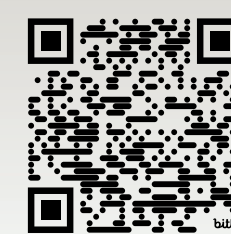


Emotionally Based School Avoidance

MISSING
SCHOOL



Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), also known as ‘school refusal’, is a school attendance problem that impacts students of all ages and their families. While its prevalence in Australia is unknown, concern has increased substantially since Covid-19. Few evidence-based interventions exist. Efficacious approaches involve collaboration between the child, family and school to understand underlying factors and the provision of educational and psychosocial supports that enable improved attendance and engagement in learning.



Health condition

- Occurs when a student is unable to attend school due to emotional distress associated with school
- Students who avoid school stay at home despite parent/carer efforts to support attendance
- Children who avoid school do so due to anxiety or distress rather than poor behaviour



Student population

EBSA can **occur at all stages of schooling**

EBSA is over-represented among neurodivergent students, students with mental health and health conditions, and students with disabilities

EBSA occurs about **equally among boys and girls**

“School avoidance is a complex issue that many families and schools alike struggle with. We need greater understanding and capacity to respond. What we do hear from parents of children with EBSA is that curiosity, listening and empathy go so much further than judgement and pressure.”



Associate Professor Glenn Melvin
MPsych, PhD. School of Psychology,
Deakin University. Researching novel
interventions and assessment methods
for adolescent mental illness and school
attendance problems.



School absence patterns

- Average duration unclear; can be days, weeks, months and even years
- Absence patterns may be hard to see; can start gradually or suddenly
- More frequent in transition times e.g., start of primary/secondary school or school year
- May be precipitated by a stressor e.g., bullying, social isolation, sport, tests, or absence due to serious illness



Challenges for students

- Being behind with schoolwork can create another barrier to regular attendance
- Avoiding school leads to missed opportunities to connect with peers and school staff and consolidate relationships
- Explaining absences to peers can feel stressful
- Engaging in regular routines and activities despite missing school



Challenges for families

- Parents may struggle to understand what is causing the emotional distress about school
- Parents report feeling shame and embarrassment about their child’s absence from school and worry about their future
- Parents describe feeling isolated and not knowing where to go for support



What schools should know

- Be aware of the symptoms and signs of EBSA
- Be curious about what might underlie the school avoidance – there is no one clear pattern
- Be aware of which students are more likely to avoid school – neurodivergence, disability, anxiety and mental health problems increase risk
- Early detection is crucial – create awareness in schools and monitor attendance data to help identify children at risk
- The impact of EBSA is not only on the child but typically on the whole family
- Adjustments at school that support attendance can be critical to re-engagement in learning
- Be knowledgeable of professionals and services that can support students who experience EBSA and their families
- Lastly, don’t underestimate the value of offering some hope