

# Go-to for Emotionally Based School Avoidance



Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) refers to difficulty<sup>1</sup> in attending school due to intense, adverse emotional factors. It is estimated to affect 1-5% of school-age children and is more prevalent in secondary schools.

(Heyne, D. et al (2019). Differentiation between school attendance problems: Why and how? Cognitive and Behavioral Practice)

## School Avoidance

School avoidance is different from truancy (skipping school) and school refusal or being kept home by parents.

In school avoidance, the child may want to go to school but feel they can't because of anxiety and emotional distress.

## School Avoidance Cycle

Once anxiety manifests, children and young people frequently fall into a school avoidance cycle.



## Early intervention is key!

Try to avoid waiting until your child stops going to school before you get help.

## Stay alert for early signs.

- Talking negatively about school
- Intense emotions when preparing for school, especially after a break or illness
- Complaining of headaches or stomach aches
- Becoming more distant from family and friends
- Trouble sleeping and reluctance to get out of bed in the morning
- Feeling nauseous or unwell

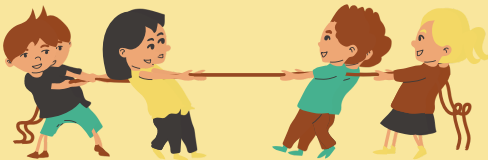
"School avoidance is not about CAN'T. It is about not feeling safe enough right now."



Push/Pull factors can play a part in whether our children are happy at school

### Push factors

- Good relationships with teachers & friends.
- Feeling included (a sense that they belong at school).
- Enjoying lessons and activities outside the classroom.



### Pull factors

- Bullying or feeling left out and lonely.
- Worrying about body image & fitting in
- School environment, e.g., too many sounds, bright lights, or smells, can cause anxiety.
- Strict rules or having to sit still can be hard for some children.
- Changes in routine, health problems and poor relationships with teachers can also make it harder for your child to go to school.

## Speak to your child's school

Ask to talk to your child's teacher, year head, pastoral care lead, or SENCO.

Write down what you want to discuss and what your child is struggling with and ensure your child is included in any plans that are being made.

Ask the teacher if they've noticed any other difficulties. Talk about changes that might help, like having a safe space when they feel overwhelmed. Agree on the changes to be made and set a time to check in again, giving your child time to get used to the new plan.



REF-School Anxiety and Refusal | Parent Guide to Support | YoungMinds

Communication, planning & flexibility are essential.

Difficulties can arise at transitions e.g., periods of holiday or illness.

Successful transitions at key points are important. Good transitions involve communication between child, parent and school.

**\*\* Focus on your child's wellbeing\*\***



# The positive Rutt



## R

### Relationships

Building good relationships with school staff can make a big difference. It's important for parents, children and the school to talk openly with each other to support the child and avoid blame.

## U

### Understanding

Many children with anxiety feel like they are always in danger. Certain things make them feel more worried or stressed. Working together is key to understanding what upsets your child and how to provide support.

## T

### Time

Children do better when they can work at their own speed. Speak to school about changes that might help. These changes could make it easier for your child to learn and feel comfortable.

## T

### Trust

Children need to trust that adults will keep them safe emotionally and that their feelings and abilities matter. It's important for them to feel like they belong in a place that understands their needs. Parents are key to helping with this understanding and to ask for changes if needed.



## Supporting your child

- Spend time together talking, playing or doing an activity your child finds enjoyable.
- Discover what is happening in their lives
- Plan time with friends / family
- Listen to music that helps to calm or soothe them.
- Practice breathing techniques to relax you and your child,
- Exercise to release built up energy and stress.
- Gratitude journal - list things they are thankful for.
- Sit with the emotions - think it through- do not move on too fast.
- Draw or write down the emotion and find language to express the feelings behind it
- Externalise the anxiety
- Encourage positive self-talk -  
"I can handle this"  
"We can handle this together"



## Supporting you

It is important to recognise the impact on you as a parent as you may be:

- Worrying people think it's your fault
- Worrying about your child's emotional health
- Worrying about your child's social development
- Worrying about your child's education and future prospects
- Worrying about your other children
- Feeling conflicted between supporting your child and adhering to school expectations
- Concerned over legal obligations related to attendance
- finding it difficult balancing work as you arrange alternative care for your child during school hours

**Early intervention is key.** When worries surface, speak to someone who can help. This could be your employer, the school nurse, the SENCO or a helpline such as Parentline.



We are in your corner here at Parentline, to listen, support or advise. Please contact us Monday to Thursday 9am to 9pm, Friday 9am to 5pm

