

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) at Home



What is Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)?

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) refers to children who are unable to attend school due to emotional distress. Post-pandemic, many children are experiencing heightened anxiety about returning to or being in school.

This guide offers practical strategies to help support those children in a compassionate and collaborative way.

What can cause EBSA?

EBSA often develops due to a combination of internal and external factors. These can include:

Emotional and Psychological Factors:

- Generalised anxiety, social anxiety, separation anxiety or panic disorder
- Depression or low mood
- Neurodivergence (e.g., autism, ADHD, sensory processing differences)
- Low self-esteem or perfectionism

Environmental Factors:

- Transitions (new school, class, teacher)
- Academic pressure
- Bullying or peer issues
- Overwhelming classroom environment (e.g., noise, expectations, crowds)

Family Factors:

- Illness or stress at home
- Attachment difficulties or parental anxiety
- Changes at home (e.g., divorce, bereavement)

What signs and symptoms can there be for EBSA?

EBSA looks different for every child, but typical signs include:

- Frequent stomachaches, headaches or feeling sick on school mornings.
- Crying, tantrums or pleading not to go to school.
- Late arrivals, frequent absences or leaving school partway through the day.
- Seeming fine on weekends or holidays, but distressed on school days.
- Difficulties sleeping or Sunday night anxiety.
- Physical symptoms (e.g., nausea, sweating, fast heartbeat) caused by anxiety.

How do children often feel during EBSA?

Again, EBSA can look different for every child, but children may often feel:

- Guilt – “I know I’m missing school and it’s causing problems.”
- Shame – “Other kids can go. What’s wrong with me?”
- Fear – “What if something bad happens if I go?”
- Relief – “Staying home makes the horrible feelings stop.”
- Loneliness – “Everyone’s moving on without me.”

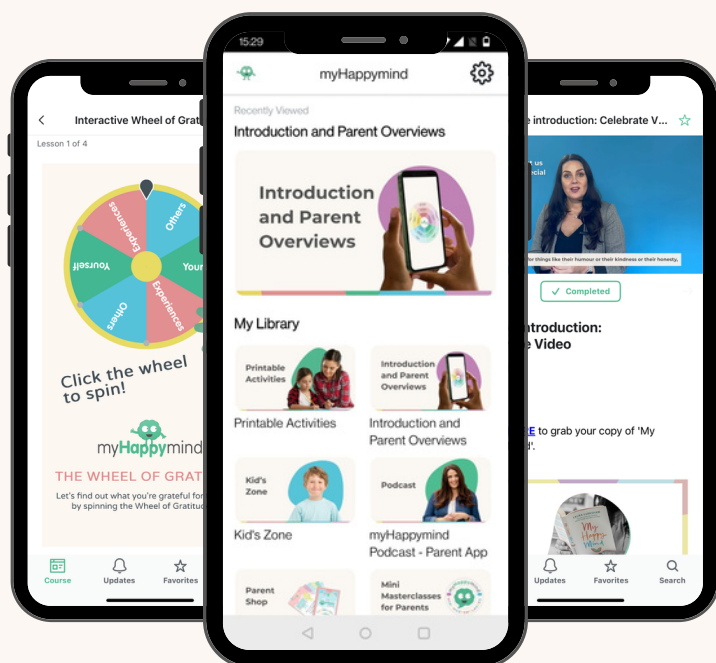
These children are often emotionally exhausted, not manipulative or disobedient.



How you can support your child at home?

Support needs to be compassionate, consistent, and team-based. Strategies might include:

- Creating a calm morning routine. Include Happy Breathing in the morning routine to help children feel calm and ready for the day. Happy Breathing activities can be accessed on our free myHappymind Parent App.
- Validating their emotions: “I can see this is really hard for you.”
- Encouraging small steps (e.g., visiting the school building).
- Avoiding shame or punishment for non-attendance.
- Completing at home activities based on the relatable story- Charlie and the Steps to School (see the next page).
- Watching the mini masterclass on EBSA on the free myHappymind Parent App.



If you haven't already, download the parent app to access the resources by scanning the QR code below...



YOU WILL NEED THIS AUTHENTICATION CODE TO SIGN UP

Charlie and the Steps to School

At school, your child has been reading a story called Charlie and the Steps to School—a gentle and relatable story designed to support children who may be struggling with Emotionally Based School Avoidance. It helps children understand that feeling nervous is completely normal, and that taking small, brave steps can make a big difference in feeling more confident about attending school.

To make this experience even more meaningful, your child has also created their very own personalised version of the story. This bespoke version reflects their unique thoughts and feelings, helping them to feel seen, understood, and supported. Inspired by this, your child has also created a checklist of small, manageable steps they are working on to help ease their return to school life.

How you can support this learning at home:

Here are a few ways to continue building on what work has been done in school:

1. Read the personalised version of the story together

Choose a quiet, calm time to read through the story. Let your child share as much—or as little—as they want, and be led by them in the conversation.

2. Celebrate small wins

Notice and praise any small, brave steps your child takes—even tiny progress is worth celebrating! Remind them they're using their Bravery Character Strength, just like Charlie in the story.

3. Revisit the story regularly

Re-reading the story from time to time can help reinforce your child's progress and boost their confidence as they continue their journey.

4. Keep the conversations open

Let your child know you're always there to listen. Use gentle, open questions and include school in these conversations. Keep in touch with your child's trusted adult at school if you notice anything at home that might support your child even more with attending school.



**If you have any questions, just get in touch with your
Customer Happiness Manager, or contact us at
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