

Herts  
Parent   
Carer InV<sup>o</sup>lvement  
[www.hertsparentcarers.org.uk](http://www.hertsparentcarers.org.uk)

  
AUTISM & ADHD SUPPORT

# Emotional Based School Avoidance

AUTISM IN SCHOOLS PROJECT

# What are the positives of Education

- ▶ Every Child has the right to an Education
- ▶ Children learn things they find interesting
- ▶ They spend time with friends
- ▶ They get to do activities they like
- ▶ They can obtain qualifications to enable them to find a career and achieve their ambitions and goals in life
- ▶ School can give structure and routine

# What can be Difficult about School?

- ▶ Being away from parents they rely on to support communication and understanding can be distressing.
- ▶ They may struggle with the work
- ▶ The expectations and demands may be too high for their developmental level
- ▶ They may struggle with being able to show what they know
- ▶ They may have difficulties with literacy and numeracy
- ▶ Executive function dysfunction
- ▶ Speech and language needs
- ▶ They may struggle communicating their emotions
- ▶ They may struggle with peer interactions, playground politics
- ▶ Navigating friendships
- ▶ Making sense of arguments
- ▶ Others not following the rules
- ▶ Bullying

# What can be Difficult about School Cont'd

- ▶ They might struggle with the adults – staff not understanding their responses or reactions
- ▶ Reasonable adjustments not being made
- ▶ Lack of understanding around their sensory needs
- ▶ Not making adjustments to behaviour and uniform policies
- ▶ A fear of failure or getting into trouble
- ▶ They may struggle with the environment
- ▶ It might be too noisy, smelly, visually overwhelming, chaotic, others walking or running in unpredictable directions,
- ▶ Sensory issues with uniform
- ▶ Classrooms or other areas may be difficult for their sensory processing.
- ▶ **SCHOOLS ARE A VERY CHALLENGING SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT**

# Why Attendance?

- ▶ Dept For Education Statistics show that for children with attendance levels of below 85%, only 10% will get 5 GCSEs at pass grades
- ▶ Therefore, huge pressure on schools to ensure attendance is good (target is currently 96% for most schools)
- ▶ Most schools will have high profile campaigns around attendance at all times with rewards for children who meet attendance targets
- ▶ This can add to pressure for our children, particularly those who feel they need to be perfect, and can cause anxiety which then causes them to find attending difficult....

# What is EBSA & What it is Not

**EBSA is severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors.**

**These factors can be :**

High levels of anxiety

Trauma

Negative experiences

Bullying

Lack of trust

Feeling unsafe

Etc

**It is Not:**

Being lazy

Wanting to play computer games

Bad parenting

Just not wanting to go to school

Just wanting to be at home

Etc

# Anxiety or mental health can be a big deal

## Why?

- They have developed awareness of the world around them but can't keep up
- May have been masking difficulties in school and social settings but this has a cost emotionally
- Demands on them grow as they get older
- Can have developed coping strategies that are risky or challenging

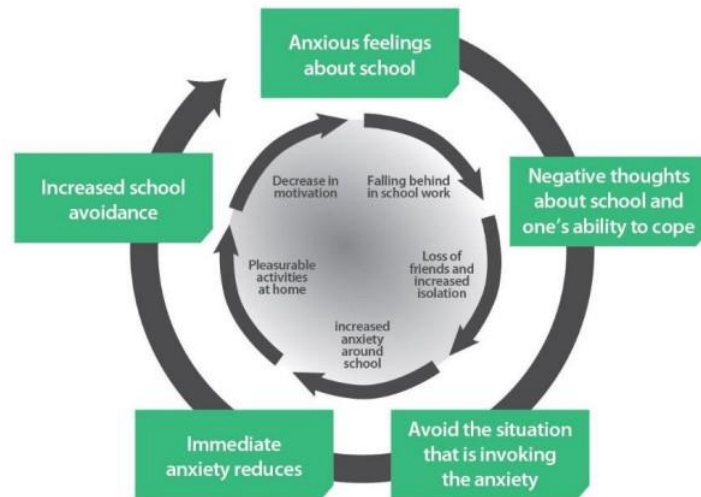
## Some strategies

- Teach strategies to help identify feelings and express them
- Use social stories/comic strip and other tools to help explain social situations
- Actively build self esteem at every opportunity
- Teach strategies to build independence - use visuals – notes, pictures, lists; calming/ stress reducing techniques
- If anxiety is a consistent problem, ask for help

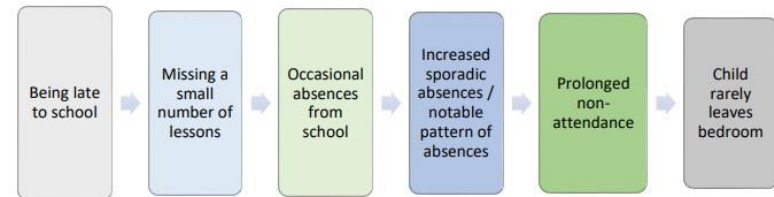
# Children Who Experience EBSA Are Likely to Be:

- ▶ Children with Autism and ADHD are more likely to experience EBSA than children who are not neurodivergent.
- ▶ Children who experience high anxiety levels
- ▶ Children who may have unidentified SEN needs
- ▶ Children who have experienced bullying
- ▶ Children who have had negative experiences at school.
- ▶ Children who struggle with learning
- ▶ Children who mask their difficulties
- ▶ Children who feel lied to or lack trust with staff and peers

# Anxiety cycles



Seeking support early can prevent anxiety from spiralling.



Not all children go through all stages, but thinking about where your child might be can help ensure appropriate support.

*Images courtesy of Herts County Council EBSA Guide for Parents (2022)*

# Difficulties for Parents

- ▶ Society is set up in such a way that it can be difficult for parents to work when they have a child who is not attending school.
- ▶ There is constant worry about being fined and dealing with letters about attendance, and the threat of prison
- ▶ There is a lack of support for parents whose children are unable to attend school
- ▶ Accessing support and obtaining medical evidence is not easy.
- ▶ It is difficult to see your child distressed and not be able to understand why, or be able to fix it easily.
- ▶ Parents feel huge pressure for their child to conform to what is a strong societal expectation

# What to do if your child is struggling to attend school

- ▶ Start taking action as soon as they start showing resistance
- ▶ Talk to school and let them know what is happening. Make sure it is logged in writing.
- ▶ Ask school for a meeting to talk through what is difficult and offer suggestions if you have some
- ▶ Make sure your child is included in discussions of any suggested solutions – only they can know if it will help.
- ▶ If they are showing signs of poor mental health contact your GP or SPA
- ▶ Be proactive and engaged – this will give the best chance of turning it round and also avoiding fines.
- ▶ Find a way to help them explain what is difficult about school ( Penny's tool)

# What is easy at school

- ▶ Using 3 columns as shown here
- ▶ Ask your child what they find easy at or about school
- ▶ Include every aspect of the school day
- ▶ Include leaving home to go to school and leaving school to come home.
- ▶ Include peers, teachers, TA's all school staff
- ▶ If you start with the easy column they may be able to identify something so you can at least start a conversation with them.
- ▶ If this is too difficult they could just draw something or you could use pictures or cards and they put them in the columns

Things I  
find  
easy  
at  
school

Things I  
find a  
little  
difficult  
at  
school

Things I  
find very  
difficult at  
school

# What is easy at school?

PE	Form time	assembly
English lesson	Maths lesson	Art and design lesson
History lesson	Geography lesson	science lesson
foreign languages	music lesson	ICT
Drama	food tech	break time
lunch time	dining room	corridors
teachers	teaching assistants	changing rooms
changing for PE	homework	leaving for school
uniform	travelling to school	R.E. lesson
p + e lesson	swimming	club/ship
dookroom	Home time	



- Using 3 columns as shown above
- Ask your child what they find easy at or about school
- Include every aspect of the school day
- Include leaving home to go to school and leaving school to come home
- Include peers, teachers, TA's all school staff
- If you start with the easy column they may be able to identify something so you can at least start a conversation with them
- If this is too difficult they could just draw something or you could use pictures or cards and they put them in the columns

# Legal situation

- ▶ Currently, schools can issue a Fixed Penalty Notice if a child has too many days unauthorised absence.
- ▶ Currently absences can be authorised at the discretion of the head teacher. DfE guidance states that HT can only ask for medical evidence if they have reason to disbelieve a parent.
- ▶ Local Authority attendance officers, however, encourage a school to ask for medical evidence, particularly if they are not aware the child has SEND.
- ▶ Medical evidence can be GP appointments, prescriptions, reports or letters about appointments, oral evidence from parents.
- ▶ DfE guidance stresses that the purpose of medical evidence is to assess whether the child requires additional support, NOT to prove they are really ill!

# What to do if your school won't authorise absences?

- ▶ Ask for a meeting or an email conversation about the reasons they won't authorise and what support they are offering your child.
- ▶ Contact the Local Authority Attendance Team and ask for their support, explaining the situation, and that your child has additional needs, and why they can't attend
- ▶ If you are not in agreement, DO NOT PAY ANY FINE ISSUED – contact the LA Attendance Officer to explain what is happening
- ▶ School will pass unpaid fines to the LA to decide what to do with them. They are unlikely to prosecute you if they can see that you are engaging with support for your child. DfE guidance says prosecution should only be an option when all other options have been exhausted.
- ▶ If your child is unable to attend school, apply for an Education Health Care Needs Assessment on the grounds that they have SEND and are currently unable to access education.

# Things that might help to get your child into school (and some that won't)

- ▶ Avoid physically forcing your child into school, or any physical intervention – this could lead to trauma
- ▶ Try to reduce pressure around “going to school”, stay calm and try not to show frustration, remember your child may take what you say literally.
- ▶ Focus on other aspects of the morning routine rather than “going to school”, particularly for those with Exec function difficulties. Break it down into steps
- ▶ Supports such as transitional objects, visual schedules, sensory activities can help.
- ▶ Using Penny’s tool, find solutions to the difficult things and focus on the positive things
- ▶ Reassure your child that you understand and want to help
- ▶ Talk to school about the issues, what reasonable adjustments can be made

# Things that might help to get your child into school (and some that won't)

- ▶ If some classes/teachers work well, what is it that is making them work, can we unpick what works and copy it?
- ▶ If your child is frequently not able to attend, would a part time timetable help in the short term? Lessons that are less stressful?
- ▶ Set clear goals around building up time in school but **GO AT THE CHILD'S PACE**, do not pressure them to build too fast. (see DfE effective practice examples)
- ▶ Sometimes being strict about how much they can do and stopping them trying to go faster can help in the long run
- ▶ Plans **MUST** be individualised and built in partnership with the child. The goal is to move the child to a place where they feel safe and positive about being in school.

# Things that might help to get your child into school (and some that won't)

- ▶ Child will need to build trust with key members of staff, and be able to trust that they are not going to be co-erced/ pressured into doing more than they can cope with
- ▶ The child needs to be able to trust that staff will follow through on what has been agreed and there is consistency throughout everyone they engage with.
- ▶ Child needs to know that their needs and any strategies that are agreed are understood by all staff and they won't be challenged or misunderstood
- ▶ Make sure there are strategies in place so the child knows what to do if it does go wrong – where can they go, who do they talk to, and then make sure that will be available at all times.
- ▶ Making home “boring”, taking away their access to interests or punishing your child for not attending are going to have a negative effect on your child's mental health so should be avoided.
- ▶ **REMEMBER YOUR CHILD IS DOING THE BEST THEY CAN**

# Need more help?

- ▶ Not Fine In School – [www.notfineinschool.co.uk](http://www.notfineinschool.co.uk)
- ▶ DfE Guidance - Summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance ([publishing.service.gov.uk](http://publishing.service.gov.uk))
- ▶ SENDIASS
- ▶ HPCI Guide for parents of children with SEND on Attendance and Exclusions - Final-Col-HPCI-Exclusions-Parent-Guide-A4.pdf ([hertsparentcarers.org.uk](http://hertsparentcarers.org.uk))
- ▶ Angels Website – [www.angelssupportgroup.org.uk](http://www.angelssupportgroup.org.uk)