

**School Non-Attendance**  
**Booklet One: Information and Guidance.**



**Version 2**

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## Purpose/Aims

Staffordshire County Council's (SCC) Recovery Plan was devised in the context of COVID-19. This plan incorporated several projects across SCC services, including the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) to support educational settings in the aftermath of emergency restrictions. The EPS devised materials in several areas with the aim of providing educational settings with support that could be accessed immediately in the new academic year, without the need to refer into the service directly.

Extended absence from educational settings has exacerbated existing school non-attendance (SNA) needs meaning intervention and support is required to return pupils to regular attendance. Additionally, the contextual experience of COVID-19 has led to increased levels of school non-attendance.

This document aims to provide educational settings with guidance that highlights good practice/recommendations/resources and enables them to work collaboratively with parents/carers to support children and young people (CYP) with unmet needs, where school non-attendance is then present as an outcome. A key objective of the guidance is to facilitate educational settings in their planning, assessment, and intervention with school non-attendance, at a school level.

It is acknowledged that school non-attendance can be complex and involvement from other services/professionals can be advantageous, appropriate and, at times, necessary. However, the aims/scope of the current guidance is to support early and effective intervention for school non-attendance, which could prevent the level of need escalating further and promote positive outcomes for the child or young person.

## Contents

<b>1. Background and Context</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Definitions and Terminology in SNA.....	4
1.2 Prevalence.....	5
1.3 Impact of SNA.....	5
<b>2. What is Anxiety?</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Anxiety and SNA.....	8
<b>3. SNA in a COVID-19 Context</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1 Why SNA Behaviours and Occurrence May Increase.....	10
<b>4. Early Identification</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>5. Factors Influencing SNA</b>	<b>14</b>
5.1 Risk Factors.....	14
5.2 Protective Factors.....	16
5.3 Push and Pull Factors.....	16
5.4 Functions of School Non-Attendance.....	17
<b>6. SNA and Autism Spectrum Condition</b>	<b>20</b>
6.1 Changes in School Environment and Routines.....	20
6.2 Relationships.....	21
6.3 Regulation of Emotion.....	21
6.4 Sensory Differences.....	22
6.5 Special Interests.....	22
6.6 Main Messages.....	22
<b>7. Working Collaboratively with Parents/Carers</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>8. Eliciting the Child or Young Person's Voice</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>9. Strategies and Approaches</b>	<b>25</b>
9.1 Whole School Approaches.....	25
9.2 Supporting a Successful Return to School.....	26
9.3 Early Intervention.....	28
9.4 Sense of Belonging/Staying Connected.....	29
9.5 Transitions.....	30
9.6 Development of Social/Emotional Skills and Knowledge..	31
9.7 Expressing and Externalising Thoughts and Feelings.....	33
9.8 Relational Policy/Practice.....	34
9.9 Strengths and Interests.....	37
<b>10. Useful Resources</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>11. References</b>	<b>41</b>

## **1. Background and Context**

### **1.1 Definitions and Terminology**

The notion of school non-attendance (SNA) has been conceptualised in a wide variety of ways, and within the literature is referred to using several terms including 'school refusal/avoidance' and 'school phobia'. 'School refusal' is commonly used; however, this can be seen to be problematic, as it implies wilful behaviour on the part of the CYP (Pellegrini, 2007). This suggests that individuals are choosing not to attend school, which implies the 'problem' is located within the child, rather than considering a range of wider environmental factors which may also support an individual to return to school.

Other terms such as 'extended school non-attendance', may also be used, which can be seen to be more neutral. This terminology also presents issues, leading to an assumption that school non-attendance only becomes 'problematic' or requiring support when it has been present for a longer period of time. It is imperative that early signs of school non-attendance are identified and lead to early assessment/intervention/support.

Emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) is the term we used in the first version of this guidance document. This is a term often used to describe those CYP who find attending school difficult due to emotional factors, including anxiety, which can lead them to being absent from school for extended periods of time (West Sussex Educational Psychology Service, 2018).

However, we have now moved away from this descriptor based on new learning and listening to others' views. Some parents/carers have reported that the term school avoidance results in the same feelings/implications for them and their child as the term 'school refusal', leading people around the child/family to sometimes take a within child perspective. Additionally, the words 'school avoidance' indicate that the school environment is the 'problem', but in some cases the CYP can be isolated from many environments and therefore focusing purely on school can lead to limited progress. Many CYP wish to be engaging in school/social events but due to their current situation, or needs, can find this too overwhelming/challenging.

We have also found that the use of the words 'emotionally based' can lead to an assumption that school non-attendance is solely an outcome of social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs. Our experience clearly suggests that school non-attendance can arise from different areas of unmet need, which are often multifaceted. Therefore, using the term EBSA can present a risk that the underlying needs are not identified/supported appropriately. For example, a student who has unmet cognition and learning needs may experience some form of worry but, under the EBSA remit, anxiety can become the focus for intervention. This guidance can be supportive/helpful for any area need e.g., medical, communication & interaction, cognition and learning, physical and SEMH.

We are also proposing that the school non-attendance (SNA) often occurs as an **outcome** of the CYP's needs not being fully understood or met within their current environment. It is important to clarify that this is not to say that those around the CYP (including school and home) are not offering support for the CYP, or that their current environment is not appropriate, but rather we are asking whether the current understanding of need, and interventions offered, are effectively supporting positive change. If not, let's work together to change it.

### 1.2 Prevalence

Attendance statistics released by the Department for Education (DfE, 2023) indicate that, within England, 'persistent absenteeism' (measured in Autumn terms) is increasing every year.

Autumn Term	% of persistent absentees
2018/19	10.9
2019/20	13.1
2020/21	13.0
2021/22	23.5
2022/23	24.2

The DfE go on to define persistent absenteeism as a pupil missing more than 10% of possible sessions within school.

Research investigating the rates of 'EBSA' within children and young people, estimate a range between 1 and 5% of school populations (Egger et al., 2003, Pellegrini, 2007, Elliott & Place, 2019). For example, using a large sample of 5,465, 11-15-year-olds, Havik et al (2015) found that one child in each class, approximately 4% of the sample, reported being absent due to 'school refusal' behaviour. However, some participants did not provide answers, and therefore, Havik et al. (2015) highlights how 4% may represent an underestimate.

Pellegrini (2007) states school non-attendance is not specific to any particular population, sex, ethnicity, or level of socio-economic status. School non-attendance tends to peak at points of key transition, such as entry into primary school and when a pupil moves into high school (Pellegrini, 2007). Other points of risk for school non-attendance may include moving to a new school, or following a major holiday (King et al., 2001).

### 1.3 Impact of SNA

SNA can have a significant impact on CYP, in addition to the wider society (Pellegrini, 2007), and the negative outcomes of SNA can affect an individual on both a short and long-term basis (Hughes et al., 2010, Kearney, 2002). SNA is likely to impact an individual's social and emotional development, alongside their educational progress. This may then subsequently affect an individual's exam results and future career options (Miller, 2008, Nuttall & Woods, 2013, Pellegrini, 2007, Hughes et al., 2010).

Furthermore, SNA can also be associated with individuals leaving school prematurely (Kearney, 2006), in addition to also being at a greater long-term risk concerning their mental health during adulthood (Flakierska-Praquin et al., 1997, McCune and Hynes, 2005).

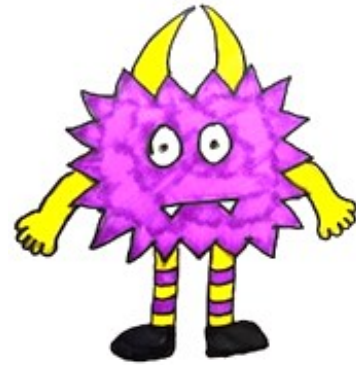
## 2. What is Anxiety?

Mind.org.uk provides the following definition:

*'Anxiety is what we feel when we are worried, tense, or afraid – particularly about things that are about to happen, or which we think could happen in the future. Anxiety is a natural human response when we perceive that we are under threat. It can be experienced through our thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations.'*

Symptoms of anxiety can include:

- anxious thoughts, such as detailed mental pictures of a difficult? event, or thoughts that the person cannot cope or is not good enough
- feeling nervous, on edge, or panicky
- feeling overwhelmed and out of control
- having trouble sleeping
- low appetite
- finding it difficult to concentrate
- heart beating really fast
- having a dry mouth
- trembling
- stomach cramps
- wobbly legs
- getting very hot



Anxiety is a normal human experience that, at lower levels (or higher ones that are temporary), can be useful to us as a stress response linked to survival. It is a natural reaction to something which is perceived as threatening. Anxiety helps prepare and mobilise the body for fight, flight or freeze by releasing a quick burst of the chemical adrenaline.

However, anxiety can become a problem when it moves beyond short-lived experiences and begins to persistently interfere with everyday life. Such difficulties are thought to be common. The charity Young Minds identified that 1 in 6 young people will have significant anxiety at some point during their school life. This equates to 5 pupils in an average class of 30.

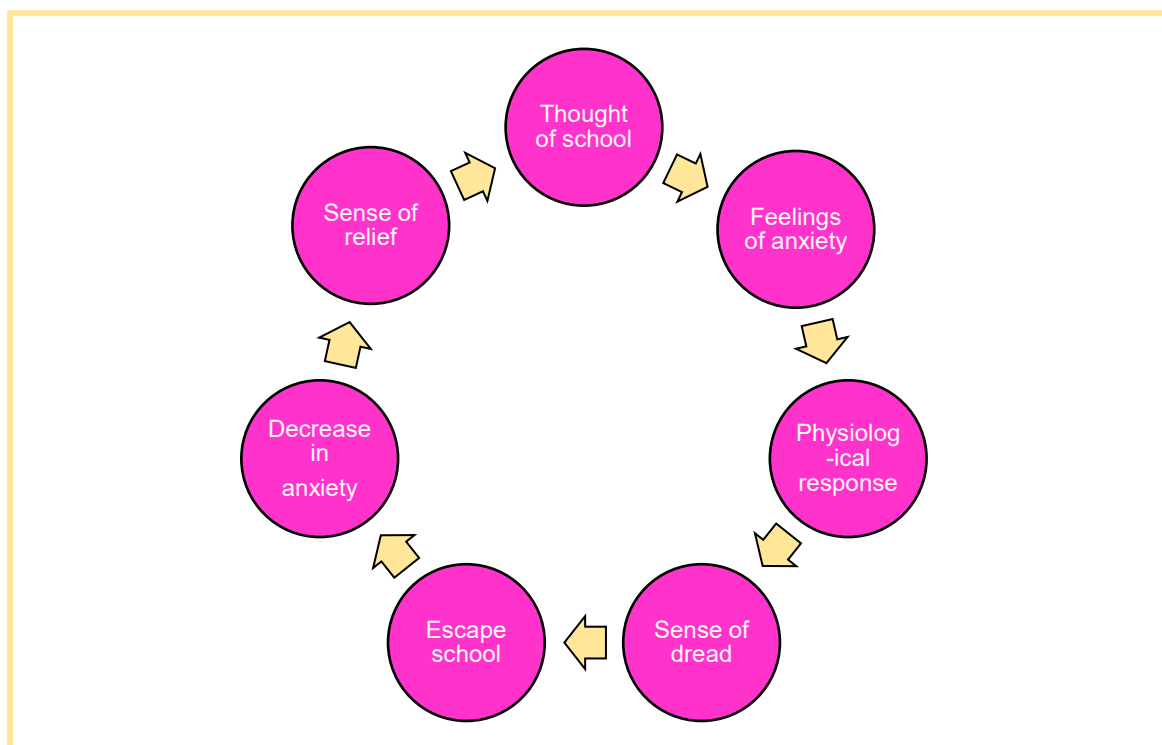
## 2.1 Anxiety & SNA

Maynard et al. (2015) indicated that nearly 50% of clinic-referred youth, characterised by school non-attendance, have an anxiety disorder.

When anxiety is linked to SNA, the child or young person may experience anxious and fearful thoughts around attending school and their ability to cope with school, which may be accompanied by physiological symptoms of anxiety.

Separation anxiety can also be a precursor to SNA in some cases (Hella & Bernstein, 2012). In order to avoid these overwhelming emotions associated with school attendance the CYP may withdraw from the situation, resisting getting ready for school, leaving the house, or entering the school. The CYP may also turn to hostile behaviours as a means to escape the threatening situation and to try and control what feels like a very 'out-of-control' situation (Thambirajah et al., 2008).

These behaviours, and the attempt to escape, may then contribute to the maintenance of SNA over time, as illustrated in the diagram below:



The CYP consequently fears going to school, anticipating it will result in challenging thoughts and feelings. The avoidance of thinking about or attending school leads to a decrease in anxiety and a sense of relief. These escape behaviours are subsequently reinforced, as is the CYP's perception that school is too difficult to manage. Heightened anxiety could therefore result in a pattern of SNA as escape behaviours are maintained.



There may be one key trigger or several triggers for anxiety related to attending school, some examples include:

- Changes to class structure/teachers/routine
- Poor class behaviour / inconsistent classroom management
- Not understanding work
- Fear of getting something wrong
- Fear of exams/poor performance
- Group activities
- Break and lunchtimes (social anxieties)
- Bullying/peer pressure
- Being away from loved ones for some reason (separation anxiety)

In addition to identifying triggers, Heyne and Rollings (2002) suggest that it is crucial to consider the CYP's perceptions of their ability to cope, including perceived social and academic competence, as negative thoughts about one's ability to cope can lead to further feelings of worry and, if left unaddressed, may undermine attempts to improve attendance.

### **3. SNA in a COVID-19 Context**

#### ***3.1 Why SNA patterns and occurrence may increase.***



SNA has increased in the aftermath of COVID-19 (Department for Education, 2022). Although research into the impact of COVID-19 is still emerging and existing interventions have not been designed or extensively evaluated in the post-pandemic context (McDonald, Lester & Michelson, 2023), many of the factors known to contribute to the onset and maintenance of SNA before the pandemic (Heyne et al, 2019; Melvin et al., 2019) also appear in the context of COVID-19. These factors include: anxiety, Special Educational Needs (SEN), parenting approaches and school factors (e.g., communication with families, school environment and academic pressures).

There are CYP in Staffordshire schools who, before the closure of schools due to COVID-19, were not attending school due to unmet needs. The extended period of time spent away from their educational setting and in the home is likely to exacerbate the difficulties attending. Research has suggested that changes to the school environment due to post-pandemic rules, a stronger dependence on parents/carers because of increased time spent together and the need for families to adjust to new routines, are all factors that have contributed to difficulties readjusting to a return to physical school (Pelaez and Novak, 2020).

There is currently little research as to the impact on children with SEN but it is worth considering that many children who presented with pre-existing anxiety, who experience social anxiety or have social interaction challenges, are likely to have welcomed home learning and the reduced social contact. For some, learning at home will have felt safer and more comfortable than the school environment and related stressors.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented and unique circumstances, the emotional impact of which may intensify the influence of factors that were contributing to previous SNA. Research has found that the following elements have contributed to SNA:

- Exacerbations of previous SNA that were long standing, particularly for children with SEN, for whom school was already a challenging context. For

some, learning at home will have felt safer and more comfortable than the anxiety evoking experience of the school environment and related stressors.

- Covid specific anxiety – some children will have experienced difficulties with changing messages around the safety of schools.
- New rules and routines - changes to the normal operation of schools were identified as exacerbating anxieties and consequently affecting school attendance.
- Academic catch up – some children may have felt intense pressure to catch up with schoolwork after periods of home learning.

Within the research following Covid-19 the factors below have been identified as important in supporting children where early signs of SNA have been identified or those 'at risk' of non-attendance (Corcoran, Bond and Knox, 2022).

- **Effective home school communication** – school should make attempts to have regular and positive communication with a consistent approach from all supporting adults to ensure parents feels valued and listened to.
- **Functional approach** – developing a shared understanding of the functions to the child's worry which included gathering and listening to children and young people's views, early identification of rising worries, and providing a sense of safety and control.
- **Positive relationships** – emotional support and reassurance from school staff.
- **Reflective practitioners** – a willingness to adapt school expectations, sharing learning, and reflect and change practice as needed.
- **Engagement with other professionals** – use of a graduated approach.



#### **4. Early Identification**

There may be signs that are noticed in CYP that can support earlier identification of SNA:

- Arriving later to school, even if this does not reach a level warranting a 'late mark'
- Talking negatively about school
- Becoming anxious on separation from caregiver
- Physical symptoms of worry (e.g., headaches, stomach aches), often on a Sunday night or a Monday morning, which may improve when the CYP stays home from school
- Sharing worries about particular aspects of school
- Resisting getting ready for school
- Difficulties sleeping
- Becoming distressed when school is talked about
- Engaging in self-harming behaviours
- Becoming withdrawn, spending increasing amounts of time in their bedroom, avoiding trips outside of the home

Early intervention is key. Baker and Bishop (2015) advocate a quick return to school alongside intervention, support, and adaptations within the school and home environment. Implementation of an individualised support plan, informed by an analysis of the factors influencing SNA, and developed collaboratively by families, school staff and the CYP has been shown to have positive outcomes.

## 5. Factors Influencing SNA

Badcock Integration LLP (2016) carried out case studies to develop an account of relevant factors for each CYP experiencing SNA. Findings added to the existing research base which recognises that, *"for most, there are no clear or identifiable 'causes' (of SNA) but a complex interlinking of factors" .... "linked to child, family context and school factors"* (p.6)

Factors influencing SNA, according to the research, include:

- Risk and protective factors
- Four functions of school non-attendance (Kearney, 2008)
- 'Push' factors and 'pull factors' (Thambirajah et al, 2008)

Thambirajah et al (2008) suggest, *"School refusal occurs when stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience and when 'pull' factors that promote school non-attendance, overcome the 'push' factors that encourage attendance"* (p.33)

### 5.1 Risk Factors

Research indicates that 'risk factors' occur at different times:

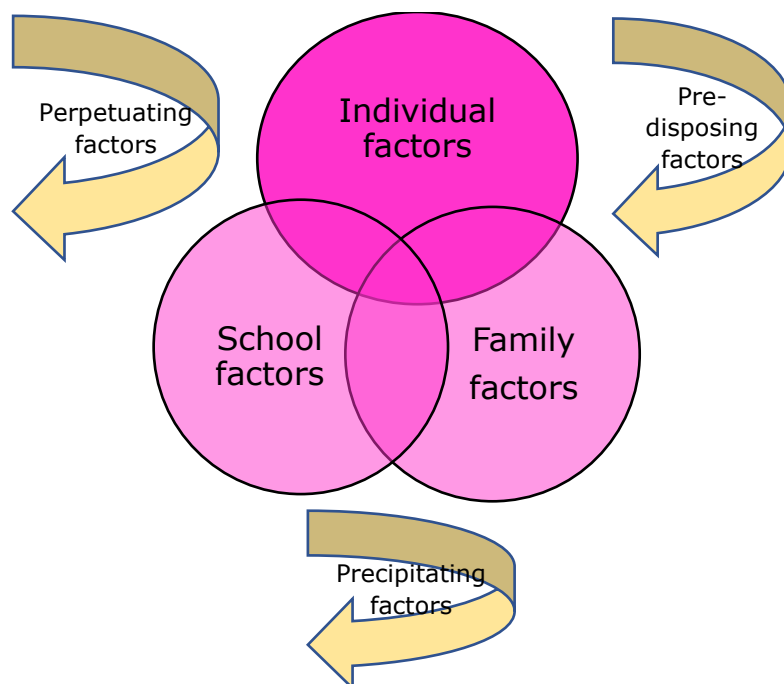
Factor	Definition
Pre-disposing factors	Factors which make SNA more likely to develop
Precipitating factors	Recent events which have an influence on SNA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Transition from primary to secondary</li><li>- Loss/ bereavement</li><li>- Changes in friendship groups or bullying</li><li>- Returning from a prolonged absence</li></ul>
Perpetuating factors	Factors which are likely to maintain SNA

(Thambirajah et al, 2008, p.36)

Research has identified the following contributing 'risk' factors to SNA:

Level	Individual	Familial	School
<b>Contributing Factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Challenges with emotional self-awareness and self-regulation</li> <li>-Fear of social and personal failure</li> <li>-Previous exclusions</li> <li>-Separation needs</li> <li>-Social interaction anxiety</li> <li>-Low self-confidence</li> <li>-Worries about those at home</li> <li>-Fear of parental separation/loss of a parent</li> <li>-Over-dependence on parents/carers</li> <li>-Illness/health needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Siblings being at home e.g., home educated, due to health needs</li> <li>-Limited social interactions within the home</li> <li>-Family dynamics</li> <li>-Loss</li> <li>-Frequent conflict</li> <li>-Family transitions – moving house, divorce</li> <li>-Loss in the family</li> <li>-Significant changes in the family</li> <li>-Mental health needs with parents/carers</li> <li>-Absence of a parent</li> <li>-Child's anxiety causes stress easily in parents/carers</li> <li>-Overprotective parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Noise and organisation levels in the classroom</li> <li>-Unpredictability of environment, leading to feelings of being unsafe and insecure</li> <li>-Consequences from staff being viewed as being unfair and harsh</li> <li>-Teachers who are perceived as having an aggressive nature</li> <li>-Peer relationships – including elements of conflict, isolation and anxiety</li> <li>-Poor communication which then leads to inconsistency</li> <li>-Class sizes</li> <li>-Bullying</li> <li>-Transitions– secondary/change of school/class</li> <li>-Unidentified/unsupported learning needs</li> <li>-Needs with specific subjects</li> <li>-Activities the young person cannot cope with e.g., P.E., assemblies, talking in front of others.</li> <li>-Poor relationships with staff</li> </ul>
Sources: Havik, Bru Sigrun & Ertesvag, (2013), Thambirajah, Grandison & Hayes, Garfi, Lachlan (2008), Hansen, Sanders, Massaro and Last, (1998) Kearney and Silverman, (1995).			

The literature also suggests that these contributing factors interact.



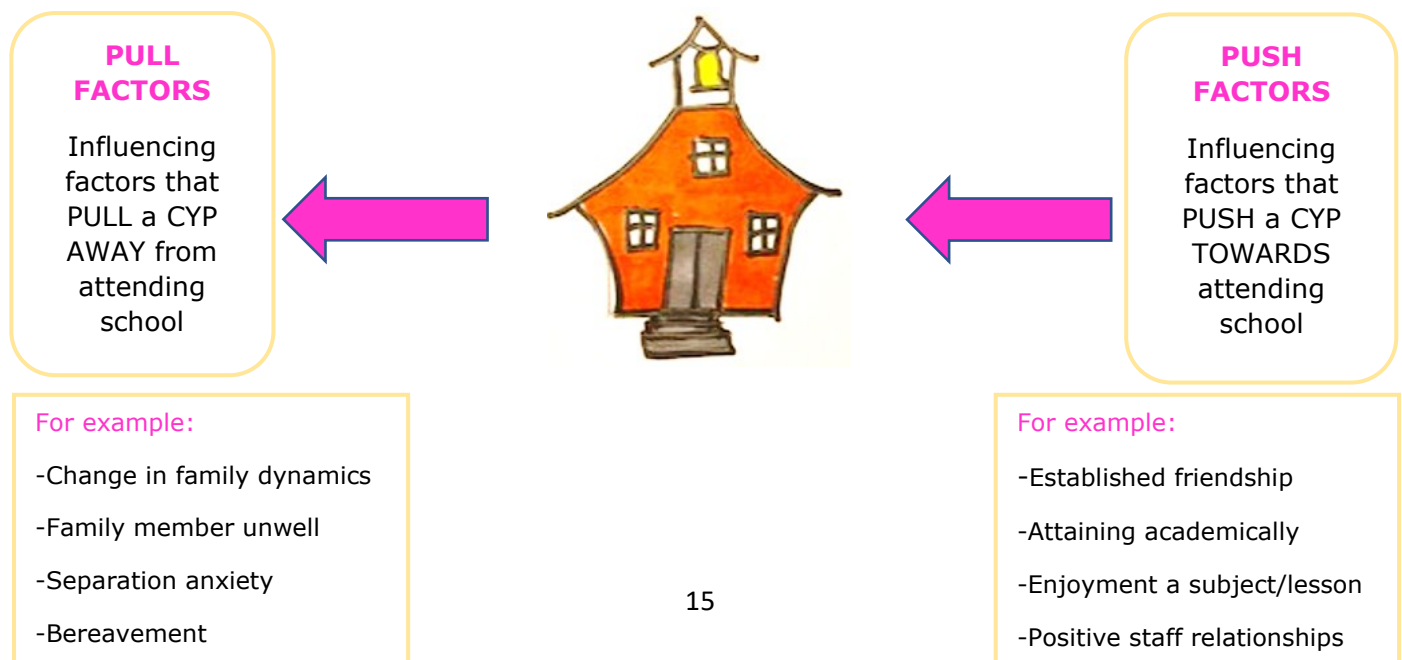
## 5.2 Protective Factors

It is important to consider factors which may 'protect' a CYP from maintaining SNA behaviours including their individual strengths, areas of resilience within themselves, their family or school context, and identifying previous successes so these can be built upon. Research suggests this can also include the protective factors within the table below.

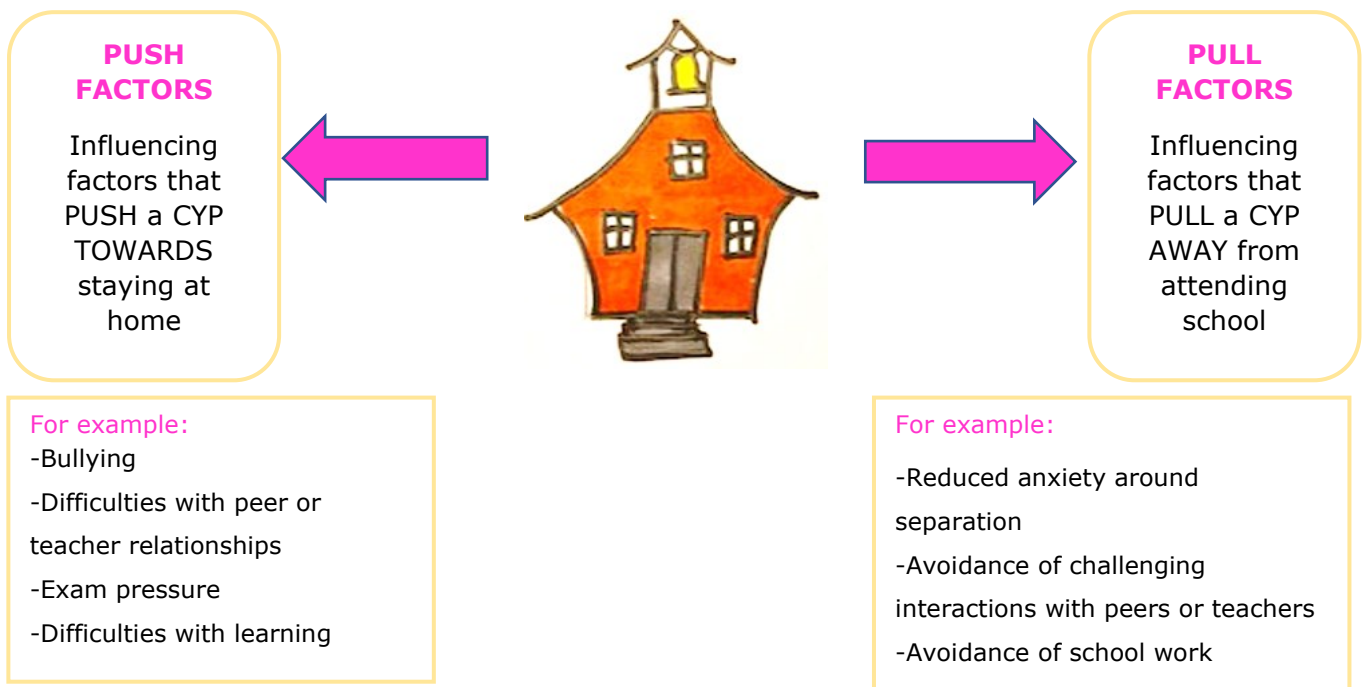
Level	Individual	Familial	School
<b>Protective Factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-CYP's strengths and interests</li> <li>-CYP's aspirations and ambitions</li> <li>-CYP's motivation for change</li> <li>- Increasing confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Positive relationships in the family and/or community</li> <li>- Willingness to work in partnership with school and support agencies</li> <li>- Positive parenting skills</li> <li>-Developing understanding of CYP needs and feelings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Positive relationships with a member/s of staff</li> <li>- Willingness to work in partnership with family and support agencies</li> <li>- Positive relationships with peers</li> <li>- Experiencing success in school</li> <li>- Having a flexible approach</li> <li>- Developing understanding of CYP needs and feelings</li> </ul>

## 5.3 Push and Pull Factors

Thambirajah et al. (2008) discuss 'push' and 'pull' factors, explaining that the balance between the two fluctuates. Thambirajah et al. (2008) state, "*school refusal occurs when.... 'pull' factors that promote school non-attendance, overcome the 'push' factors that encourage attendance*" (p.33)



West Sussex Educational Psychology Service (2018) suggest it can also be helpful to understand 'risk and resilience' influences in terms of 'push' and 'pull' factors.

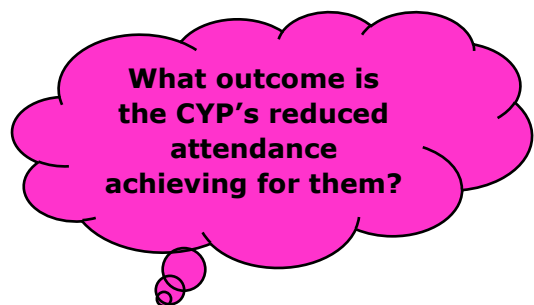
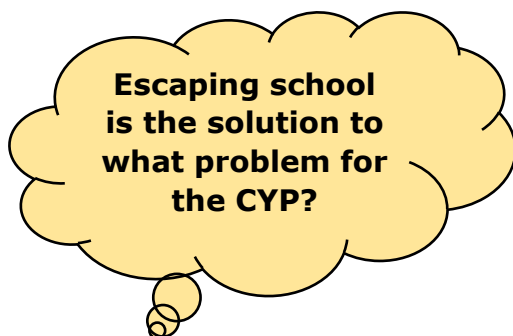


It is also important to consider secondary factors that might maintain SNA behaviours. Maintenance factors may include:

- Falling behind with schoolwork
- Loss of friends and increased isolation
- Enjoying being at home
- Decrease in motivation

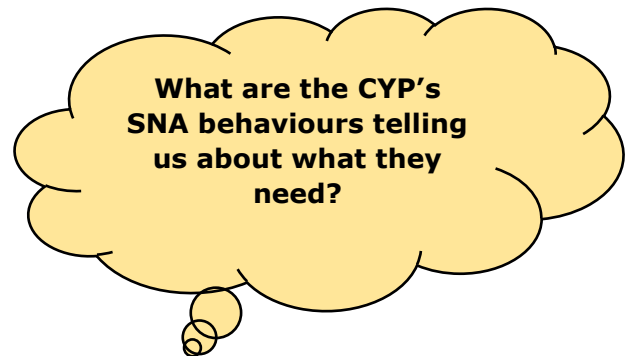
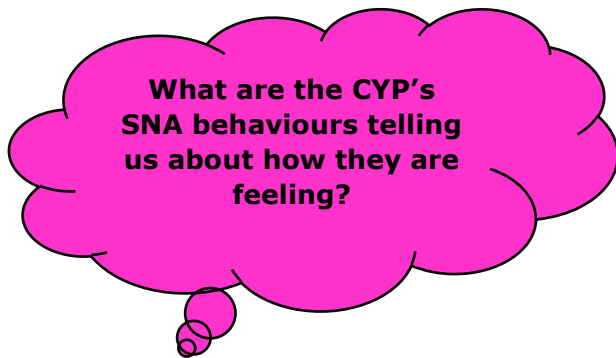
#### **5.4 Functions of School Non-Attendance**

Thought needs to be given to the function of SNA behaviours. It can be helpful to think about what unmet need, or needs, escaping school fulfils for the CYP.





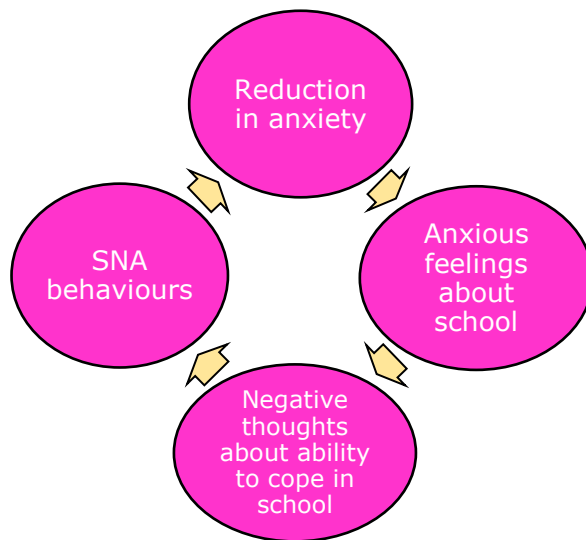
It can also be useful to consider what SNA behaviours are communicating, in terms of expressing feelings and/or unmet needs.



Kearney and Silverman (1990) developed a four-function taxonomy of SNA behaviours, identifying the purpose that reduced attendance might serve for CYP. The table below, outlines the four functions and provides examples.

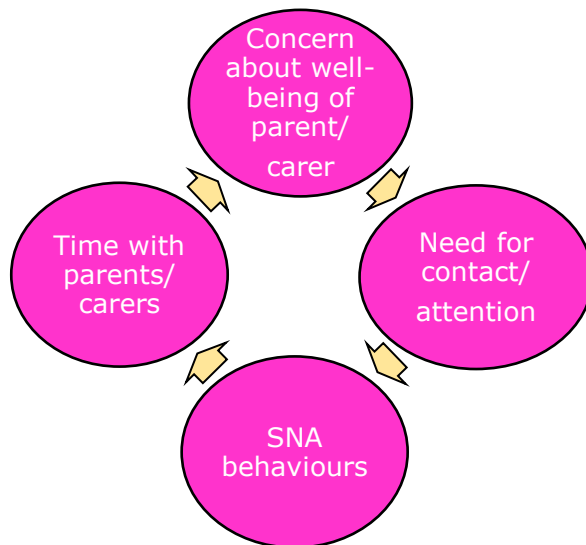
<b>Functions of school non-attendance (Adapted from Kearney, 2008)</b>
To escape school related stressors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental e.g. noise, crowds, going into the building or classroom</li> <li>• Social e.g. groups, break times, lunchtimes</li> <li>• Transitions e.g. between lessons, to and from school</li> </ul>
To escape social situations and/or activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interactions with peers which are found challenging</li> <li>• Feeling disconnected or isolated from peers, not belonging to a group</li> <li>• Evaluative situations: exams, presentations, physical education lessons, eating in the cafeteria</li> </ul>
To gain needed attention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time at home with parents/carers/ family members</li> </ul>
To engage in preferred activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watching TV</li> <li>• Playing video games</li> <li>• Spending time with friend</li> </ul>

In instances where SNA behaviour functions to *escape*, SNA can be negatively reinforced, as illustrated in Figure 3 below. SNA behaviours are strengthened as they remove or avoid negative outcomes.



*Figure 3: The negative reinforcement of SNA behaviours*

In instances where reduced attendance behaviour functions to *gain*, SNA can be positively reinforced, as illustrated in Figure 4 below. SNA increases in response to the need being met.



*Figure 4: The positive reinforcement of school non-attendance behaviour*

## **6 SNA and Autism**

CYP with Autism are more likely to experience anxiety. The CYP with Autism lives in a worrying world, hard to interpret or predict, sometimes needing support to help manage encounters. Communication can be problematic and processing its teeming information flow often demanding. No wonder such CYP can find school difficult, if not alien. And no wonder their attendance patterns can be fragile even in normal times - worse still following a pandemic!

Most schools have learnt, through training and advice, to support CYP with Autism better, allay their fears and smooth their individual pathways to integration. However, all children are different, and their success in the classroom can be provisional and incomplete. New challenges can easily disrupt precarious adjustment and require fresh strategies to meet and overcome them.

COVID-19 is one such challenge. It arrived unexpectedly and uninvited, causing havoc with schooling, everyone off guard.

### ***6.1 Changes in School Environment and Routines***

CYP with Autism can find change overwhelming. The following advice was written/provided in the context of COVID-19, however, remains relevant and useful now for any transition into school.

The following may help:

- Walkaround videos or photo sequences of the school, narrated by a trusted adult or child (or both), emphasising and giving clear rationales for any changes made, but also comforting the viewer with pictures of the familiar and the unchanged. Humour, frank emotional reference and reassurance should be central to the speakers' style, as should personalisation of the CYP's upcoming experience (e.g., name cards on desk) and a convincing 'Welcome Back!'. The video or photos could be mailed home to the child to be replayed daily, with a parent/carer present able to carry the CYP through early anxieties and confusion and recognise when this turns to curiosity and enthusiasm. Further 'filmlets' around specific situations could follow such as going to the toilet or into the playground, whatever worries the child and needs clarification on. Indeed, a small library of such videos could be contemplated for all transitional or returning children, with and without ASC.
- Social Stories written to anticipate change, validate emotional concerns and assure a successful and exciting return, could be written in advance for daily reading at home and during transition. There are many of these available pre-written that can be adapted for personal use.
- Calendars and Countdown Charts can be used to give a chronological context to the impending return and abate worries about upcoming events.
- Simple practises to restart the 'school-going habit' perhaps accompanied by a visual chart\* (e.g., wearing school uniform, restocking the pencil case

with new 'stuff', using the lunch box, walking past the school) could be encouraged and rehearsed, perhaps tied to dates on a Countdown Chart.

## **6.2 Relationships**

Existing common challenges in making friends, handling social encounters, dealing with confrontation/unkindness, controlling emotions in public and integrating with groups may have been exacerbated by long separation from peers and perhaps worsened by adverse social media contact during lockdown.

Helpful strategies to moderate these might include:

- Social Stories focussed upon social difficulties known to have been previously encountered and establishing short affirmative steps to take in these situations.
- Social skills training programmes. In periods of SNA, these may have to be sectionally re-run to re-establish forgotten material.
- Introduction of social support from peers e.g., through Circle of Friends or Lego 'Therapy'.
- Key worker contact before return and daily thereafter, from 'Meet and Greet' (perhaps as part of an 'early arrival' plan to ease school entry before the majority of pupils arrive) through classroom and playtime availability to a 'final goodbye' where affirmation of pleasurable experience, and social or learning success can be made.
- The adoption of simple reward schemes for attendance or to recognise and reinforce days socially well spent (perhaps where a specific social skill has been demonstrated).

## **6.3 Regulation of Emotion**

Recognition and better regulation of emotions within oneself and within others (Theory of Mind) has long been a focus of ASC development programmes. Returning to school after periods of isolation and reduced social challenge might prompt a 'spike' in adverse emotion showing that much emotional expression and control has been forgotten and has become 'rusty'. Helpful programmes to restore wellbeing and good regulation might include:

- First and foremost - frequent monitoring and assessment of the CYP's emotional state. Use well established simple techniques such as Salmon Lines, the Five Point Scale (with positive, graduated responses to e.g., increasing anxiety or anger, linked successively to each scale point), Talking Mats and similar. It is only by accessing the CYP's own inner world that unique perceptions, thoughts and misconceptions, fears (irrational or not) and general emotional adequacy to thrive in the social world can be understood and acted upon.
- Teaching relaxation skills the CYP can call upon quickly in an impending crisis to help better self-management. These can include specific bodily relaxation protocols, breathing exercises, imagery, Mindfulness or Yoga

techniques or other - there are many accessible programmes on the web. The opportunity to take simple physical exercise should not be overlooked.

- Use of Time Out cards, withdrawal spaces (even classroom tents), comfort zones, access to special toys and activities to allow retreat from stress when needed.
- Varied reward programmes to consolidate specific areas of self-control currently concerning.

### **6.4 Sensory Differences**

Most CYP with Autism display aspects of hyper or hyposensitivity; for instance, to noise, light, temperature, texture, pressure, and taste, and often to overcrowding or chaotic environments.

The use of sensory rooms, fidget toys, music, ear defenders, pressure pads, textured toys and so on might act positively on the CYP, improving mood and concentration. Their ready availability should be considered as assets to support transition and school return.

### **6.5 Special Interests**

It is not uncommon for CYP with Autism to show a deep interest in highly specific subjects e.g., birds, dinosaurs, historical epochs, special objects like locks or toy cars to the point where that interest can dominate daily routine. However, sensibly used, that personal interest can be recruited positively (as a reward, an attraction to attend, a medium of social communication, a calming technique) and become a tool to build adjustment. Questioning and being curious about the CYP's likes and dislikes, sensitively combined with close observation will establish the full extent of such enthusiasms and how they can be used to encourage a smoother return to school and compliance thereafter.

### **6.6 MAIN MESSAGES**

The main messages therefore to aid returning to school after episodes of SNA or some enforced absence such as caused by COVID-19 lockdown are:

- **ACT EARLY** - anticipate problems and prepare the CYP for change more strenuously than you might other CYP.
- **SUPPORT STRONGLY** - dedicate Keyworker time to support and personalise the school return experience.
- **MONITOR CLOSELY** - track the CYP's views and reactions daily; use information obtained to mentor and problem-solve.
- **RECONNECT SWIFTLY** - ensure resumption and continuity of good practice, child training and programming halted by lockdown or school avoidance.
- **COMMUNICATE CLEARLY** - between members of staff collaboratively, with parents constantly, with the peer group informatively and with the CYP proactively and reassuringly.

## 7 Working Collaboratively with Parents/Carers

To find an early and effective route to intervention, it is important that staff work collaboratively with the CYP's parents/carers. Information gathered from parent/carers is valuable and can provide an insight into the current situation that is not seen or perceived within the educational setting. The quality of this information relies heavily on the relationship staff establish with parents/carers, and the approach that is adopted during their interactions/exploration.

All educational settings should aim to have practices in place which develop positive relationships with families. This is likely to create an environment where parents/carers feel staff are approachable/supportive, which in turn supports earlier communication /identification of any needs/concerns.

When engaging in discussions with parents/carers it is important that a sense of trust and support is established, opposed to feelings of judgement/accusations. If there are areas within the home context that require intervention/support, this is more easily achieved if staff are working collaboratively with parents/carers. Parents/carers are more likely to accept ideas/intervention when they feel the purpose is supportive not corrective.

To facilitate exploration of familial/home factors within the context of SNA please refer to booklet two. These discussion frameworks/resources should be utilised to facilitate a discussion but **not** limit the contributions parents/carers wish to communicate e.g., allow them to talk freely and not just answer the questions. All staff joining these discussions need to be mindful that some of the areas potentially discussed can be very sensitive topics, which can be quite difficult for parents/carers to talk about; a safe and secure context is key.

Following assessment of the CYP's needs an action plan should be formulated with parents/carers and reviewed on a regular basis with all parties (including parents/carers/CYP). Throughout the 'do' stage of support, staff should maintain regular contact with the parents/carers to offer support/guidance and adapt the support in place in view of any changes within the home/school context.

It is also important to consider any areas within the home context which require support e.g., should morning routines and Sunday evenings be included into the action plan? Additionally, any contributing factors within the familial level which

are raised by the CYP need to be discussed sensitively with the parents/carers to ensure a holistic approach is taken.

## **8 Eliciting the Child or Young Person's Voice**

When exploring the current situation for any CYP it is important that every effort is made to gain their views/perspective. Eliciting the views of the CYP can provide us with a much richer/truer and more detailed insight into 'what is going on', which in turn leads to more individualised and effective support/intervention. Although information gathered from key adults can be helpful and informative, it is important to acknowledge that every individual's perspective can be different and hold different meaning for them; therefore, these views may not be a true reflection of what the CYP is thinking/feeling themselves.

A well-known psychologist (Kelly, 1955) once said:

'..if you don't know what is wrong with someone, ask them, they may tell you.'

It is acknowledged that this is not always easily achieved. Some CYP may find it very challenging to communicate their views for several reasons. Therefore, those working with the CYP need to be creative and adaptable to provide the CYP with different ways to communicate their thoughts/feelings using a variety of methods.

To facilitate this process, and provide some ideas/frameworks, some resources have been created. Within booklet 2 there are a number of card sorting activities that can support staff to elicit the CYP's views and perspective. This can be a useful approach for all, but especially in cases where the CYP is not ready to engage in direct conversations (about the current situation/their needs) as they can physically move the cards under different headings, rather than having to use verbal communication.

It is important that any sessions held with the CYP are carried out by an adult they feel safe and secure with. If this relationship has not already been established, then prior to discussing the current situation/SNA it would be advisable to engage in sessions which build a positive rapport e.g. 'All About Me'. Staff should base the exploration/support sessions on the individual CYP, using their strengths and interests to heighten engagement, adapting approaches to their individual needs/age/levels.

Additionally, it is important that the CYP is included (if they wish to be) in the action planning and review stages of SNA support. This will allow them to feel a greater sense of control, and predictability about next steps.

## **9 Strategies and Approaches**

### ***9.1 Whole School Approaches***

Educational settings should aim to create policies that adopt whole school evidence-based approaches to promote wellbeing to reduce the likelihood of SNA occurring. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) advises that school settings should adopt a 'whole school' approach to promote the social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people.

Public Health England (2015) highlighted eight whole school principles to promote emotional health and well-being:

1. An ethos and environment that promotes respect and values diversity.
2. Curriculum, teaching and learning to promote resilience and support social and emotional learning.
3. Enhancing student voice to influence decisions.
4. Staff Development support their wellbeing and that of student.
5. Identifying need and monitoring impact.
6. Working with parents/carers.
7. Targeted support and appropriate referral.

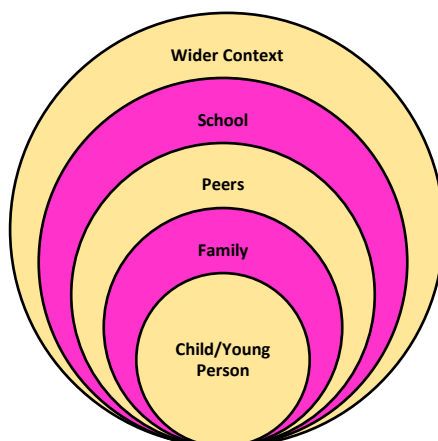
Further information about each of these principles can be found in the 'Promoting Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing' document by Public Health England (2015) which can be accessed here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/414908/Final\\_EHWP\\_draft\\_20\\_03\\_15.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414908/Final_EHWP_draft_20_03_15.pdf)

Useful information and resources around whole school responsibilities to promoting social, emotional and mental health can so be found on the Staffordshire graduated response toolkit which can be accessed here: <https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Education/Access-to-learning/Graduated-response/Social-emotional-and-mental-health/Whole-school-responsibilities/Whole-school-responsibilities.aspx>.







## 9.2 Supporting a Successful Return to School




Supporting children with SNA can be complex and multifaceted. Person centered strategies and interventions should be developed through the Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle to support a successful integration with interventions at the level of the child, the family, peer and school and wider context. However, there are a number of general strategies and examples of good practice at each of these levels (see table).

*Table 2: General Strategies and Good Practice for pupils demonstrating SNA.*

<p>Child/Young Person</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop feelings of safety and belonging. This could be achieved through having consistent support staff and/or a small welcoming space with no pressure to talk, but opportunities for interaction.</li> <li>• Promote confidence, self-esteem and value through personalised rewards or responsibility.</li> <li>• Promote aspiration and motivation by making learning meaningful and relevant.</li> <li>• Build upon strengths and interests.</li> <li>• Opportunities for positive experiences and opportunities to develop friendships.</li> <li>• Taking an interest in the child or young person e.g., through personalised rewards and positive individualised feedback.</li> </ul>
<p>Family</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain regular communication with parents/carers and ensure that the relationship between school remains positive.</li> <li>• Consider what support the family needs and refer to other support agencies as appropriate.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage the family to spend time together e.g., engaging in shared interests and activities.</li> </ul>
<p>Peers</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A peer mentoring system to provide guidance and encouragement and reinforce attendance.</li> <li>• Social provision for long-term non-attenders to enable them to establish or maintain peer relationships e.g., continued access to after school clubs.</li> <li>• Support the pupil to make or maintain friendships with peers.</li> </ul>
<p>School</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A strong pastoral system and identified senior member of staff to coordinate the response for a pupil with SNA.</li> <li>• A positive and nurturing environment with a person centred and solution focussed approach with a focus on listening to the child or young person's voice.</li> <li>• Involve the pupil in the development of their support plan in order to promote their investment in it.</li> <li>• A holistic view of students and a good understanding of the context surrounding the child or young person.</li> <li>• Persistent and resilient school staff recognising it may take time, and strategies may not always work first time and/or may need to be adapted.</li> <li>• Effective communication between staff and stress management systems for staff working with the pupil and opportunities to debrief as this work can be difficult.</li> <li>• Identify a key adult/s for the pupil who has time to dedicate to building a genuine relationship and can support the pupil at times of high anxiety.</li> <li>• A flexible and individualised approach including reintegration planned according to individual need such as a flexible and reduced timetable. Individualised support plans should be created for the young person based on their individual needs.</li> <li>• An awareness of barriers to learning, making relevant adjustments and reviewing strategies over time. Work should be achievable and delivered at an appropriate level.</li> <li>• Opportunities to make a positive contribution such as increased participation at school.</li> <li>• Opportunities for children and young people to express their views and feel listened to.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of independence through giving choice and control and involving them in decision making through collaboratively developed realistic targets.</li> <li>• Raising awareness of SNA through staff training and ensuring a key member of staff is responsible for monitoring attendance, with the support of outside agencies.</li> <li>• Enforcement of anti-bullying policies.</li> <li>• Realistic plans with small steps, agree actions with all parties and keep them until the next review date.</li> <li>• Access to a safe space with increased adult support who can then work on transitioning back into the main school.</li> <li>• Consider how to support the journey to and from school, for example, being escorted to the school building by a family member and met at school by a member of staff or close peer to ease the transition.</li> </ul>
<p>Wider Context</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clear understanding of the role of external agencies and referral routes</li> <li>• Collaborative working between professionals.</li> <li>• Utilising multi-agency working to consider the impact of the wider environment on the child.</li> </ul>

### 9.3 Early Intervention

Educational settings should provide **all** staff/parents with knowledge on early signs/indicators of SNA, including those detailed in this booklet.

Monitoring the more subtle patterns which can occur in the early stages can be advantageous. This includes CYP who begin to arrive later, even if they still manage to arrive in time for registration. Sometimes this can slowly escalate, but if explored early can minimise higher levels of SNA. Therefore, all staff, including office colleagues, should be included in training and awareness raising.

Having open communication with parents/carers is important to ensure any early indicators of SNA can be identified. Patterns of SNA or contributing factors may begin to emerge within the home context. Having a positive relationship with parents/carers is likely to mean that these aspects will be communicated and addressed early on.

#### **9.4 Sense of Belonging/Staying Connected**

**This the most important area!** Our experience has highlighted that CYP with SNA experience not only a physical isolation and disconnection but also a social and emotional one too.

All humans, especially CYP, need to feel they belong to their different communities and networks and that there is a place for them. A sense of **NOT** belonging and feeling connected can be a risk at several points for CYP in a school environment.

For example (this list is not exhaustive), For CYP who...

- are made to feel different*
- are finding academic subjects challenging*
- have a limited social network*
- have different backgrounds*
- have different cultural experiences and values*
- have not established a connection with a key adult*
- are confused*
- feel lost*
- are facing challenges in life*
- are care experienced children*
- do not feel valued, seen or understood*
- are experiencing loss or trauma*
- do not have a safe and secure base*
- change schools*
- are suspended/excluded*
- move to an alternative provision*

.... a sense of not belonging and disconnection is very likely to be present and have detrimental implications if left unaddressed, including SNA.

It is essential that this is an area of focus for schools. Below are some ways to support feelings of connectedness/belonging.

- Provide the CYP with a role within school.
- Use the CYP's strengths and interests to support them to feel like a successful pupil. Support the CYP to identify their successes, strengths and interests and how valuable these are.
- Ensure the CYP is provided with opportunities to build a secure and safe relationship with a member of staff. This should be maintained during any periods of absence.
- Support the CYP to find peers who have similar interests.
- Encourage the CYP to engage in activities with peers in an adult mediated environment if they require support with social interaction, managing conflict, effective communication.

- Reflect on practices in school that may exclude CYP who experience SNA, for example:
  - rewards/school trips that are awarded for solely having high attendance rates. Consider having different areas that can be rewarded e.g., being kind.
  - Policies/processes where having unmet needs can lead to sanctions and further isolation e.g., being removed from golden time, free times, school trips, proms. This leads to further feelings of disconnection/isolation, even when the CYP is in school.
- Maintaining contact with the CYP even when they are not attending school. Often, staff will maintain some form of contact with the parents/carers but not the CYP themselves. This can be achieved through different formats, emails, letters, short visits, video messages. This should also be encouraged with the CYP's friends.
- Approaches that let the CYP know they are being 'held in mind' and are important to the school community, whether they are in or out of the school setting.

### **9.5 Transitions**

There are numerous transitions that each CYP makes throughout their educational experience. Many of these occur on a daily basis, which can be challenging, especially for a CYP experiencing SNA.

Here are some of the transitions which should be considered by staff, to explore if there are any needs within this area for the CYP:

- Leaving the home in the morning (including leaving possessions, pets, family member).
- Accessing transport/making the journey to school.
- Leaving parents/carers at the drive, gate, car etc.
- Entering the school building.
- Entering the school corridors/playground.
- Entering the classroom.
- Moving from the classroom to another classroom/room/playground.
- Transitioning from learning contexts to social contexts e.g. lessons to break times.
- Transitioning from areas of strength to areas of perceived weakness e.g. lessons where the CYP does well to those where they find challenging.
- Changing between different staff members/peer groups.
- Through the academic years/educational settings (e.g. primary to secondary).

If any transitional needs are identified then the appropriate support should be provided, discussing with the CYP 'what could make this better/easier'. A **few** approaches/resources have been detailed below:

- Social Stories.
- Photobooks to prepare CYP for transitions to new classes/schools/people.
- Transitional objects to support CYP when they are apart from key and trusted adults e.g., provide the CYP with an object to look after for you so they know you will return to them at some point.
- Meet and Greet – to support CYP to transition into the setting, classroom, from break to learning.
- Transition planning and visits.
- 'All About Me' sessions, to establish a positive rapport/relationship with new staff members.
- Provide the CYP with key factual information about areas of concern e.g., new subjects, to minimise how much they are required to anticipate what is going to happen.
- Transition document produced by the EPS (SCC) which provides links/details of transition resources/information. This can be found within the [Graduated Response Toolkit: https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Education/Access-to-learning/Graduated-response/Graduated-response.aspx](https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Education/Access-to-learning/Graduated-response/Graduated-response.aspx)

### **9.6 Development of Social/Emotional Skills & Knowledge**

All CYP have to manage and respond to a variety of emotional experiences on a daily basis. For CYP with SNA needs, these emotional experiences can often be more intense and frequent. Additionally, social and emotional aspects can be a contributing factor to the SNA e.g. the CYP may be experiencing challenges with peer relationships leading them to want to escape school or the CYP may not have sufficient social and emotional skills to cope with the difficulties they are facing.

This area should be explored with the same depth and intent that is applied to identifying any needs a CYP may have with cognition and learning. It is important any social and emotional areas for development are also supported. However, it should not be assumed that any needs/challenges are due to the CYP having a 'gap' in skills/knowledge within the social/emotional area e.g. the CYP may have a high level of skills but may be experiencing bullying, which needs to be addressed and resolved.

It can be challenging to know how to assess and support social/emotional needs because this area is so vast. To provide a possible way forward an Emotional Literacy framework has been included (p31). This can be used to guide areas for exploration but also to devise possible session/intervention aims. It can be useful to assess each dimensional area/aspect through observation and live situations e.g. social circles. Sessions with the CYP around emotional/social aspects can also provide a helpful insight e.g. labelling emotions, talking about when they have

experienced different emotions, asking them to provide possible solutions to social conflict situations.

*Description of the five-dimensional Emotional Literacy areas used within the targeted intervention based on the work of Goleman (1996) and Faupel (2003). Extracted from Doctoral Submission – Dr Gemma Holmes.*

<b>Emotional Literacy</b>	<b>'The ability of people to recognise, understand, handle and appropriately express their own emotions and to recognise, understand and respond appropriately to the expressed emotions of others' (Faupel, 2003)</b>
<b>Dimensional Area</b>	<b>Description</b>
Self-Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Understanding your own feelings</li> <li>-Recognising and understand different feelings</li> <li>-Recognise our strengths and limitations</li> <li>-Label different emotions</li> <li>-Understand how emotions can impact on what we do and say</li> </ul>
Self-Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Managing our own feelings</li> <li>-Expressing emotions in the appropriate way</li> <li>-Containing emotions when required</li> </ul>
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Remain focused during times of emotional upset</li> <li>-Have self-motivation to achieve</li> <li>-Persist when finding things difficult</li> <li>-Attempting to achieve personal goals</li> <li>-Engage in and be attentive to learning</li> </ul>
Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Understand others' emotions</li> <li>-Recognise emotions being expressed by others</li> <li>-Acknowledge and respond appropriately to others' feelings</li> <li>-Being sensitive to others</li> <li>-To notice physical and visual cues</li> </ul>

Social Skills / Handling Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Respond to others' emotions in a way that provides comfort and support</li> <li>-Manage the emotional expressions we display during interactions</li> <li>-To inform others that you have heard them and can see their perspective</li> <li>-Engage in interactions effectively to meet our own needs and those of others</li> </ul>
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A **few** approaches/resources that may be helpful/effective in this area have been detailed below:

- Whole school approach - Emotion Coaching.
- Targeted interventions that can be delivered on a small group/individual basis – Emotional Literacy, LEGO 'Therapy', Circle of Friends.
- Use of concrete and visual materials e.g. story books exploring emotions, Kimochis, puppets.
- Range of books by Dr Karen Treisman which provide information on different areas of need (e.g. Self-Esteem) and a variety of different approaches /resources.
- Adult support and modelling to develop emotional co/self-regulation. For CYP who still need access to emotional co-regulation, adults should aim to provide them with support (modelling social skills/supporting emotional regulation using strategies) during real life situations e.g. break time, challenging social interactions.
- It is important that adults working with CYP validate how they are feeling, even if they do not agree. Validation of a CYP's feelings will allow them to feel supported and understood. This is especially important if they use inappropriate methods of communication. Once the CYP is calm then the adult should support them to reflect and problem solve.

### **9.7 Expressing and Externalising Thoughts and Feelings**

To support CYP who are experiencing worry/heightened emotions, careful consideration needs to be given to how adults can facilitate and support students to express and externalise what they are feeling/thinking. Creativity can be most valuable in this area, often leading to approaches which are imaginative, engaging and effective. Creative thinking is seen daily in staff practices but also CYP, don't be afraid to use your own ideas!

Expressing and externalising thoughts/feelings can be supported by adults, but needs to be lead by the CYP. Some may find externalising/expressing very helpful, some may wish to process their thoughts before sharing them and there may be some that want to find solutions/work through their emotions independently, or some CYP may prefer a mixture of all of the above.

Again, a **few** approaches/ideas have been detailed below:



- Having access to a keyworker for 1:1 sessions/check ins, which are planned and protected. Provide opportunities for the CYP to discuss their strengths, needs and worries.
- A variety of verbal and non-verbal ways to express/externalise/communicate emotions/thoughts e.g. drama, art, writing.
- Use of a journal to record feelings/worries, writing/drawing these down can often provide a significant emotional release. A journal can also be helpful in providing a starting point for discussions in the 1:1 sessions, and will also create a record of worries that are based on anticipating events which can then be eased by discussing what actually happened (often what we anticipate is not as negative as what happens in reality).
- To allow CYP to move on from thoughts arising that are **appropriate** to 'push aside' or 'park' the following could be trialled:
  - Write it down on a post it note, which is kept safe by the keyworker until the next 1:1 time, when it can be discussed.
  - Use of a concrete method to destroy the thought e.g. write it down and then place it in the bin/put it in a shredder.
  - Talk about who this worry belongs to, often CYP can be carrying around others worries.
- Different methods for regulating/releasing emotions e.g. Mindfulness, breathing exercises, colouring, physical activity.

### **9.8 Relational Policy/Practice**

The Department for Education guidance (DfE, 2022) for maintained schools around behaviour policies is largely based around a behaviourist approach. Due to this, many schools follow a rewards and sanctions behaviour policy. Although this approach can be successful with some children and young people, it may not work for all.

This is particularly true for a child who may have experienced trauma or who may have difficult circumstances at home. These behaviourist approaches tend not to support the development of appropriate regulation techniques for CYP, or help to foster positive, trusting relationships within school. We encourage schools to shift their focus towards relational behaviour policies.

This refers to keeping relationships, connections, and humanity at the heart of all that is done (Treisman, 2021). When working in this way, we're not only supporting the children we are aware of who need additional social, emotional, mental health support, but also those children who are not on our radar, who may be more withdrawn. "Adversity happens everywhere" (Burke-Harris, 2018), therefore by using a whole school relational approach, we can ensure we are doing something to support all who need it. Research conducted in this area has found positive relationships between children, parents/carers and school staff are related to more positive academic outcomes and engagement in learning (Cornelius-White 2007).

Furthermore, an analysis of OFSTED reports found that the majority of schools selected for excellent practice were using relationship-based approaches.

### Frameworks for practice:

There are many frameworks that can be used to support relational practice. Below we will detail some that may be useful to explore or seek training in.

### **The 4 Rs**

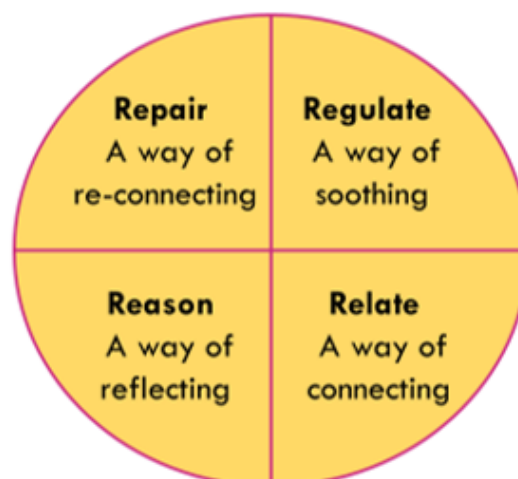
The first 3 Rs were introduced by Bruce Perry (2006). This framework is based around a neurosequential model. It is a "bottom-up" approach that first focuses on targeting the most primitive areas of the brain, that are responsible for our instinctual responses to danger, before moving onto more developed and sophisticated areas, that allow us to think logically.

- 1. Regulate** is an important first step, to soothe the young person's nervous system. Regulation can also work as a preventative strategy, to enable CYP to remain calm and engaged in the face of challenges or triggers.
- 2. Relate** is a way of connecting and is crucial to building trusting relationships. This can be done through validating a CYP's experiences and feelings, by responding in a genuine way.
- 3. Reason** is the third step and may not be done immediately after an incident has occurred. This step is a way of reflecting back on an event with a young person and can only be done when they are ready to engage in conversation. This is why it is crucial to first regulate by soothing and relate by connecting, before attempting to reason.

The fourth R was added by Louise Bomber (2020).

- 4. Repair** is an important addition, as it allows relationships that may have been damaged during incidents to reconnect. This can help to prevent long-lasting shame for the young person and help them to realise that relationships can survive conflict and challenge. This builds problem solving skills and strengthens relationships over time.

### **The 4 Rs**



## PACE

The PACE approach is a way of being. It is based around how parents connect with infants and aims to make a child feel safe. It is broken down into 4 categories:

**Playfulness** refers to being light-hearted with CYP, knowing when it is appropriate to make jokes and using this as a way of connecting.

**Acceptance** for all emotions a young person experiences. This does not refer to accepting all behaviour but accepting that the way a young person feels underneath this behaviour is neither right nor wrong.

**Curiosity** without judgement. Seeking to understand the CYP in all that they do, without making assumptions. Helping the CYP to understand their own feelings and behaviour by exploring them together.

**Empathy** allows the CYP to feel the adult's compassion for them. The adult will "sit with" the CYP in the emotion they are feeling, recognise that emotion in themselves and validate that emotion for the young person, acknowledging that they too have felt that way.

## Emotion Coaching

This is an approach that focuses on developing emotional awareness and understanding for CYP through modelling and empathy. Steps involve:

- Checking in with yourself to ensure you are in the frame of mind to begin emotion coaching.
- Recognising challenging moments as an opportunity for teaching the child about emotions.
- Noticing what feelings the CYP might be having.
- Labelling the emotion for the young person.
- Empathising with the emotion.
- Set limits on behaviour if necessary.
- Problem solve together once the child is regulated again.

### Things to consider:

## Organisational Culture

Organisational culture is crucial to consider when thinking about shifts in policies. It has been suggested that organisations can be thought about as having a collective brain (Bloom, 2011). Schools are made up of people who, like the organisation itself, have personalities, strengths, challenges, attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, memories of previous experiences and signs of when they are impacted by stress (Treisman, 2021). When considering policy change, it can be useful to think about your school as a person and how these things will impact the organisation moving forward as changes are implemented. To compliment a shift

towards a relational policy, it may be important to consider what staff training will be required to encourage a whole school understanding of why changes are taking place. This will encourage the relational policy to become embedded into practice over time and for relational practice to become a way of being rather than a procedure to follow.

### **Staff Wellbeing**

Staff wellbeing is also a crucial factor to consider when introducing relational policies. When wellbeing is low, this can have a negative impact on motivation, confidence, empathy and so much more (Treisman, 2021). In order for staff to have the ability to support children in school effectively, compassionately, and confidently, they must have the emotional space to do so. As every organisation and every person is unique, strategies for wellbeing to suit each person should also be unique. Some ideas from Treisman (2021) include:

- Individual self-care plan.
- High quality, safe, reciprocal communication.
- Relational management and leadership.
- A sense of belonging.
- Trust.
- Opportunities to share and celebrate.
- Buddy system.
- Debriefing.
- Home/work life balance.
- Relaxation exercises and opportunities.
- Calm spaces.
- Reflection.
- Opportunities for development.
- Positive affirmations.
- Being able to show vulnerability and learn from mistakes.
- Supportive structure e.g., parental leave, wellbeing champions.

### **Policy Examples:**

Emotion coaching UK have some example policies that can be viewed on their website using the link below.

[Emotion Coaching Resources for Professionals \(emotioncoachinguk.com\)](https://www.emotioncoachinguk.com)

Recommendations include:

- Taking a non-judgmental, curious, and empathetic attitude towards behaviour.
- Putting relationships first.
- Maintaining clear boundaries around behaviour.
- Recognising that not all behaviours are a "choice."
- Recognising that behaviour is everyone's responsibility.
- Using a graduated approach.
- Considering the whole school ethos.
- Encouraging parental engagement.
- Using attachment aware frameworks.

## 9.9 Strengths & Interests

When faced with a situation that can be viewed as/feel problematic or concerning there is often a focus on negative aspects and/or the CYP's needs. Highlighting and utilising the CYP's strengths and interests is paramount. In all areas of the 'assess, plan and do' stages the CYP's strengths/interests should be discussed, highlighted, encouraged and celebrated. It is important that the CYP receives regular feedback about their strengths and successes, and it is just as important these are discussed and shared with parents/carers too.

Here are a **few** ideas that can be implemented to support in this area:

- Find an area that the CYP is knowledgeable about. Think of ways this can be incorporated into the CYP's educational experience and find opportunities for the CYP to share their knowledge with others and have the opportunity to be the 'expert'.
- Some CYP can find it challenging, especially when things become overwhelming, to identify their own strengths and successes. All staff working with the CYP should aim to provide them with very clear, specific and concrete examples of their strengths to provide them with positive reinforcement/heightened confidence.
- Create a way to record positives/successes e.g. rather than systems and approaches that focus on what went wrong, use ones that promote thoughts around what went well.
- Within 1:1 sessions always have an element, or whole session, that focuses on the CYP's strengths and interests.

## **10 Useful Resources**

### ***10.1 To support CYP with Autism Spectrum Condition (section 6)***

- STARS (Specialist Training in Autism and Raising Standards)

<https://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-resources>

STARS is a team of dedicated teachers and advisers working for Leeds education service. Their website resources are free to download.

They include:

Social Stories

Symbols

Talking Mats

Addressing Worries

Transition Resources

Quick Guides and Ideas for Parents and Professionals

- NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY

<https://www.autism.org.uk/services/helplines/coronavirus/resources.aspx>

The main national charitable organisation for people with Autism that offers a vast range of resources, advice and support.

- WIDGIT SOFTWARE

<https://www.widgit.com>

Widgit is a leading commercial supplier of visual support material for helping in communication and programming with all children with special needs, including Autism.

Their Autism Support Pack is a rich collection of visual materials, under headings such as:

Routines: work planners, calendars, count down charts, 'now and next' formats

Behaviour: prompt cards, reward charts, 'keeping calm' posters

Emotion: feelings flashcards, feelings strips, feelings board

Social Interaction: communications cards, social stories

- Autism education Trust (2020): 'School Stress and Anxiety-how it can lead to School Refusal and impact on family life'
- Garfi,J.(2018) 'Overcoming School Refusal'. Australia: Australian Academic Press
- Gray,C.(2015 'The New Social Story Book'. Arlington,TX:Future Horizons

## 10.2 Books about SNA for Adults

- Understanding School Refusal: A Handbook for Professionals in Education, Health and Social Care. Thamirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008.
- Overcoming School Refusal: A Practical guide for counsellors, caseworkers and parents. Joanne Garfi, 2018.

## 10.3 Books for Working with CYP

- Starving the Anxiety/Anger Gremlin. Kate Collins.
- A Volcano in My Tummy. Whitehouse and Pudney.
- The Incredible 5-Point Scale. Buron and Curtis.
- Silly Billy. Anthony Browne.
- How to catch a star. Oliver Jeffries.
- The Huge Bag of Worries. Virginia Ironside.
- Moppy is ..... (angry, sad, scared). Asher and Scarfe.
- Everybody Feels.... (happy etc). Butterfield and Sterling.
- Have you filled a bucket today?
- Range of books by Dr Karen Triesman - <http://www.safehandstinkingminds.co.uk/>
- Range of books by Margot Sunderland.
- Think Good Feel Good. Paul Stallard.

## 10.4 Websites

SCC	Graduated	Response	Toolkit
			<a href="https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Education/Access-to-learning/Graduated-response/Graduated-response.aspx">https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Education/Access-to-learning/Graduated-response/Graduated-response.aspx</a>
			<a href="http://www.safehandstinkingminds.co.uk/">http://www.safehandstinkingminds.co.uk/</a>
			<a href="https://www.theeducationpeople.org/events/supporting-children-with-anxiety-in-the-covid-19-pandemic/">https://www.theeducationpeople.org/events/supporting-children-with-anxiety-in-the-covid-19-pandemic/</a>
			<a href="https://www.nice.org.uk/">https://www.nice.org.uk/</a>
			<a href="https://youngminds.org.uk/">https://youngminds.org.uk/</a>
			<a href="https://elearning.creativeeducation.co.uk/courses/support-children-who-are-anxious-to-attend-school/">https://elearning.creativeeducation.co.uk/courses/support-children-who-are-anxious-to-attend-school/</a>
			<a href="https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/">https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/</a>
			<a href="https://www.emotioncoachinguk.com/">https://www.emotioncoachinguk.com/</a> <a href="https://www.emotioncoachinguk.com/">https://www.emotioncoachinguk.com/</a>

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## **SNA Guidance Feedback Form**

If you have used this guidance booklet, it would be helpful if you could complete the evaluation form, accessed via the link below. This feedback will allow us to explore what has been useful and what adaptations may be required.

[School Non-Attendance EPS Feedback](#)



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