

Emotionally-related school avoidance: profile of risk and resilience

Definition of ERSA

Emotionally related school avoidance (ERSA) describes a group of children and young people that experience difficulties attending school due to school, parent or child factors, as well as wider societal factors. The roots of ERSA lie in emotional, psychological and relational issues. ERSA presents as a continuum, ranging from children and young people who are attending school, but present with anxiety and behavioural symptoms, through to complete absence from school for an extended period of time.

Using the 'Profile of risk and resilience' (PoRR)

The PoRR consists of six key areas. Each contains a number of items you are asked to consider in terms of their possible importance in influencing an emotionally related attendance problem. The rationale for the content is based on risk and resilience factors identified in this guidance.

When completing the PoRR, it is important to be as objective as possible, and to base assessments on evidence. It is therefore recommended that completion of the PoRR is a joint venture between the lead professional at school, involved professionals (such as a social worker, education welfare officer, early help worker) and the family. The child or young person can also be involved if appropriate; checking and questioning can lead to the best judgements in terms of item importance. The statements are written from the perspective of the child or young person to help consider the situation from their point of view.

During the process of completing the PoRR, it may be useful to note factors associated with particular items, such as:

- this has been an issue in the past, but doesn't appear to be now
- this has been an issue in the past and has persisted as an important item

Items are not quantified by a typical rating scale. This may be that one single item (such as the death of a parent) is so important it cannot be rated numerically in the same way other items might be rated. Its influence could be proportionately much greater than a rating scale could accommodate.

Some factors could present either as a risk or resilience factor. Thus we suggest first identifying its presence (Yes/No) and then deciding whether it is a risk or resilience factor for the child or young person. You might choose to rate the risk factors with a red, amber, green (RAG) rating with green indicating a low level of concern and red indicating a high level of concern.

Where there is a resilience factor, a tick in the box can highlight this. If there is a risk or resilience factor, it is crucial that additional information is provided in the comments section to best understand the context and needs of the child or young person. These comments will also inform the next steps regarding additional support and what is needed in the support plan.

If the resultant profile suggests that the pupil is at risk of emotionally related school avoidance, the next step is to explore the ERSA resources with the child or young person, and engage the pupil-led ERSA support plan including relevant professionals, parents and carers.

Profile of risk and resilience of ERSA

| Social and personal | Yes/No | Risk concern | Resilience factor | Additional comments |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| I often fall out with or am bullied by peers | | | | |
| I feel confident in myself | | | | |
| I feel that I am well liked by others | | | | |
| I have supportive peer relationships, at least one close friend in school or college | | | | |
| I have positive relationships with at least one staff member or adult outside of school or college (such as scout leader) | | | | |
| I feel safe in school | | | | |
| I am anxious or fearful over particular parts of the school or college day (such as break time) | | | | |
| I do things outside of school or college which I enjoy | | | | |
| I feel a sense of belonging or identity within my class or friendship group in school or college | | | | |
| I attend and enjoy after school clubs or extracurricular activities | | | | |
| Loss and change | Yes/No | Risk concern | Resilience factor | Additional comments |
| I feel a sense of loss (for example: due to bereavement, parental separation or divorce, death of a pet) | | | | |
| I feel unstable with my home or school life (for example: I am not always certain which house I am staying in each night, I do not know who will be at home, there have been lots of separations, changes and moves in my life) | | | | |
| I am or will be moving house, school, area | | | | |
| I have experienced the loss of a classmate | | | | |
| My parents, carers, relatives or friends are ill | | | | |
| The Covid-19 pandemic and the uncertainty had a big impact on my return to school | | | | |

| Family dynamics | Yes/No | Risk concern | Resilience factor | Additional comments |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| I have a close relationship with my family at home | | | | |
| I feel safe and secure when at home | | | | |
| I have a stable and predictable home routine | | | | |
| I feel comfortable being away from my parents or carers | | | | |
| I have a supportive family (for example: my family talks positively about school, my family is motivated to support me to attend school, my family values education) | | | | |
| There has been a birth of a new child in my family | | | | |
| My siblings consistently attend school | | | | |
| My parents are separated | | | | |
| My parents or carers constantly argue or fight | | | | |
| I have practical problems coming to school | | | | |
| I feel jealous of my sibling(s) | | | | |
| I often fight or argue with my sibling(s) | | | | |
| I worry about my parents or carers when I am away from home or that something bad might happen to my family | | | | |
| I stay home to spend time with my family member or significant other | | | | |

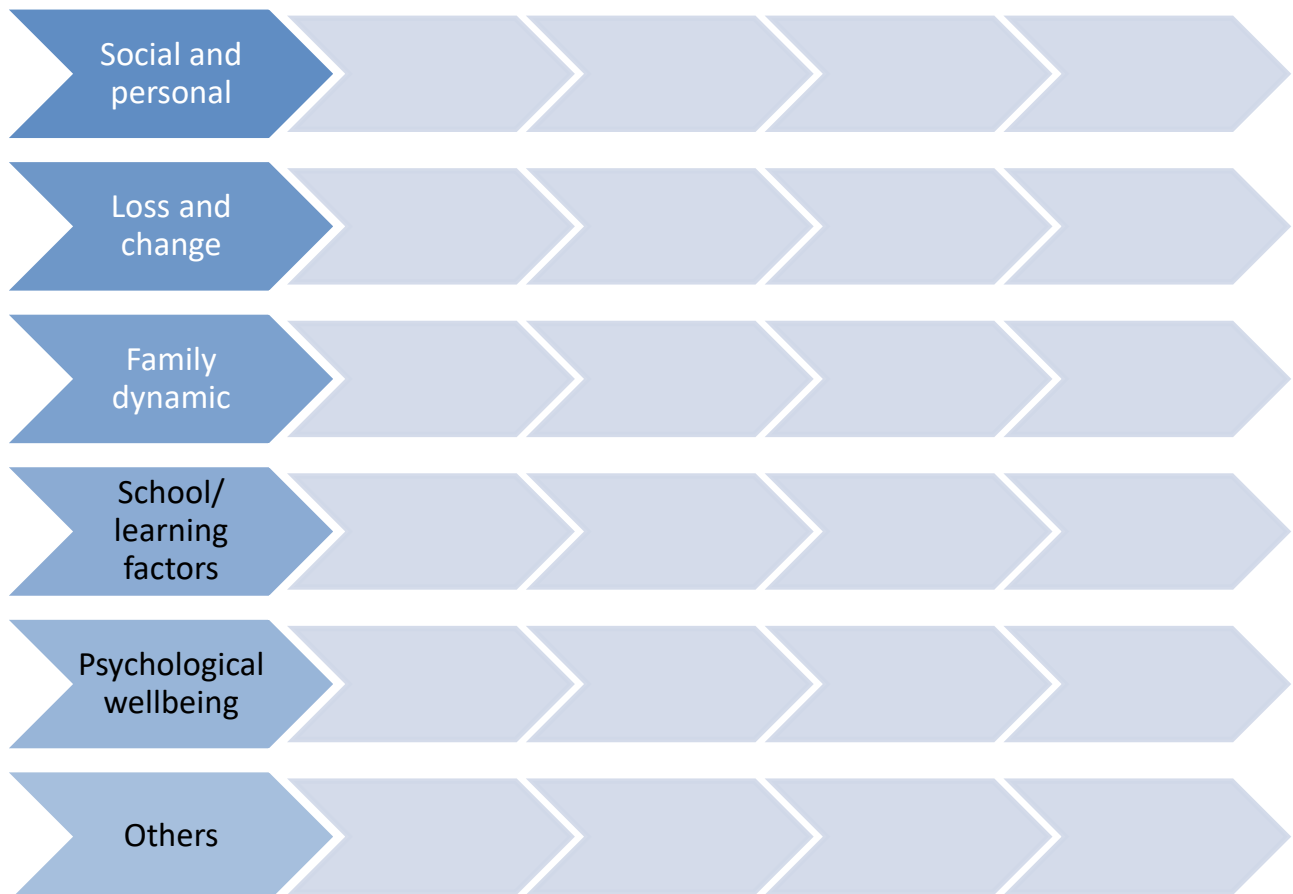
| School or learning factors | Yes/No | Risk concern | Resilience factor | Additional comments |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| I find reading and writing difficult | | | | |
| I lack confidence in my ability to achieve well at school | | | | |
| There are things I can do in school which I am proud of | | | | |
| I need to be challenged more in my learning as I need more stimulation in class | | | | |
| I often feel frustrated by learning tasks (too easy or hard) | | | | |
| I find it hard to know what information to pay attention to | | | | |
| I am hyper (over) sensitive to sensory stimuli (for example: crowds, noise or smell) and may notice everything all at once | | | | |
| I am hypo (under) sensitive to sensory stimuli. This means I present as sensory seeking and need regular movement breaks as well as not noticing things in the environment. | | | | |
| I struggle with transition points in school (such as corridors) | | | | |
| I am working within age-related expectations at school | | | | |
| I feel anxious about exams and tests | | | | |
| I have lost a connection to a teacher or friend | | | | |
| I struggle to keep pace with the set work in class | | | | |
| I am motivated to attend school | | | | |

| Psychological wellbeing | Yes/No | Risk concern | Resilience factor | Additional comments |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| I am often tired | | | | |
| I have a low self-esteem | | | | |
| When I feel anxious or frustrated, I feel this way for a long time (for example: stuck in a negative thought pattern for a while) | | | | |
| I feel that no one understands me | | | | |
| I feel pressure from others to attend school or rushed to return | | | | |
| I am fearful of making mistakes in class | | | | |
| I feel that everything will be alright in the future if I can get the right help | | | | |
| I worry about what others think of me | | | | |
| I am able to communicate my emotions effectively | | | | |
| I can recognise and talk about good things that happen in the day | | | | |

| Other considerations | Yes/No | Risk concern | Resilience factor | Additional comments |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Autism spectrum condition (ASC) | | | | |
| ADHD | | | | |
| I am part of the LGBTQIA+ community | | | | |
| Mental health needs related to disordered eating | | | | |
| I have long term health issues | | | | |
| I am new to the UK where English is a second language, impacting access to education | | | | |
| Any others: | | | | |

Overview of key risk and resilience factors identified

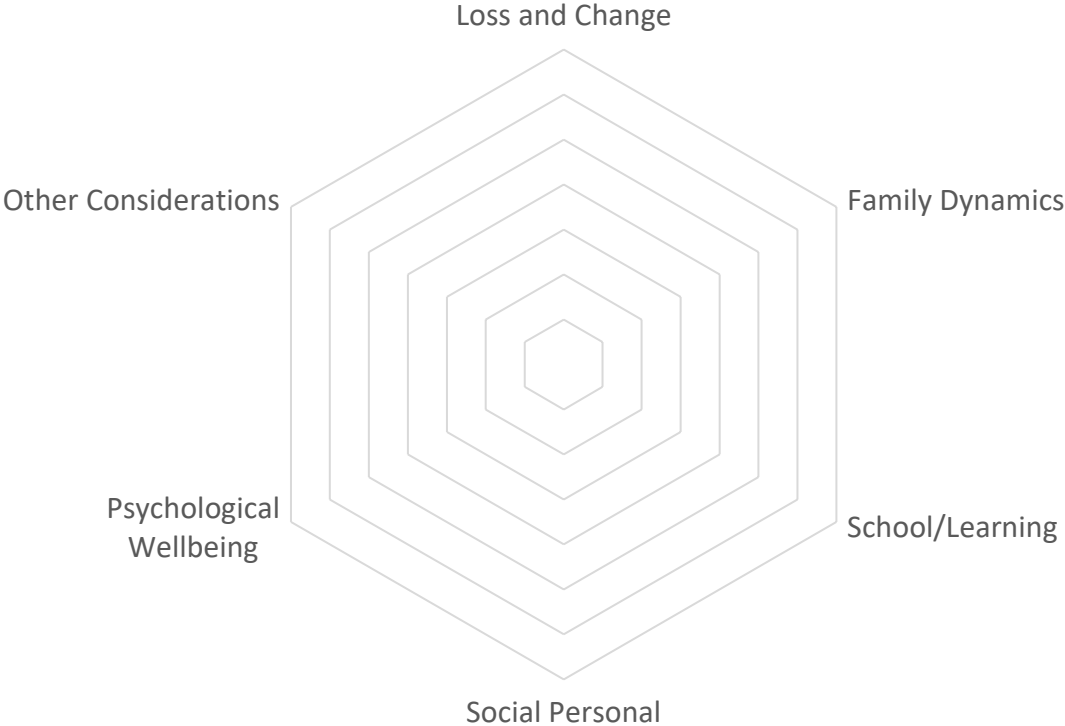
You may wish to add in the key risk and resilience factors here for an overview and to inform the key areas to address in the ERSA support plan or ERSA person-centred path. Consider using two different colours for the risk and resilience factors.



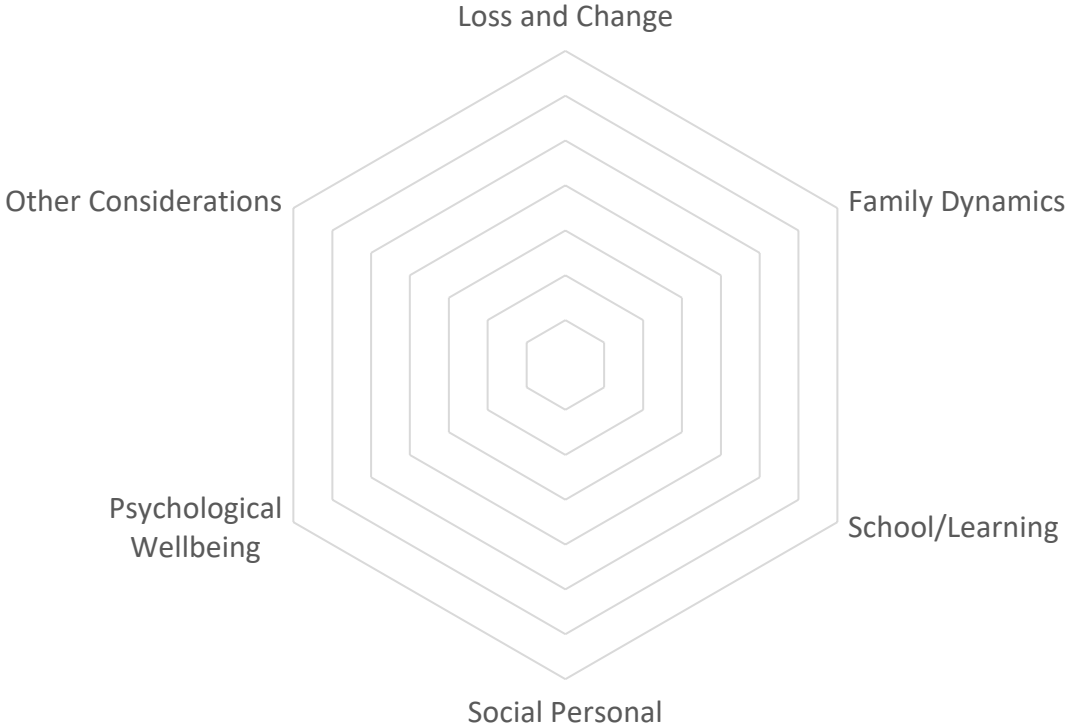
Mapping the risk and resilience factors onto the respective webs below can provide a clear visual representation of areas needing support and strengths. Here's a step-by-step guide to help you with this process.

- **Quantify factors:** For each category, identify the number of risk and resilience factors.
- **Plot the points:** Starting from the centre, mark points along each line corresponding to the number of factors. For example, if there are five risk factors in the family category, mark five points along the family line on the risk factors web.
- **Connect the points:** Connect the points for each category to form a web. This visual will help you see which areas have more risk factors and which have more resilience factors.
- **Analyse the web:** Look at the web to identify areas with high risk factors and areas with strong resilience. This can guide your support strategies. It should be noted that a high quantity of risk factors in a specific area does not diminish the impact of individual risk factors in other areas.

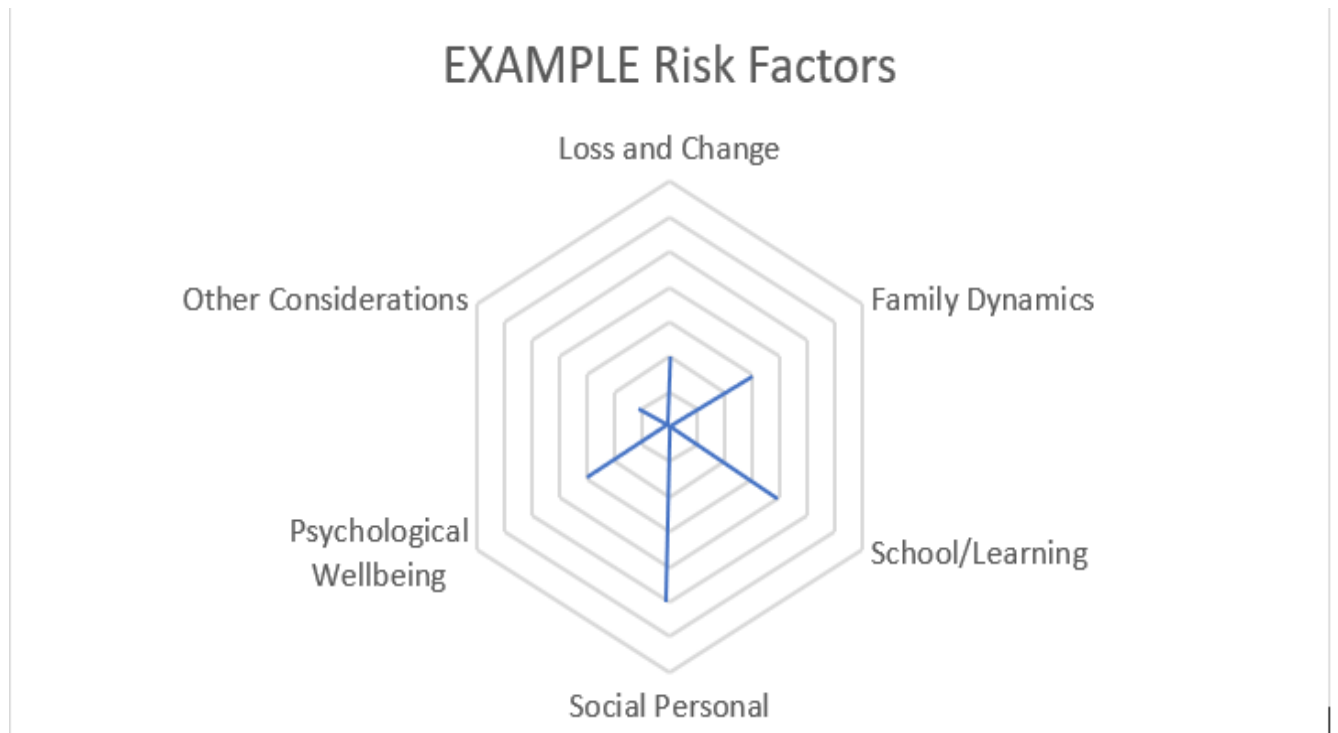
Resilience Factors



Risk Factors



Example case:



Breakdown of example risk factor web

- **Loss and change (2):** Child A transitioned to a new school during the Covid-19 lockdown (change of school and great uncertainty during the pandemic had a big impact on the return to school).
- **Family factors (3):** Child A does not feel comfortable being away from their parents, they often argue with their siblings, and there is a practical problem with getting to and from school.
- **School or learning (4):** Child A finds reading and writing difficult, they often feel frustrated by learning tasks because they are too hard, they struggle to keep up with the pace of the work set in class, and they are not motivated to attend school.
- **Social personal (5):** Child A experiences difficulties within peer interactions. They often report being bullied by peers, they do not feel well liked by peers, they do not have supportive peer relationships, they have reported not feeling safe in school, and they present as anxious during break times.
- **Psychological wellbeing (3):** Child A has a low self-esteem, they are fearful of making mistakes in class, and they are not currently able to communicate their emotions effectively.
- **Other considerations (1):** Child A has a diagnosis of autism.

With thanks to guidance from West Sussex EPS and EBSA Horizons Risk and Resilience Profiles from which this ERSA Profile of Risk and Resilience has been adapted.