

# Emotionally-based school avoidance (EBSA)

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West Community Inclusion Forum

20.03.2024

# Aims for session



To understand what we mean by EBSA and contributing factors.

To understand what we mean by an individualised approach to support and what this looks like within school settings.

To understand how you can support CYP and families in your role as SENCOs.

Signposting to resources and support services.

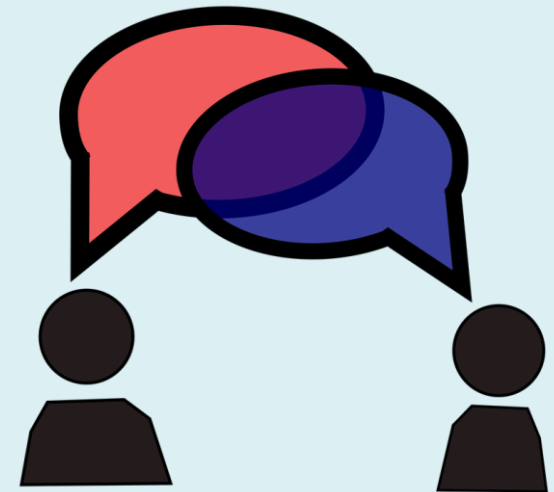
# Before we begin...

Look at the case study on your tables. In pairs/groups, please think about how you would currently approach this situation.

What questions would you ask? What approaches or actions would you take?

Share your thoughts and ideas:

5-10 minutes.



# What is EBSA?



- ‘Emotionally-based school avoidance’: difficulty attending or engaging with school due to experience of negative emotions (e.g. anxiety/ distress). \*
- Previously/also known as ‘school refusal’, ‘anxiety based avoidance’, ‘emotionally based barriers to attendance’...
- 10% of CYP currently understood to be ‘persistently absent’. Previous estimates suggested that 1-2% of CYP experience EBSA, likely to be much higher.
- **Important to view EBSA as a symptom, rather than the difficulty itself.** Often complex, long-lasting and multi-faceted.

# What causes EBSA?

Research suggests that there are a range of factors and circumstances that can contribute to attendance difficulties. These are best understood in terms of a 'push and pull' model.

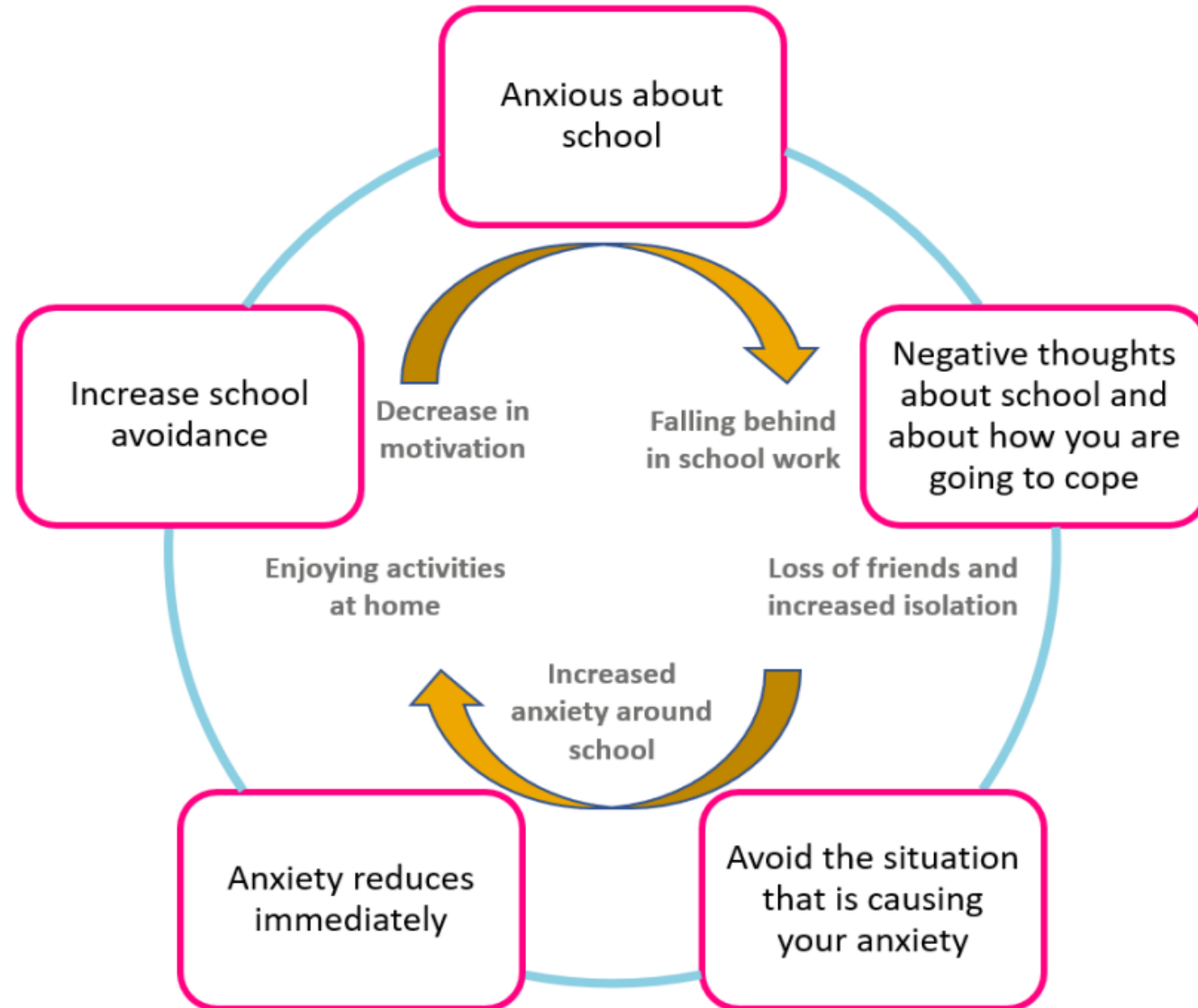


School  
factors

Home  
factors

Within-child  
factors

# The Anxiety Cycle



# The need for an individualised approach

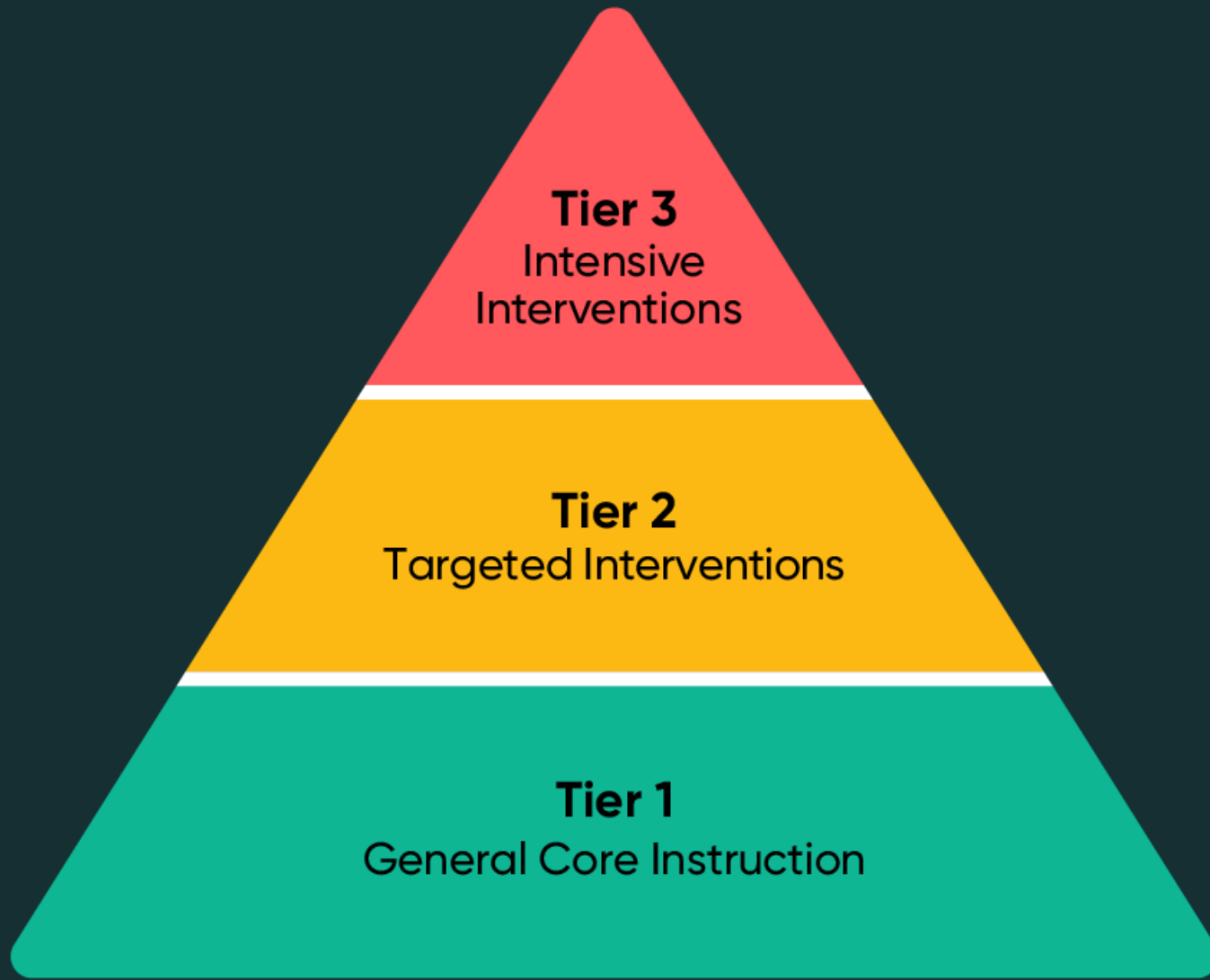
EBSA is hugely individual and varies between schools and families

EBSA impacts the wider family and not just the individual CYP

A multi-agency and systems approach to support is needed

CYP voice should be at the centre of this support.

*This makes your job, and implementing a universal offer of support, difficult!*



# Response to Intervention Model

- Different 'levels' of support'
- Often considered in relation to SEND.
- North East Lincolnshire approach:
  - Be Aware
  - Be Curious
  - Be Reactive



# SPIRAL Principles (Sawyer, 2022)



Thesis research into parental experience of EBSA, with a focus on 'what works' to support successful reintegration.

Implications for a range of professionals in supporting families, CYP and schools, and the need for early intervention and support.

Consideration of parent experience, including presence of blame and not feeling listened to, aligning with previous research: Not Fine in School: [Not-Fine-in-School-march-2020-survey \(wsimg.com\)](https://www.wsimg.com)

Highlights importance of **language** and approach (supportive, collaborative and curious).



Supporting Parents

Promoting Sense of Belonging

Including and Informing Parents

Raising awareness of EBSA

Accessing external professionals

Lessons learnt from Covid



Schools,  
Local  
Authority  
Teams,  
Health?



Any questions/thoughts so far?

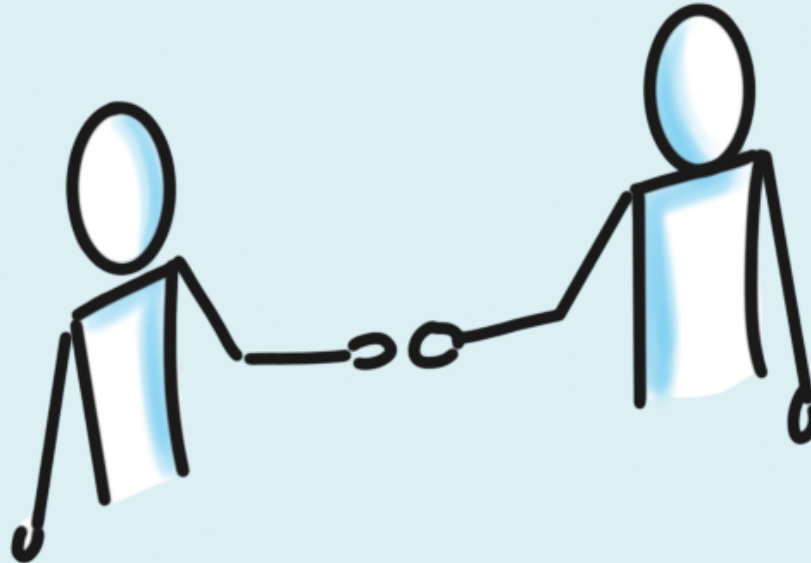
Recovery from adversity is facilitated by the development of:



SENSE OF SAFETY –  
EMOTIONAL & PHYSICAL



SELF-EFFICACY

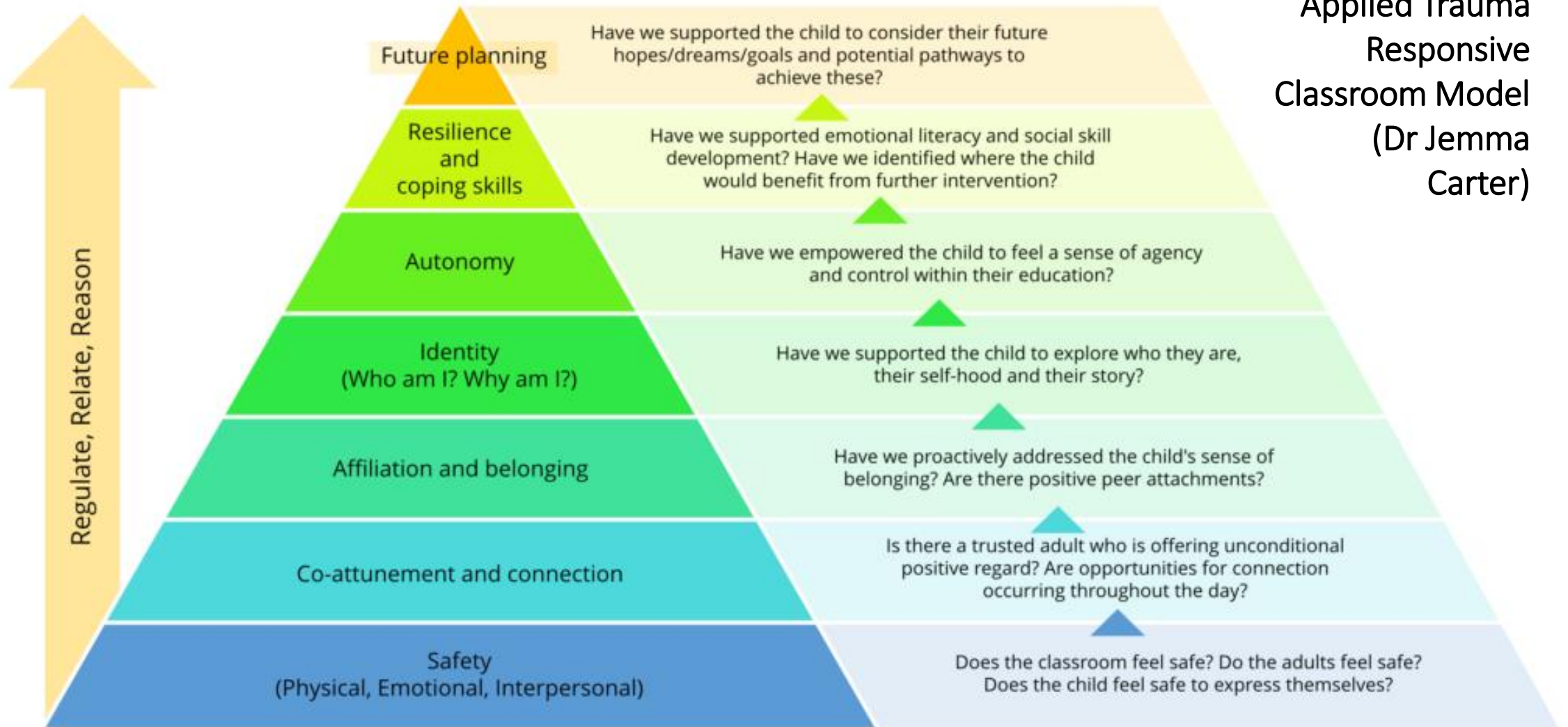


POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS



STRENGTHS

# Applied Trauma Responsive Classroom Model (Dr Jemma Carter)



# So, what can be done?



## **You begin to become concerned about a child's attendance:**

Identify the current level of attendance: what is the current picture?

What has been done so far to support this young person/ family?

What do you already know about the child's needs and situation?

## **Holding a 'supportive conversation':**

Identify what is happening for the family at present? (Think contributing and maintaining factors)

Signposting useful resources and tools (both to schools and families)

Working together to identify next steps as early as possible.

Chapter 1

CYP is at 90% attendance.

Occasional days Mum ringing in to say pupil is 'feeling sick' or has headache.

CYP is struggling a little with aspects of their academic work.

CYP has one or two friends.

CYP is reluctant to speak in front of whole class.

CYP seems a little nervy speaking to adults in school.

CYP has been observed being teary once or twice coming into school in the morning.

Parent has voiced feeling worried in a parents' eve, but the school are observing that the child soon settles.

Chapter 2

CYP is at around 80% attendance.

CYP has been late into school about once a fortnight over the last term (mostly Mondays).

They've had a few 'medical appointments' over the term, typically always arranged for a Thursday afternoon.

CYP has fallen out with friends and has been observed as being alone at break or lunch.

CYP was spoken to last week for damaging another child's work.

CYP didn't do very well in latest round of school assessments (core subjects)

Teacher spoke with CYP but they seemed very uncomfortable to talk, Teacher reassured " I'm here if you need me".

Chapter 3

CYP is at 40 to 50% attendance.

CYP is late into school daily and is also not attending at least one day per fortnight

Parent has shared with class teacher that things are a bit tricky at home right now.

Mum not been seen at school pick up; Aunty is currently walking CYP to the school gate in the morning

Member of staff on duty at lunch overheard group of pupils making negative comments about focus pupil.

CYP is becoming isolated from peers

Chapter 4

CYP is down to around 20 to 30% attendance.

When they're in school they're often dysregulated and in need of additional adult attention

Mum has confided to one member of staff that her partner has left and she is under the GP for mental health related concerns

CYP struggling to engage with academic curriculum in class

CYP very isolated from peer group

Chapter 5

CYP is not attending school at all.

CYP not really leaving the house.

CYP not accessing any learning or social opportunities.

# Gathering the CYP voice

Have efforts been made to gather the CYP's voice? Has this accounted for the CYP's needs and circumstances?

Does the school/ family need support to gather CYP views? Does the school have an ELSA or Family Liaison Officer?

Have the parent views been gathered and represented?

Is professional support needed to provide further information or input these into an action plan?

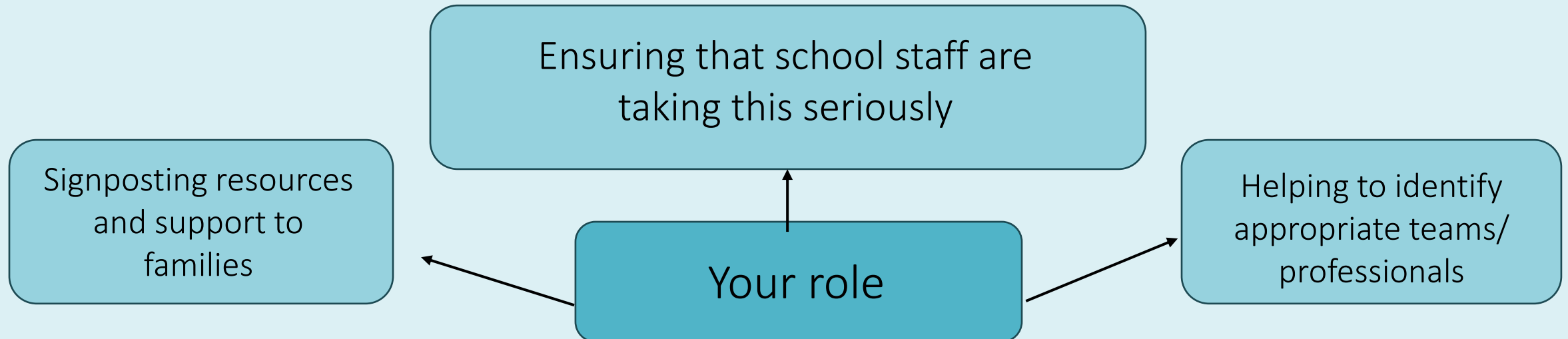
**Important step towards establishing reasons behind attendance difficulties.**





# EBSA and Special Educational Needs

- Research has consistently found a relationship between EBSA and SEND, with attendance difficulties a symptom of a wider need.
- Has the school identified any unmet needs? Is support for SEND in place?
- Remember: Social, Emotional and Mental Health difficulties are **also** SEND.



# When the child is not consistently attending...



- This can make implementing school-based support more challenging, meaning that a multi-systems approach is often needed.
- However, schools can take steps to support CYP remotely...
- Need to maintain and build relationships remotely: [Maintaining Connections Doc](#)
- Consider psychological safety: [Feelings of safety doc](#).

Is there more that the school can be doing to maintain relationships? To support feelings of anxiety and develop coping skills? Can work be sent home?

# Supporting parents

- Research highlights the importance of supporting parents both practically and emotionally, although this will differ between families.
- Consider family support network and access to mental health support/ peer support groups
- Does the parent have unmet needs or difficult circumstances that need supporting?
- Access to psychoeducation approaches
- Important that this takes place alongside school support



# Think back to the case study...

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What could be done to improve support offered remotely?

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Has this information changed how you would approach this at all?

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What support/resources would you need to be able to implement this?

# So, what can schools be doing?

- Assess, Plan, Do, Review (typical SEND support involving the SENCO **and** SLT)
- Use of the whole-school audit tool and/or Suffolk EBSA Resources to consider universal provision and school culture
- Would school staff benefit from further training or information? Who could provide this?
- Could another professional help school staff to unpick the CYP's difficulties further? Have they accessed a solution circle? Or an AANT?
- Developing EBSA Action Plans with use of the CYP/Parent voice

# EBSA Plan Example

[NAME]'s One Page Plan

At school, these things can make me feel upset:

My Key People are:



Changes to attendance, timetable etc.

Until ..... my return to school plan includes the following changes to my attendance:

(Identify any changes to days or times they come in)

My Support Plan

What?	When?	Who?	Where?

Changes to my timetable include:

(Identify any changes needed)

Other people who have access to the plan are:

This plan will be reviewed regularly so that it remains helpful. Review date:

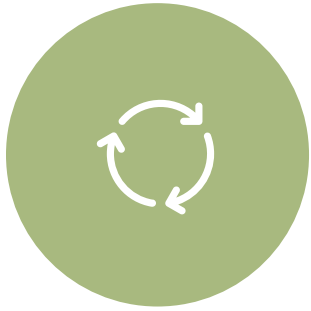
My signature:

School support

person's signature:

Parent signature:





WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE  
HAPPEN?



ANY THOUGHTS/ FEEDBACK ON  
OUR EBSA RESOURCES?



WHAT SUPPORT OR COLLABORATION  
WOULD YOU LIKE FROM/WITH OUR  
SERVICE GOING FORWARDS?



ANY QUESTIONS?

Anything else?

# Helpful links and resources

[Going back to school | Childline](#)

Suffolk EBSA Resources (for professionals, families and young people): [LINK](#)

EBSA Horizons School Training: [EdPsychEd | EBSA Horizons School Training](#)

Not Fine in School/ Square Peg Groups

[Parent workshops | Norfolk and Suffolk NHS \(nsft.nhs.uk\)](#)

[Psychology and Therapeutic Services - Suffolk County Council](#)