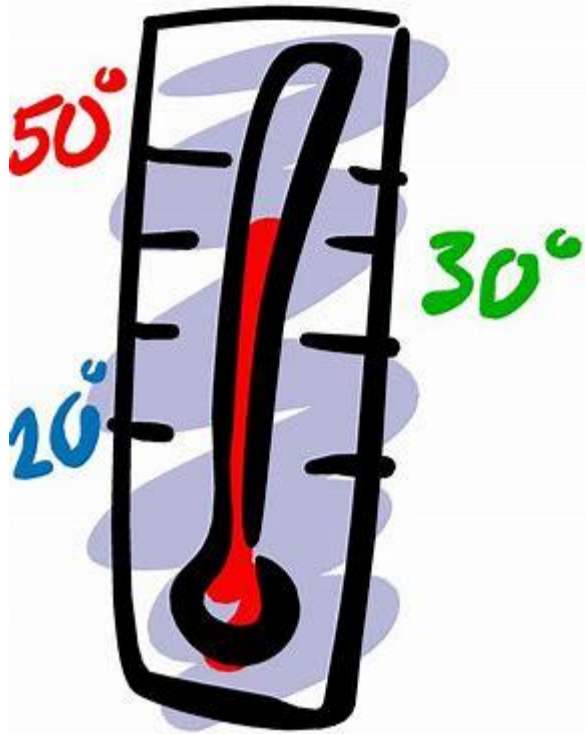# Anxiety and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Dr Emma Chettiar & Ana Gallego-Martin
Camden Educational Psychology Service

Starter Activity

Pause for a minute and reflect on your energy levels…

Best Hopes

What are you hoping for
from today's session?
Go to:
www.mentimeter.com
Enter code:
3175 4570

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Session Aims

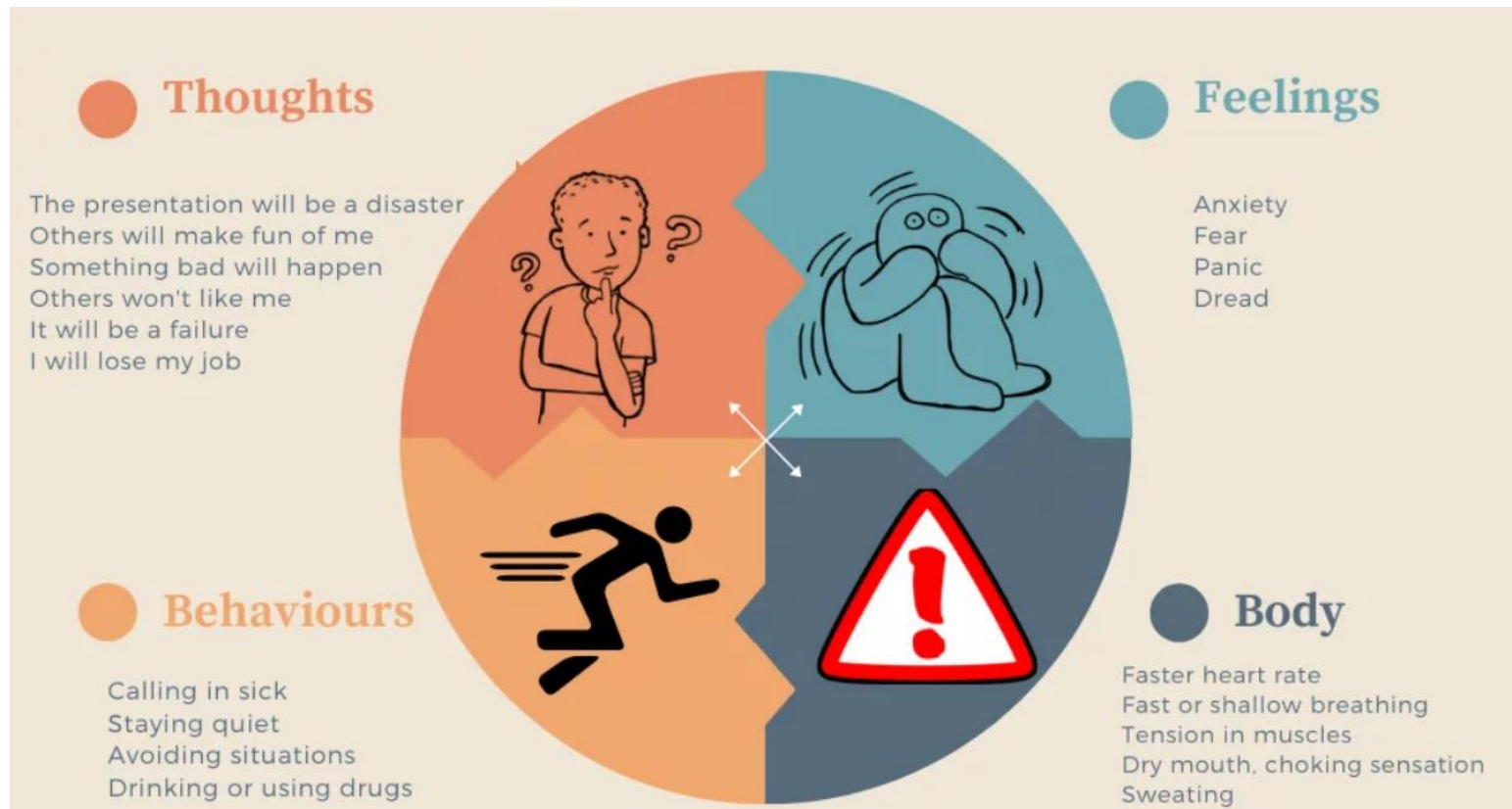By the end of this session, you will:

1. Know how anxiety and EBSA are defined
2. Understand more about the context of anxiety and EBSA
3. Consider how anxiety and EBSA affects pupils in your setting
4. Have increased skills to support pupils presenting with anxiety and EBSA
5. Have had the opportunity to plan next steps

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What is anxiety?

Anxiety is like a
smoke alarm

CBT Model of Anxiety

Thoughts

The presentation will be a disaster
Others will make fun of me
Something bad will happen
Others won't like me
It will be a failure
I will lose my job

Feelings

Anxiety
Fear
Panic
Dread

Behaviours

Calling in sick
Staying quiet
Avoiding situations
Drinking or using drugs

Body

Faster heart rate
Fast or shallow breathing
Tension in muscles
Dry mouth, choking sensation
Sweating

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Activity – CBT Triangle

TRIGGER/SITUATION:_____

YOUR CHILD'S ANXIOUS EXPECTATIONS:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

YOUR CHILD'S PHYSICAL RESPONSE:

_____
_____
_____
_____
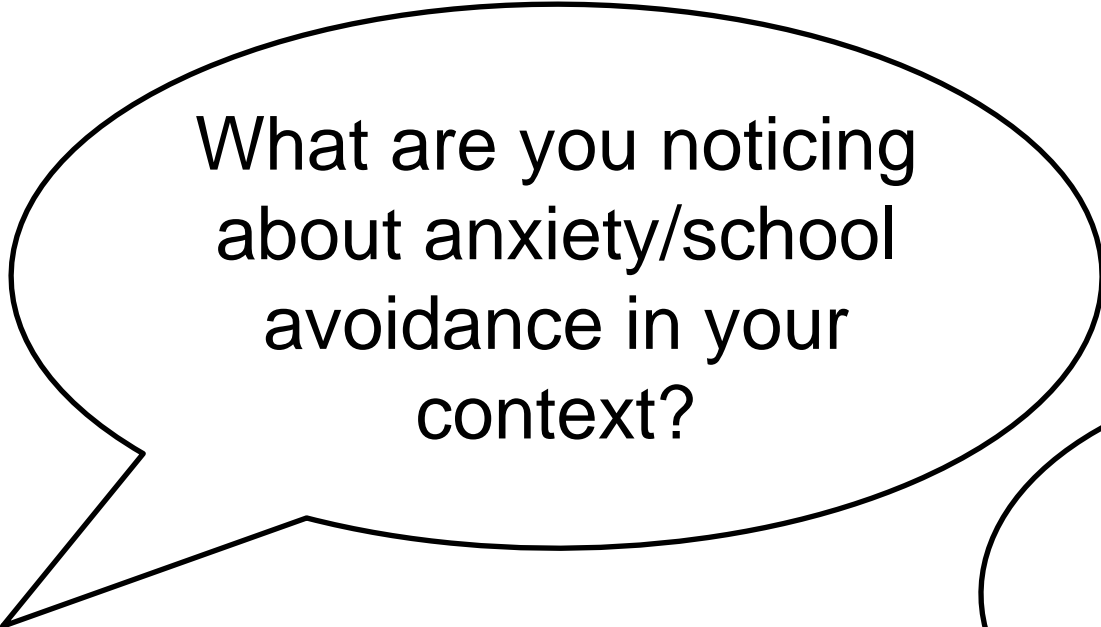_____

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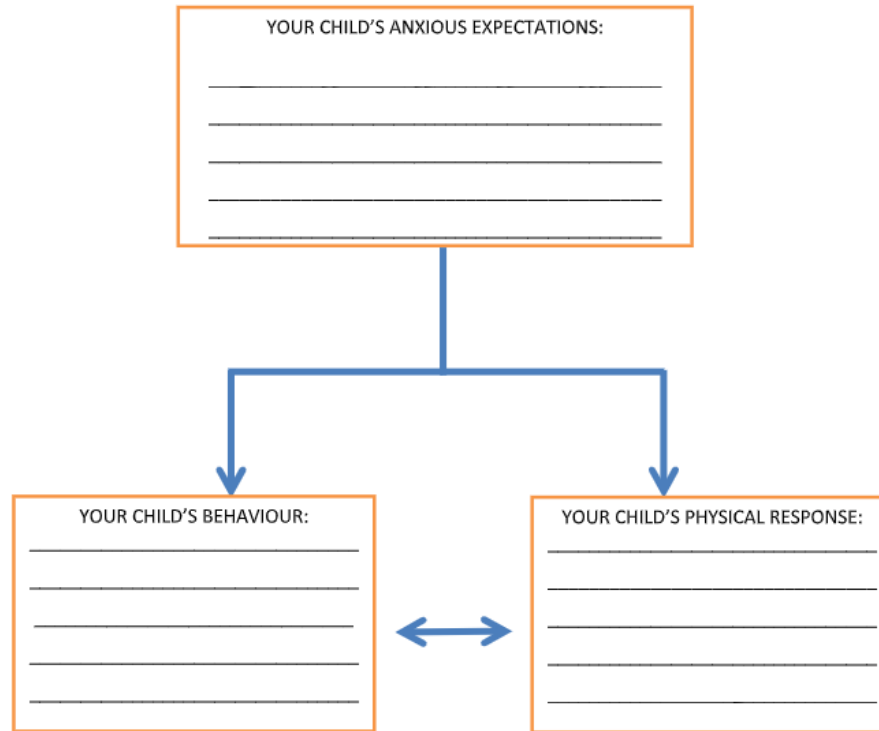
What is EBSA?

- An **umbrella** term used to describe children and young people who have severe difficulty in attending school due to **emotional factors / needs**.

- Approximately **1-2%** of the school population, with slightly higher prevalence amongst secondary school students.

- **No gender** or **socioeconomic** status differences.

- Some differences in attendance between **ethnic groups**

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EBSA & Terminology

- We need to move away from terms such as 'school refuser', 'truanting' or 'choosing not to attend'.
- These imply that the CYP has **control** over the school non-attendance and locates the '**problem**' within the CYP:
  - Detracts from their lived experience – Lack of understanding of needs.
  - Reduces our capacity to intervene – Misguided strategies.
- All behaviours are a **communication** of an unmet need:
  - Emotion drives behaviours.
- Research has identified that CYP who experience EBSA usually have high levels of **anxiety** (Finning et al 2019).

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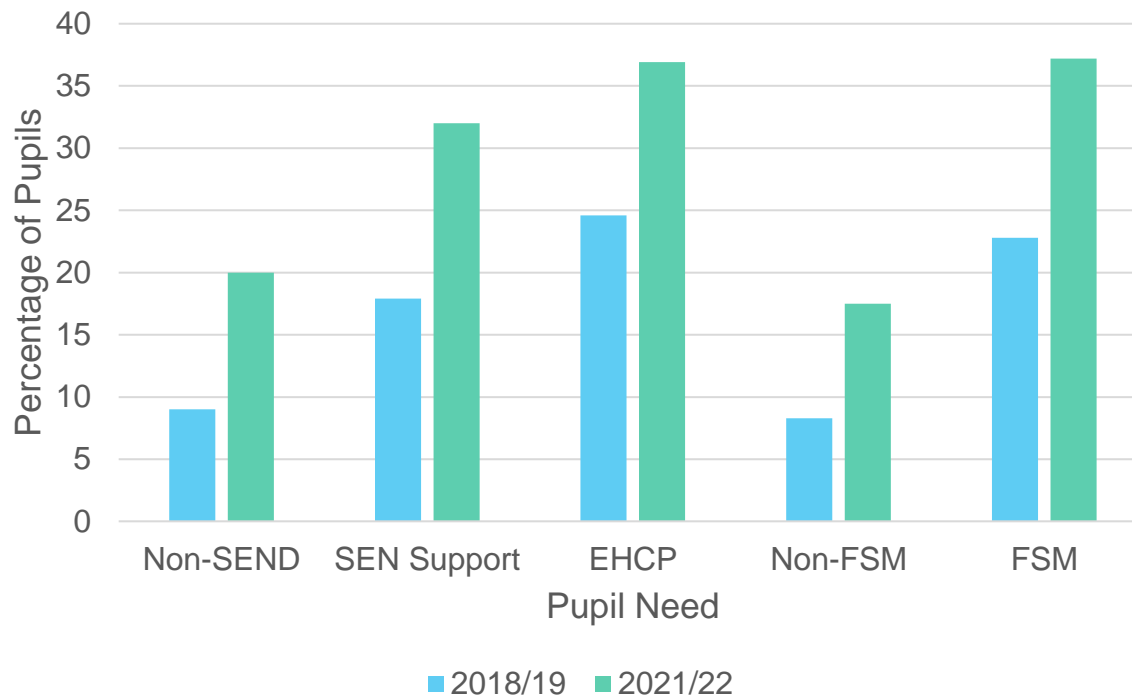Schools Services

Activity – Discussion

What are you noticing about anxiety/school avoidance in your context?

What factors are influencing these needs?

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Current Context

There has been a rise in absence post-pandemic:

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Outcomes for CYP

Negative future impact on:

- Academic attainment
- Social opportunities
- Employment
- Mental health difficulties
- Suicidal thoughts

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EBSA – Influencing Factors

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 **social situations** that might be stressful.

3. To reduce **separation anxiety** or to gain attention (attachment) from significant others, such as parents or other family members.

4. To pursue **positive reinforcers outside of school**, such as going shopping or playing computer games during school time.

The longer the issue goes unaddressed the more entrenched the behaviour is likely to become.

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EBSA – Influencing Factors

"School [avoidance] 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"
Thambirajah et al. (2008)

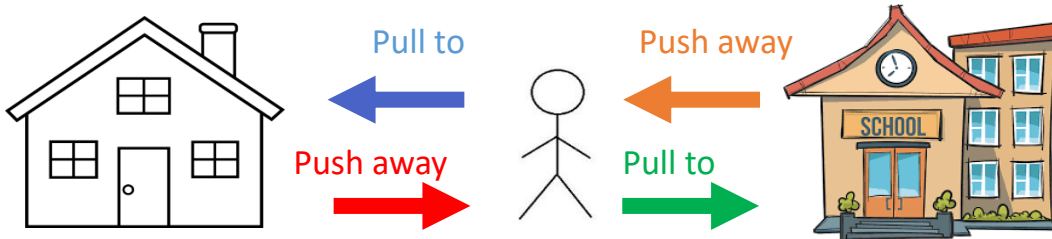**Environmental factors can be instrumental in supporting a young person back to school**

Pull to   Push away

Push away   Pull to
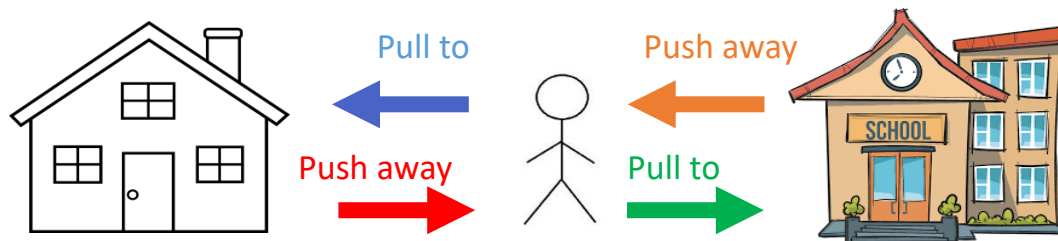
Influencing Factors

• Parental illness • Separation anxiety	• Bullying/difficult peer relationships • Difficulty accessing learning

Risk factors

Pull to

Push away

Push away

Pull to

• Parent/carer wants child to attend school	• Good relationship with Head of Year

Resilience factors

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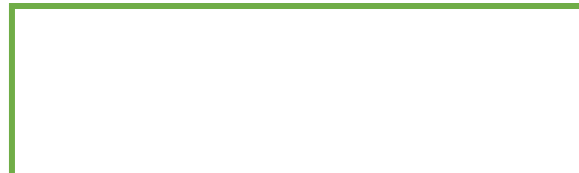
Activity – Mapping 'Push'/'Pull' Factors

Risk factors

Pull to

Push away

Push away

Pull to
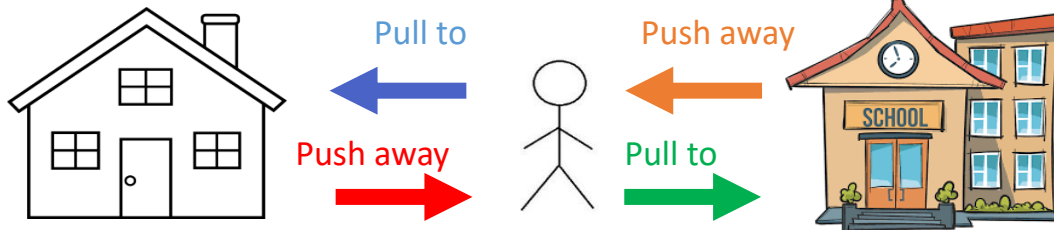
What push and pull factors do you see?

Resilience factors

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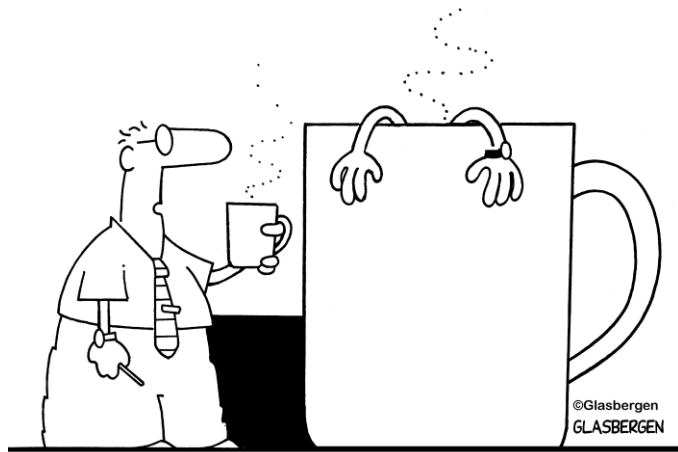
"One of those days, Phil?"
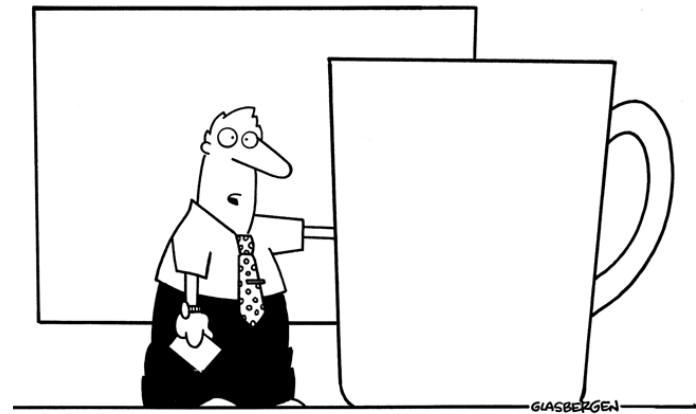
"Before we begin our Productivity Seminar, did everyone receive a free coffee mug?"

BREAK

"Don't be alarmed. After 4 cups, I switch to decaf."

Systemic Factors

Child — SEND needs, temperament, history of MH needs, friendship difficulties, LGBTQ+

Family — Parent MH needs, poverty, housing, emotional warmth, trauma/abuse, family routines

Community — Racism, bullying, limited support systems, crime, overcrowding (noise etc)

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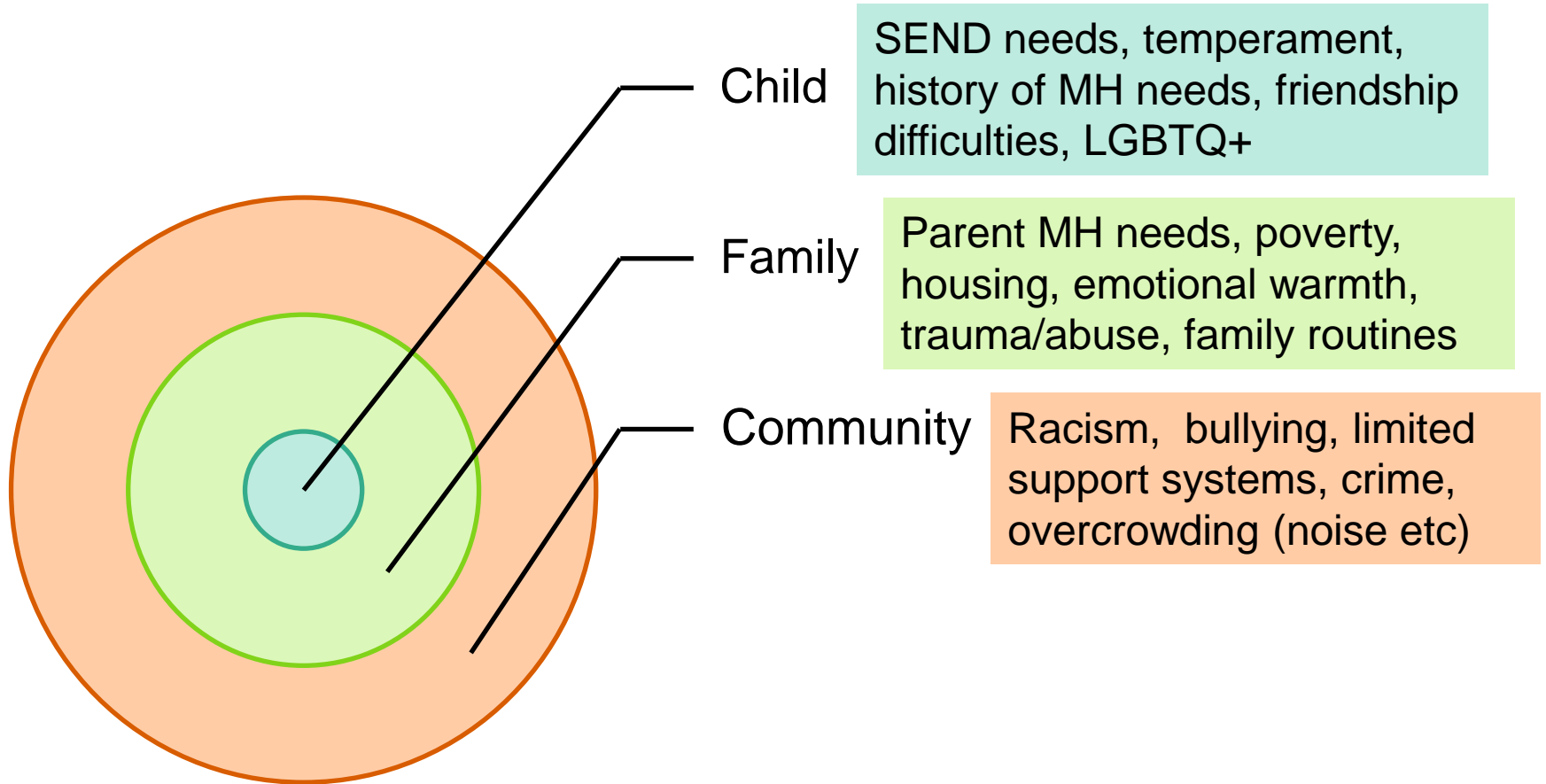
Interventions for Anxiety (AFNCCF, 2022)

Universal

Take a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing

Taking a whole-school approach to mental health has benefits for pupils, staff and families. It means involving all aspects of the school community in promoting and supporting wellbeing. By developing a culture which prioritises wellbeing and is supportive and safe, school staff can reduce the impact of EBSA risk factors.

Targeted

As well as working on universal approaches to mental health and wellbeing, it's also important for school staff to develop a planned process around EBSA for children and young people who require more targeted support.

You may be familiar with the assess/plan/do/review model, which is laid out in the SEND code of practice. If not, the SENCo in your school will know it. It is a very useful framework for working with a pupil experiencing EBSA.

Assess
Plan
Do
Review
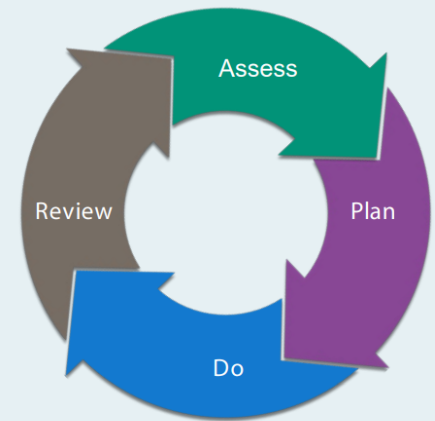
Guiding Principles

- Intervene early before behaviours become entrenched
- Use a collaborative, cooperative approach which involves families, school staff and professionals
- Consider the function of the behaviour and unmet emotional needs

Camden EBSA Pathway

Phase 1: Attendance low/intermittent patterns of attendance identified (initiate Phase 1 when attendance falls below 90%)

- Gain YP and family/carer views to consider barriers to attending, and factors contributing to non-attendance. Use this to inform a plan of push and pull interventions.
- School to arrange an initial TAF meeting to establish intervention plan. If additional services are already involved consider the coordination of network.
- Seek evidence of effectiveness of interventions (Plan, Do, Review)
- Seek support from relevant services if additional needs are identified

Suggested Strategies for Schools

- Ensure that the YP has regular contact with a trusted adult
- Create a safe place in school that the YP can go to
- Daily communication between home and school
- Continue to keep in touch with the YP when they are not on site
- Create a predictable and consistent daily routine and schedule
- Allow the child to use transitional objects
- Explicitly teach coping and relaxation strategies
- Consultation with Pupil Attendance Service

Phase 2: Persistent absences for 6 weeks

- Review attendance weekly in light of plan (plan, do, review) and monitor response to intervention, making adaptations where appropriate.
- Review effectiveness of interventions in place
- Organise a TAF meeting review
- Seek support from additional services if appropriate

Suggested Strategies for Schools

- Ensure a graduated approach to increasing attendance
- Create a hierarchy of anxiety with the YP that they work through gradually
- Consider delivering evidence based interventions directed at developing key skills such as social skills, coping strategies

Phase 3: Not attending despite professional involvement and intervention

- Review impact of interventions
- Refer to School Inclusion Panel (Camden residents only) ** Please email Camden School Inclusion Team (Dylan.Buckle@camden.gov.uk) for a referral form

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Interventions and Support

Emotionally Based School Avoidance

Covers:
- EBSA definitions/terminology
- Indicators of EBSA
- Risk and resilience factors
- Seeking information from children and parents to inform interventions
- Strategies for home and school
- Graduated approach to returning to school
- Pathway of support

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Sharing a love of learning
ROYAL FREE
HOSPITAL CHILDREN'S SCHOOL

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

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NHS
Central and
North West London
NHS Foundation Trust

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Learning

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Interventions and Support

Relationships

Key trusted adult to support with moving into school

Reassurance- Transitional objects

Starting and ending school day with protected time with an adult

Positive affirmation of steps towards progress

Positive, encouraging interactions between school and home

Psychological Safety

Clear, detailed schedule/routine for the morning and the school day

Elements of the day kept the same

Moving through levels of challenge around attending, gradually in steps

Knowing what will be happening in the day, who with, how long etc

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Intervention – Ladder of Worries

Most feared
Going into lunch hall without best friend
Going into lunch hall with best friend
Going to PE lesson
Going into next 2 favourite lessons
Going into favourite lesson
Joining in a small group activity
Staying in the resource base
Entering the school going into the reception area
Entering the school when the school is closed
Standing outside the school when the school is closed
Least feared

For each situation the young person will need to be supported to think about:

- What **coping technique** they will use (e.g. relaxation, thinking, distraction)
- What **support** will be in place (e.g. key worker available, time out card, access to secure/ quiet base)
- Some situations may need to be broken down into even **smaller steps**

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- Two week, online programme for secondary age students who struggle to attend school

- Re-engagement with learning, focus on wellbeing

- Two sessions during the LinkEdUp programme to support students to reflect on their feelings about school and consider strategies they can use to manage these feelings
- Attending the 'wrap up' session at the end of the programme to celebrate success and discuss next steps with students
- Follow up consultation with home school staff and parents to discuss the student's progress and plan targets and actions once the programme has ended
- Review consultation with home school to review targets set
- Support with planning evaluation measures

Wellbeing: Session 1

BE KIND
TO YOUR MIND

Think of one <u>successful</u> thing that has happened this week.
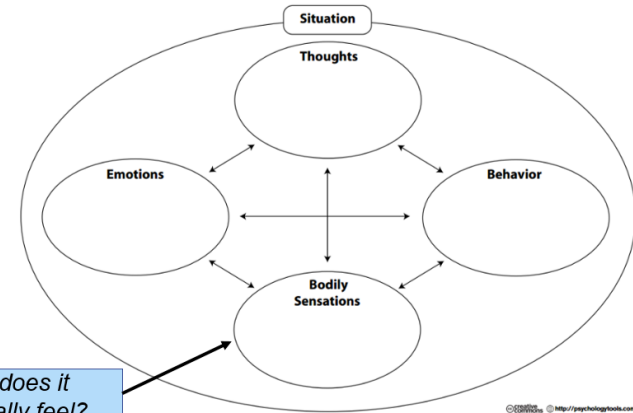
What are you proud of?
What have you done well?
What has made you feel happy or calm?
What progress have you made?

Why did it make you feel good?

LinkEdUp

Cognitive Behavioural Approaches
Thoughts, feelings or behaviours?

Situation

Thoughts

Emotions

Behavior

Bodily Sensations

How does it physically feel?

© http://psychologytools.com

LinkEdUp

What is anxiety and stress?

Prefrontal cortex
P.F.C.
"THE WISE LEADER"

"Flipped Your Lid"

What can make you flip your lid?

When do you use fight, flight or freeze?

The big emotions, anger, fear, anxiety etc...
The AMYGDALA - The alarm center
Acts on instinct
fight, flight or freeze

PRE-FRONTAL CORTEX

AMYGDALA

HIPPOCAMPUS
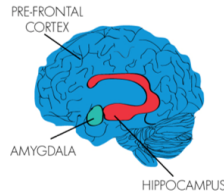
Are there any responses you have that you'd like to be different?

LinkEdUp

Most Stressful

Least Stressful

LinkEdUp

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Let me introduce myself…

Hi!

I am J and I am a Camden resident. I went to a popular, oversubscribed local Camden Primary school.

I am currently in Year 10 at a large secondary school in Camden, but I haven't been going to school for a while now.

I have three other siblings and we live with my Mum and Dad in a small flat In Camden. I also have cat.

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My background and formulation

* I was born premature at 32 weeks and I am 1 of 4 children in the my family.
- Like me, my teenage sister struggles with social anxiety- she has started seeing CAMHS for support last term
- My two younger siblings are both at Primary school in Camden
- We all live together in a flat on the 4th floor with no lift-this is really tricky for both of my parents because my Mum has a chronic illness (**Fibromyalgia**) and does not leave the house (3 years since COVID) because of her medical need
- My Dad also has health problems (asthma) he does the school runs for my younger siblings
- We have applied for support from the council to move, but we are on a waiting list
- Both of my parents say they have mental health struggles, OCD and anxiety
- We have no family to support us near where we live locally. My Mum says ,' we don't do friends...' she says that we are 'isolated' from a lot of things-especially since COVID
- My mum remembers that I loved primary school (Camden LA)- and had a really positive experience. She also says that at Primary school I *'gravitated towards other young people who appeared to have SEND'*
- Mum has always thought that I had ADHD- and even asked in primary if I could be assessed but the school wouldn't because they said it was *not their view children should be assessed for neurodiversity's at Primary school* – My Mum has told my secondary school also but nothing has happened so far
- There have been 3 historical referrals to the Early Help service to help me and my family but for one reason or another we haven't seen anyone and nothing has happened.
- I did have a CAMHS assessment via one of the EH referrals. My mum says that the people who spoke to me from CAMHS did reflect that I *'had a morbid mentality'* but that I was not actively suicidal.
- This meant that CAMHS did not take me on because I was not presenting with any thoughts of active suicidal ideation and I never heard from anyone again. Maybe I am on a waiting list? I don't know...

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How did I get here?

- I left my primary school and went to a secondary school in Camden (School A) I had a tricky time there adjusting to my new school.
- I was a pupil in School A for most of year 7 and some of Year 8.
- My Mum withdrew me from School A because I was bullied " *Because of how he was*"
- I started my current School (School B) in the November of Year 8-**COVID happened in March of that year. (4 months)**
- My mum says that the *change of school was 'ok' for me* and there were '*no major issues*.
- When school returned after Lockdown 1- no one really knew who I was. I found it difficult because I was a new pupil pretty much.
- I was still wearing a face mask- I didn't want to take it off. Again, I got bullied by some other young people at school, and this time I was physically assaulted, stabbed in the leg with a needle protractor
- My Mum wasn't entirely happy with the way that this is incident was handled at school
- **My attendance got worse after this.**
- I had one link to a teacher (the Pastoral lead) at school but I didn't really know my other teachers very well at all.
- Mr.H would call my mum sometimes to ask why I wasn't in school. My mum would call him too when she received letters saying they might fine her if I didn't go in.

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My Profile:

Curriculum/Learning issues	High	Med	Low	Not an issue	Not known
					Level of concern: Please X
Low levels of literacy			X		
PE and/or games issues		X			
General learning difficulties				X	
Subject specific difficulties			X		
Exam or test anxiety		X			
Difficulties with a particular teacher/adult			X		
Problems keeping up in lessons			X		
Psychological wellbeing	High	Med	Low	Not an issue	Not known
Often seems tired		X			
Low self esteem	X				
Appears depressed	X				
Appears anxious		X			
Keeps feelings to them selves		X			
Has a pessimistic nature	X				

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	Level of concern: Please X				
Loss and Change	High	Med	Low	Not an issue	Not known
Death of parent, relative, friend		X			
Death of pe					X
Sudden traumatic event		X			
Sudden separation from parent				X	
Moving house, school, area		X			
Loss of classmate				X	
Parent, relative, friend illness			X		

Social Personal	High	Med	Low	Not an issue	Not known
Being bullied	X				
Seems to have few friends/friendship issues		X			
English as an additional language				X	
Dislikes play/break times	X				
Few leisure interests		X			

Family Dynamic	High	Med	Low	Not an issue	Not known
Inappropriate parenting			X		
Birth of new child					X
Parents separated				X	
Parents arguing/fighting				X	
Practical problems bringing child to school			X		
Problems with parental control				X	
Jealous of sibling at home				X	

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Information from my school

Information provided by School referral paperwork:
- Not been in at all this term (Autumn 2022)
  - **On referral for Linked UP attendance was 3.9%**
  - **Year 9 attendance at School B= 49.6%**
- J is Polite, Chatty and engaging
- J struggles to make and keep friends. Has been subjected to bullying by others.
- Has previously had positive peer relationships with supportive peer group.
- Mother says J never been testes for "issues" , Primary school didn't believe in dyslexia/ADHD.
- Family are supportive and have **reached out on a number of occasions for support**.

Information provided by parent
- Post COVID lockdowns, an urgent Referral was made to CAMHS-didn't meet threshold
- feels possible ADHD, dyslexia, learning needs
- J needs to be 'nagged' to do things – left to his own devices he will not do as he is told
- Reports that J is suffering anxiety and panic attacks.
  - Physical effects, dizzy, sick, pain, no sleep.
  - Collapsed in street, father had to go to him
  - struggles with sleeping, getting to sleep
    - this causes him to be unable to be awake in the mornings for anything and if he is awake he will return to bed in the afternoons to sleep (poor sleep hygiene)

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Risk/Resilience factors to consider:

What are my Protective factors?

- ➤ I have supportive parents who want me to do well in school & life
- ➤ I have had friends. I used to go out of the house and do stuff with some friends I know from gaming online
- ➤ I have contact with a key teacher at school already Mr. H
- ➤ I did enjoy my primary school- I had a positive experience of school when I was younger

What are my pulling factors?

- ➤ I am interested in some 'school work' – I like maths, computers, gaming
- ➤ I don't have a negative association towards learning and doing work
- ➤ I know one teacher at school- he speaks to my parents- but I have never met him in real life
- ➤ I am interested in college apprentiships when I finish my GCSE's
- ➤ I want to make friends, go back to school but I find it hard

What are my pushing away factors?

- ➤ I don't have any friends at school- I haven't been for so long. Does anyone even know who I am?
- ➤ I was bullied when I was at school- will this happen to me again?
- ➤ I haven't left my house for a long time- I don't like to see anyone in my area
- ➤ I'm really far behind with my learning- I have missed a lot
- ➤ I feel nervous and have had panic attacks when I have been in school-I feel this in my body when it happens and it scares me
- ➤ I find it difficult to wake up in the mornings- I don't sleep well
- ➤ If I don't go to school my parents will get fined – I feel bad about this

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Initial ideas for follow up work:

- Explore what curriculum areas may be possible 'pulling' factors
  - Mathematics – an area of interest and strength during the online programme
  - Is there an online option available at school for J to engage with?
- What might it look like to return to school? Engaging J with school work again
  - Transition timetable
  - Collecting work each week?
- Early help – re- referral for whole family support
  - **Housing issues** are ongoing to support the families cramped housing situation as well as accommodating parents medical needs
  - **Finances-** is there any wider financial support the family can access in regards to energy/food
  - **Family worker (FIF/Transformation team)** to support the need of all the children in the home-
    - Older sister with social anxiety
    - Younger children – what might their additional needs be
    - PACE support
      - Are there local clubs, activities which JA could engage with to wider social interactions with peers?
    - CAMHS re- referral for J
      - support for J to address his experience of the physical anxieties he experiences- panic attacks, feeling sick
      - Address poor sleep hygiene- Cutting internet usage via the internet provider at home in pre-arranged hours
        - Explore other avenues of support available such as;
        - Brandon centre
        - In school councillor available?
- Key adults to connect with J from school
  - Home visit from school? School have not put eyes on him for months
  - Weekly call home for J from school adult
  - Mr. Harwood is a contact who is already familiar- Is there a teacher who could foster a connection with J so that he feels there is a safe space for him in school
- Referral to EP service for ADHD/other unnamed learning difficulties
  - Explore if indeed there are underlying neurodiversity's
  - Would an awareness of how J presents in class with disruptive or distracting behaviours to himself or others be a barrier to him being able to engage with learning

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Positives during online programme:

- J's attendance on the online programme was 100%
- Engagement in Mathematics sessions in particular was EXCELLENT! Problem solving, investigative and mental maths - For the first time J turned his audio on the whole time, offered his ideas, thinking an answers

- J showed his work in art work on 2 occasions- he even showed his face to do this.

- J used the chat function to engage with RF session leaders

- When he was late for sessions (sleeping in the PM) he did log on even if it was half way through the sessions

- J's check ins averaged either a score of 4 or 5- except for one maths session when he said he was a 3
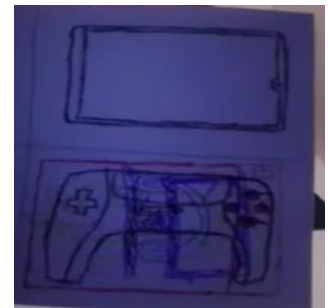
Collaborative working with me and my family:

As part of the 'Royal Free School approach,' we considered and asked parents about a comprehensive background about their child to get a better sense of *how their young person 'makes sense,' not just in the context of education, but as a young person.* ← *An MDT approach*

We used an MDT approach of thinking to establish a 'Formulation' and establish a chronology we discussed:
- * Pregnancy
- * Impressions of their childhood development- how did they engage socially and emotionally with the family/siblings or other children when younger
- * primary school experiences and level of engagement in learning
- * Any previous learning needs that may have been picked up or missed in Primary school
- * Prior Assessments that may have been carried out – query neurodiversity's?
- * Discussions around family traumas, bereavement, geographical moves or any other possible disruption
- * Medical diagnosis or and or Mental health issues past or present (for young person or Parents themselves)
- * Friendship and friendship groups past and present
- * We also asked them more specifically about the whole families experience during COVID

> o *What was the experience of Lockdown like for the whole family in the home?*
> o *What did learning look like for their young person at home during this time when schools were not operational 'in the building' ?*
> o *School response to mobilise and communicate with them as parents?*
> o *What impact they may have felt lockdown had on where their young person was now POST COVID*
> *e.g.- re- engaging with the world as well as more specifically re-engaging with education back in the school building?*

These conversations we the beginning of a 'Formulation' and line of enquiry/curiosity behind what their needs could look like in three ways:

1) Holistically; building a wider network team of services around the young person and the wider family
2) Insight to think about what shape/pace the 'steps up the ladder..' could to look like to re-engage/re-integrate back into the school building
3) Next steps practical advice we might give to parents and schools to sign post different services available to them and/or alternative pathways to explore post intervention more longer term

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Monitoring Impact:

Conversations with parents

- parents/carers were called each week for 10 weeks at a pre-arranged time to talk at length in 'real time' about how individualised transition plans were going for their children but also asking how they themselves were managing with things at home.
  - *Reminding parents/carers that this is a long process, reminding them of the 'wins' amongst what they may feel are regressions or behaviours which make them feel frustrated, or that progress isn't happening fast enough.*

Weekly transition plans

- Transition meetings with home/school/ Linked up every 2 weeks to review EBSA targets, reflect and rate progress against EBSA scales
- Each young person had 4 meetings in total – the intervention lasting a total of 18 weeks.
- *Speaking with parents weekly also allowed us to monitor the pace that transition plans were being implemented by schools, subsequently we could subtly intervene (if necessary/appropriate) by contacting individual schools in the interim weeks we weren't meeting to gently ask how things were going with work being sent home, asking if feedback was being given for work submitted, were check in phone calls home from their key teacher being made.*

Pupil voice/feedback

- Young people were invited and did attend every transition meeting.
- They rated their progress against EBSA scales and contributed to reflecting on their own next steps

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What worked well for J?

➤ **Key teacher Initiating the process for J to engage the therapeutic team** on site in school (Place to be) recognising the urgency of need and long waiting time for CAMHS

  ➤ Thinking 'out side the box'- engaging J with the potential for online sessions with someone from the Place to be team in the first instance, working up to attending sessions on site

➤ **A successful Early help referral** and allocated Family worker assigned to the whole family from the Families in Focus team in Camden

  ➤ Support for all the children in the family
  ➤ Support for parents to address their own mental/social emotional needs
  ➤ Support to advocate for housing / financial aid
  ➤ Pace referral for J to engage in activities outside of the house
  ➤ Regular home visits from family worker to support J to establish routine to his day, address poor sleep hygiene
  ➤ Regular 'eyes' on J to celebrate progress and suggest new challenges for him to widen his experience to engage with the outside world
  ➤ Connections input for post 16 aspirations

➤ **Change in teacher attitudes** about the 'holistic approach' of the intervention

➤ Key teacher **is no longer 'working in isolation'** on J's case

  ➤ Working collaboratively with FIF worker to support their work with J to expand on the momentum of the renewed motivation to increase attendance at school and engage with learning again

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My views after LinkED Up:

Is there anything you would like us to tell your school that you think would help them to understand how you feel about what would help to make you attend more regularly?

"That they should support me and not pressure me because I know school is important but I feel the more you talk about it the more the problem feels bigger and I get more worried."

What goals have you set yourself to think about attending school?

"I want to go outside without feeling anxious."

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An update on How I am doing now…

Activity – Planning

What will you do…
Tomorrow?
Next week?
Next month?

Use the resources to plan an intervention for a pupil or group of pupils in your setting…

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Questions, Reflections & Feedback