

Guidelines for Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance Support

This is a working document, which means it will be updated continuously. This is to enable new information to be added as required. Policies, information, and language are constantly changing, and my aim is to support that, to ensure children, young people and families are at the heart of this work and being well supported. This guideline aims to be simple, straightforward, and accessible.

Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) is a term used to describe children and young people who find attending school difficult for a range of different reasons or who are at risk of further disengaging from school. Reasons for EBSNA could include poor mental health, such as anxiety about attending school, language and communication difficulties, diagnoses such as Autism, ADHD or other concerns identified by people who know your child well. It can be hard to find the correct support suitable for your child, and making good use of the resources at the school your child is currently enrolled with is a good place to begin.

Young people who struggle to attend school are traditionally referred to as 'school refusers' and in conversations people may say your child is refusing to attend school. This can be amended to clarify that this is now known as Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA).

By reframing the refusal term, we demonstrate that it is out with the child's control as to whether they attend, and that there are underlying issues that need to be addressed first in order for them to re-engage with education. Anxiety and low confidence or self-esteem are the main reasons for a child to be experiencing EBSNA.

Arranging a Team Around the Child (TAC) meeting.

The purpose of a TAC meeting is to get together with people who know and/or support your child in order to best understand and meet their needs. A plan is made for moving forward to help the child progress. Sometimes these meetings are called Multi-Agency Meetings (MAM).

Ideally, at this meeting you would want some of the following people present, pastoral care teacher, class teacher, head, or deputy head teacher, your social or care worker if you have one, and yourself, and your child, if they feel able to attend.

You can also request that the Educational Psychologist (EP) attend and I would recommend you suggest they do. Having said that, it can take some time to arrange for an EP and they may not be able to organise that for your initial TAC meeting. An EP is someone who can gain an objective view of your child and their behaviour through observations in the classroom and at play as well as talking to them. They are trained to understand their needs and the impact the education environment can have on them. The information is gathered together to compile a more complete picture of the child's needs.



Key points to consider in a TAC

The focus of a TAC should always be on the child and their needs. The school has a duty to provide an education for your child, and in a way that works for the child and meets their needs.

- If your child cannot attend the meeting then be sure to write down any questions they have and what their worries are as well as their hopes and goals for the future. You can also write down all you want to say in the meeting.
- It is helpful to write down your key points as these meetings can be quite involved and the conversation can contain a great deal of information, so your questions will keep you on track and focused on your child.
- The TAC includes the taking of minutes, and this is usually done by the school. It also includes notes to put together a Child's Plan (CP) with input from yourself and your child, with the completed plan emailed to you by an agreed date.
- The minutes will be shared with you by email and a hard copy if required. The minutes can also be shared with another parent if they cannot attend with you.
- If your child's attendance has become chronic and dropped to a low percentage, and you are not looking for your child to return to school at this time, due to their anxiety or other reasons, at the TAC meeting you can request that they be supported by Interrupted Learners Support (ILS) as a way of supporting them back into education as well as keeping them connected with the school and having some form of education.
- ILS is when a teacher from the school comes to the house for an hour a week to do 1-1 tutoring, usually in maths or English. If the child prefers, they can meet at a local library or even a café. It should take place somewhere the child feels comfortable and safe. ILS is usually only offered when attendance has become chronic. ILS is dependent on the schools' resources and sometimes it may not be immediately available.

The Child's Plan

The Child's Plan is a working document that tracks what support your child needs, their progress and who is responsible for implementing the support outlined. It is usually presented in a table format. It should be updated regularly and I would recommend at least quarterly. However, when your child is new to the school or new to this type of intervention it can be helpful for this to be much sooner. I recommend checking within 4 weeks of implementing the plan that it is still working or if any adjustments are required, and within 2 weeks if needs are high or you have concerns.

Reviewing the CP is done by consulting with the child and the parent or carer as to how things are going. Adjustments can be made in meetings as well as informally over the phone or by email to avoid delay, and an updated copy of the CP emailed to you when any changes are made. The CP itself should include timescales for regular updates from the pastoral care teacher and/or the class teacher.



Points to consider

It is important that your child is getting some form of support and engagement from a school, even if it is not your preferred school. Your child deserves an education and the school have a duty to provide that, in a way that works for them. When we talk about engagement, this can mean the school communicating regularly with you for updates and exploring options to support your child in a way that helps them to feel safe, supported, and listened to. This does not mean your child has to attend school if it is too distressing and changes have not yet been implemented.

When you attend meetings, keep the focus on your child and their needs and this will help the staff and other professionals to hear you better. I know that as a parent these meetings can feel emotional at times and very frustrating, and that can draw attention away from your child and their needs. Having said that, it is also important for professionals to understand and have empathy for the impact it has on you and your family as well when your child is not attending school, so finding a balance can be helpful.

All schools are different in their approaches and the resources they have available. Sadly, there is very little funding for resources for schools these days, and most schools are genuinely doing the best they can with what they have got. Unfortunately, what they have got is sometimes not enough for children experiencing EBSNA. One of the things you can do during the meeting is find out what is available at your school to support and what, realistically, they are able to do.

The Joint Support Team (JST) is a multi-disciplinary group that meets regularly with a core membership that includes a member of the senior management team in the school (who is usually the chair of the meeting) educational psychologist and a member of social work or health professional where appropriate. Parents' permission is always sought before discussion at the JST.

The main purpose of these meetings is to discuss pupils who have exhausted all support available in school, and whose support needs cannot be fully met from the range of resources that the school has available to it. Hopefully the outcome of these meetings will be the ability to source additional support for such pupils. Find out if your child's case has been taken to the Joint Support Team, and if so, do you have a record of the outcome from that?

Was there transition support for your child in the lead up to leaving nursery and into Primary education, or Primary education and into Secondary? It is astonishing how many children with additional support needs (ASN) are not adequately supported with the transition from Primary to Secondary education. Children with ASN, require enhanced transition which can start as early as Primary 5 or 6 and involves regular and continuous involvement and use of a CP.

If your child has seen an occupational therapist or you have a social worker or any other kind of support, you can include a report from them as to what your child's needs may be



within the school and classroom environment. You can also invite them to the TAC if you feel it will help and be relevant. This is also where an Educational Psychologist (EP) comes in. An EP would likely want to meet your child in order to assess their needs. This can be framed to your child in a positive way, by explaining that these are professionals who care about young people and want them to have the same opportunities as other young people.

Children with ASN have often had poor experience of relationships, and trust is something that needs to be focused on; to build a trusting relationship with someone in the school so they feel able to voice their needs. The pastoral care teacher is usually the person who takes on that role and again, they can meet outside of the school or wherever they feel comfortable. It is worth doing this even if they are not staying at that school. The point is to build their confidence and reduce anxiety about the school environment and demonstrate to them that they are being listened to and are valued.

Use of Language

Professionals will sometimes refer to you as 'mum' or 'dad' instead of using your name when in a meeting. Please correct them on this. You have a name and they should use your name, either your first name or Miss, Ms, Mrs, Mr etc. You use their name and not just 'teacher', and they should offer that courtesy in return. It is patronising and demeaning to just simply be another parent or carer they are discussing, and not recognise your individual status and needs.

'Attention seeking' and 'manipulative' are both terms which are repeatedly heard used in meetings. These are unacceptable and should be re-framed as 'attention needing', the child needs attention and support. **All behaviour is communication**, and those most in need will ask for help in the most challenging of ways. I know you know this only too well, but often in meetings people do need reminded.

Once again, our children are not 'school refusers' but are young people who are struggling and we understand that it is out with the child's control as to whether they attend, and that there are underlying issues that need to be addressed first in order for them to re-engage with education.

Some useful links

<https://www.children1st.org.uk/help-for-families/parentline-scotland/>

<https://reach.scot/about/>

<https://www.clanchildlaw.org/>

<https://www.childline.org.uk/>

<https://www.cypcs.org.uk/rights/uncrc/articles/article-28/>

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-protection-system/children-the-law>



Glossary of Acronyms

EBSNA, Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance

TAC, Team Around the Child

MAM, Multi-Agency Meeting

CP, Child's Plan

EP, Educational Psychologist

JST, Joint Support Team

ILS, Interrupted Learners Service

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I am a parent to two boys one of whom has Autism and Pathological Demand Avoidance. As a family we have come out the other side of what has been a difficult parenting journey as we learnt how to support our boys when one had such profound needs. The best support we had was from other parents who also had children with additional needs, and that's why my first advice to anyone looking for support is to get connected to other parents. Find a support group near you by looking on Facebook and searching on the internet.

I have worked in social care for 7 years and have been working with children and young people for 17 years. I have gained a great deal of knowledge, skills, and qualifications in that time, especially in my years in social care where I have learnt a great deal about the education system, social care, and the Children's Hearings System. I wanted to share some of that with other parents which is why I developed this document, so please feel free to share this with anyone who needs it.



Wendy Woolfson is a professional storyteller and facilitator, specialising in supporting families and professionals to work collaboratively in meeting the needs of vulnerable children and young people through storytelling and trauma sensitive practice. She is the creator of the [Out of Harm Toolkit](#) which supports understanding of self-harm. She works in small therapeutic groups for people to explore stories, including their own. Wendy has more than 17 years of storytelling experience, is a Solution Focused Brief Therapy Practitioner and holds a Professional Diploma in Therapeutic Life Story Work. She currently works in social care for a Scottish charity.