



Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA)



*A Toolkit for Professionals,
Parents and Carers*

Welcome

This tool kit has been put together to support you and your child to get back to school. For some young people it can become difficult for them to attend school and this kit is aimed at supporting children and young people who are at risk of or beginning to miss education due to anxiety and worries.

If your child has been out of education for a sustained period of time this kit may be useful, but you will also need some targeted support to find a way forward. North Herts family support services are running regular drop in online and face to face parent/carer support groups to help you and we look forward to seeing you there.

Find a positive time to go through this pack with your child. Take it at the child's pace. It is important they feel at the center of this plan and that it is theirs rather than being 'done to them' by adults.



Before getting started

- 1) *It can be helpful to identify what factors may be contributing towards the school avoidance. We can do this by considering the 'push and pull' factors – these are the things that pull the young person away from school (such as new baby at home, parent illness, bullying, finding particular subjects too difficult etc.) and what pushes them towards school (friends, positive relationship with teachers, good routine in the morning etc.). It might be helpful to sit down with your child or the pupil and map these out – then consider what could be done to increase the push factors and reduce the pull factors.*

Before tackling anxiety, it is important that we rule out or address issues around physical or emotional safety, such as bullying/harassment etc.

- 2) *It is helpful to be aware of the cycle of anxiety (see below). Avoidance feeds anxiety as there isn't the opportunity for the anxious thoughts to be challenged through neutral or positive experiences. It is important to confront situations to enable the anxiety to shrink over time.*



3) *It's incredibly challenging being faced with a child's distress and knowing to how to best respond. Consider the 5 different approaches below and reflect on which approach you/others are currently taking and if there is anything that could be done differently:*

A) Neither encourages or discourages

B) Encourages but backs off in the face of resistance

C) Discourages

D) Encourages in an overly forceful or critical way

E) Encourages the child/young person to confront situations and confront them at their own pace.

This toolkit will support you to encourage your child to confront situations and ensure steps to do this are taken at their pace (Approach E).

Toolkit instructions

Step 1 - Setting a goal

To support your child in starting to feel better and build resilience, start by setting a goal. How do they want to feel at the end of this support strategy? The goal needs to be achievable and realistic, for example, it might be to have more friends or to feel more comfortable going into their school building. It might be to overcome anxiety and face my fears so ask the young person to write their goal at the top of the tool. 10 is totally achieved and 0 is nowhere near! 'What number are you this week?' 'Write it on the worksheet'. 'What small step could we put in place to help you move one score higher?' Remember – no one ever stays at a 10, most of us tend to be around a 7.



Tool 1 – Helping Hand

This tool can be used with your young person to identify those people around them who they feel they could support them achieve their goals at home, in school or in the community. It is helpful for your child to do this regularly (as friendships and home circumstances change), so that they know exactly who they would go to in a time of distress. Who is on their support network? Who could be on? Please share this pack with their chosen network.

Top tip - Suggest that they think of a trusted adult in school, a friend, family member as well as a supporter in the community (perhaps a sports coach, music teacher or church member). Pets or a faith may be on the network as they can be helpful - put these in the center of the palm as you need adult helpers to support you along the way as well as friends and pets who make you feel good.

Tool 2 – Friendship Network

An alternative network tool to help young people think about the friends in their network and to support friendship/social difficulties. Ask them who they think is a positive support within their group of peers and add these people to the inner circles. If there are children that they need to distance themselves from, add these beyond the outer rings because they don't help them feel safe?

Tool 3 – The Stress Bucket

'The bucket' is a great metaphor for when emotions are starting to overwhelm a young person and getting them to think about what is contributing to their distress. It's also helpful for you to have a code or shared language 'what's in your bucket this week' or 'how full is your bucket?'. These are good openers for conversations about feelings rather than 'how are you today?' Often young people can feel bad about themselves and not understand why they are feeling overwhelmed or stuck. This tool helps them to visualise and solve the things that contribute to their stress

Ask them to write and draw everything in the bucket that worries them, plays on their mind or is getting them down. Give each item a layer of colour and notice how full the bucket is. It is normal to feel overwhelmed but when our bucket is full, we can find it very difficult to cope with the smaller things in life and everyday demands might become huge and feel impossible.

Top tip – Work through these questions together:

'How could you empty your bucket?' 'What can't you control so you need to accept?' 'What needs your immediate attention?' 'Is there anything that someone could help you with?'

Tool 4 – What helps and what makes me feel worse

This can be used to help your child and their school identify strategies that help them when they are feeling upset and things that can make them feel worse. It can be useful to get them to think about what does support and what they might try to avoid. For example: playing on the Xbox may help but after 3 hours it may make them feel worse. Running may help. The dog may help. People shouting may make them feel worse etc. Often young people don't know what helps them so you need to go and experiment and try different things out and add them to your tool on the appropriate side.

Tool 5 - Graded Steps Plan

You can read this aloud with the young person:

To support you to achieve your goals you need a plan with small baby steps along the way. If your goal is to get back into school and attend most lessons but you feel very frightened, step 1 may be to drive past school in your uniform and go home again. You may repeat step 1 for 2 to 3 days before you feel ready to tackle the next step, this may be to stop the car outside school and one of your helpers from your network can come and say hello briefly. Step 3 may be to sit in reception for 5 minutes. Step 4 could be to go to your safe place in school for 1 hour and then return home.

Once you have written a plan with your parents, everyone needs to stick to it. It needs to be reliable and trustworthy so you can relax, feel in control and take small steps. You can complete this at home or with another adult on your network and decide on your start date. Don't worry if you have a setback. Just start again from the previous step until your confidence builds. We aren't born with confidence and resilience – we grow it by facing our fears in small ways. Your emotional brain (Amygdala) will release Adrenaline into your body when you face your fears and you may feel shaky or a bit sick or a bit sweaty. Don't worry, you are perfectly safe. You can do this. Ride the Adrenaline like a surfer riding a wave. Let it wash out of your body. Relax your body and calm your breath. Stick to your plan and build your confidence. Your whole network are supporting you. Remember, you are brave and you can do this!

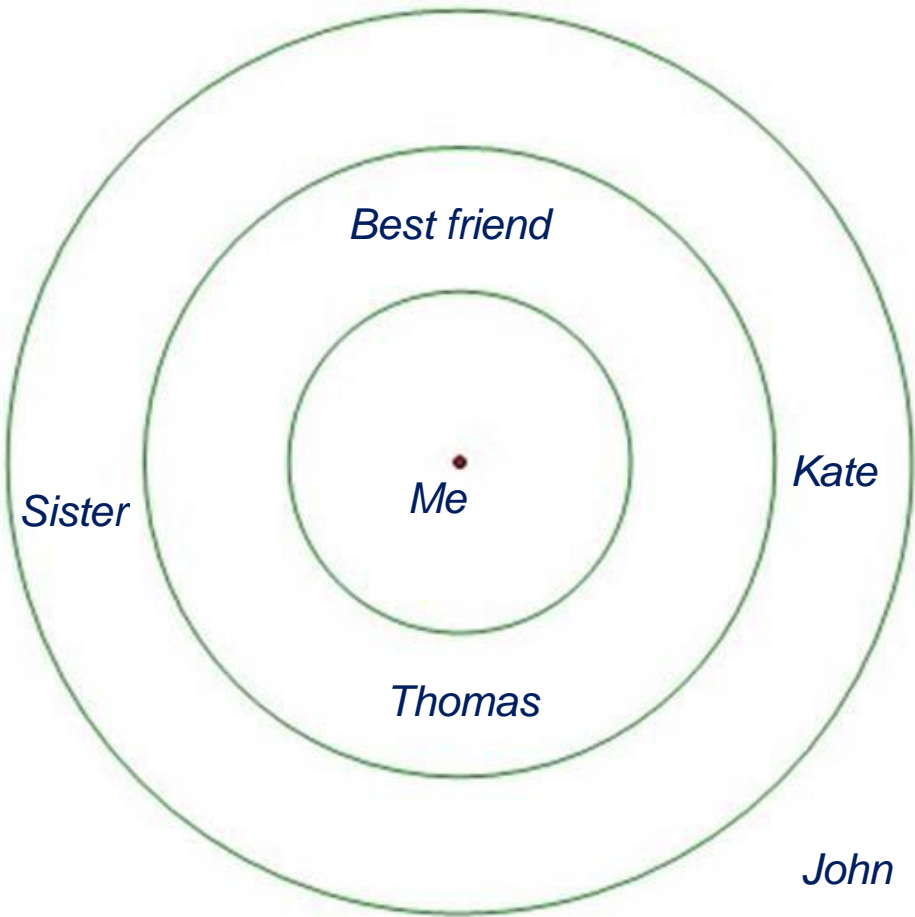
The Helping Hand



Who could help if you need to talk?

My Friendship Network

Sarah



The Stress Bucket

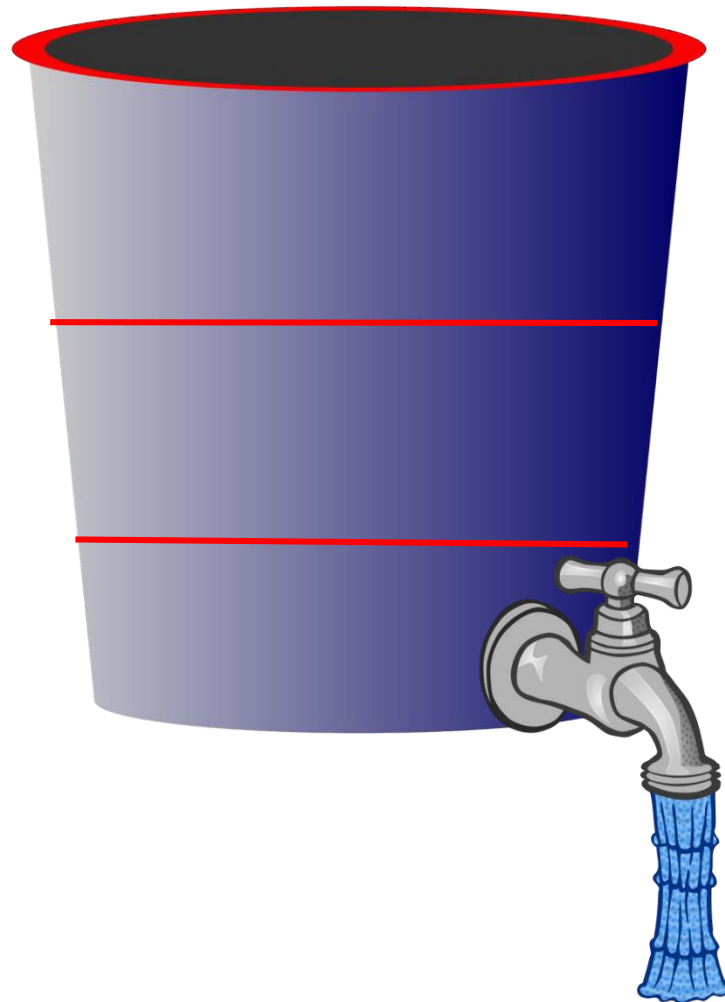
'How full is my Bucket and how can I empty it?'

What needs my urgent attention?

What can't I change & need to accept?

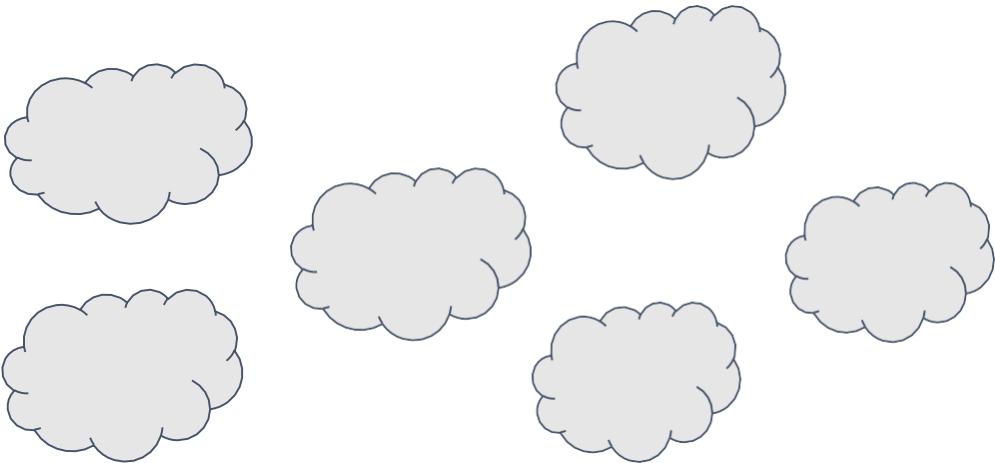
What can I change?

Who can help?

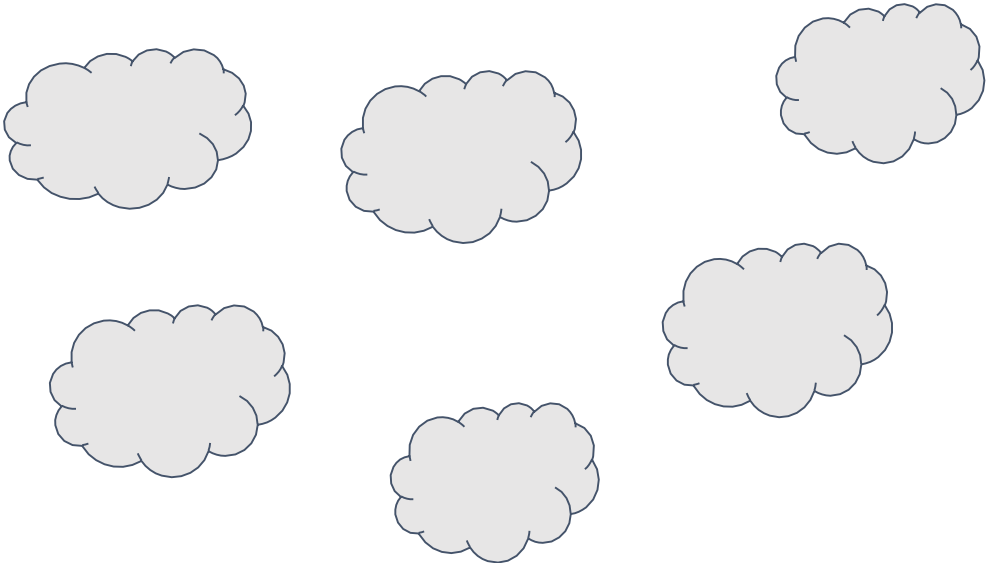


What helps what makes it worse?

What helps?



What makes it worse?



Graded Exposure Tool

What is your goal?

What is step 1 of you goal?

What is step 2 of your goal?

On the tracker below, fill in all the steps that will take you towards your goal.



Reaching your goal will mean facing your fears, but taking it step by step will help it feel more manageable