

Psychology and Wellbeing Team

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Royal Borough
of Windsor &
Maidenhead

Emotionally Related School Avoidance (ERSA) Toolkit



**achieving
for children**

What is ERSA?

Emotionally related school avoidance (ERSA) describes a group of children and young people who experience difficulties attending school which 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 recognisable as ERSA at the early stages, they highlight their vulnerability to becoming ERSA if action is not taken. Children and young people with ERSA often do want to attend school, however, their anxiety and absence of necessary coping skills 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 and parents in completing early intervention work to support children and young people presenting with ERSA to attend 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. School staff and parents 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:

- infrequent attendance and lateness
- feeling anxious or worried about (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)

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

How can the ERSA toolkit be used to support my child?

The ERSA toolkit provides clear guidance and steps for parents/carers, schools and professionals involved to access the information and support available at each stage for your child. This means that everyone that needs to be involved has a clear pathway and plan to support your child.

For more advice on how to support your child please see this [Parent webinar](#) for more information.

Access to support - What to do and when

Universal provision

Whole school approach to ERSA which supports attendance, wellbeing, and early identification.

What: Whole-school wellbeing and positive mental health policy and approaches.
Whole school audit tool used for profiling, prevention, and awareness of ERSA.

Level 1: Early Intervention - Getting help

When: If your child seems anxious or upset to attend school, is frequently expressing a serious desire not to attend school, or showing physical symptoms of anxiety (such as a headache or stomach-ache) or has been absent for several days over a short period (within three weeks). This may be a sign of ERSA and early intervention may be appropriate. It is very important to identify the signs, communicate them to school and initiate support as soon as possible to avoid the development of severe ERSA.

What: Share your concerns with the school if they have not contacted you already to discuss with a member of staff, such as: the ERSA lead, form tutor, head of year, SENCo, attendance officer. The school will then refer to the ERSA guidance for early intervention. After completing the ERSA risk and resilience profile tool (in collaboration with yourself), schools and families will work together to implement an ERSA support plan (which will involve weekly check-ins with your child) with short term goals and review dates, which involves your child. Where necessary, referrals to other services may be considered.

Level 2: Targeted intervention - Getting more help

When: If your child is struggling to come into school on a regular basis and is having longer and more frequent periods of absence.

What: If the ERSA support plan has not been successful, the non-attendance is escalating or your child has already reached this threshold prior to your awareness of the ERSA toolkit, the following may be appropriate. Regular contact to be maintained with school, parents, carers, and the young person to amend and implement the ERSA support plan as appropriate (monthly is recommended). If these steps do not lead to progress after one to two terms, then the school can consider involving other services on the graduated multi-agency pathway.

Level 3: Specialist intervention - Getting risk support

When: If your child is experiencing long-term or complete absences from school and presenting with complex anxiety or mental health difficulties and disengaging from social and/or homelife activities which is consequently impacting on their daily functioning.

What: At this point your child 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, the school will coordinate with involved professionals including specialist advisory teachers, Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and alternative provision providers the ERSA support plan that is appropriate to support your child's needs.

Getting advice and signposting

Service or team	Support provided	Contact details
Information, Advice and Support Service	Providing reliable information and advice about special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) for children, young people, and their parents or carers.	E: ias@rbwm.gov.uk T: 01628 683182 W: https://www.ias-rbwm.info
The Local Offer	Enables parents, carers, children, and young people with SEND to see clearly, the services available to them and how to access them.	W: https://rbwm.afcinfo.org.uk/local_offer
Number22	Counselling , advocacy, and independent visiting services to the community, free at the point of use.	W: https://number22.org
Early Help	A range of services in RBWM that support family resilience, good mental health and emotional wellbeing in children and young people.	W: https://rbwm.afcinfo.org.uk/pages/local-offer/information-and-advice/social-care/single-point-of-access-spa-and/early-help-hub
GEMS and Parenting Special Children	Free, specialist parenting programmes for Berkshire families (autism, ADHD, special needs, attachment, sensory processing), sleep clinics, workshops and bespoke training for professionals, family events, help and advice services, the opportunity to meet other people in similar circumstances, and group support.	Parenting Special Children W: www.parentingspecialchildren.co.uk GEMS4Health Website: www.gems4health.com
The Autism Group	A Maidenhead based charity committed to supporting and enhancing the lives of young people on the spectrum, their parents, and carers.	W: https://www.theautismgroup.org.uk
Kooth	A free online counselling service that offers emotional and mental health support to children and young people.	Access: Via website W: www.kooth.com E: parents@xenzone.com
Family Friends Anxiety Group	An anxiety group for children aged 8 to12 years who are struggling with anxiety which is impacting on their schooling, family life, self-esteem, social activities, or enjoyment of life. (This is set dates, so enquire for more information)	T: 0300 800 1005 T: 07860 021720 E: info@family-friends.org.uk
RBWM ERSA coordinator	Within RBWM there is a designated ERSA coordinator, who you can seek advice and support from.	E: ersa@achievingforchildren.org.uk

Books

'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

'Not fine in school' www.notfineinschool.co.uk

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

Anxiety by Paul Stallard - Examples of activities

<http://tandfbis.s3.amazonaws.com/rt-media/pp/resources/CBTCHILD/worksheets.pdf>