

**Emotional
Based School
Avoidance
(EBSA)
Part 1 Training**



Haringey Educational Psychology Service

Menti evaluation of knowledge

On a scale of 1-10 (10=excellent, 1 = poor) how would you rate your knowledge of factors that contribute towards EBSA?

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Aims of the training

What is EBSA?

Contributing/risk factors

Recognising stress and anxiety in children and young people

The Anxiety Cycle including maintenance factors

The impact of COVID

Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC), Neurodiversity & EBSA

What can schools do to support children and young people?

How to work with parents

Activities to further explore anxiety and EBSA with children and young people



What is EBSA?

Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is a broad umbrella term used to describe a severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences from school

(West Sussex, EPS

<https://schools.westsussex.gov.uk/Page/10483>)

There is a clear distinction between those who are absent from school due to truanting and those absent due to emotional factors

Within EBSA, pupils can still attend school

Change in terminology from 'school refuser'

Complex interaction between home, school and pupil factors

1-2% of the population meet the definition of having EBSA



Contributing/risk factors

Perceived stress

Anxiety

Predisposing risk factors

Triggers

Maintenance factors

(Jerricah Holder, 2022)



Contributing/risk factors

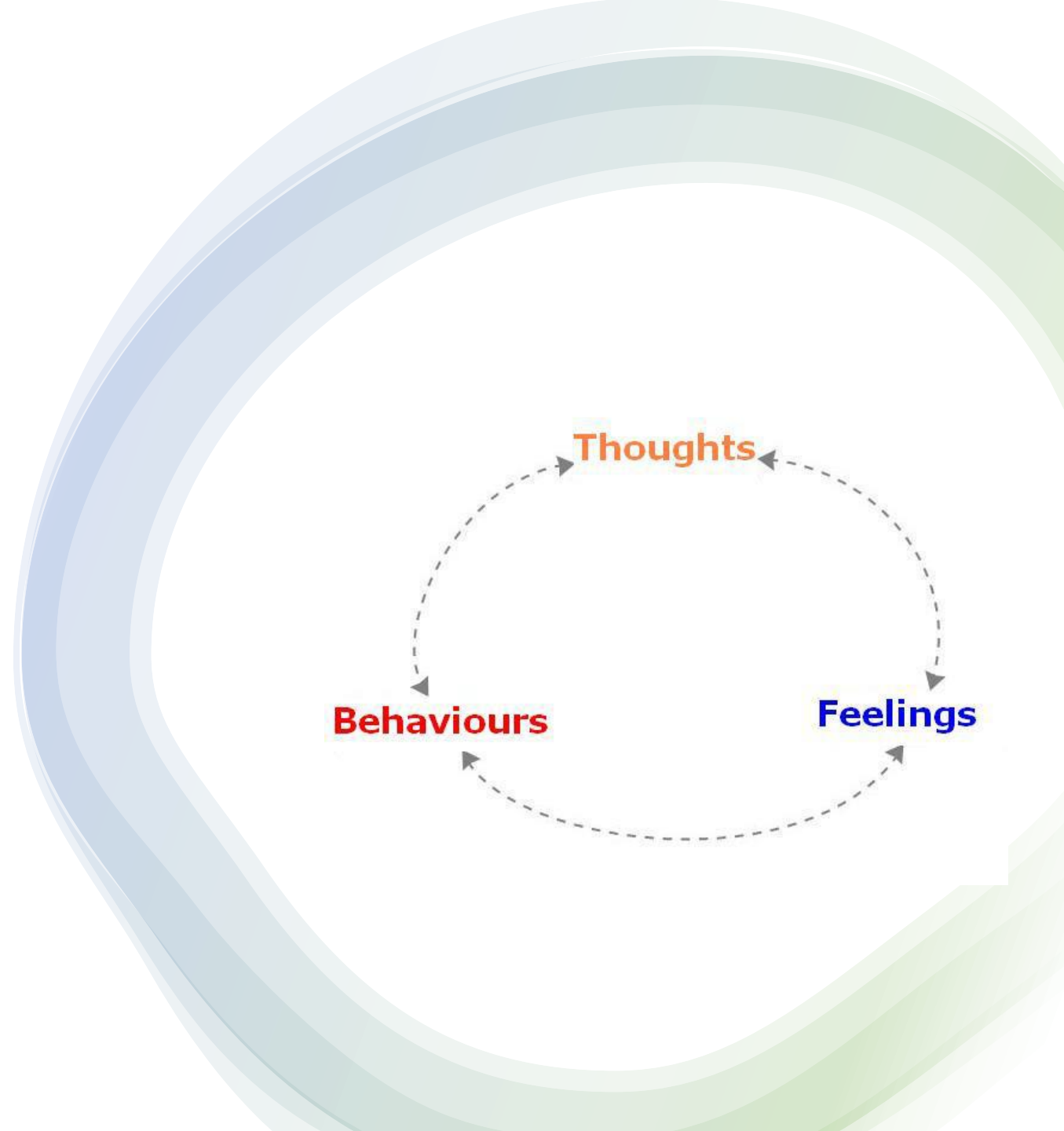
Some children worry more than others:

1/3 from genes

2/3 from environment e.g., experiences, how adults react; observing others; and having limited opportunities to face fears and develop skills

Understanding anxiety and emotions

- Anxiety is processed through the senses
- The importance of the link between thoughts and feelings and behaviour
- The snowball effect
- Thought traps
- Anger can mask anxiety





Early recognition

Changes in school performance

A lack of curiosity, interest or enjoyment in life and usual activities (changes in mood, appearance or engagement)

Reported anxiety and/or finding it difficult to transition to school e.g., Sunday evenings, mornings (including lateness)

Significant increase in time spent alone

Inability to cope with daily problems, activities or changes to usual routines

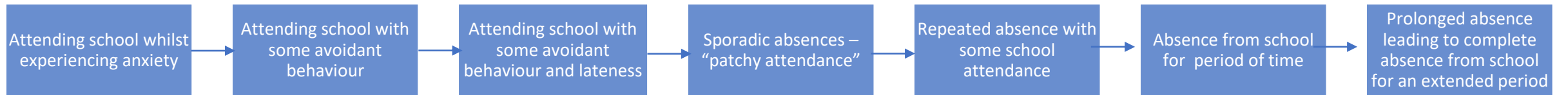
Changes in sleeping and/or eating habits

Excessive complaints of physical ailments e.g., stomach pain, headache or other illness

Changes in outbursts of anger and defiance (anxiety can present as anger)

Consider masking in particular pupils

EBSA as a spectrum



Important to intervene early to prevent escalation

Diagram adapted from Informed by Kearney, C & Albano, A. (2018) When Children Refuse School, Oxford University Press



Maintenance Cycles

We are role models to children

How we act influences them

Research shows that anxiety is exacerbated if adults either:

Encourage a child to avoid a situation they are worried about or

Are too pushy, controlling and/or overprotective

Some reassurance is ok, but it can stop children from being able to manage situations on their own



Impact of Covid

Covid led to a message from society of 'danger' which resulted in heightened anxiety

Increased time at home reinforced the maintenance cycle

Increased mental health difficulties and larger numbers of EBSA for prolonged periods

Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) & the Covid-19 pandemic

Often a higher level of stress and anxiety
Sensory sensitivities within the school environment
Communication needs impacting emotional regulation



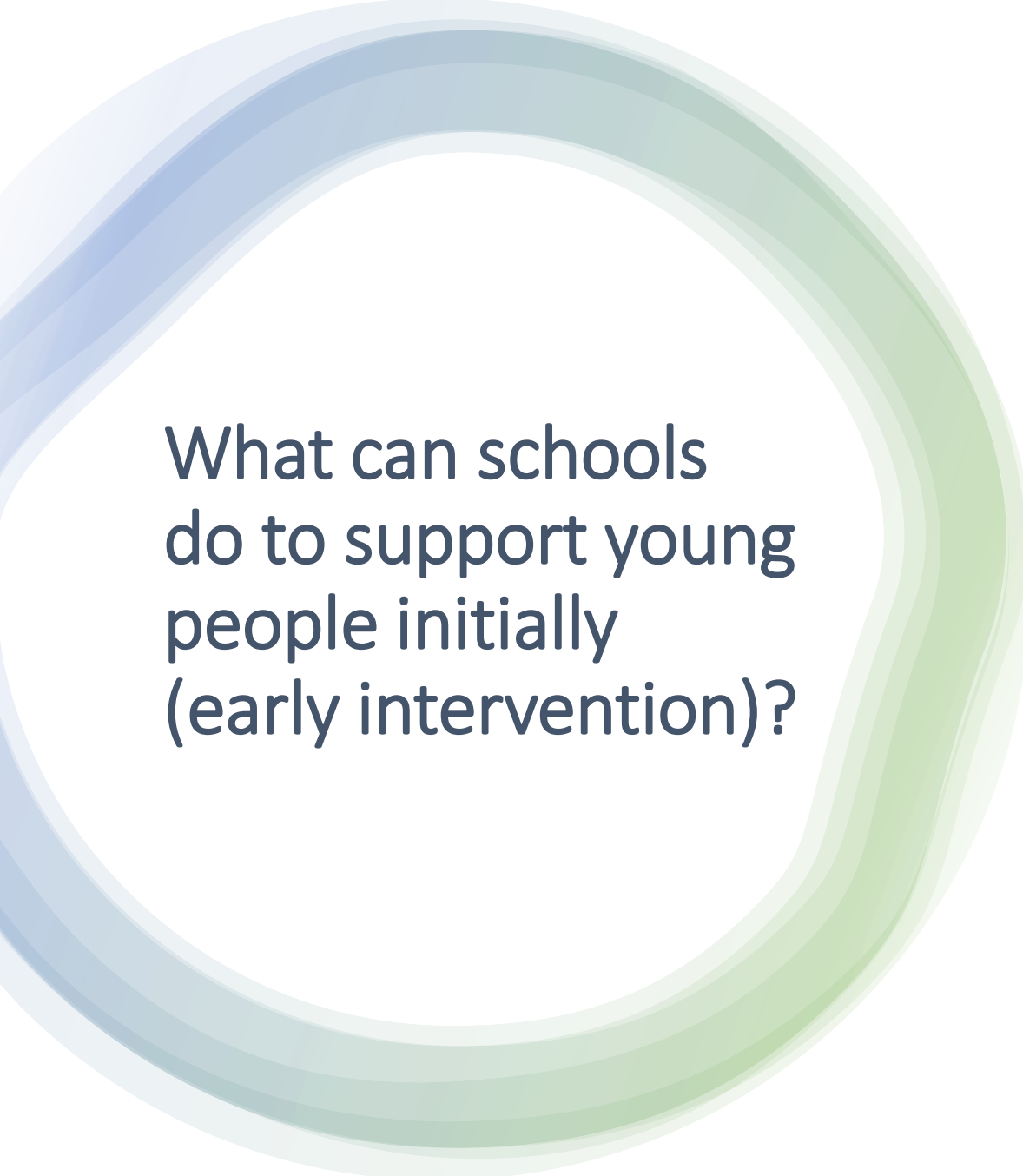
Increase in EBSA



Supporting children and young people with ASC

Consider

- **Managing changes e.g. in routine.**
- **Emotional literacy e.g. understanding of emotions and emotional regulation.**
- **Social skills and support for friendships**
- **Sensory processing** – student stressor interview/incredible 5 point scale, [Student Stressor Interview for Proactive Planning – DocsLib](#)
- **[See appendix 6 West Sussex strategies for supporting CYP with ASC EBSA Guidance Document Updated 2022 \(1\).pdf](#)**



What can schools do to support young people initially (early intervention)?

Whole school audit (appendix 5) – West Sussex EPS [EBSA Guidance Document Updated 2022 \(2\).pdf](#)

Monitor attendance

Swift response to a pupil missing specific lessons e.g., P.E including lateness

SENCO/ELSA to meet with the pupil to ascertain their views including their goals, hobbies and key adults (protective factors/strengths), agree steps of a manageable plan to increase attendance

Meet with parents- joint dialogue about sporadic attendance, agree steps of a plan, ensure the appropriateness of the plan

Assess, do, review in 2-4 weeks

Good practice

Identifying a member of staff for the young person to 'check in' with throughout the day.

Developing staff awareness around EBSA.

Ensuring that any contributing school factors identified have been explored and addressed.

Flexibility in terms of timetabling

On-going dialogue with parents/carers and the pupil and working together with other services.

Informing staff, including supply teachers or cover staff, about the young person's difficulties and the agreed reintegration plan

Identifying a safe place or base in school that the young person can go to if needed.

Utilising a pastoral support programme to identify the effective strategies being used with the young person.

Regular reviews.

Accessing services, as appropriate, to provide support to the family and to help address any contributing factors

Having access to a variety of school based interventions to support the pupil, which may include: buddying, mentoring or a Circle of Friends approach

Supporting the pupil or young person with managing anxious or difficult feelings e.g. sessions with pastoral staff, ELSA (schools can buy this in from the EPS).



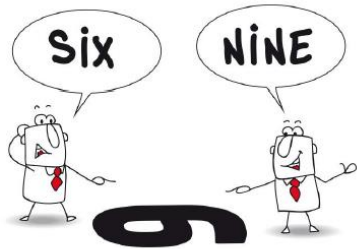
Next level of support (targeted)

Develop tools and training e.g., use of questionnaires and pupil voice (next slide) to inform the next level of a plan.
Involvement of other services – EPS & EWO

Consideration of the emotional impact on the family and how to support the pupil and family

Work with services to develop guidance on next appropriate steps – involvement of other services – EPS and EWO

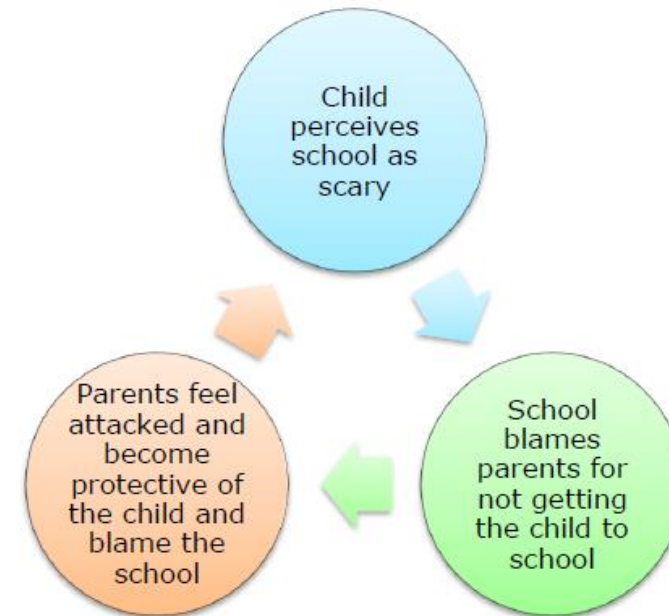
Gaining the perspectives of parents/carers



Importance of adopting a non-judgemental stance.

There is rarely one simple cause of EBSA. Instead there are a range of interactive factors.

Successful outcomes for children rely on school and home working together.



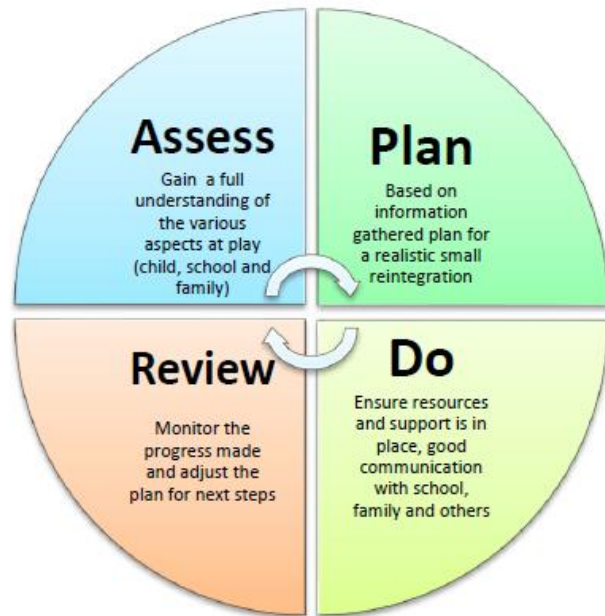
Working
collaboratively
with
parents/carers

Starting from the perspectives of
parents/carers in meetings

The importance of active listening when
gaining parents' views



Ideas to support information gathering



- Complete the push /pull factors diagram with parents. [EBSA Guidance Document p.12](#)
- Ask questions about things that have helped in the past / times when the child has felt less anxious?
- Reflect on the function of the avoidant behaviour/EBSA? [EBSA Guidance Document Updated 2022 \(1\).pdf](#) – Appendix 7
- Return to school questionnaire and support plan [Return to School Questionnaire Instructions.pdf](#)
- Assess/plan/do/review – with regular meetings with parents

Importance of gaining child/young person's views

Most successful intervention will start from the child/young person's own perspectives

An available, sensitively attuned key adult is likely to be key to establishing safety and security

When you think about school are you?



Worried

Scared

Bad Tempered

Feeling ill or pretending to feel ill

Struggling to sleep

Feeling unsure of yourself

Feeling depressed

Worrying about friendships

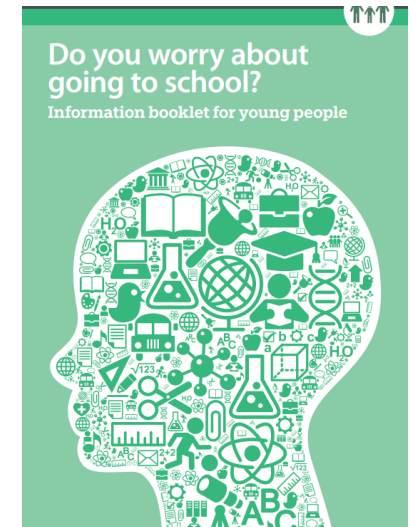
Activities and tools to gain child/ young person's views

- Risk / Resilience Cards



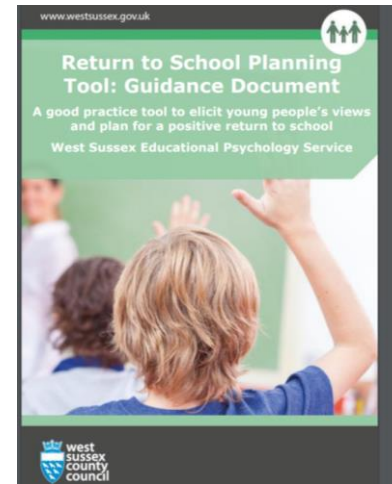
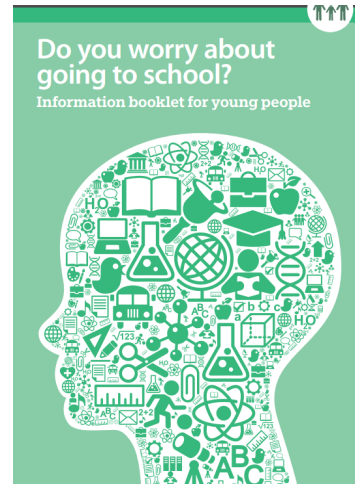
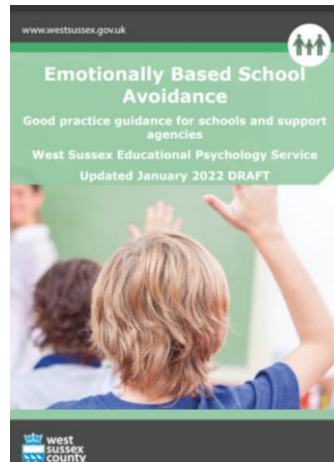
- Drawing/talking/writing about a good day and bad day at school

- West Sussex Guidance



West Sussex Guidance Documents

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