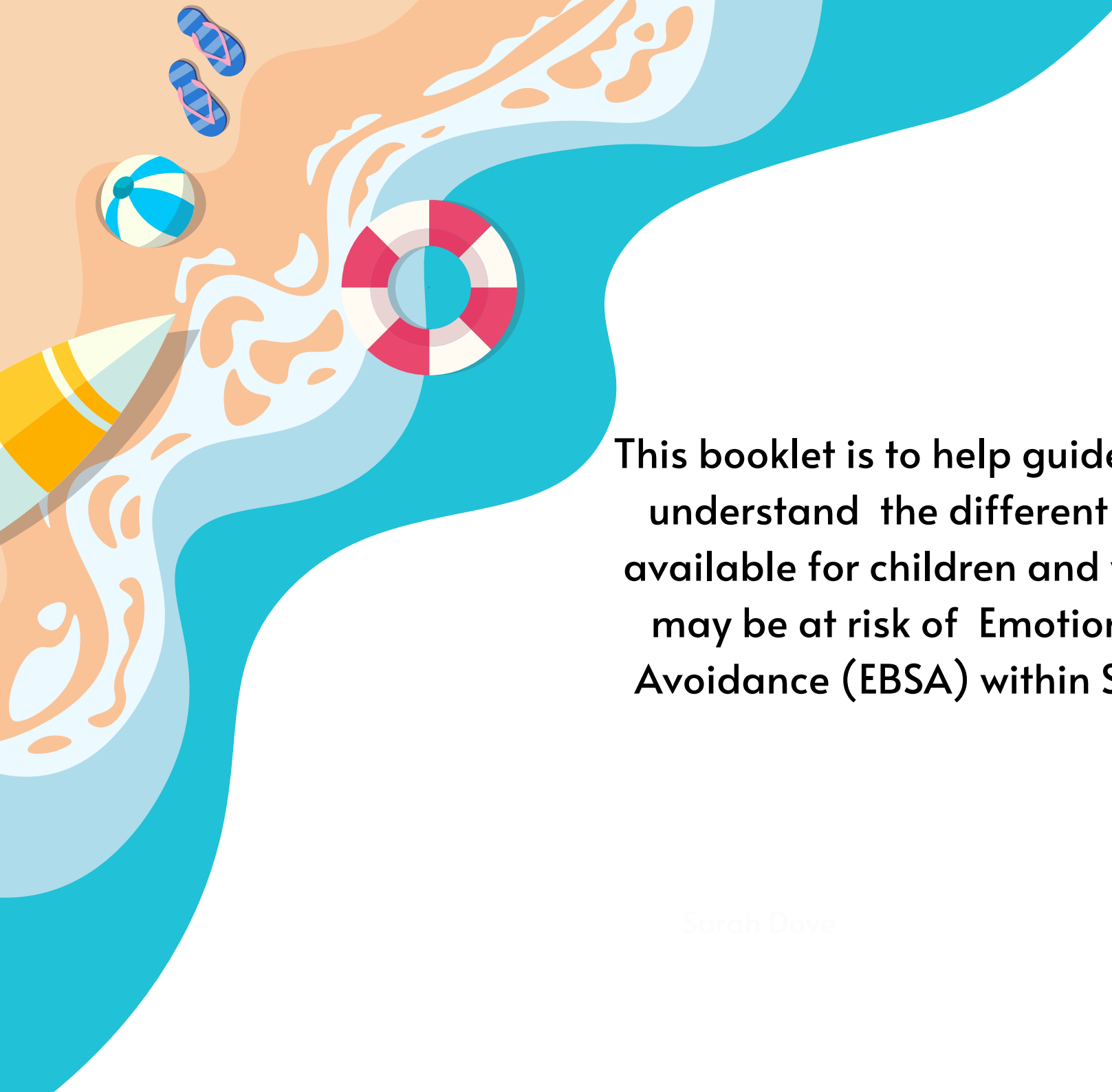


Anxiety and worries about going to school



Support for children and young people that find going to school difficult because of worries, anxiety or other needs



This booklet is to help guide parents/carers to understand the different levels of support available for children and young people that may be at risk of Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) within Southend-on-Sea

Sarah Dove

Anxiety

It is normal to sometimes feel anxious. Anxiety is a normal response that everyone that everyone experiences from time-to-time, usually in relation to a difficult situation. Anxiety becomes a problem when the difficult situation has passed, but the anxiety remains or becomes worse.

Anxiety can be described as a feeling of fear or unease. When people are anxious they normally have a variety of uncomfortable physical sensations. It might also affect how they behave. They might experience:

- shortness of breath
- palpitations
- hot flushes
- feeling sick
- headaches
- needing the toilet more
- stomach pain
- tightness in the chest
- difficulty concentrating
- trouble sleeping

What causes anxiety?



Anxiety can be caused by many different situations and experiences. How it affects people is personal to them and everyone's anxiety levels are different. Possible contributors of anxiety include:

- our relationships with others
- what is around us (our environment)
- things that happen to us
- our temperament

It is perfectly normal for children and young people to sometimes feel anxious. It is a natural reaction to some situations, but can become a problem if it starts to affect their day-to-day life

Signs of anxiety in children and young people

Sometimes children and young people will hide or 'mask' their anxiety. They may present differently at school and at home. They may:

- say they feel nervous or frightened
- have a low appetite
- find it hard to concentrate
- struggle to get to sleep, leaving them feeling tired and irritable
- complain of feeling sick or have diarrhoea

New patterns of behaviour may emerge, like not wanting to socialise with friends, when this was something they used to enjoy. Anxiety also influences how people behave. Often people will avoid doing things that they want to do because they are worried about how it will turn out. Although short experiences of anxiety are part of daily life, it becomes challenging when anxiety begins to follow people around and is a regular feature in their lives.



Difficulty getting to sleep and staying asleep



Stop doing things they like



Complaints of having a tummy ache or having diarrhoea



Become angry or aggressive

Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) describes when a child or young person avoids school due to emotional and psychological difficulties. These may include:

- anxiety
- depression
- social phobias
- low self-esteem
- specific anxieties like speaking in front of others

EBSA can also stem from bereavement, sensory sensitivities, or difficulties forming peer relationships. These challenges make it hard for the child or young person to engage in school activities, affecting their educational and social development.



How can EBSA affect people?

Anxiety and EBSA can affect a child or young person at any age. It can affect a child or young person's self-esteem, making them feel incapable and leading to a negative self-image. They may withdraw socially, feeling lonely and disconnected, and worry about disappointing others. EBSA can also act as a defence mechanism against overwhelming emotions.

Understanding these effects is crucial for parent carers, teachers, and caregivers to support children and young people, rebuild their self-esteem, foster belonging, and help them reintegrate into school.

Other terms for EBSA

The term "school refusal" is often used to describe a child or young person's avoidance of school. This can imply a deliberate choice and place blame on the child.

"School refusal" does not accurately reflect the emotional and psychological issues underlying Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA). To promote a more empathetic understanding, we advocate using EBSA instead. This term highlights the need for compassionate and holistic support rather than blaming the child or young person.

EBSA is not the same as school refusal because often the child or young person wants to be in school but cannot psychologically cope with the demands. It is rooted in emotional, mental health or wellbeing issues, and is not a deliberate act of defiance.

EBSA can also present as a child or young person attending school but avoiding certain people or areas of the school building, being unable to stay in lessons or missing certain lessons.

What to do if your child or young person is experiencing, or at risk of, EBSA

It is important to take action as soon as possible, as the longer your child or young person is away from school, or avoiding certain aspects of school, the more difficult it becomes to change the school avoiding behaviour.

Talk to your child or young person

- Ask them what they find difficult and what they would like to change. This can help identify specific triggers and worries. Their views should be the starting point of any discussion about support.
- Acknowledge that it might be difficult for them to open up to you but explain that you want to know how they feel so you can help.
- If they find it difficult to speak face to face, they can write their feelings down, or maybe draw a picture.
- Explain that you and the school will work with them to make school a happier place for them.
- If your child or young person is struggling to attend school, their friends may not understand why they aren't there. You can encourage your child to message their friends or call them to keep in touch.

Talk to the school

- Speak to your child or young person's school as soon as possible about your child or young person's anxieties, possible triggers and what can be done to support them.
- You can speak to their teacher, pastoral worker, mental health co-ordinator (MENCO) or the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) if your child has special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- If you aren't sure who to talk to you can start with their teacher or form tutor to ask for advice and support.
- The Specialist Teaching Team can be used to support students who are pre-verbal or need visuals or Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) to communicate



Support for children and young people with SEND

All schools in Southend are expected to support children and young people with SEND. The `graduated response` document outlines what support you can expect to be provided. Scan the QR code to view the document.



Due to the anxieties that some children and young people with Autism experience, they might be at increased risk of EBSA. If your child has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), you can also speak to their EHC Case Co-Ordinator, as it might be that some further support needs to be put in place. The Southend Council SEND Team will be able to tell you who your Case Co-Ordinator is.

The SENDIASS Southend website has some ideas for support strategies you can discuss with your child or young person's school that may help (www.sendiasssouthend.co.uk/parents-and-carers/education/ebsa).

Support for children and young people with medical needs

There will be a wide range of circumstances where a pupil has a health need but will receive suitable education that meets their needs without the intervention of the LA, for example where a pupil can still attend school with some support such as a Health Care Plan or Modified Learning Plan or where the school has made arrangements to deliver suitable education outside of school using the school's resources or through remote learning platforms. Schools are expected to have a policy that sets out the support for pupils at school with medical conditions. However, there are occasions when a child has health needs that means they are unable to attend school. The school are responsible for making a referral to Education Access Team. Information can be found here:

www.southendlearningnetwork.co.uk/Page/18808

Support could include the use of an AVI Robot telepresence unit, interim tuition face to face or online.

<https://www.southendlearningnetwork.co.uk/Page/17608>



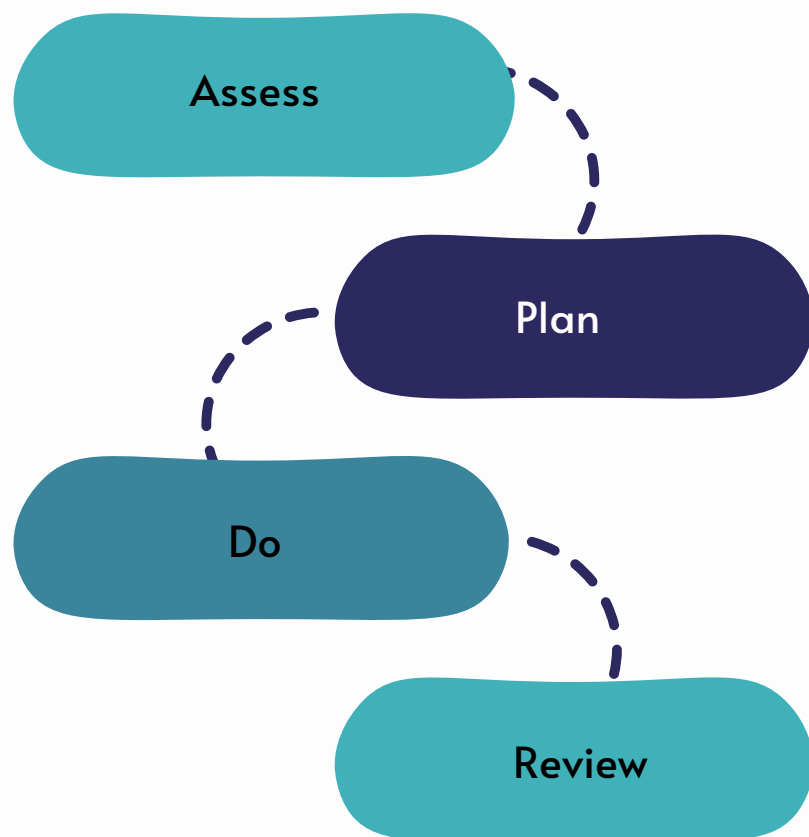
Sensory checklist for schools

These are some of the things you can expect your school to consider:

- Are there options for adjustable lighting in classrooms or areas where students spend significant time?
- Are there designated quiet spaces equipped with comfortable seating and minimal sensory stimuli?
- Have noise reduction measures been implemented in classrooms and common areas?
- Is there a system in place for providing structured breaks for students with sensory sensitivities?
- Have individualised plans been created for students with known sensory needs, with input from parents, caregivers, and professionals?
- Have school staff received training on recognising and addressing sensory needs in students?
- Is there open communication with parents and caregivers regarding a child's sensory needs, and are strategies consistently applied at home and school?



How can school help?



- Assess the needs of your child and factors that may be contributing to EBSA
- Agree a support plan with your child and yourself. This will typically involve a gradual process to reintegration, with the aim to steadily increasing the amount of time in school
- Depending on the needs of the child or young person, this might start with very small steps such as your child getting ready for school and entering the school office.
- The plan will be reviewed regularly to ensure it is effective. If your child or young person has a Modified Learning Plan it will be reviewed every 2 weeks and adjusted as necessary.
- Open communication and consistency throughout the process is essential for success.
- Schools can refer to the Specialist Teaching Team, if they feel there maybe unmet SEND needs, to help them unpick and look at additional forms of provision that may help bridge the gap/ transition.
- If you are not happy with the support the school is putting in place for your child or young person, or you'd like help to work with the school, you can contact SENDIASS Southend (if your child has special educational needs and/or a disability) or the Southend-on-Sea City Council Inclusion Team.
- If strategies put in place by the school have not worked, you may want to speak to your child's GP. If the GP agrees that your child is not currently able to attend school, ask them for a letter to give as evidence to the school or local authority for their non-attendance. Your GP may also be able to make a referral to a mental health support service.

School expectations if child not attending

The school should work with you, your child or young person, and any professionals involved in supporting your child to understand the cause(s) of the EBSA and agree a support plan.

If your child has complex health needs, or a medical condition, an individual healthcare plan may be put in place.

Depending on the needs of your child or young person, the support plan might start with very small steps such as your child getting ready for school and entering the school office.

School expectations if child not attending (continued)

Schools may apply for inclusion funding if they identify a need for additional resources, external support, or specialised interventions to effectively support a child.

Schools may request support from the Specialist Teaching Service who also include the Inclusion Outreach Team. At the point of referral there will be consideration of reasons behind and which team maybe best to support.

Schools can access EP support/assessment if they have purchased time. All schools receive 1.5 free days of core-time, so they could use EP time for school-wide EBSA support.

Some approaches to consider

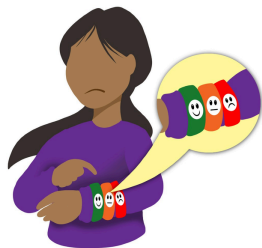
We encourage you to talk to the school to see if there are any things they can put in place to support you and your child. We have provided some suggestions and ideas below to help you.



Timers to help with children understanding



Scales to help you know if your child is worried



Red, amber and green bands, or card to help you know if a child is finding things hard.



Help recognise signs of anxiety

Sensory needs

Sometimes children find it hard to cope with the sensory demands of an environment. Our senses include:



Visual

What we can see



Tactile

What we can taste



Auditory

What we can hear



Tactile

What we can touch



Vestibular

What we can touch

Some children may find it more difficult to manage environments, they might say they are 'too noisy' or 'too bright'. Others might find it very difficult to wear school uniforms that have tags in, or are too heavy. They might insist on wearing jumpers even when it is very warm outside.

Talking about anxiety

Flight

to confront or resist perceived threats, often resulting in heightened defensiveness or agitation.

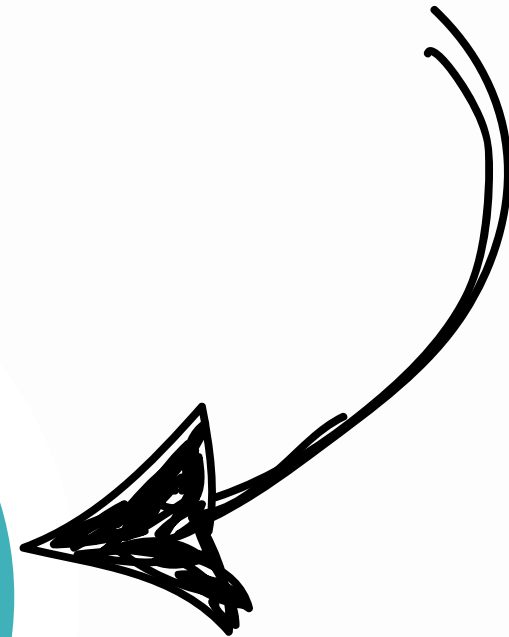
Fight

the instinct to avoid or escape situations that feel overwhelming or threatening.

Freeze

to become immobilized, feeling unable to act or make decisions in the face of perceived danger or overwhelming stress.

Our aim is not to get rid of all anxiety but rather to reduce it to manageable proportions. Start by using this to explain what anxiety is.



Challenging negative thoughts

This activity is designed to help you work with your child or young person to challenge negative thoughts and build more positive thinking patterns

1. Ask your child to share a recent negative thought (for example, "I'll fail my maths test" or "Nobody likes me")

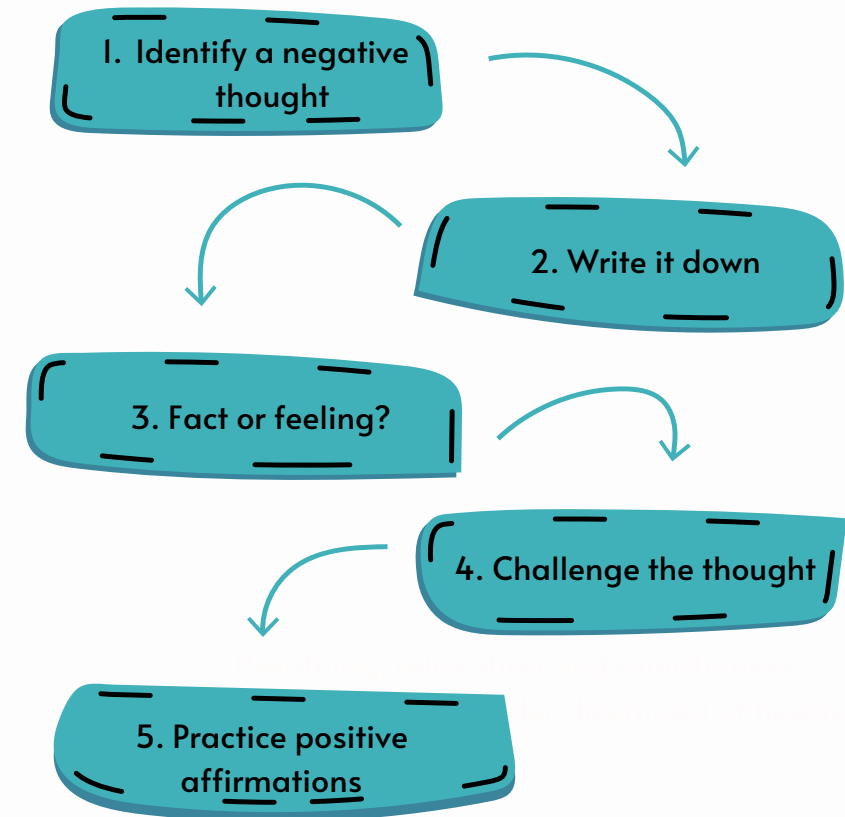
2. Write the thought down. This helps to view it more objectively

3. Discuss whether the thought is a fact or a feeling. Ask if there is solid evidence supporting it (fact) or if it's based on a temporary emotion (feeling)

4. Challenge the feeling-based thoughts by asking for evidence for and against them. Help your child reframe it into a more balanced thought (for example, "I've studied and will do my best" instead of "I'll fail")

5. Create a positive affirmation (for example, "I am prepared for the test" or "I am liked and valued")

Reflect on how your child or young person feels after the activity, and encourage them to use this method for future negative thoughts.



Mindfulness practice

Mindfulness is the practice of focusing on the present moment without judgment. It involves being aware of thoughts, feelings, and sensations as they happen, which helps in managing emotions and finding calm.

Mindfulness can be especially useful for children or young people with anxiety during moments of stress or when they feel overwhelmed. It helps them recognize early signs of anxiety, like racing thoughts or a fast heartbeat, and allows them to respond calmly. It can also be beneficial during transitions, such as before a test or when trying something new, helping them stay grounded and reduce anxious feelings.

5, 4, 3, 2, 1 what do you notice?

Think about 5 things you see, 4 things you feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste



The "5-4-3-2-1" technique is a simple mindfulness exercise that helps children and young people focus on the present moment by using their senses. Here's how it works:

- Look around and name 5 things you can see. This helps bring attention to the environment and away from anxious thoughts.
- Notice and describe 4 things you can physically feel, like the texture of your clothes or the coolness of a breeze. This grounds you in the here and now.
- Listen carefully and identify 3 sounds, whether it's a bird chirping, the hum of a fan, or your own breathing. This shifts focus to the present and calms the mind.
- Take a moment to notice 2 distinct smells, like the scent of your lunch or the fresh air. This deepens your connection to the current moment.
- Pay attention to 1 thing you can taste, even if it's just the lingering flavour in your mouth.

This completes the exercise, bringing full awareness to your senses and helping reduce anxiety.

Getting to Know Me



NAME:

DATE:

TEACHER:

I'm happiest when I am...

I really enjoy...

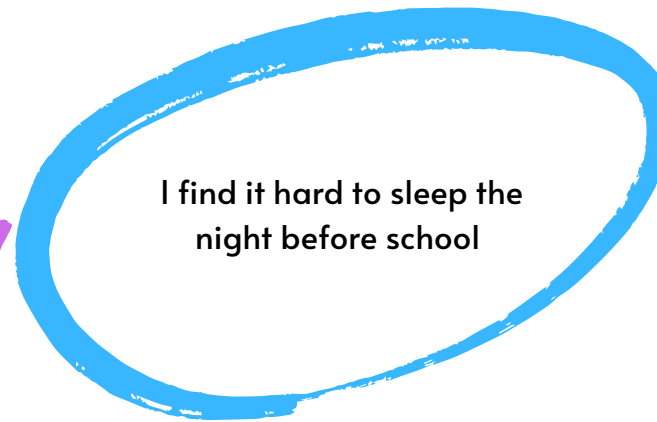
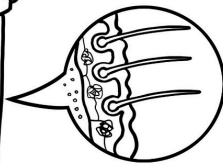
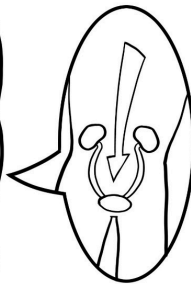
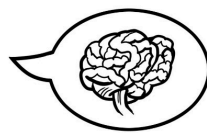
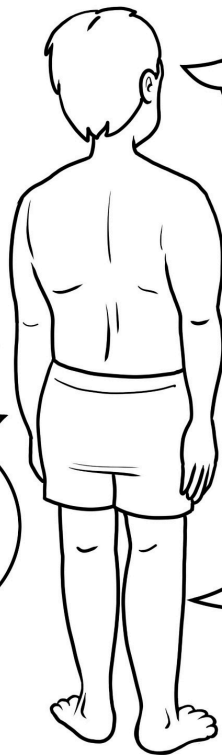
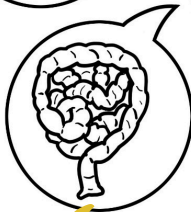
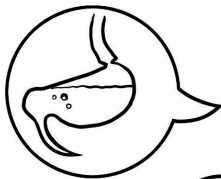
Things that make it difficult for me...

When I am at school I miss...

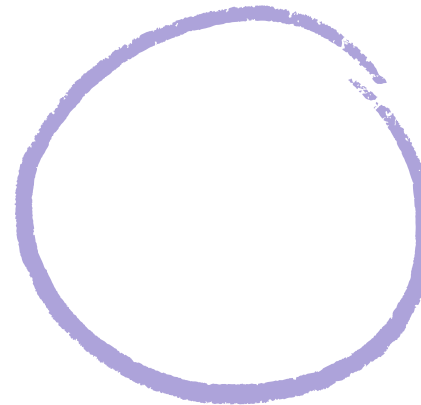
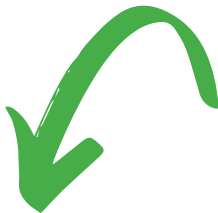
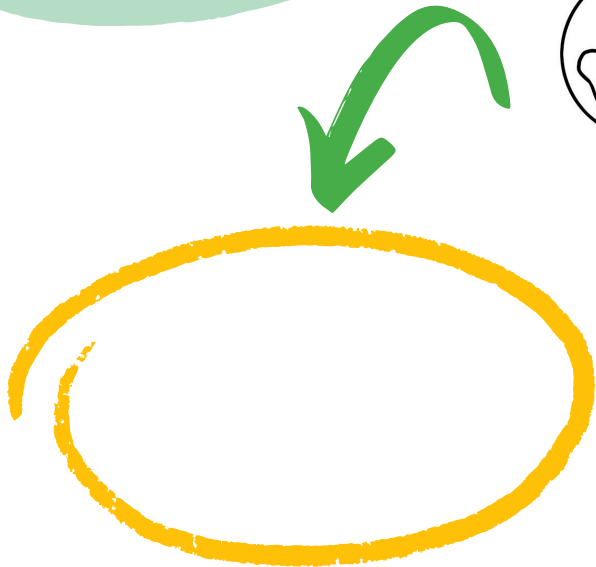
Things that help me...



Worries in your body



I find it hard to sleep the night before school



With your child, think about how worries might feel in the body and write some ideas in the shapes

If you are worried about your child or young person...



and they need help now;

- Call Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) CAMHS on 0800 953 0222 (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm)
- For out of hours or weekend support call the local crisis team on 0800 995 1000
- If problems escalate call 111 and select option 2 for mental health crisis
- If you need urgent help call 999 or access A&E

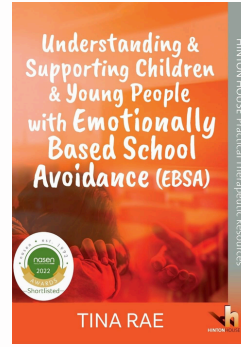
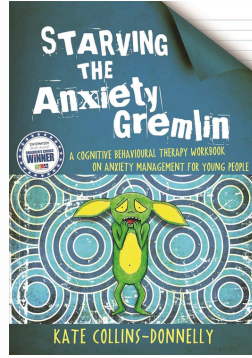
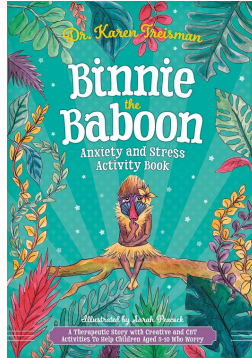


and you need more support;

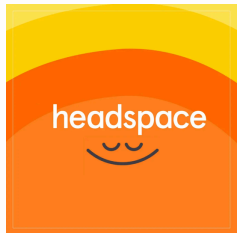
If you're concerned about your child or young person's well-being, there are several steps you can take to find support:

- Schools often have various resources available, such as mental health support teams or counselling services. Contact the school to discuss the support they can provide.
- School Nursing: Young people living in Southend can access ChatHealth, which is a secure and confidential text messaging service for young people aged between 11 to 19 years. It allows young people living in Southend to easily and anonymously get in touch with a School Nurse for advice and support. 11 to 19 year olds can text 07520 649895. Parents can text Chat Health text messaging service at 07507 3318834.
- A referral can be made via a School Nurse referral form which is available in schools. Please note, that all referrals will be triaged appropriately, and may not result in the child/ young person being seen by the service.
- The team can be contacted on 01702 534843 or email MSEICB-S.Southendpublichealthnurses@nhs.net. School nursing are a universal service
- You can e-mail the Southend Education Access Team on educationaccessteam@southend.gov.uk

Books



Apps



SafeSpot

Combined Minds

Molehill Mountain

Confidential text messaging services for young people



Young people living in Southend aged between 11 – 19 years can text a School Nurse on 07520 649895. Parents of children aged 5-19 can text a School Nurse: 07507 331884. This service is available Monday to Friday (excluding Bank holidays) 09.30–16.30.



Text `SHOUT` to 85258. Support available 24/7

Places near to me



Neurodivergent Safe Space,
9 West Road,
Westcliff-on-sea, Essex,
SS0 9AU

www.neurodivergentsafespace.co.uk



www.casss.co.uk



<https://essexfamilywellbeing.co.uk>

Places near me



www.livewellsouthend.com

Information about services and support in the Southend area.

Includes the SEND Local Offer , which has details of services and support for those with SEND aged 0 to 25 (www.livewellsouthend.com/SENDlocaloffer)



Little Heroes ASD Support Group Hub,
Garon Community Centre,
Garon Park,
Southend-on-Sea, Essex,
SS2 4FA

www.littleheroesasd.co.uk



TrustLinks,
Sites in Southend, Castle Point,
Rochford, Braintree and
Basildon

www.trustlinks.org

Websites



www.kooth.com

Online support and information for ages 11 to 18



www.themix.org.uk

Support for under 25s



www.youngminds.org.uk

UK's leading charity for children and young people's mental health. Also have a parents helpline

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/professional/resources/supporting-a-young-person-struggling-with-anxiety/>



<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-adults/advice-for-parents/anxiety-in-children/>



www.inspire.org.uk/children-and-young-people



www.togetherall.com

Websites

**The
Children's
Society**

www.childrenssociety.org.uk



www.actionforchildren.org.uk



www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize



www.place2be.org.uk



www.annafreud.org