

EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL NON- ATTENDANCE (EBSNA)

GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS

**ADAPTED FROM SCHOOL
ATTENDANCE DIFFICULTIES AND
EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL
NON-ATTENDANCE TRAFFORD
GUIDANCE DOCUMENT 2023**

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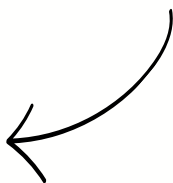
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Introduction

This document has been adapted from the Trafford EBSNA guidance 2023. We hope it will provide parents with a summary as to what emotionally based school non-attendance is, why this might be occurring, and how parents and school can work together to improve experiences.

Trafford EBSNA guidance works alongside the Department for Education's recent 'Working Together to Improve Attendance' guidance, which sets out the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for schools in promoting school attendance. This is hoped to become statutory from September 2024.

Trafford Educational Psychology services are working with schools across the area to ensure they are aware of EBSNA and how to support young people and families. This document is hoped to provide a brief outline as to what the guidance includes. If you would like to read the full guidance, you can find it on the Trafford directory by scanning this bar code, or visiting this website:



Glossary

Emotionally based school non-attendance (EBSNA)

A term used to describe young people who struggle with attending school due to emotionally-based factors (e.g., well-being, life experiences, or additional needs)

Early Identification of Needs Tool (EINT)

A tool created to identify risk factors and what might be contributing to a young person's emotional distress in relation to school. This explores factors in relation to attendance, loss and change, family dynamics, learning needs, social and personal life, and well-being.

Autism

A neurodevelopmental condition which has an affect on social and communication skills. It may also impact how someone thinks and behaves, and they may have different sensory experiences.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a natural response to perceived threat, which causes a person to feel a range of emotions including worried, scared, and nervous. This is classed as a difficulty when symptoms persist for a long time and impact daily functioning

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

This can include learning difficulties/disabilities, or neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

A legal document for a young person with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), which sets out a description of their educational, health, and social care needs which the provision must implement to support the young person.

Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO)

Teachers who lead and coordinate the provision for pupils with special educational needs and will liaise with parents, other teachers and professionals involved with the young person

What is EBSNA?

Emotionally based school non-attendance (EBSNA) describes young people who struggle to attend school due to their emotions, life experiences, or additional needs.

Previously, the term 'school refuser' may have been used, but this is being discouraged as it locates the problem within the young person, and suggests they have control over their non-attendance.

Young people may show difficulties with attending school in different ways. Common signs that a young person is struggling are:

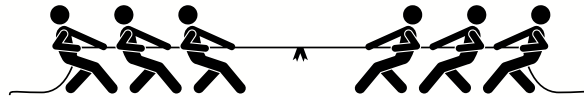
- Difficulty getting out of bed / leaving the house / getting out the car on school days
- Increase in big emotions at certain repeated times, e.g., the night before school, before the beginning of a new term
- Frequently saying they feel unwell
- High levels of distress when they are separated from their parent / carer
- Unsettled behaviours in school and/or on their return from school (e.g., anger, tears, withdrawal)
- Difficulty talking about, or engaging in activities related to school
- Comments that they are unhappy at school



What is EBSNA?

There are many reasons a young people might have difficulties attending school. This can be separated into push and pull factors:

- **push factors** = things that push the child towards attending school
- **pull factors** = things that pull the child away from attending school



School non-attendance is most likely to occur when the pull factors outweigh the push factors.

Groups who might be more at risk of experiencing EBSNA can include:

- Those with social communication, sensory processing needs, or a diagnosis of autism spectrum
- Those experiencing separation anxiety from parents / carers
- Those feeling low confidence or high pressure in relation to learning ability
- Those who have experienced trauma, loss, or change
- Those with family members who have experienced EBSNA
- Those who found adjustment difficult post-pandemic
- Those who have previously struggled with attendance and who may be transitioning to new years or settings.

Autism and EBSNA

School attendance is commonly more challenging for young people living with autism. This may be due to environmental stressors, the social communication aspects, certain sensory needs etc.

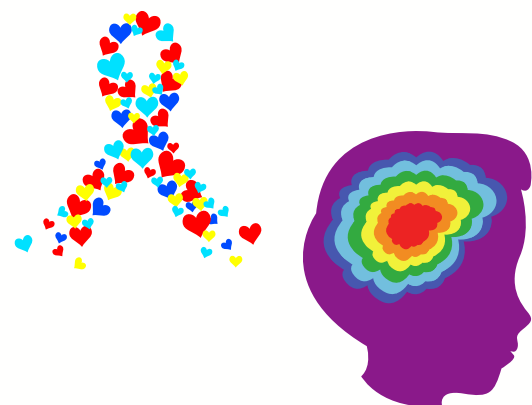
These struggles may be evident, but it may also be hard to notice if the young person is 'masking' their distress in school. This might mean parents and carers observe differences in comparison to teaching staff, which can be confusing. It is important all parents concerns are therefore taken seriously.

Below are some recommended resources that help understand attendance difficulties and autism.

[How Can Schools Better Support Neurodivergent .pdf \(wsimg.com\)](#)

[School Exclusions - School stress and anxiety \(autismeducationtrust.org.uk\)](#)

<https://notfineinschool.co.uk/>



What do young people say?

Research into young people's experiences of non-attendance has found difficulties in key areas (Corcoran & Kelly, 2022)



Friendships and fitting in is hard

Adults were not always that supportive or understanding



Primary and secondary school were really different

Academic pressure and a lack of purpose to learning. Learning needs not always met



Anxiety and low mood led to feelings of isolation and worrying thoughts

These experiences led the young person to feel 'different', not accepted, and labelled. Many of these factors went on over time, reducing motivation to return to school as it had been too long.

When adults were supportive and understanding, young people felt valued and autonomous about their return.



What can parents / carers do?

Recognising your young person is experiencing EBSNA is the first step in helping to change this. Having open, honest, and non-judgemental conversations can help parents to understand why their young person is struggling to go to school.

Knowing they have a supportive adult will be key for the young person in feeling valued and listened to. Avoid using language which suggests the young person is choosing to not attend school, or placing more pressure on them. By identifying their needs, we can work to problem solve or seek extra support. Utilising their motivating factors and values will help with empowerment and increasing their control over the return to school.

What if I'm nervous about the return to school?

It's understandable to be worried about your young person when they are struggling and natural to want to protect them from that distress. However, the longer children are out of school, the harder it is to go back.

School not only has benefits to learning, but it also aids our social skills, life skills, builds resilience, and provides purpose and routine.

Know you are not alone - the next step would be contacting your young person's school about EBSNA, meeting to come up with a shared understanding and action plan for improving the young person's experience.



What can school staff do?

Flow chart of support

1. Identifying the signs of EBSNA

Indicators that a child might be feeling anxious or nervous about attending school are identified by e.g., parent/ school observations, late arrivals, attendance difficulties

2. Meetings

Meeting between parents / carers and school staff to discuss attendance difficulties. May use the early identification of needs tool. Ideally include the young person to gather their views (see tools to gather pupil views in the guidance)

3. Early Identification of Needs Tool

Use the tool and discussion to identify the push and pull factors contributing to the young person's attendance difficulties

4. Action Plan

Create an individual action plan highlighting the push/pull factors to identify what services can do to remove those barriers and enhance the parts of school they enjoy and find comfortable

5. Implement the Plan

Implement the action plan as agreed, consider timelines to review change

6. Review

Review the plan at regular intervals with the young person, parents / carers and school, celebrating all successes

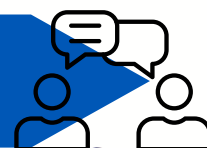
7. Continue or adapt

Attendance is increasing, monitor as needed - **or** - **return to step 2** if attendance not increasing, refer to other agencies if needed

What works?

Research has highlighted key areas of support for young people to return to school following a period of anxiety (Corcoran, Bond & Knox, 2022), which are:

Effective home-school communication to ensure parent / carer concerns are heard, and approaches are consistent



Positive relationships with school staff



An awareness of triggers for anxiety and non-attendance, understanding the push-pull factors to better support the young person before, throughout, and after their school day



Providing an individualised approach specific to the young person, their push-pull factors, and those around them



Engagement with other professionals, when needed, seeking further specialist support to inform the assess, plan, do, and review process



In addition, Boaler & Bond (2023) found key characteristics of effective support related to:

- a proactive school system and ethos to support attendance
- building relationships to support well-being, engagement, and attendance
- targeted intervention matched to needs
- and collaboration, meeting the needs of the family

What if we're "stuck"?



Where these processes have been tried and you are still feeling 'stuck', this advice from 'Not Fine In School' may offer some further guidance. You can find their website here:

<https://notfineinschool.co.uk/families>

Request Help

Ask your school what emotional support they have available for the young person, such as counselling, access to a school nurse, or whether they have a Thrive in education team based there. They can also ask for an Educational Psychologist to make an assessment of your child's difficulties. You can also speak to your child's GP and request a referral to paediatrics if you are concerned about physical health being a barrier to attendance.

Ask the school to assess your child for any relevant SEND

Underlying special educational needs or disabilities often contribute to anxiety levels. This can include autism, ADHD, sensory processing disorder, dyslexia, or learning disabilities. Unidentified and unsupported, they can make school a difficult place to be and can contribute to poor mental health and low attendance.

Ask school to provide work while your child is absent

If your young person feels able to manage homework or online learning, this may help them to keep on track and avoid falling behind, which can create further anxieties on the return to school. It may be useful to seek resources related to their interests to inspire them. It's okay if your young person struggles to complete this, they may need a period of minimal pressure.

Contact SENDIASS, IPSEA OR SOS SEN

These services provide advice about SEND and educational provisions and can often attend meetings with you at school. You can find a link to their websites on the additional services and resources page.

What if we're "stuck"?

Promoting the importance of social, emotional or mental health difficulties

These difficulties can affect a child's ability to establish friendships and cope with strong emotions. These may be barriers to learning and require the same use of SEND assess-plan-do-review cycles and possibly an EHCP. You can find some helpful information and resources on family support and well-being support by scanning these QR codes. You can also self-refer to CAMHS or ask your GP to refer if they are struggling with their mental health in and out of school.



Trafford Thrive - Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing



Family Help

Apply for an EHCP assessment

Some children will need an Education and Health Care plan if a school does not have the expertise or funding to fully meet their needs, or offer the provision they require to access an education. SENCOs or parents can apply to the local authority for an EHCP assessment.

Bullying

If bullying or sexual assault by peers are factors preventing attendance for your young person, there are legal duties on schools and local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, which includes preventing bullying and assault.

Alternative Education Provision

Some young people benefit from home tutors, online education, hospital school, or specialist units. They may eventually return to mainstream school, but they may need long-term specialist provision.

What if we're "stuck"?

Elective home education

Some parents make the decision to home school their child if they feel they struggle severely in the school environment and if they have the means to do so. This is a big decision and you should not feel under pressure to do so. Some children benefit from time at home to recover - each child is different and there is not one 'fix-all'; approach.

Work with professionals to create a child-led support plan

- Maintaining relationships between parents and school helps to create effective support plans
- Ask for any health professionals that may be involved with your young person to advise schools on support plans
- Seek confirmation these plans will be communicated to all staff
- Remind professionals on duties for reasonable adjustments for SEND
- Utilise the Trafford local authority's SEND offer which can provide further resources, information and advice
- Seek Early Help support if you feel this is required and beneficial. Families can be referred to Early Help via their GP.
- Look for online support groups such as Not Fine in School on Facebook

Spectrum Gaming

An online community for autistic young people which has 3 main intended outcomes:

1. **Building friendships** in a safe way through an online community. They also run meet ups for young people who live in the Greater Manchester area
2. **Increasing self-acceptance**: supporting people to accept their differences and flourish
3. **Advocacy**: creating a movement with positive influences on society and enabling change to ensure the needs of people with ASC are met.



Frequently asked questions

- parents / carers

What can I do to help at home?

Continue to be there for your child and to provide nurture and reassurance at home. Children often report that family members are some of the few adults that they feel listen to them, so continuing to be present for your child and listening to their worries about school will be a big support. It may also be helpful to link up with families experiencing similar difficulties. The organisations listed under the 'additional resources and services' page may also be of use.

What does the law say for parents and carers?

The law entitles every child of school age to an efficient, full-time education. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school.

Parents have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly, which is every day that school is open, except in a small number of circumstances such as being too ill or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school. Parents are expected to work with the school and local authority to help them understand their child's barriers to attendance. This includes proactively engaging with the support offered to prevent the need for more formal support.

For further advice, contact Trafford SENDIASS. They provide free, confidential, impartial advice and support to parent carers, children and young people aged 0-25 in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) who live in Trafford. Refer to the Working Together to Improve Attendance guidance, the mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance: guidance for schools and Trafford Pupil Attendance Team for further information and support.



Frequently asked questions - young people

How common are school attendance difficulties?

Recent research suggests that between 3 – 5% of children and young people experience this type of difficulty at some point in their education. That's around one child in each class!

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is the feeling you get when you're worried or scared about something. Some anxiety can be helpful as it can keep you safe from danger. But sometimes anxiety can make you feel like things are worse than they actually are and can feel overwhelming. Just like adults, children and young people feel worried and anxious at times. Children can feel anxious about different things at different ages. Many of these worries are a normal part of growing up. Anxiety becomes a problem for children when it starts to get in the way of their everyday life. For example, if you go into any school at exam time, many of the children will be anxious, but some may be so anxious that they do not manage to get to school that morning.

What can I do?

- Challenging your worries is helpful – think about how likely the worry is to happen. What might you say to someone else who's experiencing this worry?
- Find positive activities you enjoy and plan these into your week or try to think about something you're looking forward to in the future
- Do physical exercise, learn mindfulness or yoga
- Talk to someone you can trust at home or in school

The following websites also have lots of helpful resources to further understand anxiety and how to take care of yourself.

- <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/anxiety-stress-panic/anxiety/>
- <https://www.healthforteens.co.uk/feelings/anxiety/>
- <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/mental-health-conditions/anxiety>



Additional resources and services

Trafford Parents Forum:

Support parent / carers and families of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), with or without a diagnosis, across Trafford.

<https://www.traffordparentsforum.com/>



Trafford Stronger Together Empowering Parents (STEP): STEP

A support service within Trafford Parents Forum providing emotional and practical support and advice for parent/carers of children and young people with SEND in Trafford. They also have a team of trained volunteers who can act as mentors for parent carers.



Trafford Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (Trafford SENDIASS):

Provides impartial information, advice and support to children and young people with SEND, as well as their parents and carers.

<https://sendiass.trafford.gov.uk/Home.aspx>



Trafford Family Information Service (FIS)

Provide free, impartial, confidential information and advice to mums, dads, carers, young people and professionals on a range of subjects.



Additional resources and services

Calm Connections:

Supports parents, caregivers and the whole family of children and young people with emotional wellbeing and mental health challenges.



Not Fine in School:

A resource for the growing numbers of families with children experiencing school attendance barriers.

<https://notfineinschool.co.uk/families>

Further guidance around parental support for anxiety can be found at the following websites:

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-adults/advice-for-parents/anxiety-in-children/>

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/anxiety/>

