Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)

A Framework for schools

Working together for improved access to education through:

The identification of factors contributing to reduced access to education

Providing strategies to support reintegration to full time education.

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Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) - A Framework for Schools

Working Together for Improved Access to Education

Introduction

This framework is an **early intervention exploratory tool** that can be used by schools to identify the underlying reasons why a young person is finding it difficult to be in school. It provides ideas and strategies to support through a targeted Assess, Plan, Do, Review approach.

The reasons for a young person not being in school may be due to emotionally based factors, although this framework can be used to identify reasons contributing to school absence more generally.

Reasons for school absence are often varied and complex. This framework is intended to be an accessible way for schools to help identify the specific issues, so that professionals can collaborate with individual children and young people and parent(s)/carers using a systematic and transparent approach.

For readability, the term young person will be used to refer to all children and young people aged up to 16 years.

If a young person has any type of additional need (SEND), schools will use approaches and strategies in a bespoke way, making sure that they collaborate with parent(s)/carers to find effective ways of supporting young people. The approaches contained in this framework are suggestions only and should not be applied in a blanket way for all young people but considered carefully for their suitability in each individual scenario.

This framework is most suitable for school-aged young persons from 5-16 years, although may also be useful for children in their Reception Year and for those in years 12 and 13.

Some reference will be made to the Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) - Guidance for Schools document, produced by the Educational Psychology Service in 2021, although it should be noted that this document is due for review. That document explores different levels and types of intervention and support.

Effective interventions and sharing information

Increased attendance at school is more likely to be achieved if all adults around the young person work together using a holistic approach to support the specific needs of the young person. The most effective interventions will understand and address the underlying reasons for the young person's difficulties preventing them from being in school full-time and will help to build trusting relationships between families and schools. Building a

support network around the education setting and family is the most effective way towards longer-term success.

See 'Top Tips for Running an Effective Meeting' page 34-37 of the Appendix that highlights maintaining mutually respectful and effective relationships with parent(s)/carers.

Using this framework enables a school to be able to share information gained about the factors contributing to reduced attendance, the systematic approaches that have been planned or put in place and the progress made towards increasing time in school. In addition to this overview being shared with the young person themselves and parent(s)/carers, it can be shared with school leaders and services from the Local Authority if required, and other professionals who may be able to support the needs of the young person **with parent(s)/carer permission**.

This framework also facilitates the identification of patterns and the way in which effective whole school strategies can support young peoples' full-time access to education. These can be shared as whole school data with the school community, Governors, the Local Authority and School Inspectors.

Important Note

- **It is likely to be most effective if it is used as an early intervention strategy when the young person is showing signs of anxiety or has been experiencing difficulties being in school. It should also be used when there are concerns about rapid deterioration of them coming to school. Schools should not wait for the young person's attendance to drop significantly. It is important to work together with parent(s)/carers when concerns are raised.**

The Legal duties of schools

Schools have a legal responsibility under Regulation 13 of The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 to 'inform the local authority of any young persons who are regularly absent from school, have irregular attendance, or have 10 or more consecutive days' absence without the school's permission'. Schools are also under a safeguarding duty, under section 175 of the Education Act 2002, to investigate any unexplained absences. Schools must complete a 10 Day Absence Form which has been designed to assist them comply with their responsibilities.

The government expects schools and local authorities to:

- Promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence.
- Ensure every young person has access to full-time education to which they are entitled.
- Act early to address patterns of absence.

Part-time timetables

All young people of compulsory school age are legally entitled to receive a suitable full-time education, and local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that all children in their area receive such an education.

Department for Education (DfE) current guidance states that in very exceptional circumstances there may be a need for a reduction in educational provision to meet a young person's needs. A reduced timetable **must not** be treated as a long-term solution. The arrangement should always specify an end-date by when it is expected that the young person will return to full-time education (or when an alternative will be provided) and be reviewed regularly in the light of any changes to the young person's circumstances. A temporary reduced timetable should provide a means of achieving re-integration to full-time education. It should never be used as a form of exclusion from school for part of the school day or as permanent provision.

Schools are expected to maintain data on young people of compulsory school age who are on their roll but attending on a part-time timetable. Hertfordshire has introduced a Reduced Timetable Portal for schools to enable them to digitally report live data information about young persons who are on a reduced timetable.

How to use this framework

Step 1 - Information Gathering

Complete the three information-gathering forms.

a. The young person's form.
b. The parent(s)/carers form.
c. The school's form.

NB – always complete the school form last, as there are questions here that can only be answered from information provided by parent(s)/carers and young people.

All forms contain some questions that are of a sensitive and personal nature. Whether school staff are asking questions from the school form or supporting young people or parent(s)/carers to complete their information, it is important to ask these questions as they can help to gain a better understanding of the circumstances that are preventing the young person being in school full time. Safeguarding needs are known to be associated with reduced time in school.

Using all three forms helps to build ownership of the issue and gives all parties a voice, triangulating the reasons given for reduced time in school. Different perspectives will be highlighted and can be discussed. It will help school staff to find a shared perspective and agreement about a way forward between the young person, parent(s)/carer, and the school.

Completing the forms

All forms: Put a cross next to all factors that are thought to be contributing to the young person not being in school full time. There are sections where text can be added to include more detail.

For young people: The young person's questionnaire form is designed for use with young people from year 5 or above. For younger children, or those with additional needs, responses should be gained through using pictures and age-appropriate questioning to help adults to understand their perspective. For ideas on how to do this please see the risk and resilience cards from P53 of the EBSA guidance for schools (EGS) document, the School Wellbeing Cards by Dr Jerricah Holder, the card sort activity and 'coming back to school' One Page Profile which can be found in the Appendix at the end of this document pages 25-33.

IMPORTANT NOTE

- **Some young people may be able to complete the form independently after it has been introduced and explained to them. Others may require the questions to be read to them. Any support should be from a trusted adult, ideally chosen by the young person themselves. The information needs to be the young person's views, even if the adult disagrees.**
- **Age and ability should be taken into consideration when deciding how to gain a young person's views. Use judgement about the best way to gain views; a combination of approaches may be appropriate. Adults should be aware of unconscious bias when supporting a young person to complete the questionnaire.**
- **While it is helpful to explore all possible concerns that the young person may be experiencing, some questions can be omitted if it is felt to be inappropriate and/or it would cause them distress.**
- **The specific questions are designed to be a starting point for a discussion to explore the detail with the young person. For example, if they say they are troubled by some parts of the school building, ask them what parts of the school they dislike and why, as well as identifying areas where they feel comfortable.**

For parent(s)/carers: There is space on the back of the form to add additional information, to identify the key factors contributing to reduced access to education, to describe hopes and fears, and ideas about ways forward. School staff should check with parent(s)/carers whether they want to complete the form independently or whether they would like support (from a member of staff with whom they have a good relationship).

For school staff: Much of the information will be gained from the Young Person and Parent(s)/Carer forms, which should be completed first. There may be some factors associated with school that need to be explored; collect views of different staff across the school to identify both supportive and adverse factors. Use the extra space on the form if there are additional factors that are not covered.

(The Round Robin on P79 of the EGS document EBSA guidance for schools (EGS) document ***can be used to gain information from individual subject teachers).***

Step 2 - Action Planning

Review the forms so you have a clear idea of the reasons why the young person is not in school full-time. Arrange a meeting with the family and use the forms to frame a discussion about the underlying issues. The young person should be involved wherever possible.

Match appropriate support strategies to the identified contributory factors. There may be some approaches that have already been tried, so it may be a matter of trying the same strategy again in a different way, or identifying something else that could help.

The support strategies in this guidance are generic best practice, although the most effective support plan will be individualised to the young person.

(For several strategies about supporting young people to reduce feelings of anxiety, see P82-127 of the EGS document).

Step 3 - Support

Look at the factor/s that seem to be contributing most to the reduced access to education. It is suggested that a manageable number of factors is addressed at first, perhaps 1 or 2 and then other factors can be addressed at a later stage (use an Assess, Plan, Do, Review approach to implement and review support). Set regular review dates and evaluate how strategies are working.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

It is helpful to try and focus on strengths, looking at the positive aspects of school from the young person's perspective and to build on these. Research has shown that the approaches that are most successful are based on trusting positive relationships between school staff and the young person and their family. If possible, there should be a consistent member of school staff who maintains a relationship that includes regular communication with the young person and their family.

EBSNA Framework: Gathering Young Person's Views

Remember to use an approach to gain views that is suitable for the young person's age and ability. A combination of approaches could be used. Use an individualised approach and omit any questions that you feel are not appropriate. Please see guidance notes and additional resources in the Appendix.

Young person's full name	
Date of birth	
School	
School year	
Date of completion	

My Strengths

What do you think you are good at? What activities do you enjoy?

What makes it easier for you to come and stay in school?

Who are your friends?

If you could name one adult you trust at school, who would it be?

What is stopping me from going to/staying in school?			
Worry		**Sensory factors - I find these things hard:**	
Crowds	☐	The fabric of school uniform	☐
Being bullied	☐	Being too close to others	☐
Having a panic attack	☐	Some smells at school	☐
Getting to and from school	☐	Noise	☐
Getting into trouble	☐	Moving between lessons	☐
Doing badly in lessons	☐	Bright lighting	☐
Socialising with other people	☐	Something else in the school environment:	
Something else:			

Fitting in		**School work and teachers**	
I feel I am being bullied	☐	I find the work too easy	☐
I am worried about what people think of me	☐	I find the work too hard	☐

I feel lonely and I don't have friends	☐	I am having trouble with a teacher or subject	☐
I have recently fallen out with someone	☐	I worry teachers will get angry or be impatient with me	☐
I am having problems involving social media or cyberbullying	☐	I worry that I will not have the right equipment	☐
I feel I don't fit in with others	☐	I am worried about doing PE or getting changed for PE	☐
I feel I don't fit in with others because I am a different religion or race	☐	I find school rules difficult	☐
I feel I don't fit in with others because I am gay/lesbian or have a different gender identity	☐	I am really worried about exams, tests, and/or homework	☐
Do you want to explain more:			

Things at home	
I am worried that my parent or carer is not well	☐
My parent or carer worries about me not being well	☐
I do not always feel safe at home	☐
We have had a death in our family	☐
We have had stressful things to cope with at home	☐
We have had a big change in our family (e.g., new baby, new parent, new stepsisters/brothers, parents separated)	☐
I look after my parent/carer or brothers and sisters	☐
There are lots of problems where we live	☐
My parent or carer finds it hard to get me to school in the mornings	☐
I feel really worried about being away from my parent or carer	☐
I do not think school is important	☐
Do you want to explain more:	

Do any of these other things stop me getting back to school?	
When I am off school, I can use my phone, play computer games, watch TV	☐
I have friends who are also off school	☐
I have a brother or sister who are at home during the day	☐
I work and earn money while I am out of school	☐

I get extra attention from, and time with my parent or carer	☐
I can completely control my environment at home (e.g., what I wear, who I see, when I go to bed or get up, what I eat, routines)	☐
I am involved in gang activities	☐
I am part of a radical religious or nationalist group	☐
I am in a relationship with someone much older than me	☐
I do a lot of online gaming and have friends through it	☐
I am learning what I need to online or through a friend or family member	☐
I feel that school is pointless	☐
Do you want to explain more:	

Things that make it harder to go back to school	
I don't know how to explain to friends why I have been away	☐
I worry about facing my teachers	☐
I worry that if I get into school, they won't let me leave if I need to	☐
I don't feel safe at home (if yes, important to explore further)	☐
I don't think I can catch up with the schoolwork that I missed	☐
I go to bed too late or sleep badly and have trouble waking up early. I feel tired and sometimes catch up with sleep during the day	☐

Is there anything else that stops you going to school?
Look at the reasons you have ticked – which are the most important?
What is good about school?
What do you hope to do in the future when you leave school?

EBSNA Framework: Parent/Carer Form

Young person's full name	
Date of birth	
School	
School year	
Completed by	
Relationship to Young person	
Date of completion	

Young person's strengths

What do you think they are good at? What activities do they seem to enjoy?

When have they had good attendance at school? (e.g. year/age)

What helps with their attendance?

Do they have friends and who are they?

Which adult in school do you think they trust?

What is stopping my child from going to school?			
Worry		**YP's health and wellbeing**	
Certain areas of school	☐	Migraines	☐
Being bullied	☐	Sight or hearing problems	☐
Having a panic attack	☐	Speech and language difficulties	☐
Public transport	☐	Severe period pain	☐
Getting into trouble	☐	Anxiety	☐
Finding the work difficult	☐	Allergies	☐
Socialising with other people	☐		

Social factors	
I think my child is being bullied	☐
I think my child is lonely and is having friendship difficulties	☐
My child has recently fallen out with someone	☐
My child is having problems involving social media or cyberbullying	☐
My child has said they struggle at lunch and break times	☐

Lessons and Learning	
My child is having difficulties with a particular lesson/subject	☐
My child worries that teachers will get angry or lose patience with them	☐
My child is worried about doing PE or getting changed for PE	☐
My child finds the work too hard/ too easy	☐
My child has difficulties with certain school rules	☐
My child is worried about exams	☐

Things at home	
I, or another parent or carer, has physical or mental health problems	☐
My child sometimes needs to look after me or their brothers and sisters due to illness	☐
I worry a lot about the physical and mental health of my child	☐
We have had recent changes and/or stressful things to cope with at home (e.g., death of a family member, serious illness, burglary, job loss, money worries)	☐
My child feels worried about being away from me – they find it distressing when we separate	☐
I find it hard to get my child to school in the mornings for practical reasons (e.g., other children with additional needs, transport issues, health problems)	☐

Do you think any of these things stop your child getting back to school?	
At home my child can use their phone, play computer games, watch TV	☐
My child is influenced by friends who are also off school	☐
They have a brother or sister who are at home during the day	☐
They work and earn money while they are out of school	☐
They get extra attention from, and time with me	☐
They can completely control their environment at home (e.g., what they wear, when they go to bed or get up, etc.)	☐

I know or am worried my child might be:	
Involved in gang activities	☐
Part of a radical religious or nationalist group	☐
At risk of being sexually exploited by someone older than them	☐
Involved in too much gaming/online gaming	☐

Other things that make it harder for my child to go back to school	
They have lost touch with their friends	☐
I am concerned that the school won't let my child leave if they need to	☐
My child feels safer at home than at school	☐
I think my child will struggle to catch up with schoolwork that they have missed	☐
My child goes to bed late or sleeps badly and has trouble waking up early. They feel tired and sometimes sleep during the day.	☐

The relationship with my child's school is strained/broken down	☐
Is there anything else that stops your child going to school?	
Look at the reasons you have ticked – which are the most important that prevent your child from going to school?	

EBSNA Framework: School Factors & Action Plan Form

Young person's full name	
Date of birth	
School	
School year	
Attendance (%)	
Completed by	
Date of completion	

Current situation
Historic attendance (%) and lateness rates (create a timeline if helpful):
Summary of concerns
What seems to be helping right now? (e.g., ongoing friendships, activities, enjoying periods of being in school and relationships with school staff):

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS: Put a tick or a cross next to every item.

Use the Young Person and Parent/Carer forms alongside information from school staff to produce a summary of the underlying issues. With the young person and parent(s)/carer, explore any factors where there is disagreement.

If ticking multiple factors, prioritise and highlight the most important as identified by the young person.

A Anxiety, health, wellbeing and sensory factors	
Significant fear of an aspect of the school environment (e.g., open spaces, crowds, noise, social interaction, transport to school)	☐
Significant fear of something happening at school (e.g., social exclusion, bullying, getting sick, having panic attack, failing academically)	☐
General school phobia characterised by a fear reaction (e.g., tears, panic, angry outbursts, oppositional behaviours) when near to school, before school, discussing	

school. Insomnia on school nights	☐
Mental or physical health problems/condition that impact on daily life	☐
Intolerance to certain sensory input (e.g., fabric of school uniform, noise, lighting, smells, other)	☐

B Social factors	
Bullying/loss of class friend, isolated, falling out with another young person	☐
Problems involving social media or cyberbullying	☐
Feelings of social exclusion	☐

C Academic factors	
Learning difficulties/special educational needs	☐
Finds work too hard/easy	☐
Difficulties associated with a particular lesson/subject	☐
Exam anxieties	☐
PE/ game difficulties	☐
Difficulties associated with school rules	☐

D Factors relating to change e.g., transition	
Recent change of schools/move from primary to secondary/ transitional year group	☐
Recent move to UK/English is an additional language	☐

E Outside of school/family factors	
Parental mental or physical health needs/young carer	☐
Significant parental anxiety about CYP's health	☐
Significant distress separating from parent/carer	☐
Disrupted sleep cycles (late nights, sleep during the day)	☐
Stressful or life changes (e.g., bereavement, burglary, job loss, separation, redundancy, dispute with neighbours/landlords)	☐
Practical difficulties getting to school (e.g., other children with additional needs, transport issues, health problems)	☐
Access to PC, phone, game console, when at home	☐
Friend, siblings out of school/at home	☐
Working/earning outside school	☐
Greater control over environment and routines at home	☐
Membership of a gang or radical group	☐

Maintenance/secondary factors	
Low motivation- sees little point to school	☐
Specific anxieties relating to returning to the school environment, e.g., how to explain absence to friends/social embarrassment	☐
Concerns about ability to catch up with schoolwork	☐
Strained relationships between school/family/professionals	☐
Any other contributing factors:	

Action Planning

Address all issues identified as contributing factors, although focus on those that have been identified as being the most significant according to the young person and parent(s)/carer. Please see accompanying guidance notes for support in the next section, when planning strategies. It is important to build on strengths and what is going well. Look for exceptions and factors that are supporting attendance. **It is important that the action plan is shared with all school staff who have contact with the young person, so everyone is aware of the support strategies.**

Child Name:	**School professional responsible for the Assess, Plan, Do Review (APDR) Process:**	
Issues/Factor (ASSESS)	**Support Strategy (who/what/where/when) (PLAN & DO)**	**Evaluate Impact of intervention and Outcomes (REVIEW)**

	Date started:	**Date of review:**
	Date started:	**Date of review:**
	Date strategy started:	**Date of review:**

Child/Young Person's Views:
Parent(s)/Carer Views:

Support Strategies

The EBSA - Guidance for Schools (EGS) document, produced by the Educational Psychology Service in 2021 is referenced through citing the Appendices or page number where they appear. Sometimes one strategy can address more than one factor contributing to reduced time in school.

Please also refer to the following documents:

- Mental Health and Attendance (Hertfordshire Integrated Services for Learning)
- Summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance (Department for Education, February 2023)
- Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities (Department for Education, May 2022)
- Hertfordshire Grid for Learning, Ordinarily Available Provision (March 2025) found here

The strategies below are linked to the areas on the school form which should be used as part of the information gathering process. **It is important to reiterate that not all of these strategies will be appropriate for all young people, and it is imperative that their individual needs are being targeted. Only use approaches where staff, in collaboration with parents, are confident that they are appropriate.**

Strategies likely to be relevant for all young persons (see appendix 33 of the EGS document for a checklist of strategies for young persons with EBSNA)

Research has shown that relational approaches to EBSNA are most effective in increasing school attendance. Relational approaches prioritise strong and trusting relationships between the school, young person and their family. A way forward is found through collaboration and a focus on the young person's needs and their voice. Some resources for schools have been published by Devon County Council which are based on relational approaches: A relational approach to emotionally based school non-attendance (EBSNA) - Support for schools and settings

The relational support plan (EBSNA Relational Support Plan (Virtual School)) may be particularly helpful in agreeing the detailed actions as part of support (for example, which member(s) of staff are supporting, or what location has been agreed as a safe space for a young person)

Gather the young person's views about their perspective of the school environment and the push and pull factors that influence their attendance; for example, using scaling to help the young person describe the problem and what they think would help (appendix 5), a card sort activity to identify the risk and resilience factors (appendix 6). Other activities to gather their views are included below and in the EGS document appendices 7-13.

Try to find a hook or motivator to keep the young person in school, for example:

- Helping in a younger year group
- A position of responsibility
- Holding a special role within the school
- Tailoring the timetable to make this relevant to personal goals.

Check with the young person how they would best like to be supported. Every individual is different and will have different preferences (different examples are included in the EGS document appendices 5-11). Ask the young person how they would like to be reintroduced back into school and how their absence should be explained.

Develop a one-page profile describing the young person's difficulties and helpful strategies and ensure that this is distributed and used consistently by all staff.

- Allocate a personal mentor or key adults, building relationships is the best way to help a young person feel connected to school (see the relational approach mentioned above). Give the young person the opportunity to choose their key adult worker/mentor to foster a sense of agency and control in a situation that may feel entirely out of control to them. For further information on the role of the key adult in supporting young persons who have experienced trauma or abuse, please see appendix 32 in the EGS document.
- Have clear and consistent routines for warmly welcoming the young person to school.
- Ensure the young person knows what will happen during the day, including what will happen in unstructured times.
- Plan in advance with the young person about what they can do if they become worried (for further information see pages 24-30 in the EGS document).
- Keep in touch with young people who are not attending school; for example, emails, cards, remote meetings, videos, to ensure that they know they are being kept in mind and maintaining a relationship with the school.
- If felt to be appropriate, share the document Emotionally Based School Avoidance - Guide for Parents and Carers developed by the Educational Psychology Service.
- Acknowledge the impact on staff wellbeing. Allow key staff to take time out themselves and to discuss feelings with other staff to avoid becoming overwhelmed. A regular supervision model in school could be set up.
- The support of a Family Support worker can help families address factors that are contributing to anxiety about going to school. The Hertfordshire Families First website can signpost to local teams in your area. Families First
- The nine Delivering Special Provision Locally (DSPL) teams across Hertfordshire are a helpful route through which schools can access advice and support. See the SEND Local Offer for links to your local DSPL group. Delivering Special Provision Locally (DSPL)

A Anxiety, Health, Wellbeing and Sensory Factors

Please see the EGS document (pages 5-7) EBSA guidance for schools (EGS) document for an explanation of anxiety. When anxiety starts to impact on wellbeing and everyday functioning it needs further exploration to help address the reasons behind it.

More specific strategies to address anxiety can be found in the EGS document. Please note, some of these approaches are best delivered by a member of staff who has skills and experience in supporting students who are experiencing anxiety, for example an ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant).

Build the young person's confidence in their ability to manage their worries. Teach them how to recognise, understand, label, express and regulate their feelings. It is important that this should be a longer-term intervention, and the young person should have opportunities to practise these skills across different contexts.

Proactively adapt the environment where possible to reduce triggers to anxiety. It is important that whatever is provided addresses the specific worries or difficulties identified.

Identify the specific trigger(s), patterns and frequency and support the young person to manage their associated anxious or difficult feelings; for example, using Anxiety Mapping from the Therapeutic Thinking (Hertfordshire STEPS) programme and Landscape of Fear (appendix 8 in the EGS document and included on page 38 of this document).

Organise sessions with school pastoral staff (such as Learning Mentors or Emotional Literacy Support Assistants) or seek advice and support from local authority staff/external professionals. In addition to working in partnership with parent(s)/carers, it is important to liaise with any health care professionals who are involved with the young person. Approaches may include (NB: all Appendices refer to those in the EGS document EBSA guidance for schools (EGS) document and some are included at the end of this document for ease):

- Teaching calming strategies (appendix 17)
- Grounding exercises/activities (appendix 17)
- Mindfulness and Imagery (appendix 17)
- Teach the young person to identify what they feel like when they are anxious/ body mapping (appendix 18)
- Psychoeducation around the "fight or flight" response (appendix 19 and page 39-41 of this document)
- Psychoeducation around how avoidance makes fear stronger and the anxiety maintenance cycle (appendix 20 and page 42 of this document)
- Emotional Literacy (appendix 22)
- Problem solving (appendix 23)
- Emotion Coaching (appendix 31)
- Zones of Regulation (ZoR)
- Externalising the anxiety (appendix 10)
- Exposure or Anxiety Ladders (Gradual desensitisation)
- Nurture groups or smaller pastoral-focused classes within the wider school community

Ensure that there are appropriate strategies in place at school to support the young person to manage their anxieties. There should be a plan with the young person about what will happen if they begin to become anxious, for example:

- A card so that the young person can leave lessons. They should know when, where and how they can use this card.
- A pastoral base or safe space within the building to go to where a member of staff trained in emotional and sensory regulation and calming techniques is available.
- Have clear and consistent routines for welcoming the young person to school such as an alternative entrance and exit points from the school building to avoid crowds.
- Key staff meeting them at the gate or 'checking in' with them early in the day or before school.
- Visual timetable to explain the day's events.
- An amended or reduced timetable that reduces trigger situations (e.g., swimming, assembly, busy transition periods), can be considered, but must not be treated as a long-term solution and the LA must be informed (see introduction for information on reduced timetables). National Guidance can be found here.
- For those who have been absent from school, a phased re-introduction should be considered before expecting full-time attendance. This can start with aspects of the timetable that are easier to manage and involves regular face to face reviews with the young person and parent(s)/carer. For some young people, a phased return to school over a very long period is not always appropriate, as momentum can be compromised; schools should be mindful of not making the transition period too prolonged but manageable for the young person.
- Provide safe and supported activities for times of the day that provide challenges such as Lego or Minecraft club during break or lunch times.
- Seating arrangements that allow the young person to have additional space, to be near an exit, to not have anyone behind them or to work outside the classroom.
- A low stimulation/ low trigger area for self-regulation or co-regulation and rest/calming breaks.
- 'Social Story' work which involves clear expectations (the EPS can provide staff training on social stories and comic strip conversations).
- Where appropriate, visits to school out of hours when it is calm and quiet.
- A 'learning walk' with the young person around the building to build up a map of aspects of the school environment that are most problematic for them.

Allow the young person to carry a small transition object from home in their bag or pocket. Key staff could give them a small token to carry if they are going to be away from class - this is a symbol that they are being held in mind even when a key adult is absent.

Use of, and access to, toilets and eating in front of people in the dining hall can be a source of anxiety for some young people, so alternative arrangements should be considered.

If changing for PE is a factor, allow the young person to change for PE in a private location in school or to come into school in PE kit on days in which PE is timetabled.

Mental Health Support

Find self-help resources and information about Hertfordshire's Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (Herts CYPMHS) at:

Youth Mental Health Support

For the child/young person

It's always best to ask for advice and help as soon as a need emerges. The following free services are funded by Herts CYPMHS (NHS). They can be accessed straight away and don't need a professional referral:

- With Youth Digital Wellbeing Service is for those aged 5-18, parents, carers and professionals. It includes a live webchat, self-help resources, one to one and group support sessions and access to Lumi Nova. Lumi Nova is an award-winning therapeutic game for supporting 7–12-year-olds with their fears and worries using goal-based gradual exposure and CBT: With Youth
- *The Sandbox is for those aged 10–25. It offers online support via resources, livestream gaming events and a live webchat. Young people can choose to make a self-referral (by answering a few short questions). Completing a self- referral allows young people to gain access to The Sandbox Academy of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (iCBT) learning, or to see an online therapist following an assessment: The Sandbox website
- First Steps to Understanding Eating Disorders (First Steps ED) can help 5–18-year-olds in Hertfordshire with early help for disordered eating habits/eating disorders and/or body image concerns. They offer free young people's workshops and one to one session via self, parent/carer or professional referrals. Children and young people don't need to be physically unwell due to their eating behaviours to ask for support. It's best to ask for help as soon as there is a noticeable change. Eating disorders can happen to anyone at any time. First Steps ED support is on hand for anyone regardless of ability, background or identity: First Steps Eating Disorder Support

* *The Sandbox team also provide The Toolbox, which is a separate service (not funded by Herts CYPMHS) for those suspected to have or diagnosed with ADHD and Autism,*

For the adults

Parents/carers and professionals might also need some emotional wellbeing support:

- Offering a range of support, courses and advice, Together all is a safe, online community where people support each other anonymously to improve mental health and wellbeing: **Togetherall**
- Confidential talking therapies and other practical support to help improve emotional wellbeing: **Hertfordshire's NHS Talking Therapies**

Health

Consider the school environment. Ensure that there are appropriate strategies in place at school that support the young person, wherever this is possible, for example:

- Where are they most comfortable sitting in class and if they are not able to get into the classroom where they feel most comfortable in school
- Which teachers and members of staff they feel most comfortable with including knowing who is there to support them
- How they feel most comfortable entering the classroom and at what time
- Whether or not they can cope with being asked questions or reading aloud in class
- Transitions between classrooms or areas within the school
- What additional equipment they might need and where this should be stored in the building.

Work collaboratively with parent(s)/carers, medical professionals and health services to address medical needs. Ensure that there is a health plan in school for any young person who needs support in taking medication or in case of a medical emergency. Seek support from the local school nursing service.

Arranging education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs (DfE, 2023)

Gender identity

Ensure that there is a carefully thought-out policy that sets out clear guidelines for the use of personal pronouns, toilets, uniform and changing arrangements.

Ideas and guidance for gender questioning young persons can be found here: Transgender Support in Hertfordshire

There is proposed non-statutory guidance from the DfE here

Provide advice, support and opportunities to explore cultural/ethnic/gender/LGBTQ identity at school.

Sensory factors

Use a robust measure to gain an overview of any sensory sensitivities and triggers in the school environment (e.g., the AET sensory audit tool).

Help the young person to identify their own sensory triggers and manage these. An approach like Zones of Regulation can be a good way of doing this.

Introduce flexibility into the uniform policy or timetabling to accommodate sensory needs (see page 31 in the EGS document), for example:

- Allow young people to remove shoes in lessons
- Allow the substitution of certain items of school uniform with alternative garments
- Provide a low stimulation workstation in classrooms

- Review lighting and acoustics
- Allow staggered or individual arrangements for eating lunch or using corridors or entrances
- Provide seating arrangements that allow the young person to have additional space.

B Social Factors

To support the development of social skills, provide school-based interventions to support the young person (see pages 33-34 in the EGS document), which may include:

- A peer support or buddy system
- Mentoring
- Extra-curricular clubs or activities
- Friendships groups or social skills groups, which include opportunities to rehearse social scenarios in a safe space
- Support groups or a Circle of Friends approach
- Build upon the strengths of the young person and their interests within school
- Nurture groups
- Alternative or more structured arrangements at break times with adult presence (such as lunchtime clubs)
- Social stories, comic strip conversations and social behaviour mapping (the EPS can provide training on social stories and comic strip conversations).

Employ a Restorative Justice (RJ) approach, where appropriate, to address incidents that arise and to enable reparation.

Maintain an anti-bullying policy and educate young people on what constitutes cyberbullying through social media or online gaming.

Consider giving a role of responsibility within school so the young person can feel a sense of identity and belonging.

C Academic Factors

Clearly identify any learning difficulties or SEND and put in additional support where appropriate as you would with any other young person. Make sure they know what support is in place for them and that reduced attendance doesn't compromise the support on offer.

Assess current attainment, including reading and spelling ages, to check whether learning may not be accessible for the young person.

Learning confidence can support school attendance. Members of the Education Support for Medical Absence (ESMA) team have found that **for a young person going through a period of learning at home**, learning confidence can be developed through:

- The young person having access to bespoke, differentiated work from school (not just access to Google Classrooms) with identified time scales for returning work to school.

- The young person being provided with clear guidance about how to access the work set by school.
- The young person having verbal contact from school (identified key worker) about this work and guidance/input to check the tasks are at the correct level.
- The young person receiving feedback on completed tasks and guidance with next steps and even better – the young person meets with the identified school keyworker each week (remote or in person) to discuss work completion and next steps.
- The school support plan identifies and plans for 3 hours of educational activity each day.

Consider adapting the young person's timetable, for example:

- Dropping a modern language
- Changing tutor group or class
- Reducing homework demands.

Some young people worry about work that they have missed. If felt to be appropriate, provide 'catch up' sessions as part of the reintegration timetable. Identify gaps in knowledge due to missed learning input and make provision for supporting the young person to fill these.

Provide supportive small groups or one-to-one learning mentor sessions in which exam anxieties can be explored, and strategies provided.

Provide a relevant curriculum – consider less academic, more vocational, practical or creative subjects where appropriate and possible. Extend links to local colleges and consider placement opportunities in Years 10 and 11.

Provide individualised career advice from Year 10, consider part-time college placements in areas of career interest (e.g., mechanics or catering). Services for Young People may be able to support with this.

Ensure that exam access arrangements are applied for where appropriate.

D Factors Relating to Change e.g., Transition

Offer transition programmes for young people and their parent(s)/carer at key stages, with additional support and planning for vulnerable young persons (see pages 13-14 of EGS document). These might include:

- Additional familiarisation visits and opportunities to meet key staff
- Listing and addressing 'what if' scenarios
- Maps, tours and photographs of the new setting
- A simplified staff structure chart with photos
- Identifying a key support person

- Allowing a familiar member of staff to continue to support the young person, to bridge the gap into the new phase
- Going through the journey to school and practicing this
- Going through the structure of the day, how lessons are structured, homework expectations, break and lunchtime systems.

School to use INTRAN, an interpreting and translating service, to support young persons and parent(s)/carers whose first language at home is not English.

For those who are part of the traveller community or are refugees, consider seeking advice from the Hertfordshire Access to Education Team for Travellers, Refugees and Unaccompanied asylum seekers.

Foster a sense of belonging for young people from a range of backgrounds. Think about diversity in terms of wall displays, and speakers from a variety of cultures and backgrounds. Invite community speakers from a range of backgrounds into school to speak about their own experiences growing up.

Acknowledge the additional pressures and stress settling in a new country might cause and the possible trauma relating to earlier experiences. Consider peer support groups and safe spaces.

E Outside of School/Family Factors

Circumstances at home (historic as well as current) may create practical barriers to attendance, preventing young persons from feeling safe enough to leave parent(s)/carers or making it harder for parent(s)/carers to set boundaries and prioritise their children's education.

Rewards for attendance and disincentives to stay home i.e., limiting laptop time, access to internet, phone credit, time with friends in town etc. can be discussed with parents. This strategy should be used cautiously; young people who actively want to attend, but for whatever reason cannot, may also be experiencing low self-esteem and self-blame, in which case rewards and disincentives may prove counterproductive (see EBSA – A guide for Parents and Carers).

If sleep patterns are a factor, and if agreed to be appropriate, support parent(s)/carers and young people to rehearse a new sleep routine for at least a week before returning to school. Set an alarm and get up at the time that would be appropriate for attending school (see EBSA – A guide for Parents and Carers).

Some advice and support with healthy evening/bedtime routines can include:

- Stopping screen use at least 2 hours before sleeping
- Relaxation activities, such as a warm bath, warm (non-caffeinated) drink

- Mindfulness exercises
- Writing a to-do list
- Not eating in the 2 hours before sleep.

Parent(s)/carer can encourage regular exercise outdoors during daylight hours, preferably in the morning.

Change the key staff member who is liaising with the family if there are issues, or this has been requested by the family.

Be aware that transitions (between lessons, terms, years at school) can be very difficult for some young persons who have experienced adverse childhood experiences because these may trigger feelings of loss, dealing with uncertainty and may bring up feelings of abandonment, vulnerability, and rejection.

Adopting a Trauma-informed approach can enable schools to increase young persons' confidence about being in school. See websites: Young Minds Trauma Informed Schools and Trauma Informed Schools.

Provide counselling opportunities for young people going through bereavement. Consider seeking support from voluntary sector organisations, such as Winston's Wish: Winston's Wish - giving hope to grieving children. Safe Space, Hertfordshire offer support for bereavement and counselling in schools: Safe Space, Counselling in Schools | Hertfordshire Directory.

Have regular contact with parent(s)/carers. This might include daily, weekly or termly phone calls, e-mails, meetings in school, meetings in other settings and home visits. Use these contacts to build relationships and trust, to understand the issues, to share key information, to highlight the positives and to reduce anxieties.

Refer to young carer services or voluntary sector organisations that provide advice and support for young carers, such as The Children's Society or Carers UK. Identify other young carers in school to form a supportive network.

Signpost parent(s)/carers to relevant services, such as Family Support Worker for support:
Family Support Team
Parents and family support | Hertfordshire County Council
Families First

Signpost families to national or local organisations that support with drug or alcohol misuse, domestic violence or abuse, or problem gambling where these are problematic for the family (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous or Gamblers Anonymous).

Encourage the use of advocacy in meetings. Local parent/carer support groups may be able to support and advise families with this. For example, SENDIASS. It is important to avoid assigning blame and to keep meetings as solution focused as possible (Herts Parent Carer Involvement).

Check the young person is not at risk from Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). If this is a possibility, liaise with the school's safeguarding lead. Recognise that the young person may not see themselves as a victim, nor want support or intervention. For further ideas on prevention and identification and approaches, click here.

The NSPCC website has a good section on criminal exploitation and gangs and what to do if you have concerns about possible gang activity. Liaise with the local Youth Offending Team (SASH in Hertfordshire) if appropriate.

If a young person is felt to be heavily influenced by a radical nationalist or religious group, make a referral using the National Prevent referral form that must be emailed direct to police (details are on the form). This form is the current pathway to submit a concern that someone may be vulnerable to radicalisation or extremism. Police will then refer to local social services provision. For further reading and information, the Department for Education have published a very thorough document entitled: Teaching approaches that help to build resilience to extremism among young people.

For information about Hertfordshire services for Safeguarding (Family First Hub, Intensive Family Support Teams, Specialist Adolescent Service Hertfordshire (SASH)) see here.

See resource list in the EGS document for further resources and strategies (pages 137-144). There is also a list of national and local organisations to support children and young people, and their families (pages 145- 148).

APPENDIX: Additional resources for exploring children and young peoples' views



Feelings at School Cards

Feelings at school cards




The playground


The lessons


Being at school


The noise in the classroom


The smell of the classroom


The school toilets


Tests


Following instructions


Knowing how to start a task


Working on my own


Working with a partner


Working in a group



Asking a teacher for help when I don't understand



Working in a quiet classroom



Working when other children are messing around



Remembering what I have to do



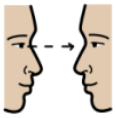
My friends



Answering questions in class



Listening when the teacher explains what we are going to do.



Paying attention and concentrating



Getting on with others



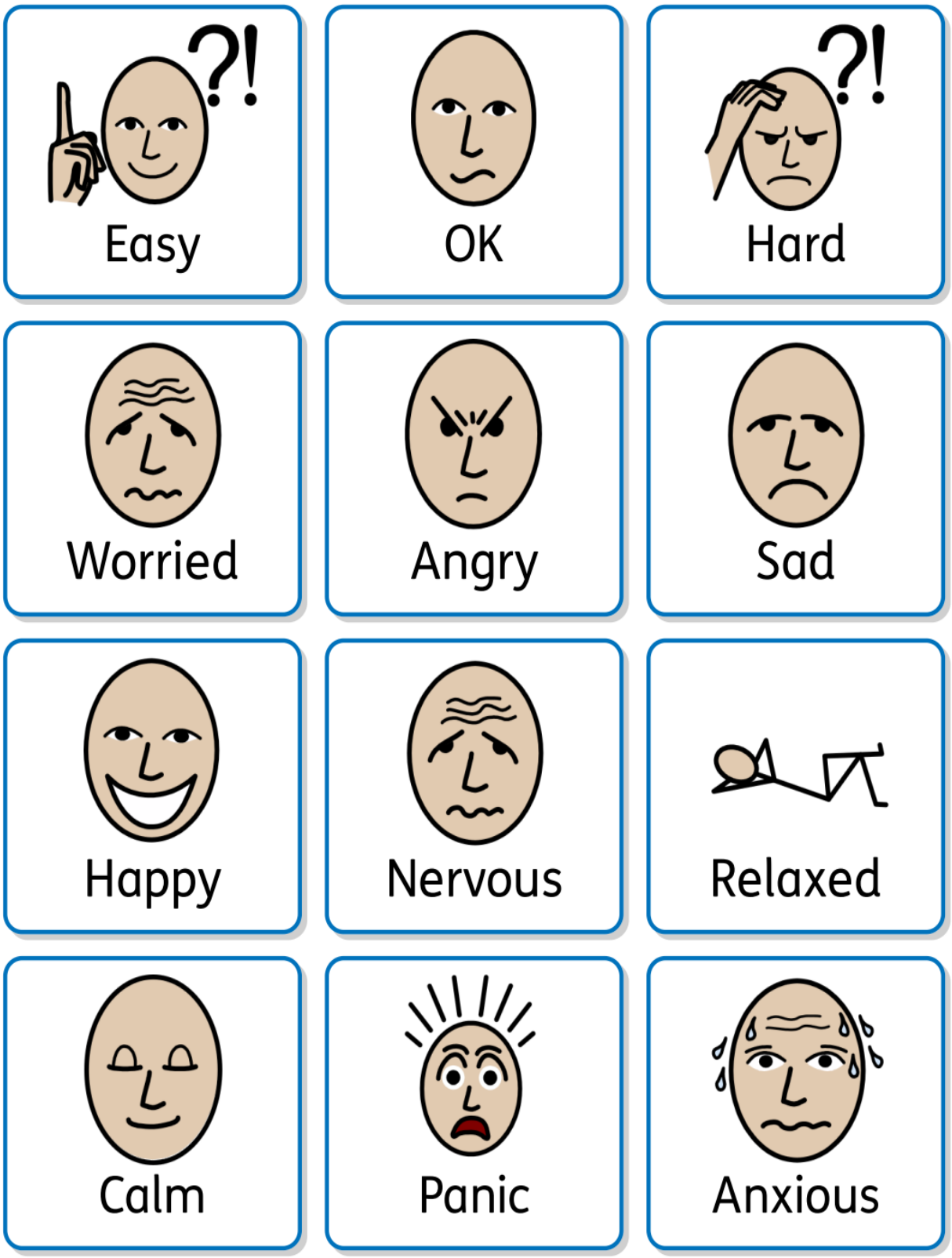
Computers



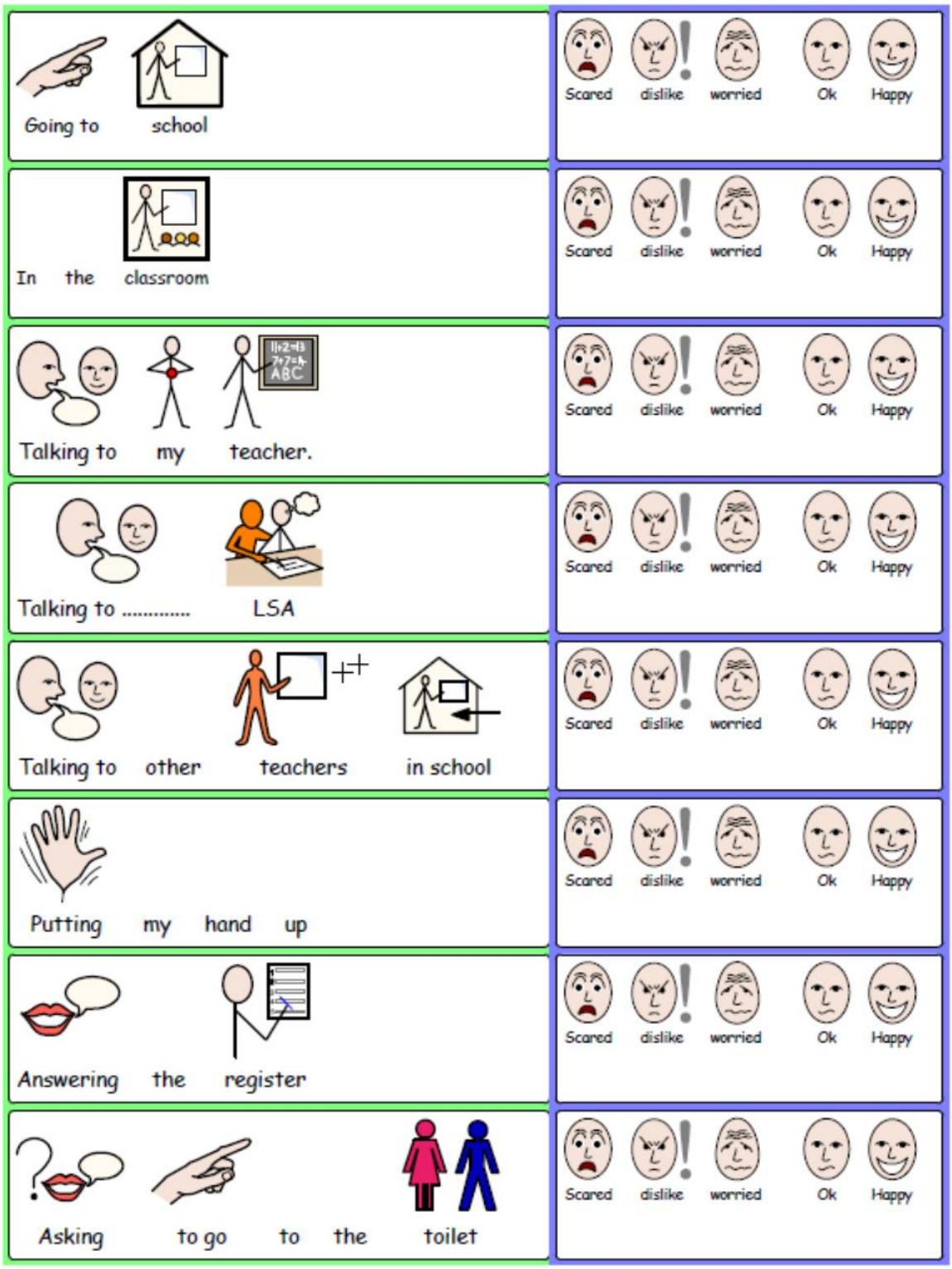
P.E.



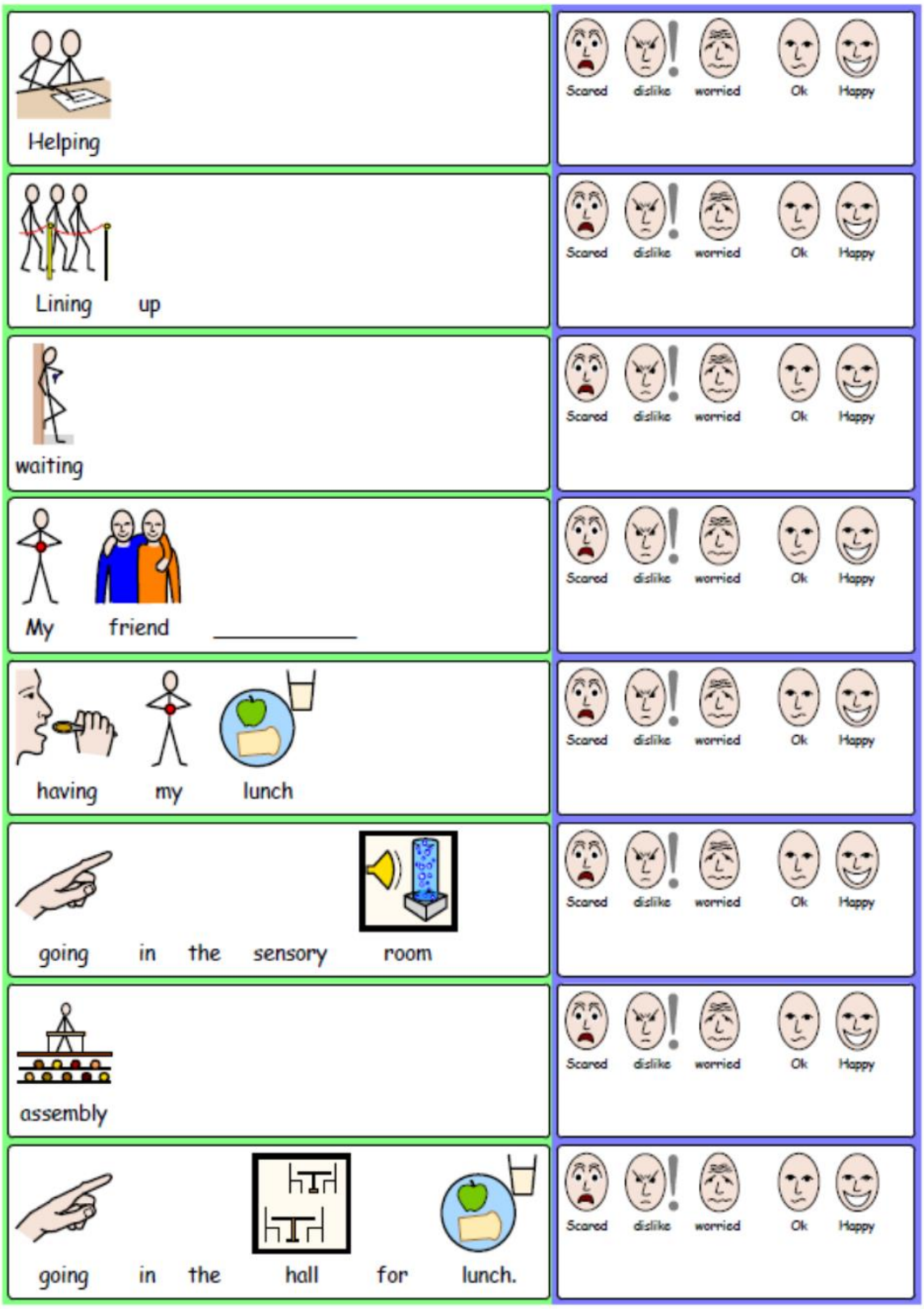
Geography/ History


Easy
OK
Hard
Worried
Angry
Sad
Happy
Nervous
Relaxed
Calm
Panic
Anxious

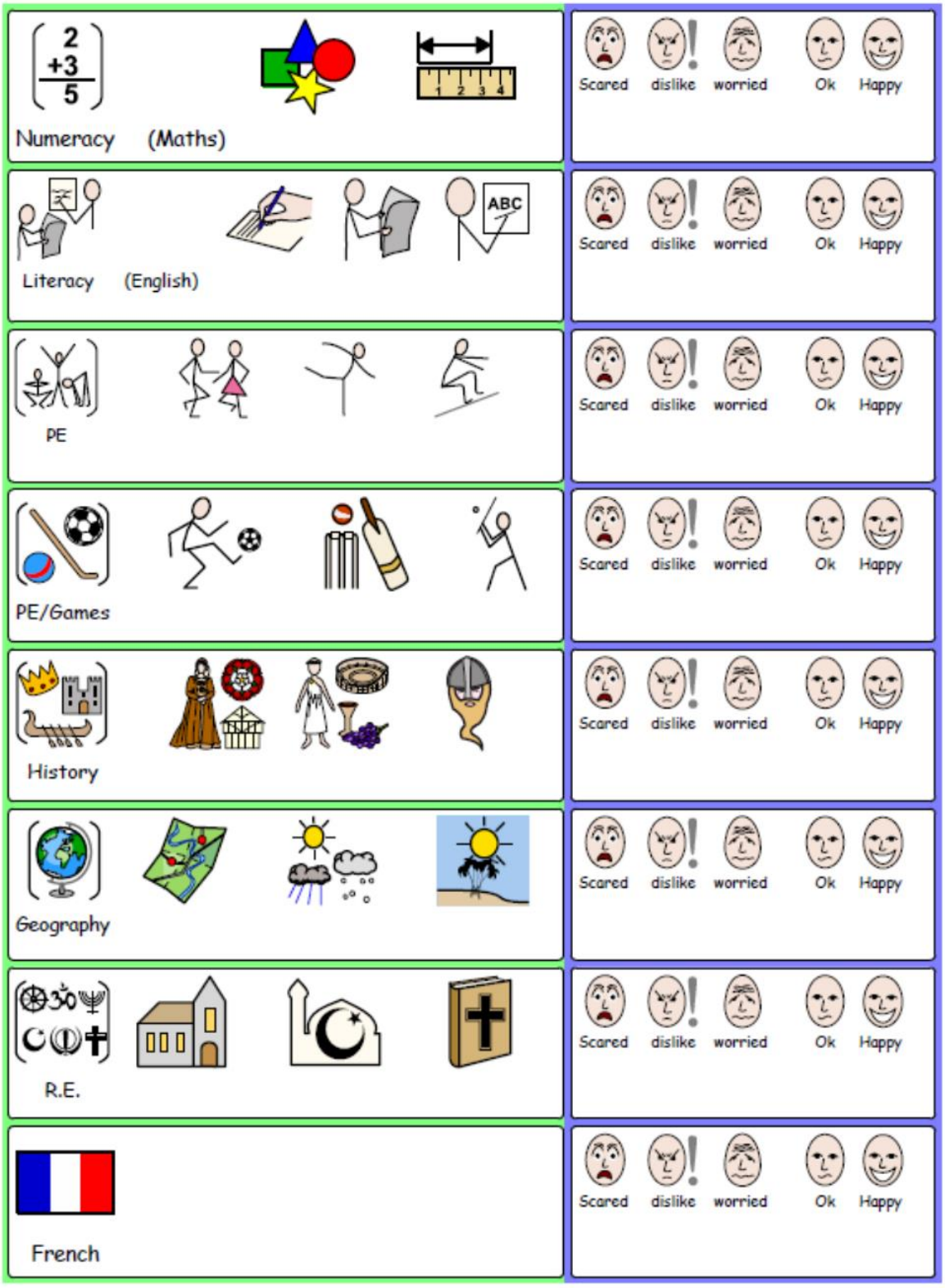
How I Feel (what's working for me ? not working ?)

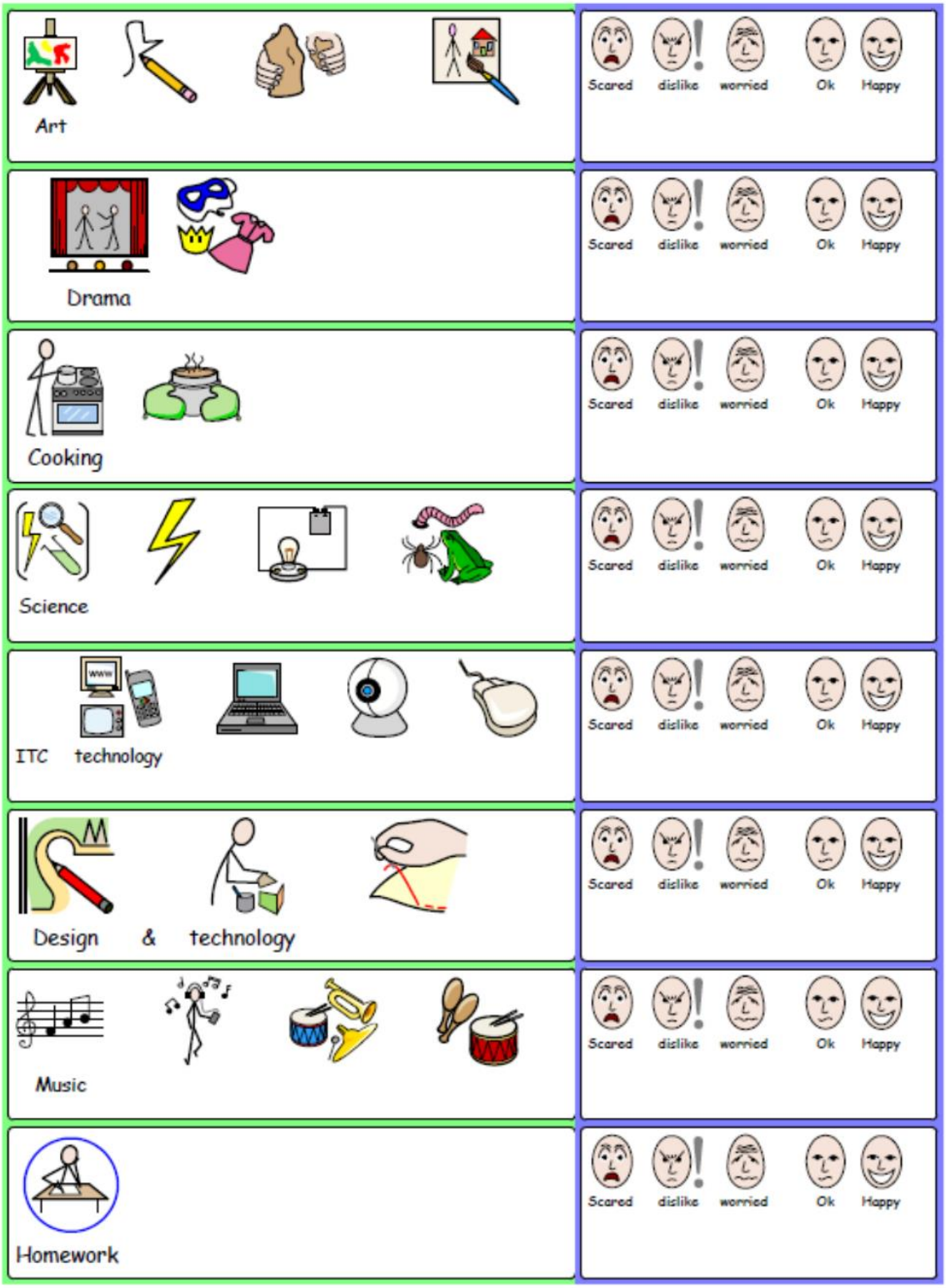


60


Helping
Lining up
waiting
My friend _____
having my lunch
going in the sensory room
assembly
going in the hall for lunch.
Scared
dislike
worried
Ok
Happy

How I feel about what I am learning...




Art
Drama
Cooking
Science
ITC technology
Design & technology
Music
Homework
Scared
dislike
worried
Ok
Happy

Top Tips for Running and Effective Meetings with Parent(s)/Carer(s)

Meetings should be child/young person and parent(s)/carer - centred and friendly, solution-focused, positive and building on strengths as well as identifying needs in an open, honest and productive way

Consider:

WHY: What is the purpose of the meeting – is this known/agreed by all?
How will you know if you have achieved the agreed outcomes?

WHO: Inviting the relevant people and knowing who is coming.
How will the child's voice be heard? (if attending, how should this be handled?)

WHERE: Suitability. What flexibility is there around venue? Consider remote or in person,
depending on the context.

WHEN: What flexibility is there around the timing of the meeting?

HOW LONG: How long do you need to meet?

Everyone attending the meeting should know all the above, especially the parent(s)/carers.

It can be the case that just as much thought has to be put into a one-to-one meeting with a parent/carer as a larger meeting involving several people and issues. The difference is with respect to the practical issues and the formality of the structure.



Creating a Positive and Welcoming Environment

- Is the parent/carer happy with the choice of venue. Could any flexibility be offered regarding this? (e.g. remote or on person).
- Meet and greet the child, young person and their family.
- Ideally, let the parent(s)/carer come into the room first and choose where they would like to sit. Do not let them walk into a room with several people already seated.
- A few minutes of friendly chat can as be helpful, if this includes the parent(s)/carer (and child/YP if attending).
- Be aware of the other pressures that people may be experiencing at the current time – particularly the parent(s)/carer, who is potentially the most emotionally vulnerable person in the room. Put yourselves in their shoes: what would make them feel more comfortable?
- With introductions, start with the parent(s)/carer, or the child/YP if they are attending.
- Spending time talking about the structure of the meeting is a good use of time.
- Parent(s)/carers may welcome some support with preparation for some meetings.
- It is respectful to all if the meeting starts and finishes on time.
- Give some consideration towards where parent(s)/carers wait prior to the meeting if in person. Outside the Headteacher's office could bring back unpleasant memories…Also, waiting in a very public space is not always desirable for those parent(s)/carers who visit the school frequently.
- Refreshments make people feel valued and respected, but don't let them dominate.
- Be honest about practical issues and check with parent(s)/carer that they are happy. (E.g. if you know that at one point you are likely to be interrupted, better to warn people of this, or if someone can only attend for part of the meeting).
- Consider suggesting a break if it is a long meeting, and make sure that parent(s)/carers know that they can request a short break if they need to.
- To encourage people to participate, refer to them by their name and ask open ended questions.
- Give parent(s)/carers some warning that a question or query maybe asked, by saying things like…'it would be good to hear your views on ……. 'In a few minutes, after we have discussed ……' etc. This gives them more time to prepare their answer.
- Show parent(s)/carers (and child/YP if attending) through your actions, posture and warm and welcoming smiles and nods that you are actively listening to their responses and expect everyone else to do similar.
- Always thank people for their contribution.
- Try to ensure that additional conversations that don't include the parent(s)/carer don't take place after the meeting has finished. If you need to stay and talk about something else or fix diary dates, then let the parent(s)/carer know that this is what you are doing.

Practical Considerations

- It is respectful to all to have reasonable notice to attend a meeting.
- How is a record going to be made of what is discussed and agreed, and who is going to do this? Will this person be able to take an active part in the meeting? How will any notes be circulated afterwards and who will do this?
- Are there any access issues to be resolved – eg physical access to the building, or access to the discussion if the parent(s)/carers first language is not English.
- Consider circulating a piece of paper for everyone to write their name and contact details.
- Is any cover required to enable relevant people to attend?
- Consider who is going to make tea/coffee (and ask this person in advance).
- It can be useful to have a box of tissues available.
- Don't forget introductions and include anyone that arrives late.
- Arrive in good time, factoring in parking and signing-in.
- Some lead-in time (e.g. 15 minutes) could be factored in for a meeting that involves a large number of people, when people could arrive and have refreshments. When this happens, the meeting is more likely to start on time.

Venue:

- Think creatively about different venues or in person/remote.
- If in person: is there a suitable (confidential) space/room available? Will there be any interruptions?
- Seating: is there suitable seating – i.e. adult-sized chairs or at least chairs of equal sizes.

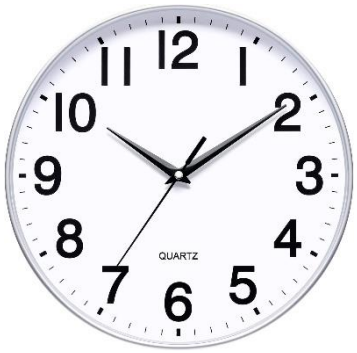




The Meeting Process:

Facilitator/chair: it's helpful to explain this role. It is this person's responsibility to make sure the process of the meeting runs as smoothly as possible:

- Make sure that all items are covered, and the structured is adhered to; that everyone can participate, particularly the parent/carer and child/YP if attending. If you run out of time and there are items/issues left not covered, negotiate how to address this. (A second, smaller meeting may be appropriate).
- Consider having an agenda, dependent on the nature of the meeting. This should be agreed with those attending, especially the parent(s)/carer. Some people find it helpful to have this on paper or on a flipchart/sheet of paper, so that everyone has a visual reminder of the structure.
- A structure to the discussion shared with everyone helps everyone to keep on track.
- There should be no shocks/surprises for the parent(s)/carer.
- Agreed actions/outcomes are usually at the end. Make sure there is adequate time for these.
- It is helpful for all for the discussion and outcomes/actions to be summarised. Check who is going to do what by when.
- When people are sharing views, consider the most appropriate sequence in which to do this.
- It is respectful to have an end time (double check that this is OK with everyone) and stick to this.
- Allow time to fix another meeting date, if appropriate.
- Always finish on a positive tone, however the challenge of the agenda, reminding everyone of the value of sharing information and arriving at an agreed way forward.

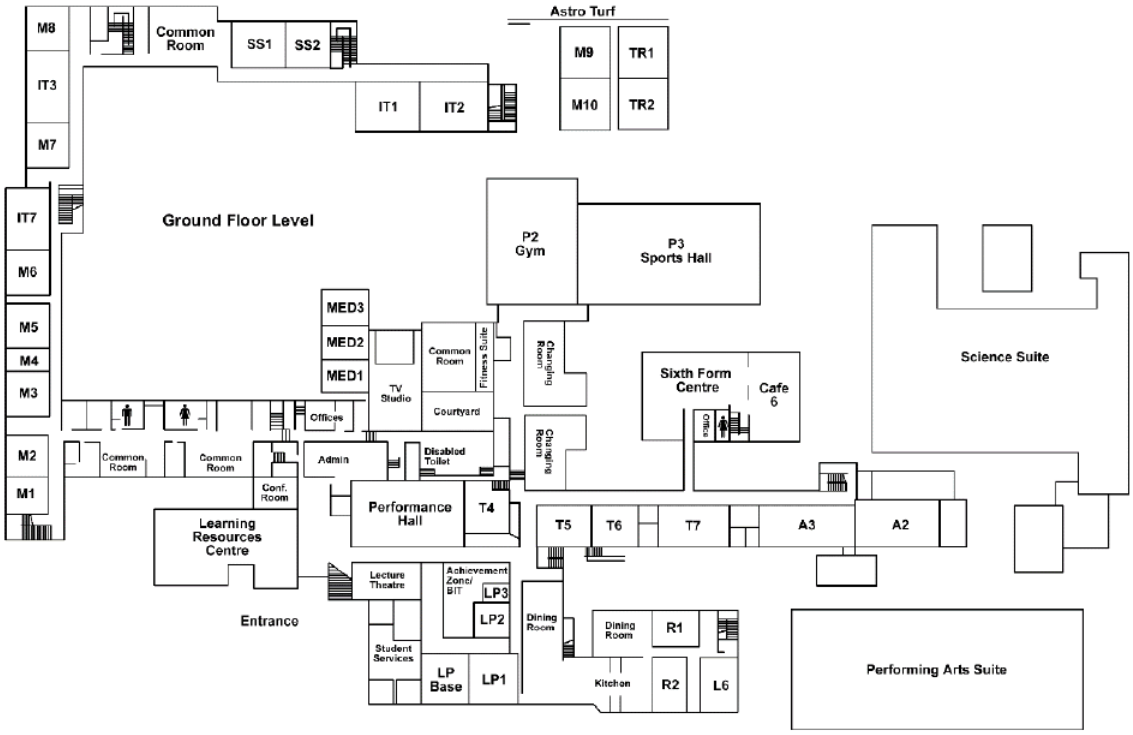




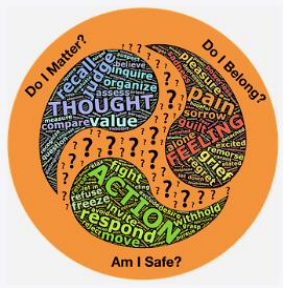
Landscape of fear (Appendix 8 in EGS document)

The Landscape of Fear is a tool designed by Kate Ripley, which explores the young person's sources of anxiety in the physical, social and learning environments of school. The young person is presented with a black and white map of the school grounds and is asked to colour the areas where they feel: relaxed (green), that they are functioning reasonably well (yellow) or most worried/ anxious (red).

Example school map:



Teach the Young Person about the Fight or Flight Response (Appendix 19 in EGS document)



What is the Fight or Flight Response?

If your body thinks you are in danger, it releases adrenaline which helps you to become stronger and faster for a short period of time. This adrenaline produces the bodily sensations you experience when you are frightened. This adrenaline helps you to run away or fight the dangerous thing.

What Anxious YPs Need to Know:

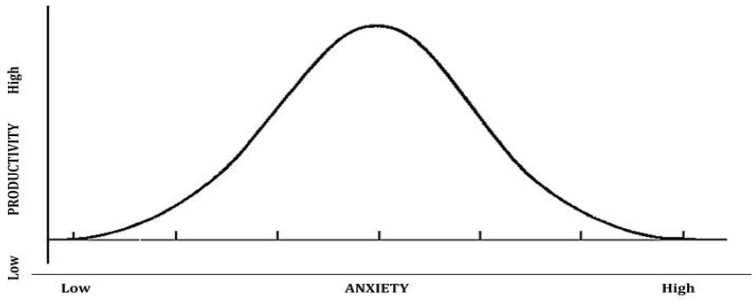
- Everyone experiences anxiety and often anxiety is a healthy and helpful response
- Sometimes our body thinks things are dangerous, even when they are not
- Because our body **thinks** we're in danger, it produces adrenaline. This makes our heart race, our hands go sweaty, we feel sick etc.
- This is a false alarm. There is no real danger, and we don't need to run away or fight
- The physical feelings we have are uncomfortable, but they are temporary and harmless
- As we learn that these sensations are a normal response to our body sending out a "false alarm", that the feelings will pass and they do no harm, we will begin to pay less attention to them.

How to present this idea to YPs

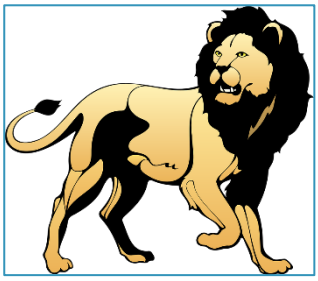
You can use the script on the following page to present the idea of fight or flight to YPs.

The Anxiety Curve

The anxiety curve below shows how increasing levels of anxiety can affect a person's thinking and performance. Some anxiety can actually help improve productivity (e.g. it can motivate us to preparing for an exam). However, when anxiety reaches a critical point, it starts to affect a person's performance and their ability to process information and make rational, logical decisions.



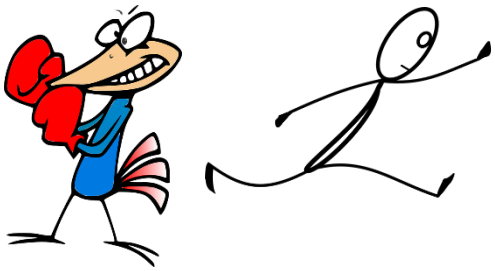
Fight or Flight[1]



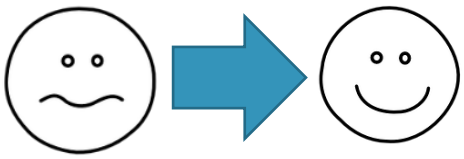
Imagine a hungry lion came into the room right now. What would happen to your body right now? What kind of sensations would you have?



This kind of fear is really helpful. It lets us know something dangerous is happening and It sends messages around our body that makes our heart pump faster and our muscles get stronger.

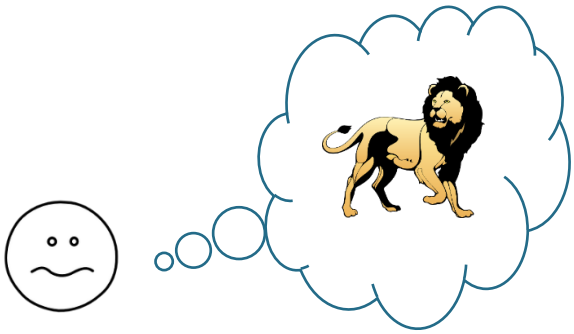


It gets our bodies ready to run away or fight. Feeling scared is normal and sometimes really helpful!



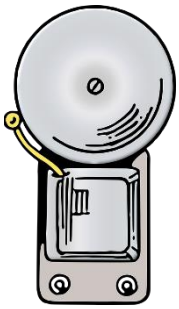
Those feelings cannot hurt us, even though they don't feel very nice. They don't last forever. They go as soon as the danger is passed.

[1] Script from "Exposure Therapy for Treating Anxiety in Children and Adolescents" by Raggi et al.

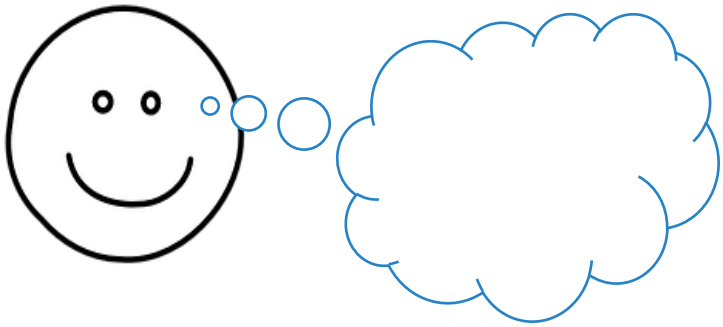


The same thing can happen to our bodies when we think about something scary or when we think something bad will happen, even if there is no real danger. You can have scary feelings without having a lion in the room. You just need to think about the lion.





We call this a “false alarm”. Our body’s alarm sounds, and we get lots of scared feelings, but there is no actual danger. It’s like a practice fire alarm going off.



Our thoughts are really powerful! But thoughts can also help us calm down. For example, we can remind ourselves that we’re safe and that the feelings in our body will go away and can’t hurt us.



You can learn how to take control of your scary thoughts and use calm thinking to help your body relax.

Teach the YP how avoidance makes fear stronger but facing fears makes them go away (Appendix 20 in EGS document)

When you feel anxious sensations in your body, it's natural to want to avoid the situation or person that your worried about.

However, every time we avoid the thing we're worried about, it reinforces the belief that we must avoid the scary thing to make ourselves feel safe

Suggested script for explaining this idea to children[2]

When we get scared, we usually try to avoid the thing we're scared of. If you're scared of separating from your mum, you'll try really hard to not let her out of your sight. If you're scared of spiders, you'll try really hard to stay out of rooms with spiders. If you're scared of school, you'll try really hard to get your parents to let you stay at home.

When you avoid things you're scared of, in the short term you feel relieved. But over time, it can make those things seem more and more scary.

We never get a chance to learn that we can handle the scary thing.

We don't get a chance to learn that things are not as bad, as we worry they might be.

To beat our fears, we must slowly get used to what we are afraid of by gradually approaching it instead of avoiding it. We can do it in tiny steps that will help you feel more confident.

As you face your fears, the false alarms will get weaker and weaker. You will feel more relaxed and your thoughts will start to change too. You may start to think that the things you're worried about aren't so bad. You may realise that even though you feel bad, nothing terrible will happen. You may start to feel proud that you didn't run away but that you handled it.

[2] Script taken from "Exposure Therapy for Treating Anxiety in Children and Adolescents" by Raggi et al.