**Video 2 - Why does EBBSA happen?**

**Why does EBBSA happen?**

Some levels of anxiety are normal. However, children experiencing emotionally based barriers to school attendance may have heightened levels of anxiety which impact on their functioning and school experiences.

**The Avoidance Cycle**

Our natural way of dealing with anxiety is through avoidance. However, the relief gained is only a short-term measure because the next time we are in the same situation, it can lead to increased anticipation of the event. This is called the avoidance cycle and leads to increased growth, growth of active anxiety. Anxiety is not the only cause of EBBSA. Or it could be linked to low mood, depression, neurodiversity and contextual factors such as the school, family and community.

**EBBSA happens 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.

**Interplay of Factors**

Multiple risk factors from various sources can contribute to the complex interplay resulting in EBBSA behaviours overtime. The factors are not isolated within the child. Therefore, a holistic approach involving the child, family, school and supporting adults is essential. We created the EBBSA support logo with the Venn diagram to represent collaboration of the child, home and school surrounded by a heart, showing the kindness and empathy needed.

**Four Functions of EBBSA**

Children and young people miss school for a variety of reasons as a voluntary or involuntary response to personal family, school or wider environmental factors. It is important to inquire about the whys involved when children and young people are experiencing difficulties engaging with education and the four functions can help to do this.

The first function to avoid school related stresses. This is often linked to how the child feels about themselves and their specific experiences of fear and anxieties.  
Those worries may come around the environment, with noise, crowds, negative mood and anxiety linked to school activities. The social times, so it could be having to work with groups. Those break and lunchtime periods, which are sometimes called those unstructured times in the school day. Transitions, so primary to secondary school is one of the main transitions in a young person's education. Those transitions between lessons and that time, to and from school as well.

The second function, to avoid social situations and activities. So, this involves social anxieties and those worries around appraisal from others. It could be situations with challenging interactions with peers and feeling isolated or disconnected from their peers not belonging to a group or feeling like they're not belonging to a group or to the school as a whole. Those evaluative situations which could be examination periods and the key stage two SATs, GCSEs, etcetera, and times when they need to speak aloud in class and asking questions, reading aloud and for some children PE lessons can be a difficult time as well.

The third function, to gain needed attention and connection. So this can be linked to separation anxiety and the need for parent carer contact. So it might be that young people prefer that time at home with family members for a variety of different reasons and it could link with separation anxiety. It could be that their main carers have some physical illnesses or mental illnesses and there could be some worries about not being with that person.

The fourth function is to engage in preferred activities, and this could be that by not engaging with their education, it could be that they were enjoying watching television, playing video games and spending time with friends or family. Which can seem like not valid reasons for not going to school. However, it depends on what the function of that behaviour is. For example, if they're wanting to engage in preferred activities of spending time with friends and family because it links to situations at home with their family members, health or situation. Then it seems a very natural reaction to wanting to spend all of that time with them. And for another example, playing video games can seem like quite an easy barrier to overcome, however, it can really depend on what the function of that time on the video games can be and what support is that activity providing for that young person. So it's really beneficial to withhold any judgement while exploring the situation around the young person, their family, and the holistic view is just vital in these situations.

**Resilience and Risk Factors**

Here you can see a seesaw with a school in the light and a school in the darkness, and this is to demonstrate that the balance of having those resilience factors and those risk factors. The resilience factors, sometimes referred to as push factors, they could be that a young person might really thrive in their education and find learning quite easy and enjoy it and have those positive educational experiences that could be the development of positive relationships with peers, some staff, they've developed a sense of belonging and safety, they have that enjoyment of lessons and they have easy interactions with their friends and staff.  
They find the schoolwork meets their needs; it's challenging, but not too challenging and things are working quite positively.

The risk factors, sometimes referred to as pull factors, may be a change in family dynamics and a family member may be unwell, separation anxiety and bereavement.  
Bullying there could be problems with friendships, peers and staff. Those academic pressures, so it could be during and those examination times. There could be some challenges with learning, areas that they're finding quite difficult. And many more.

**Contextual Risk Factors**

Carrying on from those risk factors, it's really important to recognise the stresses and the risk factors. Recognising those can help families, schools and services to identify those children that are at risk of EBBSA. These barriers to engagement are multifaceted, they're complex and they often overlap and they can really provide an understanding of the underpinning difficulties that affect the child at potentially all areas of their life.

The risk factors can be around the school ethos and the environment. The young person may feel unsafe, experience bullying, not feel valued, lack sense of belonging. They may have poor relationships with the teaching staff and experience sensory overload.

In the curriculum, teaching and learning, they might consider lessons to be boring. They may not feel supported academically, perceive learning tasks to be unachievable and lack opportunities to experience success. Lots of research shows that those transition points in going to school up from reception to foundation stage two and then from year six to year seven can also be said be difficult periods if not well supported.

Parent carer attitudes, it's really important for families to have that interest in their child's academic lives and their lives at school. If there isn't that interest then that can be a difficult factor as well. A disciplinary approach to non-attendance and a poor relationship, difficult interactions and conflict with school professionals. For example if the young people are hearing and seeing the difficult relationships that are there or a beginning between the family and the school, that can produce a barrier. Families and the parents and carers may have experienced difficulties with their own education.

Family and community, they may have experienced high levels of conflict within the home. The parents and carers may struggle to care for their children adequately, and they might live with parents and carers with mental health issues. There may have been bereavement in the family. It depends on their neighbourhoods as well.

**Resilience and Protective Factors**

That was quite a lot of information about the risk factors and there are probably many more and each situation is completely unique and no one person experiencing EBBSA will have the same risk factors and protective factors, so it really is bespoke and individual and therefore the support also needs to be bespoke, personalised and individual.  
But it's vital that we also identify those resilience and protective factors so that they can be built upon to support the child and the family and the school to thrive and for the young person to engage in education and have those high aspirations for themselves and to achieve the life that they would like to live. Focusing on these existing resilience factors can help to reframe the conversation around school to represent a more positive dialogue in a solution focused approach. What skills and support does the child already have and what are they already doing and enjoying that can encourage and support them to engage with education. These resilient and protective factors can be on an individual basis, looking at the strengths and their interests, how can their confidence be increased, is their confidence levels already really high and positive relationships with school, are they experiencing success in school and do they feel valued and do they belong there.

In the family situation, are there positive relationships in the family, lots of positive parenting skills and do the family understand and respond to the young person's needs and feelings, and is there a willingness to work with the school and with other partner agencies holistically.

From the school perspective, those resilience factors can be positive relationships with members of staff that flexible approach and reasonable adjustments, meeting the needs of the young person first, developing and responding to the young person's needs and their feelings.

**Illustration.** Here you can see a few pictures and this is a 14 year old girl who has powerfully illustrated the risk and resilience factors affecting her engagement with education. She says that her feelings are like a whirlwind where she is not in control and that the school is not a safe place. She's represented that with a tornado spiral. She worries something bad might happen, which she's represented by a fire.  
She sees school as having lots of people in it, but she is on the outside and that people are making fun of her and she's represented this with a circle with lots of people drawn inside and then on the outside of the circle is her with a sad face, and she's written ‘me’ on the above it. She has also indicated that she feels she is not doing well with her work and she loves being at home. She indicates not doing well with her work by a piece of paper with lots of words written on saying like wrong must do better and she loves being at home by having the house within the heart. Creative activities like this can be very effective in helping young people to share their thoughts and their feelings, and there's more on that in our third video.

Here is an **example of the risk and resilience factors** at each level for a young person. On the left hand side, we've got the child and in the bold writing are the resilience factors. I have future goals and aspirations. I want to be at school. I enjoy being outdoors and football. The risk factors are struggles with sleep, sensory sensitivities feels unwell when he thinks about school and shows physical anxiety signs.  
Home is in bold. Feel safest at home, has the support of his family, feels able to share his feelings at home. The risk factors are separation anxiety, struggles with relationship with siblings, experiences behaviour that challenges at home, worries about going to school when inside the family home.  
The school factors. The resilience factors are, I believe teachers care about me, I enjoy learning, I love geography and can name every flag in the world. The risk factors are worries about being restrained, I don't have any friends, it's too busy everywhere, struggles to go back to school after the holidays, doesn't have a consistent trusted adult, I can't talk about my feelings, I don't like break and lunch times.  
We've put that in there so that you can see how that interplay of factors within the child, the home and the school, the resilience and the risk factors can come together in a concise way to share with everybody that works with that young person and the family to show all of the different things that are happening around that child and that are affecting their engagement with education.

**Early Signs and Identifying EBBSA**. The early signs, when working with children and families reflectively, there are often many early warning signs that can be identified, these have been explained to us as that distress or that crying and pleading about not wanting to go to school, difficulty getting ready for school or leaving the house. Rumination and worry around school related issues, sleep problems, psychosomatic illnesses, which are headaches, tummy aches when there's no underlying medical cause that can be found and the basis is thought to be emotional. May display defensive aggression as a means of trying to control a situation that feels out of control for that person.  
Identifying EBBSA. There are indicators of EBBSA that you can look out for, these are significant difficulty in attending school frequently resulting in absences from school, staying at home with the knowledge of the families and school staff, usually absence of antisocial behaviours, limited engagement with the community this may mean that it's almost like their world has shrunk whilst experiencing EBBSA and emotional distress specifically linked to facing the prospect of attending school.  
Just as the combination of factors contributing to EBBSA are complex and largely unique to the individual and their family, their symptoms and behaviour can also present in a variety of ways. Everyone needs to be aware that some children and young people experiencing EBBSA appear to function well when they are in school. Likewise, they may happily socialise with friends outside school or attend clubs or activities. This can lead adults to question whether a pupil is really experiencing EBBSA and can lead to potential misunderstandings with parents who are experiencing significant problems at the beginning or the end of the school day.

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