

# School Avoidance

*Roxeth Primary School*

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Harrow MHST



# Harrow Mental Health Support Team

- Our team of Education Mental Health Practitioners (EMHP's) work in schools across Harrow, providing early intervention for support with common mental health difficulties.
- We know how challenging it can be to balance all the demands of daily life and are here to help
- We work with parents using guided- self help interventions for:
  - Managing challenging behaviour
  - Overcoming your child's fears and worries
- We also provide parent led group interventions and workshops that you are welcome to attend



# Safe Space

- Confidentiality
- Be mindful of what you share
- This is an emotive topic so please do what you need to do to take care of yourself



# Aims

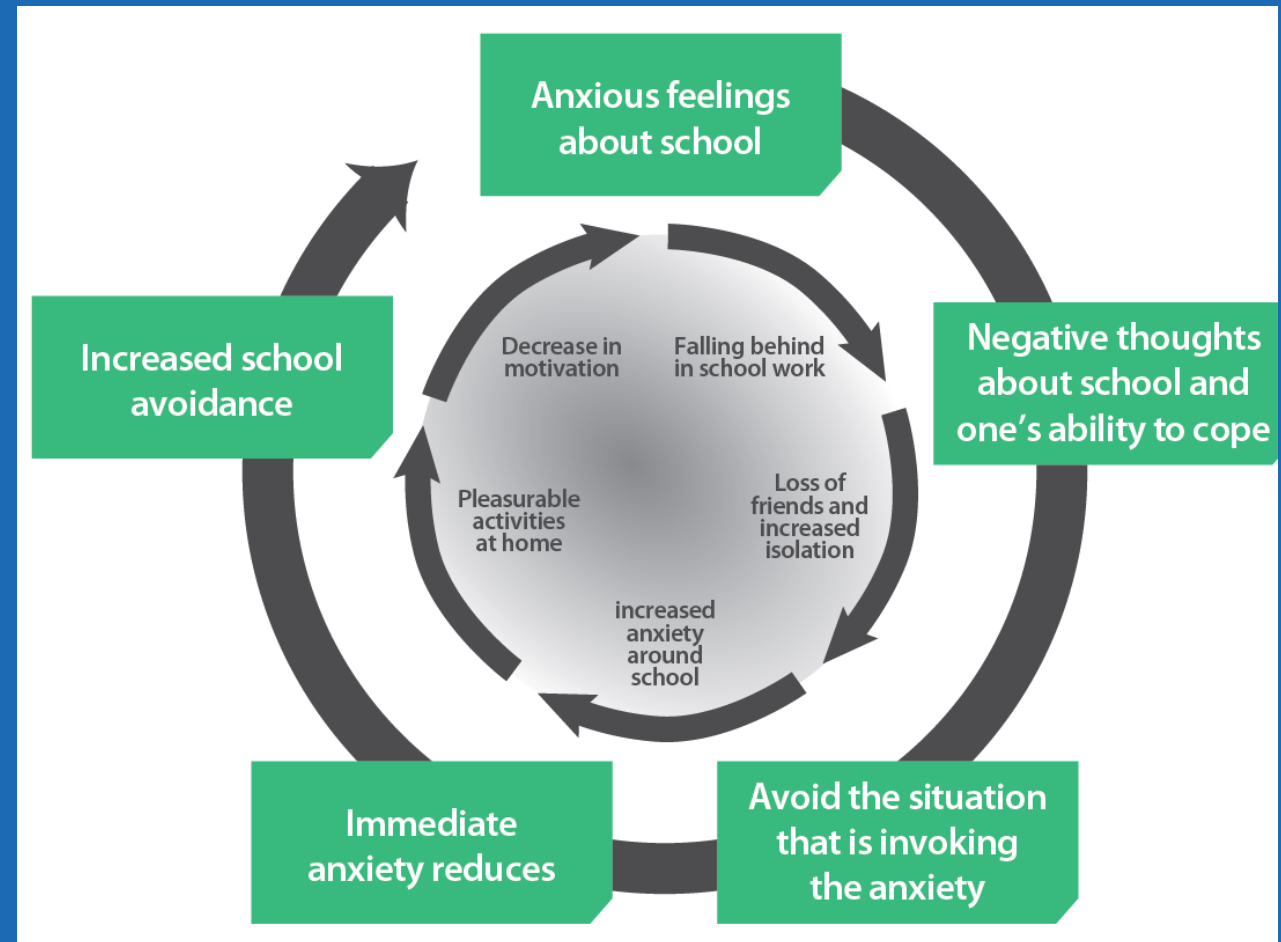
To develop a  
better  
understanding  
of emotionally  
based school  
avoidance

To explore  
possible causes  
of emotionally  
based school  
avoidance,  
focusing on  
anxiety

To explore  
strategies to  
help children  
overcome  
emotionally  
based school  
avoidance

# What is Emotionally Based School Avoidance

Emotionally Based School Avoidance is a broad umbrella term used to describe a group of children and young people who have difficulty in attending school due to emotional Factors.

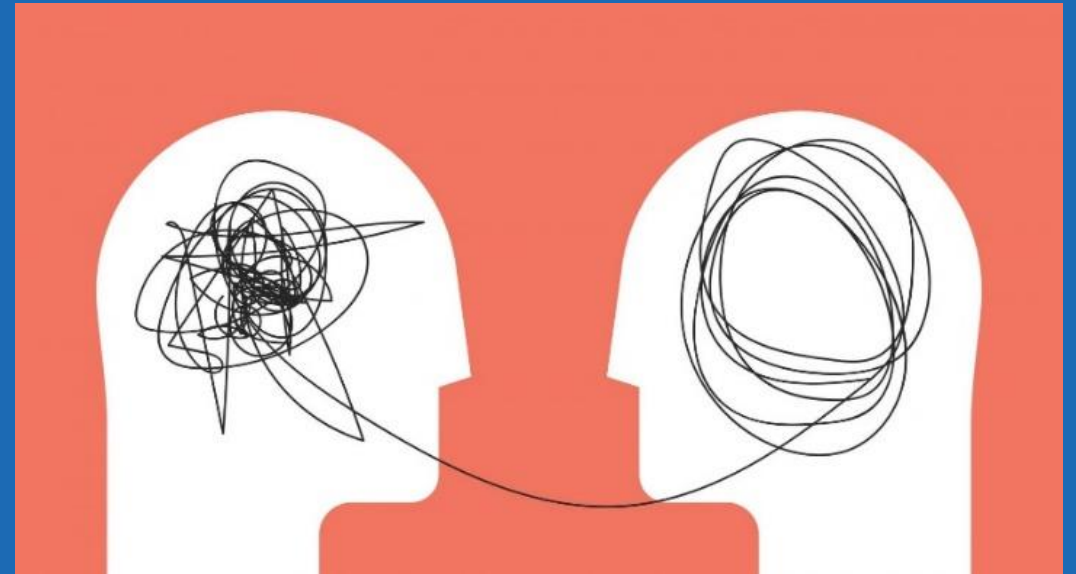


# Possible causes

School Factors	Family Factors	Child factors
Bullying (the most common school factor)	Separation and divorce or change in family dynamic	Temperamental style reluctance to interact and withdrawal from unfamiliar settings, people or objects
Difficulties in specific subject	Parent physical and mental health problems	Fear of failure and poor self confidence
Transition to secondary school, key stage or change of school	Overprotective parenting style	Physical illness
Structure of the school day	Dysfunctional family interactions	Age (5-6, 11-12 & 13-14 years)
Academic demands/high levels of pressure and performance orientated classrooms	Being the youngest child in the family	Learning Difficulties, developmental problems or Autism Spectrum Condition if unidentified or unsupported
Transport or journey to school	Loss and Bereavement	Separation Anxiety from parent
Exams	High levels of family stress	Traumatic events
Peer or staff relationship difficulties	Family history of EBSA	

# Notice difficulties (identifying and understanding anxiety)

- What's happening for your child?
- What are they thinking?
- What sensations can they notice in their body?
- What anxious behaviour are they displaying?



# Feeling worried about talking to the rest of the class





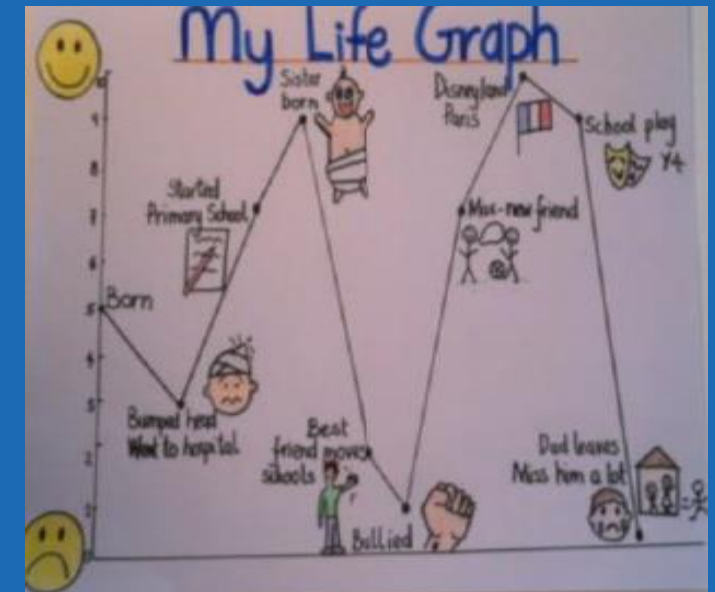
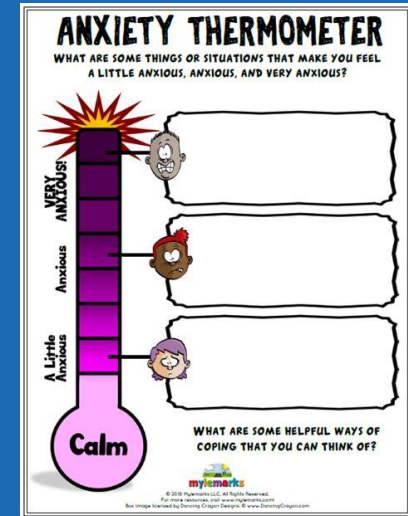
# Activities or questions to ask

- Think about your thoughts and feelings about school and what these would look like if they could be drawn?
- It also helps to externalise the anxiety. What name would you give the feeling that you experience when you think about going to school? If it was a thing, what would it look like? What would it say? How does the ..... get in the way of you attending school? When is ..... in charge and when are you in charge?
- Ask them to draw how their body feels when they are worried.



# Activities or questions to ask (continued)

- Use an anxiety thermometer or a scale to ask the child what aspects of school they find difficult
- Some areas to consider include:
  - The physical environment e.g. toilets, corridors, assembly hall.
  - Times of the day or social interactions e.g. arriving at school, play and breaktimes, lining up to go into school or classroom, lunchtimes, going home, changing for PE
  - Particular lessons or activities within lessons e.g. writing, working as part of a group, reading aloud, verbally answering a question
- A life graph or path can help them tell you their 'story so far' and what they would want in the future.



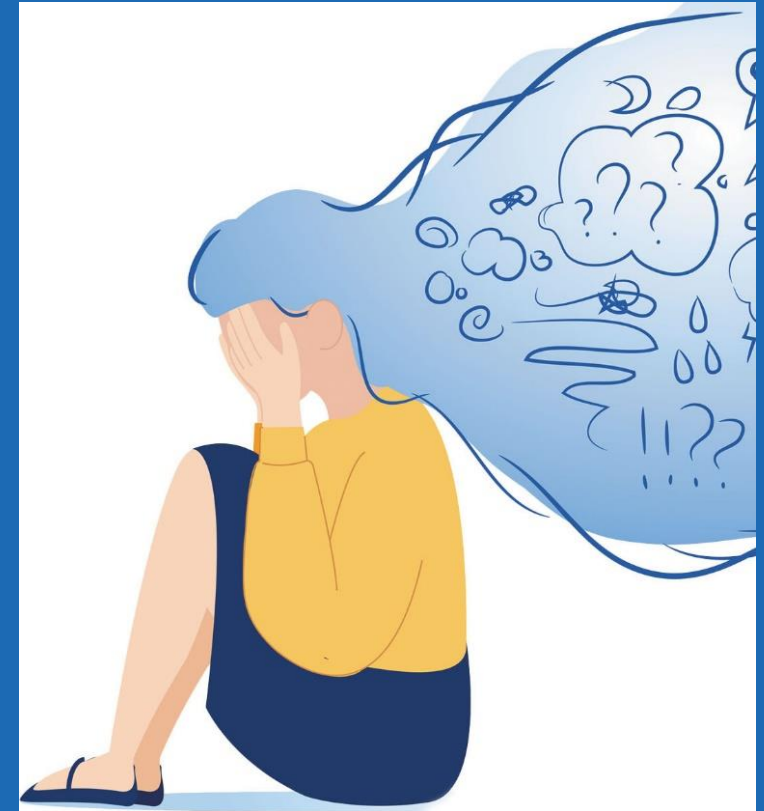
# Things You Can Do

- **Normalise** what your child is feeling and going through
- **Praise them** for sharing their difficulties. It takes courage to open up!
- **Validate** their feelings
- **Try to explore some context for your child's worries.** They may be experiencing significant difficulties or a real threat. Do their worries make sense in the situation?

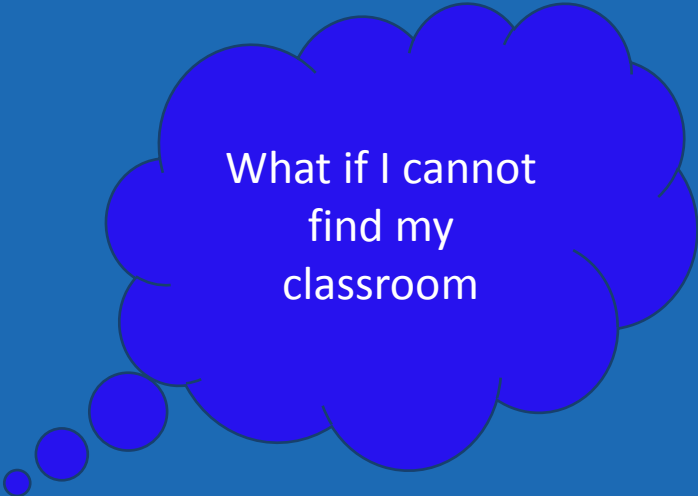


# What keeps worries going?

- **Overestimation** of threat and danger
- **Underestimation** of one's ability to cope
- We behave in a way that is consistent with our beliefs and this can become a habit
- Therefore, **we do not get the opportunity to challenge our beliefs/** gather evidence for different ways of thinking.
- **Behaviours may maintain our beliefs; therefore, we may have to change our behaviours.**



# Problem solving

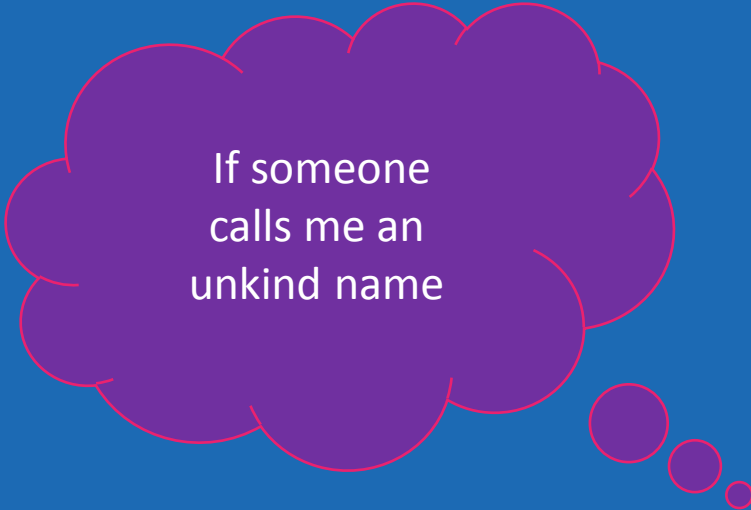


What if I cannot  
find my  
classroom

I will get my plan  
from my student  
planner and see if I  
can work it out

I will try and ask  
someone in my class

I will ask my teacher



If someone  
calls me an  
unkind name

I will tell a teacher  
why I feel upset

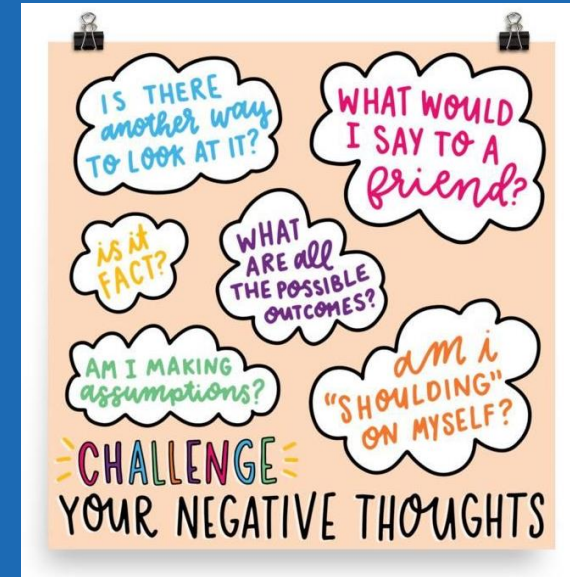
My teacher will deal  
with it and talk to  
that person

I will try and walk  
away and not swear  
or shout.



# Try to challenge their thoughts

- Children who are anxious tend to see danger and have fearful thoughts about (neutral) situations.
- Challenging thoughts helps them to weigh up the evidence for and against their thoughts.
- The trick is to ask questions not give answers (this helps child to think for themselves).



AM I OVERESTIMATING DANGER?

Or, am I catastrophizing?

IS THIS A FACT OR DOES IT SOUND MORE LIKE A FALSE BELIEF?

What's the worst that can logically happen?

AM I 100% SURE \_\_\_\_\_ WILL HAPPEN?

Has \_\_\_\_\_ happened before?

IS \_\_\_\_\_ SO IMPORTANT THAT MY FUTURE DEPENDS ON IT?

# Understanding your own responses as a parent

What type of responses might not be helpful?

Key message is encouraging independence and having a go.



# What if I need more support?

- Talk to a teacher, SENCo or the school's EMHP (Jelin)
- Talk to your GP
- Young Minds - Telephone: [0808 802 5544](tel:08088025544) Website: <https://youngminds.org.uk/>
- Mental Health Foundation Website: [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)
- The Samaritans- Telephone: 116 123





# Questions/ final comment

