

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Harrow Mental Health Support Team

NHS

Central and
North West London
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Aims

What is EBSA?

Possible causes & maintenance factors

Strategies

What is EBSA?

Emotionally based school avoidance is a broad term used to describe a group of children & young people who have difficulty attending school due to emotional factors

Function of the Behaviour

- ▶ First step in supporting your child is finding out the function of their behaviour (what your child is getting from avoiding attending school)
- ▶ There can be various factors contributing towards the causes & maintenance of EBSA
- ▶ Engaging and listening to your child will be important so they feel more in control over their re-integration which can help them feel safe

Curious Questioning & Responding

- ▶ Ask open-ended questions to explore what your child could be worried about
- ▶ It is important to normalise & empathise with your child's worries
- ▶ Validate their feelings
- ▶ If they struggle to express why they are worried about attending school, make some suggestions. Possibly explore the following:
 - ▶ The physical environment: toilets, corridors, classroom, assembly
 - ▶ Times of the day: morning, break / lunchtimes, lesson time, specific subjects
 - ▶ Social interactions: teachers & peers
- ▶ If you still struggle, make use of play. E.g., Mickey Mouse is really worried about going to school tomorrow, what do you think he is worried about?

Push Factors



Situations that is causing an increased level of distress

E.g., Tests, crowded environments, noise levels, social situations, friendship difficulties, academic worries

More fun & less levels of distress at home

Spend more time with family
- attachment difficulties
Has there been a change in family dynamics?
Significant loss? Someone unwell?

Pull Factors



It is important that we try and increase the pull factors towards school and decrease the push factors away from school

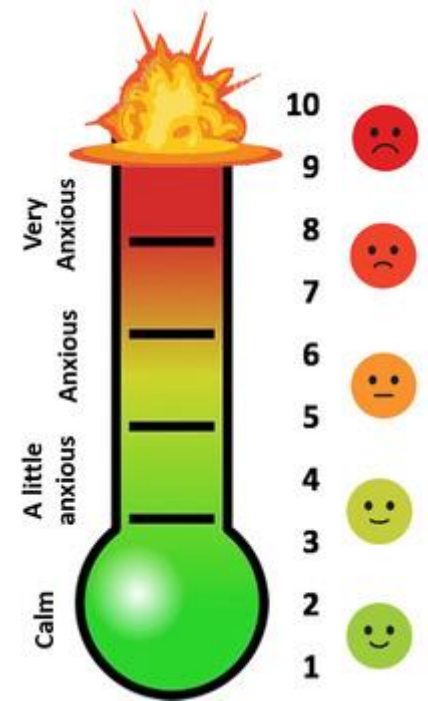
Strategies



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Graded Exposure Approach

- ▶ If your child has not been attending school for a while or has multiple situations that they are worried about in school, where there might not be a practical solution, a graded-exposure approach may be beneficial for your child
1. You can show your child pictures to help engage them in this process or just ask them to name situations they find difficult
 2. Ask them to order these steps from the least to most feared situation
 3. Come up with a reward for each step
 4. Repeat each step until they feel comfortable with the step before moving onto the next step
 5. If your child struggles with a step, think about how to break down the step



Coping Strategies

- ▶ The graded-exposure approach is about facing their fears in a very gradual & manageable way, however these steps will elicit some anxiety
- ▶ So, it is important for children to have some healthy coping techniques to use during the steps

5-4-3-2-1

This grounding technique can be done nearly anywhere and is effective at bringing you back to the present moment. Use when feeling overwhelmed



Name...

5 Things you see



4 Things you feel



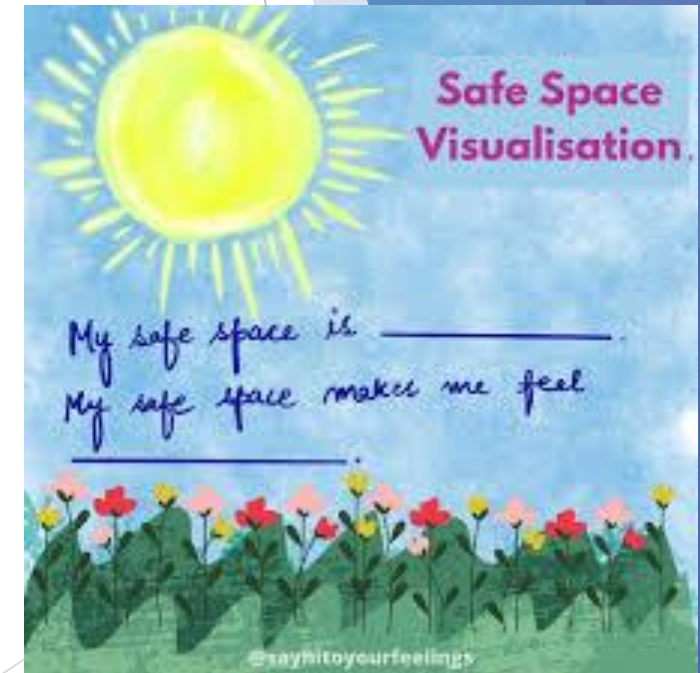
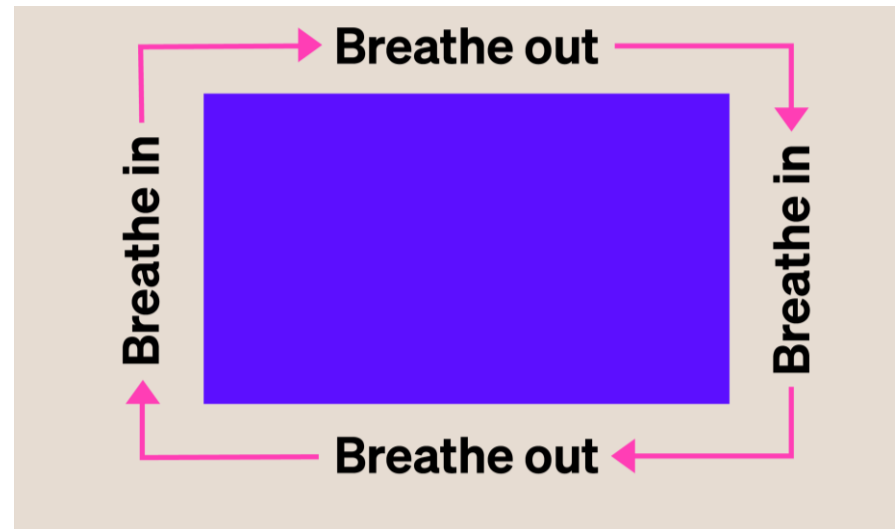
3 Things you hear



2 Things you smell



1 Thing you taste



Example of Step Plan

Most Feared
Going into the lunch hall without a friend
Going into lunch hall with friend
Going to PE lesson
Going into favourite lesson
Joining in with a small group activity
Staying in the resource base
Entering school building going to the reception area
Entering the school building when school is closed
Standing outside the building when the school is closed
Least Feared

Problem-Solving

- ▶ If your child is facing a difficulty that is contributing towards EBSA and has a practical solution, try and go through this technique with them:



This will help empower them and feel like they are taking control of their worry

Examples that could have a practical solutions - friendship difficulties or academic worries

Increasing Pull Factors towards School

Consider a rewards-based system e.g., able to ride their scooter to school or sleepover with their friend

Discuss with school to identify a key member of staff that your child enjoys talking to and feels safe with - they could go to this person for check-ins

Organise some playdates for your child to spend time with their peers to build stronger relationships, so they look forward to seeing their friends at school

Arrange for them to get involved in extra-curricular activities that would be of interest to them so they look forward to going in

Increasing Push Factors Away from Home

If your child is not attending school, it is important to create a school-like environment at home

Limit attention when not attending school & establish 1:1 quality time outside of school

Continue to establish a morning routine as if they were attending school to remain structured

No games or gadgets during school hours

Other Useful Tips

- ▶ Although it can be difficult as parents, it is important to remember that it will be a gradual process so it is important to recognise and praise the small successes
 - ▶ E.g., getting dressed for school
 - ▶ Entering the classroom
- ▶ Avoid lengthy goodbyes & too much reassurance
- ▶ Avoidance can contribute towards the maintenance of EBSA
- ▶ Prepare for school the night before or ask your child to get involved in this process e.g., packing their bag or asking them to pick what lunch they would like. If mornings are difficult, preparing the night before can save time in the mornings
- ▶ If your child has learning difficulties, consider speaking to the class teacher about gaining extra support or consider tutoring if possible

Environmental Factors

In some cases, past/current trauma, bereavement or if there is an underlying need present, could be contributing towards EBSA

In such cases it is important for your child to receive more specialist support to help meet their needs

Signposting

If you need further support...

- ▶ Harrow MHST - Mental Health Practitioner based at Roxeth Primary School
- ▶ Talk to your GP
- ▶ Harrow Horizons: harrowhorizons@annafreud.org or by phone on 0300 030 2313
- ▶ Young Minds: Telephone: 0808 802 5544 Website: <https://youngminds.org.uk/>

Questions



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