



# The Good Shepherd Catholic Primary School

## Spring SEND Newsletter 2026

Happy New Year! Welcome to our Spring Term 2026 SEND newsletter. A newsletter addressing all things related to SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities). In this issue you will find out more about how we support school based anxiety and avoidance.



As The Good Shepherd's Special Educational Needs and Disability Coordinator (SENCO), I am here to offer support and advice regarding additional needs or SEND support for your child. As a school, we value the engagement of our parents so please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions or concerns. My contact email address is: CThomas@olicatschools.org

As The Good Shepherd's new SENDCo Assistant, I support Mrs Thomas in providing high quality SEND provision across our school and support the team in meeting the needs of our SEND pupils. My contact email address is: EHarris@tgs.nor.olicatschools.org



The new school year brings both fresh opportunities and new challenges, especially for children with SEND. At The Good Shepherd, we are committed to supporting children, staff and parents in their wellbeing and mental health. We know that positive wellbeing, physical and mental health are all vital to successful learning and progress.

Good morning and welcome to Monday at **Good Shepherd Catholic Primary School** ☺  
Today, **Year 5 & Year 6 are off to the forest** for a day of learning in God's creation.

May God bless our day, guide our learning, and keep us safe. Amen ☺

### Why does it happen?

EBSA can happen at any age, and it can be more common among children with additional or special educational needs (SEND). It can be a stressful and worrying time for you as a parent/carer, so be kind to yourself as well your child. The most important thing is to listen to your child and to try and be calm, patient and show empathy. It's also important to look after yourself. School anxiety can happen suddenly or build over time. If it persists, it shouldn't be ignored, but rather be explored.

Often, anxiety is at the root and these anxieties can include:

- Social or work pressures at school.
- Difficulties maintaining or making positive relationships with peers or staff.
- Unmet needs e.g. additional needs or feeling unsafe.
- Home and/or family factors.
- Sensory needs making the environment feel overwhelming.

### How school anxiety might show up at home

Although some of the below may be typical behaviours in childhood development i.e. homework and defiance, some ways you might spot school anxiety in your child includes:

- Not wanting to get up, get ready or go to school.
- Anxiety and heightened emotions when getting ready to leave for school.
- Repeated physical symptoms like headaches, stomach ache or feeling sick.
- Repeatedly complaining of feeling poorly at school.
- A change in behaviour either by becoming more withdrawn or acting out more.
- Trouble eating, sleeping or getting to sleep.
- Performing less well at school or refusing to do any school work at home e.g. reading, homework.

## Anxiety

The most common way of managing anxiety is avoidance. When we avoid the anxious situation, we get an immediate relief. However, this is only a short-term solution as when we face the situation the next time the anxiety reaction is much greater due to the increased anticipation of the event. This happens in EBSA. Children who are anxious about attending school get an immediate sense of relief when they avoid school, however the fear of attending the next day is then much greater. They are then even more likely to avoid school again. This is called an avoidance cycle.

Instead of using avoidance to cope with feeling overwhelmed, we need to support our children to:

- Recognise the triggers of their anxiety
- Identify small steps they feel they can take
- Have ways they can calm themselves when they are starting to feel anxious. This will help them deal with stressful situations throughout life and not become overwhelmed or avoid the things they find challenging.

Remember also that anxiety can make children behave in different ways, for example...

- A desire to control people and events.
- Difficulty getting to sleep.
- Feeling agitated or angry.
- Having exceptionally high expectations for self, including schoolwork & sports.
- Struggling to pay attention and focus.
- Intolerance of uncertainty.
- Crying and difficulty managing emotions.
- Avoiding activities or events (including school).
- Over planning for situations and events.
- Feeling worried about situations or events.
- Pain like stomach-aches and headaches.
- Defiance and other challenging behaviours.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF SCHOOL ANXIETY?



## What can parents/carers do to help?

Help identify issues - Try to find out why your child is avoiding school. At a time when you're both feeling calm (and not on busy school mornings), ask your child to describe or draw the key challenges of going to school. Gently ask about what is making school feel hard. Is your child struggling with friendships? Are they worried about their work? Are they fearful of being separated from their parents for a full day?

Together, you may be able to solve these problems or develop a plan to manage them.

Be empathetic but firm - Tell them you are confident they can face their fears.

Let your child know that while physical symptoms of anxiety, such as stomach aches headaches and tiredness, can be unpleasant, they often ease up as the school day progresses and children overcome their fears.

Create a morning routine - A daily routine can give a feeling of security and reduce your stress! Pack bags and lay uniform out the night before.

In the morning, focus on completing one task before moving on. For example, say 'Put your socks on first,' rather than making the goal too big. E.g. 'Get ready for school.' If your child isn't able to get into school, avoid arguing with them and be supportive of any small achievements they make, like putting their uniform on or walking to the school gates, even if they can't go in.

Create a visual schedule or checklist together to help follow a consistent step by step routine.



## Did you know?

Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA), also known as Anxiety-Based School Avoidance (ABSA), is a term used to describe children and young people (CYP) who experience persistent challenges in attending school due to negative feelings, such as anxiety.

It's now called Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) rather than 'school refusal' because 'school refusal' makes it sound like it is the child's choice not to attend.

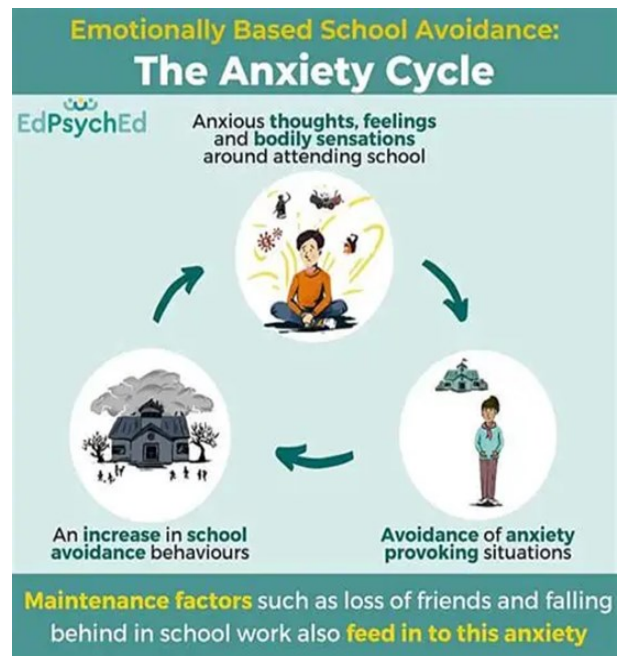
In reality however, EBSA is actually associated with emotional and physical distress. In short, it's when difficulties attending school have escalated to a point where the child has continued to struggle to attend school over a period of time.

- Break the task down - Give your child a choice of two alternatives if you're struggling to get a morning routine established. For example: Do you want to put your socks on first or your underwear? Would you like jam on your toast or honey? Do you want to take route X to school or route Y to school? Would you like to go by car, or by scooter? This gives your child a feeling of empowerment and can result in better cooperation.
- Make staying at home boring - Is there anything about the out of school environment that makes it extra tempting to stay home? Make home as school like as possible therefore if your child stays home by setting up a routine similar to school:
- Get up and dressed by school time
- Limit access to TV and the Internet during school hours
- Encourage the child to complete their homework/work
- Limit one on one time with the parent until after school hours
- Reduce activities out of the home, such as shopping or going to the café.
- Reduce sleeping or lounging in bed and less genuinely sick.

Communicate with school - If you notice that your child is feeling anxious about school and it is becoming an issue, arrange a meeting with your child's class teacher. Just making them aware and knowing that they understand your child's worries can and can help them if the need arises, can be reassuring and can help to build that trusted relationship with your child.

Personalised Plan Working with school, we can form a plan of what can be adapted to reduce some of the anxiety. The stress hormone cortisol is often higher in the morning (to help get us out of bed!), however this can make feelings of anxiety worse in the mornings. It can therefore be helpful to focus on morning routines to start with.

If you would like further support, please speak with your child's teacher or contact the school and ask to speak with the SENDCo.



### What is separation anxiety disorder in children?

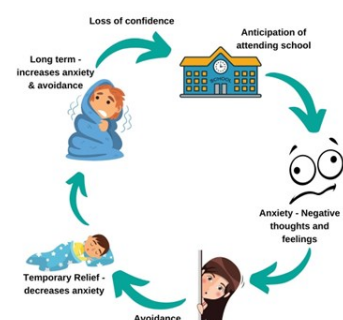
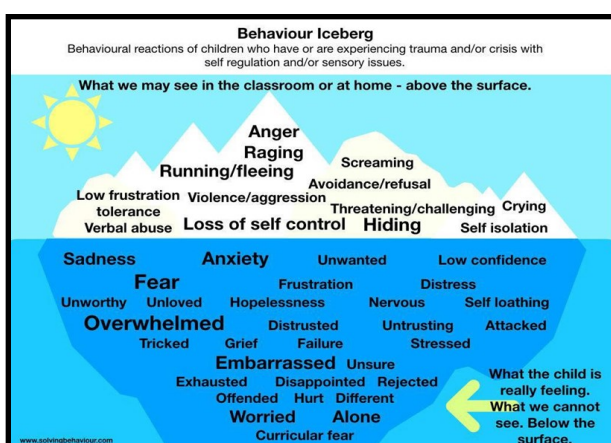
A child with Separation Anxiety Disorder (SAD) worries a lot about being apart from family members or other close people. The child has a fear of being lost from their family or of something bad occurring to a family member if they are not with the person.

All children feel some anxiety. It is a normal part of growing up. Separation anxiety is normal in very young children. Nearly all children between ages 18 months and 4 years old have separation anxiety. They are 'clingy' to some degree. But the symptoms of SAD are more severe and persistent.

A child must have symptoms of SAD for at least 4 weeks to be diagnosed with SAD. A child with SAD has worries and fears about being apart from home or family that are not typical for their age. What causes separation anxiety disorder in a child?

Experts believe SAD is caused by both biological and environmental factors. A child may inherit a tendency to be anxious. An imbalance of 2 chemicals in the brain (norepinephrine and serotonin) most likely plays a part. A child can also learn anxiety and fear from family members and others. A traumatic event may also cause SAD.

If you have any concerns please contact your GP who can support further.



What are the symptoms of separation anxiety disorder in a child?

The first symptoms of SAD often appear around age 5-6. They may start after a break from school, such as during holidays or summer. Or after a long-term sickness. Each child may have different symptoms. But the most common signs of SAD are:

- Refusing to sleep alone
- Repeated nightmares with a theme of separation
- Lots of worry when parted from home or family
- Too much worry about the safety of a family member
- Too much worry about getting lost from family
- Persistent refusing to go to school
- Fear and reluctance to be alone
- Frequent stomach aches, headaches, or other physical complaints
- Muscle aches or tension
- Too much worry about safety of self
- Too much worry about or when sleeping away from home
- Being persistently very clingy, even when at home
- Panic attacks or temper tantrums at times of separation from parents or caregivers

How can I help my child live with separation anxiety disorder?  
As a parent, you play a key role in your child's treatment. Here are things you can do to help:

- Create quick good-bye rituals. Keep the good-bye short and sweet. If you linger, the transition time does too. So will the anxiety.
- Be consistent and try to avoid unexpected factors whenever you can.

- Creating routines will allow your child to simultaneously build trust in their independence and in you.
- Keep the promises you make to your child.
- Pack a Transitional Object - Pack a small, familiar object to help ease the transition, such as a family photo in your child's backpack or small pocket heart in your child's pocket as a reminder that they're still loved and connected, even when you're apart.
- Give your child something that smells of your perfume/aftershave, or a comfort toy. A heart drawn on the hand – the comfort button – is also a lovely idea. A note in a lunchbox... a note on a handkerchief...
- Practice short "away times" with people your child trusts. For instance, a short playdate with a friend or a visit to a grandparent's house.
- Show your child reassurance and support. Encourage age-appropriate independence.
- Recognize situations that may stress your child. Knowing what stresses your child and planning ahead can help you prepare your child so they are

SEND  
Coffee  
Afternoon



You are warmly invited to attend our first SEND  
Coffee afternoon on

March 12th 2026 at 2:30pm.

### Support Hubs and further Advice

If your child frequently experiences some of these things and it's affecting their day-to-day and family life, please contact us to discuss your concerns or with your child's GP. Where we can discuss ways to support at home and school and consider next steps. The local offer also provides further advice training and activities for SEND children to access:

[Local Offer | West Northamptonshire Council](#)

Useful links:

[Emotionally based school avoidance | West Northamptonshire Council](#)

[School Anxiety and Refusal | Parent Guide to Support | YoungMinds](#)

[School anxiety and refusal: How parents can help their child get through tough times - BBC Parents' Toolkit - BBC Bitesize](#)