

Oxfordshire Educational Psychology Service





Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

School toolkit

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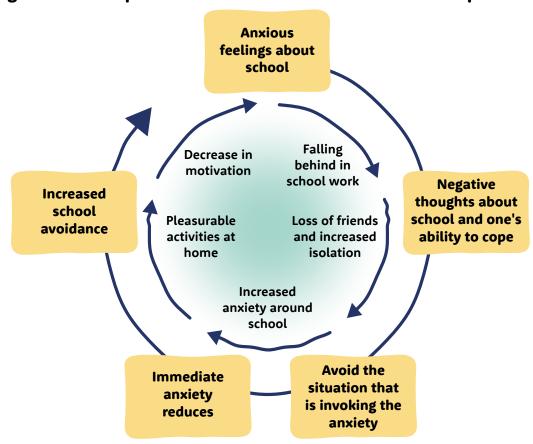
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What is Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)?

EBSA is a broad term used to describe the behaviours of a child or young person who shows persistent worries about school-related issues, struggles significantly in attending school or being in class, due to heightened levels of emotions such as anxiety. EBSA is not a diagnostic term. Other terms such as "anxiety-based school avoidance" (ABSA), "emotionally based school non-attendance" (EBSNA), "anxiety-related non-attendance" (ARNA) and "emotionally based barriers to school attendance" (EBBSA) are sometimes used.

Over time this avoidance often exacerbates their school-based worries through adding additional factors such as missed schoolwork and missed social experiences which creates a perpetuating cycle. This can result in significant absence from school and impacts the child or young person's learning, relationships, and well-being.

The diagram below represents how EBSA behaviours can develop:



Adapted from West Sussex Educational Psychology Service

There is a common misconception that the issues behind EBSA behaviours are located solely within-child or as relating to factors within the home. Research highlights the importance of looking holistically at each case to appreciate the complex interplay between the range of factors contributing to EBSA behaviours including at the child, home, and school level.

Early identification and risk factors

Risk factors are those identified that place children and young people at greater risk of EBSA behaviours. The exact nature of these will vary according to an individual child or young person's unique set of characteristics, circumstances, and experiences.

	School factors		Family factors		Child factors
0	Bullying (the most common school factor)	0	Family stress (e.g. separation, finance)	0	Anxiety and mental health concerns
0	Difficulties in specific subjects and/or	0	Changes in the family home	0	Difficulties managing and understanding
	difficulties with learning	0	Parent/sibling physical		emotions
0	Transition points:		and mental health concerns	0	Fear of failure and poor self confidence
	nursery to school, primary to secondary	0	Being the youngest child	0	Physical illness
	school, key stage changes, or change of	0	in the family Loss and bereavement	0	Age (5–6, 11–12 and 13–14 years)
	school	0	High levels of family	0	Learning difficulties,
0	Academic demands/ high levels of pressure	0	stress Family history of EBSA		developmental problems, or Autism
	and performance- orientated classrooms	0	Young carer.		Spectrum Condition if unsupported
0	Social isolation and friendship difficulties			0	Adverse childhood experiences.
0	Limited positive staff relationships.				

It would be helpful to ensure at transition points (nursery to primary school, primary to secondary school), questions around the above risk factors are noted so that early signs of concern can be supported. It is important that knowledge from different settings is captured for those vulnerable to EBSA behaviours. The Oxfordshire transition handbook is therefore a valuable document in this respect.

□ Oxfordshire SEND and transition

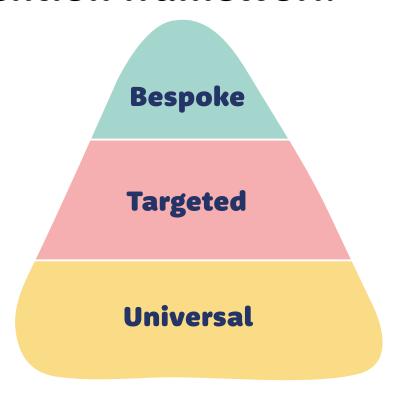
© oxfordshire.gov.uk/business/information-providers/ childrens-services-providers/send-information-providers/guidance-and-procedures

Recognising the signs of EBSA and providing early intervention is fundamental.

Warning signs include:

- O Reported anxiety and fearfulness of attending school (particularly on Sunday evenings or in the mornings before school)
- O Expression of negative feelings such as refusal, hiding, running away, hitting out
- O Complaints of stomach pain, headache or other feelings of being unwell without the physical sign of illness
- O Difficult or distressing transition into school in the mornings (including lateness).

Intervention framework



Universal provision

This section provides ideas to help schools promote emotional wellbeing at a whole school level. Below are some examples of the activities and interventions schools may be able to implement to promote resilience, belongingness, emotional literacy skills, and secure attachments.

Anna Freud 5 Steps to mental health and wellbeing in schools Consider using Anna Freud Centre's 5 Steps Framework as a whole school approach to promoting mentally healthy schools.

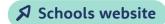
□ 5 Steps to Mental Health and Wellbeing | Anna Freud

@ annafreud.org/resources/schools-and-colleges/5-steps/

School auditing

Promoting wellbeing across the school is the first step in preventing EBSA.

Use the EPS Promoting Wellbeing Audit as part of this process.





The key elements are given below:

Leadership

- O We have a designated member of SLT with responsibility to implement whole school approaches to develop emotional health and well-being.
- O Our leadership and management support and champion the promotion of emotional health and well-being, driving a whole system approach.
- O Our leadership and management systematically connect the whole school approach to promote well-being with wider school procedures that promote achievement, attendance and discipline.
- O There is clear delegation of responsibilities in meeting the emotional well-being needs of staff and students across the whole staff team.
- O We regularly monitor the whole school approach.
- O We systematically monitor the impact of interventions at all levels.

Engagement

- D There are warm relationships at all levels. We put relationships first.
- Pupils and staff feel safe and secure. School is a secure base for all.
- We involve parents, carers and families in the promotion of emotional health and well-being.
- D There is effective communication at all levels.
- We promote pupil voice.
- We promote acceptance and provide a sense of belonging.
- Pupils enjoy and feel proud of their school.
- We plan ways to repair, restore and rebuild relationships after a rupture.
- We provide transition support at all stages and pro-actively link with feeding/receiving schools.

Learning Approaches

- We promote mastery of learning in all areas rather than social comparison goals.
- ▶ We ensure pupils have focus and purpose.
- ▶ We promote cooperation rather than competition.
- Learning from social and emotional programmes is actively promoted and embedded into mainstream processes of school life.
- ▶ We promote peer learning.
- ▶ We ensure creative opportunities are available to all students.

Staff Training and Support

- O All staff work to ensure a positive and universal focus on well-being—it is everybody's responsibility.
- O Staff well-being is actively promoted and we assist staff in supporting their own well-being.
- O We train school staff in key social and emotional programmes so they can deliver them to students.
- O Teachers are equipped to promote well-being. We ensure there are regular staff development opportunities.
- O All staff have focus and purpose.

Policies

- We have a clear policy detailing the graduated approach to providing support for SEMH needs. We identify issues, intervene early and maintain clear processes to access support.
- We have a commitment to provide sustained support; we take a long term approach (e.g. providing additional support for 9 months to a year).
- We have robust policies and practices in place to support positive behaviour, connecting it with well-being. We maintain and promote clear expectations around behaviour.
- We have robust policies and practices in place for anti-bullying, including preventative measures that permeate the whole school community.
- We have robust policies and practices in place with regard to diversity, tackling prejudice and stigma. We celebrate difference and promote a culture of inclusiveness.

The PACE model

PACE stands for playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, empathy. It is an approach established by Dr Dan Hughes that encourages the application of these four personal qualities by staff when supporting children or young people's self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and resilience. PACE focuses on the whole child or young person and is an effective approach for de-escalating conflict and increasing the chance of them feeling understood.

Restorative approaches

Many children and young people who display EBSA behaviours have experienced bullying or a breakdown of relationships with peers or teachers. Restorative approaches provide schools with a range of practices which promote mutually respectful relationships, manage behaviour and conflict, address bullying, absences, and build community cohesion. Restorative approaches offer a framework to build upon existing good practice.

Promoting belongingness

Helping children and young people to feel part of their school community is a resilience factor in positive mental health. The tree of life activity (Appendix A) is one that all schools can use during PSHE or form tutor time to explore and celebrate individual experiences and develop a sense of belonging.

Whole school nurture and nurture groups

The concept of nurture relates to the importance of the social environment on the development of emotional well-being. Children and young people who have a good start in life are known to have significant advantages and are also more likely to attend frequently compared to those who have experienced missing or distorted attachments. Nurture groups provide support for emotional and development and can be set up in both primary and secondary schools.

Trauma informed practices/relational schools project

Many children and young people showing EBSA behaviours will have experienced some form of trauma. In an educational context, trauma-informed practice is a strengths-based framework in which schools and staff understand, recognise, and respond effectively to the impact of trauma on pupils. Oxfordshire is currently running training for schools on this.

A Education Services website.

educationservices.oxfordshire.gov.uk/Emotional literacy skill development/ELSA

Emotional literacy skill development/ELSA

PSHE sessions focus on emotional literacy, however, further group or individual provision could be set up on this area. The ELSA (emotional literacy support assistant) can enhance the capacity of schools to support the emotional needs of pupils within their own school settings. Oxfordshire EPS provide training and supervision for ELSAs through the SLA portal..

Targeted provision

When a child or young person is showing signs of concern, it may be helpful to use the tools below, to explore their views further and support intervention.

Tools include:

- □ Tree of life (Appendix A)
- □ The ladder of strength and courage (Appendix B)
- School wellbeing cards by Dr J Holder (Appendix C)
- D Strength and value sorting activities (Appendix D)
- Drawing the ideal safe school: Dudley EPS website (Appendix E)
- □ Function of school avoidance card sort (Appendix F)
- D Hot cross bun model to unpick specific situations (Appendix G)
- □ EBSA school thinking and planning tool (Appendix H).

Key aspects of provision are to

- Agree a link person to coordinate the school response and link with the family.
 Ensuring that parents and carers feel connected, involved, and not judged is crucial to success. To support engagement with parents. Consider need for any social care support (e.g. strengths and needs assessment). Encourage family to maintain a morning routine and preparation for school activities (e.g. going through a timetable).
- 2. Agree a link person for the child or young person, remembering that having a trusted adult in school is a resilience factor. Ensure the child or young person knows when they can access their link person, provide them with safe spaces to go during the day if needed.
- 3. Maintain clear records of attendance, incidents of distress, issues before school or other times of the day to identify patterns in behaviour to inform support.
- 4. Build in additional support at difficult times of day e.g. a key worker meet-and-greet, a calming activity on arrival.
- 5. Build in opportunities to reduce anxiety/distress throughout the school day e.g. sensory room, quiet reading, quiet space, ELSA session.
- 6. Seek the child or young person's views in terms of reviewing the plan, what is working and what needs adjusting. RAG and/or adjust timetable and support accordingly.
- 7. Hold regular reviews with the family and the child or young person.
- 8. Inform staff of child or young person's worries; some pupils will not show their concerns outwardly. It is important that staff are aware and act to increase their confidence, despite the child or young person's outward behaviour.
- 9. Encourage teachers to be predictable in learning using 'now and next' or 'first and then' type approaches. Have clear outlines of what is going to happen within lessons.
- 10. Consider and act on school-based threats such as social isolation, bullying, subject specific concerns or learning needs.
- 11. Consider sensory needs. Use an audit with the family and child or young person to explore this. Adjust the environment where possible e.g. uniform, movement breaks, brain breaks, exit cards, fidget toys and ear defenders, or seating positions.
- 12. Promote relationships and connections with peers through various school-based groups (e.g. breakfast, lunch, homework clubs).
- 13. Encourage hobbies, explore interests and clubs relating to these.
- 14. Consider parent/carer coffee morning to help promote connectedness and support.
- 15. Look at homework support systems in and out of school and differentiate the amount of homework if needed.

Bespoke support (where there are serious concerns about attendance)

Action planning

Each plan is individual, driven by the factors indicated through information gathering; what worked for one child or young person will not necessarily work for another. See EBSA school thinking and planning tool (Appendix H) for a prompt for exploring the child or young person's EBSA behaviours/needs.

The plan should be realistic and achievable, with the aim of reintegrating the child or young person into school in the long term but initial steps may not involve being on the school site if the child or young person has not been in school for a while. If the plan is overly ambitious or lacks detail in the support that will be provided, it is likely to fail. The return should be gradual; a quick fix is not always possible, and some behaviours may have become entrenched over a long period of time. The steps need to be small and achievable. Actions need to be embedded before new steps are introduced.

There is an example of an action plan and a non-exhaustive checklist of possible provision ideas in appendix I and J respectively.

Key aspects to focus on, as well as those listed in 'targeted provision' above, are:

- 1. As soon as possible, establish a meeting with key people and the family to develop a clear, graduated strategy and support plan (appendix I). Meet regularly, initially this is likely to be more frequent e.g. fortnightly. Allow time for success to be embedded, do not rush further next steps.
- 2. The child or young person's views are the centre of the strategy. Without their buy in, the plan is unlikely to be successful. Maintain predictability by not encouraging the child or young person to stay longer than the agreed time or changing the timetable or support arrangements. This can break trust and often leads to a regression.
- 3. Secure academic work from teachers to be completed at home and establish clear expectations around this. If the child or young person has not been involved in school work for a long time, look at project work instead based on their interests. At this point, the focus is on building the child or young person's curiosity about learning again. Establish how project or art work can be shared with a trusted or key member of staff so that positive feedback can be provided and a link with school maintained.
- 4. Build on strengths and what the child or young person feels they can do.
- 5. Encourage parents to focus on their child's wellbeing, resilience, and healthy habits at home: calm routines, small amounts of informal education type activities each day (project work, self-directed learning, online learning) interspersed with calming and relaxing activities. Encourage them to use the NHS five steps to mental wellbeing as a framework. If the child or young person has not been in school for a long time, the initial step for parents/carers is to focus on community inclusion (e.g. leaving the home, museum visits, meeting family etc.), prior to any plans to reintegrate to school.
- 6. Keep a link between the child or young person and key adults at school (emails, notes, home visits etc.).

For further resources and training from the educational psychology service please head to the schools website schools.oxfordshire.gov.uk, look on schools news or the schools intranet.

Appendices

Appendix A - Tree of life

The tree of life is a visual aid to support the coherent development of a child or young person's life story. It's a recovery approach that focusses on culture, heritage, spirituality, strengths and hope.

Key aims:

- O To help children or young people who have experienced loss and trauma
- O To give language to those who may otherwise struggle
- O To create a safe place and change the relationship to the problem
- O To create strengths and hopes for the future around values.

The concepts:

- The roots = Your roots, history, heritage, important people
- ► The ground = Where you are now, where you live, activities, hobbies
- ► The trunk = Your skills, strengths, talents
- The branches = Your hopes, wishes, goals
- ▶ The leaves = Important and influential people
- ► The fruits = Gifts you have been given (not necessarily materialistic)
- ► The flowers = Gifts you bring to others.

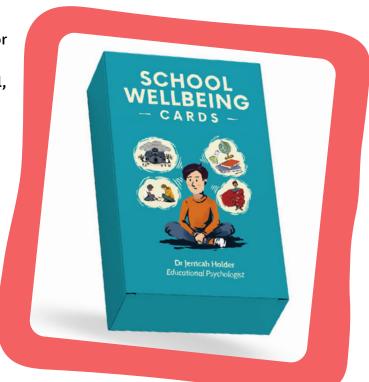




Appendix B -**School Wellbeing Cards**

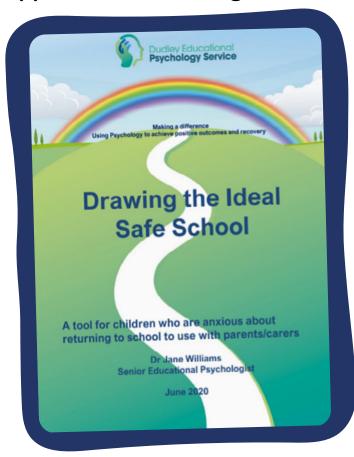
Dr Jerricah Holder developed these cards for children in KS2-KS4 who may exhibit signs of unhappiness or anxiety related to school, or are at risk of EBSA. The aim of the cards is to support key workers in identifying key barriers and risk factors to student wellbeing and attendance, focussing on the child or young person's voice. The key worker can then work in collaboration with the child or young person to problem solve and build resilience.

For more information or to purchase these cards, please follow the link below. Cards specific to special schools are also available here.



www.schoolwellbeingcards.co.uk/#How-they-work

Appendix C - Drawing the ideal safe school



In a very similar way to draw and talk, drawing the ideal safe school is a way for a key worker to garner an idea of the child or young person's perspective of school.

The drawing is not structured, it is entirely down to the individual child or young person's creativity and comfortability.

It is simply a way to more easily share and illustrate ideas over a solely verbal conversation.

Any comment or drawing the child or young person produces is valid, whether this highlight things like, dislike, or omit. Then, this can be used to inform processes and approaches moving forward.

For more information and for the necessary guide and resources, please refer to the drawing the ideal safe school (Dudley Educational Psychology Service, 2020) document below.

□ Drawing the Ideal Safe School - Dudley EPS (2020)

https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=0475c41683652d00JmltdHM9MTcy MTk1MjAwMCZpZ3VpZD0xOTI4N2FlMC0yZTFkLTY3ZTctMjNiOS02ZTI2 MmZmZDY2NWMmaW5zaWQ9NTIxMA&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=3&fclid= 19287ae0-2e1d-67e7-23b9-6e262ffd665c&psq=drawing+ the+ideal+safe+school+dudley+EPS&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly9yZXZvbHV0aW9uZm9yc2 Nob29scy5kdWRsZXkuZ292LnVrL1BhZ2VzL0Rvd25sb2FkLzEyZjRj OGNhLTIyYTgtNDdhMy1hYWE4LTk0OWI5ZGM2YTFh ZS9QYWdlU2VjdGlvbkRvY3VtZW50cw&ntb=1

Appendix D - Function of school avoidance card sort

This card sort activity has been devised by Sheffield EPS and shared by Lancashire EPS in their guidance as a tool to support staff to develop a greater understanding of a child or young person's school avoidance.

It is based on the School Refusal Assessment Scale developed by Kearney (2002). The statements are colour-coded to indicate the function of the school avoidance behaviour as identified by Kearney and Silverman (1990).

To understand why a child or young person is exhibiting EBSA behaviours, these cards may be a useful tool in a 1:1 session with the child or young person and a trusted adult.

Hopefully by asking the child or young person to sort the statements, it can aide conversations around what function EBSA behaviour has for them. As a result, it may be easier to identify appropriate strategies to support them overcome barriers to attending school full time.

For more information or to find this resource, please use the link below.

🔗 lancashire-ebsa-guidance-strategy-toolkit-2023-update.pdf



Appendix E - Anxiety scaling

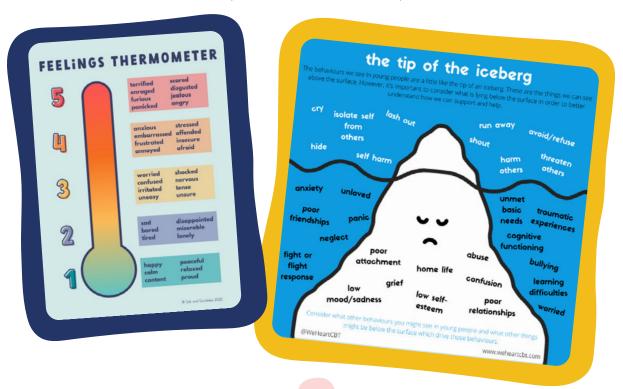
You can use various different visual representations of a scale to help you in exploring a child or young person's avoidance hierarchy. The aim is to determine the variables that lead to anxiety and to rank them according to the level of anxiety or likely avoidance a child experiences.

Ladders, thermometers, ice bergs, mountains and smiley/sad faces could all be reproduced to do this activity (see example thermometer below). You may need to scaffold the activity by listing different situations in case the child or young person finds it hard to spontaneously suggest some.

For example:

- Being in an empty classroom
- Getting out of bed
- Sitting next to another child in my class
- Playtime
- Being in the lunch hall
- Specific lessons (maths, drama, PE)
- ▶ Talking to my teacher
- ▶ When the teacher asks a question/for hands up.

You may want to write situations on a piece of paper and cut them up so that you can sequence them together. You may need several scales (for example, one about interacting with teachers, one about friendships, one about different parts of the school).



Appendix F - The ladder of strength and courage

The ladder of strength and courage is a relatively easy and individualised way of breaking an anxiety provoking task down into very small, specific and achievable steps.

This is based on anxiety hierarchies but this particular ladder model is different from ladder models you may use to rank anxiety provoking variables; this ladder shows the trajectory of conquering a whole anxiety provoking task.

Below is a demonstrative example, but to use the ladder you can just draw your own and create this in collaboration with the child or young person. It may be useful to write some positive coping strategies on the page too, to help the child or young person prepare for any unexpected or dysregulating events during their time at school.

Getting into my classroom

- 6 Mr Elliot will greet me at the classroom door and show me where to sit ready for registration at 8:05am.
- Mum will pass me her favourite pen to keep safe for her today which I will keep in my pocket.

We will walk through the gate together and wait in the playground.

I will walk with

Miss Smith into the

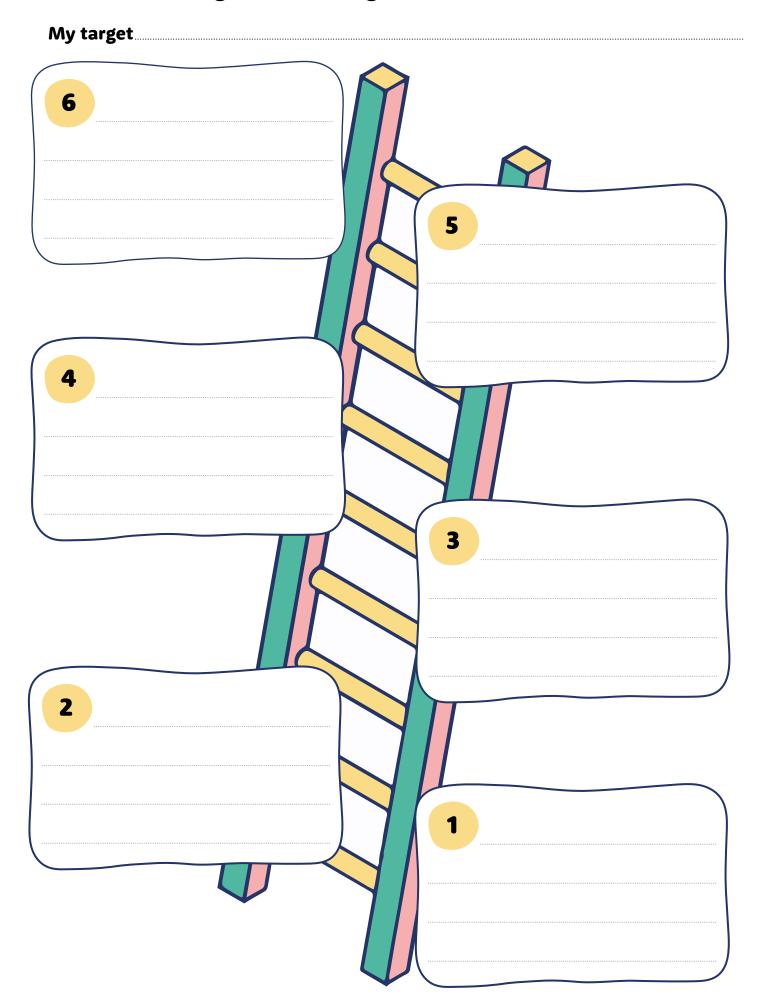
building and hang

my stuff on my peg.

We will wait for
Miss Smith to greet
us, and I will say
goodbye to mum.

When I get to school at around 7:55am, I will get out of the car with my mum.

Ladder of strength and courage



Appendix G - Hot cross bun model

The hot cross bun model is a simple but effective way of identifying a child or young person's thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and behaviours, illustrating how each of these influence each other, and how they are impacted by their situation or environment (e.g. school).

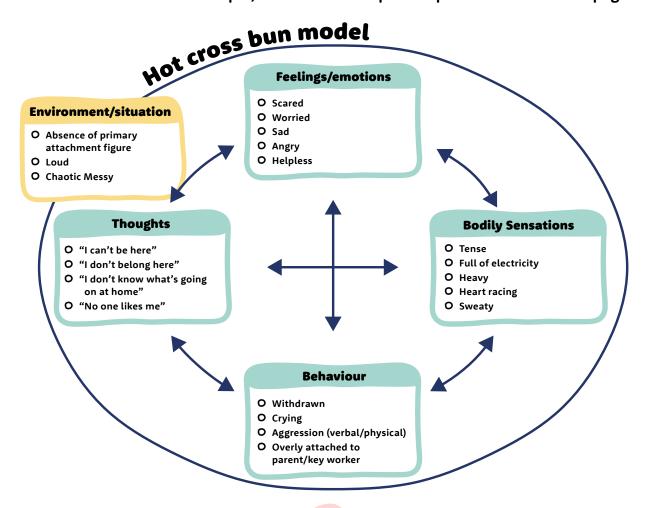
The key worker and child or young person both learn from this and can identify factors which they can work to reduce or remove, and how this can inform a support or intervention plan moving forward.

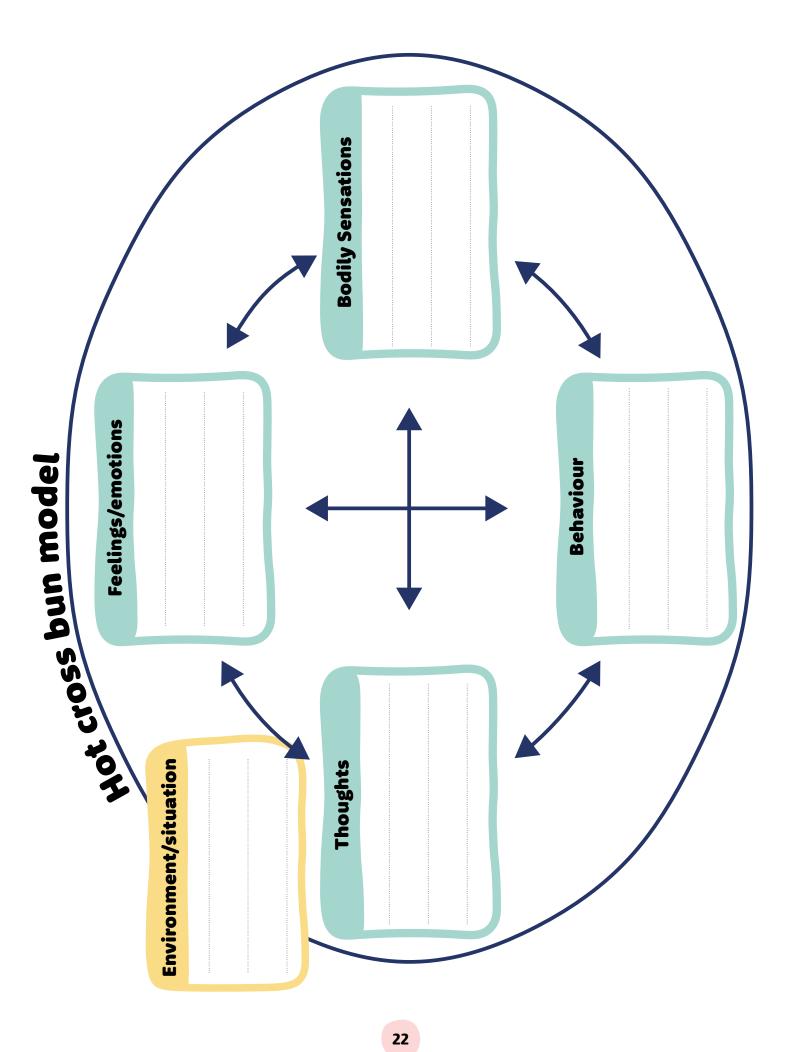
One of the premises of this model is that, when identified factors are reduced or removed, there is often a visible shift or decline in the level of anxiety as a result, and the remaining factors also begin to reduce.

Revisiting this model over time can be helpful in showing the child or young person any changes or progress as a result and can reinforce their motivation and feelings of positivity towards the situation (e.g. school attendance).

Children and young people may find it more difficult to identify things like bodily sensations and discern between thoughts and feelings, so adult guidance is important, but without too heavily influencing their answers to maintain validity.

Below is a demonstrative example, and a blank template is provided on the next page.





Appendix H - EBSA school thinking and planning tool

This form should be completed in collaboration with the child or young person.

What do staff and parents believe has improved or gone well at school for the child? What are the protective factors? E.g., strong social support systems, established regulation tasks. Rates of attendance/patterns of absence On what days does the child or young person usually attend/not attend school? Are there any regular patterns of non-attendance, e.g., subject or staff specific? When did the child and young person's attendance start to decline? Specific time frame, e.g., MM/YYYY
On what days does the child or young person usually attend/not attend school? Are there any regular patterns of non-attendance, e.g., subject or staff specific? When did the child and young person's attendance start to decline?
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any regular patterns of non-attendance, e.g., subject or staff specific? When did the child and young person's attendance start to decline?
Specific time frame, e.g., MM/YYYY
Were there any triggering events?
E.g., bullying, bereavement, mental health, significant/traumatic event, changes at home/school.
Is the child or young person currently a child we care for? Have they been previously?
E.g., living with family, foster parents, friends, residential or supported housing.

Friendship profile
Friendships or supportive relationships with peers inside/outside of school, including online.
Engagement in extra-curricular activities
Do they take part in any activities outside of school e.g., youth clubs, scouts/guides/brownies, interest/hobby groups.
External agency involvement
E.g. Early help, social services, CAMHS, therapeutic interventions (counselling etc.), EP.
SEND diagnoses/needs
Including SEMH (social, emotional, mental health needs) and ACE's (Adverse childhood experiences).
What strategies and intervention have been tried?
Strategies that have worked, and why? Strategies that have not worked, and why?
Using the information above, what are the main factors influencing their attendance?
What are the key areas to focus on for next steps?

Appendix I – School action plan

Using the information above and working collaboratively with the child/young persons and their parents/carers create an action plan outlining what strategies can be implemented or retried with modifications to encourage and support their engagement in learning and wellbeing. Please refer to the checklist provided for some guidance alongside your own ideas.

classroom, managing intervention key works	Consider lenduration of provision, frequency en	ipport for learning needs, friendship, extra-curricula it, referral to external
		e resources and planning
		ate

Appendix J – Inclusive provision checklist

This is a non-exhaustive list of support for children exhibiting EBSA behaviours. Please refer to this list to identify strategies that you may/may not have tried to implement previously.

Strategy/support:	Y/N
Child/young person has a clear link and relationship with an adult in school which is maintained when they are not in school (e.g., via e-mail, video, phone call, text message).	
Clear link between school and home, regular review meetings and contact with a focus on collaborative support and child wellbeing.	
Supporting parents and young person to consider how to promote their wellbeing using the 5 ways to wellbeing as a prompt	
■ 5 steps to mental wellbeing - NHS.	
nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities /five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing/	
Consider strengths and needs assessment to explore what support might be necessary at home to facilitate attendance.	
Individual support (e.g., ELSA) with the young person around exploring and understanding their anxiety (e.g., ladder of strengths and courage activity. Appendix F of EBSA toolkit for school staff).	
Sensory differences explored (using a sensory audit) and adjustments made.	
Individual/group support with the young person to teach strategies to manage worries (e.g., mindfulness/breathing/yoga/zones of regulation cards).	
thinkingbooks.co.uk/buy/the-zones-of-regulation-tools -to-try-cards-for-kids_281.htm	
thinkingbooks.co.uk/buy/the-zones-of-regulation-tools-to-try -cards-for-tweens-teens_295.htm	
Dysregulation crisis strategies e.g., an exit pass from class/to key adult with clear boundaries, sensory activities, co-regulation strategies, pupil passport shared with all staff.	

Strategy/support:	Y/N
Identify a consistent safe space for students to access in school. Soft start to the day in a quiet space.	
Relaxation and sensory breaks during the day in quiet space.	
Regular opportunities for movement breaks around school.	
Developing scripts or visual signal with the young person to seek support from an adult.	
Scripts to explain periods of absence to peers to avoid shame or embarrassment.	
Supporting friendships through buddy systems, lunch-clubs, social skills and friendship groups.	
Red, amber and green of timetable and school environment.	
Reduce pressure points in the day through late start/early finish. Think about busy corridor or cloakroom times and how these could be supported.	
Catch up tutoring and pre-teaching sessions.	
Clear system for completing work at home.	
Who provides the work and marks it? Will the work be completed electronically or via post?	
How will the work be delivered? How will students access feedback/support?	
Transitional objects with parents (e.g., favourite picture or pen to "look after" in their absence).	
Consider small amounts of contact with parents/carers during the school day (e.g., phone call).	
Short periods of time with a key adult to review what has gone well/successes.	
Consider referrals to or seeking advice from external agencies if they meet their criteria (please refer to their website) e.g., Educational Psychology Service, CAMHS, OXSIT, County Attendance Team, Mental Health Support Teams (MHST), SENSS Communication & Interaction Team, LCSS (Strengths and Needs), Oxfordshire Hospital School.	