



Mental wellbeing and school attendance

A keynote from Anna Freud on school
attendance, belonging and connectedness

Amy Shelton



Anna Freud
building the mental
wellbeing of the
next generation

Who we are

We are a **world leading** children's mental health charity, pioneering mental health care and support for children, young people, and their families for over 70 years.

Our mission is to close the gap in wellbeing and mental health by advancing, translating, delivering and sharing the best science and practice with everyone who impacts the lives of children and families.

We recognise that discrimination and inequality undermine the opportunity for every child to thrive. We aim to be ambitious in driving change in ourselves and supporting change in those we work with, towards a more equitable society.

annafreud.org/about/

annafreud.org/about/diversity/



Anna Freud

Our work

We believe that by working in collaboration with communities and professionals, together we can scale up our support for children, young people, and their families.

At Anna Freud, we champion research and innovation, along with clinical support for children and families. We continuously work in partnership with those of which we serve.

This expertise informs our training and ensures it is not only from a strong evidence base, but has the voice of children and families at its heart.





Setting the scene

Attendance in the news and current
statutory guidance



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Attendance in the news

Almost two million pupils regularly missing school

© 4 March 2022



Blake started dropping out of school in year 8.

By Branwen Jeffreys
Education Editor

One in five children regularly misses school, figures show

© 3 September



By Andre Rhoden-Paul
BBC News

GOV.UK

Home > Education, training and skills

Press release

New regulations for schools in next stage of attendance drive

Every state school in England will now share their daily attendance registers across the education sector.

From: [Department for Education](#) and [The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP](#)
Published 29 February 2024

What next?

February
2023

January
2024

August
2024

March
2022

September
2023

February
2024

Pupil absences remain above pre-Covid levels

© 23 February

Coronavirus



By Hazel Shearing

Press release
Major national drive to improve school attendance

Attendance hubs to more than double to support 1,000 more schools and £15 million investment to expand the attendance mentor pilot programme.

From: [Department for Education](#) and [The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP](#)
Published 8 January 2024



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Working together to improve school attendance

Statutory guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities

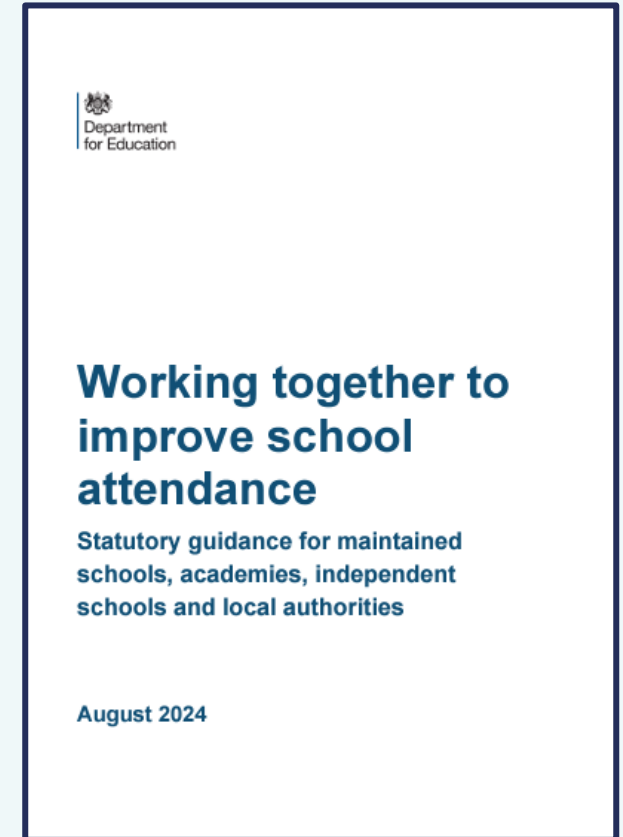
August 2024

Statutory since August 2024



Evidence-base

- Build strong relationships and work jointly with families, listening to and understanding barriers to attendance and working in partnership with families to remove them.
- Develop and maintain a **whole school culture** that promotes the benefits of high attendance.
- Have a clear school attendance policy which all staff, pupils and parents understand.
- Share name and contact details of senior (SLT) member of staff as **Attendance Champion**.
- Regularly monitor and analyse data to identify and support.
- Be particularly mindful of pupils absent from school due to mental or physical ill health or their special educational needs and/or disabilities and provide them with additional support.



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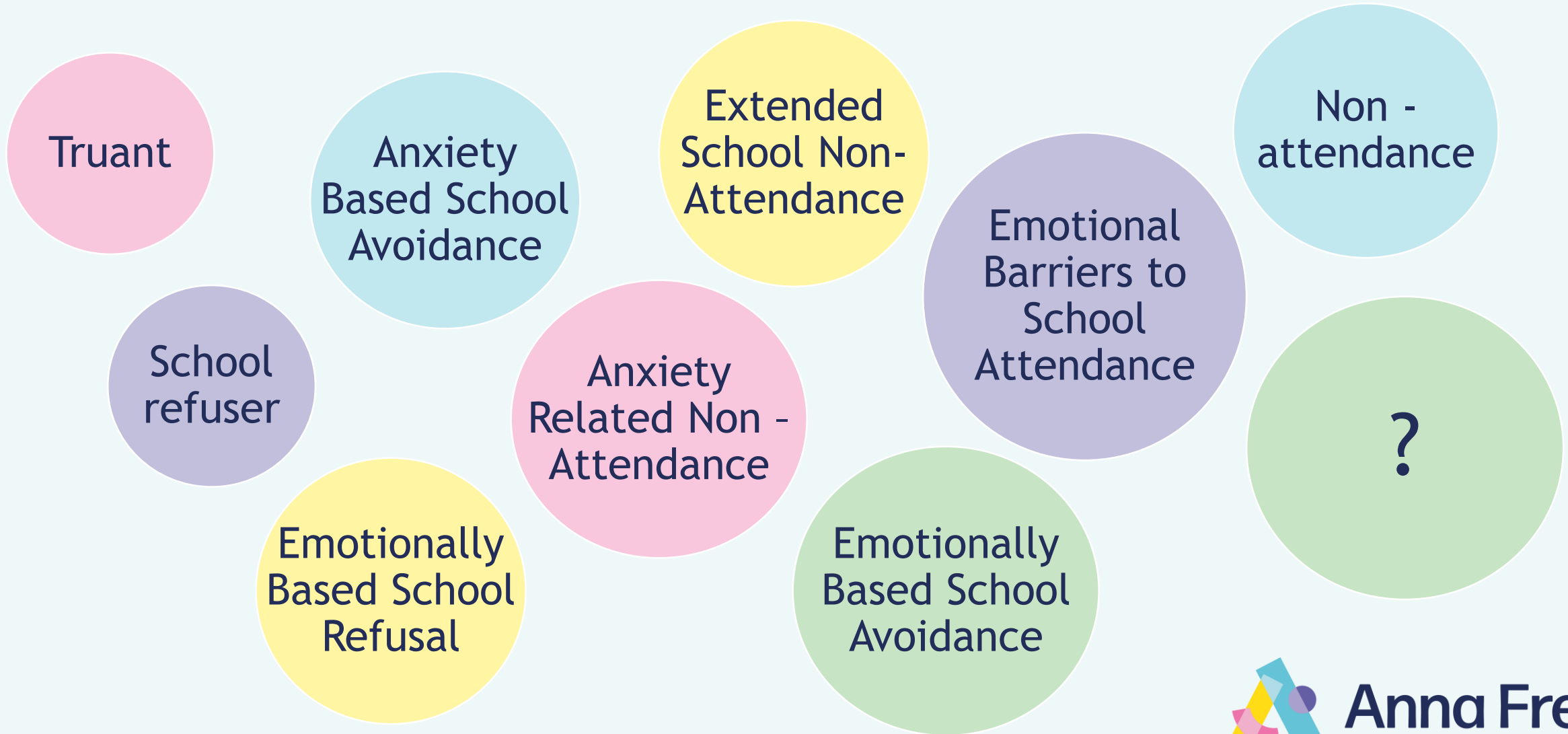
Understanding the function of non-attendance

Reframing our understanding of non-attendance.



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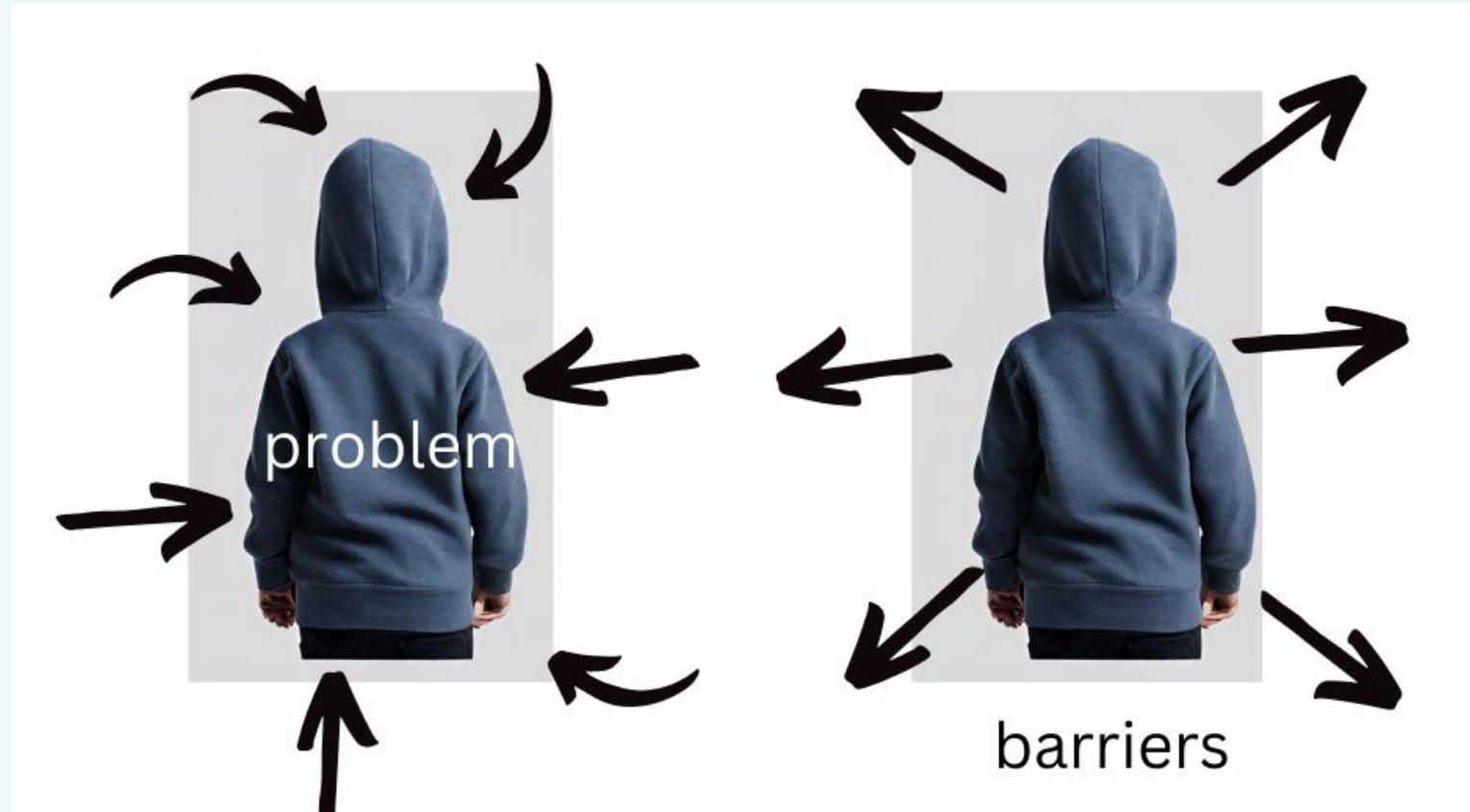
Does language matter?



Where does the problem lie?



Evidence-base

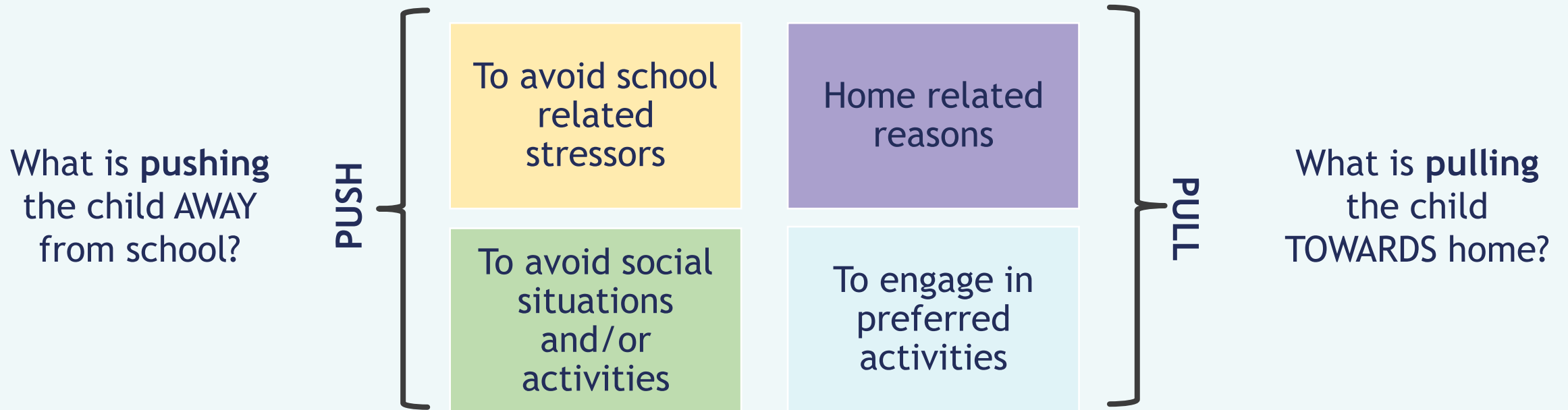


The function of non-attendance



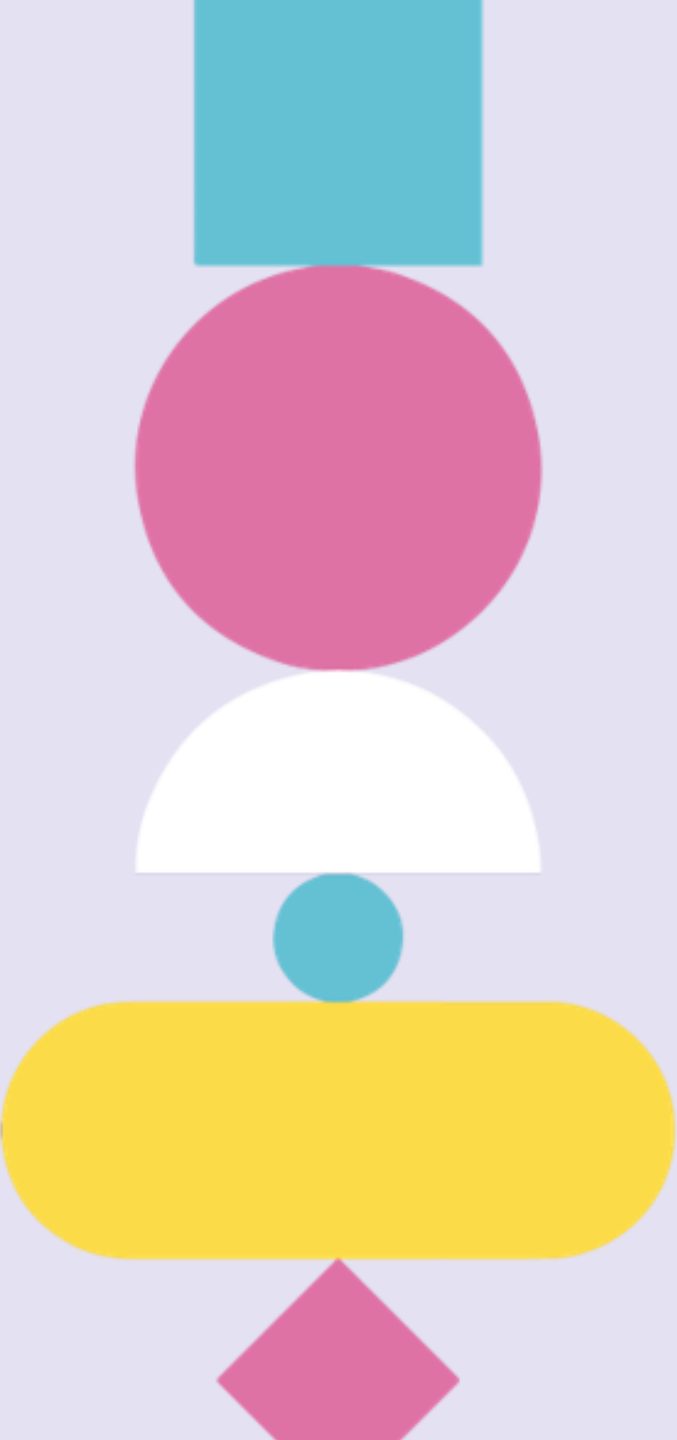
Evidence-base

There is no single cause of non-attendance; there are many possible factors. Research suggests however that there are four key functions (reasons) for school avoidance



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Adapted from Kearney, C.A. (2008) used in Staffordshire guidance



School connectedness and belonging

What do we mean by taking a relational
approach?



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What do we mean by a relational approach?

A relational approach puts **relationships** at the heart of every aspect of school life, in order to create an environment where everyone feels they **belong**, are **safe**, **cared** for and **valued**.

This approach emphasises **connection** through interactions and communications that are **respectful**, **honest**, **compassionate** and **inclusive**.



Why are relationships and belonging so important to the work of schools?



"Being able to treat your students as individuals is probably, in my opinion, the key to education."

Student

- Building strong, positive relationships between staff and students is fundamental to protecting mental health and wellbeing.
- Strategies focused on building relationships are essential.



Intersectionality

Social GGRRAAACCEEESSS



Evidence-base



Burnham, (2012)

Image - Dr. Juliet Young



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Neurodiversity

- Neurodiversity refers to the diversity of human minds meaning it is expected for brains to be different and unique.



- 30.1% of autistic pupils persistently absent (DfE 2021)

“Although they may appear to be coping at school, autistic young people can experience high levels of stress and anxiety... If the triggers for this behaviour are not identified and addressed at school, it can lead to a deterioration in mental health and ultimately an inability to attend school”

Autism Education Trust

- Exclusions of autistic children have more than doubled in the last ten years, from 2,282 in 2010 to 5,197 in 2020.



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Neurodivergent needs



Masking: Children often mask to fit into neurotypical norms. Masking can lead to poor mental health, exhaustion and low self-esteem.



Moods: Neurodivergent children's development is different from their neurotypical peers, including emotional regulation. The brain and body processes information differently, meaning the usual techniques may not be appropriate.



Demands: Different sensory processing needs can mean the demands of school in a neurotypical world can easily overwhelm a neurodivergent child. Meaning they can easily be triggered into meltdown or shut down, often perceived as defiance or challenging behaviour.

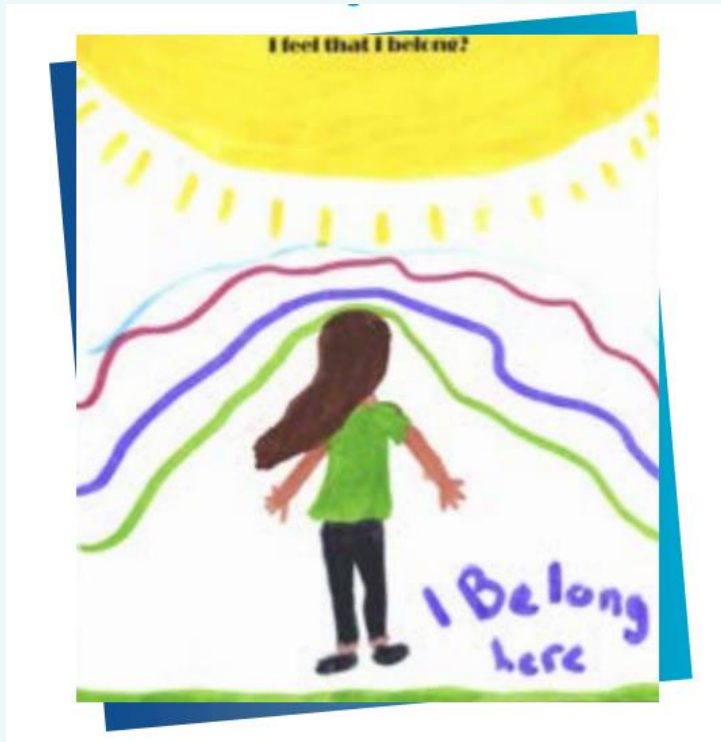


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Missing *in* school before missing *from* school



Why are relationships and belonging so important to the work of schools?



Belonging refers to students' sense of being accepted, valued, included and encouraged by others (teacher and peers) in the classroom setting, and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class.

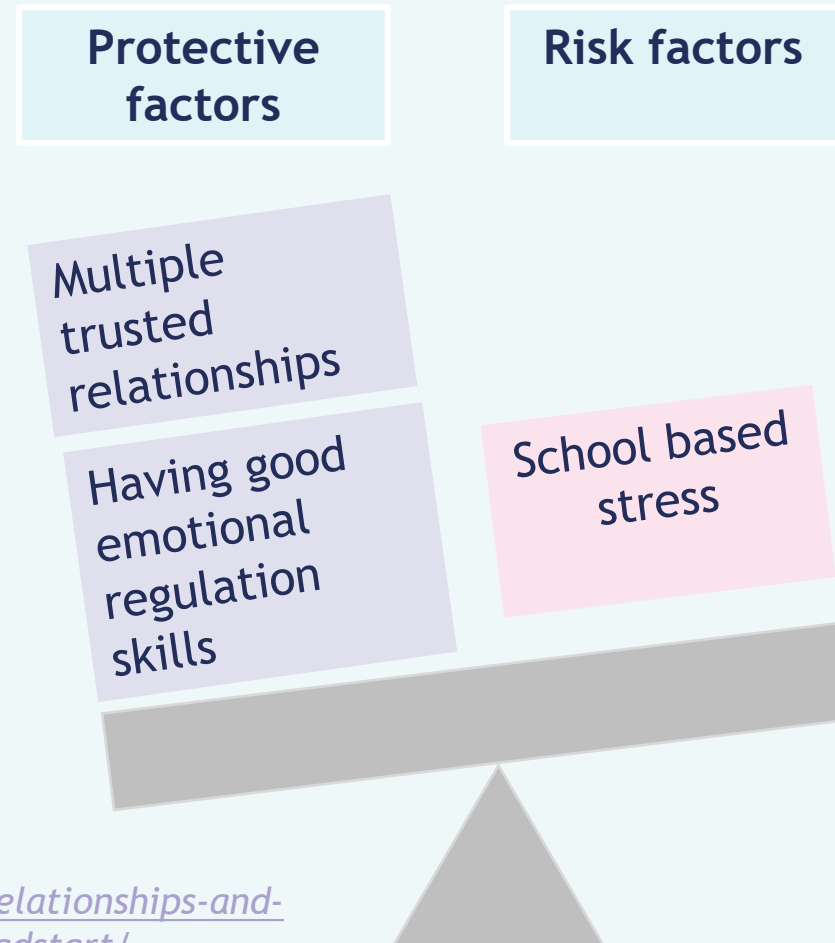
A sense of belonging is positively associated with:

- motivation and academic success
- students are also more likely to experience positive emotions and feelings of self-worth



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Enhancing wellbeing by increasing protective factors: The balancing act



<https://www.annafreud.org/news/trusted-relationships-and-mental-wellbeing-what-we-learned-from-headstart/>



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What protective factors can the school environment offer?

You might think about this in terms of:

- Individual
- Family and friendships
- Community
- Learning environment



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What does the research tell us?

Enhancing **protective factors** within the education setting:

“Think about it like building with layers of Swiss cheese. There will be gaps at each layer, and if you’re relying on just one of those layers there’s a greater chance of falling through the gap. But the more layers you build with, the more gaps are closed.”

Professor Jess Deighton



What does the research tell us: Education for Wellbeing



- One of the world's largest school-based mental health trials.
- Funded by the Department for Education (DfE)
- Led by the Evidence Based Practice Unit, a collaboration between Anna Freud and University College London (UCL)
- Ran from 2018 to 2024 and (findings were published two weeks ago)
- Involved 32,655 students in 513 schools across England
- Five mental health interventions to provide evidence-based guidance on how to best support students' mental health and wellbeing in schools.

INSPIRE

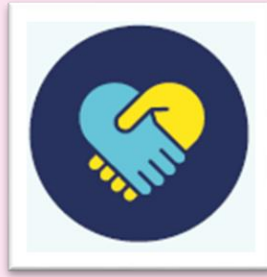
- Explored three initiatives, based either around supporting mental wellbeing or encouraging intended help-seeking.



Mindfulness-Based Exercises



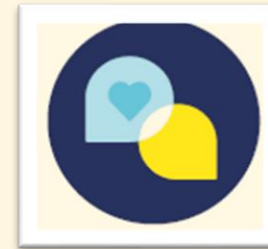
Relaxation Techniques



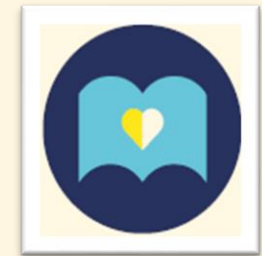
Strategies for Safety and Wellbeing (SSW)

AWARE

- Explored two established school-based initiatives that focus on improving mental health awareness.



YAM



The Guide

Outcomes: changes in **intended help-seeking** or changes in **emotional difficulties**.

Measured 3-6 months post-intervention
and 9-12 months after delivery began



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Impact

This trial found that three interventions show promise for use in schools:

1. Strategies for Safety and Wellbeing, for both primary and secondary schools

“To help me feel safe in school. So if I was feeling upset or something, I would know who to go to straight away” (SSW).

2. Relaxation Techniques, for primary schools only

3. Mindfulness-Based Exercises for secondary schools only.

Evidence from this study does not recommend YAM or The Guide as with YAM there was a lack of overall impact and for both there were indications that they might increase emotional difficulties in the longer term.

Schools that saw the most positive impact had a whole-school approach, that the intervention fit complemented.



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A collection of colorful geometric shapes (squares, triangles, circles) in shades of blue, yellow, pink, and purple, arranged in a dynamic, overlapping pattern on the left side of the slide.

A whole-school approach: universal

Considering the culture and ethos of the school, what
happening on a whole-school level to prevent non-
attendance



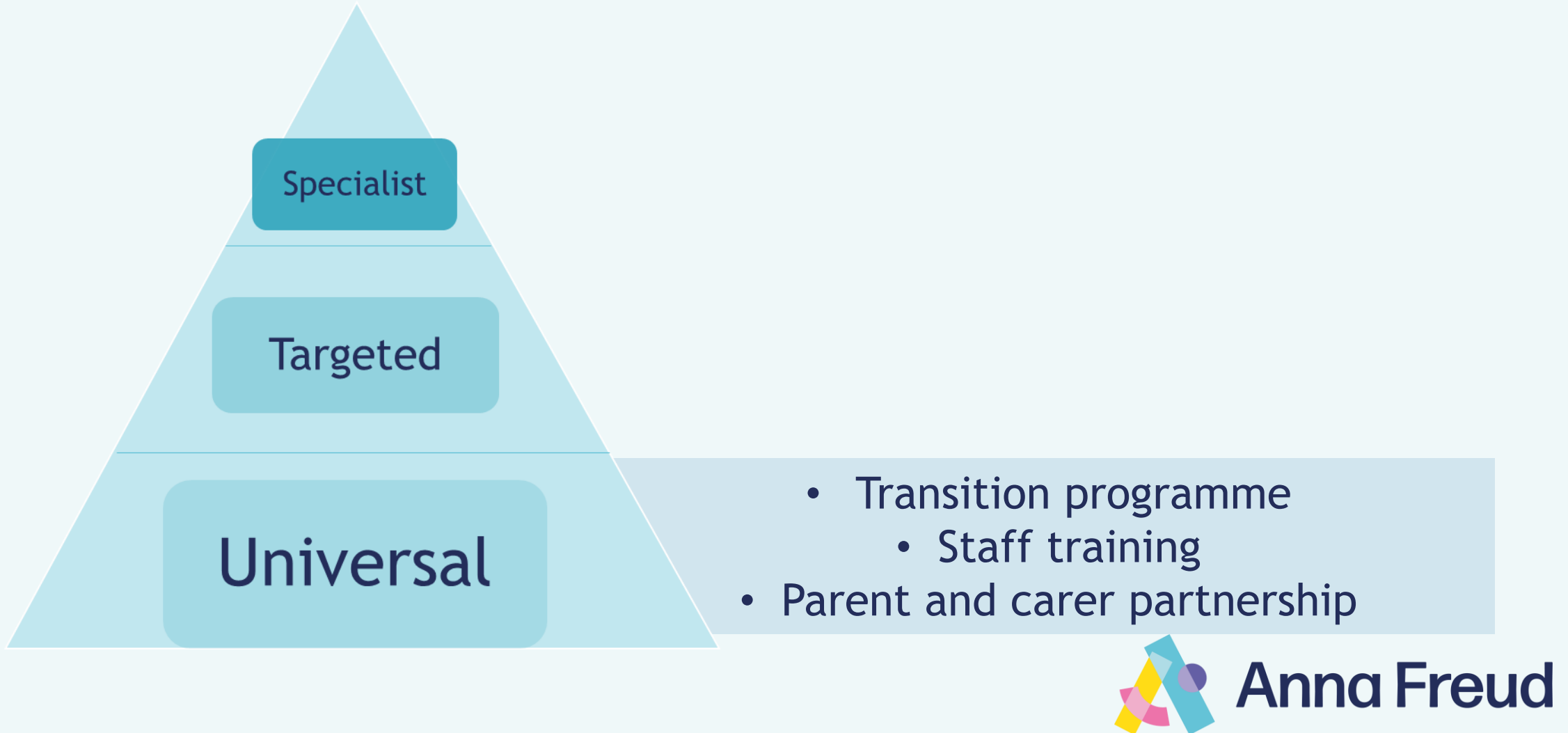
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**What were some of your
challenges regarding
attendance?**



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Using a graduated response



Audit your current whole school approach to attendance

 Devon County Council

Appendix C: Good Practice when Supporting Students Displaying School Avoidance: Self-Audit Tool

	Provision currently available	In need of development ?	Next Steps/Actions
Whole-School Level			
Systems in place for the early identification of school avoidance behaviours			
Clear and consistent bullying and behaviour policies			
Is there a nominated senior member of staff responsible for the coordination and support of students in this group			
Clear and appropriate attendance policy that takes into account the nature of school avoidance			
Excellent transition arrangements for vulnerable, 'shy' students or those with risk factors of school avoidance. Support should include work with parents, staff and development of peer and adult relationships			
Social, emotional skills embedded in the curriculum			
Staff have a holistic view of students and are accepting and inclusive towards those experiencing challenges.			
Training and CPD for Staff			

1

Devon: School attendance audit tool

 Lincolnshire County Council
Working for a better future

EBSA Self Audit Tool

The Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) Self Audit Tool can be used as part of the Initial Steps within Lincolnshire's EBSA Pathway, where the focus is on early intervention & effective whole school systems. School plays a key role in the identification of children and young people who are currently experiencing or are at risk of EBSA. It is important for schools to develop effective whole school systems to support young people, be vigilant to early indicators and employ a thorough assess, plan, do and review cycle placing the child or young person at the heart of the interventions.

Schools should take a preventative measure towards EBSA, with a focus on early intervention and prevention. It is important to identify the early warning signs of EBSA. If unaddressed, the EBSA behaviours can become entrenched making it difficult to intervene once the child or young person has been out of education for some time.

The eight principles are linked to the DfE and Public Health England document: [Promoting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing)

The indicators listed below are suggested points of reflection, designed to stimulate discussion and guide plans and developments. They are not an exhaustive list. Some will be more / less pertinent or relevant for settings than others. There will inevitably be cross-over with other audit documents related to areas such as mental health, attendance or whole school inclusion.

Name:	Role:			
Name of School:	Date:			
Principle 1 – Leadership and Management				
There are clearly identified roles and responsibilities amongst staff, including a nominated senior member of staff who oversees EBSA policy and practice. SENCo, MH Lead and pastoral team have status within the school and work collaboratively. Senior leadership team embody and model school values from the top down				
Indicators:	Yes No Evidence Action or follow up (Who, what & by when)			
Emotional wellbeing is seen as everyone's responsibility across the continuum from development of strengths and wellbeing to targeted intervention.				

Lincolnshire: School attendance audit



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Parent and carer partnership

Working collaboratively with parents and carers through building a relationship of trust.



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- Have you received training for managing parent and carer relationships?



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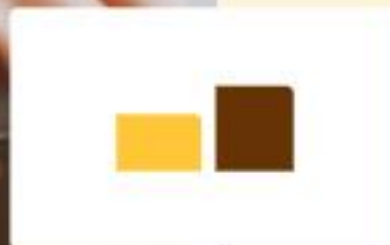
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Training for managing parent/carer relationships

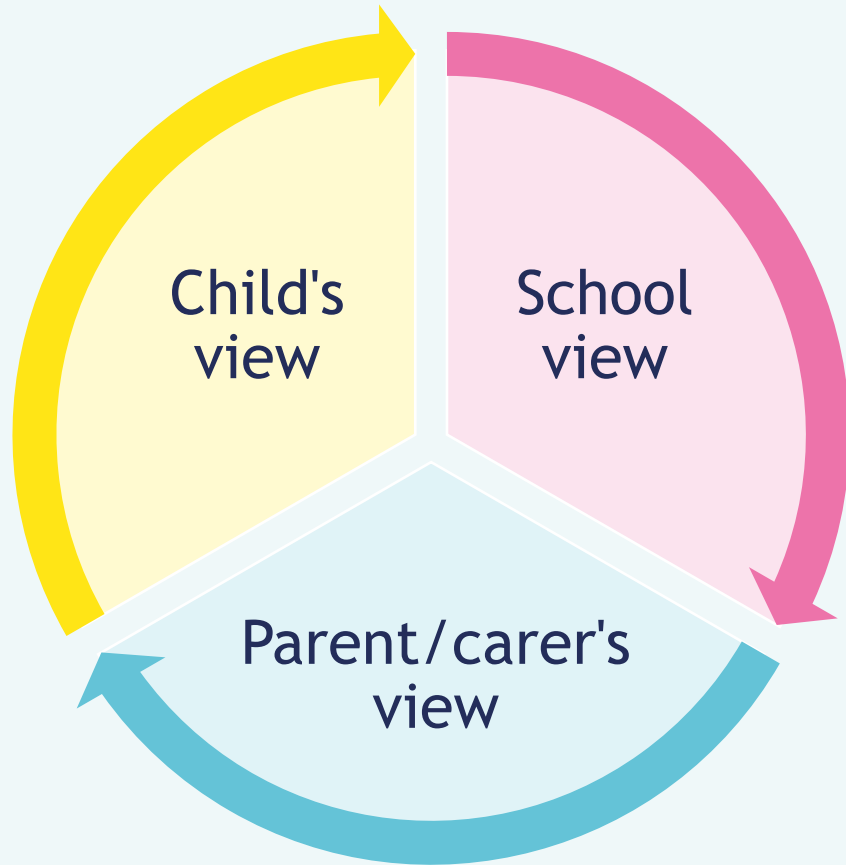


- **52% of respondents had never had any training.**
- Those that had received some training was during initial teacher training year.

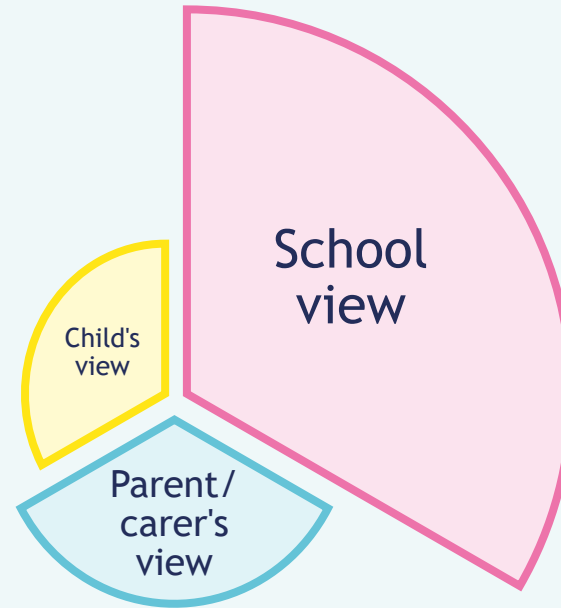


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Collaborative participation



What we need to hear



What we maybe hear

- How can we facilitate space for different viewpoints, whilst creating a shared understanding?
- How can we engage the family in a way that reduces shame, accusation and judgement?



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Parent and carer partnership

***Partnership:** Collaborative planning and problem-solving between parents or carers and staff to solve children's behavioural and emotional challenges.*

Recognise that partnership with parents or carers is not always a given.

To best work with parents or carers, **trust** must be established.

Establishing positive relationships at the earliest point, so that when the time comes to have a “high stakes” conversations, it feels safer for those involved.

Find out which parents or carers may need that “trust building” beforehand.



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A whole-school approach: targeted

What practical tools can be implemented identify and support those at higher risk of non-attendance.



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Understanding autism and non-attendance

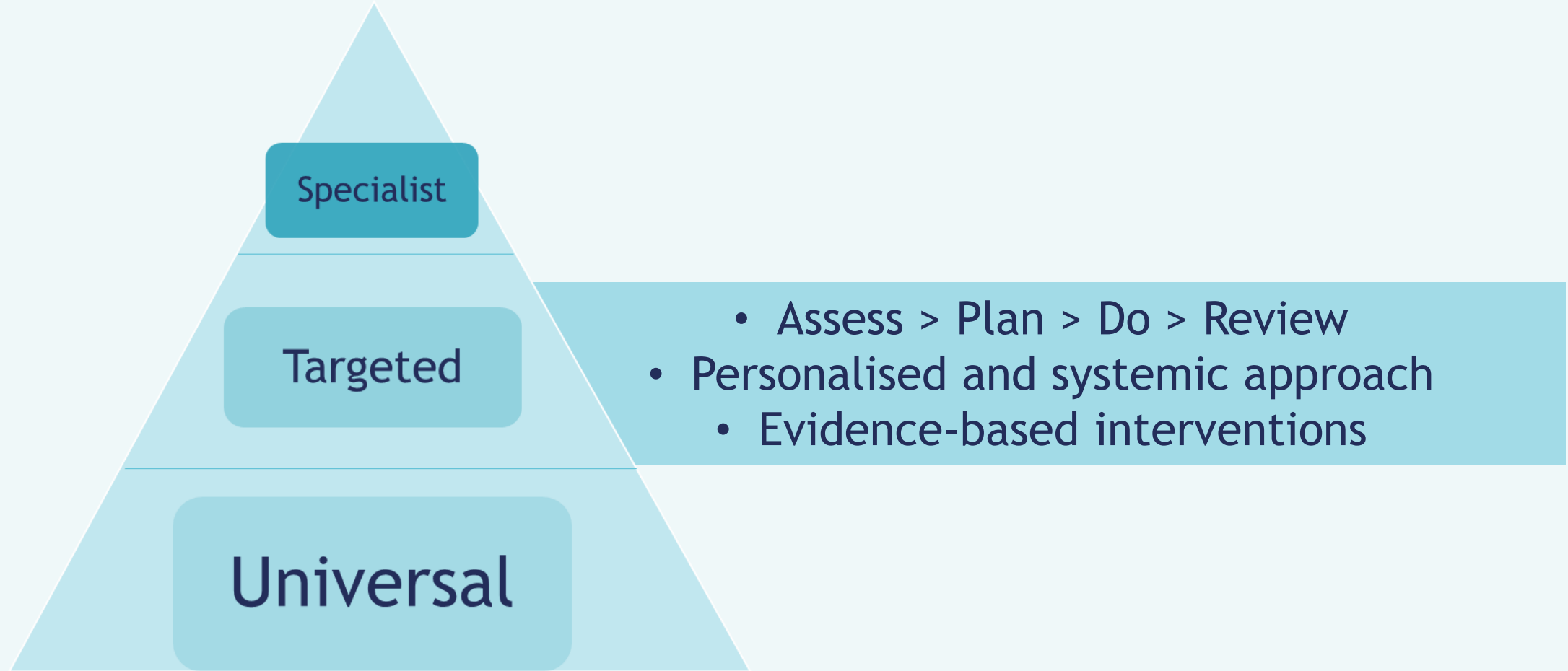


Evidence-base

*‘Well-meaning responses by school may amount to an invitation for them to return when they feel able, but this positions the issue as a problem **within the child** - and for the child to solve. In reality, the reason for absence often lies in school and outside the control of the young person. Without an informed effort to understand why they stop attending, the likelihood of a successful reintegration is remote.’*

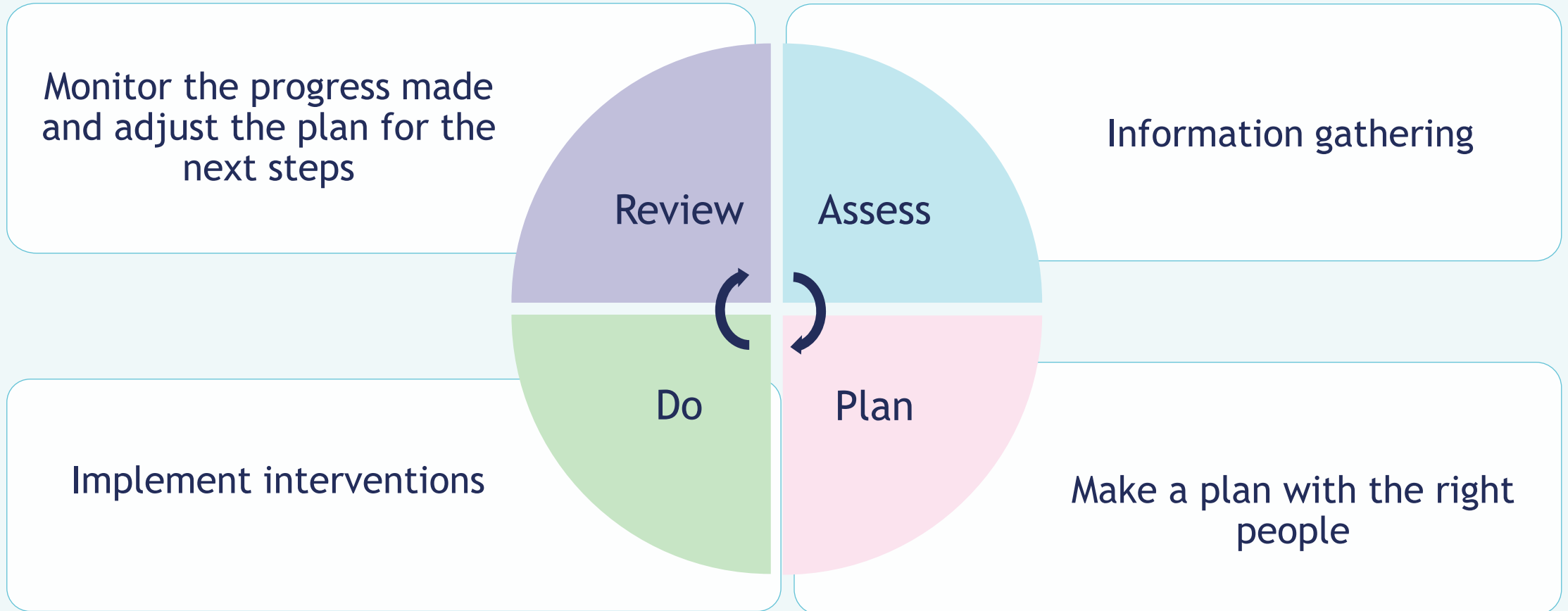


Using a graduated response



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Assess, plan, do, review



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Assess

Assess

Building up a holistic picture of
the contributing factors



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Formulation

What might be happening for the child or young person.



Building a systemic picture

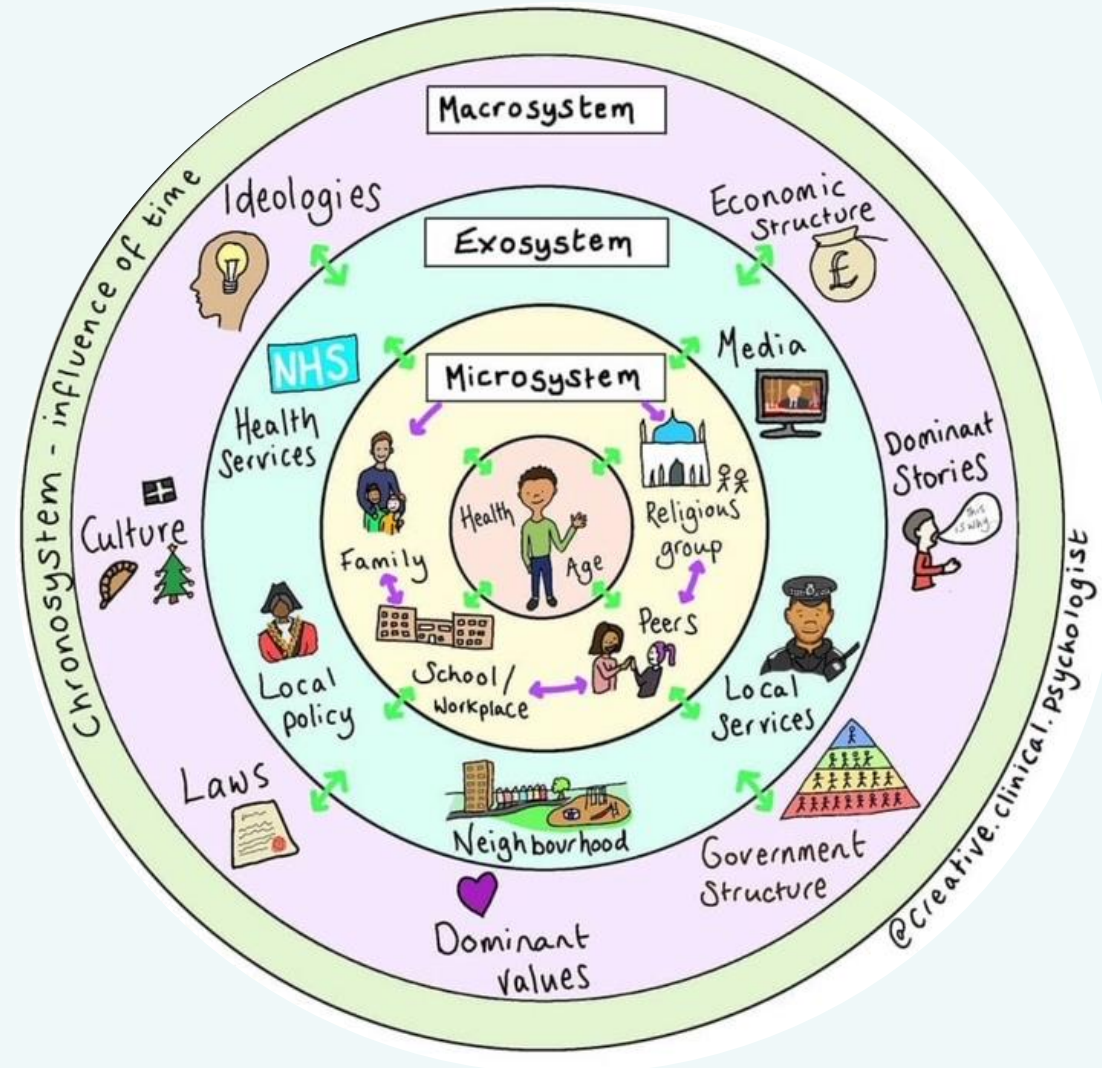
- Considering the systems around the child / young person.
- Highlight gaps in our understanding and approach the situation more practically.
- Facilitates tailored and personalised support, helps to highlight any potential barriers early on.
- Identifies risk and protective factors.



Building a systemic picture

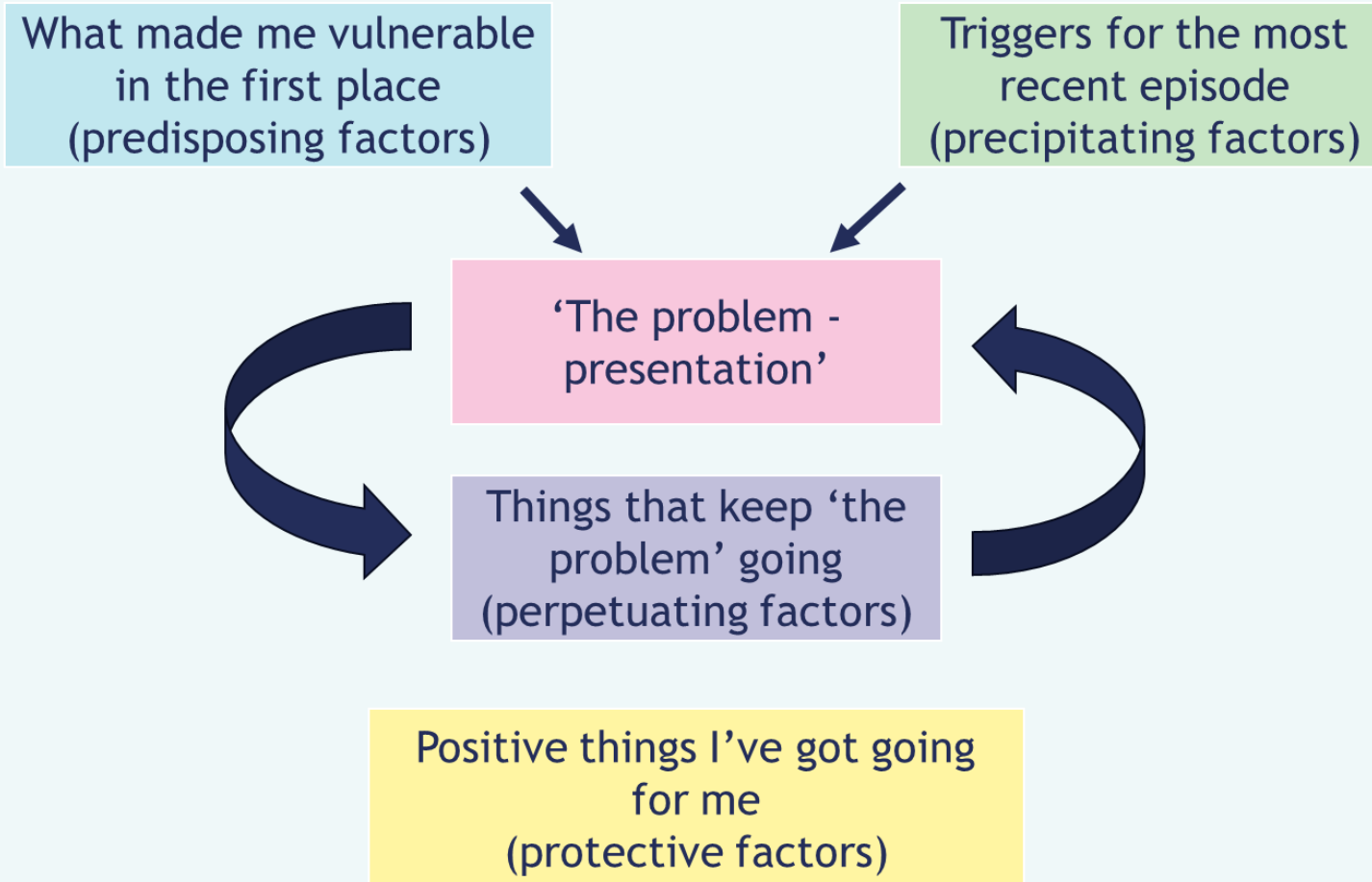


Evidence-base



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The 5Ps formulation



What made me vulnerable in the first place? (Predisposing factors)	Triggers for the most recent episode (Precipitating factors)
"The problem - presentation"	
Things that keep "the problem" going (Perpetuating factors) (These might include things that I do to control the problem)	
Positive things that I've got going for me (Protective factors)	

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Layla

Layla is 15 and is academically capable. Ever since she returned to school from lockdown her attendance has been inconsistent. She is a quiet student but used to have a small group of reliable friends and has always completed her classwork and homework to a high standard.

More recently her approach to her work has become less enthusiastic. Teachers have noticed that her moods can be variable. Some days she seems happy and gets on well in class, other days she's very quiet, lacks concentration and doesn't seem to want to participate in anything. She has begun to forget to complete homework and doesn't have much to say when asked about it.

She has asked to move seats in two of her subjects. She told one teacher that she thinks people are judging her. For a while at the start of the year she asked her form tutor if she could stay in her classroom at lunch time but that teacher has now gone on maternity leave. She frequently brings notes excusing her from PE.

Layla lives at home with her mum, dad and older brother. Her parents both work in the health service doing stressful and demanding jobs. Her older brother is in 6th form studying A levels. He is an academic high achiever, but experienced significant homophobic and racist bullying lower down in the school. Layla has a very strong relationship with her maternal grandparents who live nearby. Her grandfather retired from work recently because of ill health. Layla worries about him but also enjoys spending time with him.

When they were at primary school, Layla and her brother witnessed a violent street incident resulting in the death of a teenager. Layla and her parents declined the school's offer of mental health support at that time.

Recently Layla's attendance has become a more serious concern. Attendance on Mondays is particularly poor. On other days of the week she frequently comes in to school late. Often her mum has to bring her and Layla sometimes becomes distressed after her mum leaves. She will usually calm down quickly and then attend classes. However, she very frequently asks to leave lessons for various reasons.

Last week Layla had a dispute with a teacher because she was using her mobile phone during the lesson. Layla shouted at the teacher and wouldn't hand her phone over as required by school rules. She left the classroom and then went home without permission. Layla has not come to school since.

Another student has confided in a member of staff they saw cut marks on Layla's arm. Layla doesn't seem to spend much time with her former friends.



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Reflection - Formulation (5Ps)

Assess

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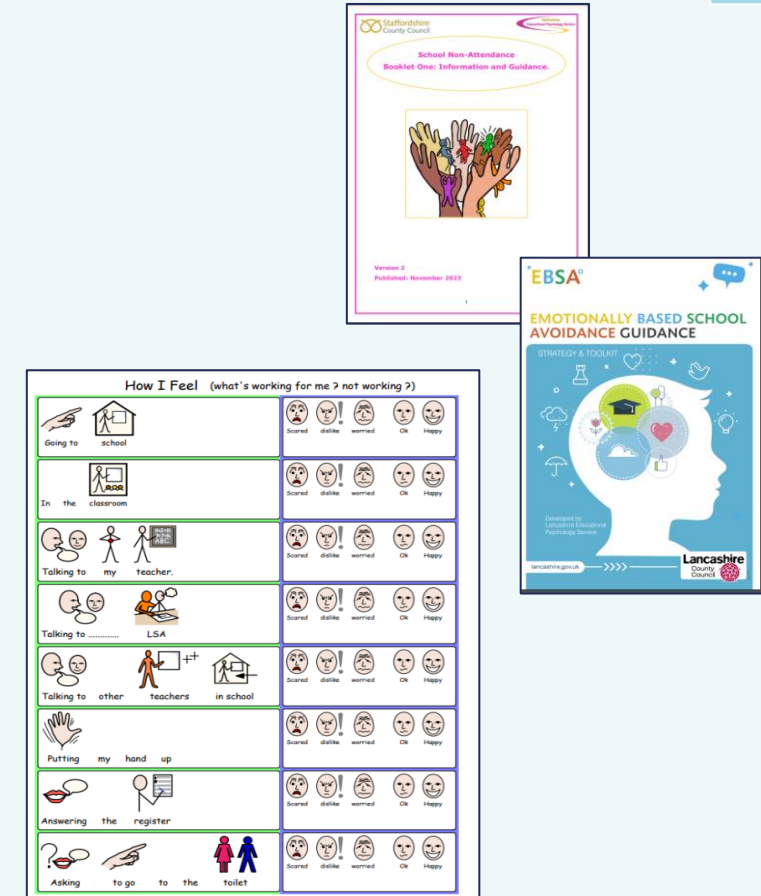
Using tools to refine understanding



How can we use resources?

Assess

- Using the resources will be helpful way to information gather about the potential push and pull factors, however they may be limited if its not the right person, the trusted adult, using them with the child or young person.
- Schools will need to select and adapt these based on:
 - Student age
 - Reading and language skills
 - Communication and/or learning difficulties



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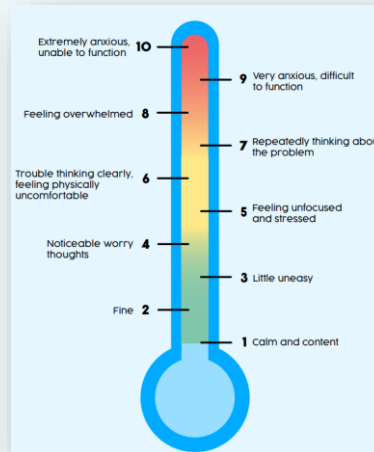
Seeking the detail through scaling activities

Assess

- Scaling tools give an insight into academic difficulties, relationships with teachers or other peers, or even the specific learning environment.
- For example, are the lights too bright in a certain room and how can this be mitigated.

Bromley 'Sort-it' activity

 No problem	 Sometimes a problem	 Big Problem	 Nothing to do with me
English	Maths	Science	
Art	PE	DT	
Music	ICT	Circle Time	
Talking	Friends	Writing	



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Plan

Plan

Planning to best support
the child or young person.



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Reasonable adjustments

Plan

"When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower"

Alexander Den Heijer



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When co-developing any reintegration plan, factors to consider are:

Plan



Do we have an understanding of their sensory profile?

How do they manage daily transitions within the setting?

How do they feel about interactions in class?

Which members of staff are they most comfortable with?

Who are their support network at school?

Are there safe spaces for them at school?



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Reintegration planning

Plan

A good reintegration plan:

- Is **child-led** and supported by parents/carers and school.
- Is informed by what the **child finds difficult (assess)** and not by timetables or other contextual restrictions.
- Has small steps to allow for confidence to develop and success celebrated.
- Is supplemented by appropriate, evidence-based interventions/referrals.

Adapted from Buckinghamshire EBSA toolkit

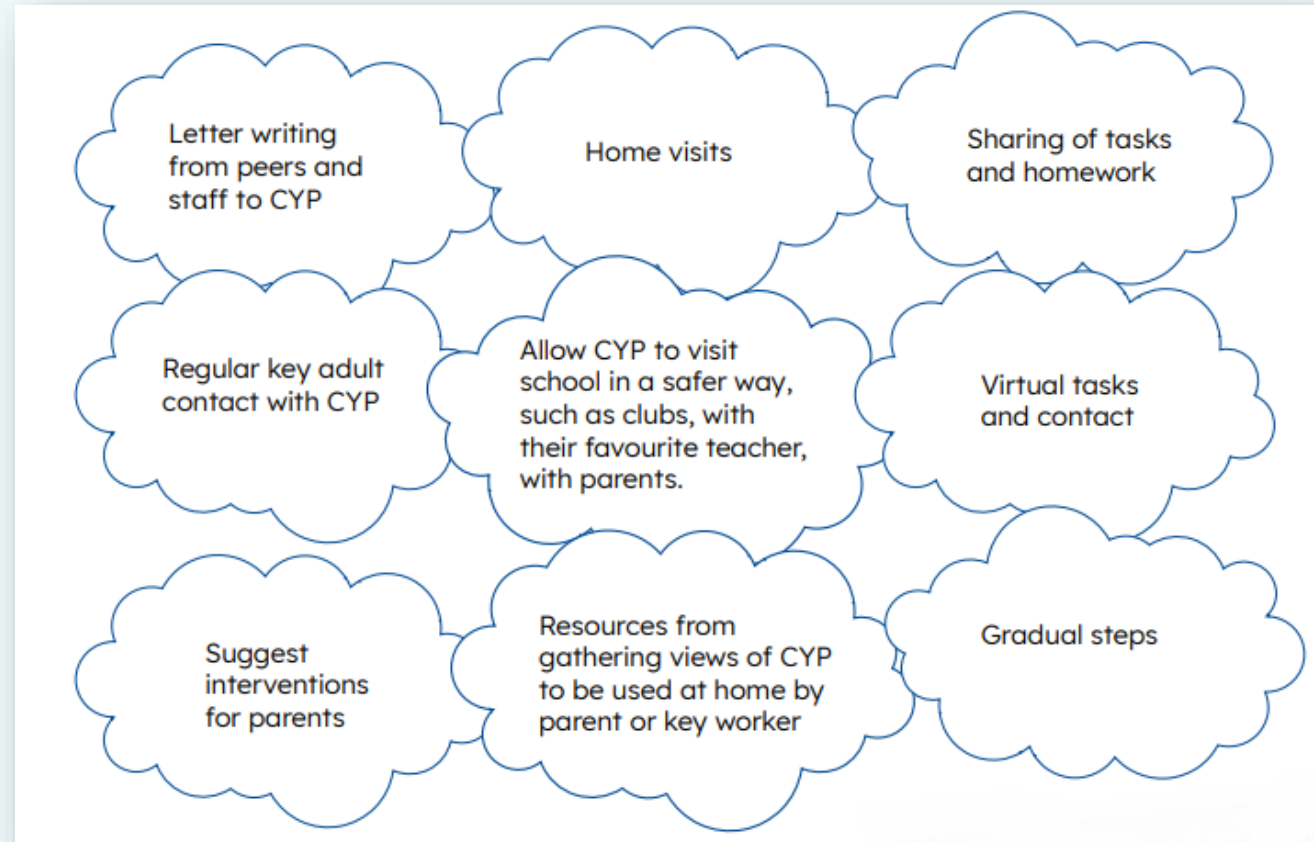


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Maintaining connection

Plan

How do we ensure we maintain the relationship between school and home?



Plan examples

Plan

WSSC Return to School Planning Tool - Appendix 1

Return to School Planning - Feedback and analysis sheet

Child or young person (CYP) name:	Staff member name:
'About Me' section: What things and people are important to the CYP?	'My Home' section: How did they feel being at home? What did they do? How did they feel about home learning?
'Return to School' section: How do they feel about returning to school? Are they looking forward to anything? What are their questions about returning to school? What would they like to get better/need support with?	
'My Coping Toolkit/When I Feel Worried' section: What activities were selected? Do they have a preference for one type?	
Integrate the information above and the pictures selected on pages 8&9 (Version A) and 7&8 (Version B) to identify:	
Push and pull factors keeping them away from school: Avoid situations which are negative, social pressures and health concerns. (Pictures with border colours light green, grey, blue and purple. These are areas to reduce through support.)	Push and pull factors encouraging them towards home: Attention and time from parents, preferring to spend time more time out of school as it is more fun or stimulating. (Pictures with border colours dark green and orange. These are areas to reduce through support.)
Push and pull factors encouraging them to attend school	
Factors to promote attendance that were selected (Pictures with yellow borders. Find opportunities to promote these)	Factors to promote growth which were not selected (Pictures with yellow borders. Find opportunities to develop these.)

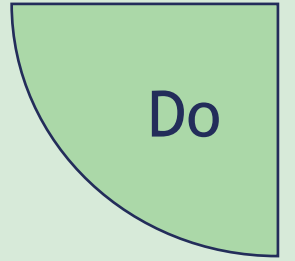
4.5 Pupil / Young Person's Attendance Support Plan



My Attendance Support Plan

Name:	My plan will be reviewed on (date) by (who)
My key adults: I can get help by...	My safe place: I can go to this place by...
What I'm finding difficult at the moment: • • • 	
My next steps are to: • • 	
To help me...	
My teachers will:	
My family will:	
I will: 	
Other changes in school (e.g. timetable, lunchtimes):	





Do

What are the next steps for the young person



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Interventions

Lincolnshire



Universal and Targeted Approaches

The interventions that could be used will greatly depend on the specific needs of the child or young person and the nature of the issues identified through the phases of the EBSA Pathway. Any provision that is put in place should not be considered a long-term solution but a bridge towards eventual reintegration. Continued assessments to ensure appropriate provision is in place is key. While not an exhaustive list, here are some potential interventions or adjustments:

> Checking and doing the basics:

For example:

- Getting enough sleep
- Eating healthfully
- Exercising
- Going on walks
- Connecting with people the CYP loves and/or trusts, including trusted adults at school.

> Interventions and adjustments:

For example:

- Targeted interventions on key areas of difficulty
- Revision of instructional practices
- Revision of how the information is presented and delivered
- Differentiated learning approaches
- Adjusted expectations in line with emotional needs
- Allowing a child to start a few minutes earlier or later than their class
- Change of classes / form group
- Appropriate positioning within the class to reduce the impact of sensory needs
- Allowing a child to sit with a child they have an established relationship with
- Phased return starting with favourite / least challenging lesson or time of the day, starting small and building up; for example 15 minutes if a whole lesson is too much

Essex

Function 2: Avoiding difficult social situations, evaluations or judgements in school

As above, interventions should include teaching about anxiety and how to manage it. Pupils may also need to be taught specific social skills and given opportunities to practice coping skills in real-life situations, starting small and building up to those which are most challenging for them.

If their anxiety and social difficulties are linked to neurological diversity (such as Autism Spectrum Disorder), they may need more specialised interventions. Seek further advice from your school's link Educational Psychologist or Inclusion Partner, where necessary.

Bromley

Emotionally-Based School Avoidance (EBSA) Interventions Sheet

Pupil: _____ Year: ____ Date: _____

Initial actions that may resolve specific issues/barriers

✓	Personalised support/intervention
	Address and resolve any bullying or friendship issues that may be taking place (a restorative justice approach may be appropriate)
	Ask class/subject teacher(s) to make any specific and simple reasonable adjustments, for example changing the seating plan or modifying homework expectations
	Agree a change or set of changes in the routine around school with parents/carers (for example, an exact plan for 'drop-off' or public transport in the morning might be helpful)

Class-based differentiation and strategies for teachers and support staff to support Quality First Teaching

✓	Personalised support/intervention
	All of the pupil's class teachers and support staff made aware of pupil's circumstances and relevant aspects of the plan
	Advised differentiation and personalised strategies (some of which may be specific to SEN) listed in a central place which is easily accessible to each class teacher and teaching assistant and/or provided in a one-page profile



Wrap-around support and pupil self-care resources

✓	Personalised support/intervention
	Safe space(s)
	Buddy/peer support system
	Seating plan for each subject/teacher
	Colour-coded/visual timetable including all parts of the school day (not only lessons); this might include the step-by-step school journey and required equipment, as well as before/after school provision and break time arrangements/options
	'Circle of adults' personal reference (features names and photographs of key staff that the pupil can check in with)
	Special responsibilities/jobs
	'What if' prompts personal reference (what to do in anxiety-provoking situations, e.g. 're-set activities')
	Signal card, to show a teacher/support staff if they are feeling overwhelmed (important for the pupil and staff to know what will happen when they use this – i.e. what response the pupil can expect from adults and what adults can expect the pupil to do)



Anna Freud

Do

What if prompts

Do

If I don't know where my classroom is...

I will get my plan from my student planner and see if I can work it out

I will try and ask someone in my class

I will ask my teacher

If someone calls me an unkind name...

I will try and walk away and not swear or shout

I will tell a teacher why I feel upset

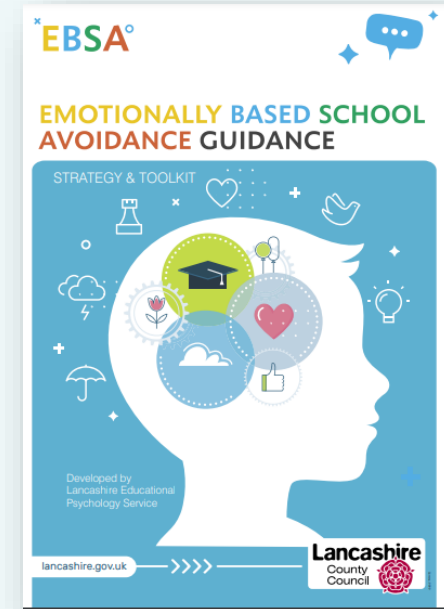
My teacher will deal with it and talk to that person

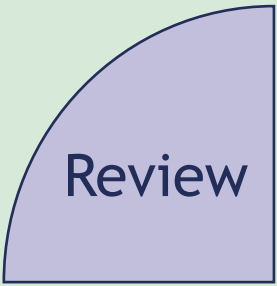
What if I have nothing to do at breaktime...

I could go to the library

I could buy a snack and eat it in the dining hall

I could find my buddy





Review

Review

Reviewing the actions and support with the child or young person



Anna Freud

Review

Action and support plan should be regularly reviewed with the child or young person, parents and carers, key staff (SENCo, key person, etc.) and other professionals (MHSTs, social workers, family support workers, etc.).

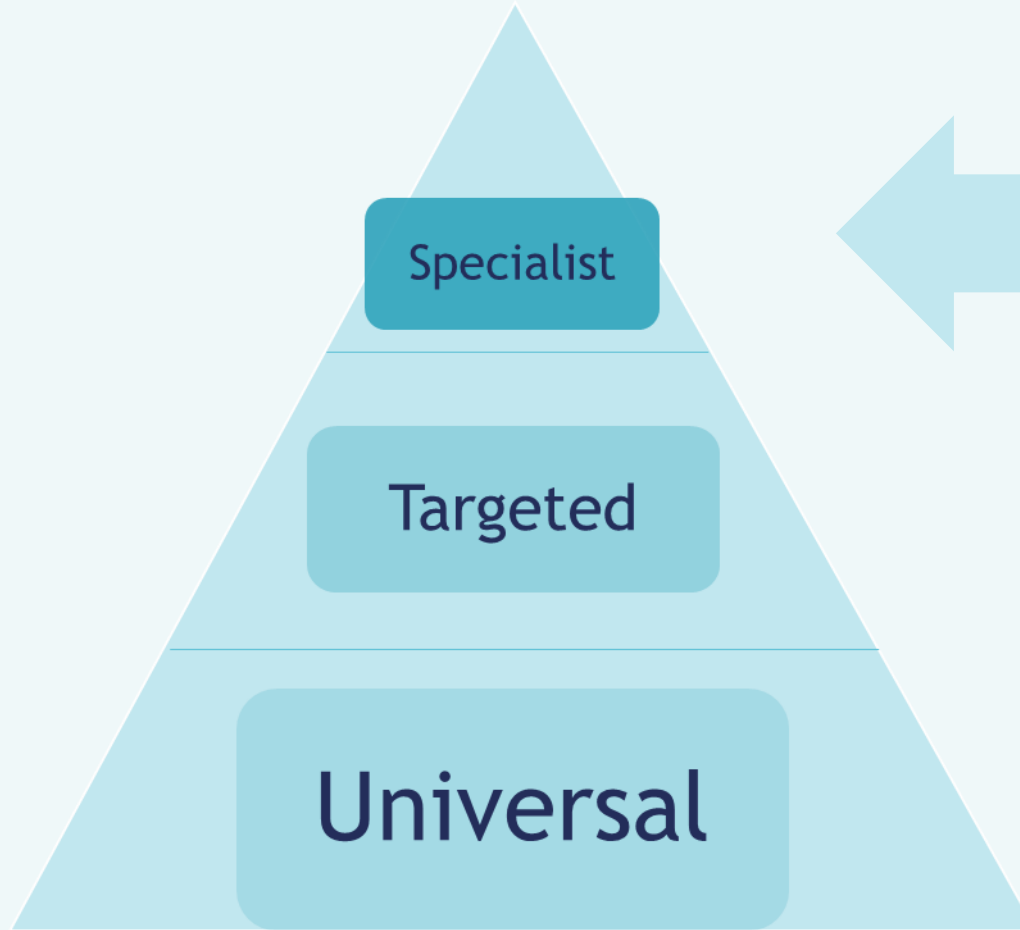
- Celebrate progress.
- Remember that progress isn't always linear.
- Identify if there needs to be further consultation with, or referrals to, other agencies.
- Consider any new information or changes to the situation and plan next steps.
- Continue the cycle of **Assess, Plan, Do, Review**.



Anna Freud

Using a graduated response

Review



Referrals to specialist support:

- School Attendance Support Team
- Ed Psych team
- CYPMHS
- Social Care
- Virtual Schools (for care experienced children)
- Youth Justice
- SEN/Disability Teams



Anna Freud



Good practice

Preparing for success.



Anna Freud

What did young people said would help them thrive in school?

1

Listen

-Daisy

2

Be curious

-Robyn

3

Prioritise wellbeing

-Erin

4

Take action

-Jane

5

Be more informed

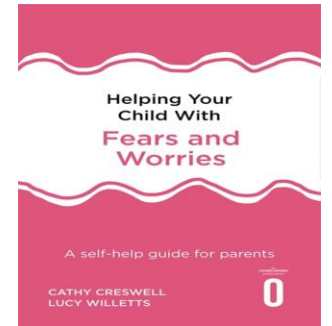
-Alex



Anna Freud

Support for attendance - What's happening in DCC?

- › Supporting School Attendance - Attendance and Wellbeing (EBSA) Web Content for parents/carers and schools
- › Prevention and Early Identification: Supporting School Attendance: Understanding Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) and what to do about it | DES Training to all mainstream primary and secondary schools on how to use The ATTEND Framework
- › Expanding the Education Key Worker Team (EKW)
- › Developing Parent/Carer support: Overcoming Programme and Family Practitioners within EKW Team
- › Use of AV1s - Pilot





Key resources

To accompany this training and support your development.



Anna Freud



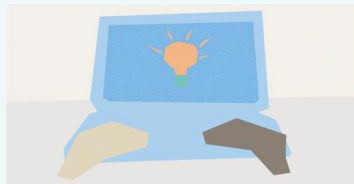
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Anti-racism and mental health in schools e-learning

[A podcast, 10 practical resources and an e-learning course on anti-racism and mental health in schools.](#)

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Anna Freud



Thank you

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Anna Freud
building the mental
wellbeing of the
next generation