

Norton CEVC Primary School
Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) Policy

Learn Believe Achieve
Hand in hand with God and each other



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Statement of Intent

Norton CEVC Primary School recognises that regular attendance is essential for raising educational standards and for ensuring that all pupils fulfil their potential.

The school understands that there are instances when pupils who have mental health issues may find it difficult to attend their classes or the school altogether. We are committed to valuing, respecting and understanding pupils with emotionally based school avoider (EBSA), and will provide continuous, professional support to these pupils.

The main aims of this policy are:

- To provide all necessary and required support, details, information, etc., for pupils with EBSA.
- To ensure that staff are educated on mental health issues to encourage early identification and support.
- To create and foster a learning environment which is free from bullying and harassment.

Legal Framework

This policy has due regard to the following legislation including, but not limited to:

- Equality Act 2010
- Mental Health Act 1983, as amended in 2007

This policy also has due regard to the following guidance:

- DfE (2018) 'Mental health and behaviour in schools'

This policy is implemented in conjunction with the following policies:

- Attendance Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Positive Mental health and Wellbeing Policy
- Anti-bullying Policy

Roles and Responsibilities

The governing body is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the school community recognises EBSR as a serious mental health issue.
- Ensuring appropriate support measures are in place for pupils with EBSR.
- In liaison with the headteacher, determine the need for commissioned support.

The headteacher is responsible for:

- Establishing and communicating procedures for attendance monitoring.
- Ensuring that bullying incidents relating to pupils with EBSR are dealt with in the same manner as other bullying incidents.
- In liaison with the governing board, determine the need for commissioned support.

The mental health lead is responsible for:

- Overseeing the pastoral team.
- Liaising with external support, such as children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS).

ELSA Support is responsible for:

- Determining and documenting pupils' emotional triggers.
- Liaising with parents of pupils with EBSA on a regular basis.
- Supporting pupils during the school day
- Working together with staff, parent and child

Parents are responsible for:

- Working with the school to ensure the best educational outcomes for their child.

Definitions

The discourse and terminology surrounding school non-attendance has continually been evolving in response to emerging literature and research findings. Previous terms include 'school phobia', 'school refusal', 'school withdrawal' and 'truancy' (Kearney, 2008, Pellegrini, 2007). More recent definitions used within practice include 'emotionally based school avoidance' as coined by West Sussex Educational Psychology (2018). See definitions below:

Truancy: 'generally refers to unexcused, illegal, surreptitious absences, non-anxiety based absenteeism, absenteeism linked to lack of parental knowledge about the behaviour, absenteeism linked to delinquency or academic problems, or absenteeism linked to social conditions such as homelessness or poverty' (Kearney, 2008, p.452)

School phobia: 'generally refers to fear based absenteeism, but youths are rarely phobic of school and so this term has been deemphasized in recent research literature (Hanna, Fischer, & Fluent, 2006; Suveg, Aschenbrand, and Kendall, 2005)' (Kearney, 2008, p.453).

School withdrawal: where parents deliberately keep a child home from school for economic purposes, to conceal maltreatment, to prevent abduction from an estranged spouse, to protect a child from perceived school-based threat, to assist a parent with psychopathology, or for other reasons (Kearney, Lemos and Silverman, 2004)' (Kearney, 2008, p.452)

School refusal: 'generally refers to anxiety-based absenteeism, often from separation, generalized, or social anxiety' (Kearney, 2008, p.452). School refusal is a psychosocial phenomenon defined by a prolonged absence from school, with parents'/carers' knowledge, and the prospect of going to school causing severe distress (Maynard et al, 2015, Berg, 1997). Kearney and Silverman (1993) proposed school refusal occurs when children experience lowered anxiety through avoidance of the school setting, which results in negative reinforcement.

Emotionally based school avoidance: a 'broad umbrella term used to describe a group of children and young people who have severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences from school' (West Sussex Guidance, 2018, p.3).

What is emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA)?

For the purpose of this policy, EBSA is the manifestation of internal problems, such as fear, anxiety, misery, and feeling ill without obvious cause, which affects a pupil's willingness to leave their home and/or attend an educational environment.

Pupils who have experienced emotional trauma may display some signs of EBSA. The school recognises this link and supports pupils experiencing emotional trauma to attend school regularly.

EBSA differs from truancy such that there are underlying emotional and anxiety issues which cause the individual to be absent from school. Contrastively, truant behaviour displays anti-social behaviour and an unwillingness to learn.

It is important that schools are able to identify instances of EBSA and can differentiate this from truancy; however, three potential overlaps between EBSA and truancy have been identified for reasons of non-attendance. These include:

- Problems with specific teachers or lessons.
- Complexity of primary and secondary education.
- Being bullied and in isolation.

Though some instances of EBSA are not always clearly identifiable, it can be commonly recognised by:

- A pattern of absence from school which may lead to prolonged absence.
- Anxiety or fear which is presented as a reluctance to attend school.
- Common complaints of feeling unwell and requesting to leave the classroom.
- Challenging behaviours and social isolation.
- Expressing a desire to attend classes but not doing so.
- Under-achievement of learning potential.
- Physical indicators, e.g. sweating, sickness, rapid weight loss or gain.

Whole School Approaches to Mental Health and Wellbeing

At Norton CEVC Primary School we aim to create an environment and policies that adopt whole school, evidence-based approaches to promote wellness enhancing, resilient environments and reduce the likelihood of EBSA concerns emerging.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) advises that school settings should be supported to adopt a comprehensive 'whole school' approach to promoting the social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people. Such an approach moves beyond teaching and learning to be incorporated in all aspects of school life. Mental wellbeing is not simply the absence of mental illness but is a broader indicator of social, emotional and physical wellness. The Anna Freud Centre defines mental wellbeing as 'children and young people's happiness, life satisfaction and positive functioning'.

Public Health England (2015) highlighted eight principles to promoting whole school approaches to emotional health and well-being, and builds on the mental health Wheel of Resilience.



Leadership and Management

Support from the senior leadership team is essential to ensuring the efforts to promote emotional health and well-being are accepted and embedded. NICE recommends that head teachers, governors and teachers should demonstrate a commitment to the social and emotional wellbeing of young people. They should provide leadership in this area by ensuring social and emotional wellbeing features within improvement plans, policies, systems and activities. These should all be monitored and evaluated.

School leaders have an important role in advocating for the needs of children and learners within the context of wider local strategic planning.

School Ethos and Environment

The physical, social and emotional environment in which staff and CYP spend a high proportion of each weekday has been shown to affect their physical, emotional and mental health and wellbeing as well as impacting on attainment.

Relationships between staff and CYP, and between CYP are critical in promoting CYP wellbeing and in helping to engender a sense of belonging.

NICE guidance recommends that Primary education providers:

- create an ethos and conditions that support positive behaviours for learning and for successful relationships

- provide an emotionally secure and safe environment that prevents any form of bullying or violence

Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

School-based programmes of social and emotional learning have the potential to help children acquire the skills they need to make good academic progress as well as benefit children's health and wellbeing. Children are more likely to engage in lessons that focus on emotional wellbeing if they are of practical application and relevant to them.

Teaching of EBSA and mental health issues will be incorporated into PSHE lessons to promote an accepting, understanding attitude from other pupils, and to prevent any bullying incidents.

The school will educate pupils about EBSA, in order to give them the confidence to approach a member of staff and request support.

NICE guidance recommends that:

Primary education providers:

- include a curriculum that integrates the development of social and emotional skills within all subject areas (these skills include problem-solving, coping, conflict management/ resolution and understanding and managing feelings)

Pupil's Voice

Involving children in decisions that impact on them can benefit their emotional health and wellbeing by helping them to feel part of the school and wider community and to have some control over their lives (sense of belonging and sense of mastery). At an individual level, benefits include helping children to gain belief in their own capabilities, including building their knowledge and skills to make healthy choice and developing their independence.

Staff Development, Health and Wellbeing

It is important for staff to access training to increase their knowledge of emotional wellbeing and to equip them to be able to identify mental health difficulties in their pupils. This includes being able to refer them to relevant support either within the school or from external services. Promoting staff health and wellbeing is also an integral principle of the whole school approach to emotional health and wellbeing.

As a school we staff training and support in how to develop children's social, emotional and psychological wellbeing. We also train and develop staff so that they have the knowledge, understanding and skills to deliver a curriculum that integrates the development of social and emotional skills within all subject areas effectively. The training includes how to manage behaviours and how to build successful relationships.

Staff are also trained to identify and assess the early signs of anxiety, emotional distress and behavioural problems among primary school children. They should also be able to assess whether a specialist should be involved and make an appropriate request.

Getting Help

Awareness, curiosity and recognition

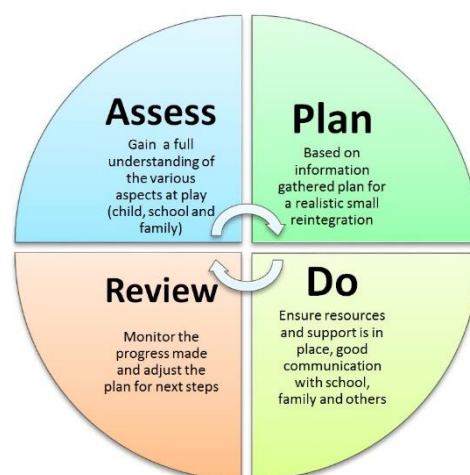
As a staff team, it is important that there is a shared understanding and awareness of EBSA indicators, so that pupils at risk of EBSA can be identified as early as possible so that effective support can be put in place. It may be that the child may present with few or many different indicators of EBSA. Please see table below which outlines some possible early indicators of EBSA (those you may notice before the child's patterns of behaviour become entrenched) and indicators of EBSA (those you may notice once the child's patterns of behaviour are more established).

Early indicators of EBSA	Indicators of EBSA
- Sporadic attendance and/or lateness - Parent reporting that the child does not want to come to school - Physical signs of stress believed to be linked to stress (e.g. stomach ache, sickness, headache) or complaining of feeling ill. - Behavioural changes or fluctuations e.g. interactions with others, reduced motivation and engagement in learning tasks	- Periods of prolonged absence - Persistent lateness - Parent/carer unable to support child to attend school - Identifiable patterns within non-school attendance e.g. specific days, subjects, staff members - Providing minor reasons for school absences - Child experiences anxiety in relation to home factors e.g. parental separation, divorce, conflict, loss, bereavement - Child displays greater reliance upon family members e.g. separation anxiety, increased proximity - Concerns around academic progress due to non-school attendance / missed education - Child displays increased anxiety in relation to their learning and/or poor self-concept as a learner - Low self-esteem and/or lack of confidence - Struggling in relation to peer relationships and/or social situations - Physical signs of stress believed to be linked to stress (e.g. stomach ache, sickness, headache) or complaining of feeling ill. - Displays of emotional dysregulation and/or distress

Where risks of emotionally based school avoidance are identified, it is important to gather further information from the child, families and school staff and put in place strategies to support them as soon as possible. Fast action can prevent emotionally based school avoidance from becoming entrenched and result in much better outcomes. At Norton CEVC Primary School we should follow the assess, plan, do and review cycles with the young person at the centre of the planning and interventions.

Assess: Information Gathering

Once there has been a difficulty identified there should be a prompt information gathering process to explore reasons for the difficulties. The main aims of this are to gather information regarding the various child, family



and school factors that may be contributing to the emotionally based school avoidance experienced by the child.

Working with the Child

Once it has been identified that a child is displaying indicators of EBSA, it is important that staff begin to gather further information regarding the child's thoughts, feelings and wishes so that any support or intervention can be tailored and personalised accordingly. Remember that any child currently avoiding school will become anxious when asked to discuss returning; they are managing their feelings of anxiety by employing avoidant behaviour, so any talk about going back will raise their anxiety as you are proposing taking away their coping mechanism. Always a good place to start is to acknowledge it will be difficult, but you would like to know how they think and feel. It is important that the adult working with them does not dismiss anxieties or worries.

This information gathering and then a proposed action will be carried out by the school's ELSA TA or Mental Health Lead. The action plan will be shared and agreed with child, school and parents. A template of the action plan can be found in Appendix 1

Working with Families

It is important that time is taken to build collaborative partnerships working together with families in the best interests of the young person. Families may find it difficult to talk about the concerns they have and the difficulties they experience in getting their child to school. During the initial meeting it is important to gather background information, establish the current situation and the family's views. There should be regular contact with families throughout the assess, plan, do and review cycles and schools should identify a key person to communicate with parents.

Working with school staff

It is essential that representatives from schools seek information from members of staff who work most closely with the child or young person. We all respond differently according to the environment, situations or task and with different people. Each member of staff may have valuable information to help identify triggers for anxiety and strategies the child responds positively to. In particular it is important to seek out the views of any members of staff the young person speaks positively about and any member of staff where relationships may be more difficult.

Key information to gather includes:

- The young person's strengths?
- What is going well?
- Any difficulties they have noticed
- Peer relationships
- Relationships with adults
- Response to academic tasks
- If they have witnessed emotional distress what did this look like and what caused it.
- What support or differentiation is put in place and how the young person responds to this?
- Any ideas for further support.

Formulating an Understanding of the Behaviour

Following the gathering of information from the child, family, school and other professionals involved it is important that 'sense' is made of it. In other words, an overview of the whole picture

and various factors are obtained and potential formulations or hypotheses regarding the behaviour are formed. These should then inform the intervention and return to school support plan. In order to understand the cause of EBSA, professionals must consider the child's underlying needs and how these may be contributing towards their presenting behaviour. It can be helpful to consider what the function of the behaviour is and what it may be communicating. Try to separate behaviours from feelings and underlying needs.

Intervention Planning and Delivery

Early Action

- Listen to the pupil
- Listen to the parent
- Listen to all staff who interact with the pupil
 - Look for patterns – Relationship awareness
 - *With peers*
 - *With staff*
 - *With parents(s)*
- Look for triggers – sensory awareness
 - Sights
 - Sounds
 - Textures
 - Space
 - Smells
- Look at the classroom environment
 - Is work too hard
 - Is progress being made
 - Are resources being provided to support learning such as visuals
 - Does pupil have a good understanding of tasks expected of them

It will be the expectation that all these communications will be recorded in a meeting with the class teacher, parent, pupil and the SENDCO or Headteacher. From this meeting an action plane will be devised and early intervention strategies will be discussed.

Early Intervention

- Safe person to talk to
- Safe place to go
- Signalling worries
- Break System
- Allowing calming activities
- Address issues arising from monitoring
- Specific interventions
- Meet and greet
- Preparing for change (social story support)
- Basic stress management techniques
- Refer to wellbeing principles

These interventions will be recorded in the action plan and time allocations will be identified.

Action Plans

After the information gathering and analysis process has occurred an Action plan should be co-produced with parents, the child and any other professionals involved with outcomes that focus on the child remaining in school or returning to school. The outcomes on the action plan should be individual to that child and therefore each plan will be different. The outcomes should be realistic and achievable with the aim of reintegrating the young person. The return should be gradual and graded. A part time timetable may be necessary as part of this process but this should always be temporary and not seen as a long term option as all children are entitled to a full time education. An optimistic approach should be taken, if the child fails to attend or carry out the actions as described in the action plan one day, start again the next day. It should be anticipated that there is likely to be more difficulties following a weekend, illness or school holiday.

At the start of the plan the child is likely to show more distress and everyone involved should be aware of this and work together to agree firm, consistent approaches. A unified approach is recommended between all involved and any concerns should be communicated away from the child.

Getting More Help

When there has been limited or no progress in response to targeted intervention over time, following the plan, do, review process, it is advised to seek psychological support. The appropriate service to refer to depends upon the individual needs of the child.

Next Steps

- Review with all parties
- Make any further adjustments
- Review Again
- Consider referrals: CISS, GP, EWO
- PMHW Consultation Line

Increasing Support

- Part time timetable (agreed with parents)
- Bespoke package of support
- Activities in line with pupil's interest
- Sensory activities
- Use of outside space
- Alternative Provision Directory
- Keeping links with home open
- Alternative Tuition Service

Bullying Incidents

The school has zero tolerance for any bullying incidents towards pupils with EBSA.

Teachers have the power to discipline pupils who engage in misbehaviour inside or outside the school premises.

Any occurrence of bullying will be reported to a member of school staff, who will then issue disciplinary action against the pupil once they are on school premises.

These incidents will be dealt with following the process in our Anti-Bullying Policy.

Monitoring and Review

The headteacher, in conjunction with the ELSA TA and Senco, will review this policy every two years or unless any significant change is made to policy.

The next scheduled review date is October 2025

All members of staff are required to familiarise themselves with this policy as part of their induction programme.

EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL AVOIDANCE (EBSA)

INTRODUCTION

"School Refusal" is when a child or young person starts to miss school frequently because of vague illnesses or symptoms.

ESBA occurs when children are having severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors.

‘When stress exceeds support’

If this does not effect change or the young person is showing increased distress, either your GP, school or the MAT can refer to CAMHS.

SCHOOL REFUSAL CAN PRESENT FOR 2 MAIN REASONS

- Firstly, that the child or young person has a phobic reaction either to the general school situation or to a particular situation or thing within the school. Eg Friendships, pressure, exams, issues with a specific member of teaching staff.
- Secondly, where the child or young person displays a fear of attending school but the main source of the worry is leaving home or separating from family. Eg Separation anxiety, loss/bereavement, mental health.
- Pupil based factors Eg. Low self-confidence, fear of failure, emotional issues etc

Although, on the surface, the three appear distinct, a single cause of the young person's anxieties can be difficult to establish.

SCHOOL REFUSAL SYMPTOMS

- The symptoms the young person complains about are similar to those associated with worry (e.g. stomach aches, diarrhoea, nausea, headaches, fatigue, dizziness, vague and general aches and pains, etc).
- The child/young person shows extreme determination not to attend school, for example reluctance to get dressed, to leave the house or enter the school premises.
- The child/young person appears to be anxious or agitated on the mornings of school attendance.
- The child/young person may have difficulties settling to sleep on school nights.
- The symptoms appear to settle fairly quickly after getting into school.
- These symptoms are worse the night before starting a new school week, after school holidays, and are less obvious during weekends and holidays.
- A child/young person who has a genuine fear of attending school often wants to be on their own at home or outside of school.

THINK ABOUT YOURSELF

If you have displayed school refusal or separation anxiety yourself, it is important to separate your own feelings and experiences from those of the young person you are trying to help. While it can be useful to empathise with the strength of feelings that the young person may be having, your own experiences can sometimes inhibit you from helping them to the best of your ability.

Being aware of the need to be firm and encouraging in spite of your own feelings is important. If you realise that you may be over-identifying with the child's problem or family's dilemma, you may not be the right person to offer the most effective help and encouragement.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

In trying to understand why a child or young person may be displaying school refusal or truancy, ask yourself the following:

Could this be a specific fear or anxiety around a particular subject or activity that they feel they are failing in or likely to become embarrassed by, for example reading, maths, physical education? This is probably the easiest cause to tackle, but more often than not there are other anxieties involved.

Do they appear to be scared to leave their home or worried about separating from their family? In this situation, the parents are often very caring and protective of the young person. It is important to consider the attitudes of parents towards their non-attendance, for example; are the parents unable to be firm, are they anxious themselves, or are they accepting the young person's excuses too readily?

SIGNIFICANT LIFE CHANGES/STRESSORS

Consider whether there have been any significant life changes/stresses affecting the child/young person:

- Has there been significant loss or bereavement such as parental separation, the death of a close family member or friend, a change of school or move of house?
- Are they struggling academically in one or more of their subjects?
- Are they confident and socially integrated with strong friendships and alliances?
- Are they different from the majority of other young people (for example; from a different ethnic or religious group)?
- Do they have an obvious or hidden disability?
- Are they suffering from a physical illness?
- Could they be a victim of bullying, teasing or another form of abuse?

It is important to bear in mind that some physical illnesses can present vague and intermittent symptoms; therefore it is important to ensure that the child has a medical examination if there is any doubt about what is causing their symptoms.

WHAT CAN YOU DO AS A PARENT/CARER?

- Listen to the child or young person and find out if there is anything specific that is bothering them at school (e.g. exam stress or bullying). Remember that the young person may not be forthcoming with this information due to fear or embarrassment.
- If there are no genuine problems at school then school refusal/separation anxiety symptoms can be improved with firm and supportive encouragement to attend school every day.
- Keep a diary of the child or young person's reluctance to attend school or non-attendance at school and the type and frequency of their physical symptoms to determine if there are any patterns, or encourage the parents/carers to keep a diary.
- Sensitively talk to the young person about any worries they have either in school or at home.

- Have there been any significant changes or stressors in their life (e.g. bereavement or parental disharmony)?
- Try and resolve or help the young person to resolve any specific reasonable worries they have about home or attending school.
- Explain to them that you understand how upset they feel, but that experience tells us that this upset will settle fairly quickly if they attend school consistently and will get worse if they continue to avoid attending.
- Encourage support from their friends, for example get them to call for the young person on school days.
- Draw up a plan of gradual steps to reintegrate them to full time schooling with support. Support and encourage carers to be firm in their expectation that the young person will attend school. If appropriate, introduce a reward for attending school.
- Avoid sending the child home when they complain of feeling unwell before first getting a detailed description of their symptoms to check that the symptoms are genuine and not the result of anxiety. However, if they have non-anxiety symptoms, such as raised temperature, do send them home or seek medical advice.

Appendix 2

Child Questionnaire		
Emotionally Based School Avoidance		
Child:		Date:
	What makes it more likely that I will come to school?	What makes it less likely that I will come to school?
CHILD	How I would describe myself as a learner	How I would describe myself as a learner
	Things I like about school	Things that I don't like about school
	What I find easy	What I find hard
	What I am good at	What I am not so good at

FAMILY/HOME	Some good things about my family are	Sometimes I don't like leaving my family/home and coming to school because
	I would describe my family as	I would describe my family as
	How others might describe my family	I would describe my family as
	Things I miss about school when I am at home	When I stay at home I enjoy
	To help get me ready for school in the morning, I like to	Things I miss about home when I come to school
		People I miss at home when I come to school

PEERS	Other children at school make me feel	Other children at school make me feel
	People I enjoy spending time with at school	Activities and situations that I do not look forward to in school
	During breaktimes I like to	I don't like breaktimes when
	Social situations and activities that I look forward to in school	
SCHOOL	I would describe school as	I would describe school as
	Lessons I enjoy	Lessons that I do not enjoy

	Because	Because
	Things about school that I find difficult	Things about school that I enjoy
	When I think about school, I feel	When I think about school, I feel
	I would describe my teachers as	I would describe my teachers as
	Things that people do that helps me in school	Things that I feel worried about in school

Appendix Three

EBSA ACTION PLAN				
Name:		Year Group:		Date:
Key School Staff				
Other agencies involved				
Overview of Concerns				
The Action Plan should be co-produced with parents/carers, teaching staff and any other professionals involved, with the focus on a return to school. The outcomes should be realistic and achievable. A unified approach is recommended between all involved, however if the child fails to carry out the actions as described in the Action Plan one day, start again the next day.				
Description of concerning behaviour at home (parent)				
Action Plan for Home (Choose realistic and achievable goals)				
Evaluation of Action Plan for Home				
Description of behaviour at school (Teaching Staff)				

Action Plan for School (Choose realistic goals that are achievable for staff to help support the student)			
Evaluation of Action Plan for School			
What do we hope to see as a result of these Action Plans			
Review Date:			
Parent:		Child:	
Staff:	Staff:	Mrs Kirk:	Mrs Colman:

Appendix 4

Where to get information and support

For support on specific mental health needs

Anxiety UK www.anxietyuk.org.uk OCD UK www.ocduk.org

Depression Alliance www.depressoinalliance.org

Eating Disorders www.b-eat.co.uk and www.inourhands.com

National Self-Harm Network www.nshn.co.uk www.selfharm.co.uk

Suicidal thoughts Prevention of young suicide UK – PAPYRUS: www.papyrus-uk.org

For general information and support

www.youngminds.org.uk champions young people's mental health and wellbeing

www.mind.org.uk advice and support on mental health problems

www.minded.org.uk (e-learning)

www.time-to-change.org.uk tackles the stigma of mental health

www.rethink.org challenges attitudes towards mental health