

# Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

*Information for parents and carers*



**Salford City Council**

## What is EBSA?

Worrying or anxiety are normal feelings that we all experience from time to time. They can even keep us safe from harm or help us perform in difficult situations. However, sometimes anxiety or excessive worrying can become a problem especially when it stops people doing what they want or need to do.

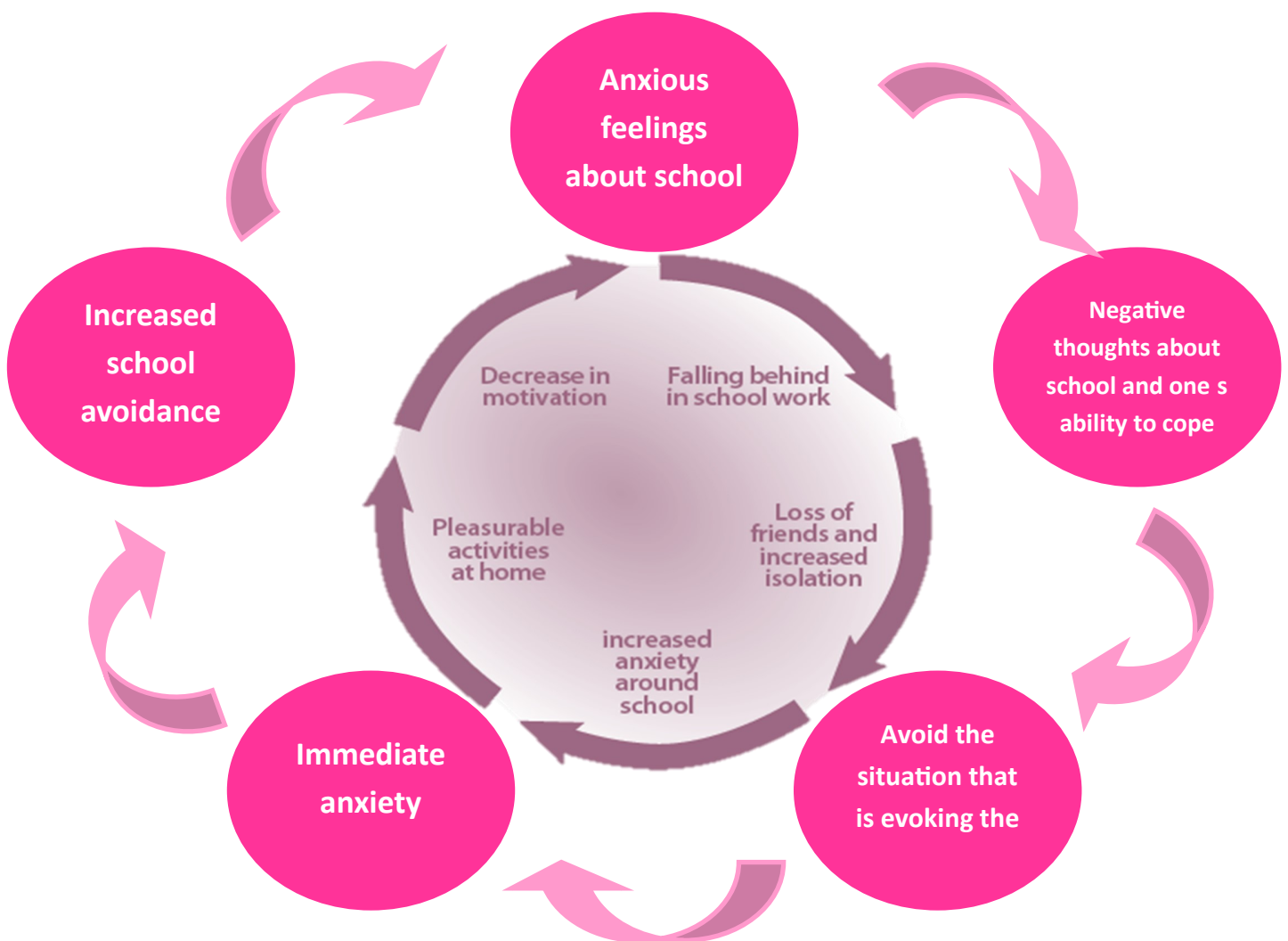
Many children and young people worry about school. This is normal. Anxieties are part of life and learning to deal with them is part of growing up. However sometimes a child's worries may lead to difficulties attending school. If your child has high levels of anxiety and does not want to attend school they may be experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA).



## Is your child worried about going to school?

It can feel 'kinder' for a child or young person to avoid the situation that is causing them to feel worried or anxious. However, the more time they spend out of school, the stronger these feelings become and the harder it will be for them to return. It is best to intervene and support a return to school as soon as possible.

The diagram below shows how EBSA behaviours can develop.



The longer the problems remain unaddressed the more difficult it becomes to change the school avoiding behaviour.

## Signs of EBSA?

These could include:

- Fearfulness, anxiety, tantrums or expression of negative feelings, when faced with the prospect of attending school.
- They may complain that they have abdominal pain, headache, sore throat, often with no signs of actual physical illness.
- Anxiety symptoms that include a racing heart, shaking, sweating, difficulty breathing, butterflies in the tummy or nausea, pins and needles.

The symptoms are typically worse on weekday mornings and absent at weekends and school holidays.

## What should you do?

One of the most important ways you can support your child is to calmly listen to them and acknowledge that their fears are real to them. Remind them how important it is to attend school and reassure them that you and the school will work with them to make school a happier place for them.

Tell the school there is a problem as soon as possible and work in partnership with the school to address the issue. A plan should be made with the school to help your child. Towards the beginning of initiating the plan your child may show more unhappiness and you should prepare yourself for this.

It is important to involve children and young people in support planning, working collectively with all adults, both at home and school, to agree a firm and consistent approach. You can put together a plan based on small steps or 'challenges' that you agree together, focused around the things they find difficult. If they are involved in identifying and agreeing next steps, children and young people are as a result more likely to be motivated to try to make changes that have been agreed. Any concerns about the plan should not be shared with your child and a positive 'united front' is recommended.

It is likely that there may be difficulties implementing the plan and these should be anticipated and solutions found. You should try to keep an optimistic approach, if your child fails to attend school on one day, start again the next day. It is also important to remember there is likely to be more difficulty after a school holiday, period of illness or after the weekend.

Plans should be broken into small, realistic steps that can be built up over time. Although it's understandable to want to improve things as quickly as possible, it is unlikely that the situation will change overnight, especially if the child has been out of school for a long time.

You may feel tempted to change schools, however research tells us that often difficulties will re-emerge in the new school and whenever possible it is normally better to try to resolve the issue in the current school.

Finally, as a parent it can be really difficult to see your child unhappy. Make sure that you have someone to talk to too. This could be a friend, family member or an organisation such as those listed at the end of this leaflet.

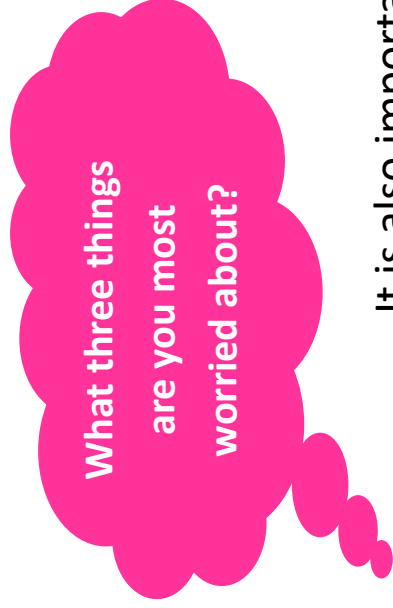


## What can you expect the school to do?

- Listen carefully to you and your child. They should acknowledge the challenges faced by your child and you as their parent.
- Maintain close contact with you and your child, even during extended periods of non-attendance. An agreed member of staff should be named as a link person.
- Work in partnership with you and your child to find out what difficulties your child is experiencing and find ways of making school a happier place and improve their attendance.
- Hold meetings to devise a plan in conjunction with you and your child. The plan should include what the next steps will be.
- Respond to any school-based needs, such as academic support, dealing with bullying or support with social relationships.
- Consider the support your child might require upon arrival at school. This might include meeting with a friend at a specific place and time, using a quiet space to settle before school starts, engaging in a preferred activity or being given a responsibility such as a monitor role.
- Provide short wellbeing breaks or 'check-ins' with a trusted adult during the school day, so any concerns your child has can be addressed early and your child can be supported to relax in school if they begin to feel anxious.
- If difficulties persist the school should consider requesting involvement from other professionals.
- The school should refer to the Salford EBSA Guidance Document.

## Talking to your child about their worries

Any child currently avoiding school is likely to become anxious when they are asked to talk about their difficulties or returning to school. A good place to start is to acknowledge that it may be difficult but that you would like to know what they think and feel. If they find it difficult to talk, you could ask them a specific question this might help them start to sort through their fears and feelings. For example:



It is also important to focus on positives:



Sometimes children may find it hard to tell you face to face, perhaps you could ask them to write it down, email or text you. Some children also find it easier to draw how they are feeling.

**We have also produced information booklets for children and young people. These have some ideas for activities children and young people can do. Your child's school should be able to give you a copy.**

## Further sources of support

### SIASS

The Salford SEND Information, Advice and Support Service provides impartial information, advice and support to parents and carers of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You can contact one of the team by calling **0161 778 0343/0349**

Website : <https://www.salford.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/info-for-parents-students-and-teachers/special-educational-needs/salford-information-advice-and-support-services-siass/>

Or by Email: [siass@salford.gov.uk](mailto:siass@salford.gov.uk)

### Salford's Local Offer

The Local Offer provides information on what support services are available in Salford for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their parents/carers

<https://directory.salford.gov.uk/kb5/salford/directory/localoffer.page?localofferchannel=0>

### Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership – Resource Hub

Free access to a useful range of documents and films around mental health, includes a COVID-19 specific section.

<https://hub.gmhsc.org.uk/mental-health/>

### Young Minds

A charity championing the wellbeing and mental health of young people. They publish a range of information for parents.

They also have a parent helpline.

Calls are free Mon-Fri from 9:30am to 4pm 0808 802 5544

Website:

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/>