



PARENT TOOLKIT

EBSA



EBSA describes when a child **struggles to attend school due to emotional distress**, often linked to anxiety, trauma, or other underlying difficulties. This toolkit provides strategies to support your child, reduce school-related stress, and rebuild confidence and engagement with learning.

Understanding EBSA

- EBSA is usually **driven by anxiety**, not laziness or defiance.
- Common signs include:
 - Frequent stomach aches, headaches, or other physical complaints before school
 - Panic, tearfulness, or avoidance behaviours
 - Emotional distress or agitation when thinking about school
 - Strong preference for staying home or isolating
 - Sleep disturbances or nightmares about school
- EBSA often co-occurs with **anxiety disorders, autism, ADHD, trauma, or attachment difficulties**.

Building Emotional Safety

- **Validate feelings:** “I can see school feels scary for you; it’s okay to feel that way.”
- **Create predictable routines:** visual schedules, bedtime routines, and consistent morning rituals.
- **Start small:** partial days, familiar staff, or a safe space at school can reduce overwhelm.
- **Provide reassurance:** maintain calm and consistent communication about school.
- **Encourage control:** allow choice over order of activities, breaks, or seating arrangements.

Gradual Re-Engagement

- Use **graded exposure:** short, low-pressure visits to school, gradually increasing time.
- Celebrate **small achievements:** walking to the gate, entering the classroom, completing a lesson.
- Collaborate with school staff to develop a **support plan** that feels safe and achievable.
- Offer **positive reinforcement** for attempts rather than just attendance.
- Encourage **peer support:** a trusted friend can ease anxiety.

Supporting Emotional Regulation

- Teach **calming strategies:** deep breathing, mindfulness, grounding techniques, or stress balls.
- Use **emotion charts** to help your child identify and communicate feelings.
- Allow access to **safe spaces** at home and school for regulation.

- Model calm responses to anxiety and frustration — your regulation helps your child self-regulate.

Supporting Social and Academic Needs

- Maintain **connection to learning** at home using online lessons or short study sessions.
- Encourage **friendship and social interaction** outside school in safe, low-pressure environments.
- Adjust academic expectations temporarily to prevent overwhelm.
- Collaborate with teachers to **modify workload or provide one-to-one support** where needed.

Tools & Approaches

- **Visual schedules and countdowns** for transitions.
- **Emotion thermometers / Zones of Regulation** to monitor anxiety.
- **Calm boxes or sensory items** for home and school regulation.
- **Gradual exposure plans** co-designed with the child and school.
- **Collaborative problem-solving** to involve your child in decisions about school.

Organisations & Support

- **Place2Be** – Counselling and emotional support for children and families.
- **Education Support Services / Educational Psychologists** – Guidance and assessments for attendance difficulties.

- **Anxiety UK** – Resources and advice for children experiencing anxiety-related school refusal.
- **National Autistic Society / PDA Society** – Guidance if EBSA overlaps with autism or PDA.
- **Family Lives** – Parent helplines and support networks for managing school-related stress.
- **Local CAMHS teams** – Assessment, therapy, and support for anxiety and emotional regulation.

Supporting Yourself as a Parent

- EBSA can be stressful for families; maintain **self-care and support networks**.
- Avoid guilt — your child's distress is not your fault.
- Celebrate small progress and **acknowledge your efforts**.
- Seek advice from **professionals and parent forums** to share strategies and feel supported.

Children with EBSA need **empathy, predictability, and gradual support** rather than pressure or punishment. By validating emotions, supporting regulation, and collaborating with schools, you can help your child rebuild confidence, reduce anxiety, and re-engage with learning. Your patience and consistent support are crucial to their success.