

Four Functions of Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)

Avoiding Negative Emotion

This is when a child does not attend to avoid the uncomfortable feelings brought on by attending school, such as feelings of anxiety or low mood. Often children who are avoiding general school-related stress cannot say what specific things causes them to feel stressed about school. Therefore this function might be identified more, but not solely, in younger children

Relationship Seeking

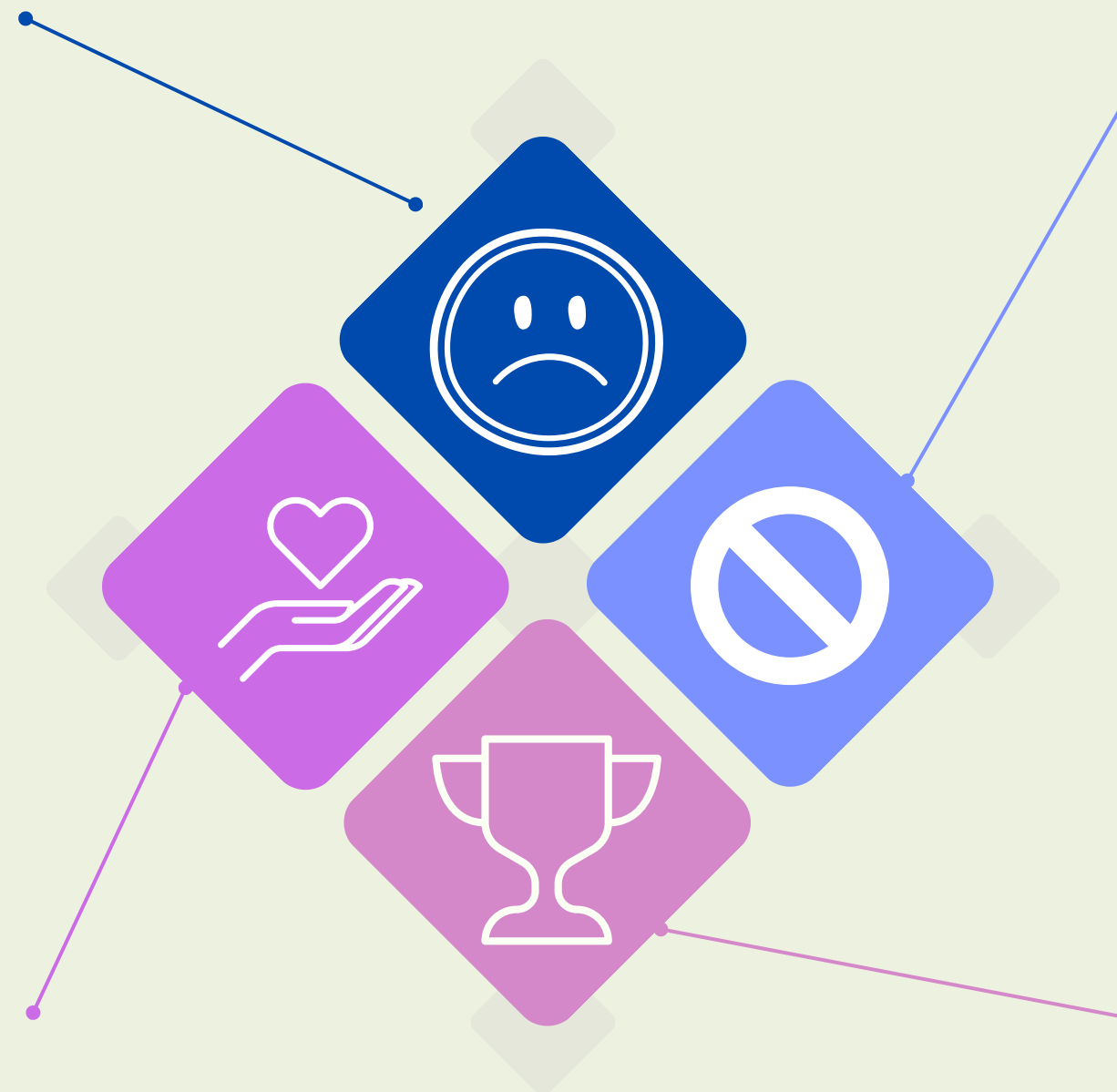
Children may also avoid school to reduce feelings of anxiety associated with being apart from their parents/carers or other family members. These children may not be particularly worried about school-related situations, but are seeking ways to spend more time with family members at home. Children in this group may include those with high levels of separation anxiety or those who are concerned about the wellbeing of a parent at home.

Situation Avoidance

This is where the child is avoiding particular situations that they find stressful. Examples include to school work or certain lessons that they find difficult, assessments, particular peers or adults, working in a group, assemblies, or lessons which involve an element of performance like PE or drama. It could be one situation or a combination of many.

Tangible Reward

Some children may seek to spend time out of school doing stimulating activities or things that meet their needs better than being in school. For some, being out of school may be more enjoyable or motivating than being in school. For others, there may be emotional needs being better met outside of school – this includes the group who are very socially vulnerable and at risk of exploitation if they are seeking things like a sense of belonging or group membership in the community.





Avoiding Negative Emotion

- Gain pupil views to learn more about particular 'hotspots' or areas requiring support, as well as things that feel more manageable within school (visual approaches and sorting activities are helpful). Wherever possible make environmental changes to address triggers and boost positive experiences.
- Develop relationships with adults and peers to enhance their sense of safety – this will involve building a relationship with at least one key adult (ideally a team).
- Support to learn about anxiety and develop coping strategies (e.g. mindfulness, cognitive-behavioural approaches).
- Build in opportunities for calming activities throughout the day in a preventative (rather than a reactive) way – this might include a 'calm start' to the day with a key adult.
- Identify with the young person a safe space that they can go to when starting to feel overwhelmed and a way to communicate when they need to use this space (this may require support/prompting from adults if the child is not yet aware of when they are starting to feel overwhelmed or finds it difficult to ask for help in front of others).



Situation Avoidance

- In addition to the strategies listed next to function 1, intervention in this area will be targeted towards building skills and manageable experiences of success in specific areas that the young person is trying to avoid. For example:
- Practical support for social inclusion and friendships (e.g. buddy systems, clubs, structured group activities, peer mentoring).
- Social skills interventions (teaching and modelling of specific social skills).
- Social stories and comic strip conversations (Carol Gray).
- Pre and/or post teaching in subjects they are finding difficult.
- Targeted intervention to develop specific academic skills (e.g. reading, spelling, maths, independent study skills).
- Additional support in lessons that they find challenging – this could be adult/peer support.
- Gradual exposure to the things they are finding tricky. This must be done alongside environmental changes so that the young person isn't just exposed to the thing that they find most difficult repeatedly and in the same way, which could increase anxiety and damage trust/relationships. Gradual exposure tends to work best when the goal is elicited from or co-produced with the young person (e.g. "I want to spend my break times outside with my friends").



Relationship Seeking

- Work to increase the child's sense of belonging and connection to school - this will involve developing relationships and their involvement in the school community.
- Provide at least one key adult within school who they know they can go to when in need and can meet with regularly (e.g. a 'meet and greet' and/or 'check out' at the end of the day).
- Consider allowing a phone call/text message at a specific time of day to check in with family members.
- Use of a visual timetable to show what will happen through the day and when they will see their parent/carer again – this might include a visual showing what activity they will do together with their parent/carer after school.
- Work with parents/carers (and when needed, other services) to help the family:
- Support the child during moments of anxiety.
- Establish morning routines.
- Use problem solving techniques.
- Establish positive and individual time to spend with the child outside school hours.
- Focus on positive behaviours.
- Limit the relational input received during school hours when they do not attend school.



Tangible Reward

- Increase incentives for attending school and decrease rewards for non-attendance where possible:
- Consider what need is being met outside of school and what experiences need to be built into their day to meet this need within school (e.g. sense of belonging, group membership, experiences of success).
- Increase the appeal of school – start the return to school with areas of interest and positives.
- Explore with the young person their hopes and aspirations and consider with them (and their parents/carers) what experiences need to be built into their school day to move them towards their goals.
- Work with the parents/carers (and when needed, other services) to support the family to:
- Establish routines around sleep.
- Help their child get ready for school.
- Get their child to and from school.
- Limit stimulating activities during school hours, focusing on educational activities during school hours if possible.
- Find ways to meet the need being met outside of school outside of school hours (e.g. special 1:1 time with parent/carer, access to preferred activities).
- Teach them how to resist offers from peers.