Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Resource Pack for Co. Wexford

A collaboration between Wexford CYPSC, Barnardos, CAMHS, CFSN, FDYS, HSE, IPPN, NAPD, NEPS, SCP, TESS, WxCCC, WWETB & YNR

CYPSC

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES COMMITTEES

Wexford

www.wexfordcypsc.ie

Acknowledgements

This pack was created by an interagency steering group whose members have a shared interest in EBSA. With that interest comes a shared passion to improve outcomes for children, young people and families directly and indirectly affected by EBSA in Co. Wexford. The contribution of each and every member of the Steering Group is greatly appreciated. See P. 4 for a full list of our partners. This is the first step in the development of EBSA resources for Co. Wexford and we look forward to the implementation of the pack.

In developing this pack, we have built on the previous work of colleagues around the country. In particular, we are grateful to our colleagues in Wicklow CYPSC for their assistance and generosity in allowing us to build on their "Wicklow School Refusal Pack". We also learned from colleagues outside the jurisdiction and in particular, we acknowledge the work of West Sussex County Council and reference some of their resources throughout this pack.

At a Steering Group level, we were anxious that the voices of those directly impacted by EBSA would be heard in this pack. The input of the children, young people and parents/care-givers who contributed to the "EBSA Stories" section of this pack is acknowledged and appreciated. Thanks also to those who reviewed the pack at various points.

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This pack is available to view on the Wexford CYPSC website at;
www.wexfordcypsc.ie

Our Collaborative Partners

Barnardos

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)

Child & Family Support Network (CFSN)

Ferns Diocesan Youth Service (FDYS)

Health Service Executive (HSE)

Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN)

National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD)

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

School Completion Programme (SCP)

Tusla Education Support Service (TESS)

Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board (WWETB)

Wexford Children & Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC)

Wexford County Childcare Committee (WxCCC)

Youth New Ross (YNR)

Glossary of Terms

ACES: Adverse Childhood Experiences

ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder

CAMHS: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

CFSN: Child & Family Support Network

CYP: Children and Young People

CYPSC: Children and Young People's Services Committee

EBSA: Emotionally Based School Avoidance

ECCE: Early Childhood Care and Education Programme

ELC: Early Learning and Care

EWO: Education Welfare Officer

EWS: Education Welfare Service

HSCL: Home School Liaison Officer

IEWS: Integrated Education Welfare Service

IPCC: Irish Panel on Climate Change

NEPS: National Educational Psychological Service

NCS: National Childcare Scheme

SAC: School Age Childcare

SAD: Separation Anxiety Disorder

SCP: School Completion Programme

SENCO: Special Education Needs Co-ordinator

SET: Special Education Teacher

SNA: Special Needs Assistant

TESS: Tusla Education Support Service

Foreword

Origins of Wexford EBSA Pack

This Resource Pack has been compiled by a group of professionals in collaboration with schools all of whom are concerned about the issue of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) in Co. Wexford. When EBSA becomes entrenched, it can have negative impacts on children and young people (CYP) in terms of their mental health and wellbeing. It can also influence educational attainment and can limit future employment opportunities. The impact on families who are trying to support CYP to return to education can also be considerable.

This pack was developed to provide information and practical tools on how to address EBSA. It is informed by the experience of professionals who work to support children, including pre-schoolers and young people and their families who have been impacted by EBSA.

The information contained in this pack is supported by research and grounded in a theoretical framework. There is also a list of the literature reviewed in Appendix 9. To learn more about this see wexfordcypsc.ie

We have also placed our advice in the context of current world events. This EBSA Resource Pack references supports which can be found in County Wexford including supports for families when their children are in pre-school settings. It recognises the importance of early intervention and education. This pack is divided into sections specifically designed for young people, parents and professionals. You can read the pack in its entirety or navigate to the section that is most appropriate to you.

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EBSA or School Refusal?

Literature in relation to this topic often refers to the term "school refusal". This terminology is problematic as it implies that the young person has control over their school non-attendance. It over-simplifies the issue and fails to recognise the range of environmental factors that have an influence on a young person. Throughout this pack, the terms "Emotionally Based School Avoidance" or "EBSA" are used interchangeably as opposed to "school refusal", in acknowledgement of the complexity of EBSA.

On the advice of professionals who work with young people experiencing EBSA, we have included a section specific to Autistic CYP.

Key worker/Key member of staff

Parents/guardians are valued as primary educators of the child and have a pre-eminent role in promoting her/his wellbeing, learning and development. However, once a child is in an education setting, the development of responsive, sensitive, and reciprocal two-way relationships that are developed with school staff are often another cornerstone of a child's wellbeing. When a child is having difficulty attending school, they may benefit from being assigned a key member of staff to lead on the response from home and school and liaise with the child. Schools do not have EBSA specialist teachers. However, schools can, for a time, assign the duties of supporting the child to a named teacher, during a period of difficulty at school. This could be a class teacher, SET teacher, subject teacher, member of management, Home School Liaison teacher (in schools that have such a post), the schools Guidance Counsellor or Tutor/ Year Head at post primary level. Their job title isn't important. What is important is that they are committed to support the young person to attend school and to receive their education.

Autism or ASD?

There are increasingly differing views on the terminology to use when describing autism. Person-first language (i.e., a student with autism/on the autism spectrum) continues to be used by many organisations when referring to students with a diagnosed autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The term "spectrum" highlights that the presentation of autism can vary greatly from person to person. Some young people and adults indicate that they prefer to use the term "autistic" when describing themselves, as they believe this embraces their neurological difference (AsIAm, 2019). The term "autistic person" is used in this pack to reflect an understanding of autism as a neuro-developmental difference characterised by challenges or differences in social interaction, social communication, and patterns of restricted or repetitive behaviour.

Teachers and other professionals can acknowledge individual preference by asking parents and students their preferred term and applying this in their communication (Autism Good Practice Guidance, 2022).

Section 1: Introduction

Is EBSA 'new'?

You will often hear adults saying that in 'their' day, everyone just went to school and there was no school refusal or EBSA! There is evidence in the literature that this is not true. As long ago as 1932, Broadwin defined a special kind of truancy where the child wanted to go to school but was unable for emotional reasons. So EBSA isn't new. However, we do seem to have increased EBSA especially post the COVID-19 pandemic. The next section will look at some global/lifestyle events that might be influencing this rise in EBSA.

Setting the Scene-The impact of world events & lifestyle

We do not live in a bubble and, one way or another, our daily lives are affected by what is happening in the world at large, by media coverage of world events, and how these events impact on our daily lives. Over the past number of years, we have been living through the global Covid-19 pandemic. More recently, the war in Ukraine has captured our attention and the fallout from the conflict is beginning to have real implications for our country, our economy and our education system. As we move into the future, the global climate crisis looms on the horizon, and no doubt, there will be other crises to navigate. Events such as these are unsettling, upsetting and anxiety provoking. Changes in parenting style, the online world, technology addiction and increasingly busy lives create stress for us all. These layers of external factors may interact with pre-existing personal, familial, and/or school factors and lead to a child or young person presenting with EBSA.

The Covid-19 pandemic is of particular relevance to students with EBSA. Prior to school closures due to the pandemic, a number of students were already experiencing attendance difficulties. Some were at home. Some were on a reduced or reintegration timetable. Some were starting to display avoidance behaviour. EBSA behaviour can be maintained by periods of absence, due to the impact of isolation on relationships and friendships, or fear of being behind with schoolwork, decreased motivation to attend, and anxiety related to these factors.

Anecdotal evidence from those working in schools indicates that many students who presented with EBSA prior to the pandemic were happy about school closures. They were content to be at home with their families, safe in the knowledge that they did not have to go to school. As school closures continued, these students got used to being at home and it became their new routine. Some engaged well with online learning, while others did not. Over time however, lack of face-to-face contact with others in the school community led to feelings of isolation and a loss of skills as to how to interact socially with others. Despite school efforts, those with learning difficulties fell further behind with schoolwork and their awareness of the growing gap between themselves and their peers contributed

to their unease about returning to school. In addition, for some anxious students (and parents) there were fears about catching the virus and unease about wearing masks in school. In the context of children and young people with EBSA, these factors have served to increase their levels of anxiety and decrease their motivation to return to school even with supportive school systems in place.

The war in Ukraine has also impacted on some children. Talk and images of war are upsetting. They threaten our view of the world as a safe and predictable place. For children and young people, they can cause different reactions, with some more affected than others. Vulnerable groups may include children and young people of Ukrainian and Russian heritage as well as others who are seeking protection in Ireland (asylum seekers and refugees, displaced people), those who have experienced separation and loss; those with pre-existing risk factors; and finally those with additional needs. Students with EBSA could be considered in either of the last two categories. As many students with EBSA are anxious, the impact of this war, following swiftly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, may serve to further increase their sense of fear.

At a global level over the past number of years, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has been issuing repeated warnings about the threat of human-induced climate change. Talk and occurrence of catastrophic weather events and natural disasters has become more commonplace and frequent. Storm warnings can impact on education. Indeed many of these weather events have led to school closures.

Nationally, we now have lots of conversations about the cost of living "crisis". There has also been a change in parenting style in many families. Technology addiction is on the rise. All these events can have an impact on the ability of CYP to manage anxiety.

Mental Health and EBSA

Not wanting to attend school is not a mental health issue of itself and for many CYP, support from their parents and schools is enough to help them overcome their problems attending school. Nervousness or worries can be an issue for some CYP in relation to school attendance but this does not mean they have a mental illness and need input from a Consultant Psychiatrist. The CYP who is having problems managing their worries may require supports but this may be obtained from their home/schools/community services. Most of the time there is a reason in relation to non-attendance, therefore it is vital to explore with the child all areas of their life- this may be in the context of family circumstances; significant life events; learning difficulties; friendships/relationships; sensory needs; social and communication skills; hearing/sight issues; maturity. Exploring the reason for the young person's concerns/worries is vital, followed by the correct intervention. Also, ensure basic lifestyle habits are implemented by parent(s)/carer, such as:

- Sleep hygiene.
- Healthy balanced diet/Omega 3 supplements. Avoid caffeine.
- Exercise regularly.
- Take part in meaningful activity/ Limiting screen time.
- Family time- play board games/ games that require concentration- train the brain.
- Meditation- benefits to aid concentration skills.

How can adults support children and young people?

There are many aspects to a child's life, and while working with children, we all have one thing in common - the child is the main priority. Therefore, it is necessary for all to work collaboratively to ensure best outcomes for the child, empowering them, embracing differences, and fostering their uniqueness.

During difficult times, when children and young people's sense of safety is threatened, a secure and trusted relationship with key adults will help them to process and manage their thoughts and feelings. At a general level, adults can support children and young people during such times by using five key principles. These are the promotion of safety, calm, belonging and connectedness, self- and community-efficacy, and hope (Hobfoll et al., 2007).

At a practical level, parents/ guardians can support children and young people in the following ways:

- Model a sense of calm
- Tend to your own wellbeing needs
- Maintain routines
- Limit media exposure

- Monitor vulnerable groups
- Foster a sense of control-encourage students to think of small ways to help
- Give information in reassuring ways – children and young people will have different understandings of what is going on, and without the facts, they often imagine situations far worse than reality. They need factual, age-appropriate information. Let their questions and their age guide you as to how much information to provide. Very young children need brief, simple information and reassurance that they are safe and that the people they care about are safe. Older children may need help to separate reality from rumour and fantasy. Having the facts can help them feel a sense of control. They may also be concerned with their mortality, fairness and moral and/or ethical issues. Give them space and opportunity to discuss these in a supportive and safe way. Be aware of what you are saying if talking to other adults about the war in the company of children and young people.

Further Reading

See www.gov.ie/en/publication/48639-information-for-schools-ukraine/ for more advice, including:

Supporting the Wellbeing of Children from Ukraine in your School

The Response to Stress Information for School Staff Primary and Post Primary

Section 2: Background

What is EBSA?

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is 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 County Council, 2022).

What is reluctant attendance and school avoidance behaviour?

This refers to avoidance attending school or difficulties remaining in school for an entire day. It can result in a student missing school for lengthy periods of time or missing specific classes or particular times of the day. It can involve challenging behaviours in the morning as the child or young person attempts to miss school. This avoidance behaviour can range from mild sporadic difficulties with school attendance to severe and persistent difficulties that require collaboration with the family/ carers and multi-agency input (NEPS, 2020).

Why does EBSA happen?

There is no single cause for EBSA and there are likely to be various contributing factors for why a child may be finding it difficult to attend school. It is well recognised in the research literature that several complex and interlinked factors often underpins EBSA, including the child, the family and school environment (Baker &Bishop, 2015). Kearney and Spear (2012) found four main reasons for EBSA:

1. To *avoid* negative feelings provoked by school-related stimuli.

2. To *escape* from social aversion and evaluation, often to avoid being rejected or disliked.

3. To *gain attention* from significant others, e.g., parents.

4. To *seek tangible reinforcers outside of the school setting,* such as going shopping or playing computer games during school time.

According to this model, the avoidance of uncomfortable feelings or situations described in the first two points could be viewed as negatively reinforcing the EBSA, whereas in the second two points, the EBSA could be seen as positively reinforced by factors outside of school (Kearney & Spear, 2012).

Possible Causes of EBSA

The possible causes of EBSA are demonstrated in the diagram below. Each young person experiencing EBSA is a unique individual and may experience challenges under one or more of the headings below.

Figure 1: Possible Causes of EBSA

Family
Poor Parental Mental Health
(Christogoirgos & Glannakopolous. 2014)
Addiction/Substance Misuse
(Casas-Gil & Navarro-Guzman. 2002)
Parenting Style
(Reid. 2015)
Family Transitions
(Learnsheffield.co.uk, 2022)

Community
Anti-social Behaviour
(Johnson et al. 2016)
Criminality
(Soba. 2018)
Wealth & Social Status
(Luthar. 2003)
Increased Pressure to
Achieve Academically
(Vatterott. 2019)

CYP and EBSA

School
Lack of Knowledge of EBSA
(Jones et al. 2019)
Failure to Review Attendance Early
(Tusla. 2015)
Bullying
(Ochi et al. 2020)
Transitions
(Smith. 2017)

Individual
Confidence/self-esteem
Relationship with peers/staff
(Havik & Ingul. 2021)
Poor Emotional Literacy
(Finning et al. 2019)
Lack of Coping Skills
(O'Malley. 2015)
Mental Health Diagnosis
(Kawar et al. 2022)

What protective factors can prevent EBSA?

Just as there are risk factors for young people experiencing EBSA, there are also protective factors that prevent or reduce the possibility of EBSA occurring.

Sector	Essential Elements
Community	Safety of neighbourhood Availability/adequacy of health and other services Availability of jobs (Kearney, 2008; Maynard et al., 2015)
School	Trauma Informed: A trauma informed school recognises and responds to the signs, symptoms, and risks of trauma to better understand students who have had adverse childhood experiences (ACES) (Devenney & O Toole, 2021) Pastoral care teams (Best, 2014) Key adult (Gristy,2012; Bomber, 2008) Enforcement of anti-bullying strategies Collaboration with parents (Tusla, 2015)
Family	Development of parenting skills and understanding (Tremblay, 2015) Partnership with schools (Oostdam & Hooge, 2012) Participating in support groups for EBSA (Arky, 2021)
Individual	Confidence and self-esteem (Jami & Aqeel, 2016) Positive relationship with peers/staff (Gristy, 2012) Emotional Literacy: Having self-awareness, recognising your own feelings and how to manage them (Cook et al., 2017) Good level of Coping Skills (Freire et al., 2020)

How does EBSA start?

The following diagrams illustrate the thought process and cycles that can lead to a student's growing reluctance to attend school. This in turn can develop into total school avoidance if interventions do not break the cycle.

Figure 1: Possible Causes of EBSA

Behaviours
Refusal to get ready for school.
Refusal to attend school, leave the house, etc.
Avoidance of school related situations & people.
Crying, hiding, tantrums, etc.

Thoughts
Mammy is sick & might go to the hospital if I'm not here.
I'm safe at home.
I don't have to worry about not being able to do the work.
No one can laugh at me when I'm at home.

Feelings
Anxiety, fear, embarrassment, inferiority, depression, uncertainty, insecurity, isolation.

OR

Behaviours
Refusal to get ready for school.
Refusal to attend school, leave the house, etc.
Avoidance of school related situations & people.
Crying, hiding, tantrums, etc.

Thoughts
Everyone will be asking me why I haven't been at school.
I won't know the work
My friends won't want to hang out with me.

Feelings
Anxiety, fear, embarrassment, inferiority, depression, uncertainty, insecurity, isolation.

Source: Wicklow School Refusal Pack

Initial Signs of EBSA

- Frequent tearfulness/ distress/ pains in tummy or headaches on Sunday nights or Monday mornings
- Bedwetting/signs of distress/upset on Sunday nights at the thoughts of going back to school.
- Distress or saying they feel sick after a break (e.g., long weekend or school holidays)
- A pattern of the young person frequently asking the teacher to ring his/her parent from school/wanting to go home/saying that they are feeling sick.
- Young person being challenging/having tantrums at the mention of going to school, or before school in the morning.
- Prolonged difficulties (anxieties) for a young person when mixing with others (e.g., going outside to play with other children, going to after school activities, parties etc.)
- Pre-occupation with being organised for school – overly perfectionistic.
- A family stressor (e.g., parental separation or bereavement) can trigger some anxious behaviours/feelings about leaving home or leaving a parent in order to attend school. This is normal.

Adolescents may also show the following behaviours;

- Worry or fear related to school
- Sleeping difficulties and fatigue
- Change of mood, negativity towards school, subjects or teachers
- Increased self-consciousness
- Lack of engagement with school activities, outings, trips
- Poor sense of school belonging

(Extracted from Wicklow School Refusal Pack)

Further Reading

Christopher Kearney is a leading author in this area based in the USA. His books contain a lot of theory and practical ideas. *"Helping School Refusing Children and their Parents: A Guide for School-Based Professionals"* (2nd ed.) and *"When Children Refuse School"* are two of his most recent books.

Section 3: Information for Parents and Care Givers

If you are a parent reading this document, it is highly likely that your CYP or a CYP you know is having problems attending school or you may have been directed to this document for advice on supporting your child with starting preschool/primary school.

This section starts by explaining why schooling is important. Transitions advice is then outlined; how to talk to your child before they start in a setting and getting ready for the first day. Some tips are then provided for you as a parent to follow. You are your child's primary caregiver and first teacher after all.

Then there is a section on "What Should You Do If You Notice Signs of EBSA With Your Child". In this section, we have listed some questions to guide you when dealing with this issue and outline how your child's school can help you.

If your child is experiencing EBSA and if they are able, we advise that you consult Section 4 and complete some of the activities with your child. Remember that you can enlist other family members to help you with talking to your child and if necessary, bring them to school.

For many children nowadays preschool is your child's first experience of the education system and is a key transition phase. It is important to use this time to establish good habits that they will carry with them throughout their education journey.

Research shows that early childhood (birth-5yrs) is the most important time for child development. From the time a baby is born, the emotional and social attachment they develop with their primary carers (parents/guardians) is critical (Brazelton, 1992). During this phase, most children will begin to attend an Early Learning Service. There is a range of service types available. See Appendix 1 for more information on choosing an appropriate service for your child. Following on from this, children in Ireland enter the primary phase of schooling. During the primary school years (5-12) your child will develop core academic skills and will develop both socially and emotionally. During the post primary years your child will continue to develop academically, emotionally and socially.

Supporting Parents/Guardians to Make Successful Transitions to Early Learning Care and School Settings

Attending preschool and school settings offers many benefits to children. It can be a great place for children to interact with peers and learn valuable life lessons such as how to share, take turns, and follow rules. It can also prepare them academically for primary school, in relation to establishing routine and socialising. Going to preschool and primary school comes with some emotions however, for both the parent and the child. For a child, entering a new preschool or school environment filled with unfamiliar educators and children, can cause both anxiety and excitement. Parents might have mixed emotions about whether their child is ready for preschool/school.

Easing Your Child's Fears starting Pre-school and School

Spend time talking with your child about the new school year before it starts. In the months and weeks before preschool/start of primary school, gradually introduce your child to activities that often take place in a classroom/learning environment. A child who is used to scribbling with paper and crayons at home, for example, will find it comforting to discover the crayons and paper in the preschool classroom. Picking up their "rubbish" at home will prepare them for every education setting!

Attend story time in the library before entry to pre-school and/or over the summertime. This allows your child to begin mixing with others.

Visit the preschool classroom with your child a few times before school starts and attend the primary school's open night. This can ease concerns about this unfamiliar territory. Visiting is also a chance to meet your child's educator/teacher and ask questions about routines and common activities. You can introduce some of those routines and activities at home, so they become familiar.

At primary level while you're in the classroom, let your child explore and observe the class and choose whether to interact with other children. This helps familiarise children with the classroom and lets them explore the new toys/materials they will play with.

You can also ask how the educator handles the first tear-filled days. How will the first week be structured to make the transition smooth for your child?

While acknowledging the important step your child is taking and providing support, too much emphasis on the change could make any anxiety worse. Children notice their parents' nonverbal cues. When parents feel guilty or worried about leaving their child at pre-school/school, the child will probably sense that.

The calmer and more assured you are about your choice to send your child to preschool and school, the more confident your child will be.

Here are 6 tips for helping your child adjust to school settings

1. Prepare Yourself

The first step is to prepare yourself to leave your child at school whether its pre-school, primary or post primary. Children have a good sense of picking up on non-verbal cues such as stress or sadness. So, try to be calm and use an encouraging tone when you are talking to your child. You should be mentally prepared for your child's first day of pre-school. This will ease the transition for both.

Going into post primary school is a very different experience as a parent and there is a view that post primary schools are "scary" places compared to primary schools. Of course, there are new challenges in a new setting but there are lots of benefits to post primary school settings. New subjects, new friends and more frequent breaks are reported by CYP as being some of the positives. Some report liking the independence from their parents! Make sure you give them positive messages about post primary school.

2. Have a Fixed Routine

Children need to have a consistent routine. Make sure that your child goes to bed on time to be fresh and active the next morning. Moreover, create a consistent healthy morning routine as well, which should include having breakfast, reading a book on the way to school, saying hello to the educator/ teacher, and happily saying goodbye. Sometimes the child may get cranky in the morning and might even cry. Try to comfort your child and make them understand that everything will be alright. Do not yell or be harsh to your child at this point. As they get older it can be more difficult to have a routine. At this stage you might limit night-time routines to Sunday to Thursday nights (to be ready for school the next day) and allow more flexibility on Friday and Saturday nights. Management of phones and electronic device usage on school days will also positively impact on their experience of school.

3. Saying Goodbye

At preschool and primary level this is a very important tip that parents/guardians should do. It is essential to say goodbye to your child before leaving them at pre-school/primary, as it creates security knowing you will be back to collect them later. If you sneak out without saying goodbye, this will only make things worse as your child could feel abandoned or tricked. It will have a negative psychological effect, which you obviously don't want. At post- primary level the goodbye is still important! It conveys that message that you care about their education and want them to enjoy it.

4. Communicate with the Pre-School Educator/Teacher

This is a very useful tip. Talking to the educator/teacher always helps as you can familiarise them with your child's habits and needs. Educators/Teachers can be very accommodating and will pay extra attention to any special needs of your child. You should also encourage your child to talk to the

teacher to help ease any transition especially as they get older. Many schools have a tutor system. This is someone with whom your child can "check in".

5. Prepare Your CYP

It is always a good idea to encourage your child to read books before starting preschool/primary school. Parents/guardians should talk to their children about preschool before it even begins. Sometimes reading books about preschool also prepares children beforehand and they don't face much trouble adjusting to the school environment. You can also get your child to try a few interactive activities such as solving puzzles or colouring. As your child gets older you can support their development by encouraging independence. You can teach them how to cook a simple meal/manage their clothes.

6. Have Positive Interactions

You need to ask the right questions when talking to your child about school. For example, you can ask how the day went, what did they do today, did you make any new friends, or what made you smile today. These are all interactive and positive questions.

It is understandable that the change to and between educational settings can be difficult for some parents/guardians as well as some children. There is nothing to worry about though because sooner or later, your child will adjust to the routine.

What Should You Do If You Notice Signs of EBSA With Your CYP

The important thing to remember is that we all experience situations in life which are difficult. There will be "bumps" in the parenting journey and in your child's educational experience. These may be caused by very "obvious" reasons such as struggling with learning, feeling a teacher doesn't like them etc. Our job as parents is to support our children through these life issues. As a parent, don't think you are alone. Many children have difficulties at some time attending pre-school or school. This can range from the odd Monday morning to more severe difficulties. Remember attending school is good for children but not always easy! Providing the young person with a calm listening ear, and letting them know that you understand, but that they still need to attend school, can help them to get through a difficult period.

The following are some questions to help guide you at the early stages;

1. Have I set aside time to sit down and talk about this issue with my child?
2. Have I acknowledged their fears and concerns?
3. Have I let them know that I understand? Have I checked what the issues might be. Try not to jump to conclusions or ask leading questions.
4. Have I explained that difficulties happen in life and explained how we cope with them?
5. Have I developed a plan with my child?
6. Anticipate that this plan will probably be met with opposition by your child. Be prepared for this. Be reassuring and praise your child's efforts. A sample plan can be found in Appendix 1.
7. What reasons might there be for my child not wanting to go to school/stay at home? Some problems in implementing the plan can be expected. Some challenges will be met along the way, such as after school holidays or after weekends. If your child misses pre-school or school, don't be disheartened. Return to the plan.

Next Steps

- Inform the education setting that there is a problem as soon as you feel that you need help. This is important as early intervention will prevent the behaviour associated with EBSA becoming entrenched. It will also help you to establish if there is an issue in school causing the problems. If so, this can be worked on. If there is nothing obvious but the child still feels anxious, then you will need to support them to manage (not avoid!) the anxiety.

- The school will work with you to develop a plan to facilitate your child's return to school.

- Be supportive but firm with your child. Continue to listen to your child's concerns but do not reinforce their fears and anxieties. You may find it helpful to use an approach such as emotion coaching. You will find some helpful videos by looking up 'emotion coaching videos' on the internet.

- Try to focus on being solution focused. Talk about what is going well in school rather than focusing on the problems.
- Assist with practical issues such as organisation of homework, school bag and uniform. Establish good routines for bedtime, getting up and breakfast. Make the morning as pleasant as possible.
- Keep the lines of communication open with your child and with the school.
- Read Section 5 of this pack with your child.

What action/supports can you expect from your school?

"Parents, our task is to work in partnership with you, as part of a whole school approach, for the ultimate well-being of your children. We are privileged to go into the future together"

Concepta Conaty "My Child My Vision"

Your child's education setting is available to help you. Most of them, particularly pre-school settings will have some experience of reluctant attenders and you can ask them what has worked before in their experience. Section 6 outlines how your school can help in more persistent cases. In Section 8 there is a list of services in Wexford who can help you and their referral routes. Remember however that in many cases parents themselves and parents working with their child's educational setting hold the key to getting a child to overcome EBSA.

> *Find out if there is any underlying issue. Liaise with the school. Short stints if needed to reduce school day but stick with it. Going in for morning and home earlier helped when things were very bad. Get professional help if you can. Be mindful of siblings.*
>
> **(Parent of child who experienced EBSA)**

Further Reading

For further information and support on Early Childhood Education, please contact Wexford County Childcare Committee CLG on 053-9237156 or visit www.wexfordchildcare.ie
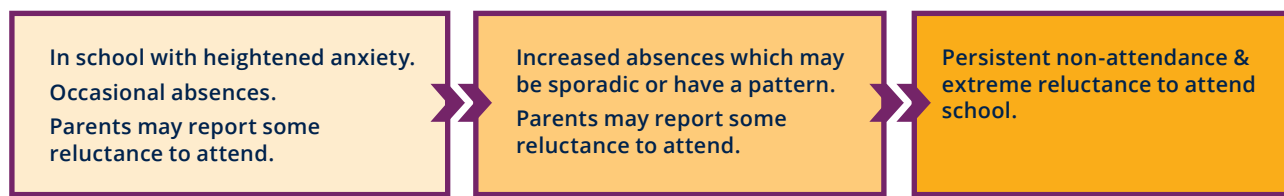
The NCSE have developed *"Guidance for Parents of children moving from Pre-school to Primary School".* It can be accessed at www.ncse.ie

A video and information leaflet can be found here about moving from primary to post primary school https://ncse.ie/moving-from-primary-to-post-primary-school

Section 4:
Frameworks for Working With EBSA

EBSA occurs along a continuum, ranging from mild to severe, and from transient to long term. CYP will require different levels of support depending on where they are on an EBSA spectrum. Some CYP are at the 'first stage' and stay there while others may quickly experience extreme reluctance to attend despite there being no previous issues.

The Spectrum of EBSA

| In school with heightened anxiety. Occasional absences. Parents may report some reluctance to attend. | ➤➤ | Increased absences which may be sporadic or have a pattern. Parents may report some reluctance to attend. | ➤➤ | Persistent non-attendance & extreme reluctance to attend school. |

Understanding EBSA through The Continuum of Support and Hardiker Model

Both the Continuum of Support (COS) and the Hardiker model are used by services when developing their systems to support CYP and their families. Both are in triangle format to represent the idea that prevention and intervention for all should work to stop problems happening.

The Hardiker model was developed in the 1990's to help understand different levels of need within a population (Hardiker et al., 1991). It is now widely used as a planning tool by the U.K and Irish governments. The model outlines four levels of intervention as illustrated in Figure 3.
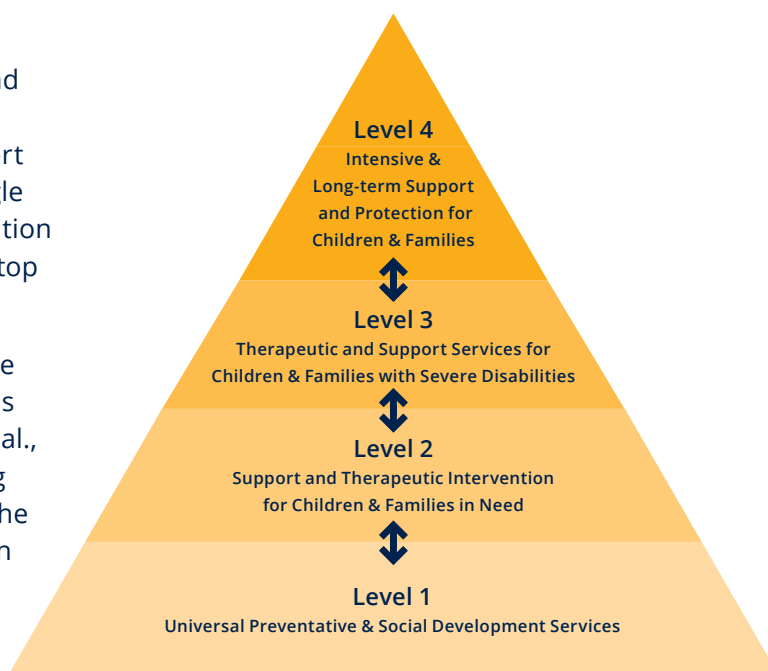
Figure 3: The Hardiker Model

Level 4
Intensive &
Long-term Support
and Protection for
Children & Families

↕

Level 3
Therapeutic and Support Services for
Children & Families with Severe Disabilities

↕

Level 2
Support and Therapeutic Intervention
for Children & Families in Need

↕

Level 1
Universal Preventative & Social Development Services

Figure 4: The Continuum of Support

The Continuum of Support

Support for Few

Support for Some

Support for All

School Support Plus for Few:
Individualised, targeted intervention for children and young people with more complex and enduring needs.

School Support Plus for Some:
Identification, targeted prevention and early intervention for those at risk.

Whole School and Classroom Support for All:
Whole school support for wellbeing promotion that includes prevention and development of social and emotional competence & coping skills.

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna | Department of Education and Skills

Both the Hardiker and Continuum of Support frameworks emphasise the importance of a staged approach.

The Dept. of Education advises schools to use the Continuum of Support to map out how they will support CYP with additional needs and this includes learning and social and emotional needs. Research advocates a multi-component, preventative, whole-school approach to the promotion of wellbeing, so interventions at universal and targeted levels are needed (DES, 2019). This framework involves three levels as set out in Figure 4.

The Continuum of Support recognises that individual children and young people can have different needs at different times. Our response to the needs of students is also offered along a continuum, from whole school and preventative approaches to individualised and specialist approaches. Using this framework helps to ensure that school-based interventions are incremental, moving from class-based or whole-school interventions (at the "Support for All" level) to more intensive and individualised support (at the Support for Some/Support for Few levels). Movement is informed by careful monitoring of a child's needs and their progress.

The Continuum of Support model offers a useful lens through which to conceptualise EBSA, and the spectrum of EBSA presentations. In essence, some CYP will attend school and benefit from what the school offers to 'all' while others will need extra support. Those at greater risk and with greater needs might need extra "supports for some" (the middle of the triangle), while those whose behaviour is at the more severe end or at the 'top of the triangle' may require more specific and targeted support which is offered to a 'few'.

Figure 5: NEPS Problem Solving Framework

At any stage on the spectrum of EBSA, we suggest that there is use of a problem-solving process. There needs to be systematic gathering of information about the pupil and what is going on for them. Within the context of EBSA, this involves a more intensive problem-solving process. You build on information gathered from people who know the pupil best of all. It is important, at this stage, to gather information from the young person, parent and school staff in order to develop and implement a plan and review its progress. The NEPS problem-solving framework can be a useful tool to assist with this process. It is illustrated in Figure 5.

Section 5: Information for Young People

What does EBSA mean for me?

Many young people and children worry about leaving their homes and going to educational settings. This is normal and it is ok to feel this way. Anxieties are part of life and as we are growing up, we start to learn how to deal with them. It is not expected that you will never feel anxiety but you have to manage your anxiety and make sure you are in charge of the anxiety and it is not in charge of you! You may be experiencing EBSA when you have overwhelming emotions and the fear associated with attending school.

What does it look like?

When you think about school are you?

- Worried
- Overwhelmed
- Anxious-sweating, vomiting, heart beating faster, muscles may become tense, dry mouth
- Experience feelings of sadness
- Reluctance to engage with school activities, outings and trips
- Agitated
- Feeling alienated and having a poor sense of school belonging
- Struggling to sleep
- Easily annoyed
- Bad tempered
- Feeling sick or pretending to be sick
- Lacking confidence in your own ability
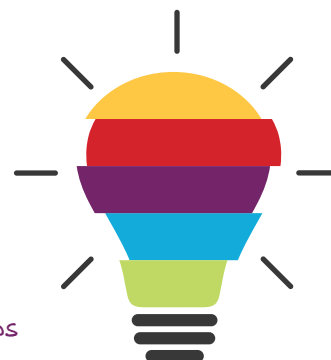
We can all feel this way at different points in our life because of things that may be happening at home, at school or elsewhere and that's ok. You are not alone.

There may be things that can make you feel this way in school and outside of school.

In school

Struggling to cope with the workload

My teacher doesn't like me

My appearance. I look different to everyone

The loud noise and the crowds

My friends are not talking to me

I'm worried about changing in PE class

I am no good at sports or drama

Everyone laughs at me

I am anxious about the exams

I am being bullied

My favourite teacher has gone on leave

I need extra help with my learning

Difficulty with transitioning (moving to a new school, returning to school after a long absence due to illness or entering/exiting primary school)

Outside school

My parents are separating or getting a divorce

Someone close to me died

A new sibling

I am having problems getting to school

Illness within the family

Nobody understands how I am feeling

Experienced a traumatic event e.g., death, domestic abuse, illness

What happens if I don't attend school?

It is the law in Ireland that you must go to school from the age of six until you are sixteen years old. The only exception is if you are being educated at home. All schools keep an attendance strategy. If your school is concerned about your attendance, they will follow the steps laid out in this plan and will refer your non-attendance to Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) if necessary.

If you miss 20 or more days of school, the school must tell Tusla Education Support Service. If your absence cannot be explained, the service may make contact with your parent/guardian to work out how best to get you back into school and attending.

It is important for you to try to overcome the difficulties you are having as quickly as possible. Staying at home might feel like a good idea and make you feel better. However, the more time you miss from the school, the more lessons you miss and therefore the workload and the learning also become more difficult. Not seeing your friends may make maintaining those friendships difficult. If you are worried about anything at home or school, speaking to an adult you trust (parent, teacher, sister/brother coach etc.) and letting them know you are worried is the first step to getting the help and support you need to make it better. Not letting people know your feelings and your worries can make you feel like there is no way out and things may get worse rather than better.

What do I do if I feel like this?

Talk to somebody you trust (parent, brother/sister, teacher) and let them know your worries.

At home:
Think about the things that are worrying you. Here are a few ideas of what you can do.

- Draw or write a list and order them from most worried about to least worried about.

- Use a journal. Journaling allows you write down your worries, fears and concerns and by tracking these each day, it allows you to see when these feelings occur and you can learn ways to better control them.

Most worried about

Not so worried about

- Express your feelings rather than bottling them up
- Keep a record of your own school attendance and reward your successes-see example below.

School + Attendance = Good School Results
Set your own targets

Week 1: I made it to school every day this week

1	2	3	4	5
Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____
Reason: _____	Reason: _____	Reason: _____	Reason: _____	Reason: _____

Week 2: I made it to school on time for the whole week

6	7	8	9	10
Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____
Reason: _____	Reason: _____	Reason: _____	Reason: _____	Reason: _____

Week 3: Attended full days for the whole week

11	12	13	14	15
Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____
Reason: _____	Reason: _____	Reason: _____	Reason: _____	Reason: _____

Don't forget to ask for help!

- Draw up checklists. These may be useful to putting a routine in place. Did you know that morning routines and school attendance patterns are set in September?. That means that you can set yourself up for success by getting off to a smooth and drama-free September.

NIGHTIME CHECKLIST
Choose & layout clothing and shoes ☐
Put any items that you need for school in your school bag (e.g. permission slips, books, journal, homework) ☐
Make your lunch ☐
Set your alarm! ☐

MORNING CHECKLIST
Get out of bed when your alarm goes off ☐
Have a good breakfast ☐
Leave yourself plenty of time to get to school ☐
Walk or cycle to school if you can ☐

Suggestions if you are feeling anxious about attending school.

Watch these useful YouTube clips;

📌Are you anxious to go to school? Advice from a therapist
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3nCwYcwuHM

📌Dealing with school phobias and Anxiety. Hear a young person's experience
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqs1BuNyVY4

In school

Identify an adult in school you like and get on well with. Talk to them about how you are feeling. They can work with you and your parents to figure out what things are worrying you and what your parents, school and you need to do to help. Some things could include;

- A key adult in school to check in with
- A safe space to go to when you are becoming overwhelmed
- Buddy system
- Help with school work
- Altering your timetable
- Checklist of what do and where to go if you start to become overwhelmed

If I don't know where my classroom is...

I will get my plan from my student planner and see if I can work it out

I will try and ask someone in my class

I will ask my teacher

If someone calls me unkind names...

I will try and walk away and not swear or shout

I will tell a teacher why I feel upset

My teacher will deal with it and talk to that person

What if I have nothing to do at breaktime...

I could go to the library

I could buy a snack and eat it in the dining hall

I could find my buddy

Source: https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/930428/lancashire-ebsa-guidance-strategy-toolkit.pdf)

Tips to getting you back to school

You may not be attending school because your worries are so great, it is important you try to work with your parents and school to get you back attending. These tips may help;

- Remember a time when you did cope. What did you do then?
- Try to notice when you become worried and try out some strategies that will help you relax
- Keep in contact with your friends and find out what is happening e.g., a school trip, a match, a musical.
- Start catching up on some of the work that you have missed.
- Take small steps to getting back into routine. Remember things may not get back to normal immediately and that's ok.
- Reward yourself for small successes.

Tips to getting you ready for life

As you can see, there are many things that can help you to start feeling better within yourself and while dealing with the world. Some more ideas include;

- Having a good diet. Swap sugary and fatty foods for fruit and vegetables.
- Exercising-Take a walk, join a sports team, swim.
- Laughing-Go to the cinema, watch a funny movie.
- Getting outdoors. Take in the fresh air and the sunshine.
- Meditate-take time for yourself. This helps to promote relaxation and calm.
- Practice deep breathing. This helps to reduce stress and anxiety.
- Do something you enjoy e.g., listen to music, read a book etc.
- Talk with someone who listens and understands you.
- Take a moment at the end of each day to reflect on what you have accomplished and not on what you didn't get done.
- Set small achievable goals in order achieve your main goal.

Notice the signs of Stress and Anxiety – get to know your stress signs and manage them!

When you start to worry or become overwhelmed. Start to notice what is happening within your own body.

Figure No. 6 What you might feel in your body when you are worried

When you experience this, take note and practice some of the following exercises that will help to reduce stress and anxiety. Not all of them will work for you but try them out and see which one you prefer and works for you.
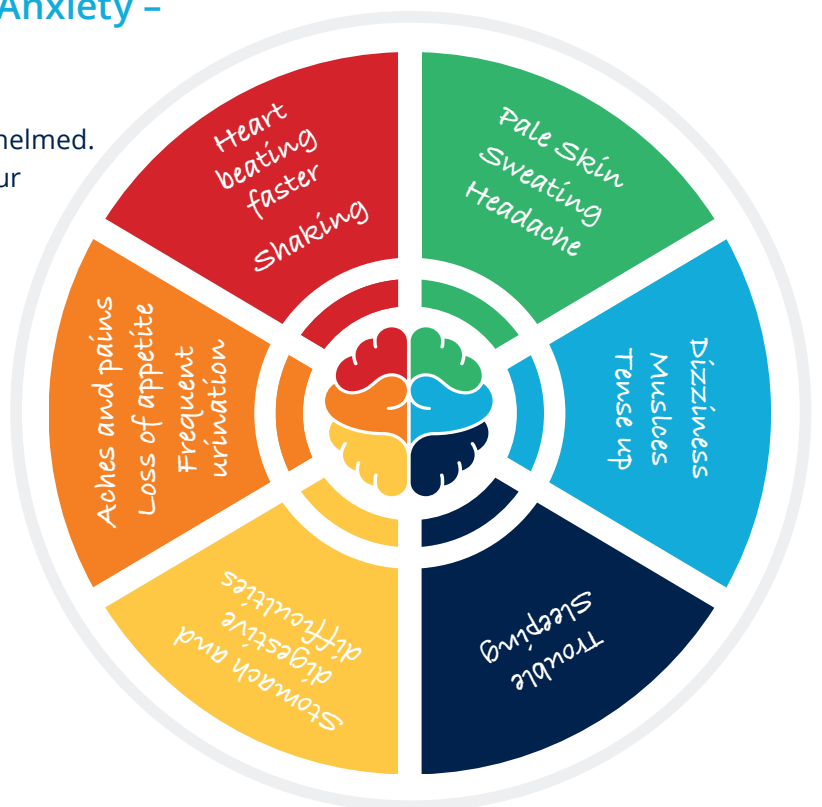
Search Relaxation Techniques NEPS for some examples. "Breathe", a relaxation resource can be found at Health and Wellbeing | PDST

> *School isn't forever; it is only a stepping stone to the next stage in your life and you will get through it. Seek help, talk to someone you can trust but ensure 'not to bottle it up.' Keep going you will get there.*
> **(Young person who returned to education, 17 years old)**

Section 6: Information for Schools

In this section we consider how schools can respond to EBSA through the lens of the "Continuum of Support" model (DES & NEPS, 2007, 2010a, 2010b). A range of school-based intervention strategies and interventions at the "Whole-School"/"Support for All", "Support for Some" and "Support for a Few" levels of the Continuum of Support (COS) are outlined.

Whole-school Approach ("Support for All" Level)

In order to help CYP to thrive and to prevent issues such as EBSA, it is vital that schools have a broader whole-school approach to promoting emotional wellbeing and positive mental health.

> *A consistent approach to supporting the young person is necessary. A toolkit to aid a whole school approach to school avoidance would greatly enhance consistency.*
> **(Teacher with experience of successfully managing EBSA)**

Figure 7: The Continuum of Support "Support for All" Level

School Support Plus for Few

School Support for Some

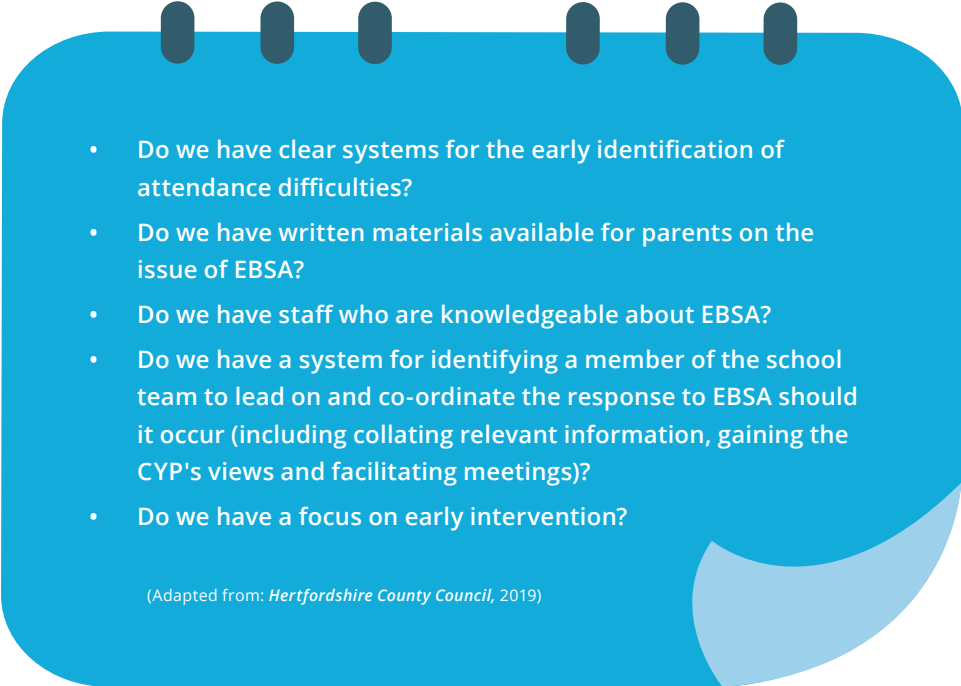Whole-School and Classroom Support for All
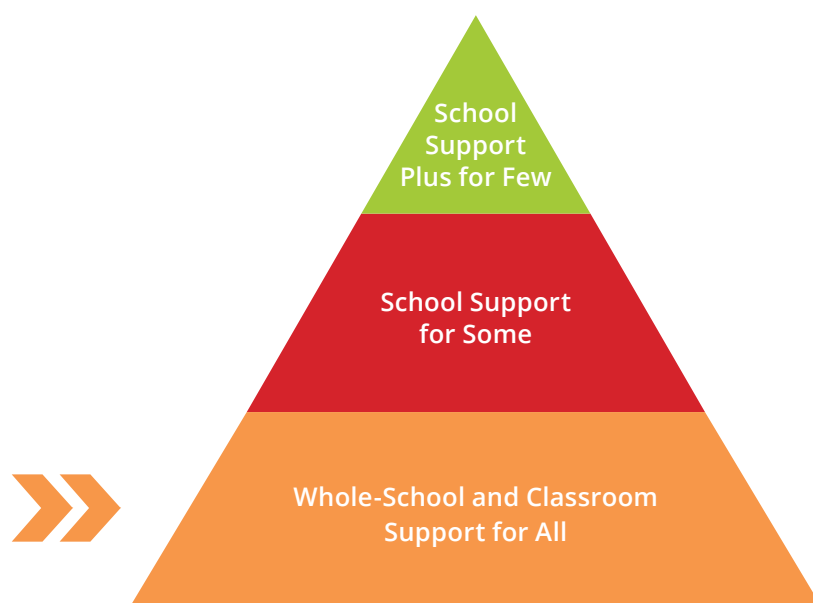
The Support for All level of the Continuum of Support involves a process of prevention, universal school-based intervention and early identification. The emphasis here is on whole-school approaches to developing best practices in responding to the need of all students. Intervention at the whole-school level is intended to be proactive. It focuses on the main student body, and this phase of intervention should effectively meet the needs of about 80-90% of the school population. Within the context of EBSA, this phase of the Continuum aims to support and promote emotional well-being, positive mental health and resilience, a sense of belonging and school connectedness. This phase also focuses on the early identification of "at-risk" students. It is important that schools take a proactive approach to understanding and managing EBSA, as part of a whole-school initiative to monitoring attendance and promoting emotional wellbeing. Figure 8 highlights some key elements of an effective whole-school approach that aims to promote resilience and prevent EBSA.

Figure 8: Whole-School Approach to EBSA

WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH (SUPPORT FOR ALL)
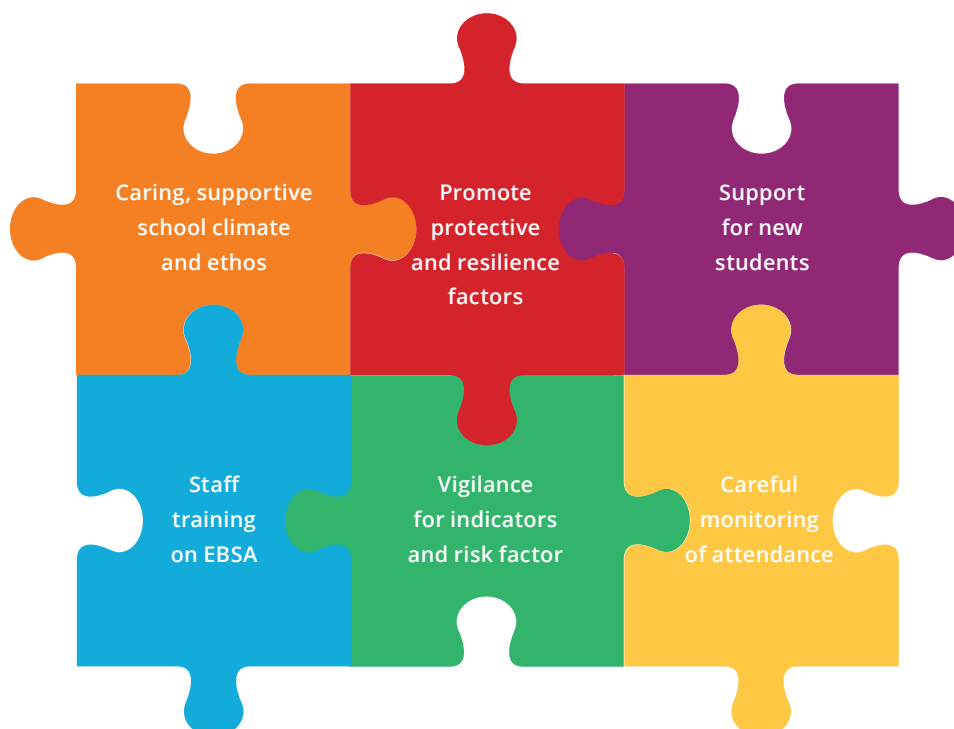
To ensure best practice schools can check the following questions:

- Do we have clear systems for the early identification of attendance difficulties?
- Do we have written materials available for parents on the issue of EBSA?
- Do we have staff who are knowledgeable about EBSA?
- Do we have a system for identifying a member of the school team to lead on and co-ordinate the response to EBSA should it occur (including collating relevant information, gaining the CYP's views and facilitating meetings)?
- Do we have a focus on early intervention?

(Adapted from: *Hertfordshire County Council,* 2019)

The following section details some whole-school approaches that may help to reduce the prevalence of EBSA in our schools.

School Culture and Ethos

School culture and ethos can play an important role in fostering resilience and minimising the prevalence of EBSA. A welcoming and inclusive whole-school culture and ethos can be an important factor in promoting a sense of connection and belonging to the school community. There are many ways that schools can aim to foster a sense of connection and belonging;

- Ensuring that systems are in place so that the voice of the CYP, teacher and parent are heard and lead to improvements in school culture and ethos.
- Offering a wide range of curricular options to cater for the range of educational needs that may exist within the school.
- Promoting differenciation and inclusive educational practices.
- Respecting and celebrating diversity.
- Offering a wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities.
- Having good pastoral care systems in place, such as class tutors, Year Heads, etc. with clear communication channels.
- Providing opportunities for student leadership.

Early Identification

Early identification is essential to ensure a proactive and responsive approach to EBSA. This can include careful monitoring of attendance and being alert to potential indicators of EBSA. Attendance data is helpful as it provides hard data such as time missed and also allows potential patterns to be observed. Monitoring attendance is in itself crucial in terms of identifying CYPs who may indicate early warning signs for EBSA. This is an area that all schools are obliged to adhere to and it is important that this information is utilised effectively.

Additionally, there are several potential signs of EBSA that may be observed in school settings, and it is important that all school staff members are alerted to these potential indicators. Figure 9 provides a visual overview of potential indicators of EBSA (signs that may be observed in a school setting). It is important to note that many CYPs are occasionally reluctant to go to school or may have some anxiety about certain activities. It is normal for CYPs to miss some days of school during the year and most young people will show some of these signs occasionally. EBSA however, is a more persistent, prolonged and repeated pattern of behaviour. It is important, therefore, that there are clear systems in place for the early identification of EBSA, and, ideally, that there is a designated member of staff that has responsibility for investigating and acting on concerns.

Figure 9: Potential Indicators of EBSA

POTENTIAL INDICATORS OF EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL AVOIDANCE (EBSA)

Signs that may be observed in school:

ABSENCES

- Long, unexplained absences from school
- Frequent absences for minor illnesses
- Difficulty attending for full days
- Periodic or missed classes with no explanation
- Patterns in absences such as particular subjects, days, after weekends or holidays
- Frequent lateness to school or particular subjects
- Frequently missing the bus or lift to school

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL ISSUES

- Refusal to separate from parent
- Frequently asking to ring home/ go home
- Reluctant to go on school trips
- Frequently appears to be socially isolated or avoidant of peers
- Reports experiences of being bullied or feeling victimised (by peers or staff)
- Prolonged difficulties (e.g. anxiety) when mixing with others
- Friendship difficulties
- Periods of increased emotionality

ILLNESS

- Frequent complaints before or during school, such as headaches, stomach-ache, feeling dizzy or tired
- These symptoms often fade if allowed to stay home
- Presents with low mood
- Appears fatigued, restless, irritable

UNDERACHIEVING

- Underachieving academically
- Often has difficulty focussing
- Appears confused, disengaged
- Avoids participating in class

Most young people will show some of these signs occasionally. EBSA is a more persistent, prolonged and repeated pattern of behaviour.

Source: Anne Marie Toomey

General Screening

In addition to monitoring of attendance, having robust general screening systems in place at a whole-school level can also help to identify learning and social, emotional, behavioural issues at an early stage and prevent CYP from potentially "falling through the net". Comprehensive guidance on screening for learning needs and social, emotional and behavioural functioning needs is available in the DES Continuum of Support guidelines, which are available to download on the NEPS platform of the www.gov.ie website.

For **Primary Schools** the relevant guidelines are:

> ➤ **Special Education Needs-A Continuum of Support**
> - • Guidelines for Teachers
> - • Resource Pack for Teachers
>
> ➤ **Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties-A Continuum of Support**

For **Post Primary Schools** the relevant guidelines are:

> ➤ **A Continuum of Support for Post Primary Teachers**
> - • Guidelines for Teachers
> - • Resource Pack for Teachers
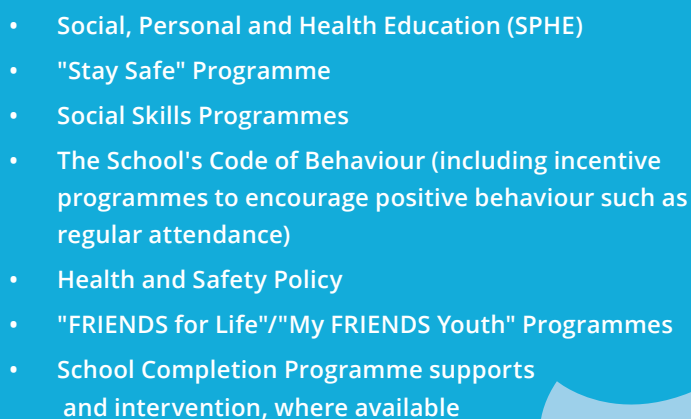
Promoting Parental Involvement

The development of an active and positive relationship between parents and school is essential in ensuring that, when difficulties occur, there can be a quick, collaborative response. Having open channels of communication in place ensures that, where concerns arise, they can be dealt with efficiently. Active parental involvement can be encouraged in schools through a range of strategies including Parents Associations, Coffee mornings, encouraging parents to assist with fundraising activities, extra-curricular activities etc.

In addition, home-school communication can be promoted by having regular Parent-Teacher meetings, using social media or Parent Text systems to communicate key messages to parents and having clear communication channels in place, should parents wish to raise a concern. It is also important that parents receive consistent information and advice in terms of encouraging regular school attendance and initial steps to take should a decrease inattendance be noted. Home-School Community Liaison (HSCL) teachers are an invaluable resource here (for those schools who have a HSCL teacher).

Developing supportive partnerships between home and school is an essential element in understanding a child or young person's story and recognising their strengths and the protective factors supporting the child's development, as well as their needs.

School Based Programmes/Curricula

There are a number of school-based curricula and programmes that aim to foster emotional wellbeing. These include but are not limited to:

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)
- "Stay Safe" Programme
- Social Skills Programmes
- The School's Code of Behaviour (including incentive programmes to encourage positive behaviour such as regular attendance)
- Health and Safety Policy
- "FRIENDS for Life"/"My FRIENDS Youth" Programmes
- School Completion Programme supports and intervention, where available

## Continuing Professional Learning for Education Staff

It is important that schools aim to ensure that opportunities to learn about EBSA are available for all staff. Training should make it clear that the promotion of positive emotional health and wellbeing is everybody's responsibility. Training can provide staff with an understanding of EBSA, and particularly, an awareness of the potential indicators of EBSA.

Transitions

Literature has shown that peaks in the number of young people with EBSA correspond with transition in educational phases. It is therefore important that robust systems are put in place to ensure that CYP are supported to make successful transitions at key points in their educational lives. In the "Information for Parents" (Section 3) some advice is provided for parents in relation to this. Successful transition in education settings also needs to be addressed. Transition and induction programmes can alleviate any potential anxiety and provide the tools for successful transitions. For example, at the primary to post-primary transition point, good transition practice involves effective exchange of information (pastoral and academic information) from primary to post-primary school. It is important for feeder schools to flag any early separation difficulties and past EBSA even if the issues were mild and attendance is now fine. Post-primary schools could consider asking for this information on any transition gathering forms. Good transition also involves good communication with the young person and their parents.
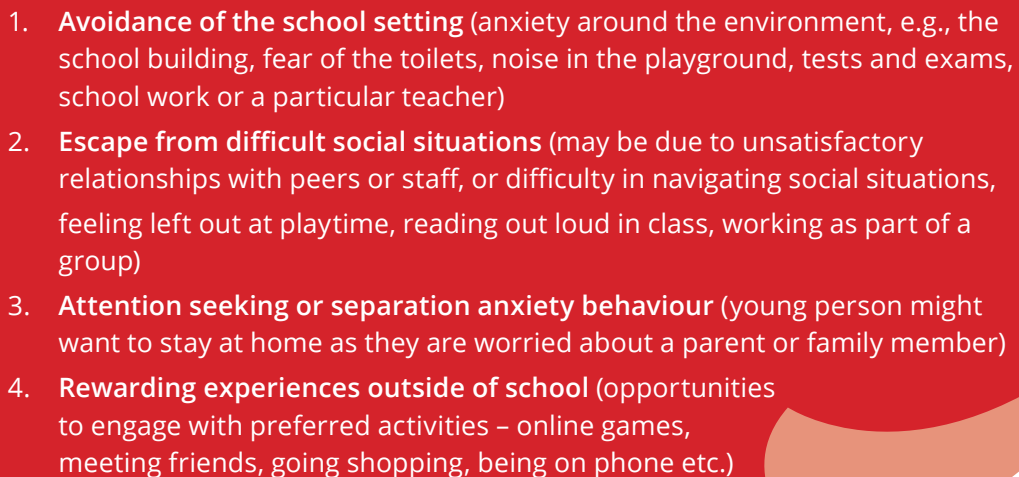
Figure 10: The Continuum of Support "Support for Some" Level

School Support Plus for Few

School Support for Some

Whole-School and Classroom Support for All
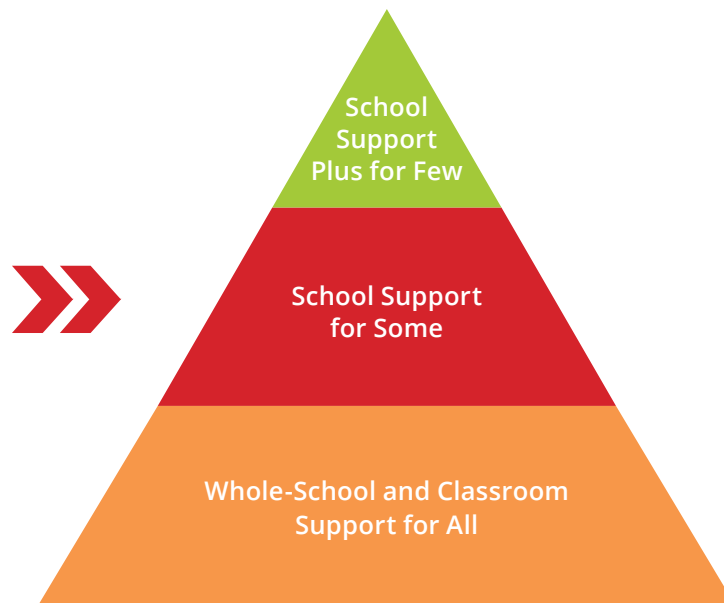
The "Support for Some" level of the Continuum of Support applies to those pupils for whom interventions at class or whole school support level, for example "FRIENDS for Life", are not enough to fully meet the pupil's needs in relation to EBSA. The emphasis here is on a more individualised approach to develop best practices in responding to the need of individual students. The NEPS Problem-Solving Framework, outlined in Section 4, is a useful framework to guide the information-gathering, planning and review process at this stage of the COS.

Information Gathering

The first step before designing a plan to support a young person experiencing EBSA is to gather information that will assist in understanding the function of the behaviour. Kearney and Silverman (1995) proposed a model for school non-attendance identifying four categories for these behaviours.

1. **Avoidance of the school setting** (anxiety around the environment, e.g., the school building, fear of the toilets, noise in the playground, tests and exams, school work or a particular teacher)
2. **Escape from difficult social situations** (may be due to unsatisfactory relationships with peers or staff, or difficulty in navigating social situations, feeling left out at playtime, reading out loud in class, working as part of a group)
3. **Attention seeking or separation anxiety behaviour** (young person might want to stay at home as they are worried about a parent or family member)
4. **Rewarding experiences outside of school** (opportunities to engage with preferred activities – online games, meeting friends, going shopping, being on phone etc.)

The School Refusal Assessment Scale Revised (SRAS-R) which was developed by Kearney and Albano (2007) can be a useful tool to attempt to identify the potential functions of EBSA. This can be accessed at the following link schoolavoidance.org

Figure 11 below illustrates how the different potential functions of EBSA may be present in the school setting.

Figure 11: Functions of EBSA Behaviour

Avoid school situations which cause distress	Avoid school-related social/performance situations
Somatic complaints. Sense of dread, nervousness, sadness in school.	Talking with peers. Group work. PE/drama/choir. Lunch time. Tests/presentations.

Attention	Get something rewarding
Get attention from significant people. Give attention to others e.g. young carers; keeping others safe.	Preferred activities. Online gaming/shopping. TV/computers.

Ensure that the views of the young person, the family and key school staff are listened to. It is important to always aim to explore all three sources of information (school staff, family and CYP). The following strategies may be used to gather important information that will be useful in developing a student support plan or return to school plan.

Step 1: Gathering information from children and young people: What is the concern and why is it happening?

- It is essential to get the student's perspective on what is happening. However, be aware that talking about returning to school may provoke anxiety. We encourage you to empathise with the student and acknowledge that things are difficult, but don't collude or promote the EBSA behaviour (i.e. the student is aware that EBSA behaviour needs to change).

- Think about the students age, level of understanding and language level when discussing EBSA, and associated thoughts, feelings and body sensations.

- Some students may prefer to draw or write, than talk.

- Externalise the anxiety – this helps the student to separate his/herself from the problem. Anxiety is the problem, not the young person e.g., ask the young person what name they could give to the feeling? What colour they associate with it? If it was a thing, what would it be and if it could talk, what would it say?

- Explore and identify thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and behaviours a student experiences when they are anxious about school.

- Scaling or an anxiety thermometer can be helpful. For example, ask the student to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 how different school situations affect their worry level (physical environment/area of the school building, certain lessons, times of school day, group work, etc.). This helps students identify triggers, the value given to certain factors and their potential influence on anxiety. Ask the student what needs to change for them in order for them to be able to move down one place on the anxiety scale?

- Life graph-student reflects on when their EBSA started, the context and triggers that may have changed over time.

- RAG – Red Amber Green activities – colour code or heat mapping. A student identifies aspects of the school timetable or school physical environment/school building and yard etc. and how they grade them in terms of managing worry/not managing worry at schools.

- Talk about an ideal classroom/school activity – student draws, describes or builds a model to demonstrate their ideal classroom or school. This activity helps identify elements of school (lessons, physical environment, people) that the student would like to change and why.

- West Sussex Educational Psychology Service (2019) has developed a useful tool for understanding a CYP's worries about school 'Are you feeling sad or worried about school?' (See Appendix 4)

- Staffordshire County Council (2020) has a card-sorting activity to elicit a CYP's views. See *Staffordshire County Council EBSA Guidance for Educational Settings*.
- The NEPS "My Thoughts About School Checklists" (for younger children) or the *"What's going on?"* questionnaire for older students are also useful resources for eliciting a CYP's viewpoint (See Appendix 5)

Gathering information from Parents

- Focus on building a collaborative relationship with the students' family. There may be issues within the family context which are contributing to the EBSA behaviour and parents may be reluctant to talk about this.
- Ask about their child's strengths, interests and hopes for the future.
- Ask about what their child was like when they were younger. How did they find starting primary/secondary school? Any history of learning, language, behaviour or social difficulties?
- Ask about the family context. Who lives with the student? Who do they get along best with? Have there been any recent changes in the family? Any significant life events, illnesses, losses, bereavement in the family? These all put EBSA behaviour in context.
- Ask what the student says about school to their family. Which staff or students do they talk about, get along with, don't get along with. What worries them about school? What do they like about school?
- Ask about the anxious behaviour. What does anxiety look like at home? What happens on a day a student is anxious and doesn't go to school? Look for exceptions-what about days when the student is anxious but still goes to school? What happens on those days? How has the student coped on those days?
- Check how the EBSA is affecting the family and what they need to cope.

Gathering information from School Staff

- Seek out perspectives from a variety of staff and include non-teaching staff as appropriate – e.g., SNAs observe things that teachers don't and vice versa.
- Questions to ask include what the student is good at and interested in at school? How do they get along with others and whether there have been any observable changes in their relationships with peers and/or staff at classroom level? What supports have been offered and what has worked/not worked?
- It's important to ask about their academic progress and any changes or concerns in this regard. Follow up on exploring academic needs in more detail, where this arises and plan for academic supports. Does the student seem overly anxious about their work, exams, etc?

- If staff have witnessed the student being upset, ask for details about this as it can give important information on triggers and the severity of the EBSA behaviour, what helps and also what may be maintaining the behaviour. For example, if you note that a student always gets to go home after being upset/crying-that may be a reaction to address and may make it more difficult for the student to build capacity to cope.

Step 2 Developing and Implementing a Plan: How can we help?

- After the information gathering and analysis process has been completed, the next step is to develop a "Return to School" or support plan (See Appendix 6 for sample Return to School Plan template). Alternatively, the NEPS Student Support Plan template may be useful (See Appendix 3).
- It may be useful at this point to organise a meeting between school, parents/ guardians and the CYP to identify and discuss the issues. Try to make this as comfortable as possible. Emphasise the collaborative nature of this work. Use language like...work together , your views are important to this ...we ...
- Start with the information that was gathered. These are the ingredients of the next step.
- Identify possible causes of the school avoidance with the student and family. Check for clarity... are we saying that ...?
- Learning or social needs may be identified, and the school and family should seek to address these barriers with interventions.
- All plans need to be co-produced with the young person, parents, and school staff. It is important that all parties are aware of the plan and sign up to it.
- Each plan will look different according to the actions indicated by the assessment. Personalised plans are crucial because what works for one child may not work for another.
- The plans should always be realistic and achievable, incorporating small steps, with the aim of reintegrating the young person.
- A plan for re-entry to school should be agreed with the young person, their parents/guardians and the school team. The return may need to be gradual and graded and there should be a recognition by all that a "quick fix" is not always possible.
- All teachers and school staff should be made aware of the plan and briefed on anxiety- related issues if present. For example, staff may be told not to ask the young person why they have not been in class etc.
- The student should be helped to identify staff members they feel safest with who can support them throughout the return process.

Any additional support strategies should be implemented as soon as the student begins the return to school. These strategies may include some of the following:

- Identify a buddy/mentor or preferred staff member to meet the CYP on their first day back. The peer/mentor can be asked to ensure that the young person is included in group at lunch time etc. Ask young person if it might be helpful to brief peers on the return to school and encourage them to be supportive with no questioning etc.
- Where possible, a quiet space could be designated for the young person to use as a relaxation room/areas, as required.
- Regular phone contact between parents/ guardians and school.
- A record of attendance and time spent in school should be kept by the school.
- A part-time or reduced timetable may be necessary to support this process but should always be temporary and not a long-term option as all children are entitled to a full-time education.
- Help the young person develop feelings of safety and belonging – e.g. having consistent support staff/welcoming space in school, providing opportunities for interaction without the pressure to talk.
- Promote confidence, self-esteem and value through personalised rewards or responsibility.
- Build on strengths and interests.
- Opportunities for positive experiences/develop friendships.
- Peer mentoring system to provide guidance and encouragement.
- Enable young person to establish or maintain peer relationships – Zoom social meetings/ continued access to after school activities.
- Positive and nurturing environment with person-centred and solution focused approach with focus on listening to young person.
- Identify key adult for young person who has time to dedicate to building genuine relationship and can support young person at times of high anxiety.
- Flexible and individualised approach-e.g., flexible and reduced timetable.
- Ensure that the young person knows what time they are going home and who is collecting them etc. if on a reduced day.
- Awareness of barriers to learning – work should be achievable and delivered at appropriate level.
- Provision of additional interventions as required, for example, social skills interventions, additional support from the Special Education Team etc.
- Provide opportunities for the young person to express their views and feel listened to.
- Investigate how to support the journey to and from school. It is important that the young person is escorted to school and that an identified staff member/close friend meets the young person to ease the transition into the school building.

Once the plan has been developed, the next step is to put the plan into action. If early progress is made, continue to stick to the plan. It is important to build in a clear review mechanism. If needed, a review can be brought forward so the plan can be altered and any progress celebrated. Remember "small steps"!!

Reviewing the Plan-Did it work?

The review meeting provides an opportunity to monitor and celebrate progress made, consider new information and plan next steps. Plans may need to be maintained or adapted to incorporate new outcomes or actions. The review is also an opportunity to identify if there needs to be further consultation with, or referrals to other agencies. It should be noted that the review process is intended to be cyclical rather than linear in nature and the practice of problem-solving may be a regular occurrence. As part of the review process, it is important to discuss the parts of the plan that have worked well and examine why these supports have been effective. Examining the barriers preventing progress, considering possible solutions and thinking about other supports that may be helpful is also essential.

## What if this plan is not working or has not progressed?

All supports currently in place should be reviewed and if additional supports are needed, they should be identified and implemented early. If it is felt that all supports and resources have been exhausted at the School Support level and that a more individualised and intensive approach is needed, it may be necessary to move to the School Support Plus stage of the Continuum of Support.

School Support Plus/ Support for a Few (more Intensive and Individualised Approaches)

The School Support Plus process will generally require more intensive and individualised supports and may involve external professionals and support services in a more detailed problem-solving process to help the pupil experiencing EBSA. School Support Plus applies to those pupils whose needs are enduring and/or severe and complex and whose progress with EBSA is considered inadequate despite carefully planned and reviewed interventions detailed in the Classroom Support and/or School Support plans.

Figure 12: School "Support for a Few" Level
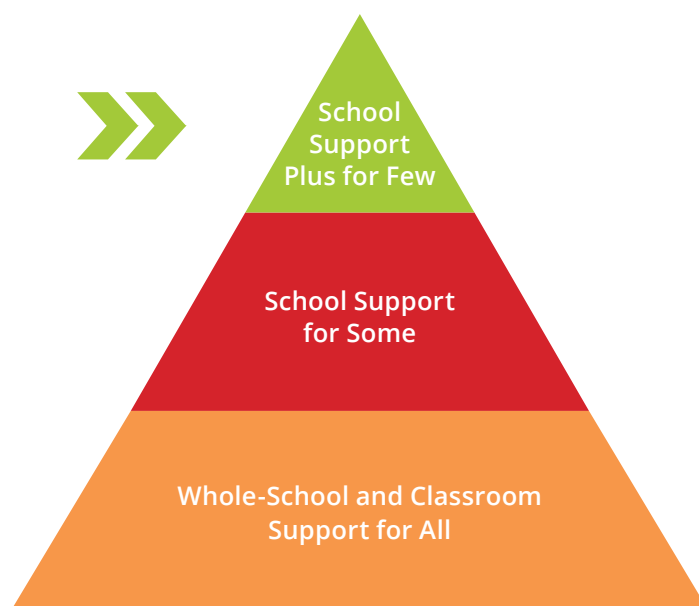
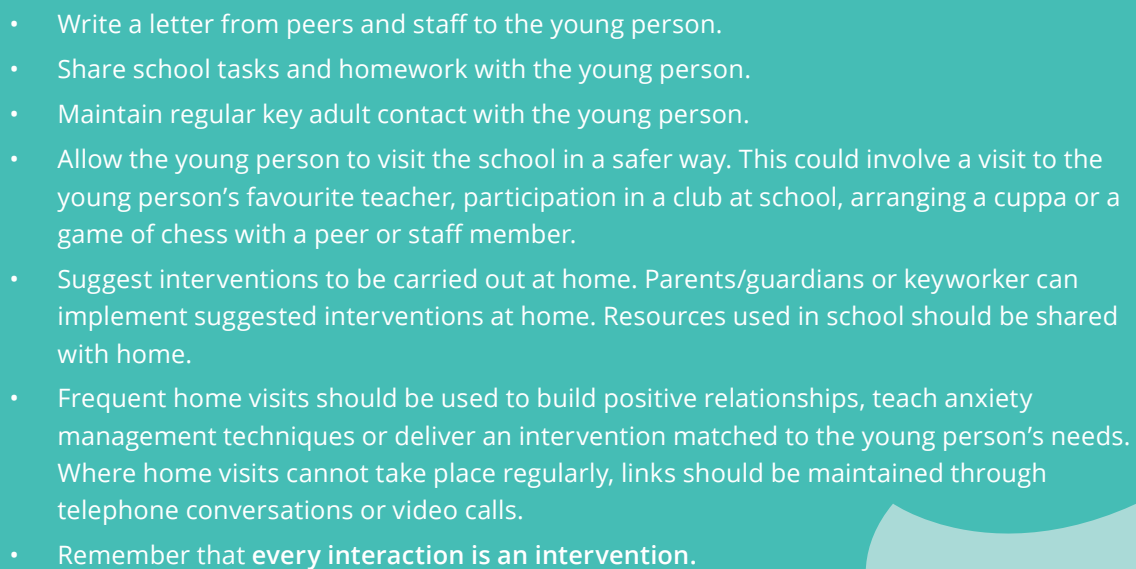## Initiating School Support Plus/Support for a Few Level

The NEPS problem-solving framework can again be utilised to guide the information-gathering, intervention planning and review process at the School Support Plus stage. At this stage, schools may decide to continue with the interventions already in place and to build on and add to these interventions and strategies. Alternatively, the team may feel that a change in approach is required. Moving into the School Support Plus stage of the Continuum of Support is characterised by a more bespoke, individualised and intensive support plan for the target student. This may include drawing on an increased range of supports available within the school, creating a more flexible, individualised plan and seeking support from other agencies and services. Again, it is important that all relevant parties, including school staff, family and the CYP, are involved in co-producing the new plan.

Interventions and Strategies at the School Support Plus/ Support for a Few Level

The following interventions and strategies may be implemented at the School Support Plus level:

- Revisiting approaches that have worked well with the CYP such as, mapping the landscape, creating a safe space, psycho-education for anxiety, the use of laddering approaches etc.
- Introducing new strategies that have not been previously adopted. See suggested strategies as mentioned at the School Support level.
- Assessing the young person's anxiety levels through scaling or the use of another assessment method. This could be a rewarding way of measuring progress or simply a pointer to adapt a plan or intervention.
- Considering whether additional Special Education Teaching (SET) or Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support could be provided to support the young person experiencing EBSA.
- Developing a reintegration plan for the student. This helps the young person to see what action can be taken by themselves, by school and by their family to support their reintegration. The support plan can include agreed information about timetable changes, key adults, strategies to help reduce anxieties, ways that friends and family can help and information about a safe place. It is crucial that all staff are aware of the young person's difficulties and agreements that are included in the support plan. (See Appendix 6 for a return to school support plan).
- Drawing on all available supports and resources that may be available within the school, that are not already involved, where relevant, for example, School Completion Programme, Guidance Counsellor, Home School Community Liaison (where these supports are available within a school).
- In the event that additional supports are required, they should be identified and implemented as soon as possible. This may include involvement with NEPS and/or Tusla Family Support Services.

At the School Support Plus stage, children and young people may be experiencing significant levels of EBSA where their difficulties and behaviours have become entrenched. It may be that in some cases, the young person continues to struggle to attend school over a longer period and will require a more flexible approach to their support and interventions. This may include some support work at the young person's home. Where possible, it is important to maintain links and a sense of connection and belonging with the child and family. This is achievable through the following strategies;

- Write a letter from peers and staff to the young person.
- Share school tasks and homework with the young person.
- Maintain regular key adult contact with the young person.
- Allow the young person to visit the school in a safer way. This could involve a visit to the young person's favourite teacher, participation in a club at school, arranging a cuppa or a game of chess with a peer or staff member.
- Suggest interventions to be carried out at home. Parents/guardians or keyworker can implement suggested interventions at home. Resources used in school should be shared with home.
- Frequent home visits should be used to build positive relationships, teach anxiety management techniques or deliver an intervention matched to the young person's needs. Where home visits cannot take place regularly, links should be maintained through telephone conversations or video calls.
- Remember that **every interaction is an intervention.**

When faced with significant challenges, it is normal for some school staff to feel powerless to support change. Due to the complex nature of EBSA no fixed "assessment process" can be followed. However, in all cases it is essential that the views of the young person, the family and key school personnel are gathered and listened to. There should be no expectation that the problem will be fixed overnight or by a single person. Celebrate success no matter how small and look to making those gradual changes if the EBSA case seems stuck.

Further Reading/Resources

- West Sussex Educational Psychology Service has developed a useful Whole-School Audit, which can facilitate schools in identifying areas of strength and areas for development in relation to school culture and ethos and school systems, policies and practices that foster emotional resilience and help to prevent EBSA (Appendix 7). It can also be located at the West Sussex County Council Educational Psychology website (https://schools.westsussex.gov.uk)

- The NBSS has developed a transition and transfer programme for incoming first years called Belonging Plus+. Further information is available at the NBSS website (nbss.ie).

- NEPS has also developed a range of resources and guidelines to assist with the transition process, which are all available to download from the NEPS platform of the gov.ie website.

NEPS Useful resources;

- A Continuum of Support for Primary Schools located at
- https://www.sess.ie/special-education-teacher-allocation/primary/continuum-support-primary
- A Continuum of Support for Post Primary Schools located at https://www.sess.ie/special-education-teacher-allocation/post-primary/continuum-support-post-primary
- Universal evidence-based interventions for wellbeing promotion and emotional resilience-building located at:
  https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a9118-catalogue-of-wellbeing-resources-for-schools/
- Student Support Teams More information and details on Student Support teams can be found on gov.ie and by emailing Neps_Wexford@education.gov.ie

Other resources

HSE Emotional Wellbeing Resources for Post Primary school teachers located at www.hse.ie

More information and details on FRIENDS programmes can be found on:
www.friendsresilience.org and training may be available through NEPS and the local Education Centre (check out the ESCI website).

Section 7: Supporting Autistic Children and Young People Who Are Experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance

This section overlaps with the information for school and information for CYP sections. However it adds to this pack by highlighting background issues and specific approaches that might work better for autistic children and young people.

Why autistic children and young people are at risk for EBSA?

While any student can experience EBSA during their time at school, students with complex social emotional behaviour needs, such as autism, can find school life particularly stressful at times. The following cognitive deficit theories, outlined in Figure 13 , are commonly used to support an understanding of how day-to-day interactions in school can challenge autistic individuals.

Figure 13: Cognitive theories of Autism (NAIT, 2019)

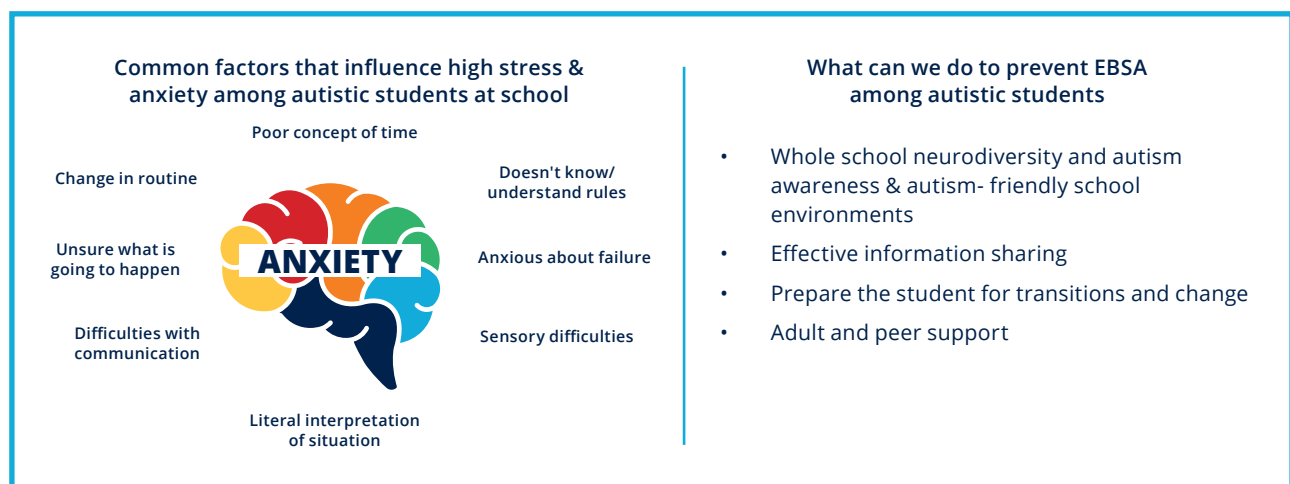| Theory of Mind	Executive Function	Weak Central Coherence	Context Blindness	Double Empathy Problem	Monotropism
• Develops from joint attention • Understanding other people's thoughts, feelings, beliefs & experience • Taking account of this understanding in your own actions	• The ability to plan, organise & sequence thoughts & actions • Control our impulses	• The tendancy to focus on details rather than the "big picture" which affects the person's ability to consider context.	• Challenge in processing or using all of the information from visual, auditory, historical & social contexts to make sense of experiences in the moment • Missing the 'obvious'	• A mutual challenge of misunderstanding intentions, motivations or communication between autistic and non-autistic people.	• A tendency to focus attention on one thing at a time, with difficulty shifting attention & processing multiple stimuli which might support understanding

Within the emerging neurodiversity paradigm and the social model of disability, it is recognised that autism can result in fluctuating levels of disability, or differences, depending on the demands of the neurotypical world and available environmental supports (PSI Guidelines, 2022). Building cultures of inclusion is central to good intervention practice in school settings.

What schools need to know about autism – from autistic children and young people.

School life – how it impacts on autistic differences and behaviour

It is valuable to understand why a student might be behaving in a way that is causing concern. Through greater understanding, we are more likely to make reasonable adjustments and provide the appropriate support to reduce or replace that behaviour, and potentially avoid school refusal. This can also help families who see different behaviour at home compared to behaviour seen in school.

Figure 14: Identifying stress factors and preventing EBSA among autistic students.

Common factors that influence high stress & anxiety among autistic students at school

Poor concept of time

Change in routine

Doesn't know/ understand rules

Unsure what is going to happen

ANXIETY

Anxious about failure

Difficulties with communication

Sensory difficulties

Literal interpretation of situation

What can we do to prevent EBSA among autistic students

- Whole school neurodiversity and autism awareness & autism- friendly school environments
- Effective information sharing
- Prepare the student for transitions and change
- Adult and peer support

There is no "one size fits all" approach to plan for autistic students. Each is an individual, and the same behaviour observed in a number of autistic students may have different causes or functions. It is also important to understand a student's actions from their perspective. The AET link on the next page provides some insight into how autistic young people experience school and their advice on how schools can support them.

AET How to support young people with autism in school and college

www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0ubxEOIuSw
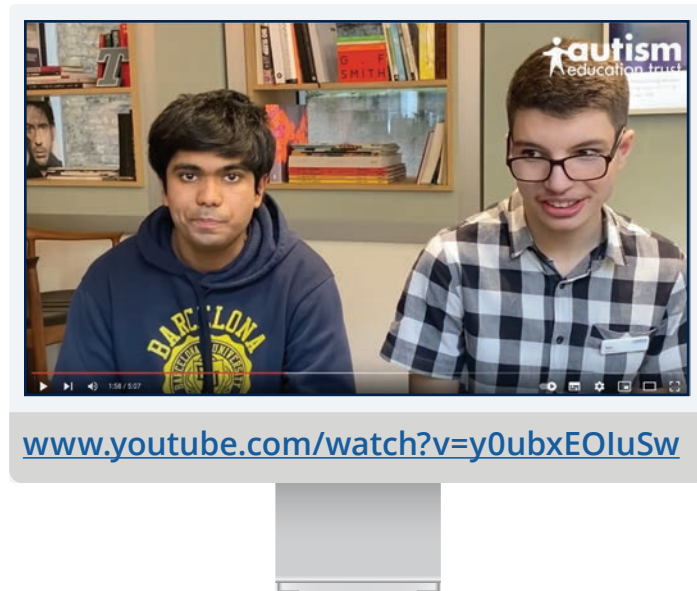
The following section looks at what we can do to manage emotionally based school avoidance among autistic children and young people.

Problem Solving Step 1: Identification of Need/Gathering Information

What is the concern and why is it happening? (NEPS problem Solving Approach)

- **WHAT IS THE CONCERN?** Starting Point
- **WHY IS IT HAPPENING?** Information Gathering and Assessment
- **HOW CAN WE HELP?** Planning and Intervention
- **DID IT WORK?** Review

Gathering information from the child/young person

Techniques that work for other CYP experiencing EBSA may also work for autistic students so we advise that techniques such as "Drawing the Ideal School" and mapping the school are considered. (See Section 6: Information for schools)

The following are examples of Person-Centred Planning Tools which are mainly visual. They might help when a student is nonverbal or finds it particularly difficult to express their needs or emotion to others. Indeed many of the techniques listed below are also helpful for CYP with general learning disability/difficulties.

Talking Mats is a light-technology framework that uses picture symbols representing topics, options, and emotions to help

https://www.talkingmats.com
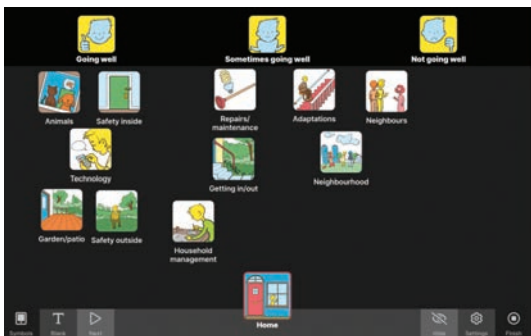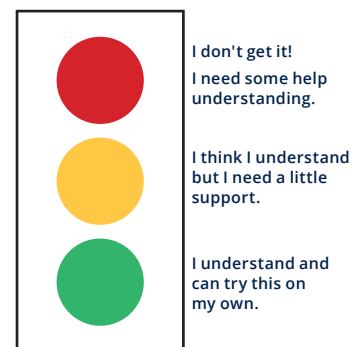
How do I feel today?

The Feelings Ladder can be used by CYP to identify where they are on a feelings scale. Questions may be asked to gather views on why a child placed their feeling where they did, and what might make them move up/down the ladder
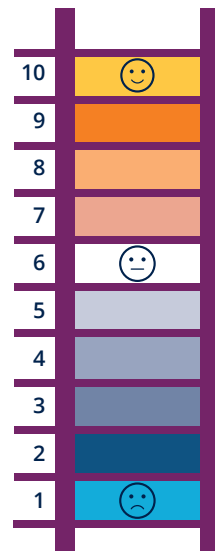
Likert Scale Faces may be used in the form of a colour or emoji face scale to allow children and young people to identify how something makes them feel.
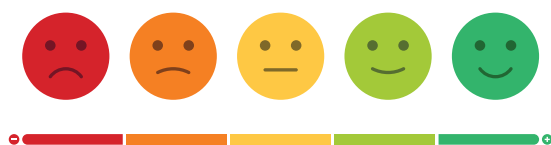
If the school mapping exercise if too difficult then the **Traffic Lights Technique** can be useful for students to self-reflect on how they have found aspects of school life, as well as their feelings about school.

I don't get it!
I need some help understanding.

I think I understand but I need a little support.

I understand and can try this on my own.

For more advice on using Person Centred Planning Tools with autistic children and young people, see Appendix 1 of the Autism Good Practice Guidance for Schools (2022). https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8d539-autism-good-practice-guidance-for-schools-supporting-children-and-young-people/

Gathering information on autistic CYP from supporting adults

As with all CYP, you will gather information from supporting adults. In the case of autistic CYP, it can be valuable to know if a child or young person knows they are autistic, or if autism is a diagnosis the CYP understands or identifies with.

Observations, checklists and autism-friendly assessment tools can contribute greatly to an understanding of a student's strengths and needs at school and how they might be influencing emotion-based school avoidance.

For more examples of how to support the identification of needs in a learning environment, see Resource Box 4 of Autism Good Practice Guidance to Schools (2022).
https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8d539-autism-good-practice-guidance-for-schools-supporting-children-and-young-people/

Gathering and sharing information in a way that can help

Communication Passports are one example of how to share key information on what can help or hinder an individual student at school (see Appendix 8 for examples).

During transition periods, it will be essential to share what worked well in previous school settings. With parental consent this can be assisted by the systematic use of **Transfer Profiles** and collaborative discussion between schools. Early contact with home and student school visits in advance of a transition is considered good practice.

Before starting in a new school: Key tips on Proactive Transition & Induction Supports

Target parents of autistic students/pupils for school induction including:

- Have we established if the child/young person has been made aware of their autism diagnosis?
- Have we established clear communication pathways between school and home, including phone/email contacts and/or scheduled parent-teacher meetings etc?
- Have we facilitated school visit/virtual tour in advance of the student/pupils' first day? Provide photos of staff, maps of school building etc., where possible.
- Have we engaged in early dialogue relating to awareness of school policies and adaptations required to support an individual autistic student (e.g., uniform policy, homework policy etc.)
- Have we examined previous school reports and professional reports for evidence of EBSA or EBSA risk factors?

For more information.

Pupil Passports see Appendix and Call Scotland Communication Passports
www.callscotland.org.uk/blog/personal-communication-passports/
www.communicationpassports.org.uk/creating-passports/

Problem Solving Step 2: Intervention Planning-How can we help?

a) Advice on intervention management in a school

All schools should aim to become familiar with the Autism Good Practice Guidance for Schools (2022) and its comprehensive guide to developing autism-friendly teaching and learning interventions across 8 key domains associated with good practice.

- Learning environment support
- Language and communication development
- Social development
- Emotional development
- Sensory processing
- Functional skills & daily living
- Academic development
- Behavioural development

https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8d539-autism-good-practice-guidance-for-schools-supporting-children-and-young-people/

b) The importance of autism and anxiety awareness/acceptance

All adults, parents and staff need to build their understanding of autism and their understanding and acceptance of various emotional states across a school day. The development of healthy coping skills in schools, including how adults' thoughts, feelings or actions might influence a child's success at school is valuable. Autistic CYP often mask/camouflage their anxiety throughout the school day, then express high levels of distress and even aggression when home. This is referred to as the Cola Bottle analogy.

Bad Behaviour After School?

The Cola Bottle Analogy

https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/health/coke-bottle-video-explains-autistic-14626730.

Neurotypical Day/Response to Anxiety	Autistic students are likely to start their day at the higher level of Anxiety – the green line.
1. You might get up in the morning worried about the day ahead.	1. They may wake up anxious.
2. You calm yourself down by thinking calmly about the day over a cup of tea.	2. Their parent calms them down by looking at their home visual timetable for the day.
3. You set off for work and there is a diversion on the road.	3. Perhaps none of their favourite cereal is left, but they find an alternative they like.
4. You start to get anxious about being late and take a detour.	4. They set off to school later than usual so someone else gets to the front of the line first.
5. Many others have taken the same route and now you are stuck in traffic and are very late.	5. Someone else gets the coat peg they had wanted.
6. Suddenly, the car behind bangs into yours!	6. Someone brushes past them and brushes them softly on the arm.
7. No one is hurt, but it will take the rest of the day for you to return to the level you were at the beginning of the day.	7. That's it, they've lost it. They are on the ground kicking and screaming. They are 'over the losing it line!' The adults are all saying, "There was no reason at all for that! It's come from nowhere." But it hasn't.

Another analogy that can explain anxiety build up is called the 'Losing it Line'. This graph shows anxiety levels over time and demonstrates the differences between neurotypical and neurodiverse individuals' experience of anxiety, and anxiety's impact on behaviour.

Figure 15: 'Losing It" Line Graph
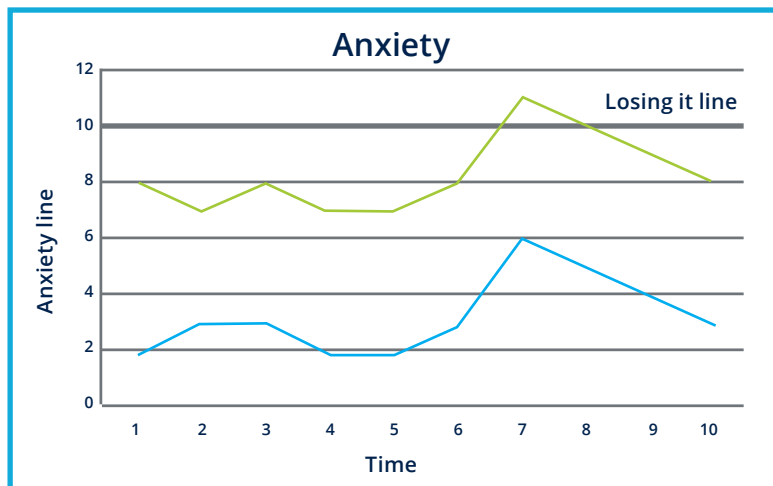
Understanding the 'Losing it Line' graph, The Y axis marks the level of anxiety, and the X axis is the passage of time. Each point on the coloured lines represents a different event in the day. The blue line along the lower part of the graph represents most people on an average day with nothing big or significant going on in our lives to cause major distress.

Key tips on autism and anxiety awareness/acceptance:

Regularly scheduled Autism Awareness training for staff is valuable to all schools.
Middletown Centre for Autism provides training for parents too.

• NCSE Support Services in school training-https://ncse.ie/school-support

• AsIAm Book a Talk-https://asiam.ie/book-a-speaker/

• Middletown Centre for Autism: Training-www.middletownautism.com

For more information on how parents can explain autism to children and young people, see Autism Good Practice Guidance, p.24, Resource Box 1: Explaining autism to children and young people'.
https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8d539-autism-good-practice-guidance-for-schools-supporting-children-and-young-people/
For more information on the relationship between autism and anxiety related school absence,
see NAIT Anxiety Related Absence Guidance 2020.pdf (autismtoolbox.co.uk)
Autism Good Practice Guidance: A Closer look Anxiety
https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8d539-autism-good-practice-guidance-for-schools-supporting-children-and-young-people/
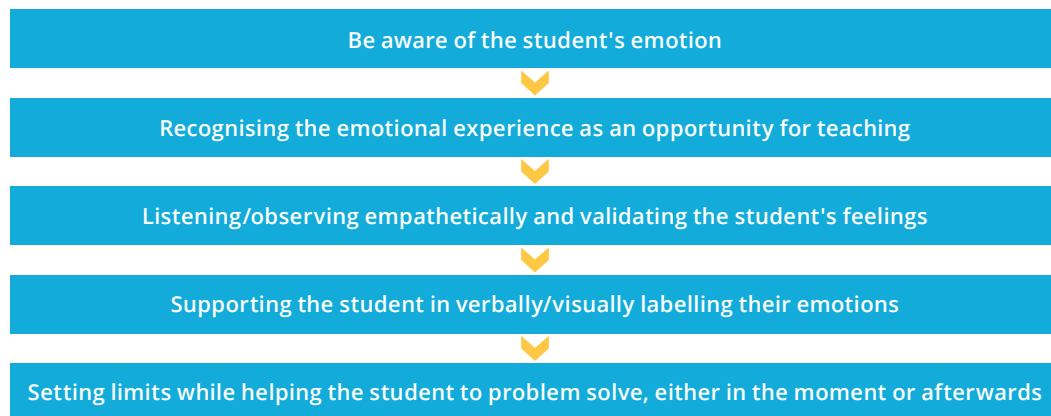
c) The importance of building relationships and supporting adults.

While it is important to avoid over-dependence on one member of staff, it can be valuable in large schools to establish a consistent Key Adult/Key Teacher support system as part of an autistic student's Support Plan. This can help a large school to plan for a student's need for predictability in adult responding when the student feels overwhelmed.

Strategies such as emotion coaching and co-regulation techniques can assist a Key Adult at school in responding to a CYP when they are in distress. See Autism Good Proactive Guidance for schools' chapter on Emotion Development and adult-led emotion supports for more advice:
https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8d539-autism-good-practice-guidance-for-schools-supporting-children-and-young-people/

Figure 16: Co-Regulating Technique

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│           Be aware of the student's emotion                  │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                           ⌄
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Recognising the emotional experience as an opportunity      │
│                   for teaching                               │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                           ⌄
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Listening/observing empathetically and validating the       │
│                student's feelings                            │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                           ⌄
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Supporting the student in verbally/visually labelling       │
│                  their emotions                              │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                           ⌄
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Setting limits while helping the student to problem solve,  │
│             either in the moment or afterwards               │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Check and Connect strategies are also a valuable framework for frequent proactive intervention planning to address issues that can cause worry for a student, if left unassisted. See Check and Connect: A structured adult mentoring intervention for students: www.nbss.ie/interventions-and-projects/behaviour-for-learning/check-and-connect

Schools should organise regular autism awareness training for all staff and parent groups, including lunchtime supervisors/ancillary staff. This can assist in building proactive environmental and sensory supports that can help when creating a low arousal state that helps to reduce triggering behaviours. For example:

    Carry out sensory audits in key rooms/areas of the school that can trigger stress

    https://sensory-processing.middletownautism.com/sensory-strategies/sensory-audit-for-school-and-classrooms/

    Provide sensory safe spaces in school and develop a plan to enable access when needed

    https://asiam.ie/about-autism/sensory-space/

    NCSE Resources on occupational therapy support ideas (home and school)

    https://ncse.ie/resources-for-teachers-on-occupational-therapy-support

    Work with families to develop morning and after school routine (encourage use of visual schedules, down time after school and strategies to relieve stress e.g., exercise, trampoline or punch bag).

d) The importance of building relationships with Peers

Schools and families can support autistic students in building relationships with peers and sharing common interests with others by promoting opportunities for meaningful social interactions during break times for example, alternatives to unstructured leisure time, or sports activities, where needed, or structured activities centred on areas of special interest (Nurture Room access, Social Café, chess, coding, sci fi club etc.).
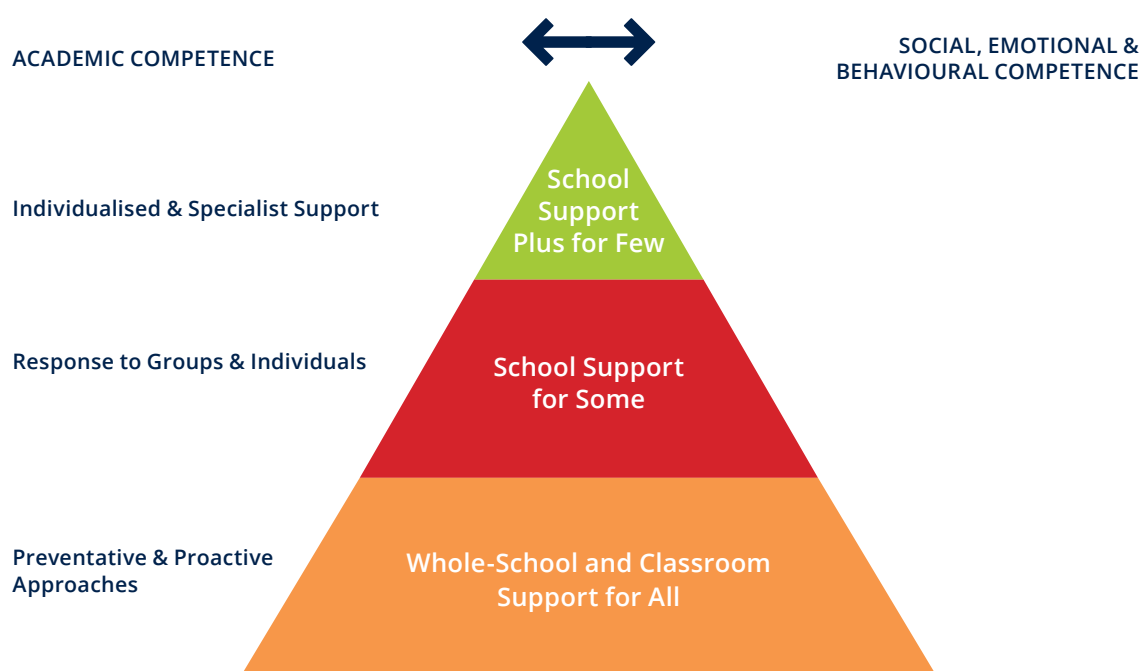
A school's, Anti-Bullying Policy should include discrimination of neuro-diverse students/pupils. Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) lessons and assemblies can also help teach all students about accepting diversity and difference, including disabilities. A general assembly to teach autism awareness/acceptance may avoid a particular student feeling uncomfortable. Other resources that might be helpful:

- Neurodiversity in the classroom: a teacher's guide
  www.structural-learning.com/post/neurodiversity-in-the-classroom-a-teachers-guide

- The Learning About Neurodiversity at School (LEANS) resource
  www.ed.ac.uk/salvesen-research/our-projects/learning-about-neurodiversity-at-school

- Autism/Neurodiversity awareness for all students/pupils
  Pandas Online www.pandasonline.org

Step 3: Monitor student outcomes and build effective practise at all levels of the Continuum of Support

Did it work?

ACADEMIC COMPETENCE

SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL &
BEHAVIOURAL COMPETENCE

Individualised & Specialist Support

School
Support
Plus for Few

Response to Groups & Individuals

School Support
for Some

Preventative & Proactive
Approaches

Whole-School and Classroom
Support for All

When developing an EBSA Support Plan for an autistic child or young person, it will be valuable to include their voice in any outcome measure. Repeating procedures used at the Information Gathering phase is a useful way to establish if change has occurred and/or what new targets are needed.

In line with the Continuum of Support, prevention of EBSA at whole school and classroom level remains key for autistic students, as it does for others. Sometimes more targeted interventions at School Support/Support for Some level and/or reactive interventions at School Support Plus/Support for a Few are required. When this occurs, parents should be encouraged to express their priorities are for their child. Set realistic targets and nurture communication structures that enable effective information sharing.

Quick Guide to EBSA Planning for autistic students through CoS

	What's needed in a Plan	Resources
PREVENTING EBSA among autistic students	Whole school awareness & understanding of autism and how it can affect learning and wellbeing	NCSE Support Services in school training https://ncse.ie/school-support
Whole School/Classroom Support/Support for All		AsIAm Book a Talk https://asiam.ie/book-a-speaker/
Who needs to be involved at this level (All staff, All students/pupils at school, Parent body)	Whole school staff awareness of EBSA (see school support chapter for more ideas)	Middletown Centre for Autism: Training for Parents and Professionals www.middletownautism.com
		Government of Ireland: Autism Good Practice Guidance for Schools https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8d539-autism-good-practice-guidance-for-schools-supporting-children-and-young-people/)
	Whole school social inclusion and emotional wellbeing plan, including prevention of bullying and discrimination	AsIAm: Autism Guidance for Teachers https://asiam.ie/advice-guidance/education/autism-guidance-for-teachers/
		Universal evidence-based interventions for wellbeing promotion and emotional resilience-building https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a9118-catalogue-of-wellbeing-resources-for-schools/
	Effective general transition planning supports between schools and clear communication pathways between home and school	HSE Emotional Wellbeing Resources for Post Primary school teachers https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/hse-education-programme/training-and-resources-for-post-primary-school-teachers/mental-health-training-and-resources-for-post-primary-school-teachers.html
		Restorative Practice https://www.restorativeresources.org/educator-toolkit.html
		NEPS Transitions from Primary to Post Primary & Transfer Review Profiles www.gov.ie/en/collection/84e52e-national-educational-psychological-service-neps-guidelines-tips-and-/#transfer-from-primary-to-post-primary

Quick Guide to EBSA Planning for autistic students through CoS

|	What's needed in a Plan	Resources
TARGETED EBSA intervention for autistic students Support for Some/ School Support Who needs to be involved at this level (autistic students/pupils with a history of wellbeing and/or EBSA needs. Intermitted school refusers.)	A Key teacher assigned to support Planning in school and communication with home. Assessment and monitoring tools that help build an understanding of what's happening/what triggers EBSA for an individual case. Targeted evidence-based interventions for social emotional and behaviour confidence and competence.	KEY Teacher & Targeted transition planning for children and young people who have been identified previously as experiencing EBSA/ refusing to go to school in the past. • Activate information sharing early (as soon as a new school placement has been identified) • Regular scheduled meetings with school & home to review Student/Pupils strengths and areas of interest as well as their needs (see Transfer Profile/ Communication Passport for suggestions). • Assign Key Adult teacher support and set realistic expectations and goals for home and school • Managing cycles of anxiety at home and school Autism Good Practice Guidance for schools on intervention development in social, emotional, behaviour advice for school https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8d539-autism-good-practice-guidance-for-schools-supporting-children-and-young-people/ Middletown Centre for Autism: Anxiety Management best-practice.middletownautism.com/approaches-of-intervention/anxiety-management/ Building social interactions at school https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Developing-Social-Skills.pdf Wexford Parent HUB workshops/advice on managing social-emotional behaviour at home. http://www.wexfordcypsc.ie/wexford-parents-hub/contact-us

Quick Guide to EBSA Planning for autistic students through CoS

	What's needed in a Plan	Resources
REACTIVE Intervention planning Support for a Few/ School Support Plus Who needs this (Entrenched school avoidance for an extended period of time).	Key person support for families and continued Key teacher support in school.	School and interagency comprehensive planning for re-integration back to a learning environment (Home and School). AsIAm: School Refusal & Reduced Timetables asiam.ie/advice-guidance/education/reduced-timetables/

Section 8: External Professionals and Agencies

A collaborative working approach.

There are many aspects to a child's life, and while working with children all have one thing in common- The child is the main priority. Therefore, it is necessary for all to work collaboratively to ensure best outcomes for the child, empowering them, embracing differences, and fostering their uniqueness. Identifying the possible causes for the child's difficulties and exploring all areas of their life. The solution is more likely when everyone is clear on their role in supporting the child to successfully attend school.

Figure 17: Visual representation of collaborative approach with child in centre
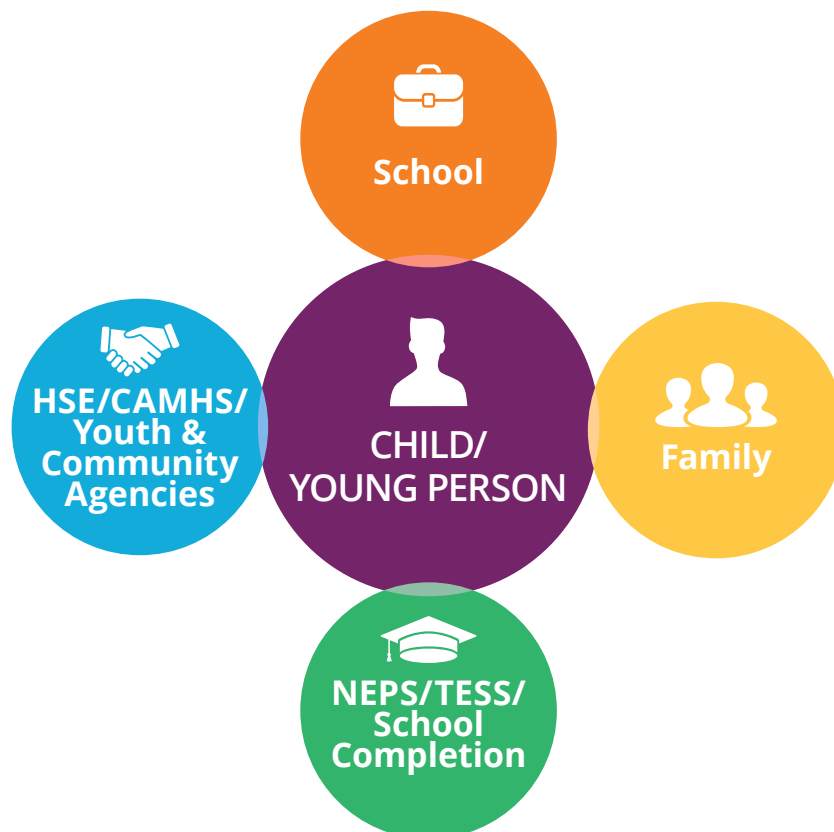
Services and Referral Routes in Wexford

There are a number of services that provide information and support to young people in Co. Wexford. These vary from universal to more targeted support depending on the requirements of the young person and the stage they are at in their EBSA journey. Complex cases will obviously require more intervention.

- A young person's case should be referred to the Education Welfare Service (EWS) when they continue to struggle with school attendance within the academic year. The Education Welfare Service is part of Tusla's Education Support Service (TESS) that deals with children and families who have difficulties in relation to school attendance, participation and retention. Involvement may include Duty advice/guidance, an assessment to establish the barriers to education, meeting with the family and child, liaising with other agencies, organising of Educational Review Conferences and support to devise an educational plans with all involved. For more information see: https://www.tusla.ie/tess/.

- With parental/guardian consent, the case may be considered for the Meitheal process. Meitheal is a multi-agency approach to assist children and their families when they need support from more than one service. Meitheal identifies the strengths and needs of the young person and family and coordinates services in order to develop an agreed action plan. See https://www.tusla.ie/services/family-community-support/prevention-partnership-and-family-support-programme/meitheal-national-practice-model/.

- If no significant progress has been made about a young person's emotional wellbeing or mental health, a referral can be made through the GP or relevant clinician to:

Primary Care Psychology (if behavioural or mild-moderate mental health difficulties are present). Primary Care Psychology in County Wexford follows a stepped care model of intervention in line with Primary Care services nationally. The aim is to assist parents, children, and young people to develop skills to better understand and manage emotional and behavioural difficulties and challenges. Research has repeatedly shown that difficulties that arise for children and adolescents are best responded to in a family context- no matter how the problem has developed, parents/carers are always part of the solution. Therefore, parents and carers of children who are referred to Primary Care Psychology are offered group training and education to enable them to make changes to assist their child. In some circumstances assessment and/or individual work is required.

Parents/Carers are asked to opt-in to the Primary Care Psychology service by completing and returning a Pre-Screening Questionnaire. They are then offered an initial screening consultation appointment with a Psychologist and are waitlisted for the most appropriate group or intervention. Please note, individual therapy for children is not offered on a routine basis.

Older adolescents, i.e., 16 years up their 18th birthday, referred to Primary Care Psychology are considered old enough to consent to a service or intervention themselves (they can decide to opt in or not) and will generally be waitlisted for a CBT (cognitive-behavioural therapy) and/or group for young people. See:
 http://www.wexfordcypsc.ie/young-people-and-mental-health/hse-psychology-services-wexford.

- A referral should be made to Tusla Child and Family Agency if it is deemed that the parents/guardians are not supporting the young person to meet their identified unmet needs. See: https://www.tusla.ie/services/child-protection-welfare/concerns/.

- It may be beneficial to link in with the local Youth Service (FDYS) to support the young person, outside of school. FDYS provides a range of targeted and universal services to young people and their families including information points, youth clubs and youth counselling. See: https://fdys.ie/.

- Other youth organisations that provide youth programmes include Gorey Youth Needs Group and Youth New Ross. See: https://www.youthnewross.com/ and https://gyng.ie/wp/.

- Child and Family Support Networks (CFSN's) operate in Co. Wexford. Membership is drawn from all the services that play a role in the lives of children and families in their network area. They work together to ensure that there is no "wrong doors" for families. CFSN co-ordinators support the development of networks and oversee the Meitheal programme.

It may be worthwhile to recommend that the young person's family make contact with **Wexford's Family Support Drop-in Service**. Tusla, Barnardos, Youth New Ross, Gorey Youth Needs Group and Family Resource Centres across County Wexford provide a free, confidential drop-in support service for parents and carers where they can discuss a concern they have about their child. Help and support can be provided on a range of issues affecting children from 0-18 years. This includes behavioural difficulties, parenting dilemmas, issues in school, relationships, concerns around drugs or alcohol and more.

General Family Support/Information

See: http://www.wexfordcypsc.ie/services for information on services/supports for children, young people and families. Some services have developed short videos outlining the supports they provide. These can be accessed on the Wexford CYPSC website here: http://www.wexfordcypsc.ie/children-and-young-peoples-plan/videos.

School Completion Programmes

School Completion Programmes will endeavour to link with the young person, their family and the school. Within their catchment population, they run programmes that address specific topics e.g., anxiety, behavioural issues with the young person, to work towards a return to education. This work and support is provided through in- school settings and home visits to ensure that the young person is met where they are most capable of engagement. The SCP will liaise with the school and family to consistently work towards a positive outcome for the young person and where necessary make appropriate onward referrals and support to access these services.

There are currently five SCP's in Co. Wexford. Details can be accessed at the following link: http://www.wexfordcypsc.ie/education-and-training.

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

NEPS is a school based educational psychology service . NEPS psychologists work with both primary and post-primary schools and are concerned with learning, behaviour, social and emotional development. Each psychologist is assigned to a group of schools. Referrals come from the school principal.

NEPS psychologists work in partnership with teachers, parents and children in identifying educational needs. They offer a range of services aimed at meeting these needs, for example, supporting individual students (through consultation and assessment), special projects and research.

Barnardos

Supports available from Barnardos in Co. Wexford include the Family Support Service, Teen Parent Support Programme and Wexford Parent's Hub. The "Parents Hub" is a a "one stop shop" for parents, providing easily accessible information on forth-coming talks and parenting programmes available in Co. Wexford. Examples include "Parenting When Separated" and "Non Violent Resistance".
See http://www.wexfordcypsc.ie/wexford-parents-hub for details of current courses. There is also an online safety programme for schools and webinars for parents. This can be accessed on the Barnardos website at ;
https://www.barnardos.ie/learning-development/training/online-safety-programme.

Barnardos Wexford is contactable at 053 923 6342 or at info.wexford@barnardos.ie.

SECONDARY SERVICES (after primary services have responded):

CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service)
(if moderate to severe mental health issues are present).
What is CAMHS?
The function of the CAMHS Team is to provide a specialist mental health service to children and adolescents up to the age of 18 years old who have moderate to severe mental health disorders that require the input of a specialist multidisciplinary mental health team.

Who is on the CAMHS Team?
The multidisciplinary team is under the clinical leadership of a consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist and includes junior medical staff, psychologist, speech and language therapist, occupational therapist, clinical nurse specialists, social worker and social care worker.

Who can attend CAMHS?
The CAMHS Team accept referrals for the assessment and treatment of disorders such as moderate to severe depression, mood disorders, psychosis, anxiety disorders, moderate to severe Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), moderate to severe eating disorder, suicidal behaviours and ideation where intent is present.

The diagnosis of autism and intellectual disability remains the remit of primary care and disability services. Children and young people with a mild intellectual disability are seen by CAMHS only when there is a co-morbid moderate to severe mental health disorder. Children and young people with moderate to severe intellectual disability should be referred to Mental Health Intellectual Disability Services for Children and Adolescents (CAMHS-MHID).

How to refer to CAMHS team?
GPs are usually the first point of contact for families who seek help for various problems and determine whether to refer to primary care services or specialist services such as CAMHS. An important role of primary care services is to identify when a child or young person needs more specialist mental health care and to initiate such referral through the child's GP. Paediatricians and consultant liaison psychiatrist may also refer to CAMHS. Tusla- Child and Family agency via GP may also refer. There are two CAMHS teams.

-Wexford (North) CAMHS Team (Enniscorthy & Gorey): Arnold House, Parnell Road, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford, Y21 A272. Tel. 053 9259860

-Wexford (South) CAMHS Team (Wexford and New Ross): Arden House, Whitemill Industrial Estate, Wexford, Y35VK59, Tel. 053 9243220

What will the CAMHS Team do?

The aim of the CAMHS service is to provide clinical assessment with diagnosis, based on the needs identified with specific intervention appropriate to the needs of each individual child/young person and his/her family. It also enables families, carers and other professionals to positively support children/young people by providing them with appropriate strategies and skills to improve their mental health.

For additional information please see pages 17-37 of the CAMHS Operation Guidelines 2019 available on hse.ie

Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People Programme (PDS)

PDS is a significant change programme for the provision of therapeutic services for children from birth to 18 years of age. It has been rolled out nationally by the HSE in partnership with its funded voluntary organisations. PDS;

➤ Provides a clear pathway and fairer access to services for all children with a disability.

➤ Makes the best use of available resources for the benefit of children and their families

➤ Ensures effective teams working in partnership with families and with education staff to support children with a disability to reach their full potential.

A child's access to services will be based on his/her needs, each Childrens Disability Network Team (CDNT) will provide for all children with complex needs who live in that area. Children with non-complex needs will receive services at Primary Care level. A small number of children with very complex needs will need a level of expertise which may not solely be met by Primary Care services or the Children Disability Network Team. Specialist services will be developed to support and work with the CDNT and Primary Care services to meet the needs of this group of children. Children will be able to move between primary care and the team depending on their needs at a point in time.

Referrers will submit a completed national Children's Services Referral Form, including signed parental consent, and an age specific Additional Information Form to the local Primary Care Service or Children's Disability Network Team.

All of the agencies in the South East, the HSE, Enable Ireland, the Central Remedial Clinic and the Brothers of Charity, are working together to roll out this programme;

The Ability Programme

The programme facilitates support to students and families to set expectations and create pathways to provide opportunities, to exercise their rights to further education, employment opportunities, inclusive access to their communities and the continued development of their independence.

- The programme works with young adults 16+ with a disability and their family members access 4 counties.

- The programme provides support in the school during school terms and the student's home community during school holidays for the final two years of school and sic month after the start of the students chosen pathway.

- The aim is to provide the participant with a clear pathway, of their choice, and to support the transition from school to this chosen pathway. These pathways have so far included College, PLC Courses, Apprenticeships, RT Training, Support Services, Adult Day Services and employment.

- This is done by discussing such topics as Decision making, Social Skills, Friendships Relationship, Vulnerability, Confidence/Self-Esteem, Boundaries, Change, Change in Support, Accepting New Support and more.

For more information contact info@schoolleaversap.ie.
Dayna Bradley, Project Team Leader
danya@schoolleaversap.ie/085 1380858

Section 9: EBSA Stories from Children and Young People's and Parents/Care-Givers

Here are some direct accounts given by CYP and their parents/carers about their experiences of EBSA You may find it helpful to review them (what they were thinking/ feeling at the time and what helped?) and see if there are any ideas which could be useful for a situation you are managing.

Children & Young People's Stories.

Molly's Story....

Molly was a student in Fifth Class when she experienced acute problems attending school due to a concern about vomiting in school post-pandemic school closures. Molly's school implemented a plan at the "Support for a Few" level when her difficulties were acute. Now she is at the "Support For All" level of Continuum Of Support. Molly returned to school full time and can look back on her experience. Below is her story.
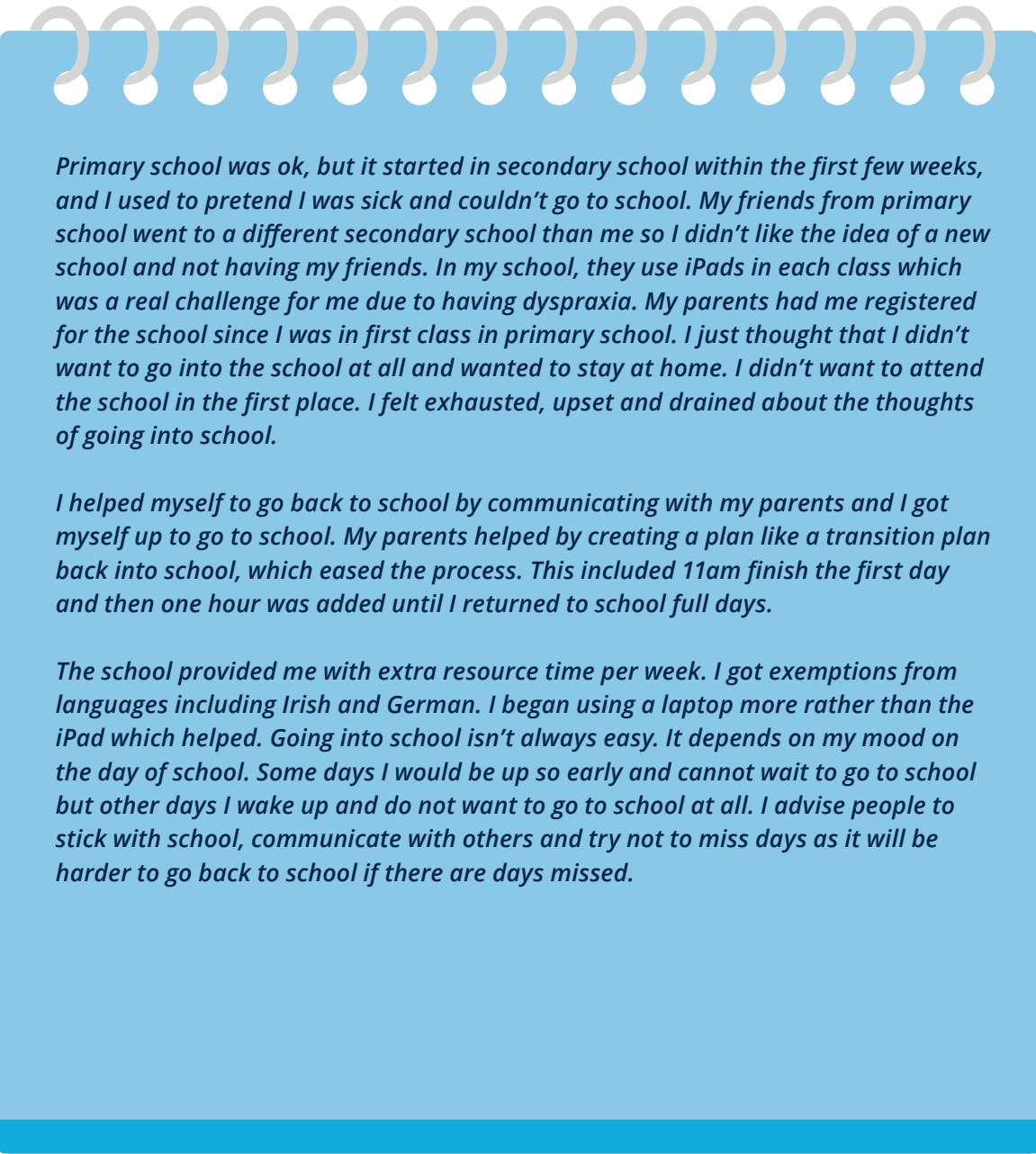
When this problem started, it was because I was worried that I would be sick if I went in and didn't want to leave the house or car. I felt I would be sick in school and didn't want to leave Mammy or Daddy. I thought that my friends didn't like me, that I wasn't good at things and that bad things would happen. I felt terrified. CBT sessions helped me learn lots of coping strategies and how to think positively. I also made a plan with the teacher. My parents listened and that helped. They never said 'don't be silly' or 'you have to go in'. They listened and helped.

My school arranged support sessions with a school completion worker who helped me with mindfulness and relaxation and arranged for play therapy for me. The teacher was in daily contact with Mam. We had a plan that if I got overwhelmed, my teacher would contact Mam. Sometimes a support teacher would meet me at the gate and I would go to her room for 10mins before entering the class. My teacher sat me near the door as I had said I felt more comfortable there. Before I started sixth class, I saw the classroom and met my new teacher before school officially started in September.

As well as support from my school, attending a therapist helped me and a Physio who used a programme called 'Body Talk'. My great friends and my teacher and the SCP worker help me to keep going to school. Now I have strategies that I use to cope if I get worried. If I had to give advice to a CYP who was having an experience of finding it difficult to go to school, I would say everything not just the good things and explain how you feel to somebody you trust. I would want them to know that lots of young people have these feelings and it will get better. Remember school isn't the problem. Once you learn to manage and deal with your worries school will be ok and you will feel happy and proud.

Darren's Story...

Darren is a boy for whom transition from primary to post primary was when his problems started. He now attends school full- time. Here is his story.

Primary school was ok, but it started in secondary school within the first few weeks, and I used to pretend I was sick and couldn't go to school. My friends from primary school went to a different secondary school than me so I didn't like the idea of a new school and not having my friends. In my school, they use iPads in each class which was a real challenge for me due to having dyspraxia. My parents had me registered for the school since I was in first class in primary school. I just thought that I didn't want to go into the school at all and wanted to stay at home. I didn't want to attend the school in the first place. I felt exhausted, upset and drained about the thoughts of going into school.

I helped myself to go back to school by communicating with my parents and I got myself up to go to school. My parents helped by creating a plan like a transition plan back into school, which eased the process. This included 11am finish the first day and then one hour was added until I returned to school full days.

The school provided me with extra resource time per week. I got exemptions from languages including Irish and German. I began using a laptop more rather than the iPad which helped. Going into school isn't always easy. It depends on my mood on the day of school. Some days I would be up so early and cannot wait to go to school but other days I wake up and do not want to go to school at all. I advise people to stick with school, communicate with others and try not to miss days as it will be harder to go back to school if there are days missed.

Kelly's Story....

Kelly is a young person now in a PLC . Her attendance at Junior Cycle was very sporadic and part time. However, it improved at Senior Cycle when she decided on a goal. She tells her story below.

My problem started in sixth class in national school. I straight out told my parents I would not be going to school. I used to be so upset and cried about not wanting to go. I didn't want to go to school. It was because of bullying and isolation from others in the class. Everyone had groups and did not want to include me. When I started in sixth class, the classes got split up and my friends since junior infants were put in the other sixth class and I was left on my own.

Then when I started secondary school, the people in my class were already friends which made me feel isolated. I thought school was hell and I hated it so much and really did not want to go into the place again. I felt lonely because I was socially isolated from everyone else. I felt very down about the thoughts of going into school and wanted to stay at home in an environment that I felt comfortable in and did not have to deal with the situation in school.
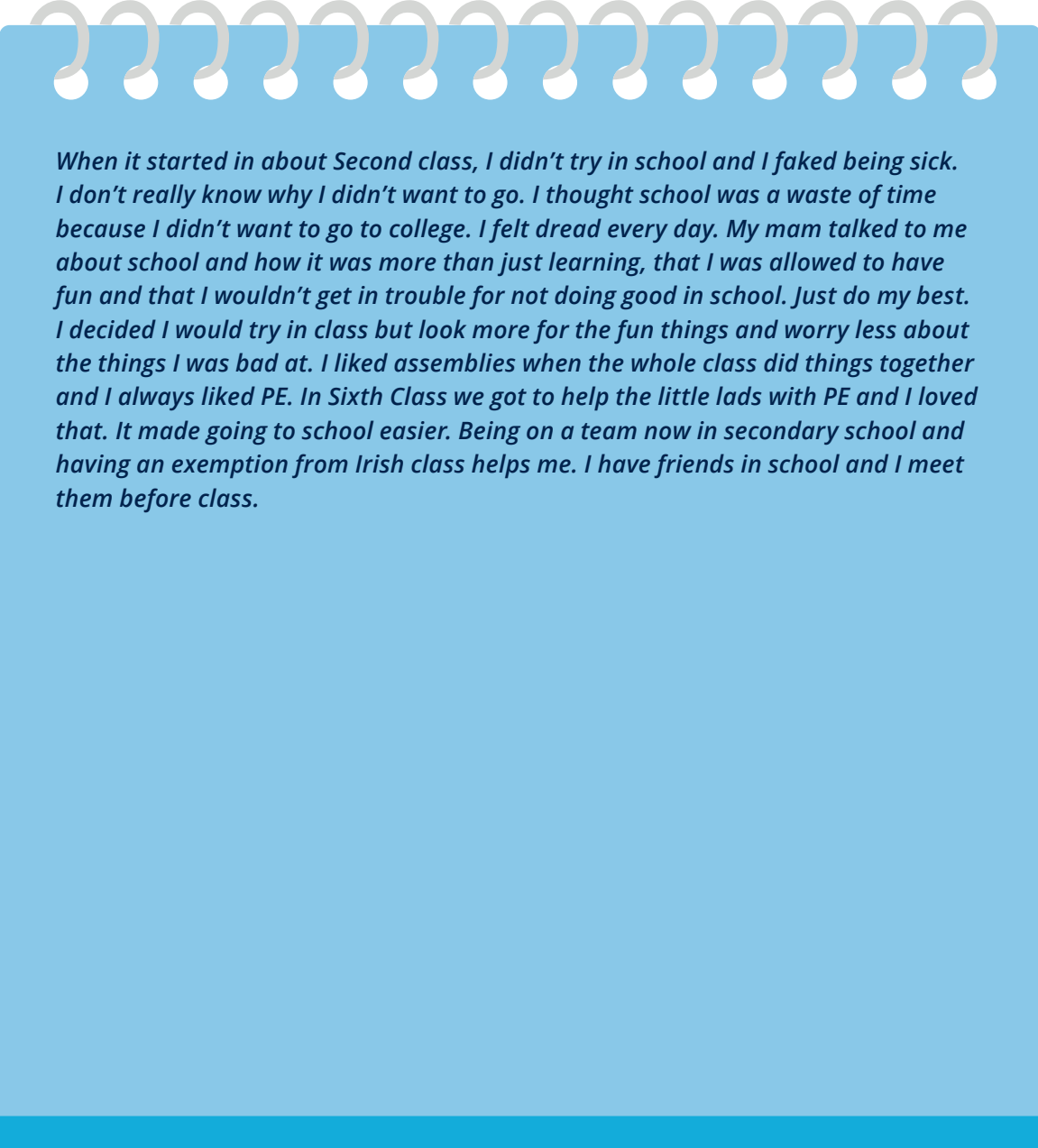
Things started to get better when I decided in my head to try the PLC course because I felt like I had nothing to lose. I got calculated grades for my Leaving Cert and from this after chatting with the Family Project Worker and my Mam, I decided to try a PLC to re-engage in education which I am currently completing. My Mam, Dad, and extended family continued to encourage me to reach goals and my potential. Mam and Dad financially supported me throughout my studies.

The Career Guidance Counsellor and my Year Head continued to provide support throughout my time in school through emails and phone calls with my parents, the GP, consultant and Family Project Worker to check up on me. My parents continue to support me in my journey, and I now have the drive and confidence to continue and to complete it.

My advice is that school is not forever. It is only a stepping stone to the next stage in your life and you will get through it. Seek help, talk to someone you can trust try not to bottle it up. Keep going you will get there. Remember you are there to get your education. You are there for you and not for anyone else and you will not be there forever. I know it's tough but go in and focus on your studies. You will move onto bigger and better things.

Tom's Story....

Tom is a pupil who is in the "At Risk" category. Due to his mix of learning difficulties, he is at the "Support For Some" level, receiving support classes and input from the Guidance Counsellor as needed. He has a Specific Learning Difficulty (Dyslexia). Now in second year, here is his story.

When it started in about Second class, I didn't try in school and I faked being sick. I don't really know why I didn't want to go. I thought school was a waste of time because I didn't want to go to college. I felt dread every day. My mam talked to me about school and how it was more than just learning, that I was allowed to have fun and that I wouldn't get in trouble for not doing good in school. Just do my best. I decided I would try in class but look more for the fun things and worry less about the things I was bad at. I liked assemblies when the whole class did things together and I always liked PE. In Sixth Class we got to help the little lads with PE and I loved that. It made going to school easier. Being on a team now in secondary school and having an exemption from Irish class helps me. I have friends in school and I meet them before class.

Parent/Caregivers Stories

Siobhán's Story...

Siobhán is the parent of a child who had significant difficulties attending school from fourth class. He is now in Transition Year and attends well. He has no Special Educational Needs (SEN). He had SNA support and a high level of support from his schools Guidance Counsellor and Vice Principal for first and second year but SNA support was no longer needed. Now his mother and school Vice Principal connect by telephone when needed.

Siobhán says *"When it started, I was very worried and felt helpless as we didn't know what was going through his head. We had never heard of a child who didn't want to go to school because of his emotions. The school counsellor, principal and teachers were great, the school psychologist as well. We just took it at his pace, tried to understand more and as it went on, got to know the days you could or couldn't push. There was counselling, the psychologist coming in. He was very upset and didn't want to leave us... pains in tummy, head etc. He just didn't want to leave us.*

I would advise parents to listen to them and engage straight away with school. Know that every day is not going to be sorted. Learn to accept bad days but still keep trying. Looking back, I should have been more patient, listened more and not worried about little things. Education is important but it can't be done unless your child is in a good place, so take your time, be patient".

Pauline's Story...

Pauline is the parent of a 15 year old girl who struggled with separation. She has no learning difficulties or special educational needs. She is now in 3rd year and things are much better for her.

Pauline spoke about the stress of trying to get her daughter to school every day. She said *"she was never a big fan of school but once she got to secondary school, she had her mobile phone so was able to contact home at any time. It would start on a Sunday night with stomach pains or headaches which at first we believed and allowed her to stay at home. But then it became a very regular occurrence. If she did go into school she would be texting shortly after with a reason to come home. I know she was always a bit anxious, she had counselling previously and seemed to be ok then.*

I found mornings very difficult and felt bad for making her go when she was upset. I spoke to the year head and the HSCL in the school who were very understanding and gave me some good advice. Sometimes I felt so helpless and stressed about the situation.

Then the school referred my daughter to SCP for support and there the worker talked her through her feelings and they came up with things that might help. My daughter said she found it hard separating from us and always wanted to come home when she had to get out of the car. A plan was made that instead of me dropping her to school her friends' mother would bring them in the morning and I would collect them in the evening. I didn't expect it to work but it did. Now she does still have the odd day where she will text to come home but at least we don't have the morning stress anymore".

"My advice to other parents would be to ask for help early before it gets too bad and give every suggestion a try even when you think it won't work".

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Early Years Intervention: Information about Early Learning & Care Settings

Understanding the importance of children's early experiences on later development

Research shows that early childhood (birth-5yrs) is the most important time for child development. From the time a baby is born, the emotional and social attachment they develop with their primary carer/s (parents/guardians) is critical (Brazelton, 1992). During these early years children learn best through loving and trusting relationships, through positive and nurturing interactions and through hands-on play and exploration opportunities. Children who are supported to be adventurous, creative, and confident learners will develop a positive sense of personal well-being and will interact with their surroundings in ways that promote successful development.

Providing children with the best start in life, helps develop strong healthy brains. A healthy and active brain, supported by safe, enriching and challenging environments, and healthy nutrition in early life, enhances children's brain functions and life-long learning skills (Arias & Sharpko, 2015).

Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare in Ireland

Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) is the term given to the range of services offered for children outside the family home. It includes full day care for working parents, pre-school for 2.5 years olds to the start of formal schooling, school age childcare for older children after their school day has finished or in the school holidays and childminding in the home. Typically, ELCs/Creches, Pre-schools and SAC are both community and privately run services in local communities.

All ELC and SAC services are registered and inspected by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency and the Department of Education. All staff must be qualified in Early Childhood Education and Garda Vetted to work in an ELC setting.

Importance of Quality Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood Education (ECE) or Early Years Education (EYE) is the combination of education and care provided to young children, which is based upon the beliefs, values, knowledge, understanding and experience of those providing it, namely early years educators. Practice must be informed by theory to be effective, particularly in supporting young children's development and learning, educators need to possess an acute understanding of 'what we do and why we do it'. This enables educators to create and construct early years curricula, which is observable in practice such as Montessori, Play-Based, Steiner, HighScope, Naíonra (Irish Medium) (Hayes, 2013).

Research on the Benefits of Quality Early Childhood Education

Benefits of quality early childhood education for young children into later life is widely documented internationally, through longitudinal research studies, such as the United States (US) HighScope Perry Preschool Project and United Kingdom (UK) Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project. Research evidence concludes that;

- High-quality early childhood education leads to immediate and measurable gains in children's social, emotional and educational development.
- High-quality early childhood education results in better developmental outcomes for children at school entry.
- Specialised support in the areas of social learning, language, and pre-reading skills benefits all children, particularly children at disadvantage and for whom English is an additional language.
- Quality early childhood education leads to life-long social and cognitive benefits for children, which continue through adolescence and adulthood.
- Investment in quality early childhood education provides significant economic benefits back to society.
- Finding results (Perry Preschool Project) from adults at 40yrs, who as children experienced high-quality early childhood education found that they were; more likely to remain in education and have better 3rd level educational outcomes in later life, gain employment and have higher earnings, own their own home and car, fewer teen pregnancies and lower criminal activity.

 (Sylva et al., 2004; Hodmann, Weikart, 2002; OECD, 2006).

What is Quality in Early Childhood Education?

Síolta (CECDE, 2006), meaning 'seeds' in Irish, is The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education developed by the government, through The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE). Its purpose is to inform and increase quality in early learning and care settings in Ireland.

Síolta defines principles of quality as follows.

- Valuing early childhood as a significant and distinct time in life that must be nurtured, respected, valued and supported. Children have the right to be listened to and have their views on issues that affect them, heard, valued, and responded to.

- The child's individuality, strengths, rights, and needs are central in provision of quality early childhood experiences.

- Parents/Guardians are valued as primary educators of the child and have a pre-eminent role in promoting her/his wellbeing, learning and development. Respectful partnership with parents/guardians is essential to promoting the best interests of the child.

- Responsive, sensitive, and reciprocal two-way relationships are developed with adults, peers, family and the extended community. Positive relationships, such as key worker systems which are secure, responsive, and respectful are the cornerstone of a child's well-being.

- Equality is an essential characteristic of quality early childhood education, which requires individual needs and abilities of each child be recognised and supported from birth.

- Quality early childhood settings acknowledge and respect diversity and ensure all children and families have their individual, personal, cultural, and linguistic identity validated.

- Environments, the physical indoor and outdoor environments should stimulate curiosity, foster independence, and promote a sense of belonging, all of which extends and enrich children's development and learning,

- The safety, welfare and well-being of children must be protected and promoted in all early childhood environments. The opportunity to form trusting relationships with adults and other children is a key characteristic of quality.

- The role of the adult in providing quality early childhood experiences is fundamental to practice. The professional competencies, qualifications, dispositions, and experience of early years educators is essential to supporting children's learning and development.

- Provision of quality early childhood experiences requires effective teamwork, cooperation, communication, and mutual respect. All educators work professionally, sharing knowledge and understanding as a team, among other professionals involved with the child and with parents. This is a prerequisite of quality practice and reflects 'a whole child perspective'.

- Pedagogy in early childhood is a term used to refer to the whole range of interactions which support the child's development, this is observed within the curriculum or programme of activities offered to children.

- Play is central to the well-being, development and learning of the young child. It is an important medium through which the child interacts with, explores, and makes sense of the world around him/her. Play is a source of joy and fulfilment for the child and as such, play will be a primary focus in quality early learning and care settings.

Aistear (NCCA, 2009), meaning 'journey' in Irish, is The National Early Childhood Curriculum

Framework for children from birth to six years. Its aim is to help adults, parents/guardians and early years educators, plan for and provide stimulating, enjoyable, and challenging learning experiences for children. There are four interconnected themes in Aistear: **Well-being:** Children will be happy, healthy and confident. **Identity and Belonging:** Children will value themselves and feel respected as part of their family and community. **Communicating:** Children will develop their confidence in sharing their experiences, thoughts, and ideas with others and **Exploring and Thinking:** Children will learn more about the world through playing, observing, questioning, with others and for themselves. In Ireland, all Early Childhood Education curricula and programmes must be informed by *Aistear, The National Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.*

All Early Learning and Care settings are inspected by the early years education inspectorate of the Department of Education (DE). Their inspections are based on a quality framework that is informed by the principles of Aistear and Síolta as well as national and international research related to early childhood education and care and inspection.

Supporting the Child's Early Childhood Learning and Developmental Journey

Aistear (NCCA, 2009) promotes the ideal that planned and challenging experiences provided by trusting adults, will support children to grow and develop as competent and confident learners. The types of learning children gain in their early years is important to them acquiring new skills, knowledge, understanding, attitudes and values and dispositions (perseverance, independence, problem-solving, resilience, confidence, trust etc.).

Supporting Parents/Guardians to Make Successful Transitions to Early Learning and Care Settings and Primary School

Attending Early Learning and Care/Preschool settings offers many benefits to children. It can be a great place for children to interact with peers and learn valuable life lessons such as how to share, take turns, and follow rules. It also can prepare them academically for Primary School, in regard to routine and socialising.

Going to preschool does come with some emotions, for both the parent and the child. For a child, entering a new preschool environment filled with unfamiliar educators and children can cause both anxiety and excitement. Parents might have mixed emotions about whether their child is ready for preschool.

Easing Your Child's Fears

Spend time talking with your child about preschool before it starts. In the months and weeks before preschool, gradually introduce your child to activities that often take place in a classroom (learning environment). A child who's used to scribbling with paper and crayons at home, for example, will find it comforting to discover the crayons and paper in the preschool classroom.

Attend story time in the library before entry to pre-school – allows your child to begin mixing with others.

Visit the preschool classroom with your child a few times before school starts. This can ease concerns about this unfamiliar territory. Visiting is also a chance to meet your child's educator/teacher and ask questions about routines and common activities. You can introduce some of those routines and activities at home, so they become familiar.

While you're in the classroom, let your child explore and observe the class and choose whether to interact with other children. This helps familiarize children with the classroom and lets them explore the new toys/materials they'll play with when pre-school starts.
You can also ask how the educator handles the first tear-filled days. How will the first week be structured to make the transition smooth for your child?

While acknowledging this important step your child is taking and providing support, too much emphasis on the change could make any anxiety worse. Young kids can pick up on their parents' nonverbal cues. When parents feel guilty or worried about leaving their child at pre-school, the child will probably sense that.

The calmer and more assured you are about your choice to send your child to preschool, the more confident your child will be.

Resources

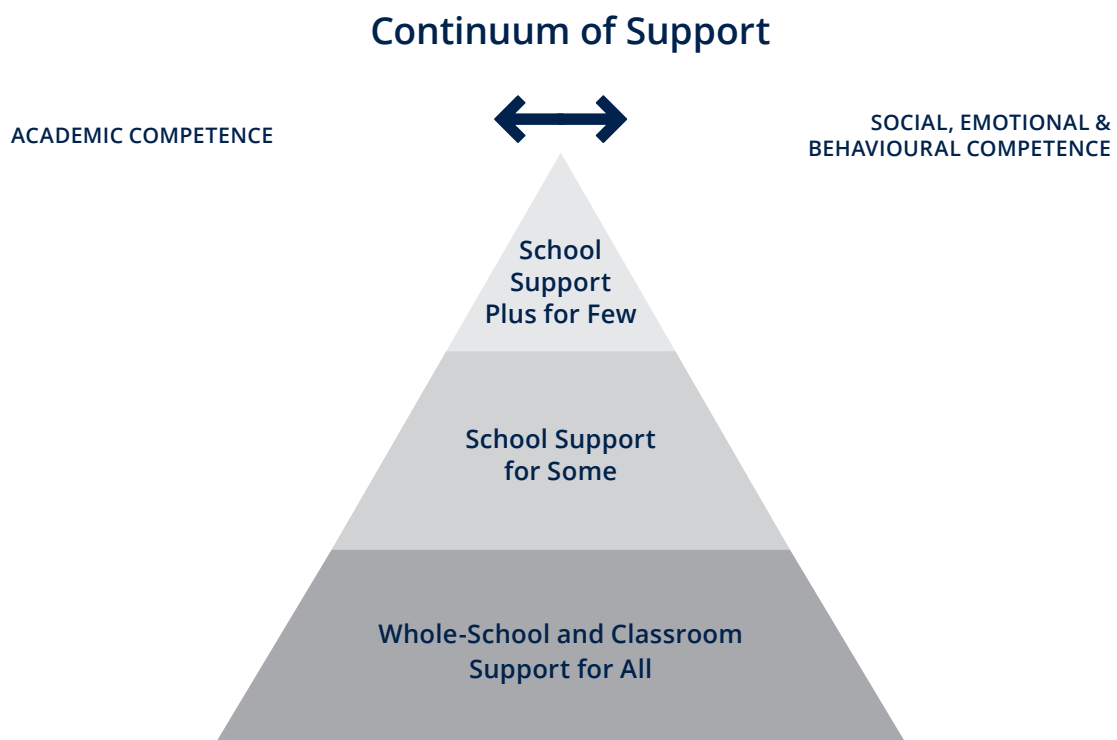|	
Aistear	https://curriculumonline.ie/Early-Childhood/
Síolta	https://siolta.ie/standards.php
Aistear Síolta Practice Guide	https://www.aistearsiolta.ie/en/introduction/
Mo Sceál	https://ncca.ie/en/early-childhood/mo-sc%C3%A9al/

Appendix 2:
Visual Representation of EBSA Support

Image credit: Aoife Power

Appendix 3: Student Support Plan

STUDENT SUPPORT FILE (DRAFT)	
Name of Student	
Date of Birth	
School	
Date File Opened	
Date File Closed	

Continuum of Support

ACADEMIC COMPETENCE ⟷ SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL & BEHAVIOURAL COMPETENCE

School Support Plus for Few

School Support for Some

Whole-School and Classroom Support for All

Developing a student support plan is the outcome of a problem-solving process, involving school staff, parent(s)/ guardian(s) and the student. We start by identifying concerns, we gather information, we put together a plan and we review it.

Student Support File, Log of Actions

Date	Actions

Support Checklist		
Name:	Age:	Class:
General Information	**Date Checked**	**Comments**
1. Parents/Guardians Consulted		
2. Information from previous school/preschool gathered		
3. Hearing		
4. Vision		
5. Medical Needs		
6. Basic Needs Checklist completed		
7. Assessment of learning- screening		
8. Observation of learning style/approach to learning		
9. Observation of behaviour		
10. Interview with pupil		
11. Classroom work differentiated?		
12. Learning environment adapted?		
13. Yard/school environments adapted?		
14. Informal or formal consultation/advice with outside professionals?		
15. Advice given by learning support/resource teacher or other school staff?		
16. Other interventions put in place in school?		
Action needed		
Helpful references: SEN: A Continuum of Support: Resource Pack for Teachers, pp. 13-16, 18 to 20; BESD: A Continuum of Support, p 7; A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools, Resource Pack for Teachers, pp32-36; Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools, pp20		

SUPPORT PLAN*

Classroom Support
School Support (Support for SOME)
School Support Plus (Support for A FEW)

To be completed by the teacher(s).

For help, see SEN: A Continuum of Support-Guidelines for Teachers: BESD: A Continuum of Support – Guidelines for Teachers pp.71-74; A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools, Resource Pack for Teachers, pp. 51, 53, 54, 57.

Student's name		**Age**	
Lead teacher		**Class/year**	
Start date of plan			
Review date of plan			
Student's strengths and interests			

Priority concerns
Reasons for concerns (Hypothesis)
Targets for the student
Strategies to help the student achieve the targets
Staff involved and resources needed

Signature of parent(s)/ guardian(s)	
Signature of teacher	

*A consultation with a NEPS psychologist/ other professionals may contribute to this plan.

SUPPORT REVIEW RECORD*

Classroom Support
School Support (Support for SOME)
School Support Plus (Support for A FEW)

To be completed by the teacher(s) as a review of the plan and as a guide for future actions.

For help, see SEN: A Continuum of Support-Guidelines for Teachers; BESD: A Continuum of Support – Guidelines for Teachers; A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools, Resource pack for Teachers; Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools.

Student's name		Age	
Names of those present at review		Class/year	

What areas of the plan have been most successful and why?
Since the start of the plan, has anything changed in relation to the original concerns? If so, what are these changes, and what have we learned from them?
Have the student's needs changed since the start of the plan, and if so how?
Recommended future actions – what, how, who, when?
Any comments from the student?

Signature of parent(s)/ guardian(s)	
Signature of teacher	

Outcome of review (tick as appropriate)			
	Revert to previous level of support- Support for All/ Classroom Support OR Support for Some/ School Support		Progress to next level of support- Support for Some/ School Support OR Support for a Few/ School Support Plus
	Continue at Current Level of Support		Request consultation with other professionals

*A consultation with a NEPS psychologist/ other professionals may contribute to this plan.

Appendix 4:
Activity Sheet for working with CYP

Source: https://schools.westsussex.gov.uk/Pages/Download/4055a9a3-1c3d-4aa7-8553-4d1e7d088fe0/PageSectionDocuments

Appendix 5:
My Thoughts about School Checklist

My Thoughts about School Checklist

My Thoughts About School...

NAME | CLASS | DATE

The things I like best at school are:
The things I don t like about school are:
The things that I am good at are:
The things I find hard are:
I am happy in class when:
I am happy during break and lunch times when:
My friends are:
I need help with:
Teachers in school can help me by:
My teacher would describe me as:
My parents would describe me as:
My parents would describe me as:

The following questions can be asked if children have an emotional and behavioural difficulty in school.

Adults I get on best with in school are:
I get into trouble in school when:
The things I do that make my teacher feel unhappy are:
The things my teacher does that make me feel unhappy are:
I make my teacher happy when:
The things my teacher does that make me feel happy are:
The class rules are:
If someone breaks the rules:
Rewards I like best are:
The things that I need to change are:

Appendix 6:
Sample "Return to School Plan" Template

Support Plan	
Name	Date

At school these things can make me feel upset

My school support person/(s) is/are:

Details of checking in with my school support person (When, where)

Until _____ my return to school plan includes the following changes to my attendance

(Identify any changes to days or time they come in)

Changes to my timetable include

(Identify any changes needed and what should happen/ where they should go instead)

Any other changes include:

(Identify any other changes to routines (break, lunch times, changes between lessons etc) to classroom expectations (not expected to read aloud, work in pairs etc) homework

When I start to get upset, I notice these things about myself

When I start to get upset, others notice these things about me

Things I can do to make myself feel better when I'm at school

Things that other people (staff and friends) can do to help me feel better when I'm at school

Things that my family can do to support me to attend school

Places in the school where I can go to where I feel safe and supported

This plan will be reviewed regularly so that it remains helpful.
Review date:

My signature	School support persons' signature	Parent signature

Other people who have access to the plan are?

Appendix 7: Whole School Audit

Whole school systems for promotion of emotional well-being and prevention of EBSA			
	Whole School Provision Currently Available	In Need of Development	Comments/Next Steps (Including by Whom and When)
School Culture and Ethos			
Committed and inclusive senior management team - values all students and allows them to feel a sense of belonging			
All staff working within school are valued. Clear protocols regarding emotional support and stress management for staff including supervision			
Continuous professional development for all staff which makes clear the promotion of positive emotional health and wellbeing is everybody's responsibility (including EBSA)			
The importance of pupil voice and viewing the child holistically are approaches which are embedded within the culture of the school.			
Recognition of the importance of communication and partnership working with parents and external agencies			
School systems. policy and practice			
Clear policies on attendance, behaviour, bullying, equality and transition which sets out the responsibilities for all and the support in place			
Curriculum includes the teaching of resilience, coping and social skills.			
Curriculum appropriately differentiated according to individual need			

Whole school systems for promotion of emotional well-being and prevention of EBSA			
	Whole School Provision Currently Available	In Need of Development	Comments/Next Steps (Including by Whom and When)
Promotion of supportive literature regarding emotional well-being and mental health for young people and parents.			
Clear roles and responsibilities for SENCo and emotional wellbeing leads.			
A member of senior staff is responsible for over-seeing arrangements for EBSA students			
Clear systems in place for the early identification of school avoidance.			
Nominated member of who has a responsibility to investigate and act on concerns			
Staff are aware as to whom they should convey any concerns regarding EBSA.			
Provision of interventions within a graduated response - assess, plan, do & review			
Staff are aware of the role of other agencies and local arrangements with regard to assessing and supporting students experiencing EBSA.			
Access to indicated provision e.g., safe places within the school, key person.			
All staff are aware of specific strategies and programmes in place to support those experiencing EBSA			

Appendix 8: Child Profiles & Passports

Child profiles or 'one-page profiles' have been developed as a useful tool particularly for Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) to use in schools in order to share information about the needs and capabilities of a range of students with additional needs across the staff. This can help staff ensure their practice is in line with consistent approaches for the child in a setting. Children interact with numerous adults during the course of a day, and there needs to be a shared understanding across the staff.

Child profiles are best when based on person-centred planning approaches. This is a way of capturing a child holistically. How can we begin to understand what helps a child if we only ever know what things they can't do? So a child profile will cover what we appreciate about the child, what they can do, what they find difficult, what works, what doesn't work, how we can help and what outcomes we are working for. These profiles are best when the child, the parent and the school (this could be more than one member of staff) have all contributed ideas, so we are all working together to ensure vital information can be shared about effective strategies.
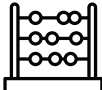
The general idea is to give enough information to enable any adult working with your child to be able to support them for the time they are with them.
Other important points:
   • Depending on the age and understanding of the child, it can be very helpful for the child to contribute their ideas and also know what is on this profile;

Positive language and focusing on the underlying skill which is under-developed is better than focusing on the behaviours children exhibit i.e. say 'Difficulty with sharing space'

Example of Pupil Profile/Passport (Primary)

Things About me	How I communicate	Things I'm good at
Things that help me	My favourite things	Tricky things

Example of Student Profile/Passport (Post Primary)

Difficulties/needs....

- [insert child's name] has Autism which affects his ability to interact successfully with others and he often experiences extreme anxiety when he does not feel familiar with or in control within a given situation. These are the difficulties [insert child's name] experiences;
- **Anxiety:** I may show resistance, claiming to be frozen or legs not working, silliness, avoidance, running away, hiding or panic;
- **Rigid thinking:** I tend to get stuck thinking and find it difficult to accept when the idea or plan I have in my head cannot take place. I need help to agree an alternative if my plan cannot happen;
- **Difficulties with friends:** I like being with friends but I can be controlling or reactive. I need help so that situations with friends run smoothly;
- **Transitions:** If I am enjoying something I will find it hard to stop and move onto another activity. Negotiation and ensuring I know and understand what the next activity will be can help;
- **Sensory needs:** I can find certain sensory experiences intolerant or my behaviour might change in crowded/busy situations;
- **Waiting for things:** Waiting in queues or waiting for my turn can be stressful and increase my anxiety;
- **Sharing:** Sharing equipment but also sharing my physical space if I have asked someone to play with me can cause me to feel anxious. I may find it hard to share friends and adult attention also;

What are we working for....

For [insert child's name] to be included in [name of group or class] so he can learn to [insert skills] and be a part of his community. These outcomes would be more specific for a school setting...

[Child's name and picture always go in the middle – the child is as the centre of everything!]

Things I like and am good at...

- Being honest
- I like the number 10
- I like LEGO and Star Wars
- Science is interesting to me
- I like holding equipment being given special jobs
- I am good at diving underwater
- I can remember interesting facts
- I love playing with water
- I like iPads and TV

What works/how you can help....

- Give processing time;
- Negotiation;
- Help other children understand me;
- Never try to force me into anything I do not feel ready or comfortable doing;
- Giving me some control by offering choices;
- Show you like me, smile and say that you understand how I feel before trying to change my mind;
- Let me be amongst the first few children to take a turn or line up;
- Help me explain what happened after an incident by asking non-judgemental open ended questions like 'what happened just before that?' or 'How did you feel at the point that happened?'

What to do if I panic....

- Try to work out what has led to panic/meltdown and ensure a need is met as soon as possible – it can be resolved later if I have made mistakes;
- Make the area safe and move others away;
- Someone I feel safe with should stay;
- Offer a quiet space;
- Offer sympathy, acknowledge the fear/anxiety and why you think I have it. Tell me we can find a different way;
- Wait and give me time;
- Talk about it later when I am calm;

APPENDIX 9:
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