



Emotionally Related School Avoidance (ERSA)

Toolkit



achieving
for children

Context and how to use this resource

This Emotionally Related School Avoidance (ERSA) Toolkit has been created alongside the 'ERSA Information for parents and carers' and 'ERSA Guidance for schools' documents, and has been designed to be used in conjunction with the latter. The hope is that in many circumstances the support provided by school staff will result in a decrease in the challenges experienced by the child or young person and will reduce the need for further support from outside agencies.

The strategies and tools included in this toolkit have been made available so that school staff are able to provide proactive support before requiring support from outside professionals. The hope is that in many circumstances the support provided by school staff will reduce the need for further support from outside agencies.

It is important to acknowledge that working with children and young people who are at risk of, or who are already experiencing, ERSA is challenging. This is because ERSA is typically underpinned by feelings of anxiety, with which the children and young people primarily try to cope by avoiding the situation they find stressful.

Avoidance coping strategies are particularly difficult to support as they can be very effective in temporarily relieving feelings of anxiety. However, they quickly impact on a person's ability to build their confidence, problem solving and resilience, which can lead to their anxiety growing in general, and greater avoidance usually follows. Working with this presentation of need takes considerable time and effort, and a change in tact is often necessary depending on response to intervention.

Involvement with these children and young people can sometimes leave staff feeling deskilled but it is important to remember that this is normal and not a reflection of how good you are at your job. Anxiety can very quickly become entrenched in children and young people and it is a difficult problem for anyone to tackle. The most important thing is to **act early** and to not give up on these vulnerable students.

To use this toolkit effectively, we suggest the following guidelines which should be repeated as necessary (an 'assess, plan, do, review' approach).

- **Stage 1:** Identify the child's and young person's difficulties, and explore and assess the situation further (see 'early identification and assessment' and 'exploring the emotions and assessing the problem').
- **Stage 2:** Create a plan of action using the strategies and tools suggested throughout this document (see 'return to school plan' and the rest of the 'strategies, tools and resources' section).
- **Stage 3:** Carry out and closely monitor the plan of action.
- **Stage 4:** Review the process by considering what has gone well and what needs to happen next.

Early identification, assessment and intervention

The longer a child and young person avoids school, the more entrenched the problem becomes, and so the more difficult it is for them to return to school. It is vital that ERSA is identified as early on as possible.

Research shows that a key determinant of likely success in managing ERSA is early intervention. This is reliant on the systematic management of attendance data. In secondary schools, the established school systems should encourage pastoral managers, heads of year and tutors to identify those children and young people who continue to attend school but are showing early signs of ERSA (those you may notice before patterns of behaviour become entrenched). Some examples of these early signs might be:

- sporadic attendance and lateness
- feeling anxious or worried about particular (or all) lessons, but still attending school
- parent or carer reporting that the child or young person does not want to come to school
- physical signs of stress believed to be linked to anxiety (eg, stomach ache, sickness, headache)
- behavioural changes or fluctuations (eg, less interactions with peers, reduced motivation and engagement in learning tasks)

Once ERSA (or risk of) has been identified, there should be a prompt assessment to establish the various factors contributing to the school avoidance. Whilst there is often a temptation to avoid this step and embark on interventions immediately, an assessment is vital to ensure appropriate interventions are implemented as quickly as possible. There is much to be said for managing most school avoidance problems at a school level rather than referring to other agencies.

The importance of working with parents, carers and the child or young person

It is important to remember that, except for in very rare cases, the parents and carers of the school avoiding children and young people are as, if not more, concerned with the non-attendance of their child than professionals. Equally, the school avoiding children and young people are likely to experience feelings of guilt related to their school avoidance behaviour. As such, listening to, and working collaboratively with, the parents and the children and young people is an important part of the ERSA intervention.

In working with the parents carers, the following is important.

- Try to ensure that parents and carers do not feel blamed for the child's or young person's behaviour.
- The school avoidance behaviour should be explained mostly as an anxiety-based difficulty that most children and young people encounter at some stage of their school career, as this helps to normalise the problem a little. The 'ERSA Information for parents and carers' document should be shared if this has not already been done, as this provides more information about ERSA and how their child can be supported.
- A 'Return to school plan' (RSP) (see below for some guidance on creating a RSP) should be completed in conjunction with the parents and carers.
- During the early stages of the RSP, it is normal for the children or young people to feel distressed, as they are being asked to take the first steps towards facing their fears. Parents and carers need to know to expect this, and they should be encouraged to manage this as calmly as possible and provide praise when the child or young person succeeds (however small the success may feel to them).
- Where there is more than one parent or carer, their approaches must be consistent, and responsibility shared.
- Parents and carers should be warned that there may be setbacks during the execution of the RSP, however it is important to remain optimistic and get back to the plan as soon as possible after a setback (eg, later that day or the next day).

- Close links must be kept between a key member of school staff (eg, the ERSA coordinator) and parents or carers.

In working with the children and young people, the following is important.

- Acknowledging, empathising with, and normalising the child's and young person's experience of anxiety. For example, drawing on previous examples of when the child might have experienced some anxiety (eg, during exams, going to the dentist, etc.) may help them to make connections between those feelings and the feelings they experience in relation to attending school.
- Spend time explaining the features of anxiety to the children and young people. An example of one way to do this is by asking them to draw onto a human body outline ([see Appendix 1](#)) and indicate where they 'feel' the anxiety most.
- Explore the child's experience. This may be done verbally or through drawings. Some example questions to help do this include the following.
 - 'Are there other times when you have had similar but less scary feelings? Do you think I (or others) may have experienced similar feelings?' (Attempt to normalise the feeling)
 - 'When someone feels X, it is common to experience...' (Explaining anxiety)
- Encourage the children and young people to externalise the anxiety by, for example, asking them:
 - 'What name would you give the feeling you experience when you think about going to school?'
 - 'If it was a thing, what would it look like and what would it say?'
 - 'When is it in charge, and when are you in charge?'
- Adopt and encourage a 'growth mind set' with the children and young people, especially in relation to the language used. Those with a growth mind set believe that working hard at something makes you better at it. Adding certain words to the end of negatively framed sentences can support the children and young people to see that the way they currently think is not set in stone. For example, adding the word 'yet' when a child or young person says 'I can't go into that classroom' suggests that one day they may be able to, instilling hope and showing that you will not give up on them.

Strategies, tools and resources

Every child's or young person's experience of ERSA is different, and as such an individualised approach is necessary. The aim of this ERSA Toolkit is to provide ideas and examples of strategies and tools, and provide signposting to available resources, however it is important to note that this is not a comprehensive list, and it will be important to problem-solve and solution-find as a group of school staff to appropriately support each child experiencing ERSA, as well as each other.

Gradual desensitisation

'Desensitisation' is where the child or young person is exposed to the feared situation in a gradual way, beginning with small steps. The foundation of the management of school refusal is a gradual desensitisation approach whereby the child or young person is gradually reintegrated into the school setting, and eventually back into class. This is likely to look quite different depending on the student, and so a return to school plan will need to be carefully created.

Return to school plan

For a RSP to be effective it must:

- be well thought out and properly planned
- be realistic (implementing a second RSP is much more difficult)
- be slow to avoid the child or young person feeling overwhelmed
- be individualised according to the specific needs of the child or young person
- be collaboratively created and agreed by the active member of staff, the parents, carers and the child or young person
- include potential difficulties in implementing the RSP so that these can be worked through
- be reviewed frequently (at least monthly) by the active member of staff, the parents or carers and the child or young person
- include a return to school at the earliest opportunity

It is important to note that part of a desensitisation approach (and so the RSP) is that each step of the exposure needs to prolong for long enough for the child or young person to overcome the anxiety enough (this is called 'habituation') before moving onto the next step. An optimistic, but realistic, approach should be adopted and if the child or young person fails to attend or carry out the actions as described in the RSP one day, start again the next day. It is normal for there to be more difficulties following a weekend, illness or a school holiday. See [Appendix 2](#) for an example of a RSP.

The three core principles of gradual desensitisation are:

- identifying and developing a list of feared situations of increasing difficulty (this must be done in collaboration with the child or young person)
- helping the child or young person to be able to cope with the anxious feelings before exposure to the feared situation begins
- practising each step as frequently as possible (ideally, daily)

It is normal for the first few steps to be the most challenging, however the more exposure is repeated, the more likely the level of anxiety experienced will decrease, as shown in Figure 1:



Figure 1: Desensitisation: Successive exposure to the feared situation produces gradual decline in anxiety levels (Thambirajah 2004, p.10, cited in Thambirajah et al., 2008)

Exploring the emotions and assessing the problem

As explained above, in order to understand the child's experiences, reasons for ERSA, and create an effective RSP, it will be vital to explore the child's or young person's experience of ERSA.

It is important to note that whilst all children and young people are likely to experience anxiety at some point in their school careers, children and young people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may be more prone to experiencing anxiety due to the nature of their difficulties with social communication, social interaction and social imagination. When supporting children and young people who are showing signs of ERSA, it may also be helpful to consider exploring these areas of a child's or young person's development to decide whether a neurodevelopmental referral is appropriate.

Here follows tools to support the process of exploring emotions and assessing the problem in relation to ERSA

The fear ladder (fear hierarchy)

The child or young person and key adult at school can create a ladder that includes the various fears the child or young person has in relation to school, beginning with the worst feared situation and ending with the least feared one or vice versa. The end result is a pictorial representation of the hierarchy of fears or worries.

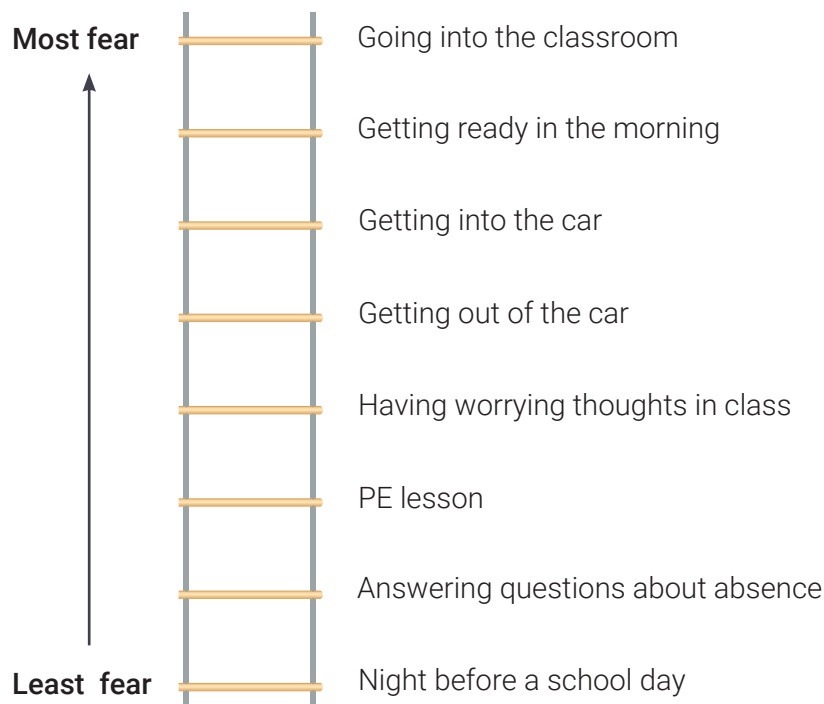


Figure 2: An example of a fear ladder (Thambirajah et al., 2008)

In the beginning stages of the RSP, the fears in the lower levels of the ladder should be addressed. When there is consistent success with this, the next stage should be focused on in order to ensure that habituation has taken place. [See Appendix 3](#) for a blank fear ladder to be used with a child or young person.

School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised (SRAS-R)

This questionnaire is designed to measure the relative strength of the following four conditions that school avoidance is often maintained by:

- avoiding school-based stimuli that provoke a general sense of negative affectivity
- escaping aversive school-based social and/or evaluative situations
- pursuing attention from significant others
- pursuing tangible reinforcers outside of school

The questionnaires, which were developed by Kearney & Albano (2007), may add helpful information to further inform the RSP and links to these can be found in the below footnotes (child¹ and parent² versions). Whilst it can easily be administered by a member of school staff and/or parent or carer, it may be helpful to consult with your educational psychologist to help score and interpret the results.

Drawing the 'ideal school' technique

The 'Drawing the Ideal School' technique uses personal construct psychology, which is an approach that seeks to explore the child's or young person's important or core constructs about themselves and how they view the world. At the end of the activity, which takes approximately one hour to complete, the facilitator will have a better understanding of what is important for the child or young person for a school to be or have and not to be or have. It is likely to provide some rich information that a typical conversation may not yield, and will result in the adult having a better understanding of the child or young person and their relationship with school. See [Appendix 4](#) for a fuller description and a step-by-step guide to completing the technique.

RAG rating activities

In order to gain a better understanding of how a child or young person thinks and feels about their school environment, RAG (red, amber, green) rating various things (eg, their timetable, a map of the school) may be helpful. When using this type of activity, it will be important to collaboratively agree upon a key for each colour (eg, Green = I like this area or I enjoy this subject, etc). These activities can be used as conversation starters and to find out further information about what may be causing the child or young person to feel anxious within the school setting. Follow-up questions will provide opportunities for further exploration.

Changing coping mechanisms

Freydenberg and Lewis (1993) suggest that there are three main types of coping strategies:

- solving the problem (working on the problem and remaining optimistic)
- reference to others (seeking support from others)
- non-productive coping (eg, ignoring the problem, worrying and wishful thinking)

Children and young people who are displaying school avoidant behaviours typically rely on the non-productive coping approach (avoidance) and do not believe that they have the ability to produce change (low self-efficacy).

Exploring the child's or young person's coping strategies in non-school related situations may shed some light on how they tend to cope with perceived difficult situations. It will be beneficial to encourage them to use active problem-focused coping strategies rather than avoidant-focused coping. Whilst it is not possible to include a comprehensive list of problem-focused coping strategies, an example of a group of these coping strategies follows (relaxation techniques). Where peer relationship problems and social anxiety issues are prevalent, supporting the child or young person to improve peer relationships and enhance social skills may be helpful.

1 <https://tinyurl.com/SRAS-Child>

2 <https://tinyurl.com/SRAS-Parent>

Relaxation techniques

More often than not, the experience of anxiety comes with physical symptoms, such as stomach aches, breathing difficulties and muscle tension. These symptoms often cause a great deal of distress, and it is helpful for the child or young person to learn that these physical symptoms are not harmful and that they can take control of them. Relaxation techniques support the child or young person to take control of these physical symptoms so that the anxiety lessens.

- **Muscle relaxation:** Progressive muscle relaxation teaches the child or young person to relax their muscles, focusing on one group of muscles at a time. See [Appendix 5](#) for a muscle relaxation technique that can be completed with child or young person.
- **Breathing to relax:** Breathing slowly and deeply slows the heart rate and encourages relaxation. See [Appendix 6](#) for a guided breathing exercise that can be completed with children and young people.

Peer support strategies

As has been touched on above, some children and young people who present with school avoidant behaviours do so because they feel isolated at school or have anxieties over friendships. The use of buddy or peer mentoring systems can be helpful:

- **buddy systems** usually involve matching the child or young person with a peer who has volunteered to act as a supportive friend
- **peer mentoring** involves volunteers, who are often older pupils who have received some training in listening skills and problem solving approaches

Adult mentoring

Some students who are displaying signs of ERSA need increased levels of adult support to negotiate the demands of school life. For these child or young person, establishing an ongoing, supportive relationship with a member of the school staff can make a considerable difference. This role could be adopted by, for example, the ERSA coordinator, a pastoral member of staff or an emotional literacy support assistant (ELSA). Opportunities for regular contact, not always focused on the problem, should be provided.

Curriculum and timetabling adjustments

If a student experiences anxieties around particular curriculum subjects, classroom demands, or even specific teachers, it may be necessary and appropriate to alleviate these anxieties temporarily in order to explore them further and decide on next steps. These may include providing support for the child or young person to catch up with work from that subject with extra support, talking to someone about the problems, and mediating or building a positive relationship between the child or young person and member of staff.

It may be supportive to discuss the needs and fears of the student with the teacher in question so that changes in the way lessons are managed and the type of demands placed on the child or young person may be made.

Breaktime adjustments

Interventions aimed at providing suitable options for lunchtime and break time activities and locations for students who prefer a quiet supervised environment may be helpful for those whose difficulties centre around social interactions and related anxieties.

Identifying a 'safe space'

Children and young people who find being in school and/or particular lessons challenging need to be supported to identify a safe space within the school environment where they are able to go when they feel overwhelmed. What matters here is not where there might be space for such an area (schools often struggle to find unused rooms), but that the child or young person is involved in identifying somewhere where they feel safe and comfortable (it may, for example, be in the playground or in the student support area of the school).

When identifying this safe space, there will also need to be rules collaboratively identified about when and how to use this space so that these can be shared with other members of staff and adhered to by all involved.

Fostering and developing a sense of belonging and connectedness

The less time a child or young person spends at school, the less connected they are likely to feel, which can encourage them to continue avoiding school. It is important that the child or young person and their family never feel that they have been forgotten, so any communication, newsletters, information about parent evenings, trips, etc should be sent home as a matter of course.

Ensure that someone from school has daily contact with the child or young person and their family. This could be by telephone, text or email, with face-to-face contact on at least a weekly basis. Deciding who will maintain this contact with the child or young person and their family should be guided by the quality of the relationship with the child or young person.

It is important to note that fostering a sense of belonging and connectedness relates to a wider, systemic approach whereby any successful work with a child or young person needs to be embedded within whole school systems. Therefore, general good practice for promoting emotional wellbeing and positive mental health also applies to ERSA. As such, [Appendix 7](#) outlines the culture, structures, resources and practice within a school that can promote the wellbeing of staff, children and young people with specific reference to ERSA.

When considering school belonging and connectedness, the importance of peer relationships should not be underestimated. If a child or young person has begun to stop attending school, it will be important to plan with them how to maintain existing relationships whilst they are away from school.

They could be encouraged, for example, to keep in touch with friends via text, email and meet-ups. Friends are likely to naturally encourage the child or young person to return to school, and maintaining friendships will increase motivation to do so.

All staff who would normally have contact with the child or young person should be kept up to date with their progress in relation to ERSA. Information needs to be shared with school staff so that individual members of staff can help in any way possible (eg, changing seating plan, etc).

Developing ambition, aspiration and motivation

It can often be more motivating for a child or young person to stay at home than attend school. Despite parents often wanting to support their child to attend school, they can inadvertently reinforce the school-avoidant behaviour by, for example, allowing their child to engage with enjoyable activities such as playing computer games, etc. It is vital for school staff to work closely with parents or carers to provide alternatives to these approaches, otherwise behaviour is often unlikely to change. Parents and carers should be encouraged to read the 'ERSA Information for parents and carers' document, and should be supported to access this if necessary.

Positive reinforcement strategies, such as receiving rewards for attending school, are likely to be supportive in these cases, being careful not to inadvertently also reward the child or young person for staying at home. It is important to ensure that rewards offered are motivating for the child or young person, and so it will be important to include them in deciding how they are rewarded.

'Planning alternative tomorrows with hope' (PATH) is a visual person-centred tool that can be used to support identification of specific goals and dreams for the future and work out the steps the child or young person will need to take in order to reach these. The PATH tool has a clear structure that an adult can support the child or young person to follow, and encourages tasks to be completed within time scales. See the below footnote for a link to the PATH resource³.

ELSA support

The emotional literacy support assistant (ELSA) intervention was designed to build the capacity of schools to support the emotional needs of their students from within their own resources. Teaching assistants and learning support assistants are trained to be ELSAs by the Educational Psychology Service to develop and deliver individualised support programmes to meet the emotional needs of children and young people.

The ELSA training covers many topics, including resilience, self-esteem, social skills, loss and bereavement and managing emotions, and so are well placed to support students who are experiencing or beginning to show signs of ERSA. Ideally, an ELSA would begin working with the child or young person as soon as signs suggest they are at risk of ERSA.

Please contact the Educational Psychology Service for more information about enrolling members of staff onto the ELSA training at educational.psychology@achievingforchildren.org.uk.

Coordinating provision for children or young people who are not currently attending school

If severe anxiety is preventing a child or young person from attending school or lessons despite a desire to do so, this anxiety can become worse with the worry of how far behind they are getting in relation to academic work. The longer they are away from school, the more entrenched this worry will become, causing a vicious cycle. Alongside other approaches described in this document, schools need to provide accessible work and activities for this group of children or young people to complete at home so that they feel better able to keep up with their peers.

If a difficulty keeping up with the pace of the work is contributing to a child's or young person's ERSA, it is vital that academic support is provided, such as in the form of adult check-ins, encouragement to attend homework club, and timetabling catch-up sessions delivered by someone the child or young person feels comfortable and safe with.

³ <https://tinyurl.com/PATH-Doc>

Supporting the child or young person to prepare scripts

When a child or young person has been away from school for some time, part of their worry about returning to school is often related to the questions that their peers may ask them about where they have been and why they have not been at school. Talk to the child or young person about what they feel comfortable sharing with their peers and collaboratively develop some scripts to help the child or young person share only the information they feel comfortable sharing.

Important to note

In severe cases of ERSA, it may be necessary for the child or young person to receive more formal methods of intervention, such as cognitive behavioural therapy. If, after exhausting the tools and strategies in this document, you feel that this may be the case for the child or young person you are working with, please refer to the list of other professional roles and responsibilities in the 'ERSA school guidance' document.

Attendance policy

In reviewing the school attendance policy (in line with the usual policy review cycle), it will be important to ensure that the policy communicates the messages within and the principles behind this toolkit in relation to ERSA to ensure consistency and appropriate support.

References

Overcoming your child's fears & worries: A guide for parents using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques, Creswell, C. and Willetts, L. (2007/2010) Great Britain, Robinson.

School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised (C & P) When Children Refuse School: Assessment, Kearney, C.A. and Albano, A.M. (2007) UK, Oxford University Press.

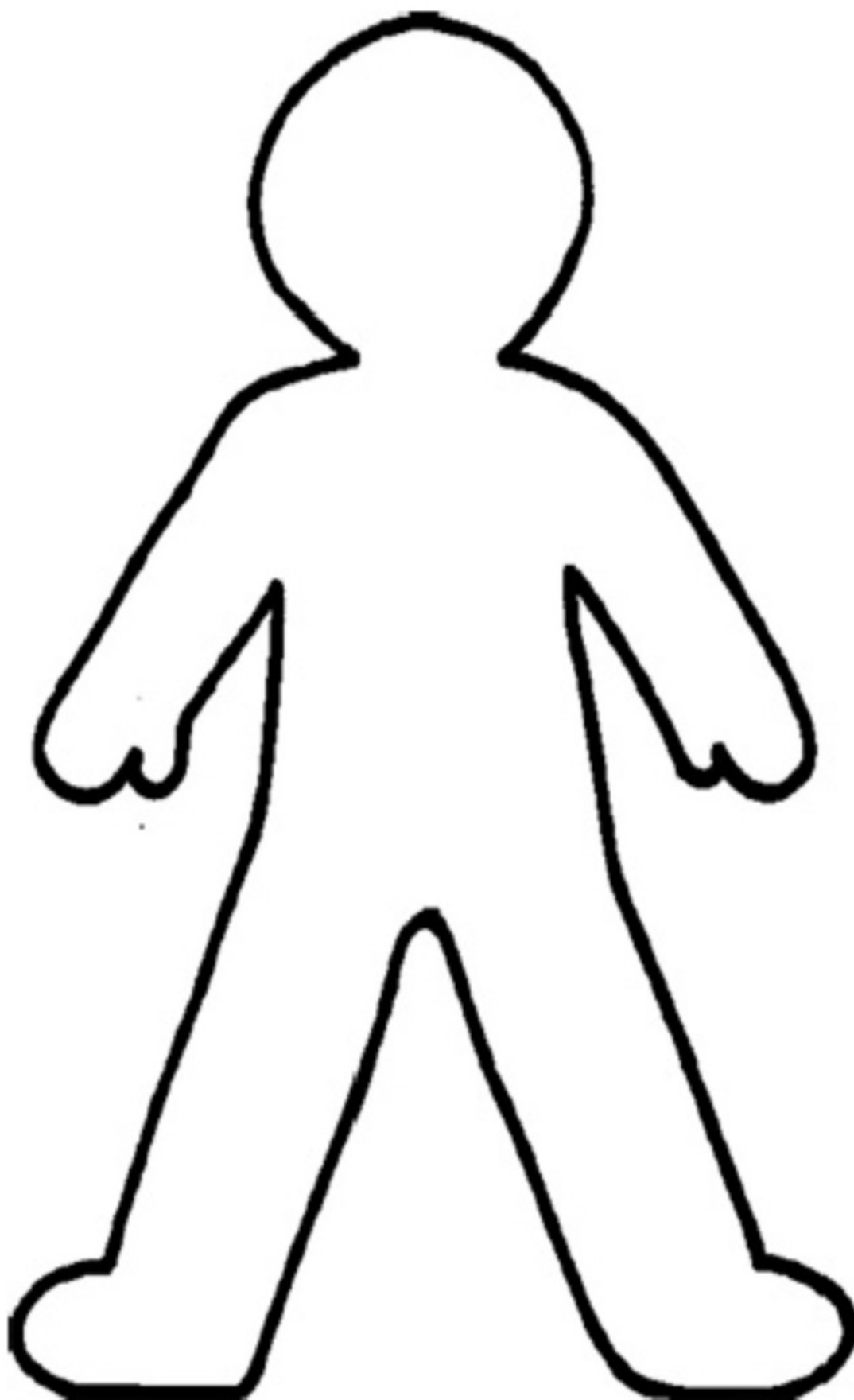
Collaborative working to promote Attendance and Psychological Wellbeing, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

Understanding School Refusal: A Handbook for Professionals in Education, Health and Social Care UK, Thambirajah, M.S., Grandison, K.J., and De-Hayes, L. (2008) Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Emotionally Based School Avoidance: Good practice guidance for schools and support agencies, West Sussex Educational Psychology Service

'Do you want to know what sort of school I want? Optimum features of school provision for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder', Williams, J. and Hanke, D. (2007) GAP Journal, 2007.

Appendix 1: Human body outline

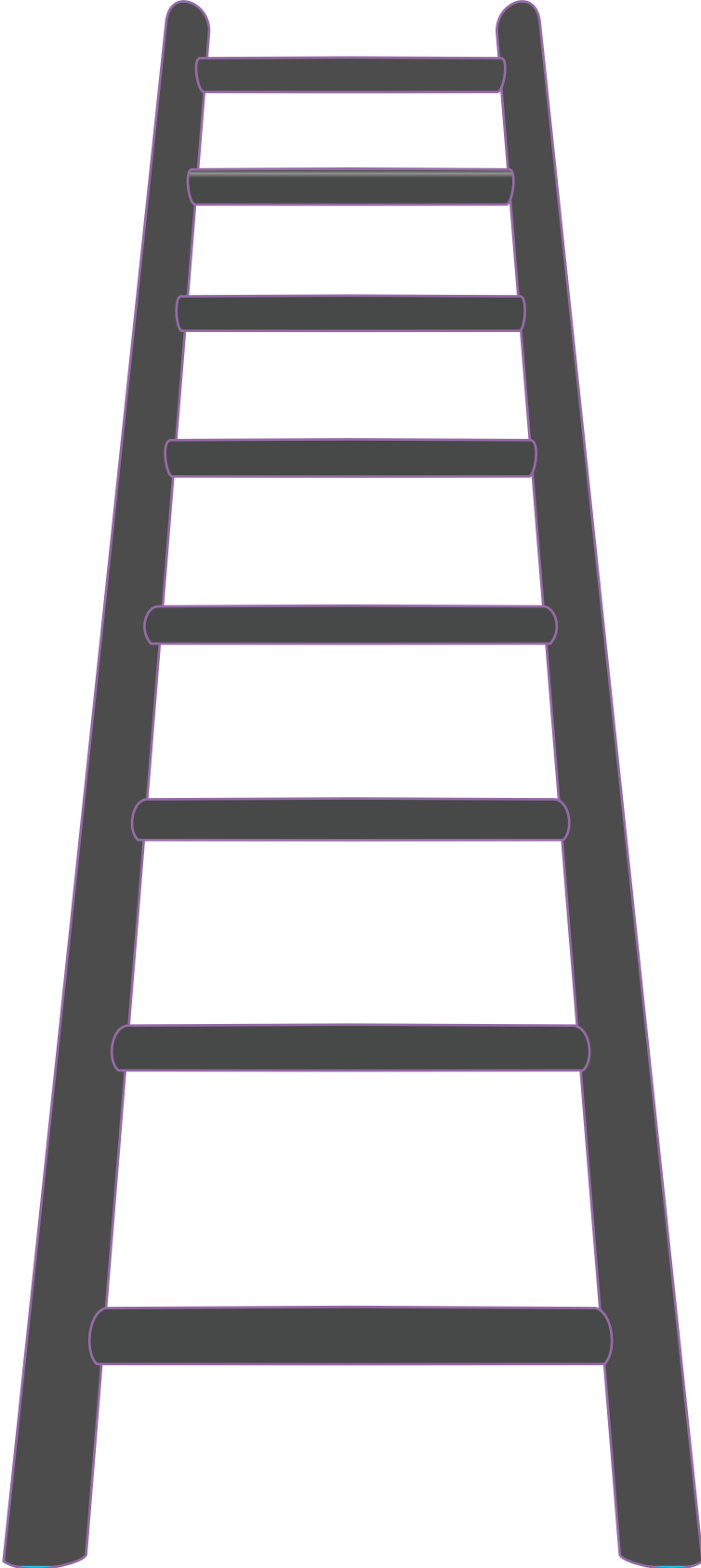


Appendix 2: Example of a return to school plan (RSP)

Name	Year Group	Date	
Contributors			
Children and young people			
Parents and carers			
School staff			
Shared desired outcomes	Agreed action Intervention or strategy	Pre-intervention evaluation	Post-intervention evaluation
What do we hope to see as a result? What is a realistic expectation given our starting point How can we write this is a SMART target?	What? Who? How often? For how long?	What does it look like now?	What does it look like now? Have we achieved our shared desired outcome? If not, have we made steps forward towards our shared desired outcome?

Appendix 3: Fear ladder

Hardest



Easiest

Appendix 4: Drawing the ideal school technique

Introduction

The 'Drawing the ideal school' technique has been adapted from an approach developed by Heather Moran (2001). Heather Moran has been a teacher and educational psychologist and now works as a clinical psychologist. The technique enables children to become actively involved in understanding themselves and expressing their views. It is based on ideas from 'personal construct psychology', which was introduced by Kelly in 1955. This approach seeks to explore children's and young people's important or core constructs about themselves and how they view the world. Children and young people (and adults) behave in a way that makes sense to them according to their own view of the world. We are likely to understand children and young people (and the sort of provision that is most likely to help them) more fully if they are able to express these core constructs to us.

In summary, this type of work attempts to:

"Understand the child's unique perspective on life through the careful use of questions and extremely sensitive note of the child's answers." (Moran, 2001)

The technique itself is simple to use once the child or young person understands what is expected. This appendix provides guidelines for the adult completing the technique to follow.

Guidelines for use

- Equipment needed: a pencil and two sheets of plain A4 sized paper for the child or young person, and a pen for the adult.
- Allow about an hour to complete the activity, perhaps with a short break if necessary.
- Explain to the student that you are going to be doing the writing today, acting as a scribe. This is to take the pressure of the child or young person and keep the process moving.
- The child or young person is asked to make quick drawings or sketches (rather than detailed drawings). Reassure the child or young person that it doesn't matter if errors are made.
- It is important to record exactly what the child or young person says using their own words.
- If the child or young person is overly anxious about drawing, either model stick people drawings first or just record their verbal responses.
- Allow time for the child or young person to process the requests: repeat, reword, simplify the questions if not understood.
- Provide reassurance that there are no right or wrong answers or responses.
- Provide encouragement and praise for the child's or young person's involvement with the activity.
- Be sensitive about sharing the drawings with others. Ask the child's or young person's permission and ensure that other adults understand that the child or young person has trusted you in revealing such views, which must be respected.
- Talk to other colleagues about planning any follow-up work that might be indicated.

Part 1: Drawing the kind of school you would not like

The school

Think about the kind of school you would not like to go to. This is not a real school. Make a quick drawing of this school in the middle of this paper.

Tell me three things about this school. What kind of school is it?

The classroom

Think about the sort of classroom you would not like to be in. Make a quick drawing of this classroom in the school.

Draw some of the things in the classroom.

The children and young people

Think about some of the children, young people and students at the school you would not like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of them. What are they doing? Tell me three things about them.

The adults

Think about some of the adults at the school you would not like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these adults. What are the adults doing? Tell me three things about these adults.

Me

Think about the kind of school you would not like to go to. Make a quick drawing of what you would be doing at this school. Tell me three things about the way you feel at this school.

Part 2: Drawing the kind of school you would like

The school

Think about the kind of school you would like to go to. This is not a real school. Make a quick drawing of this school in the middle of this paper.

Tell me three things about this school. What kind of school is this?

The classroom

Think about the sort of classroom you would like to be in. Make a quick drawing of this classroom in the school.

Draw some of the things in this classroom.

The children and young people

Think about some of the children, young people and students at the school you would like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of them. What are they doing? Tell me three things about them.

The adults

Think about some of the adults at the school you would like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these adults. What are the adults doing? Tell me three things about these adults.

Me

Think about the kind of school you would like to go to. Make a quick drawing of what you would be doing at this school. Tell me three things about the way you feel at this school.

Adapted from Williams, J. and Hanke, D. (2007) 'Do you want to know what sort of school I want? Optimum features of school provision for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder'. GAP Journal, 2007.

Appendix 5: Muscle relaxation

Hands

Clench each fist (one at a time) for three seconds and then relax each hand for three seconds.

Arms

Bend each elbow so the wrist nearly touches the shoulder (one at a time) and hold for three seconds, then relax each arm for a further three seconds.

Legs

Point the toes and straighten the leg, pushing the knee down, so both the calf and thigh muscles tighten for three seconds, then relax this leg for three seconds. Repeat with the other leg.

Bottom

Squeeze the bottom as if trying to lift it off the chair for three seconds, then relax it for three seconds.

Stomach

Pull the stomach in and hold for three seconds, then relax it for three seconds.

Chest

Stick the chest out like a bodybuilder and take a deep breath in, hold it for three seconds then relax for a further three seconds.

Shoulders and neck

Pull the shoulders up to the ears (or as close as they can get), and hold for three seconds, then relax for a further three seconds.

Mouth

Clench the teeth and do a big, wide smile and hold for three seconds, then relax the mouth completely for three seconds.

Eyes

Scrunch up the eyes so that they are tightly shut for three seconds, then relax the eyes, but keep them shut for at least three seconds.

Forehead

Put a hand on the head to make sure it does not move! Raise the eyes to look at the ceiling so that the forehead becomes wrinkled. Hold for three seconds and relax for three seconds.

Credit: Creswell, C and Willetts, L (2007/2010) *Overcoming your child's fears & worries: A guide for parents using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques* Great Britain, Robinson.

Appendix 6: Guided breathing exercise: box breathing (also known as square breathing)

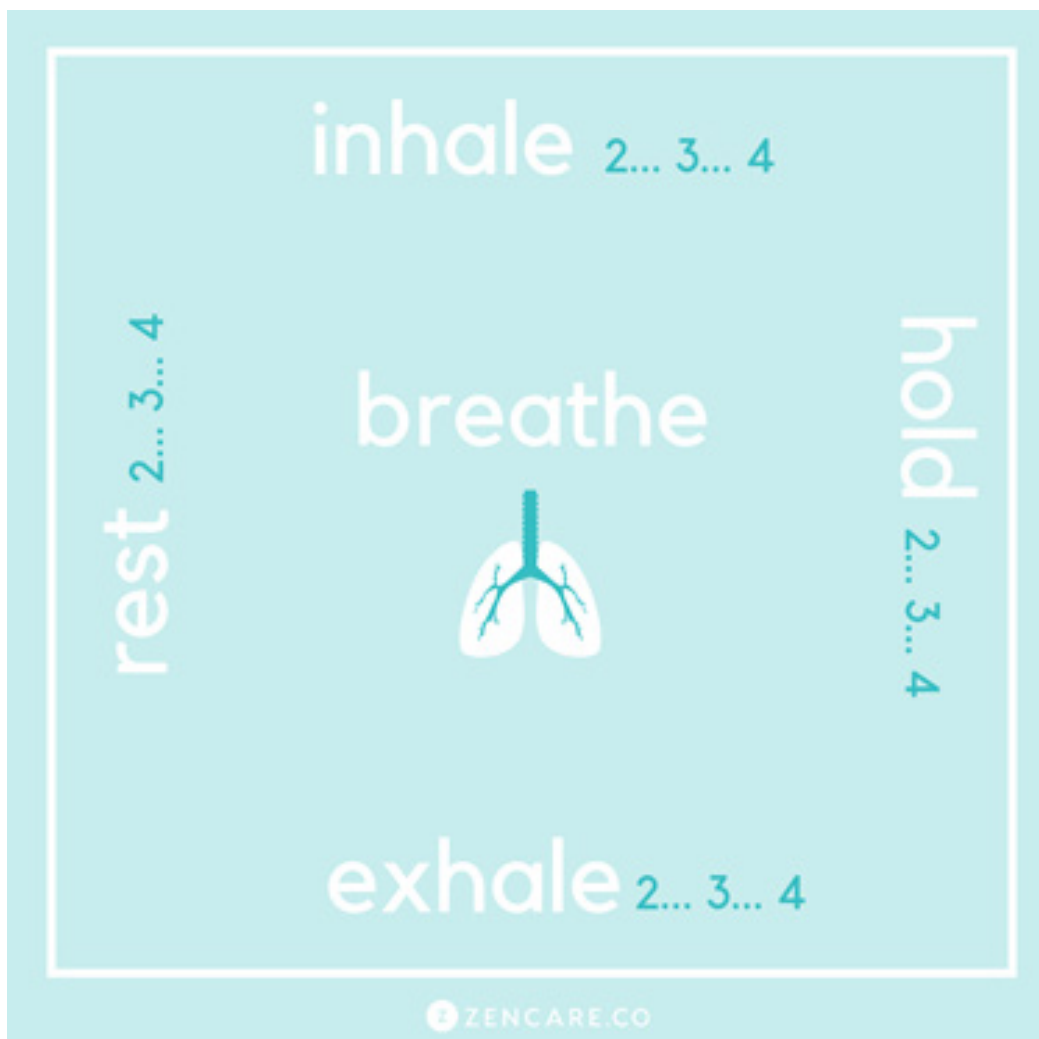
Background and context

Evidence suggests that intentional deep breathing can calm and regulate the autonomic nervous system and provide an almost immediate sense of calm.

How to do it

Follow these instructions. When you get to the end, repeat it as many times as you feel you need to in order to feel more relaxed.

- Begin by slowly exhaling all of your air out.
- Then, gently inhale through your nose to a slow count of 4.
- Hold at the top of the breath for a count of 4.
- Then, gently exhale through your mouth for a count of 4.
- At the bottom of the breath, pause and hold for the count of 4.



Appendix 7: Whole school systems for promotion of emotional wellbeing and prevention of ERSA



Adapted from West Sussex Educational Psychology Service Emotionally Based School Avoidance: Good practice guidance for schools and support agencies.



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