



Helping your child with attendance issues or Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

It can be distressing when your child starts to manifest a reluctance or a refusal to go to school, sometimes saying they feel unwell or even having physical symptoms or emotional meltdowns. It is hard to balance the importance of attending school with the stress on the child and their family of trying to get them there. It is important to get appropriate support as soon as possible.

DO reassure your child and try to encourage them to tell you what the issues are.

DO ask the school for a meeting as soon as possible.

DO keep a record of dates and times when it happens and who you have asked for advice.

DON'T feel pressured by the circumstances to take your child off roll.

Preparation:

Find out from your child if you can identify what is behind their reluctance, has something happened? If your child has SEND, look at their SEN Support plan or Education Health and Care plan to see what provision is in place to support them. Has something changed?

Use the Parent guide form the Educational Psychology service to help you think things through. [EPS Parent Carer Guide \(openobjects.com\)](#)

Questions you might want to ask yourself:

- Has your child ever had issues with attendance before e.g. at primary school?
- If not, what has changed?
- Are there any issues with their peers or form?*
- Do they feel safe at school?*
- Have you taken them to GP to check there's no underlying health issue?
- If your child has an EHCP, has anyone suggested an Early Annual Review?*
- If your child is on SEN Support and what is being provided isn't helping address the issues, have you or anyone else suggested an Education Health and Care Needs assessment ?*
- Is there a reintegration timetable in place – what is the Pastoral Support Plan suggesting to support the reintegration?*
- Has an Early Help assessment been suggested?*

If you answer no to any of the questions with an *, ask about these things at the meeting.

Things to check:

Does your school have an Attendance policy- is it up to date, is it clear, are you and pupils aware of it and why attendance matters?

Points to make at the meeting:

- If your child/young person has SEND, you can discuss whether that may be impacting on their attendance.
- If relevant and people refer to the need for CAMHS, highlight the waiting times for CAMHS, and emphasise the need to act regardless of diagnosis. NB. CAMHS is not the only provision for mental health support. There has been training made available for all schools to support children's mental health and well-being needs. There are Mental Health Support Teams for schools available across the county
- If you have other children who are regularly attending the same school, you could make the point that it's not because you don't understand the importance of school attendance that your child isn't attending.
- It might be helpful to describe your home morning routine on school days

Questions to ask at the meeting:

- How is your child's absence being recorded?
- Have school taken into account your child's SEND?
- Have people, both family and school, looked at WHY your child is not attending to identify and address the underlying cause?
- Has school asked for advice from outside agencies e.g Educational Psychologists?
- Are there any first small steps that can be taken to build on?
- What is a realistic time frame to enable them to attend full time?
- Has the school considered/ explored Alternative Provision?
- Has the School Nurse been informed?
- Does the school have a counsellor? Could they meet with child or young person? Details?

Discuss with school what has been or could be tried:

- Identify key person for your child or young person and a liaison for parent
- Offer ELSA (emotional literacy support assistant)
- Apply restorative practice where reason for being at home is due to bullying/incident (speak to OCC- all schools have access to free Restorative Practice training [Restorative Practice | Schools \(oxfordshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/restorative-practice))
- Explore change of form if appropriate
- Offer peer buddy or mentor
- If absence on-going, arrange home visit
- Organise visit to the school at arranged time to pick up work from a key person/support worker and return the work done at home
- Provide child/young person with worksheets appropriate for their ability/anxiety not necessarily their year group
- Mark work that has been set and write comments which focus on the positives; send congratulations cards/letters
- Make sure the form teacher includes the child or young person in the form updates – can they dial in for form time and just listen in, or can the form tutor send e-mail to make sure they still feel included as a member of the class
- Celebrate and build on very small successes (for example managing to persuade a child into a car to walk or drive up to the end of the school drive)
- Arrange weekly Teams meeting with the same key person to do something fun e.g. a quiz on chocolate, then the following week child does a quiz on different dog breeds
- Drive or walk by the school at quiet times and build up to busier times
- Offer visit to school after hours to have a look around
- Identify lessons child/young person may like to attend where there are particular interests that can be built on and they enjoy e.g. cooking, DT, art,
- Identify lessons where there may be issues to address (later)
- Arrange visit to the school after hours to meet with one or two teachers that the child or young person has identified as possible lessons they might feel able to attend
- Arrange for that key person to meet the young person, without fail, at the agreed start of the day and where you will meet and exactly what will happen next. Is it clear what will happen when the child or young person attends school that day.
- Risk assessment to mitigate any risks? If parent has managed to persuade child to go in it is so important that school sticks to what has been agreed otherwise there is no reason for the child to trust either their parent or school
- Acknowledge and reward any improvement with praise and small rewards
- Explore lunchtime clubs of interest to avoid the playgroup if this is a trigger
- Explore a card option to leave lessons if feeling overwhelmed with a safe and nurturing place to access
- Consider entering and leaving school by a different entrance is available

If, despite your, and school's best efforts, there has been little progress, you could ask the Attendance Team what they would suggest. If the possibility of an attendance order and possible prosecution is raised, especially if your child has SEND, you might suggest that in these circumstances it would be premature and inappropriate as it is not useful for your child. Instead, suggest the focus needs to be on further co-ordinated action such as an Early Help Assessment by support agencies to identify and make provision for all of your child's needs if their non-attendance is to do with their anxiety and SEND rather than deliberate truancy. Any legal enforcement action is always one of last resort.

Things to be aware of:

Definitions:

"Truancy" refers to pupils who deliberately avoid attending school, without their carer's knowledge.

"School Refusal" is when a child starts to miss school frequently because of unclear illness/symptoms.

"Emotionally Based School Avoidance" is when a child experiences extreme anxiety and distress in relation to attending school and as a result, remains absent.

School registers:

Schools must take an attendance register at the start of the first session and again after lunch.

A legal duty is placed upon schools to ensure that registers are accurately completed. They form part of the witness statement presented to the court in the case of a prosecution.

Code I: Illness (not medical or dental appointments)

"Schools should advise parents to notify them on the first day the child is unable to attend due to illness. Schools should authorise absences due to illness unless they have genuine cause for concern about the veracity of an illness. If the authenticity of illness is in doubt, schools can request parents to provide medical evidence to support illness. Schools can record the absence as unauthorised if not satisfied of the authenticity of the illness but should advise parents of their intention. Schools are advised not to request medical evidence unnecessarily. Medical evidence can take the form of prescriptions, appointment cards, etc. rather than doctors' notes."

– School attendance guidance August 2020

Government Guidance which may be helpful:

- [Supporting children with medical conditions at school](#)
- [Education for children with health needs who cannot attend school](#)
- [School attendance](#)
- [Mental health and behaviours in schools](#)
- [Illness and your child's education](#)
- [Alternative provision](#)
- [SEND Code of Practice](#)
- [Reasonable Adjustments for Disabled Pupils](#)