



Understanding EBSA



What Is EBSA?

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is the term that is currently used to describe the situation where children are struggling to attend school for emotional reasons.

For some children and teens, school attendance can feel emotionally overwhelming and trigger significant anxiety and mental ill health. For children who are experiencing EBSA, it is important to understand that they are not 'refusing' to go to school, they are avoiding it because they are emotionally overwhelmed.

The Four Main Reasons Why Children Avoid School

There are many reasons why children will avoid going to school and it is important to understand your child and what is going on for them. These challenges can overlap and can be linked to both school and/or home.

However, there are four main accepted reasons backed by research:

To avoid the uncomfortable feelings that can be brought on by attending school. This could be anxiety, low mood etc.

To avoid stressful situations at school such as exam pressures, issues of bullying or challenges with the noisy, busy environment.

To reduce separation anxiety from loved ones at home, finding it difficult to leave family. Or it may be to gain attention from family.

To get to do things that are motivating and fun that they can't do at school. For example, spending time gaming or outdoors.

Early Warning Signs

Most children/teens don't make a decision one day that they are not going to attend school. There will be a pattern of behaviour that may be noticeable building up, until the overwhelm happens.

Becoming emotional when school is mentioned

Making themselves late for school

Unsettled or agitated when arriving at school.

Reluctance to leave the house for school

Refusing to get dressed in school uniform.

Pleading to stay at home.

Being upset or reluctant to leave parents/care givers

Anxiety when having to separate from family

Absent for minor illnesses or increasing number of illnesses.

Increase in negative talk about school or friends .

Periods of prolonged absence.

Negative changes in behaviour at home.

Showing more defensive type aggression.

Changes in appetite.

Changes in sleep.

Displaying low mood.

Negative changes in self esteem and confidence.

Avoiding friends or peers.

Becoming more emotional and upset over small things.

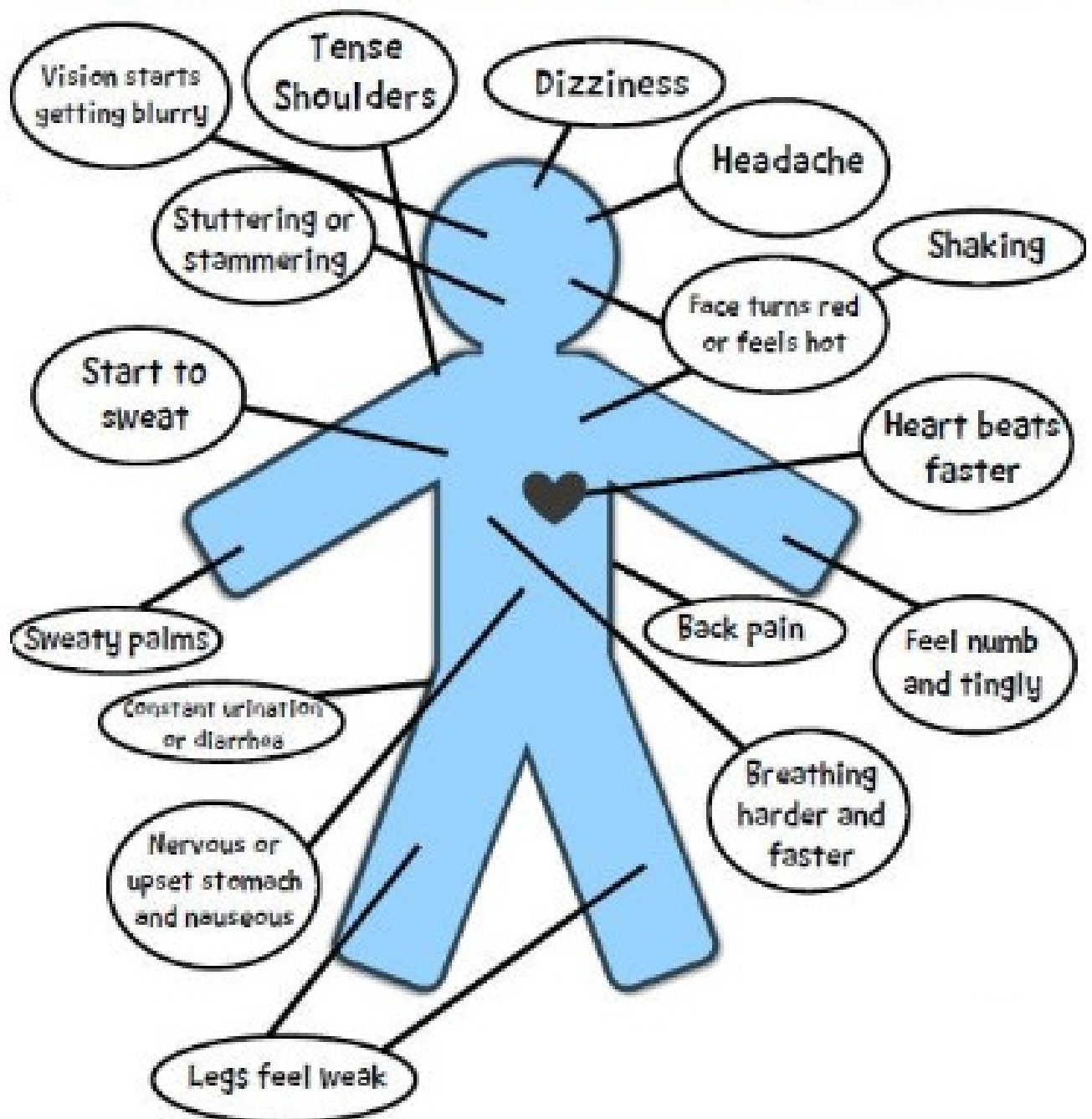
Pattern in absences, eg after a weekend.

Disruptive behaviours at home.

Noticing Anxiety

Anxiety is one of the most common conditions that come with EBSA and understanding the symptoms can help to support your child/teen with what is happening for them.

Some of the main symptoms that they can show are:



What Can You Do?

Having a child at home who is struggling with school or is refusing to go, can be very challenging, but there are steps that you, your child and school can do, to help things improve. It is important to take things at the pace that is right for your child.

Work With Your Child - Although your child may be causing situations that are challenging, they are not choosing to do it, it is a response to how they are feeling.

Listen to them and support them to talk about the challenges and difficulties that they are facing at school. Help them to vocalise and understand their worries. Don't minimise their worries and fears, listen to them and let them know you are on their side. Be consistent in your approach and give your child time to work through their difficulties.

Give praise and/or rewards when you can see that they are making a genuine effort.

Have A Plan - Being consistent and boundaried can help your child to get back into a routine and find a way back to school.

Keep the routine the same even if your child is not attending school - get up at school time, have breakfast etc.

Avoid 'rewarding' your child for being at home by allowing them to play on games or to get to do 'special' trips out. Try where possible to stick to some learning activities during 'school hours'.

Small Steps - Work with your child (and school) to create a plan of small steps to work towards reintegration to school. This might be something like:

Putting on school uniform and travelling the route to school, but not going in.
Building up over time to be able to enter the school building and drop something at reception.

Working towards attending for a specific lesson, or a morning or afternoon.

You will need to move back and forward with the steps as required depending on how your child is feeling. The idea is to help them build confidence with each step, so if a step is overwhelming, go back to the previous one.

Don't Do It All Alone - Discuss the situation with your child's school to ask them to support. They may be able to offer both pastoral support as well as helping with a plan to help reintegrate your child in the way that is correct for them.

It is important to involve your child in any decisions that are made, where possible. They need to know that everyone is working together to support them, and they need to be able to trust the adults and process.

Other Support Avenues - As well as school, you can also look for support from:

- Parent support services such as Parent Carer Forums
- Your GP
- School Nursing Team
- Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- Early Help
- Counselling and Mental Health Support Services

Support For You - If you are a parent or carer who has a child not attending school, it can be challenging for you. As with any situation, you also need to look after your own wellbeing whilst you are supporting your child. Seeking help from friends, families or professionals is important for you too.

If you have any questions, would like further advice, or are interested in counselling services for either yourself or your child, please do get in touch.

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