

# Anxious about School?

Update on working party group

# Context

- ▶ Membership of working party.
- ▶ Hoped for Outcomes
- ▶ Next steps

# How common is it?

Documented prevalence is between 1-2% in the UK population. However, some sources indicate it may be up to 5%, if not higher. Due to challenges around present data gathering systems, it has been suggested that this percentage may not be fully reflect the size of the problem.

Impact of COVID - 19. There is thought to be an increase in those YP whose attendance is related to anxiety due to nationwide lockdowns and prolonged school closures.

# Working definition?

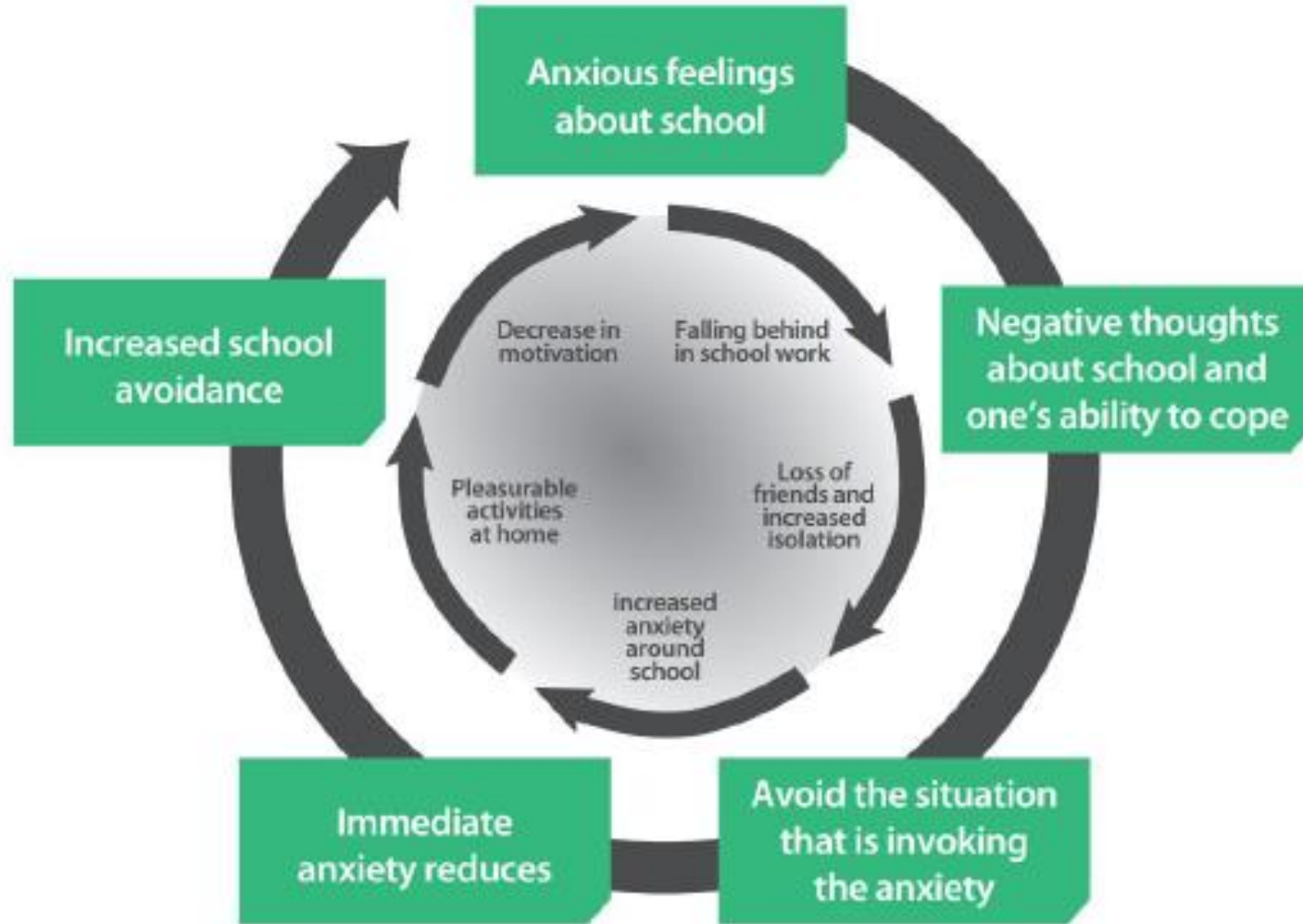
A range of terms and definitions have been used in the past.

Recently, studies have increasingly highlighted the presence of HEIGHTENED STRESS / ANXIETY IN RELATION TO BEING IN SCHOOL, OR THE THOUGHT OF BEING IN SCHOOL and acknowledged the impact of ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS that might contribute to the emergence and maintenance of school attendance .

There is a need to agree a term that is understood by all....Emotionally Based School Non attendance? Anxious about School?...?

“[EBSA] occurs when stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience, and when ‘pull’ factors that promote non-attendance overcome ‘push’ factors than encourage attendance”

Thambirajah et al 2008



Anxiety cycle taken from West Sussex - Emotional Based School Avoidance and Autism

# Links with Autism ?

- ▶ Children and young people with autism often face additional challenges in school environments which may make them anxious about school and lead them to experience mixed school attendance and engagement. (It is important to appreciate that anxiety is simply considered to be an inevitable part a YP's autism profile and can be supported in its own right).
- ▶ There are some key factors that impact on the anxiety levels of autistic children and young people in particular.
  - Sensory processing differences can make the world highly unpredictable. School life is full of sensory experiences ranging from busy corridors to colourful display boards to uncomfortable school uniforms .
  - Difficulties in understanding social situations and recognising and managing their own emotions can lead to some autistic YP feeling heightened for much of the time.
  - Transition times can be particularly challenging for this group as they do not always cope well with change. It is this intolerance of uncertainty which can cause additional anxieties.

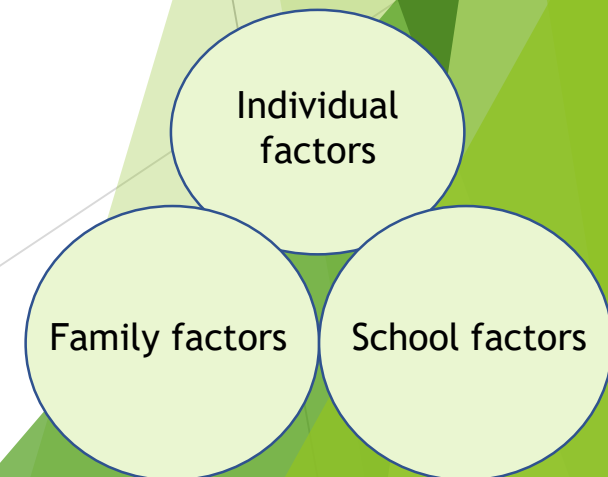
# What might be in the influencing factors?

There is an acknowledgment that the issues are complex and multifactorial (Thambirajah, 2008) and there are 'pushes' and 'pulls' that interact.

**Individual factors** - diagnosis of anxiety and/or depression, fears around health, emotional regulation difficulties, problem solving difficulties, social communication and interaction difficulties e.g. Autism.

**Family factors** - Parental mental health, relationship with school, perspective on importance of education, complex family dynamics and social disadvantage, child as a carer.

**School factors** - history in primary school, transition teacher-child and teacher - parent relationships, bullying, sensory factors, friendship difficulties, access to the curriculum, managing social and academic demands of school.



# Breakout rooms

- ▶ Thinking about the children and young people that you have worked with in the past, talk about what you tried and what worked well.
- ▶ Are there any systems in place in your organisation/setting that helps to identify/monitor those YP who may be presenting with different attendance issues? Are there ways to improve and enhance these?



# Next Steps?

- ▶ Publish a guidance document that is accessible to all parties
- ▶ Look at our support offer in the different teams that will include exploring different interventions
- ▶ Monitor and review