

Every Child Matters

Emotionally Based School Refusal



Guidance for education providers and support services in North Somerset



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EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL REFUSAL

Emotionally Based School Refusal (EBSR) is a term ascribed to the group of young people who do not attend school for reasons of fear, anxiety and misery (West Sussex EPS, 2004). It can affect all young people irrespective of school, age, ability, gender and social background. Young people who present with EBSR show a heightened sensitivity to school experiences of which they cannot maintain personal control. Their anxiety can affect performance, attendance and social contact within school and can develop into fear of social activities out of school and to isolation, even within the family.

EBSR is school non-attendance that is:

“...characterised by internalised problems such as fear and anxiety, misery, complaints of feeling ill without obvious cause, reluctance to leave home, or externalised problems including tantrums and oppositional behaviour. Moreover, there is an absence of significant anti-social behaviour. Such young people rarely present as obvious management problems to school and their difficulties can go undetected until unwillingness to attend school becomes marked.” (West Sussex EPS, 2004: p.5)

Therefore the two main components of EBSR are an emotional and a behavioural response:

- Emotional distress surrounding attendance at school.
- Behavioural response of not attending school.

In itself, the term ‘EBSR’ can be misleading since the problem is not always a straight forward phobia of school. The term ‘refusal’ can also give the impression that the responsibility for the non-attendance is within the young person’s control, taking the focus away from their environments, which should not be ignored when planning suitable interventions to support a young person back to school. Research has shown that EBSR is the result of a combination of factors and searching for one main factor will not sufficiently explain the problem (Thambirajah et al, 2008). “School refusal occurs when stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience and when ‘pull’ factors that promote school non-attendance overcome the ‘push’ factors that encourage attendance” (Thambirajah et al, 2008: p. 33).

Most cases of EBSR are apparent at transition (eg on entry to primary school, on transfer to secondary school and at age 14 years, Ollendick & Mayer 1984) and are more prevalent between the ages of 11 and 12 years of age, therefore making the majority of young people with recognised EBSR secondary school age. Many of these young people have often had difficulties in attending primary school but because their absences, though frequent, are often short, the pattern is often not picked up as the possible development of EBSR. It is usually when the young person transfers to secondary school that EBSR becomes acute and obvious.

It is important to tackle EBSR because, although pupils with EBSR constitute a small group (approximately 2% of all school age young people (Thambirajah et al, 2008)), it can have a range of long-term negative consequences. These include: psychiatric consequences (eg conduct disorders, phobia, depression), socio-economic consequences (eg poor academic achievement and unemployment) and social consequences (eg lack of satisfactory social relationships) (Brandibas et al, 2004). There is a concern that if young

people do not return to school then they will find it difficult to enter the workplace (Brandibas et al, 2004), partly due to poorer attainment but mainly due to having become excluded from society.

It is vital that young people who are developing EBSR are recognised at an early stage, particularly as there may be a number of young people who are anxious about attending school or leaving home, but who are managing to maintain some level of school attendance. School plays a key role in the recognition and management of EBSR in collaboration with other agencies. Once a young person is refusing to attend school, secondary difficulties arise such as social isolation, loss of routine, preferred other activities, falling behind with school work and heightened anxiety as the EBSR becomes entrenched. EBSR among secondary school young people has a poorer prognosis than that for primary school young people (Thambirajah et al, 2008). A poorer prognosis has also been found for those students with prolonged school absence, severe symptoms of anxiety or whose commencement of symptoms was around the onset of adolescence. Early intervention is vital as the shorter the period of school refusal, the more likely the young person is to return to school.

SUPPORT MATERIALS

As part of this pack we have included a list of risk factors that may indicate a child is developing EBSR. This list is based on research and practitioners' experience. There can be no definitive list that will give a measurable outcome as EBSR is so complex. However, this is a list that can be used as an indicator. We suggest it could be used at times of transition (eg Years 6 to 7, 9 to 10) when a child is having unexplained or regular time off school or when a child is causing concern within school. It should be used as an aid to identify specific areas of concern that may lead to a child being increasingly absent from school. This list can also be used for sharing information within and between schools and other agencies where appropriate consent has been gained.

Also included in this pack are some leaflets that summarise this information.



TRIGGERS

There are various factors which may contribute towards, or trigger, a young person's vulnerability to EBSR. These may include: -

- School transfer (especially year 6/7).
- Anxiety about the journey to school and travel sickness.
- Educational demands and pressures, eg: un-identified learning needs, a young person's wish to do better, fear of failure in class or tests, fear of examinations, fear or dislike of a specific teacher or subject.
- The unpredictability of teacher requests or young people's behaviour, eg: noise levels in class, differing teachers' methods of controlling classroom behaviour, crowding in corridors or queues, break and lunch times, changes in routine (eg supply teachers).
- Bullying or fear of being bullied, by young people and/or adults.
- Social factors, eg: lack of identifiable peer or friendship group, complicated teenage relationships, changes in pupil groups.
- Traumatic events or illness within the family, eg: bereavement, domestic violence, family history of EBSR, adult mental health problems.
- A young person's own long-term illness resulting in prolonged absence from school.
- Some young people may be more sensitive to the above triggers.



Dependent upon the presence and number of these factors, a young person may manage the anxiety and perceived threat of school, or fail to cope, such that it becomes overt EBSR. In some cases, the young person may not excessively fear school but simply find life at home preferable, with extra attention and reinforcement in this context or feel they are supporting their parent/carers more by being at home. It is possible that a young person may be experiencing a number of these triggers, hence the multiplicity and complexity of EBSR makes it difficult to understand for young people, parent/carers and professionals involved.

IDENTIFICATION

It is very important to be proactive with EBSR, before it becomes entrenched. Schools need to be vigilant in monitoring attendance of young people where a pattern of non-attendance for minor ailments can become the norm. A quick response is particularly appropriate where complex and acute problems are evident. Schools should take the initiative in making early contact with parent/carers to discuss the young person's non-attendance.



EBSR can be identified by a number of factors, including:

- Severe difficulty attending school, with periods of prolonged absence
- Staying away from school with the knowledge of the parent/carer
- Patterns in absences, for example particular days and subjects
- A history of anxiety (including EBSR) within the family
- Reluctance to attend school trips
- Frequent absences for minor illnesses
- Episodes of self-harm
- Anxiety on separation and inappropriate dependence on family members
- Evidence of under-achievement of learning potential
- Poor personal hygiene
- Social isolation and avoidance of class mates or of the peer group in general
- Regular absence without indication of anti-social behaviours
- Challenging behaviours, particularly related to specific situations within school
- The young person expressing a desire to attend classes, but being unable to do so
- Severe emotional upset with excessive fearfulness, outbursts of temper and complaints of feeling ill on school days
- Depression and a sense of isolation, low self-esteem and lack of confidence
- Confusion or extreme absent-mindedness demonstrated in school work by a lack of concentration and lowering of attainments
- Physical changes - sweating, sickness, aching limbs, hyperventilation, panic attacks, abdominal pain and headaches, rapid weight loss or gain
- Disruption of day to day activities, affecting the family and often putting a great deal of pressure on parent/carers and siblings
- The fear is persistent and is maintained in spite of reasoning

KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

It is vital that parent/carers and school staff work in partnership to ensure they have the whole picture of the young person's difficulties. Some young people who are anxious about school function very well socially in other aspects of their lives, eg: mixing with certain friends, going to specific sport and youth clubs of their choice. This can lead people to believe that perhaps the young person is not really anxious at school and maybe it is a case of the parent/carers not insisting that their son/daughter attends. Equally, a parent/carer who has coped with mornings where their young person vomits in fear of school, or has tempers severe enough to cause damage to the house, is prone to feel the school is not taking their concerns seriously enough. Open and continuous communication is key.

School is central in prevention, early identification, and continuing management of EBSR. Good practice would include:

- Ongoing monitoring of absences over the school year, transfers and transitions ensuring early identification of EBSR. Careful monitoring of patterns of non-attendance (eg frequent absence on Mondays or after school holidays).
- A caring and supportive pastoral system in school with an active and successful anti-bullying policy. Creating a school ethos and atmosphere where young people with anxiety feel supported and able to seek help.
- Direct telephone contact between parent/carers and key workers in school and early home visits if appropriate to discuss the young person's reluctance to attend school.
- A personalised programme for each young person. (eg: flexible timetable, arrangements for transport, buddying, and provision of a safe haven).
- Ensuring the young person has access to an identified member of staff who can be approached if anxiety becomes temporarily overwhelming in school (ie a key worker).
- Ensuring the young person is appropriately placed in classes both socially and academically so that underlying difficulties are appropriately identified and supported.
- Ensuring all staff (including supply staff) are informed about the young person's difficulties, particularly during changes of classes/key stages.

Where concerns about a young person are continuing, other strategies used by schools should include:

- Putting in place a pastoral support programme listing the strategies currently being used.
- Initiating a CAF (Common Assessment Framework).
- Holding TAC (Team Around the Child) meetings and subsequent reviews.
- Referrals to other services made through CPMs (Consultation Planning Meetings) – see CPM and Integrated Working Guidance for further information.

STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT THE FAMILY

Where a young person avoids or refuses to attend school, the picture at home may be one of unhappiness for all concerned. Parent/carers are frequently despairing and they may feel guilty or blame themselves for their young person's anxiety and reluctance to attend school.

- Positive and constructive involvement from within the family is a key factor in overcoming EBSR.
- Early contact with the family to discuss the young person's reluctance to attend and any contributory factors as perceived by the family.
- Develop knowledge of support and resources that family members could use to help resolve issues relevant to young person's anxiety.
- Being prepared to meet with the family on neutral territory or at home where there are family issues with school.
- A key person should be identified within school that the family can contact. It is important that this person is someone who knows the young person and is able to respond to phone calls relatively quickly.
- Regular telephone contact with the school for monitoring purposes, to provide updates, and to exchange positive information about the young person.
- Communicating specific needs and concerns of the young person, eg: placement in certain classes, seating arrangements, anxieties about specific lessons or teachers.
- Persisting with agreed targets, despite any setbacks rather than continually seeking 'new solutions'.
- Being prepared for difficulties or recurrence of the problem following natural breaks, eg: holidays and genuine illnesses.
- Focus on positive aspects of school life and encourage all small steps towards positive progress.
- Encourage parent/carers to ask what has gone well rather than what has gone badly in school each day.
- Parent/carers should be encouraged to allow school to deal with issues arising in school.
- Parent/carers and staff need to remember that some young people can have specific fears about the school environment that do not occur in other areas of their lives.
- Encourage parent/carers to make use of other support they may have in the community - eg: other family members, friends, neighbours, etc.
- Reintegration programmes should be flexible, creative and individualised to suit each particular young person.

- Reintegration should be at an appropriate pace; it is important not to expect too much too soon.
- Everyone working with the young person must offer a consistent and united approach.



PROCEDURE FOR MANAGING EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL REFUSAL

The young person remains on roll and school staff are key to managing EBSR.

- Share this guidance with all school staff to raise awareness of EBSR.
- Use the checklist in this pack at pre-transition periods.
- Discuss concerns with the designated member of school staff.
- Ensure preventative support takes place (eg: promoting self-esteem, resilience, transition preparation, etc).
- Look for attendance patterns.
- Agree on an action plan including:
 - Contacting parent/carers.
 - Putting a Pastoral Support Plan (PSP) in place.
 - Utilise support available within school (eg: Learning Mentor, Parent Support Advisor (PSA), School Counsellor).
 - Initiate and implement a CAF.
 - Consider a referral to other services made through the CPMs.
- Regularly monitor and review until the young person is attending school full time.



SUPPORT SERVICES AVAILABLE IN NORTH SOMERSET

The following services are available to support schools and families of young people with EBSR.

EDUCATION WELFARE OFFICERS (as part of locality teams)

Within North Somerset the Education Welfare Officer working within a school is able to support school in identifying cases of non-attendance which require further action and may contribute in some of the following ways:

- Act as mediator between home and school.
- Help to assess reasons and circumstances that could have led to the breakdown in school attendance.
- Helping school staff to become more aware of strategies to support reluctant attendees.
- Support ideas to assist in resolving the problem.
- Carry out home visits and attend relevant meetings in school to plan actions with the young person, family and school, aimed at re-establishing attendance.
- Help to plan and review strategies.
- Encourage the young person/parent/carer in ensuring they manage to get to school in the morning.
- Help to refer on to other agencies if appropriate where specialist support may be provided.
- Maintain awareness and where appropriate initiate statutory duties with regards to school attendance.

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE (EPS)

In addition to many of the activities above, through Consultation Planning Meetings (CPMs), the EPS can also provide:

- A range of psychological approaches to help reduce anxiety and to help the young person feel more confident about attending school.
- Advice to home and school on managing/working with young people with EBSR.
- Advice to home and school on the design and implementation of a reintegration programme into school.
- Support to parent/carers as the programme of reintegration is underway.

- Facilitation of communication between young person and parent/carers or young person and staff.
- Training to school staff on EBSR.

INCLUSION ADVISORY TEAM (IAT)

Advisory teachers from this service can support schools by working with staff in the following ways:

- Contributing to the development of whole-school policies that promote inclusive practice.
- Gathering information to help formulate inclusion support programmes.
- Whole school training; workshops and/or surgeries on a specific young person's needs.
- Advising staff on reintegration programmes.
- Facilitating communications between school and other support agencies.

COMMUNITY PAEDIATRICIANS

- All schools have a named Community Paediatrician who the child can be referred to or the school can seek advice from. The role of the paediatrician would be to investigate health problems and their severity and the impact that this has on their schooling.
- Community Paediatricians can be involved in co-ordinating ongoing support for those children with identified EBSR.
- Parents are also able to discuss their concerns with their General Practitioner (GP) who can refer to agencies as appropriate.

Please speak to education providers about access to the above support services.

EDUCATION OTHER THAN AT SCHOOL SERVICE (EOTAS)

- In severe cases, where re-inclusion plans are not working and all in-school strategies have been tried and found to be unsuccessful, then the key worker from CAMHS or the EPS may support a period of education out of school and make a referral to the EOTAS service.
- Schools may themselves provide the education out of school of 10 hours per week, or support a referral to the EOTAS service and will pay a contribution for funding this provision. For this reason the Head teacher must endorse the referral before Tuition starts. The young person remains on the school roll and the aim is to support their return to school wherever possible.

- The entitlement of educational provision while the EOTAS service is supporting a young person with medical needs, including EBSR, is for up to a maximum of 10 hours education in total per week. This may include some lessons in school or work experience as well as some lessons with EOTAS tutors. Some young people will not be well enough to access a full 10 hours.
- At the onset of Tuition the professionals involved will meet and put a plan in place. A key worker will be identified in school who will offer support throughout. Whilst EOTAS provision continues the key worker making the referral will continue to work with the young person until a successful return to school has been established. Regular reviews and monitoring will take place, involving the young person and family throughout.
- EOTAS provision will cease once the young person is attending school for 10 hours or more per week.
- It should be noted that it is North Somerset's responsibility to provide education for young people living in the county regardless of their school. EOTAS provision for young people who attend a North Somerset School but live out of County is the responsibility of the LEA for the area in which they live.

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE (CAMHS)

Currently, this service considers referrals from a range of agencies in Health, Education and Social Services. Members of this team may: -

- Meet the young person and family for an initial assessment.
- Liaise with other agencies involved, with the family's consent.
- Provide psychological treatment and support as indicated and in conjunction with other professionals involved.
- Provide consultancy to schools.
- Help parent/carers develop good behaviour management strategies, including limit setting and use of positive reinforcements such as praise and reward. It is often helpful for meetings to be held with parent/carers and the young person in order to think about these strategies.
- Involve parent/carers as well as a young person in school in designing a reintegration programme which would usually be a gradual systemic desensitisation. The service ensures that parent/carers have support and advice in using appropriate parenting strategies to support their young person in the programme, as well as the young person being helped to develop coping strategies.
- Identify patterns of family interaction and behaviours which might be maintaining the difficulties. Then helping families to try out different patterns of interaction/behaviour in order to facilitate change. Again it can be useful to involve other family members within this work.

USEFUL CONTACTS

NAME	ADDRESS	PHONE NO
Education Welfare Officers	Education Welfare Officers, North Somerset Council, CYPS, Room 119, Town Hall, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1UJ	01275 888310
Educational Psychology Service (EPS)	Educational Psychology Service, North Somerset Council, CYPS, Room 119, Town Hall, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1UJ	01934 634854
Inclusion Advisory Team (IAT)	Inclusion Advisory Team, 14 Fenswood Road, Long Ashton, BS41 9BS	01934 426870
Community Paediatricians	Community Paediatricians, Drove House, Drove Road, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 3NT	01934 418804
	Community Paediatricians, The Barn, Great Western Road, Clevedon, BS21 6HB	01934 426622
Education Other Than At School Service (EOTAS)	Tuition Service North Pound Lane, Nailsea, BS48 2NN	01934 426400
	Tuition Service South Ellesmere Road, Uphill, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 4UT	01934 622341
Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)	Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service, Drove House, Drove Road, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 3NT	01934 629660
	Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service, The Barn, Great Western Road, Clevedon, BS21 6HB.	01934 426622

These details are correct at the time of going to press. Please see online at www.n-somerset.gov.uk for up to date contact details.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Risk Factors Checklist

Appendix 2 – Emotionally Based School Refusal – A leaflet for parents/carers

Appendix 3 – Emotionally Based School Refusal – A leaflet for young people

Please see following pages for the above.

Risk Factors

Young Persons Name:

Date of Assessment:

Attendance

Are there any patterns in non attendance?

Yes No

Please answer all the statements in relation to the above young person

What is the current attendance for this academic year?%

Loss/Change	Yes	No	Comments
Death/physical illness of significant people.			
Mental health issues of significant people.			
Significant life events (eg: moving house/school, separation of parents/ family members, additions to the family, death of a pet). Please specify.			
Family			
Often late for school.			
Young person living in more than one home/temporary accommodation.			
History of conflict within the family home.			
Inconsistent/ineffective parenting.			
Lack of constructive involvement in the young person's education.			
Known family history of non-attendance at school.			
Practical difficulties in getting to school.			
Learning Needs			
Inabilities to problem solve.			
Organisational difficulties.			
Difficulties working under pressure/ processing difficulties.			
Specific learning difficulty. Please specify.			
Not achieving learning potential.			
Avoidance of particular school activities/subjects.			
Does not regularly complete homework.			

Loss/Change	Yes	No	Comments
Social			
Difficulties with peer relationships.			
Difficulties with relationships with adults in and out of school.			
Social communication difficulties.			
Not independent for age.			
Struggles during unstructured times.			
Unable to manage change.			
Emotional Well - Being			
Often appears tired.			
Often appears to be lacking in interest/ motivation.			
Often appears anxious.			
Negative about self.			
Negative about others.			
Can display challenging behaviours.			
Does not get involved in school life.			
Are there other agencies involved, or have they had involvement from other agencies?			

Any other comments/concerns you may wish to make about this young person:

Facts

- Most children worry about school at some time or another
- There are times when they would prefer to stay at home
- You may have had similar feelings when you were at school.

As a parent/carer you could help. Ask them whether there is anything worrying them, eg:

- At home - changes, family life
- At school – worried about their schoolwork or the school environment
- Difficulties with friendships/relationships.

Once they share the problem, you may be able to resolve it early. On the other hand, you may feel you would like some support.

Signs of EBSR

- Stomach aches
- Headaches
- Feels sick and/or is sick when it's time to go to school
- Tries to stay in bed
- Is tearful or unhappy

- Is 'ill' following weekends and holidays
- Doesn't want to leave you.

What you can do

- Stay calm
- Listen to your child
- Reassure and encourage them
- Check there is no obvious underlying reason, eg: friendship difficulties, not being able to do the work, or a health problem
- Find someone to talk to – a friend or a member of your family
- Tell the school there is a problem
- Work in partnership with the school to try to get your child to attend
- Keep in constant touch with the school
- Respond positively to any suggestions.

What can you expect the school to do?

- Listen to you and your child
- Make constructive suggestions
- Hold meetings to plan and review progress

- Try to find ways of making school a happier experience for your child
- Continue to monitor attendance
- Suggest a key worker to support you and your child
- Suggest that they refer you and your child to other professionals if the problem persists
- Re-introduce your child back into school with adjustments to their timetable if appropriate.

Others who can help in and out of school

Members of your family

Encourage other members of the family to help integrate your child into school.

Your child's friends

Involve their friends – try to get one of them to call and collect her/him on the way to school.

Support Agencies

Educational Welfare Officers
Educational Psychology Service
Inclusion Advisory Team
Community Paediatricians
Child & Adolescent Mental Health
Service

Contact your school for further
information.



Points to remember

- Progress may be slow.
- Be persistent and remain positive about school to your child.
- Work in partnership with the school and other professionals.
- Let your child know that you are all working together to help.
- Try to remain focussed on the issue in hand. Do not worry too much about other issues going on in the school, eg: class tests, exams, coursework, deadlines, homework, etc.



Emotionally Based School Refusal (EBSR)

A leaflet for parents/carers

Facts

- Not wanting to go to school can be normal
- It could be sign of anxiety
- You can do something to help yourself
- The school can help you
- Other people can help you

Can you identify why?

It may be one of the following:

- Worried about family life
- Worried that you can't keep up with school work/coursework
- Worried about your appearance, ie having to change for PE
- You've fallen out with your best friend/girlfriend/ boyfriend
- Other young people are being unkind and making comments because you've had a lot of time off
- You've lost some friends due to your absence
- You don't like the lesson/teacher
- Concerned about the school environment.

There are lots of reasons why you may not feel confident about attending school. You could try

talking to a friend or a trusted adult, eg parent/carer or teacher/tutor

"By the time it's about 3 pm on Saturday I've given up and just start worrying about Monday again."

A comment from a Year 9 student

Signs to look out for

- Stomach pains
- Headache
- Feeling sick and/or being sick when it's time to go to school
- Wanting to stay in bed
- Feeling unhappy and tearful
- Finding it difficult to return to school on Mondays and after holidays
- Want to go to school but feeling unable to go outside your home
- Frightened of going into the school buildings
- Anxious about school
- Not wanting to leave mum/dad or carer

Who else can help you?

Members of your family

- Try to explain to someone how you really feel. Share your worries with someone who will listen and take action on your behalf.

Your friends

- Let your friends help you. Perhaps they could collect you in the morning and accompany you to school.

Someone in school

- There are a lot of people in school who would help you. Perhaps a tutor, teacher, in-class support, learning mentor or PSA (parent support adviser).
- There are other agencies you, your school, or your parents/ carers can approach for help if necessary.

How things could change

- School can identify a key worker to help and support you.
- Class teachers can be notified so that they are alert to your feelings and not put too much pressure on you with regard to class/ coursework deadlines.
- School may adjust your day
- You may start feeling confident again and realise that school isn't such a bad place to be!

Remember

- You are not on your own.
- There are lots of people who can help you so that you are able to enjoy learning again.
- Keep an open mind – listen to advice.



Emotionally Based School Refusal (EBSR)

A leaflet for young people