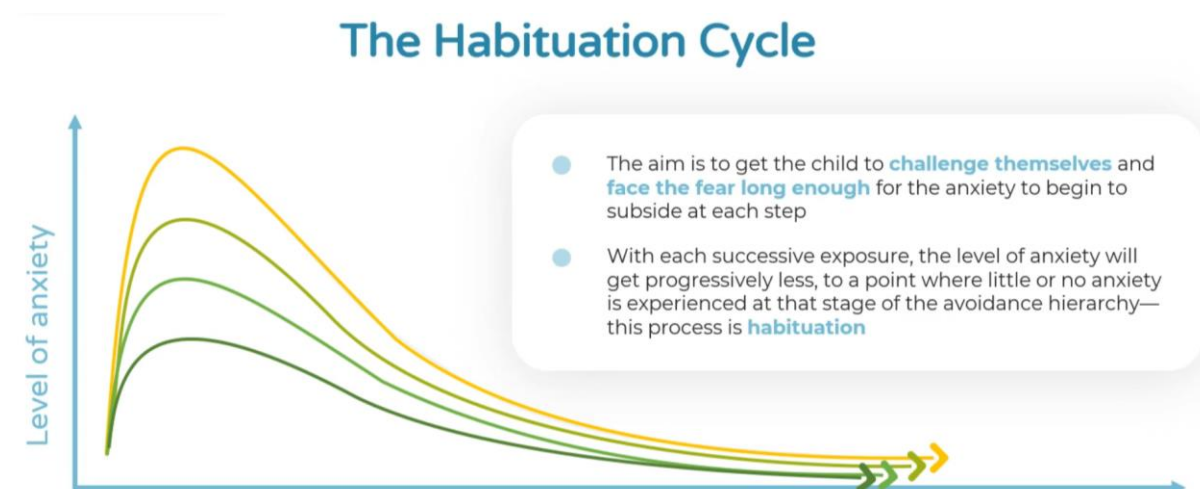
What your role is to support you and your child:

- Use emotion coaching strategies to support your child through heightened behaviour.
- Collaborate and communicate with school who will be able to advise you and agree a plan moving forward.
- Keep the communication open with your child.
- Offer guidance of support as agreed with your child and school.
- Agree a plan and stick to it. Be consistent.

- Expect days when it feels you have moved backwards. Be reassured that the skills you have used will equip you to support your child for the long term.

6. The Habituation Cycle and facing fears:

Once your child has agreed a plan with you and school that is led by your child, the next and possibly the hardest step will be carrying out the first step back into school. This is going to be difficult for your child, but it is natural for your child to feel an increased amount of anxiety. This is called the habituation cycle.



The habituation cycle explains that overtime your child's anxiety will decrease with the agreed plan in school. For all care givers (teachers and parents), it is important to remember not to change from the agreed plan. For instance, if a child has agreed to come to school for a certain lesson and that has been successful, it is important to stick to that agreed plan and not change it on the day. This will help to reduce your child's anxiety over time. Throughout the plan, offering a high empathy and high guidance approach will support your child. Keep the language positive and support your child. Know that St Polycarp's will do the same.

Remember, supporting your child through trickier times may be overwhelming and upsetting. Make time for yourself and talk to trusted friends and family. Know that you will be supported by St Polycarp's.

Here in the St. Polycarp's family we follow in the footsteps of Jesus through playing, praying, loving and learning together

7. Useful links:

Surrey Mindworks: <https://www.mindworks-surrey.org/>

Hampshire CAMHS: <https://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/>

Surrey Local Offer EBSA page: <https://www.surreylocaloffer.org.uk/parents-and-carers/education-and-training/ebsna>