

Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance



What Is Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)?

EBSNA is the term used to describe situations where a child struggles to attend school because of overwhelming feelings—often anxiety, stress, low mood, or worries about school or home. It is sometimes referred to as EBSA (Emotionally Based School Avoidance) or school attendance difficulties. It isn't "naughtiness" or a child refusing for no reason. It's usually a sign that something in their world feels too big, too uncomfortable, or too hard to manage alone.

Children experiencing EBSNA might:

- Complain of headaches, stomach aches, or feeling unwell before school
- Become tearful, withdrawn, or distressed in the mornings
- Avoid talking about school
- Show changes in sleep, appetite, or behaviour
- Attend some days but struggle on others

EBSNA is common, and with the right support, children can recover and rebuild confidence.

What Parents/Carers Can Do to Help Prevent EBSNA

You can't prevent every wobble, but there are gentle things that can make a big difference:

- **Keep communication open.** Regularly check in with your child about school—what they enjoy, what feels tricky, and what they wish was different.
- **Build predictable routines.** Calm mornings, consistent bedtimes, and organised school prep reduce stress.
- **Notice early signs.** Small changes—like reluctance to get ready or vague complaints of feeling unwell—are often the first clues.
- **Stay connected with school.** A positive relationship with school means you can spot issues early and work together.
- **Encourage independence.** Let your child practise problem-solving, organising their bag, or speaking to teachers. Confidence grows from small wins.
- **Model healthy coping.** When you show how you handle stress, your child learns that big feelings can be managed.

How Parents/Carers Can Support a Child Struggling with EBSNA

If your child is already finding school attendance difficult, here are ways to support them gently and effectively:

- **Stay calm and compassionate.** Their feelings are real, even if the trigger isn't obvious. Let them know you're on their side.
- **Validate their emotions.** Try phrases like "I can see this feels really hard" rather than "There's nothing to worry about."
- **Work with school early.** Teachers, pastoral staff, and SEN teams can help create a plan.
- **Break the day into small steps.** Getting dressed, leaving the house, or walking to the gate might be the first goals. Celebrate progress, however small.
- **Keep school attendance the expectation.** While being gentle, keep the message consistent: school is important, and you'll help them get there.
- **Support emotional regulation.** Breathing exercises, grounding techniques, movement breaks, or quiet time can help your child feel more in control.
- **Seek professional help if needed.** If anxiety or low mood is significant, talking to your GP or a mental health professional can provide extra support.

Trusted Resources & Support Helplines & Services:

Warwickshire County Council—EBSNA Toolkit Info.

<https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/homepage/555/ebsna---emotionally-based-school-non-attendance>

- YoungMinds [Parents Guide](#) and Helpline: 0808 802 5544

- NHS Mental Health Support: www.nhs.uk/mental-health

-Anxiety UK Resources: www.anxietyuk.org.uk/resources

-Barnardo's Mental Health Support: www.barnardos.org.uk