

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) Early Help

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Aims

- To explore: what is EBSA?
- To understand the language and change in terminology
- To understand a range of factors that present with EBSA
- To develop skills in a framework for understanding and intervening when CYP present with EBSA

What is EBSA?

- An umbrella term used to describe a group of children and young people who have severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors and how these are met/unmet.
- Approximately 1 and 2% of the school population, with slightly higher prevalence amongst secondary school students (Elliot, 1999; Guilliford & Miller, 2015).
- No gender or socioeconomic status differences (King & Bernstein, 2001).
- Different levels (CYP, Family, School, Community, Services)

The impact of language

- What terms have you heard CYP who are not attending school being referred to?
- School refuser
- Truant/truancy
- Choosing to stay at home
- Delinquent
- The language chosen communicates your interpretation of the child/circumstances

Attendance and Mental Health

- The term ‘refuser’ implies that the young person has control over the school non-attendance.
- This is problematic as this locates the ‘problem’ within the young person and detracts from how their lived experience tells us how to intervene.
- All behaviours are a communication of an met/unmet emotional need.
 - Emotion drives behaviours
- Research has identified that CYP who demonstrate ‘truancy’ may also have high levels of anxiety (Finning et al 2019)
- It might not always look like an emotional need but our knowledge about trauma helps us see beyond externalising behaviours: Think about Survival mode: flight, fight, freeze

Combination of Influencing Factors

| School Factors | Family Factors | Child factors |
|--|--|---|
| Bullying (the most common school factor) | Separation and divorce or change in family dynamic | Temperamental style- reluctance to interact and withdrawal from unfamiliar settings, people or objects |
| Difficulties in specific subject | Parent physical and mental health problems | Fear of failure and poor self confidence |
| Transition to secondary school, key stage or change of school | Overprotective parenting style | Physical illness |
| Structure of the school day | Dysfunctional family interactions | Age (5-6, 11-12 & 13-14 years) |
| Academic demands/high levels of pressure and performance-orientated classrooms | Being the youngest child in the family | Learning Difficulties, developmental problems or Autism Spectrum Condition if unidentified or unsupported |
| Transport or journey to school | Loss and Bereavement | Separation Anxiety from parent |
| Exams | High levels of family stress | Traumatic events |
| Peer or staff relationship difficulties | Family history of EBSA | |
| | Young carer | |

What might CYP be experiencing?

There tends to be four categories of reasons for school avoidance (Kearney and Silberman, 1990)

1. To avoid **uncomfortable feelings** brought on by attending school, such as feelings of anxiety or low mood.
2. To avoid **situations** that might be stressful, such as academic demands, social pressures and/or aspects of the school environment.
3. To reduce **separation anxiety** or to gain attention from significant others, such as parents or other family members.
4. To pursue tangible **reinforces outside of school**, such as going shopping or playing computer games during school time.

The current context- COVID

Camden
Schools Services 

- We've talked about the role of trauma for CYP experiencing EBSA
- Loss and bereavement
- Anxiety
 - Separation anxiety
 - Health anxiety
 - Social anxiety

Push/Pull factors (Thambirajah et al, 2008)

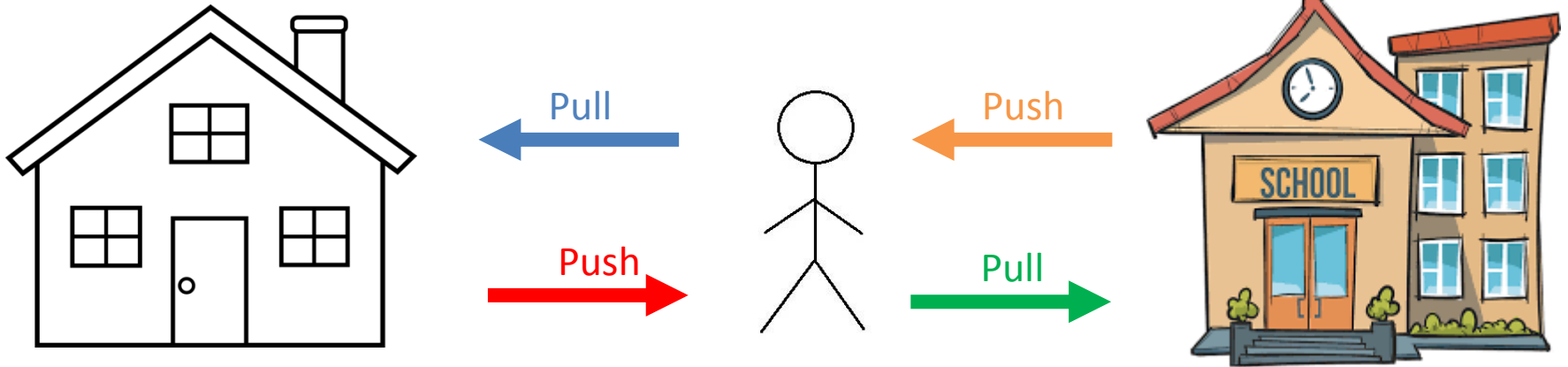
“School refusal occurs when stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience and when ‘pull’ factors that promote school non-attendance overcome the ‘push’ factors that encourage attendance”

- Environmental factors can be instrumental in supporting a young person back to school

Push and Pull Grid

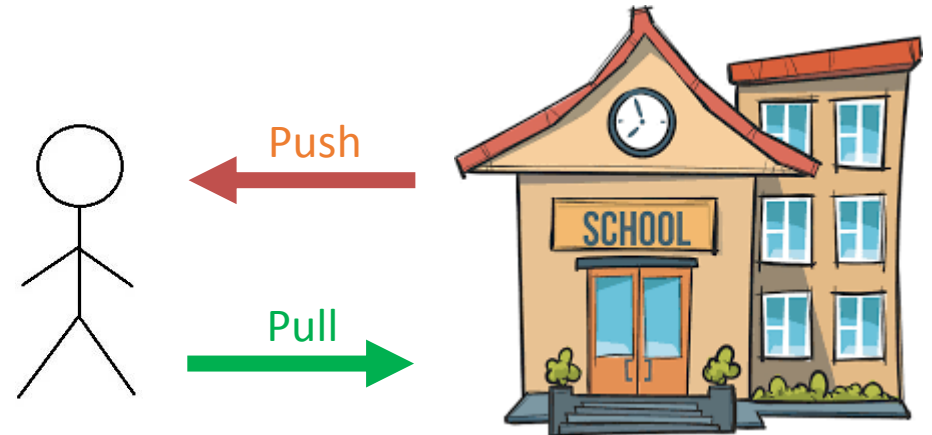
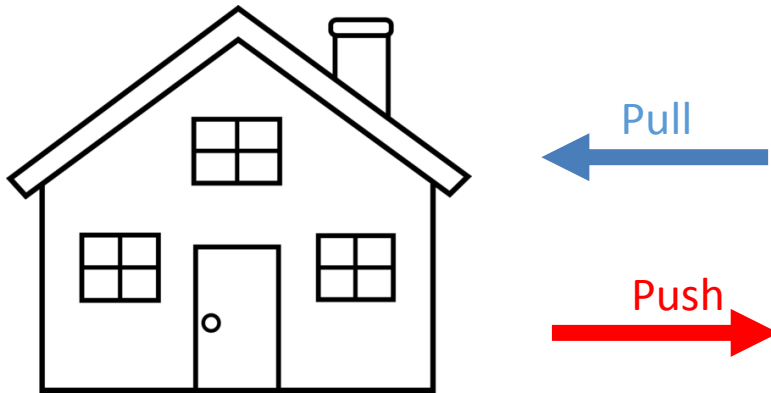
| School | Home |
|--|--|
| <p><i>Push (towards attending school)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Academically bright- Beginning to form a friendship | <p><i>Pull (away from school, home factors)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Change in family dynamics,- Mum diagnosed with cancer- Difficulties sleeping, night mares about mum dying- Separation anxiety from parent |
| <p><i>Pull (away from school, school factors)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Prolonged period of absence from school- Isolated, not leaving the house- Difficult transition to secondary school- Academic demands- Social difficulties, possible bullying- Separation Anxiety | <p><i>Push (towards staying at home)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Reduce anxiety around separating from mum- Reduce anxieties around attending school- Not having to complete school work |

Case study activity



- Worry about mum's health/wellbeing
- Mum spending time with younger sibling without her
- When at home, spend time dreading going back to school which makes her unwell

- Teachers 'rejecting' her
- Feeling anxious about learning and 'punished' when anxious (hood up/withdrawing/texting mum)
- Lessons are hard
- No close friends



- Mum wants her to go to school and is keen to work with school around this

- Good relationship with head of year
- Likes Spanish

Reduce the pull home and increase the push away from home

- Supporting development of a secure attachment at home so ok to separate
- Transition objects
- Helping parents support emotions at home
- Encouragement and positive affirmations (happy for you)
- Protected quality time together (special time)
- Narrative around school (balanced view)
- Routine/visual/weekly planner/organisation
- Graduated approach to leaving bedroom/house

What works well

- Identifying and intervening early (Baker & Bishop 2015)
 - Focus on rapid return to school
 - Encourage work between CYP, home, school and early referrals to appropriate professionals
- Changing the language you and the network use
 - Emotionally based school avoidance
 - Home/school ‘wellbeing plans’ rather than ‘behaviour plans’ (this is under development)
- Working in a flexible manner paying attention to the individual case and function served by non-attendance

What next?

- What has stood out for you the most?
- What would you like to find out more about?
- What would support you more in your role in relation to EBSA?
- Please can you complete the feedback form so we can understand what has been useful/would like more on.
- Thank you for your time