

## Psychology and Wellbeing Team



# Emotionally Related School Avoidance (ERSA) Toolkit

Quick guide  
for schools



## What is 'emotionally related school avoidance' (ERSA)?

Emotionally related school avoidance describes a group of children and young people who experience difficulties attending school that can be linked to school, parents, carers or child factors as well as wider societal factors.

ERSA can range from children and young people who are still attending school but present with anxiety, through to those with no attendance at school for an extended period. Although children's and young people's behaviours might not be readily recognisable as ERSA at the early stages of the continuum, it highlights their vulnerability to develop ERSA if action is not taken. Children and young people with ERSA often do want to attend school, however, their anxiety or an absence of necessary skills or resources leaves them unable to do so.

## Who is the ERSA toolkit for and what is its purpose?

The ERSA toolkit is a set of guidance intended to support schools, involved professionals, parents and carers in completing early intervention work to support children and young people presenting with ERSA with their wellbeing and enabling them to feel safe at school.

The ERSA toolkit includes a graduated response guide, outlining to schools the appropriate resources, measures, and referrals to be implemented at the varying stages and severity of ERSA. Research shows that a key determinant of likely success in managing ERSA is early intervention (Baker and Bishop, 2015). School staff should identify those children and young people who continue to attend school, but are showing early signs of ERSA. Some examples of these early signs might be:

- sporadic attendance and lateness
- feeling anxious or worried about some (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 (for example, stomach-ache, sickness, headache)
- behavioural changes or fluctuations (for example, less interactions with peers, reduced motivation, and engagement in learning tasks)

## How do I use the toolkit in my school?

Identify an ERSA Lead who is well positioned to enable a joined-up approach to understanding and supporting students with ERSA.

### Step 1: Training and awareness

- Watch the [ERSA Webinar](#) (30 minutes) or request training and/or consultation from the RBWM ERSA coordinator (E: [ersa@achievingforchildren.org.uk](mailto:ersa@achievingforchildren.org.uk))
- Read the ERSA Pathway and Toolkit Guidance

### Step 2: Use of the ERSA whole school audit

The ERSA whole school audit is a tool for schools to use to profile the staff's knowledge and awareness of ERSA. The tool also looks at the school's approach to mental health and wellbeing as a preventative factor, and the systems and support in place for children and young people experiencing ERSA. This can then be used to target areas in need of development to support a whole-school ethos of positive mental health and school attendance. Schools may request coaching support from the RBWM ERSA coordinator to use the information gathered from their audit to identify specific goals and formulate a whole-school action plan.

### Step 3: Identifying individual students and putting a personalised plan in place

When a child or young person is showing early signs of ERSA, and/or they have been absent from school for several days over a short period within three weeks, this is 'Level 1: Early Intervention - Getting help' ([see ERSA pathway and toolkit guidance for more information](#)).

- **Complete the ERSA profile of risk and resiliency** in collaboration with parent, carers and school staff who know the child or young person well. Use the information gathered to inform the support plan and make referrals to outside agencies as appropriate. This also acts as an intervention tool.
- **Complete the ERSA support plan:** identify who is the person best placed to work directly with the child or young person to elicit their views and formulate a young person-centred plan. Identify with the children and young people who the support plan needs to be shared with.

Please refer to the document, '[Further guidance resources for supporting children and young people with ERSA](#)'.

## Step 4: Reviewing the plan

Hold regular ERSA support plan review meetings (monthly is recommended), together with the young person, parent, carers, key school staff, and other professionals who have been identified as part of the team around the child. The reviews will inform when to progress to:

- **Level 2: Targeted intervention: Getting more help**

If the ERSA support plan has not been successful, the non-attendance is escalating or the child or young person has already reached this threshold prior to your awareness of the ERSA toolkit, the following may be appropriate. If no progress is seen after one to two terms, then the school can consider involving other services on the graduated multi-agency pathway, such as the pupils educationally at risk (PEAR) panel.

- **Level 3: Specialist intervention: Getting risk support**

At this point the child or young person may be accessing support from the wide variety of local authority and health services listed in the graduated multi-agency pathway. During a long-term absence, school will coordinate with involved professionals including specialist advisory teachers, CAMHS and alternative provision providers the ERSA support plan that is appropriate to support the child's needs.

It is also recommended that the ERSA support plan is used as a live document to inform and structure weekly check-ins with the child or young person.

## Working with parents or carers

Close collaborative working with parents or carers will include:

- sharing the ERSA parents and carers guidance
- identify trusted member of staff to link and communicate with parents
- signpost parents to support networks and other services highlighted in the ERSA pathway
- planning for all transitions for the children and young people
- capturing parent or carer voices and perspectives

Please also see '[Emotionally Related School Avoidance \(ERSA\) Toolkit Quick Guide for Parents](#)' for more information.

## Getting advice or signposting

Service or team	Support provided	Contact details
SHaRON Digital Platform	An online network for education professionals providing peer support and access to resources 24/7 on mental health and wellbeing to enable you to support children and young people.	E: To sign up for access to SHaRON for Professionals please email a request to: <a href="mailto:CAMHSGettingHelpEast@berkshire.nhs.uk">CAMHSGettingHelpEast@berkshire.nhs.uk</a>
PPEP Care Training	Psychological Perspectives in Education and Primary Care (PPEPCare) training has been designed to help staff/volunteers in the CYP workforce to recognise and understand mental health difficulties in children and young people; offer appropriate support and guidance using psychoeducation and relevant evidence based psychological techniques	W: <a href="https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/our-services/service-for-professionals/ppepcare-training/">https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/our-services/service-for-professionals/ppepcare-training/</a>
Kooth	Kooth provides regular webinars for professionals to provide an insight into the Kooth service offer and a demo of the site. They also offer virtual assemblies; wellbeing workshops; resilience, exam stress; awareness raising training sessions for staff	W: <a href="https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/kooth-back-to-school-planning-for-education-professionals-tickets-374185598197?aff=ebdsoporgpr">https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/kooth-back-to-school-planning-for-education-professionals-tickets-374185598197?aff=ebdsoporgpr</a> ofile E: <a href="mailto:lmunro@kooth.com">lmunro@kooth.com</a>
Charlie Waller Free Webinar Programme	They are running a series of live webinars for parents, carers, and educators. Topics include 'The Teen Brain', 'Sleep' and 'Perfectionism'.	W: <a href="https://charliewaller.org/what-we-offer/free-webinars/">https://charliewaller.org/what-we-offer/free-webinars/</a>
Five to Thrive	The 90 min 'Five to Thrive' pre-recorded training webinar titled ' <i>Attachment, Trauma &amp; Resilience: the importance of relationships from birth and beyond</i> ' is available to watch.	W: <a href="https://connected.kca.training/register.cfm?form=Frimley-FTT">https://connected.kca.training/register.cfm?form=Frimley-FTT</a>
Every Mind Matters Lesson Plans on Mental Health Wellbeing	Helping you teach PSHE, RHE and RSHE to Upper KS2, KS3 and KS4 students, with flexible, ready-to-use content co-created with teachers, and young people.	W: <a href="https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/schools/topics/mental-wellbeing/overview?WT.mc_id=BH_Schools_EVERFI_MENTALWELLBEING_MARCH_TWITTERADS_AD3_general2&amp;twclid=11506988598201040896&amp;s=09#subscribeModal">https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/schools/topics/mental-wellbeing/overview?WT.mc_id=BH_Schools_EVERFI_MENTALWELLBEING_MARCH_TWITTERADS_AD3_general2&amp;twclid=11506988598201040896&amp;s=09#subscribeModal</a>
RBWM ERSA coordinator	Within RBWM there is a designated ERSA coordinator, who you can seek advice and support from.	E: <a href="mailto:ersa@achievingforchildren.org.uk">ersa@achievingforchildren.org.uk</a>

## Books and websites

'Helping your child with fears and worries' Second Edition, Cathy Cresswell and Lucy Willetts

'What To Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety', Dawn Huebner and Bonnie Matthews

'Anxiety survival guide for teens: CBT skills to overcome fear, worry and panic', Jennifer Shannon

'Starving the Anxiety Gremlin: A Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Workbook on Anxiety Management for Young People', Kate Collins-Donnelly

'A Volcano in My Tummy', Elaine Whitehouse and Warwick Pudney.

'Not fine in school' [www.notfineinschool.co.uk](http://www.notfineinschool.co.uk)

'Square pegs' [home | squarepeg \(teamsquarepeg.org\)](http://home.squarepeg.org)

Mighty Moe by Lacey Woloshyn

<http://www.cw.bc.ca/library/pdf/pamphlets/Mighty%20Moe1.pdf>

Anxiety self help guide – Mood Juice

[https://www.mcgill.ca/counselling/files/counselling/anxiety\\_moodjuice\\_self\\_help\\_guide.pdf](https://www.mcgill.ca/counselling/files/counselling/anxiety_moodjuice_self_help_guide.pdf)

Anxiety by Paul Stallard -Examples of activities <http://tandfbis.s3.amazonaws.com/rt-media/pp/resources/CBTCHILD/worksheets.pdf>