



BEDFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Best Practice Guidance for Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA)

March 2026



“Right support *Right action* Right time”

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Introduction

Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA) is an increasingly recognised issue affecting children and young people across Bedford Borough and beyond. Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA) occurs when a child or young person struggles to attend school due to emotional distress. Unlike truancy or deliberate absenteeism, EBSA is often driven by a complex range of interacting emotional, psychological and environmental factors that cause overwhelming anxiety or distress in relation to school attendance. EBSA requires a compassionate, multi-faceted response to ensure the child or young person's mental wellbeing and educational progress are supported. The impact of EBSA is significant and far-reaching, with many associated adverse outcomes on attainment, social relationships and future employment opportunities.

It should be noted that 'Emotional Barriers to School Attendance' is also referred to as 'School Refusal', 'Emotionally Based School Avoidance' or 'Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance' within the research literature. Bedford Borough has chosen to use the term 'Emotional Barriers to School Attendance' as it encourages a more solution-focused, needs-led approach which focuses on identifying and overcoming barriers and shifts the focus from the individual child or young person's emotions to the interaction between the child or young person and their environment.

The purpose of this guidance is to provide Bedford Borough schools, parents and support agencies with a structured, evidence-based approach to managing EBSA. It aims to foster a unified response across the borough, enabling all partners to work together to reduce barriers to attendance and ensure every child receives the emotional and educational support they need to thrive.

Scope of the Guidance

This guidance is intended to:

- Support **schools** in identifying and managing EBSA cases through the development of inclusive policies and practices.
- Assist **parents and carers** in recognising the signs of EBSA and working in partnership with schools and relevant agencies to address their child or young person's needs.
- Provide **multi-agency teams** with a clear framework for collaboration and joint action to support children and young people with EBSA.

The approach outlined in this guidance reflects key national policies, such as the Department for Education's 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' (2022), which emphasises the importance of early identification, strong partnerships between schools and families, and the use of personalised interventions. Additionally, the SEND Code of Practice (2015) underscores the need for tailored support for children with mental health needs that impact their education, which is essential when addressing EBSA.

Why EBSA Matters

Children and young people affected by EBSA often experience significant emotional distress related to attending school, which can be mistakenly viewed as misbehaviour or refusal. However, research has shown that EBSA is a complex issue, driven by factors such as anxiety, family pressures, academic stress, and/or trauma. If left unaddressed, prolonged school absence can lead to long-term mental health difficulties, social isolation and educational underachievement (West Sussex County Council, 2018). It is therefore vital that Bedford Borough schools, parents and support agencies adopt a proactive and holistic approach to prevent and manage EBSA cases.

A Multi-Agency Approach

Effectively supporting children and young people with EBSA requires close cooperation between schools, families and support agencies. This guidance advocates the use of a Team Around the Family (TAF) model, promoting a joined-up approach to planning and intervention and ensuring that all relevant professionals contribute to a cohesive support plan tailored to the child or young person's needs. Regular communication, data sharing (within GDPR guidelines) and joint decision-making are essential to this process, ensuring consistent and comprehensive support.

Bedford Borough Council recognises the importance of providing tailored and flexible solutions that address both the emotional and educational needs of children with EBSA. By implementing this guidance, schools and their partners will be equipped to support children and young people in overcoming attendance obstacles and reintegrating into school life.

Understanding the Complexity

It is essential to recognise that EBSA is not simply about a reluctance to attend school but is often a symptom of deeper emotional, psychological, or environmental challenges. For schools, parents, and support agencies in Bedford Borough, a nuanced understanding of these challenges is vital to creating an empathetic, practical, and effective approach to re-engaging children with their education.

The Importance of Early Intervention

Early identification and intervention are crucial to successfully managing EBSA. Schools in Bedford Borough are encouraged to adopt early screening tools, such as the ATTEND Framework (see page 9), and to closely monitor attendance patterns to identify children at risk of developing EBSA. Early intervention, including offering emotional support, making reasonable adjustments to the curriculum and fostering a supportive school environment, can significantly improve the chances of successful reintegration into school.

By following the best practice outlined in this guidance, Bedford Borough schools, parents and agencies will be able to work collaboratively to create an inclusive and supportive environment for children and young people experiencing Emotional Barriers to School Attendance.

Understanding Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA)

Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA) occurs when a child or young person struggles to attend school due to emotional distress. Unlike truancy or deliberate absenteeism, EBSA is often driven by a complex range of emotional, psychological, and sometimes social factors that cause overwhelming anxiety or distress in relation to school attendance. Understanding EBSA is essential for schools, parents, and support agencies to respond appropriately and ensure that the child receives the help they need.

Definitions and Terminology

EBSA encompasses a broad spectrum of attendance difficulties, from reduced attendance to complete non-attendance at school.

We acknowledge that there are several definitions; however, for this guidance, EBSA relates to all cases where emotional factors are the primary driver of school absence, regardless of severity.

Risk Factors and Causes

EBSA often arises from a combination of emotional, psychological, environmental factors, and sometimes special educational needs (SEN), making it crucial to adopt a holistic approach when understanding its root causes. Common risk factors identified by the Anna Freud Centre (2024) include:

Individual Factors:

- **Mental health conditions:** Anxiety, depression, and social anxiety are often closely linked to EBSA. Many children may also have undiagnosed mental health conditions.
- **Special educational needs (SEN):** Children with SEN, including autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), are at higher risk of EBSA due to increased challenges in navigating the school environment, including Sensory processing differences (Prosser and Birchwood, 2024).
- **Trauma or adverse experiences:** Personal trauma, such as bereavement, bullying, or family breakdown, can contribute to feelings of insecurity or fear related to school.

Family Factors:

- **Parental anxiety or mental health:** A parent's emotional well-being can influence a child's attendance. Children may avoid school to stay close to a parent experiencing mental health difficulties.
- **Family instability:** Separation or divorce, parental physical or mental health, loss and bereavement, and high levels of family stress.

School Factors:

- **Bullying or peer relationship issues:** Fear of bullying or social exclusion can make school attendance distressing for some young people.
- **Academic pressure:** A fear of failure or struggles with academic work can contribute to a child's anxiety about attending school.
- **Transitions:** Moving to a new school or progressing through key stages can exacerbate anxiety, especially in children with SEN or those struggling with change.

Environmental Factors:

- **COVID-19 and lockdown:** The pandemic has intensified emotional barriers towards attending school for some children, particularly those with pre-existing anxiety (Department for Education, 2025). The shift to remote learning and the return to in-person schooling challenging have been particularly difficult for some pupils, alongside the rise in parental home working.
- **Economic hardship:** Families facing economic and financial challenges may experience additional stressors, which can affect a child's school attendance.
- **Sensory processing differences:** For neurodivergent individuals, the school environment plays a crucial role in influencing attendance and engagement. Those with sensory processing differences may find specific environments - such as noisy, brightly lit, or crowded spaces - overstimulating or uncomfortable. These sensory challenges can contribute to increased stress or anxiety, ultimately leading to non-attendance or avoidance behaviours.

The Impact of EBSA on the Child and Family

EBSA can have a profound effect on a child's wellbeing, education, family and prospects. Prolonged non-attendance can lead to:

- **Mental health deterioration:** Continued school non-attendance can deepen feelings of anxiety and contribute to the development of other mental health issues, such as depression or low self-esteem (Creswell et al., 2020).
- **Social isolation:** Children and young people with EBSA may become increasingly withdrawn from their peers, missing out on crucial social development opportunities (Lay-Yee et al., 2023).
- **Academic underachievement:** Frequent absences from school often lead to gaps in learning, causing academic setbacks that can exacerbate a child's anxiety and reduce their engagement with education (Morrissey et al., 2014; Butcher et al., 2021).
- **Strained family relationships:** The stress caused by EBSA can put significant pressure on family dynamics, leading to conflict, frustration, or feelings of helplessness within the family unit (Sawyer & Collingwood, 2023).

The Views of Young People and Parents in Bedford Borough

Even thinking about school makes my tummy hurt

I watch the clock all day, hoping no one asks why I'm not there

I want to go to school, but my body feels too scared to move

I feel like I'm falling behind, but I can't face the classroom

Quotes from children and young people in Bedford Borough, 2025

Their future feels uncertain - we just want someone to understand and help

People assume it's bad parenting; they don't see the genuine distress

It's exhausting! We're juggling work, guilt, and a child in emotional crisis

We're constantly walking on eggshells, trying not to trigger panic about school

Quotes from Bedford Borough parents, 2024

Early Identification and Intervention

Early identification and timely intervention are critical in addressing Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA). The earlier a child's emotional difficulties are recognised and addressed, the better the chances of preventing prolonged school absence and reducing the negative impact on their educational, emotional, and social development (Keppens, 2023). Effective early intervention can help schools, parents, and support agencies work together to resolve attendance difficulties before they become entrenched.

The Importance of Early Identification

Early identification of EBSA can significantly improve outcomes for children and young people (Boaler et al., 2024). Schools are uniquely positioned to recognise the warning signs of EBSA at an early stage, often through regular monitoring of attendance patterns, classroom behaviour, and wellbeing assessments. Schools are well-placed to identify and play a pivotal role in addressing the root causes of a child or young person's emotional distress by working with young people and parents/carers.

The Department for Education's (DfE) guidance on school attendance stresses the importance of a proactive and preventative approach to reducing absence, with schools and local authorities working closely with families to identify issues before they escalate (Department for Education, 2022). This aligns with the principles of the SEND Code of Practice (2015), which calls for early intervention when a child's needs - whether related to mental health, SEN, or other factors - are identified, with strategies implemented through an assess-plan-do-review cycle.

Warning Signs of EBSA

Recognising the signs of EBSA is essential for early identification. Some of the key warning signs that schools and families should look out for include:

- **Frequent absences or repeated lateness:** Particularly where there is no clear medical reason.
- **Physical symptoms before school:** Complaints of headaches, stomach aches, or other physical ailments that resolve once the possibility of attending school is removed. It is important to note that these symptoms are not falsified, but rather a response to anxiety and stress (Havik et al, 2014).
- **Emotional distress:** Children showing signs of anxiety, depression, or distress when discussing or preparing for school.
- **Difficulty with transitions:** Increased anxiety or non-attendance during key transitions, such as the start of a new school week, term or year, moving to secondary school, or after significant breaks like holidays. Some smaller transitions are also points of raised anxiety, such as changing into a uniform or leaving the house.
- **Changes in behaviour:** Withdrawn behaviour, irritability, difficulty concentrating, or reluctance to participate in school activities.
- **School performance decline:** A noticeable drop in academic performance that coincides with an increase in absences or emotional distress.

The Role of Schools in Early Identification

Schools play a pivotal role in identifying and addressing EBSA at the earliest possible stage. A whole-school approach to wellbeing and mental health can help to create a supportive environment where children feel safe and are more likely to engage with education.

Key actions schools can take include:

- 1. Monitoring Attendance Data:** Schools should have systems in place to monitor attendance patterns regularly. Unexplained absences, late arrivals, and prolonged absenteeism are early indicators of EBSA. Schools should investigate these patterns promptly and sensitively.
- 2. Wellbeing and Mental Health Assessments:** Regular wellbeing surveys or assessments can help identify pupils who may be at risk of EBSA. These tools can flag changes in emotional health and allow staff to act quickly.
- 3. Staff Training and Awareness:** Training staff to recognise the signs of anxiety and other mental health issues can enable teachers and support staff to identify pupils who may be developing EBSA. Teachers, in particular, should be aware of how classroom stressors—such as academic pressure or social issues—can trigger avoidance behaviour.
- 4. Creating a Safe and Inclusive School Environment:** Fostering a positive and trauma-informed school ethos, where mental health and wellbeing are prioritised, can help reduce the emotional triggers for school avoidance. Anti-bullying policies, inclusive practices for all pupils, and flexible learning environments can all contribute to a more welcoming atmosphere.
- 5. Open Communication with Families:** Early identification relies on open communication between schools and parents. Schools should encourage parents to share concerns about their child's emotional well-being and be proactive in reaching out to families when attendance patterns raise concerns. Collaborative working between schools and parents is vital to ensuring early intervention.
- 6. EBSA and SEND:** In March 2020, the DfE reported that school non-attendance rates for young people with an 'Education, Health and Care Plan' were 24%, compared to 10% in the wider school population. There is also evidence to show that autistic young people are significantly more likely to experience difficulties with school attendance (Munkhaugen et al, 2017), with many young people socially complying at the expense of their mental wellbeing until they are unable to cope with school attendance. It is important to note that special educational needs, disabilities and mental health needs can all co-occur within a young person, contributing to their non-attendance.

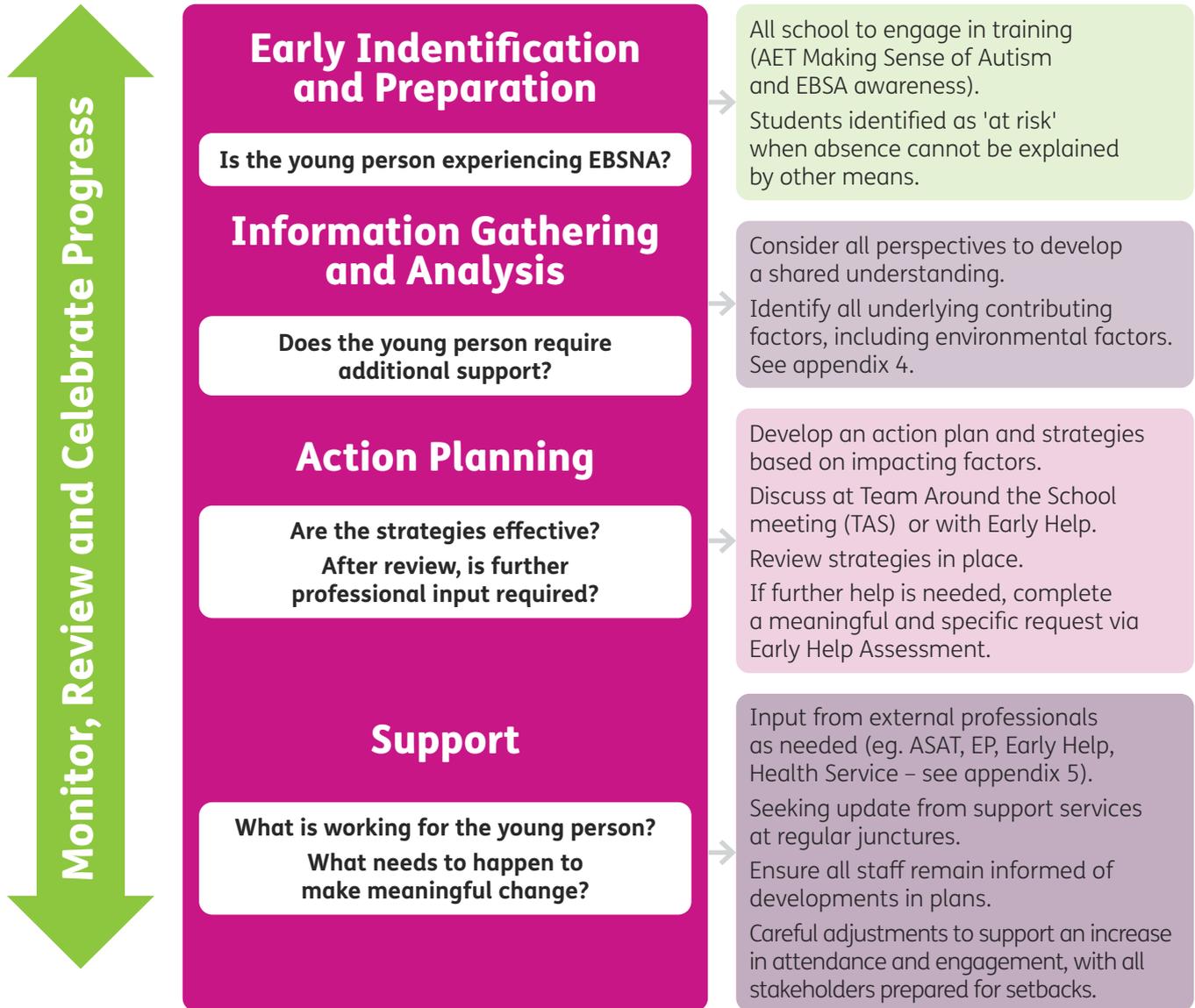
Effective Early Intervention Strategies

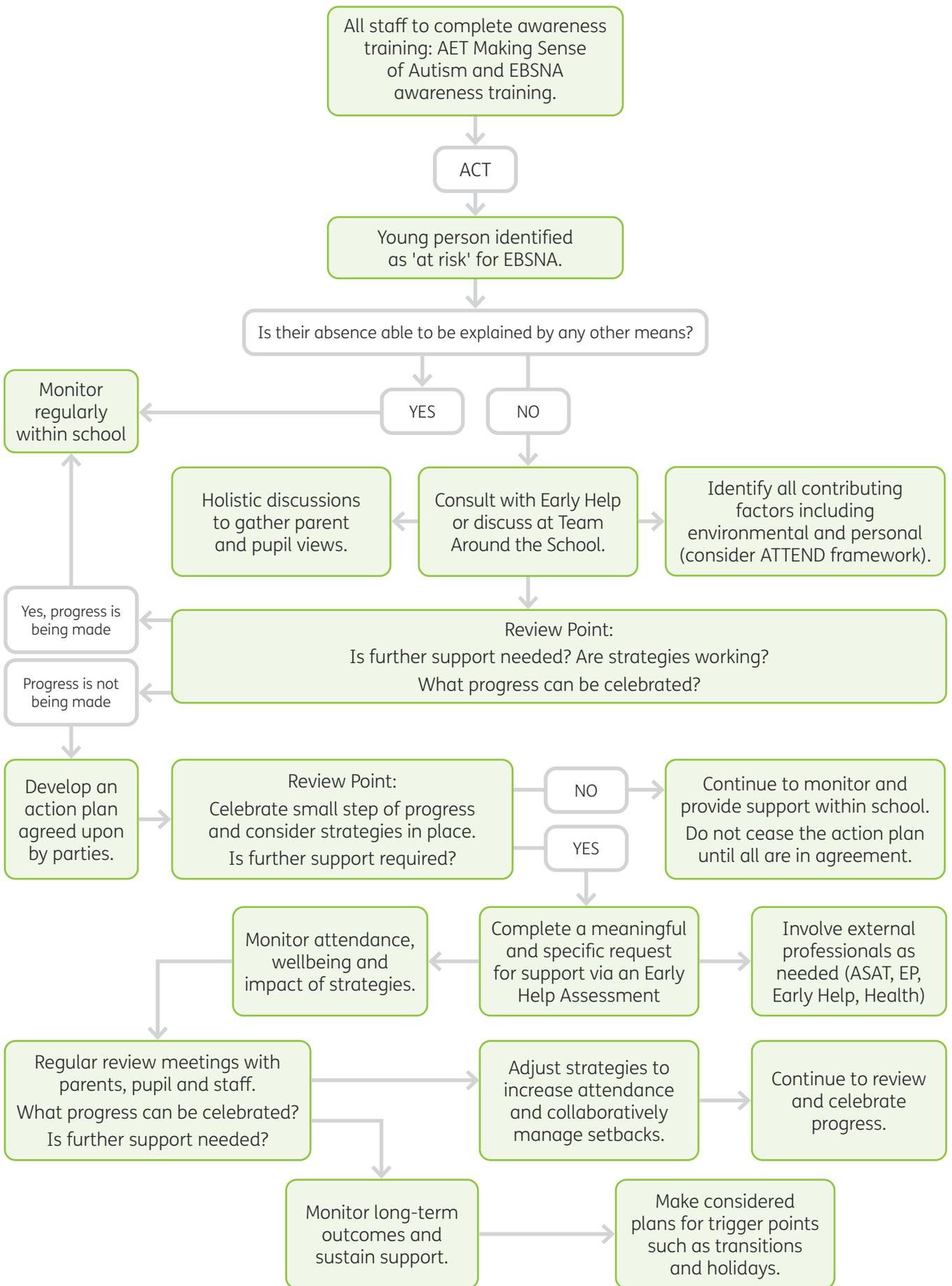
Once EBSA is identified, timely intervention is crucial. Schools and support agencies should take a holistic approach to support the child or young person, addressing both their emotional and educational needs. Some key strategies and approaches include:

- 1. ATTEND Framework:** The ATTEND Framework is a tool developed by Brighton and Hove City Council to help schools understand the reasons behind student absences and develop tailored support plans in collaboration with students and their families. It is used for students aged 5–16 who have attendance below 90% and seeks to identify all contributing factors to low attendance. Rather than serving as a simple checklist, the ATTEND Framework provides a structured approach to guide conversations with families, fostering a trusting and cooperative relationship throughout the process.

- 2. Autism Education Trust:** The AET provides many resources to support gathering a child or young person's views. Resources are varied, with tools available for a variety of ages. 'Mapping the Landscape of Fear' (developed by Kate Ripley, 2015) is one such tool which can be used to support young people to identify environmental factors which be contributing to their EBSA.
- 3. Consultation with professionals:** Engaging with professionals as early as possible can help determine the most effective approach for managing EBSA cases. Consulting with your school's linked Early Help Professional or Team Leader can assist in identifying appropriate resources and support. Similarly, discussions with an Educational Psychologist or a linked CAMHS worker can offer valuable strategies and insights, providing immediate guidance and practical support for these situations.
- 4. Early Help Assessment (EHA):** Arranging an early meeting with parents, school staff, and the young person is a crucial step in building a shared understanding of the situation. This meeting should focus on exploring the child or young person's experiences, reviewing their attendance patterns, and assessing their emotional well-being. Completing an Early Help Assessment (EHA) can guide the discussion, helping to identify both strengths and challenges. It also assists in setting clear outcomes and identifying any additional support that may be required.
- 5. Developing a Personalised Support Plan:** Creating a tailored plan based on the child or young person's individual needs can help them gradually return to school. This plan might include:
 - **Modified timetables:** Offering a part-time or flexible timetable to ease the child or young person back into the school environment.
 - **Safe spaces:** Providing a safe and quiet space in school where the child or young person can retreat if they feel overwhelmed.
 - **Key worker or mentor:** Assigning a staff member to act as a trusted adult for the child or young person, offering regular check-ins and emotional support.
 - **Access to therapeutic support:** Referring to services who can provide interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to address the underlying emotional difficulties (such as Early Help).
 - **Graduated Exposure back to School:** In some cases, a graduated exposure back to school is necessary, especially for children who have been absent for an extended period. This may involve starting with short school days or focusing on preferred activities before gradually reintroducing a full timetable.
- 6. Multi-Agency Working:** EBSA often requires a coordinated response involving multiple professionals, including educational psychologists, education advisors, social workers, and health services. The **Team Around the Family (TAF)** model can be useful for ensuring all professionals work together to meet the child or young person's needs. Regular TAF meetings help to monitor progress, adjust interventions as necessary, and ensure the child or young person's holistic needs are met.
- 7. Assess, Plan, Do, Review (APDR):** The APDR framework should be used to gather initial information, devise a personalised support plan and review the effectiveness of this (see appendix 3).

The Bedford Borough EBSA Pathway





Support Framework: Schools

Schools play a pivotal role in both identifying and addressing Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA). They are often the first to notice changes in a child or young person's behaviour and attendance patterns, making them crucial in early intervention. A structured support framework ensures that schools can respond effectively to the needs of children and young people experiencing EBSA, working closely with families and other agencies to develop tailored interventions.

The 'Assess, Plan, Do, Review' Process

A structured problem-solving approach is essential for supporting children with EBSA. The **Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle**, as outlined in the **Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice**, provides a clear and systematic framework for schools to follow when responding to EBSA. This process ensures that interventions are tailored to the child or young person's specific needs and are regularly monitored and adjusted as required.

Assess:

The first step is to gather a comprehensive understanding of the child or young person's experiences, emotions, and factors contributing to their non-attendance. The assessment should involve input from:

- **The child or young person:** Listening to their views, concerns, and feelings about school, what they find challenging and discovering what is working so that this can be built upon.
- **Parents or carers:** Understanding their perspective on the difficulties, family dynamics, and any additional stressors at home.
- **School staff:** Gathering information on attendance patterns, classroom behaviour, and any identified issues, such as bullying or academic struggles.
- **Using the tools:** Tools such as the ATTEND Framework, attendance records, and observation reports can help build a complete picture of the situation. Understanding both push and pull factors is critical during this stage to ensure interventions are targeted effectively (see Appendix 2).

Plan:

Based on the assessment, a personalised plan is developed that outlines the specific interventions and strategies needed to support the child or young person's return to school. The plan should include:

- **SMART targets:** Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound goals to ensure progress is clearly defined.
- **A flexible timetable:** In some cases, a phased return to school with shorter days or reduced timetables may be necessary to ease the child or young person back into the routine of school life.
- **Pastoral and therapeutic support:** Identifying the key staff members responsible for supporting the child or young person's emotional wellbeing, such as a key worker or mentor, and considering any additional support from counsellors or therapeutic services.
- **Environmental adjustments:** Making reasonable adjustments to the school environment or classroom to reduce push factors (e.g., a quiet space for the child or young person, support with academic work, or addressing bullying).

A collaborative approach to planning is key. The plan should be co-created with input from the child or young person, family, school staff, and any external professionals involved in the child or young person's care. This helps ensure the interventions are holistic and address both emotional and practical barriers to attendance.

Do:

This stage involves implementing the agreed-upon interventions. The school, parents and child or young person work together to provide the support outlined in the plan. During this phase, it is essential to:

- **Maintain communication with the child and family:** Regularly check in with the child or young person and their family to ensure they feel supported and that the interventions are meeting their needs.
- **Monitor attendance and engagement:** Keep track of the child or young person's attendance and engagement levels. Gradual improvements should be noted, and any setbacks should be discussed with the child or young person and family to understand the reasons and adjust the plan if necessary.

Review:

Regular reviews are crucial to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions and make any necessary adjustments. The frequency of reviews will depend on the child or young person's progress, but they should occur at least once every half-term. During the review meetings, schools should:

- **Evaluate progress towards SMART targets:** Assess whether the child or young person is meeting their attendance and emotional wellbeing goals, and if further support is needed.
- **Make adjustments as needed:** If the child or young person is struggling to meet the goals, the plan should be adjusted to better meet their needs. This may involve increasing therapeutic support, further modifying the timetable, or exploring new interventions.
- **Celebrate successes:** Recognising and celebrating the child or young person's achievements, no matter how small, can boost their confidence and motivation to continue attending school.
- **Seeking guidance from external professionals:** Seek additional support and advice as needed to support the young person. Professionals may be able to identify further barriers or provide strategies.

The Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle is a dynamic and flexible process that allows schools to respond to the changing needs of children with EBSA and ensures that support is continually tailored to their evolving situation.

Creating a Whole-School Approach to EBSA

In addition to personalised support for individual pupils, schools should adopt a whole-school approach to tackling EBSA. This involves fostering a positive school culture that prioritises mental health and wellbeing for all students. Key elements of this approach include:

- **Raising awareness and understanding of EBSA:** Providing training for staff to recognise the signs of EBSA and to understand how to support pupils experiencing emotional distress related to school attendance.
- **Promoting positive mental health:** Embedding wellbeing into the curriculum and school activities, promoting a culture where it is acceptable to talk about mental health, and providing universal support through programmes that build resilience.
- **Supporting SEND:** Ensuring young people with additional needs are supported academically, emotionally and socially through the graduated approach. Young people are entitled to adjustments and support regardless of whether they have a diagnosis (SEND Code of Practice, 2015).
- **Parental engagement:** Working closely with parents and carers to create an open dialogue about their child or young person's attendance and emotional well-being. Regular communication helps build trust and ensures consistency in approaches between home and school.
- **Flexible responses:** Understanding that EBSA is not a 'one size fits all' issue and being flexible in how support is offered, including making adjustments to teaching styles, providing quiet spaces, and offering tailored timetables.

Support Framework: Support Agencies

Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA) is often complex, involving multiple contributing factors that affect a child or young person's emotional, mental, and social well-being.

A coordinated multi-agency response is essential to effectively address EBSA, as schools alone may not have the resources or expertise to meet all of the child or young person's needs. Support agencies such as CAMHS, Educational Psychology, Autism Advisory Teams, Early Help, and Social Workers can play a vital role in providing the specialised support required to tackle the underlying causes of EBSA.

Multi-Agency Collaboration

A successful intervention for EBSA relies on effective collaboration among all these agencies.

A coordinated approach ensures that the child or young person's emotional, educational, and social needs are met holistically. Regular Team Around the Family (TAF) and review meetings are crucial for maintaining communication between all professionals involved and ensuring that the child or young person's support plan is flexible and responsive to changing needs.

Schools should act as the central hub for coordinating this multi-agency work, ensuring that each agency's contributions align with the child or young person's individual support plan and that there is consistent communication between the school, family, and external professionals.

Support Framework: Parents and Families

Parents and families are central to the successful identification, intervention, and resolution of Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA). As the primary caregivers, they are often the first to notice changes in their child or young person's emotional well-being or behaviour, and their involvement is crucial in both preventing school avoidance and supporting a child or young person's return to regular attendance. Building a partnership between schools, agencies, and parents is vital for ensuring that the child or young person receives consistent, tailored support both at school and at home.

Understanding the Role of Parents and Families in EBSA

Parents and carers often experience considerable stress and anxiety when their child or young person is unable to attend school. They may feel uncertain about how best to help, face conflicting advice from professionals, or struggle with feelings of guilt or frustration. It is essential to acknowledge the complex emotions parents may experience and offer them guidance and support throughout the process.

The role of parents in tackling EBSA includes:

- 1. Identifying Early Warning Signs:** Parents are in a unique position to notice early signs of emotional distress or anxiety that may lead to school avoidance. Changes in sleep patterns, complaints of physical illness (such as headaches or stomach aches), mood swings, or reluctance to talk about school can all be indicators of emerging EBSA. Open, trusting communication with their child or young person is key to identifying concerns early.
- 2. Providing a Safe and Supportive Home Environment:** A stable, supportive home environment can significantly reduce anxiety and encourage school attendance. Parents can help by maintaining consistent routines, providing emotional reassurance, and encouraging their child or young person to talk about their feelings. Understanding and reducing 'pull factors' that make staying at home more attractive, such as excessive use of technology or avoidance of social interaction, can be part of this supportive role.
- 3. Collaboration with Schools and Agencies:** Parents are essential partners in the intervention process. Effective collaboration between parents, schools, and external agencies ensures that the child or young person's needs are understood, and that support is consistent across home and school environments. Schools should work closely with parents, keeping them informed of progress and ensuring their input is valued when developing support plans.
- 4. Modelling Resilience and Encouraging Gradual Exposure:** Parents play a critical role in helping their child or young person develop coping skills and resilience. This includes encouraging the child or young person to face their fears incrementally, supporting a gradual return to school, and reinforcing positive behaviours. Parents can also model resilience by remaining calm, focused, and solution-oriented during challenging times.

Key Strategies for Parents and Families

Supporting a child or young person with EBSA can be a daunting task. Still, there are specific strategies that parents can use to help their child or young person manage anxiety, build confidence, and reintegrate into school life.

These strategies include:

Open and Honest Communication:

- Encourage open dialogue with the child or young person about their feelings and anxieties without judgment. Validating their feelings while gently challenging negative or distorted thoughts about school can help the child or young person feel heard and supported.
- Use age-appropriate language to help the child or young person understand their emotions, and engage in problem-solving discussions to explore possible solutions together.
- Keep lines of communication open with school staff, ensuring regular updates on the child or young person's progress and discussing any adjustments needed in their support plan.

Consistent Routines:

- Establishing and maintaining consistent daily routines can provide the child or young person with a sense of security and predictability. This includes regular sleep patterns, set mealtimes, and consistent morning routines, all of which can reduce anxiety and prepare the child or young person for the school day.
- Even on days when the child or young person is unable to attend school, it is important to maintain structure at home and reinforce the expectation that school is a priority.

Graduated Exposure:

- For children experiencing high levels of anxiety, a phased return to school may be necessary. Parents can support this by working closely with the school to develop a gradual reintegration plan. This may involve starting with a reduced timetable, attending specific lessons or activities, or spending time in a safe space within the school.
- Celebrate small victories, such as attending school for part of the day or completing a class without incident and build on these successes over time.

Reducing 'Pull Factors':

- Parents can reduce the attractiveness of staying at home by limiting access to activities that reinforce school avoidance, such as playing video games, watching TV, or using social media during school hours. This should be done sensitively, ensuring that the child or young person still feels supported rather than punished.
- Encourage participation in structured activities outside of school that build the child or young person's confidence and social skills, such as clubs, sports, or hobbies.

Seeking Professional Support:

- Parents should not hesitate to seek additional support from professionals if they feel overwhelmed or if the child or young person's anxiety is severe. Involving services such as CAMHS, educational psychologists, or Early Help can provide specialist advice and intervention.
- Family counselling or therapy may also be beneficial, particularly if the EBSA is linked to family dynamics, parental mental health, or other stressors within the home.
- If a student struggling with non-attendance is autistic or presents with autistic characteristics, schools can refer to the Autism Spectrum Advisory Teachers.

Parental Engagement in the 'Assess, Plan, Do, Review' Cycle

Parents and families should be actively involved at every stage of the **Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle**, ensuring that interventions are tailored to the child or young person's needs and are consistent across both school and home environments.

1. **Assess:** Parents provide crucial insights into the child or young person's behaviour, emotional state, and any factors within the home that may be contributing to school avoidance. Their input helps build a complete picture of the situation.
2. **Plan:** Parents collaborate with the school and other professionals to co-create a personalised plan that outlines interventions and strategies for both home and school. The plan should reflect the family's circumstances and, where needed, include support for parents.
3. **Do:** Parents play a vital role in implementing the support plan at home. This may include managing morning routines, encouraging attendance, and working on therapeutic strategies recommended by professionals, such as relaxation techniques or gradual exposure exercises.
4. **Review:** Regular review meetings should involve parents, allowing them to provide feedback on the child or young person's progress and discuss any challenges they are facing at home. Adjustments to the support plan should be made based on the child or young person's evolving needs and the family's input.

Emotional Support for Parents and Carers

Supporting a child or young person with EBSA can take a significant emotional toll on parents and carers, who may experience frustration, helplessness, or guilt. It is essential that parents seek support for themselves as well. This may involve:

- **Parent Support Groups:** Engaging with local or online parent support groups can provide a space to share experiences, gain practical advice, and find emotional support from others in similar situations. In Bedford, support can be sought from Bedford Borough Parent Carer Forum, Autism Bedfordshire and Family Hubs.
- **Counselling or Family Therapy:** Professional counselling or family therapy can help parents process their emotions, strengthen family dynamics, and develop strategies for supporting their child or young person's mental health and school attendance.
- **Engaging with Early Help:** For families struggling with broader issues such as financial stress, housing, or parental mental health, Early Help services can offer practical assistance and support. Engaging with these services early on can help alleviate some of the pressures that may be exacerbating the child or young person's school avoidance.

Partnership with Schools

A strong, supportive partnership between parents and the school is key to effectively addressing EBSA. Schools should adopt an open, non-judgmental and genuinely curious approach to working with parents, recognising the challenges they face and ensuring that their voices are heard throughout the process. Parents should be seen as partners in the intervention process, and open, non-judgmental communication is key to building trust and ensuring consistency in support between home and school.

Parents should be encouraged to:

- Attend regular meetings with school staff and external professionals.
- Be honest about any difficulties they are experiencing at home that may affect their child or young person's attendance.
- Participate in the development and review of the child or young person's support plan.
- Work collaboratively with the school to maintain consistency in their approach to supporting the child or young person's emotional wellbeing and school engagement.

The SPIRAL framework (Sawyer & Collingwood, 2023) is a set of evidence-based principles that outline how parents should be included in EBSA support (see Appendix 1). There is a downloadable action-planning tool that can be used in discussions with parents to identify the young person's and the family's holistic needs. The SPIRAL acronym breaks down into the following principles:

- Supporting parents and carers.
- Promoting a sense of belonging.
- Informing and including parents.
- Raising awareness.
- Accessing external professionals.
- Lessons learnt from COVID-19.

Legal and Policy Context

Addressing Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA) requires a comprehensive understanding of the relevant legal and policy frameworks that underpin the responsibility of schools, local authorities, parents, and support agencies. The legal framework ensures that children's rights to education and their welfare needs are met, while also guiding schools and local authorities in taking appropriate action to support attendance and safeguard the well-being of children and young people.

The legal and policy framework surrounding EBSA is extensive, and it is essential that schools, local authorities, and other support agencies work within this framework to provide appropriate, child-centred support. Early intervention, collaborative working, and adherence to statutory duties and guidance are critical to ensuring that children experiencing EBSA are supported in returning to education and achieving their full potential.

Statutory Duty of Schools and Local Authorities

Under the **Education Act 1996**, all children in the UK have a legal right to a suitable education, either through regular attendance at school or alternative provisions arranged by the local authority. Local authorities and schools have a duty to ensure that children attend school regularly and to intervene when attendance becomes a concern. Specifically:

- **Section 7 of the Education Act 1996:** This places a duty on parents to ensure that their child or young person of compulsory school age receives a full-time education suitable to their age, ability, and any special educational needs they may have. This can be achieved either through regular school attendance or through elective home education.
- **Section 19 of the Education Act 1996:** The local authority must arrange suitable education (full-time or as much as the child's health allows) for any child of compulsory school age who cannot attend or cannot reasonably access school because of illness, including mental health needs. This duty applies where a child remains unable to attend despite appropriate reasonable adjustments and SEND support having been considered or implemented, and where evidence indicates that school attendance is not currently possible. The local authority will not delay decisions while awaiting a formal diagnosis or specialist input. Where medical evidence is not immediately available, other relevant professional evidence (for example from school staff, Educational Psychology, CAMHS, Occupational Therapy or equivalent services) will be considered. In line with LGSCO Supporting children out of school (October 2025) guidance, the authority will: act promptly; consider requests from parents as well as schools; seek evidence early while recognising potential barriers; clearly record decisions about whether Section 19 applies; communicate decisions in plain English (including routes to challenge) and ensure effective multi-agency information-sharing to determine accessibility and appropriate provision.
- **Section 444 of the Education Act 1996:** This outlines that parents may be prosecuted if they fail to ensure their child or young person's regular attendance at school without a legitimate reason. While legal action may be taken in cases of persistent absence, the focus should always be on working collaboratively with the family to address the underlying issues.

- **The Children and Families Act 2014:** This legislation, alongside the **Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (2015)**, places specific obligations on local authorities, health services, and schools to support children with special educational needs and disabilities. Many children with EBSA may have underlying SEN, including mental health conditions such as anxiety, which must be taken into account when assessing their needs and planning support.
- **Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018):** Schools and local authorities also have safeguarding responsibilities. EBSA may sometimes be linked to underlying safeguarding concerns, including issues such as emotional abuse, neglect, or domestic violence. In such cases, schools must follow statutory safeguarding guidance, including involving children's social care where necessary. Local safeguarding procedures should be followed to protect the welfare of the child or young person.

Attendance Law and Guidance

Ensuring regular school attendance is a shared responsibility between parents, schools, and local authorities. In cases of EBSA, legal action is usually considered a last resort, with the primary emphasis placed on supportive intervention. However, the law does provide clear frameworks for addressing attendance issues, including:

- **The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006:** These regulations stipulate the criteria for pupil registration and absence, defining what constitutes authorised and unauthorised absence. Schools must keep accurate attendance records and distinguish between different forms of absence, including EBSA, to ensure appropriate action is taken.
- **Department for Education (DfE) – Working Together to Improve School Attendance (2022):** This guidance outlines best practices for schools, local authorities, and multi-agency partners in promoting regular school attendance and reducing persistent absence. It emphasises the importance of early intervention, multi-agency collaboration, and tailored support to meet the individual needs of pupils who are at risk of becoming persistently absent, including those affected by EBSA.
- **Parental Responsibility Measures for School Attendance and Behaviour (2015):** This statutory guidance sets out a range of measures available to local authorities and schools to improve school attendance. These include parenting contracts, penalty notices, and, in extreme cases, prosecution. However, for children experiencing EBSA, the focus should remain on support and intervention rather than punitive measures.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

For many children experiencing EBSA, there may be underlying special educational needs or mental health conditions contributing to their school avoidance. In such cases, schools and local authorities have additional legal responsibilities to assess and provide appropriate support under the **Children and Families Act 2014** and the **SEND Code of Practice (2015)**.

Key aspects include:

- **Reasonable Adjustments:** Schools are legally required to make reasonable adjustments for children with disabilities, including those with anxiety disorders or other mental health conditions. This may involve changes to the school environment, timetable adjustments, or providing access to therapeutic support. These adjustments must be individualised and based on the child or young person's specific needs.
- **SEND Support in Schools:** For children with additional needs but without an EHC plan, schools should provide high-quality SEND support. This includes early identification, the implementation of appropriate interventions, and regular reviews of the child or young person's progress using the **Assess, Plan, Do, Review framework** outlined in the SEND Code of Practice.
- **Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans:** Some children and young people who are experiencing EBSA may require an Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment to identify their specific needs and secure additional resources and support. An EHC plan can provide a coordinated approach to meeting the child or young person's education, health, and social care needs in circumstances where a young person's needs supersede the support typically provided through the graduated approach.

Mental Health and Wellbeing in Schools

The legal framework around mental health and wellbeing has become increasingly relevant in the context of EBSA. The Children and Families Act 2014 places a duty on local authorities to promote the welfare of children, and this includes mental health support for children with emotional difficulties. Schools and local authorities must be aware of their legal obligations related to mental health, particularly in light of the following policies:

- **Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: A Green Paper (2017):** This government initiative aims to improve mental health support in schools by introducing designated mental health leads and school-based mental health teams. Schools should work with these teams to identify children at risk of EBSA and offer timely intervention.
- **Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools (2018):** This guidance provides schools with strategies to promote positive mental health, including how to support children with anxiety and other mental health difficulties. It encourages schools to adopt a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing, which is crucial for preventing and addressing EBSA.

Safeguarding and Child Protection

There may be cases where EBSA is linked to safeguarding concerns, such as neglect, emotional abuse, or exposure to domestic violence. In these instances, it is essential that schools and local authorities follow statutory safeguarding procedures as set out in **Keeping Children Safe in Education (2023)** and **Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)**.

Schools have a duty to identify potential safeguarding concerns early and involve social care where appropriate. Safeguarding concerns must always take precedence, and where there are risks to the child or young person's welfare, a referral to children's social care should be made.



[Integrated Front Door \(previously MASH\) | Bedford Local Offer](#)

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on schools and local authorities to prevent discrimination against pupils with protected characteristics, including disability. Children with anxiety disorders, autism, or other mental health difficulties may qualify as having a disability under this Act.

Schools are required to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that these pupils are not disadvantaged in accessing education. Failure to make such adjustments could be deemed discriminatory.

Training and Capacity Building

The successful management of the Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA) requires school staff, support agencies, and families to be equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding. Training and capacity building are essential to ensure that all involved parties can effectively identify, understand, and address the emotional, psychological and social factors that contribute to school avoidance. Developing knowledge in this area will improve the quality of interventions and ensure consistent support for children and young people experiencing EBSA.

Training for School Staff

School staff play a frontline role in identifying and supporting pupils with EBSA. Building their capacity to recognise the signs of school avoidance, understand its underlying causes, and implement appropriate interventions is critical to reducing the prevalence of EBSA and ensuring successful reintegration into education.

1. Raising Awareness:

- All school staff, including teachers, teaching assistants, pastoral staff, and senior leadership, should be trained to recognise early signs of EBSA. This includes understanding the ‘push and pull factors’ that influence school avoidance, such as anxiety, bullying, unmet special educational needs, and family issues (see appendix 2).
- Training should also cover the emotional and psychological aspects of EBSA, with a focus on recognising the link between mental health and school attendance.

2. Understanding the EBSA Framework:

- Staff should be trained in the Assess, Plan, Do, Review (APDR) framework, ensuring they can develop, implement, and monitor individualised support plans for pupils with EBSA. This includes understanding how to work collaboratively with other professionals, parents, and the pupil to create a flexible, responsive support system.
- Training should also highlight the importance of reasonable adjustments in the school environment to reduce anxiety triggers and support reintegration, such as providing safe spaces, managing transitions, and offering personalised timetables.

3. Pastoral and Mental Health Training:

- Staff involved in pastoral care and mental health support, such as SENCOs, school counsellors, and safeguarding leads, should receive more in-depth training in specific interventions for EBSA. This may include training in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques, de-escalation strategies, or trauma-informed approaches.
- Schools should provide continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities in areas such as child and adolescent mental health, attachment theory, and resilience-building strategies.

4. Working with Families:

- Staff should receive training on how to engage and work effectively with families of children experiencing EBSA. This includes understanding the importance of building trust, offering practical advice, and involving parents in the development and review of support plans.

Training for Support Agencies

Support agencies, including Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), educational psychology services, and Early Help, play a key role in supporting schools and families. Ensuring that professionals in these agencies are equipped with up-to-date knowledge and skills around EBSA is critical to effective multi-agency collaboration.

1. Specialist Knowledge:

- Professionals within support agencies should have specialist knowledge of EBSA, including its causes, psychological impacts, and evidence-based interventions. This may involve training in anxiety management, family therapy, and school reintegration strategies.
- It is essential that support agencies are aware of the latest guidance and research on EBSA, particularly regarding mental health interventions and SEND support.

2. Multi-Agency Collaboration:

- Training should emphasise the importance of working collaboratively with schools and families to develop integrated support plans. This includes training in information-sharing protocols, joint working strategies, and clear communication with all stakeholders.
- Agencies should understand how to apply the APDR model within a multi-agency context, ensuring that interventions are reviewed and adjusted regularly in collaboration with schools and families.

3. Support for Schools:

- Agencies such as educational psychology services and CAMHS should be trained to provide schools with the appropriate advice and resources to manage EBSA cases effectively. This includes offering consultations, assessments, and guidance on therapeutic interventions.

Training for Parents and Families

Parents and families are vital in helping children with Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA). They need to understand the factors contributing to their child or young person's non-attendance and learn strategies to support their child or young person's return to education. Bedford Borough's Children's Services offer a range of evidence-based interventions to empower parents, including Triple P Fearless, a parent-led Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) programme delivered by Child Wellbeing Practitioners (CWP), and other parental support interventions. These programmes provide valuable tools to help parents manage their child or young person's anxiety and emotional wellbeing, fostering collaboration between home, school, and support agencies.



[*Training round up for parents/carers | Bedford Local Offer*](#)

Understanding EBSA:

Parents are provided with training and information on the root causes of EBSA, including emotional, psychological, and environmental factors. This helps them gain a clearer understanding of their child or young person's behaviour and reinforces the importance of seeking early support.

Managing Anxiety and Emotional Wellbeing:

Interventions such as Triple P Fearless offer practical strategies for parents to manage their child or young person's anxiety and build resilience. Training may include techniques like relaxation exercises, managing transitions, and establishing positive routines. Parents are also encouraged to prioritise self-care, as supporting a child or young person with EBSA can be emotionally challenging.

Collaborating with Schools and Agencies:

Guidance is provided to help parents work effectively with schools and other support agencies, understanding processes such as Assess, Plan, Do, Review (APDR). Building open communication and trust between parents and professionals is essential for ensuring that the child or young person's support is consistent and responsive to their needs.

Parent Support Groups:

Bedford Borough also offers opportunities for parents to connect through support groups and workshops. These forums allow parents to share experiences, strategies, and resources, reducing isolation and fostering peer-to-peer support, creating a community for families facing similar challenges with EBSA.

Conclusion

Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA) is a complex issue that requires a coordinated, multi-agency approach to ensure that children and young people receive the support they need to overcome barriers to attending school. As we have explored throughout this guidance, addressing EBSA effectively involves early identification, understanding the root causes, implementing personalised interventions, and working closely with all stakeholders, including schools, support agencies, and families.

Key Principles

The following key principles underpin an effective approach to managing EBSA:

1. Early Identification and Intervention:

Spotting the early signs of EBSA, such as increased anxiety, changes in attendance patterns, or emotional distress, is crucial. Timely intervention, supported by a whole-school approach, can prevent the issue from escalating and enable the young person to receive the help they need before school avoidance becomes entrenched.

2. Holistic, Child-Centred Support:

Each case of EBSA is unique, requiring a personalised and flexible approach. A holistic understanding of the child or young person's emotional, psychological, and social context is essential. Solutions should be tailored to the individual, with the child or young person's voice at the centre of decision-making processes. Involving the child or young person in creating their own support plan fosters empowerment and ownership of their progress.

3. Family Engagement:

The role of parents and families in supporting a child or young person with EBSA cannot be overstated. Families are often key to understanding the root causes of school avoidance and are vital partners in implementing strategies to overcome it. Engaging parents in the support process ensures that they can contribute to and reinforce interventions at home.

4. Multi-Agency Collaboration:

Collaboration between schools, local authority services, and external agencies such as CAMHS, educational psychology, and social care is critical. Working together ensures that interventions are comprehensive, consistent, and aligned with the child or young person's needs. Information sharing, joint working, and regular reviews between professionals contribute to more effective support.

5. Creating an Inclusive School Environment:

Schools play a pivotal role in both the prevention and resolution of EBSA. Building a school environment that promotes emotional wellbeing, inclusivity, and a sense of belonging is critical. Adjustments in school practices, such as flexible timetables, safe spaces, and mental health support, can make a significant difference in encouraging school attendance.

6. Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation:

Progress in EBSA cases must be regularly reviewed to ensure that interventions are effective and adapt to any changing needs. The use of the Assess, Plan, Do, Review (APDR) cycle provides a structured approach to monitoring the child or young person's development, enabling timely adjustments to support plans. Continuous feedback from children, families, and professionals is essential for improving strategies over time.

A Collective Responsibility

EBSA is not just a challenge for individual schools or families; it is a collective responsibility that requires input and commitment from all sectors involved in supporting young people.

Bedford Borough Council is committed to providing guidance, resources, and leadership to ensure that the needs of children with EBSA are met. However, it is through strong partnerships—between schools, support services, parents, and the wider community—that we can achieve the best outcomes for these young people.

By fostering a collaborative, supportive approach that values the emotional wellbeing of children and young people, we can work together to reduce school avoidance and promote successful, long-term reintegration into education.

As part of an ongoing commitment to addressing EBSA, Bedford Borough Council encourages schools and support agencies to:

- Embed the practices outlined in this guidance into their daily operations and review their existing policies to ensure they are responsive to the needs of children with EBSA.
- Engage in regular training and professional development to build the capacity of staff to manage EBSA effectively.
- Strengthen multi-agency partnerships, ensuring that communication and collaboration between services are prioritised.
- Involve families in every step of the process, providing them with the support, resources, and guidance they need to help their child or young person return to education.
- Reflect on and share good practice, learning from successful interventions and case studies to continuously improve the support provided to children and young people experiencing EBSA.

By committing to these actions, Bedford Borough Council and its partners can create a comprehensive, compassionate approach to supporting young people with EBSA, ensuring that they can overcome their challenges and fulfil their potential within the education system.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following for their contributions to this guidance document and for their continued support to the children and families of Bedford Borough:

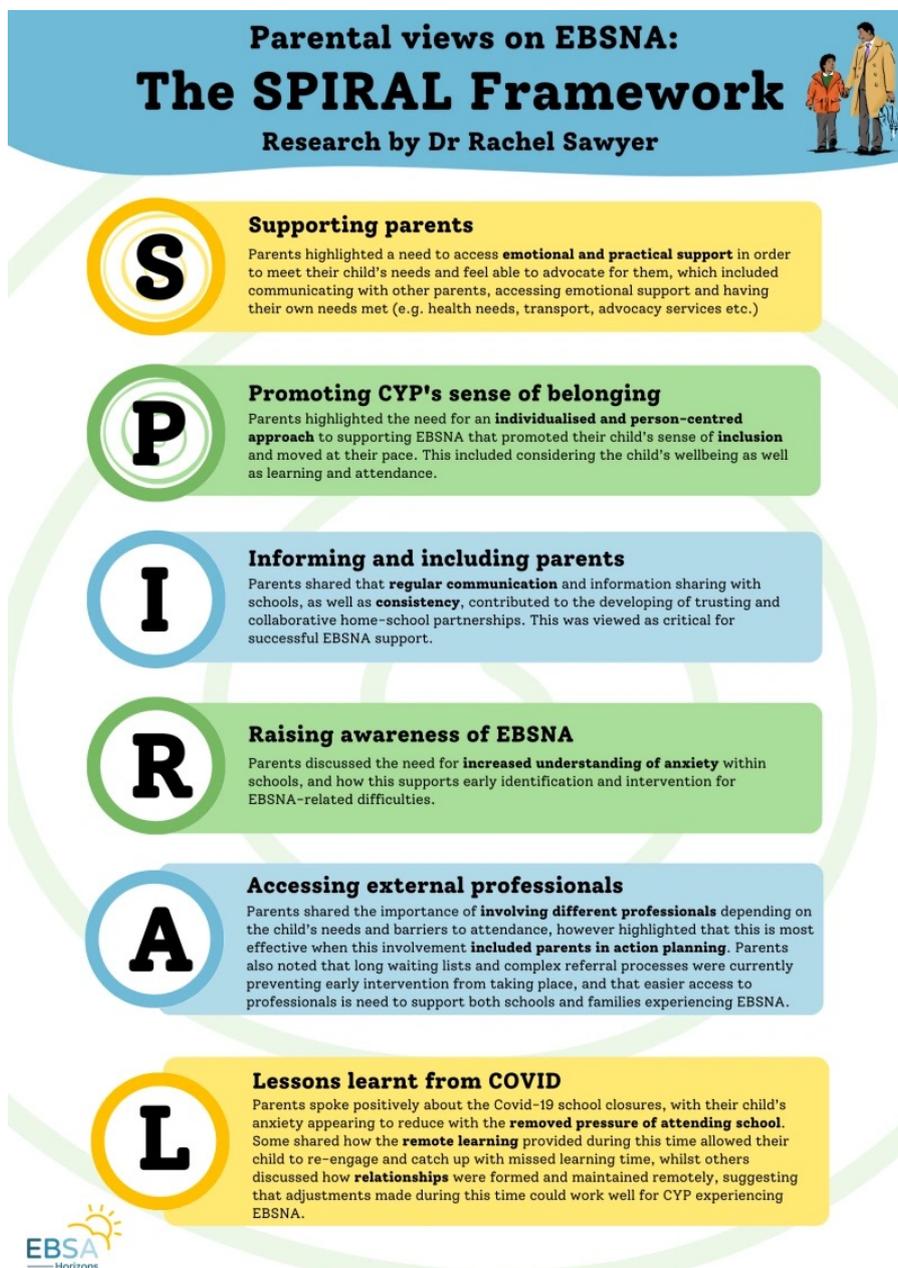
- Educational Psychology Team
- Early Help
- Autism Spectrum Advisory Team
- Bedford Parent Carer Forum and the parents of Bedford Borough
- RISE Space
- Bedford Academy
- CAMHS
- CHUMS
- BILTT
- Children and young people of Bedford Borough who offered their views and perspectives

Appendices

The appendices provide additional resources, templates, and tools to support the implementation of the guidance on Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA). These resources are designed to help schools, support agencies, and families in Bedford Borough Council work together effectively to address EBSA and ensure that children and young people receive the support they need.

Appendix 1: SPIRAL Framework

SPIRAL Framework with prompts (Dr Rachel Sawyer)

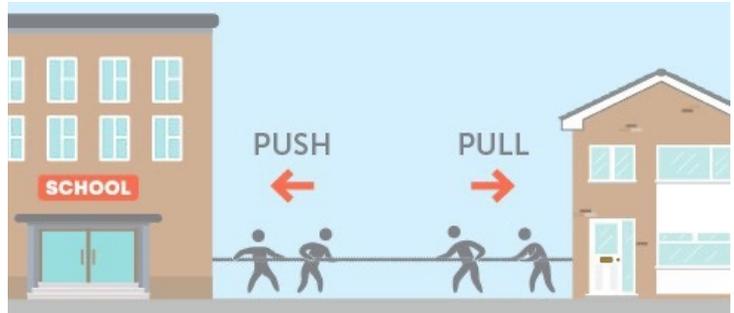


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Appendix 2: Understanding Push and Pull Factors in EBSA

To address EBSA effectively, schools must understand the complex interplay of push and pull factors that contribute to a child or young person's avoidance of school.

These factors are essential in designing interventions that address the root causes of emotional distress and support the child or young person's re-engagement with school. School staff can map out these factors with a young person to identify ways to support regular attendance and increase emotional resilience.



1. Push Factors

These are negative aspects of the school environment or the child or young person's experience at school that drive them away from attending. Common push factors include:

- **Bullying or peer conflict:** Fear of bullying or social difficulties can lead to school avoidance.
- **Academic pressure:** The child or young person may feel overwhelmed by schoolwork, fear of failure, or a lack of support with learning difficulties.
- **Negative relationships with staff:** Poor relationships with teachers or other staff can contribute to feelings of alienation.
- **Unmet special educational needs:** If the school environment is not adapted to meet a child or young person's learning or emotional needs, they may feel anxious or unsafe attending.

2. Pull Factors

These are external factors that make staying away from school more attractive or comforting than attending. Pull factors often originate outside the school environment but reinforce avoidance behaviours. Common pull factors include:

- **Separation anxiety:** A strong emotional attachment to parents or carers can make leaving home for school distressing.
- **Home comforts:** The child or young person may find it more comforting or safe to stay at home, particularly if they have anxiety or mental health issues.
- **Engagement in non-school activities:** The child or young person may prefer activities at home, such as gaming or social media, over the structured school day.

Effective interventions should focus on reducing push factors that make school attendance difficult while also addressing the pull factors that reinforce school avoidance. For example, improving the school environment or providing therapeutic support can alleviate push factors, while gradual reintegration plans can help reduce the appeal of staying at home.

Appendix 3: Assess, Plan, Do, Review (APDR)

This framework should be used by schools and support agencies as part of the Assess, Plan, Do, Review process to support students experiencing EBSA. It is designed to guide professionals through each stage of the intervention cycle, ensuring that support is regularly monitored and adjusted as needed.

Stage	Action	Details
Assess	Gather information on the student's needs and experiences.	Use attendance data, conversations with the student and family, and input from professionals.
Plan	Develop a personalised support plan based on identified needs.	Outline specific strategies, interventions, and reasonable adjustments.
Do	Implement the support plan, ensuring that interventions are delivered consistently.	This may involve adjustments to timetables, mental health support, and academic accommodations.
Review	Evaluate the effectiveness of the plan and make any necessary adjustments.	Review progress regularly with the student, family, and professionals to ensure ongoing support.

Appendix 4: Early Warning Signs Checklist

The following can be used by schools as a checklist to identify early signs of EBSA, which may indicate that a student is struggling emotionally and at risk of school avoidance.

Category	Possible Early Signs
Emotional Wellbeing	Increased anxiety, emotional outbursts, withdrawal from peers, avoidance of social interactions.
Attendance Patterns	Regular lateness, frequent unexplained absences, reluctance to attend school after weekends or holidays.
Academic Performance	Sudden drop in academic performance, incomplete work, avoidance of certain subjects or lessons.
Health Complaints	Frequent complaints of physical symptoms (e.g., headaches, stomach aches) without a medical cause.
Family Context	Recent family changes (e.g., divorce, bereavement), tension between home and school.

Appendix 5: Support Services Directory

This appendix provides a list of key support services available in Bedford Borough and beyond to help children and families experiencing EBSA. It includes contact details and information about each service's role in supporting young people with school avoidance.

Local Services

Service	Role	Contact Details
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)	Offers mental health assessments, therapy, and interventions for young people.	elft.spoebedfordshire@nhs.net
Educational Psychology Service	Provides assessments, consultations, and advice on learning, behaviour, and emotional wellbeing.	school.support@bedford.gov.uk
Autism Spectrum Advisory Teachers	Supports children and young people in primary and secondary schools who either have an autism diagnosis or whose behaviours can be attributed to social communication differences. This can be through consultation, assessment, or direct work.	school.support@bedford.gov.uk
Early Help Service	Provides support to families facing difficulties, including school attendance issues. Child Wellbeing Practitioners work within Early Help to support mild to moderate anxiety.	earlyhelphub@bedford.gov.uk
Social Care	Offers support to vulnerable children and families where safeguarding concerns are present.	ifdinformation@bedford.gov.uk

National Services

Resource	Description	Link
Young Minds	A charity offering information and support for parents on child and adolescent mental health.	www.youngminds.org.uk
National Autistic Society	Information and advice for parents of children with autism, including school-related anxiety.	www.autism.org.uk
Anxiety UK	Provides advice and support for managing anxiety in children and young people.	www.anxietyuk.org.uk
Family Lives	A charity offering support and advice for families facing parenting and school-related challenges.	www.familylives.org.uk
Spectrum Gaming	A UK-based autistic-led charity providing safe, supportive online and offline communities for autistic young people to connect, build friendships and explore their interests through shared gaming experiences, aiming to foster self-acceptance and advocacy.	www.spectrumgaming.net
Barriers to Education	Provides a range of information and resources underpinned by the WARMTH framework, aiming to address barriers to education so young people can thrive.	www.barrierstoeducation.co.uk

Appendix 6: Case Study: Emma's Journey through EBSA

Emma is a 14-year-old student who began avoiding school after struggling with anxiety related to social interactions and academic pressure. Her absences became more frequent, and eventually, she refused to attend school altogether.

Step 1: Assess

The school pastoral team and SENCO met with Emma and her family to explore the underlying causes of her anxiety. They gathered information from her teachers, school records, and Emma herself to build a comprehensive picture of her needs.

Step 2: Plan

An individualised support plan was developed, involving:

- A flexible timetable with reduced academic demands.
- Regular one-to-one sessions with the school counsellor.
- Small group activities to rebuild Emma's confidence in social situations.

Step 3: Do

The support plan was implemented with the involvement of CAMHS for additional mental health support. Emma gradually started attending school for shorter periods, with a focus on subjects she found less stressful.

Step 4: Review

Regular reviews took place with Emma, her family, and the professionals involved. Adjustments were made to her timetable and the level of support as her confidence grew.

Within six months, Emma was attending school regularly with a full timetable, although continued support was provided to manage ongoing anxiety.

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Notes

Finding out more

If you would like further copies, a large-print copy or information about us and our services, please telephone or write to us at our address below.

Për Informacion

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01234 718700



Early Help

Early Help and Intervention
Bedford Borough Council
Borough Hall, Cauldwell Street
Bedford MK42 9AP



EarlyHelpHub@bedford.gov.uk



[https://www.bedford.gov.uk/social-care-health-and-community/
children-young-people/help-for-families/early-help/](https://www.bedford.gov.uk/social-care-health-and-community/children-young-people/help-for-families/early-help/)