

Understanding and Responding to Anxious Thoughts and Feelings about School

Parental Information Event

ACADEMY AT SHOTTON HALL

21ST OCTOBER 2024

SEND & Inclusion Service



Aims of this session

- To understand anxiety and the anxiety maintenance cycle
- To consider the links with feeling anxious about school
- To think about how parents can help
- To think about how school might help

Other Terminology

- EBSA - Emotionally Based School Avoidance
- EBSNA - Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance
- ESNA - Extended School Non-Attendance

- In Durham we use *Anxious about School*

Anxious About School:

An umbrella term used to describe any child or young person who is struggling to engage in their education due to emotional stress and distress.



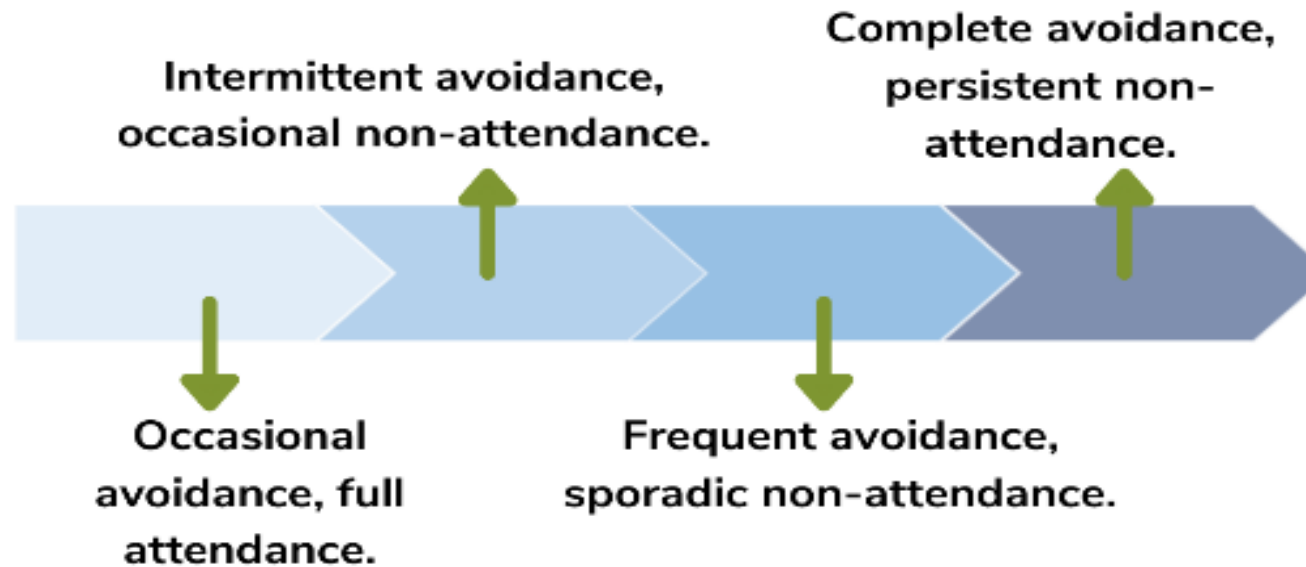
Why is this important?

- Good Childhood Report (2024) found that school is the area of a child's life they are most likely to feel unhappy with.
- 1-5% of the school population are likely to be experiencing anxiety around school (Elliot, 1999; Guilliford & Miller, 2015)
- Peaks in anxiety around school correspond with key transition points such as the Y6-Y7 transition (King & Bernstein, 2001).
- Higher rates of anxiety about school are observed among secondary students (Elliot, 1999; Kearne, 2008).



A Spectrum of Need

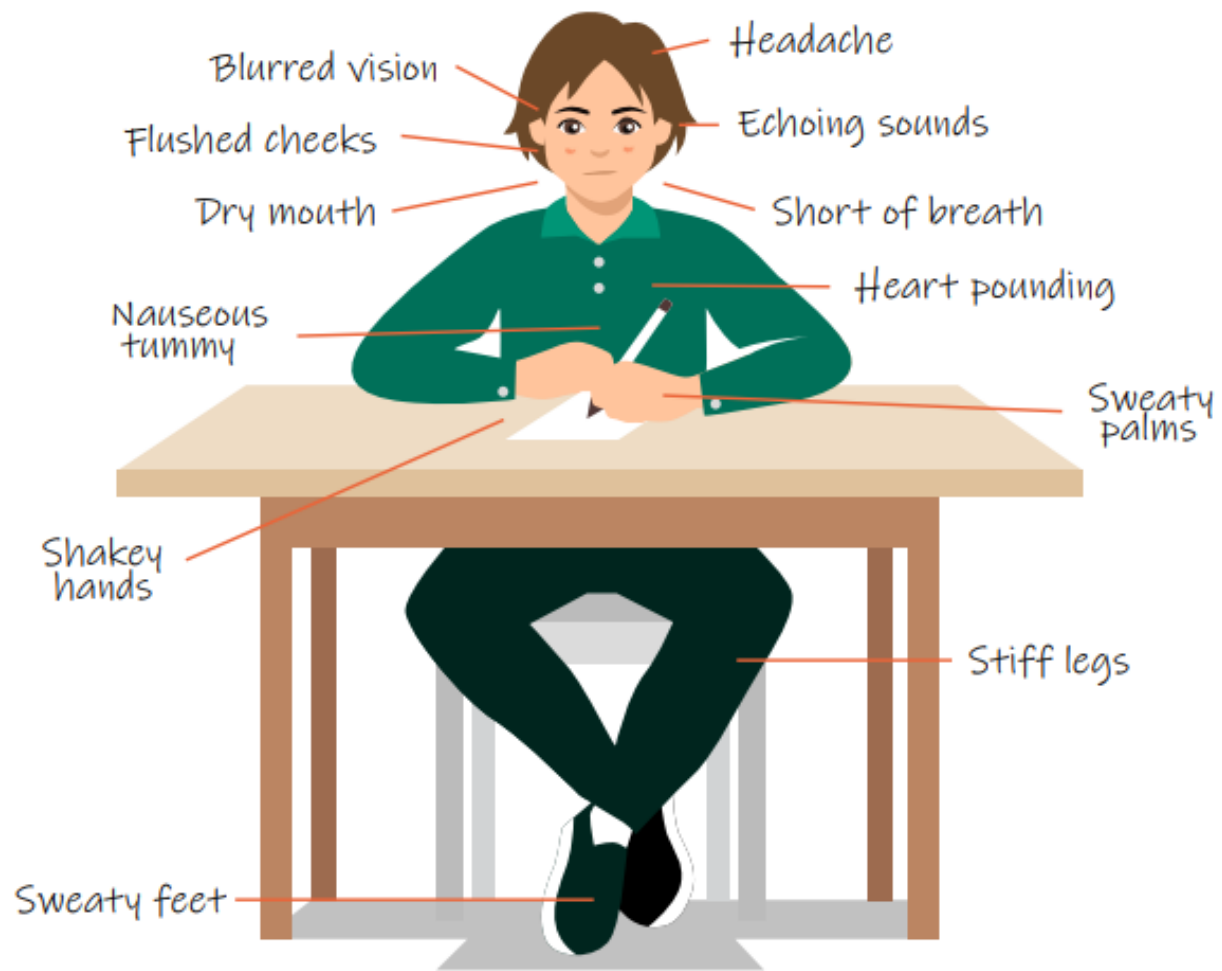
Model adapted from Thambirajah et al (2008).



Why do we feel anxiety ?

Anxiety is important and we all feel it. It helps to keep us *safe*. It can protect us !





Functions of School Anxiety

Negative Reinforcement

To avoid uncomfortable feelings brought on by attending school such as low mood or anxiety

To avoid uncomfortable situations that might be stressful such as academic or social demands

Positive Reinforcement

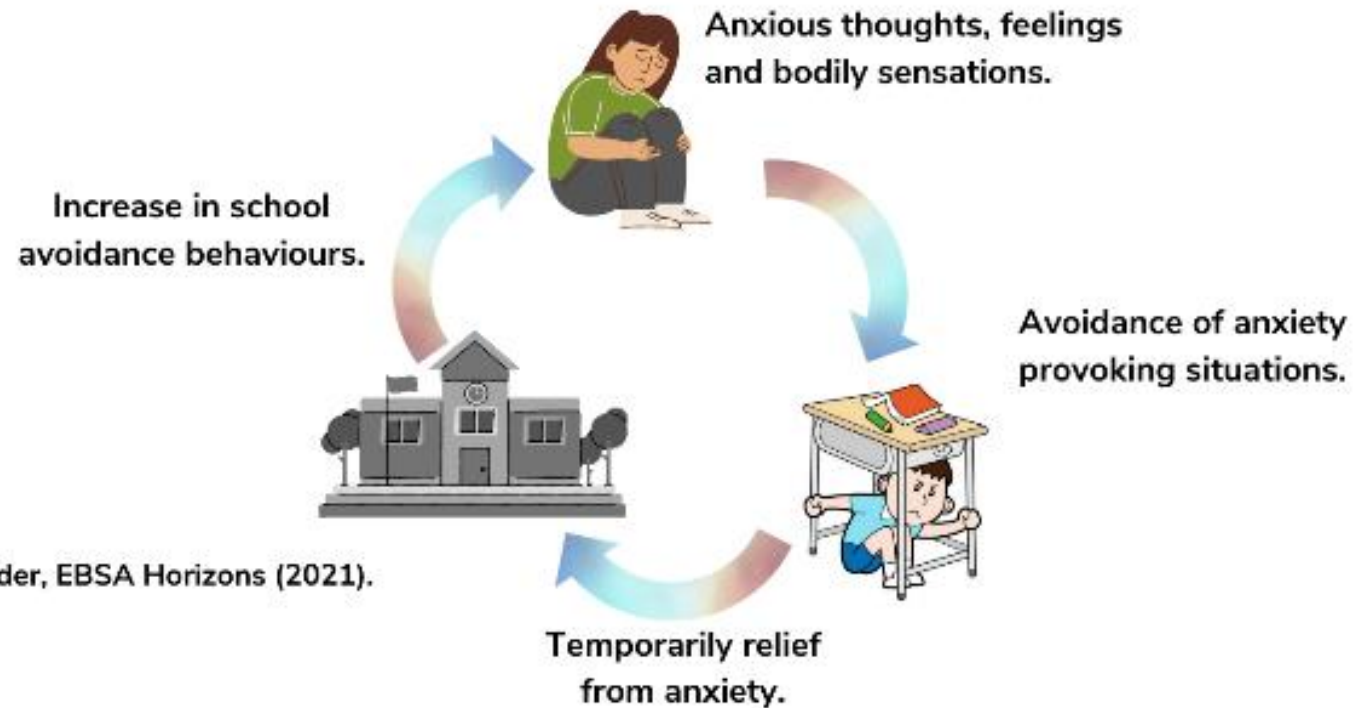
To reduce separation anxiety or to seek attention from family members

To pursue tangible reinforcers outside of school such as going shopping or gaming

(Kearney & Spear, 2012)

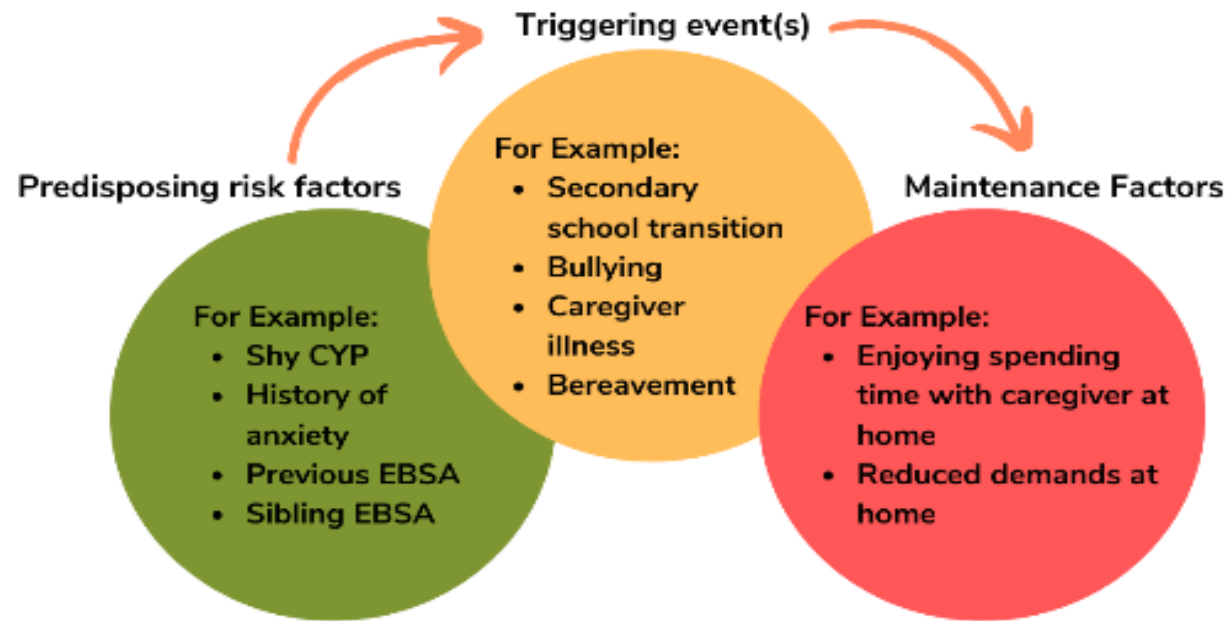
The Anxiety Cycle and School

https://www.nhs.uk/health/a-z/anxiety-cycle/



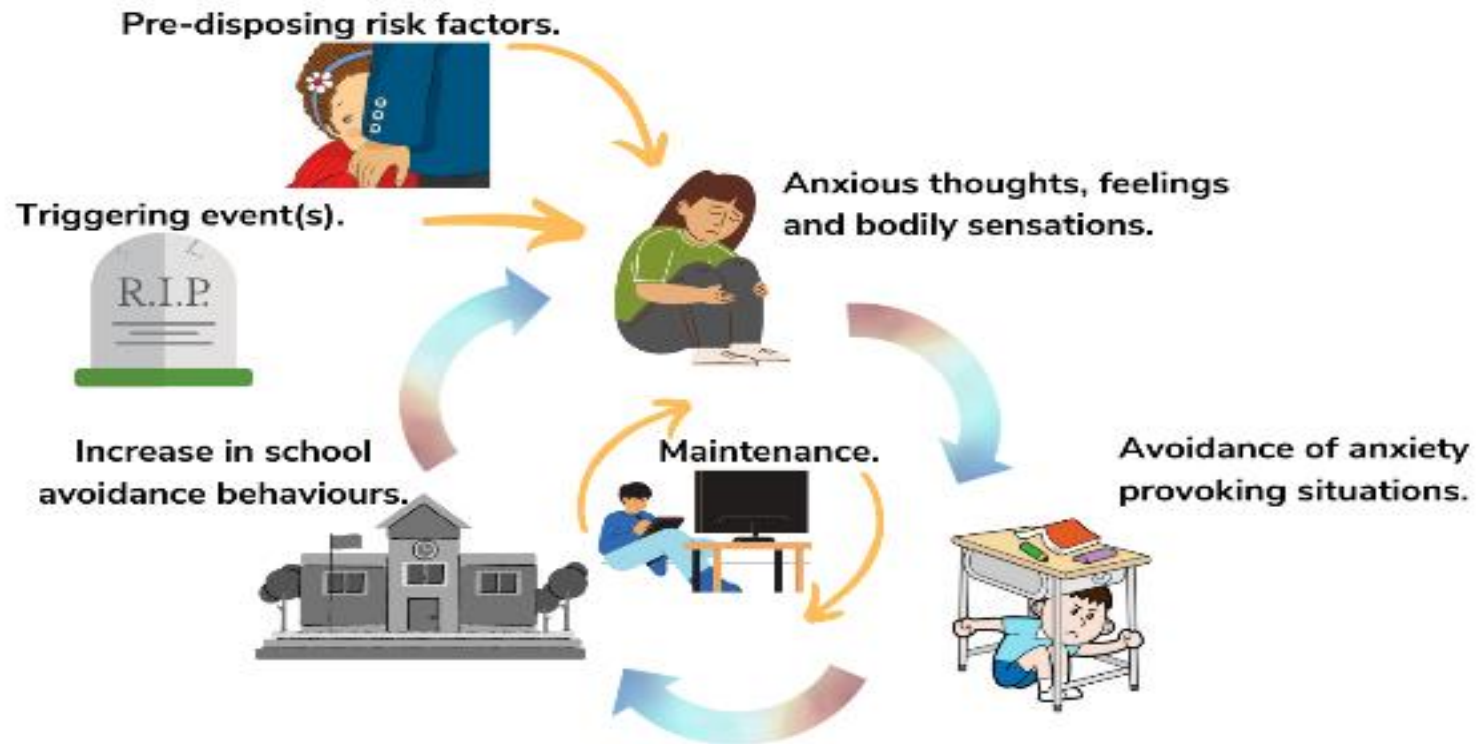
Dr J Holder, EBSA Horizons (2021).

School Anxiety Over Time Model



Dr J Holder, EBSA Horizons (2021).

Integrated Model of School Anxiety



What can parents/carers do to support their child/young person?

Modelling – talking about emotions

Coaching/guiding your child with calming techniques

5 ways to wellbeing

Providing routine and structure

Adopting a low demand approach

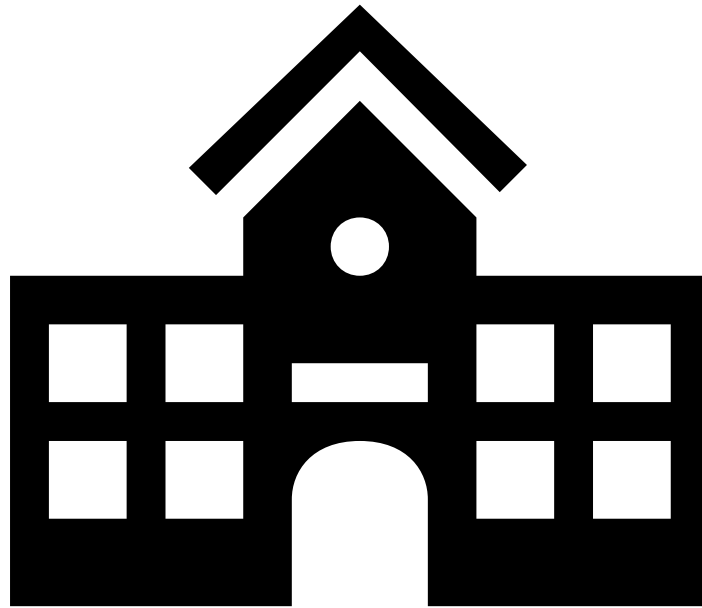
5 Ways to Wellbeing



[5 Ways to Wellbeing | Mind – Mind](#)

[5 ways to wellbeing for young people - Derbyshire County Council](#)

How might schools help?



Reasonable Adjustments

- Provide sensory and emotional regulation breaks.
- Provide a designated safe space/quiet space/time out pass.
- Provide positive role models with similar experience or peer mentors.
- Provide access to sensory toys/weighted blanket, ear defenders etc.
- Considering transition points throughout the day
- Soft landing and exit
- Adjustments for break and lunch times



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