

# Emotionally Based School Non- Attendance (EBSNA)

Case studies from Warwickshire  
schools and settings.



# Case study 1: Emily (Year 2)

## About Emily – risk factors and wellbeing

In Year 2, Emily began to show signs of emotionally based school non-attendance. This followed a period of family disruption and increased anxiety. Her attendance dropped gradually, and mornings became particularly difficult. Emily expressed worries about separating from her mum, feeling overwhelmed in busy classroom environments, and struggling with transitions between activities. She also found it hard to cope with unexpected changes and was sensitive to noise and crowded spaces.

## What made a difference?

Assessment tools	Support strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>ATTEND framework:</b> Used to identify key barriers to attendance as well as positive influences and sources of support across home and school life (protective factors).</li><li>• <b>Pupil voice activities:</b> Drawing and storytelling were used to help Emily express her feelings and worries. Emily worked with a trusted adult to explore the 'drawing your ideal school' resources.</li><li>• <b>Daily monitoring sheets:</b> Helped track patterns in Emily's attendance through the school attendance officer and her emotional presentation based on staff observations.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Soft start routine:</b> Each morning, Emily was welcomed by a familiar adult and engaged in calming activities in a quiet space, such as using play dough, before joining the class.</li><li>• <b>Visual timetable:</b> Provided predictability and reduced anxiety around transitions.</li><li>• <b>Safe space access:</b> A designated calm area was made available for Emily to use if she felt overwhelmed.</li><li>• <b>Home-school communication:</b> Daily check-ins with Emily's parents helped maintain consistency and offer reassurance.</li><li>• <b>Peer buddy system:</b> A trusted peer supported Emily during playtimes and group activities.</li></ul>

## What changed?

Emily's attendance improved steadily, and she began to show more confidence in entering the classroom independently. Her emotional wellbeing stabilised, and she was able to use coping strategies more frequently. She re-engaged with learning, especially in creative subjects, and began to rebuild friendships. Staff observed a marked improvement in her ability to manage transitions and express her feelings more openly.



# Case study 2: Lucy (Year 4)

## About Lucy – risk factors and wellbeing

Lucy was in Year 4 and had found it hard to feel confident and calm about going to school. This had been a challenge for several years. Her difficulties came from a mix of emotional, communication, learning, and sensory needs that made school life more challenging for her. Lucy often worried about what others thought of her and was afraid of being judged by her classmates.

Getting ready for school sometimes made Lucy feel so overwhelmed that she experienced strong 'freeze' responses - moments where she felt stuck, unable to move or speak - even though she wanted to. She also had trouble sleeping, was sensitive to things like noise, light, or touch (known as sensory sensitivities), and often felt anxious about falling behind in her learning.

## What made a difference?

Assessment tools	Support strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>ATTEND framework pupil voice cards:</b> Used to identify key risk factors and prioritise support, based on what was most important to Lucy.</li><li>• <b>ATTEND framework support strategies cards:</b> Used to focus on easily achievable, reasonable adjustments.</li><li>• <b>Sensory audit:</b> Completed using Autism Education Trust tools. This helped to identify sensory adjustments to school life.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Trusted adults:</b> A small, consistent and nurturing team supported Lucy with soft starts, craft activities, and classroom transitions.</li><li>• <b>Safe, motivating activities:</b> Activities like reading with younger pupils and creative projects boosted Lucy's confidence and purpose.</li><li>• <b>Calming sensory breaks:</b> Short, regular breaks using tools Lucy chose were scheduled into the day to prevent overwhelm.</li><li>• <b>Social reconnection:</b> Structured small-group activities and breaktime clubs helped Lucy to feel an improved sense of belonging. Classmates were also gently supported to understand and include her.</li><li>• <b>Discreet support:</b> A shared hand signal let staff check-in with Lucy discreetly, helping her feel seen without standing out.</li></ul>

## What changed?

Lucy began to re-engage with school through a carefully planned approach, focused on her emotional safety. She rebuilt trust with adults, reconnected with peers, and grew more confident in managing school-related stress. As the support strategies were developed with her, she felt heard and understood.

She now talks about her hopes for her future, including going to college and working in psychology or law.



# Case study 3: Ibrahim (Year 5)

## About Ibrahim – risk factors and wellbeing

In Year 5, Ibrahim's attendance fell sharply – from 86% to 61% - highlighting more serious underlying concerns. Through assessment tools, Ibrahim disclosed that he was anxious about leaving his mother at home due to past domestic violence and recent changes in his father's behaviour, including aggression and alcohol use after losing his job. These family dynamics had a serious impact on Ibrahim's emotional wellbeing and sense of safety, contributing to his school non-attendance. The assessments helped him feel safe enough to share important safeguarding information, and appropriate support was put in place for the family.

## What made a difference?

Assessment tools	Support strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>School wellbeing cards:</b> Helped uncover underlying emotional concerns.</li><li>• <b>Graduated approach:</b> Ibrahim was added to the SEND register</li><li>• <b>School communication platform (Dojo):</b> Facilitated consistent home-school communication.</li><li>• <b>EBSNA additional support plan:</b> Used to structure and review the support agreed.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Trusted support:</b> Regular home visits, meet-and-greets and daily check-ins with a familiar adult. <a href="#">Relax Kids</a> sessions helped Ibrahim feel safe and build emotional awareness.</li><li>• <b>Positive connection:</b> A <b>positive pot</b> and <b>postcards</b> were used to offer encouragement and reassurance. A Positive Pot is a container where children collect positive moments from school - like compliments, praise, proud achievements, or happy memories.</li><li>• <b>Emotional validation:</b> Staff acknowledged Ibrahim's feelings and celebrated small wins, like attending school on difficult days.</li><li>• <b>Reassurance strategies:</b> Reassurance from his mother regarding her safety and the use of a transitional object (and <a href="#">the invisible string</a>) helped reduce separation anxiety.</li><li>• <b>Ongoing input:</b> Continued support provided through <b>Thrive sessions</b> and involvement from <b>Warwickshire Attendance Service</b>.</li></ul>

## What changed?

Using the EBSNA tools helped to build trust between the school and Ibrahim's family, creating space for open conversations and emotional safety. Ibrahim felt more understood, and the school expressed strong confidence in the tools' ability to support pupils with EBSNA. The use of [School Wellbeing Cards](#) was particularly effective in creating a space for open conversations. Although Ibrahim's attendance later declined due to illness and a family holiday, the school and family agreed on small, manageable steps to continue supporting his emotional wellbeing and engagement with learning.



# Case study 4: Sammy (Year 5)

## About Sammy – risk factors and wellbeing

Sammy was in Year 5 when support began, with an attendance rate of 89%. He had a history of anxiety, and his older sibling was home educated. A neurodevelopmental assessment had been completed in Year 4 and [Early Support](https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/children-families/early-help-warwickshire) HYPERLINK "https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/children-families/early-help-warwickshire" \h was already in place.

Sammy's main barriers to attendance included feeling overwhelmed by schoolwork, general anxiety about school, and a strong preference for the safety of home. Despite this, he expressed a clear wish to attend school every day, feel safer while there, and be able to share his feelings with trusted adults.

## What made a difference?

Assessment tools	Support strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>ATTEND framework:</b> Used to identify barriers and protective factors, through conversation with school and family.</li><li>• <b>School wellbeing cards:</b> Helped Sammy to communicate his emotional needs and preferences.</li><li>• <b>Graduated approach:</b> School worked closely with the family to respond to any barriers to attendance and to introduce reasonable adjustments. This support was regularly reviewed to ensure it was still meeting Sammy's needs.</li><li>• <b>Early help meetings:</b> Used to support the family.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Emotional support:</b> <a href="#">Thrive sessions</a> helped Sammy develop strategies for managing his emotions.</li><li>• <b>Trusted adults:</b> Named staff were available for Sammy to approach when feeling unsure or anxious.</li><li>• <b>Wellbeing check-ins:</b> <b>First-day calls</b> after absences and <b>weekly school-family check-ins</b> supported both wellbeing and attendance.</li><li>• <b>Young carer support:</b> Following discussions with his parent, an application was submitted to the <a href="#">Warwickshire Young Carers Project</a>.</li><li>• <b>Transition planning:</b> Extra support was put in place to help Sammy prepare for the move to secondary school.</li></ul>

## What changed?

Sammy's attendance improved significantly to 95%, and his anxiety levels visibly decreased. He became more engaged in learning, especially while preparing for his Year 6 SATs. Socially, he built strong peer relationships and showed greater confidence in class.

Positive changes were also seen at home, with improved sibling relationships reported. The school expressed high confidence in the effectiveness of the EBSNA tools and highlighted the importance of early, proactive support in preventing attendance issues from escalating.



# Case study 5: Olivia (Year 8)

## About Olivia – risk factors and wellbeing

Olivia experienced increasing difficulties with attendance due to a combination of school, family, and personal factors. She missed a supported transition to secondary school due to COVID-19 and developed a fear of school transport after experiencing unkindness from peers. The busy school environment often left Olivia feeling overwhelmed by noise, movement and sensory input.

Olivia also experienced academic pressure and often compared herself to a high-achieving sibling. She was diagnosed with Autism and Generalised Anxiety Disorder, and while she showed a strong desire to be accepted, she feared judgment from peers and staff due to her absences and unique fashion sense.

## What made a difference?

Assessment tools	Support strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>ATTEND framework:</b> Used with Olivia, her family and school staff to identify risk factors to attendance.</li><li>• <b>Sensory audit:</b> Used to understand Olivia's sensory sensitivities and to identify reasonable adjustments to the school environment.</li><li>• <b>Occupational therapist (OT) sensory assessment:</b> External assessment commissioned to inform a tailored sensory support plan for Olivia.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Arrival support:</b> A named staff member greeted Olivia daily with warmth and predictability. Senior leaders were asked not to challenge lateness.</li><li>• <b>Sensory adjustments:</b> Olivia could leave class early, wear ear defenders and black trainers, and follow a sensory diet informed by OT.</li><li>• <b>Flexible reintegration:</b> A gradual return plan was created with Olivia and her family, including clear routines and agreed pick-up/drop-off arrangements.</li><li>• <b>Emotional safety:</b> Staff understood that Olivia's behaviour was driven by anxiety and responded with reassurance, not punishment. The Zones of Regulation tools helped her to find calming strategies (<a href="#">Tools to Try Cards for Tweens and Teens</a>).</li><li>• <b>Peer connection:</b> Olivia joined a small lunchtime club with familiar peers, based around her love of anime and manga, to rebuild social confidence.</li></ul>

## What changed?

Olivia's reintegration was supported through a personalised, compassionate approach that prioritised emotional safety and sensory regulation. She began to re-engage with school routines, felt more in control of her environment, and her anxiety around arrival and transitions reduced.

The collaborative planning process empowered Olivia and her family, building trust and clarity around the support in place. This led to improved attendance, wellbeing, and a stronger sense of belonging. Olivia felt that expectations were fair and achievable, which supported her reconnection with learning. She returned to school full-time and was able to complete her GCSE mock exams.



# Case study 6: Charlie (Year 8)

## About Charlie – risk factors and wellbeing

For several years, Charlie (Year 9), had been experiencing anxiety-related difficulties with attending school. He often felt physically unwell at the start of the school day and needed rest days at home to recover emotionally.

Charlie placed high academic expectations on himself and struggled with social confidence, especially after experiencing unkindness from peers. Sensory sensitivities - particularly around uniform and busy school spaces – contributed to his distress. A recent autism diagnosis added to his feelings of difference and uncertainty. As his attendance declined, Charlie became more disconnected from peers and had sometimes felt overwhelmed when steps were taken too quickly to get him back into school.

## What made a difference?

Assessment tools	Support strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>ATTEND framework:</b> Used to identify and code primary and secondary factors affecting attendance.</li><li>• <b>One-page profile:</b> Developed collaboratively to share Charlie's needs and preferred support strategies with staff.</li><li>• <b>Sensory processing audit:</b> Used to identify adaptations to the school environment.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Personalised arrival routine:</b> A named staff member greeted Charlie each morning, with flexibility around arrival times.</li><li>• <b>Emotional regulation support:</b> Mentoring sessions focused on understanding anxiety and emotional burnout using tools like <a href="#">Spoons Theory</a>.</li><li>• <b>Environmental adjustments:</b> Use of ear defenders, music tracks, and flexible seating plans to reduce sensory overload.</li><li>• <b>Gradual reintegration:</b> A phased return to more challenging lessons, starting with subjects Charlie felt more confident in.</li><li>• <b>Staff awareness:</b> Staff were briefed to raise awareness of Charlie's sensory needs and masking behaviours.</li><li>• <b>Safe spaces:</b> Areas were identified for Charlie to take respite breaks when he felt overwhelmed.</li></ul>

## What changed?

Charlie started showing more confidence in navigating the school environment and was better able to manage his emotions. He said he felt heard and involved in decisions about the support he received. Staff noticed that he was using agreed strategies to cope with anxiety, like asking for breaks and using calming tools. His school attendance became more consistent, especially on days with clear routines and structured support. Charlie also began regularly checking in with pastoral and SEND staff to share any concerns and seek support.





# Case study 7: Ryan (Year 10)

## About Ryan – risk factors and wellbeing

Year 10 student, Ryan, experienced a complex mix of factors that made it hard for him to attend school regularly. Primary factors included a history of learning difficulties, low confidence in his academic ability, and significant family disruption, including bereavement and siblings going into care.

The COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted Ryan's learning and routine. Over time, his inconsistent attendance led to secondary concerns, such as feeling disconnected from friends, anxiety about returning to the GCSE curriculum, and a lack of trust in some staff. Despite these challenges, Ryan was clear that he wanted to return to school and succeed.

## What made a difference?

Assessment tools	Support strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>ATTEND framework (student version):</b> Helped Ryan identify both primary and secondary factors affecting his attendance.</li><li>• <a href="#">A Therapeutic Treasure Deck of Feelings and Sentence Completion Cards</a>: Used in mentoring sessions to explore emotions and self-perception.</li><li>• <b>Pupil voice tools:</b> These included the <a href="#">ATTEND pupil voice cards</a> and <a href="#">Mapping the Landscape of your School</a> (Secondary version) to create a visual map of safe and challenging areas.</li><li>• <b>Re-integration ladder:</b> Ryan worked with school staff to plan small steps for increasing his time in school.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Relational approaches:</b> Staff were told about Ryan's needs and encouraged to respond with warmth and understanding.</li><li>• <b>Flexible expectations:</b> Staff adopted a "Does It Really Matter?" (DIRM) mindset – focusing on what truly matters to reduce pressure.</li><li>• <b>Curriculum adjustments:</b> Ryan took fewer GCSE subjects to focus on core areas and reduce stress.</li><li>• <b>Social reconnection:</b> A plan helped Ryan meet friends in quieter spaces during breaktimes.</li><li>• <b>Safe spaces:</b> A backup plan gave Ryan access to a quiet space and calming activities on difficult mornings.</li><li>• <b>Mentoring and emotional support:</b> Weekly sessions helped Ryan talk through worries about his attendance and find solutions.</li></ul>

## What changed?

Ryan's engagement with school improved through a personalised reintegration plan that made him feel emotionally safe. He reconnected with trusted adults and friends, found success in creative subjects, and started to rebuild his confidence in learning. He became more willing to attend school and learned ways to understand and manage his emotions. He successfully studied towards four GCSEs.





# Case study 8: Riley (Year 10)

## About Riley – risk factors and wellbeing

Riley has faced many early life challenges that have affected her wellbeing and emotional control at school. She was adopted as a young child and exposed to drugs before birth. In Year 5, she experienced the loss of her adoptive mother. Moving schools meant losing a trusted adult and being separated from her older sister, who was a key support for her.

Riley showed signs of separation anxiety, physical distress like tummy aches, and emotional overwhelm, often finding it hard to enter the classroom or connect with peers. She was also sensitive to things like noise, light and touch (sensory sensitivities), had trouble sleeping, and low confidence in her learning abilities.

## What made a difference?

Assessment tools	Support strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>ATTEND framework:</b> Used with Riley, her family and school staff to explore factors affecting attendance and wellbeing (school, family, and child-related).</li><li>• <b>Mapping the Landscape of Your School, Secondary version:</b> Used with Riley to identify safe and challenging areas of school life.</li><li>• <b>Zones of Regulation:</b> the 'Size of the Problem' scale to support Riley's emotional understanding.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Low-demand, motivating activities:</b> Riley took part in low-pressure tasks like art and crafts to help her feel safe and build confidence.</li><li>• <b>Backup plans:</b> On difficult days, Riley could use a 'Plan B', including access to a safe space and calming resources.</li><li>• <b>Regulation support:</b> Riley joined <a href="#">sensory circuits</a> and other structured activities to help manage emotions and stay focused.</li><li>• <b>Peer connection:</b> A <b>lunchtime games club</b> gave Riley a relaxed space to rebuild friendships.</li><li>• <b>1:1 mentoring:</b> Weekly sessions with a Pastoral Support Teaching Assistant helped Riley explore coping strategies and build resilience.</li></ul>

## What changed?

Riley started to rebuild trust in school by spending regular time with familiar adults and structured time with peers. She reengaged with learning through creative tasks and began coming up with her own ways to manage her emotions.

