

# UNDERSTANDING EBSA

## Guidance for Parents

When anxiety makes school feel difficult, staying home can sometimes feel like the easiest option.

Understanding what is behind the avoidance can be an important first step towards helping your child feel safe, supported and able to return to learning.

## What is Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)?

**Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)** describes a situation where a child or young person experiences **significant emotional distress about attending school**.

It isn't simply a case of not wanting to go to school. For some children, worries and anxiety can become so overwhelming that attending school feels extremely difficult.

Importantly, **EBSA isn't a clinical diagnosis**.

It is a term used to describe a pattern of emotionally driven difficulty attending school, often linked to anxiety or other underlying challenges.

Every child is different, and there may be more than one reason behind their distress.

## What may be contributing:

- Anxiety or social anxiety
- Worries about schoolwork or exams
- Friendship difficulties or bullying
- Fear of getting things wrong
- Sensory sensitivities or feeling overwhelmed
- Changes at home or school
- Separation anxiety
- Difficulties with transitions or unfamiliar situations
- Low mood or reduced confidence

## What might EBSA look like?

- Headaches, stomach aches and feeling sick on school mornings
- Being very upset or tearful before school
- Difficulty sleeping
- Worrying about school, friendships or being away from home
- Struggling to get dressed or leave the house
- Difficulty staying at school

**These signs do not necessarily mean your child is experiencing EBSA.**

Every child is different, and there can be many reasons for changes in behaviour, but keeping an eye on patterns and talking openly can help you understand what they may be finding difficult.



## If you are concerned, consider:

- Speaking to your child's form tutor, head of year, school nurse, or SENCO
- Contacting your GP for advice and onward referral if needed
- Reaching out to an external support organisation

If you have any concerns about your child's wellbeing at school, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us.

## Useful contacts:

- **Speak to your NHS GP:** The local NHS may offer Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

[nhs.uk/mental-health](https://nhs.uk/mental-health)

- **Young Minds Parent Helpline:**  
0808 802 5544  
(Mon–Fri, 9:30am–4pm)
- **Childline:** 0800 1111 (free, 24/7)
- **YoungMinds:** [youngminds.org.uk](https://youngminds.org.uk)

