

*29th September 2022*

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# Understanding emotionally-based school avoidance

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*This seminar will begin shortly*



**Anna Freud**  
National Centre for  
Children and Families

@AFNCCF

# Programme

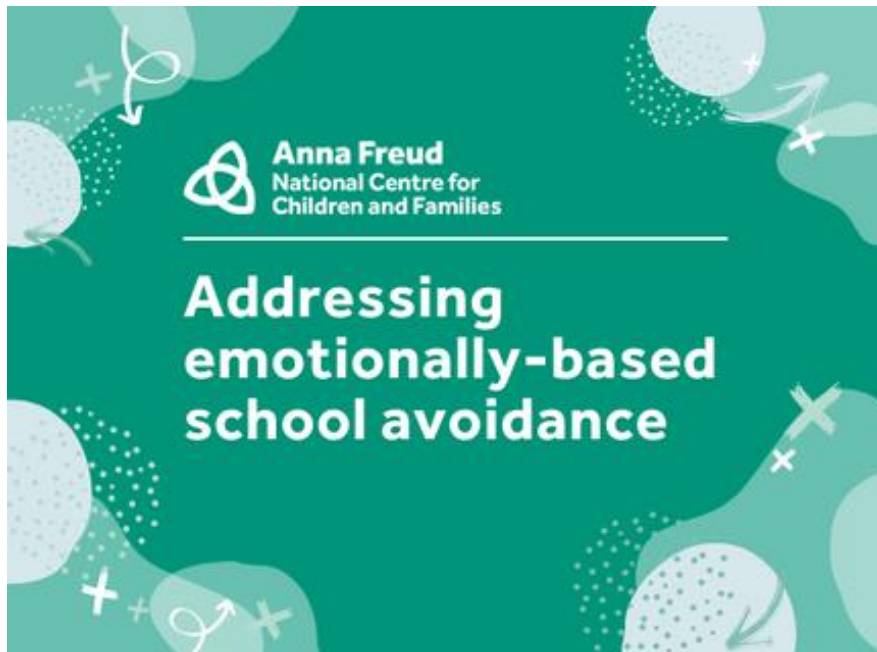
Time	Details
16.30 – 16.45	Introduction – <b>Natalie Merrett</b> , Head of Knowledge Dissemination – Schools Division
16.45 – 17.05	Presentation – <b>Vicky Saward</b> , Head of Training - Schools Division
17.05 – 17.25	Presentation – <b>Brenda McHugh</b> , Consultant Psychotherapist and Co-Founder of the Pears Family School
17.25 – 17.58	Q&A chaired by <b>Natalie Merrett</b>
17.58 – 18.00	Closing remarks from <b>Natalie Merrett</b>

# 5 Steps Framework



# Emotionally-based school avoidance resource and training

[Addressing emotionally-based school avoidance resource](#)



The image shows the cover of a book titled "Mental health and school attendance". The top half of the cover features a yellow background with a white illustration of a person sitting at a desk, looking thoughtful. A green diagonal banner in the top left corner says "Book now". The bottom half of the cover has a light grey background with the title "Mental health and school attendance" in teal. Below the title, there is a short description in black text: "Learn more about emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA), and how to support students experiencing it."

[Book onto Mental health and school attendance training](#)

Upcoming dates:

- 18<sup>th</sup> October 2022
- 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022

**Share your thoughts with us**

[schoolsinmind@annafreud.org](mailto:schoolsinmind@annafreud.org)

**@AFNCCF**

29<sup>th</sup> September 2022

# Emotionally Based School Avoidance

An opportunity to learn  
about EBSA and how this is  
affecting schools.



**Anna Freud**  
National Centre for  
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# Learning Outcomes:

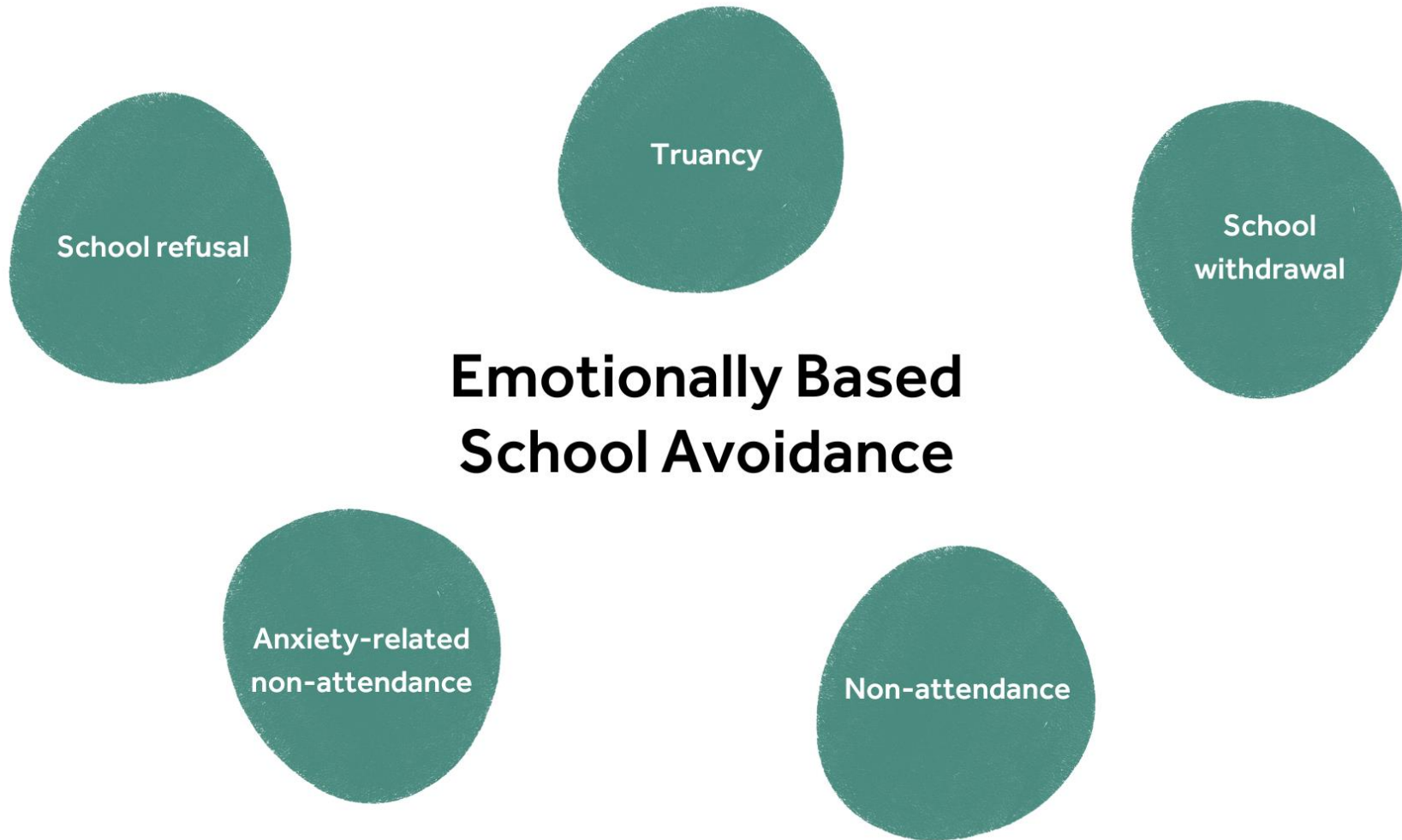
- To increase understanding of the term 'emotionally based school avoidance' (EBSA)
- To summarise the current national picture for school-aged children
- To explore the role of schools in supporting those affected
- To share further development opportunities and resources on EBSA

# Emotionally Based School Avoidance

Emotionally Based School Avoidance is a broad umbrella term used to describe a group of children and young people who have severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences from school.



# Terminology... at a glance



# Why is EBSA happening?

1. To avoid uncomfortable feelings brought on by attending school, such as feelings of anxiety or low mood.
2. To avoid situations that might be stressful, such as academic demands, social pressures and/or aspects of the school environment.
3. To reduce separation anxiety or to have feelings acknowledged by significant others, such as parents or other family members.
4. To pursue tangible reinforcers outside of school during the school day relating to the child or young person's interests.

# Emotionally Based School Avoidance...

*"...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."*



# Some examples of EBSA risk factors could include:

Child / young person	Family / home	School
Anxiety, depression or other mental health concerns	High levels of family stress (including financial stress, conflict or domestic violence)	Bullying
Difficulties with managing and regulating emotions	Changes to the home environment (including divorce, separation or parent/carer illness)	Difficult relationships with staff members
Trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)	Being a young carer	Difficulties making and maintaining friendships, being socially isolated
Low levels of self-confidence or self-esteem	Loss and bereavement	Difficulties in particular subjects
Separation anxiety or attachment issues with a parent/carer	Family history of EBSA	Demanding, pressurised academic environment
Having a special educational need or disability	Poor parental mental health	Transitions: from primary to secondary, or through key stages

# Current national picture

**Persistent absence definition:** A pupil enrolment is identified as a persistent absentee if they miss 10% or more of their possible sessions.

## Persistent absence rate:

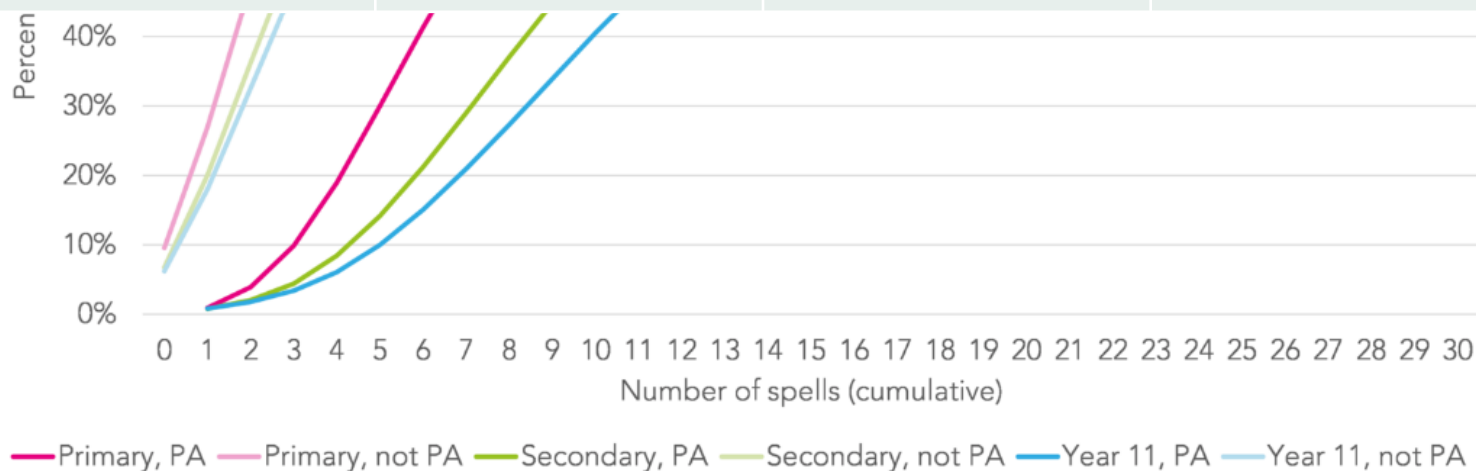
$$\frac{\text{Number of enrolments classed as persistent absentees}}{\text{Number of enrolments}} \times 100$$

	2018/19 Persistent Absence	2021/22 Persistent Absence
Primary	8.4%	25%
Secondary	12.7%	34%

# Isn't all this just because of Covid?

Cumulative no. spells of absence per pupil, persistent absentees vs other  
Attendance Tracker schools - Autumn and Spring Terms 2021/22

	2018/19 Persistent Absence	2021/22 Persistent Absence	2021/22 PA allowing for 10 days off with Covid
Primary	8.4%	25%	12.1%
Secondary	12.7%	34%	20.8%



# The role of schools

- Embed a whole-school/college approach to mental health and wellbeing
- Review engagement with parents and carers
- Adopt a relational approach within your setting
- Increase school connectedness within your school/college community



# Government Guidance

From September 2022 this is guidance but includes the statement

*"Secretary of State has committed to this guidance becoming statutory (no sooner than September 2023)."*

with the caveat

*"This guidance will be updated and reissued ahead of academic year 2023-2024."*



## Working together to improve school attendance

Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities

Published: May 2022

Applies from: September 2022



# Guidance - Improving school attendance: support for schools and local authorities

Principles of an effective whole school attendance strategy:

- Leadership and management
- Relationships and communication
- Systems and data
- Intervention

The screenshot shows the GOV.UK website page for the guidance document. The page header includes the GOV.UK logo, navigation links for 'Topics' and 'Government activity', and a search icon. The breadcrumb trail reads: Home > School and college behaviour and attendance > School attendance: guidance for schools. The Department for Education logo is visible. The main content area features a blue header with the title 'Improving school attendance: support for schools and local authorities' and the date 'Updated 4 August 2022'. Below this is a grey box stating 'Applies to England'. The page is divided into two columns: 'Contents' and 'Overview'. The 'Contents' column lists: Overview, Principles of an effective whole school attendance strategy, Actions for school staff and local authorities to improve attendance, and Further resources. The 'Overview' column contains two paragraphs: the first states that the document gives guidance to schools and local authorities to support them to improve school attendance; the second states that the first part sets out the principles underpinning an effective whole school strategy for attendance, and the second part outlines actions that school staff and local authorities may consider taking to improve attendance for all pupils, pupils at risk of persistent absence and pupils who are persistently absent (PA). A 'Print this page' button is located at the bottom of the 'Contents' column.

# Further development opportunities


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Learn more about emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA), and how to support students experiencing it.

## Course overview

Government data on school attendance suggests that the numbers of children and young people with a record of severe and persistent absence from school has risen following the pandemic.

Emotional, mental health or wellbeing issues can be significant barriers to school attendance. On this course, we will learn more about these factors and how they can contribute to poor attendance.

We will also explore strategies that school staff can implement to support students experiencing emotionally based school avoidance.

## Course details

### Who is it for?

Our training modules are suitable for anyone working with children and young people in a school, college or community setting. This could include:

- School leaders
- Teachers and staff in schools and colleges
- SEN/Designated mental health leads
- Learning mentors

[Book Now](#)

18th October 2022

📍 Online – live via Zoom (Joining instructions will be sent to the email address you booked on with at least one working day before the event)

🕒 Approx. 2 hours

🕒 15:00 - 17:00 (UK time)

Price

£75.00  
Training fee

[Book Now](#)

7th December 2022

📍 Online – live via Zoom (Joining

# Further development opportunities



# Thank you

For more information please contact:

[School.Training@annafreud.org](mailto:School.Training@annafreud.org)



**Anna Freud  
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Brenda McHugh

# The Pears Family School

Parent and Carer Engagement as an effective intervention for children with EBSA



**Anna Freud**  
National Centre for  
Children and Families

Case study

# Pears Family School

THE YOUNG CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

ANNA FREUD CENTRE  
NATIONAL CENTRE FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

PEARS  
FAMILY SCHOOL  
Member of the PEARSON GROUP





# 13 year old boy out of school for one year



## His mother's message

Trust yourself to embrace your  
curiosity and challenge your  
fears with warmth and empathy





# WHY IS THE SOCIAL WORLD KEY TO EVERYONE'S MENTAL HEALTH?

# A parent voice from Pears Family School



## Vulnerability and risk factors

An oversensitive threat system can also lead to withdrawal from potentially enriching relationships and activities. Over time, this can reduce a child's social network, limiting their opportunities to form and maintain helpful social bonds and learn new things about themselves and the world



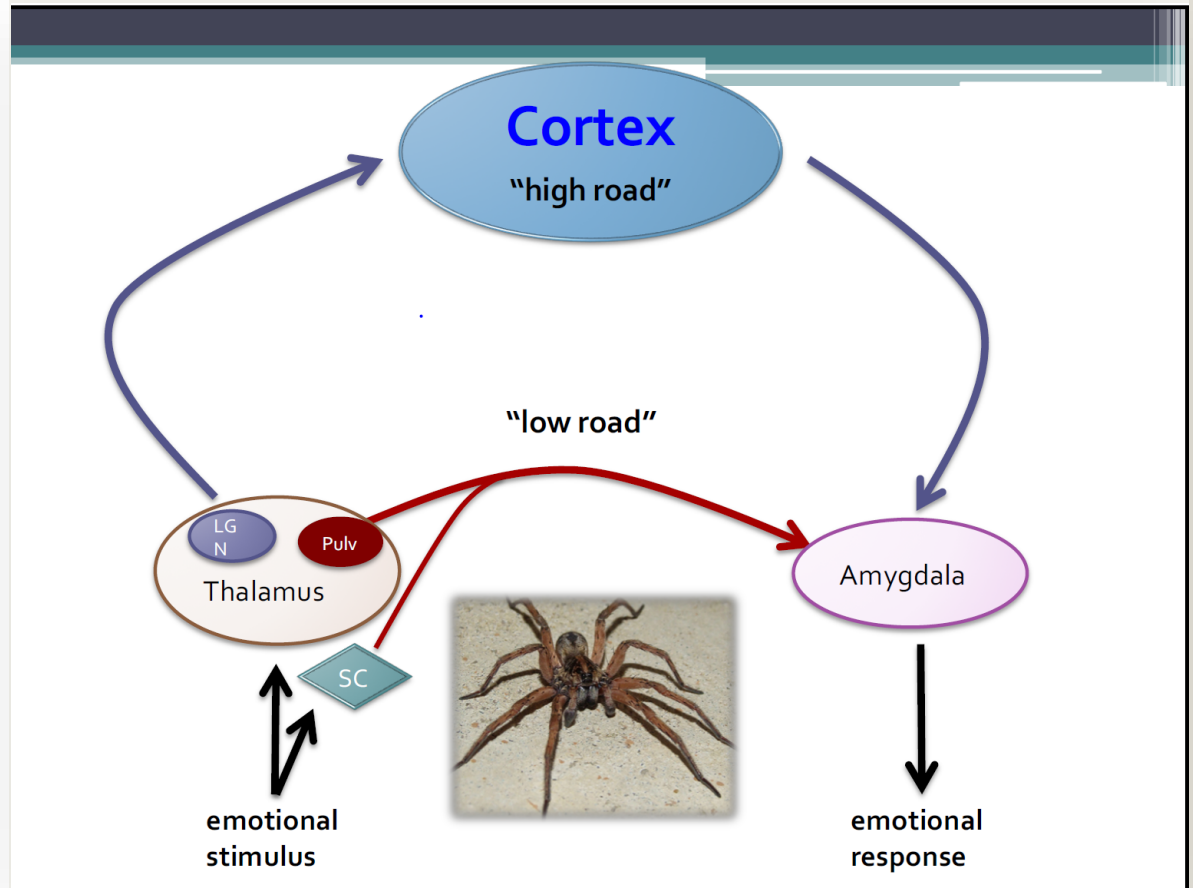
The process of social thinning

## Active risk factors

The THREAT SYSTEM, which processes potential danger

The REWARD SYSTEM, which responds to positive experiences

The MEMORY SYSTEM, which stores and makes use of our past experiences





# Guidance: lessons from Pears Family School

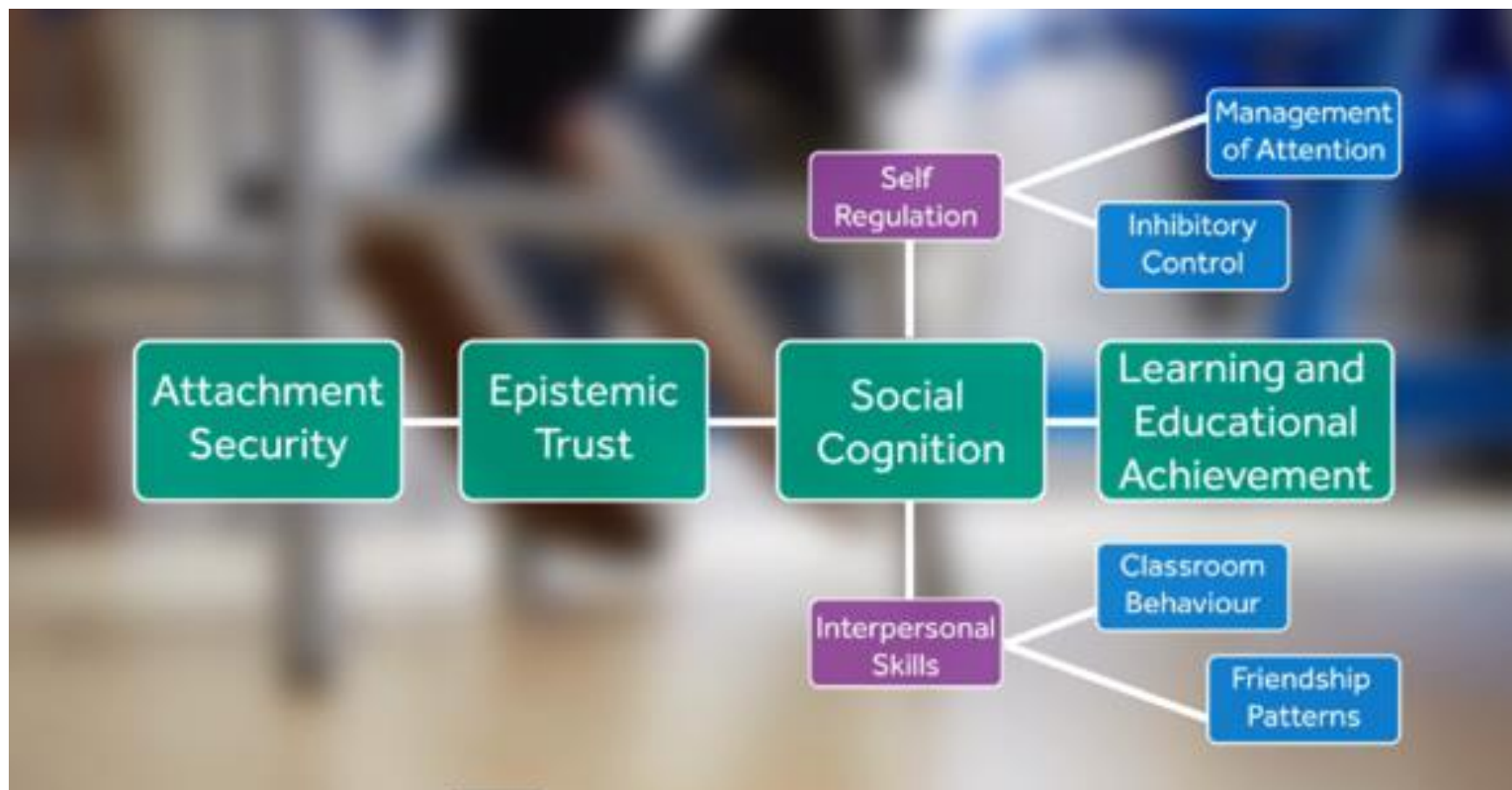
FOR PUPIL: to feel safe enough to feel anxiety yet keep on the re-integration journey.

- Develop the ability to TRUST
- Help manage SELF REGULATION skills
- Reduce HYPERVIGILANCE and SHAME

Build a PARTNERSHIP with PARENTS/CARERS to create opportunities to work together by creating a safe, non judgemental low stakes environment

- Identify a SHARED INTENTION and PROCESS

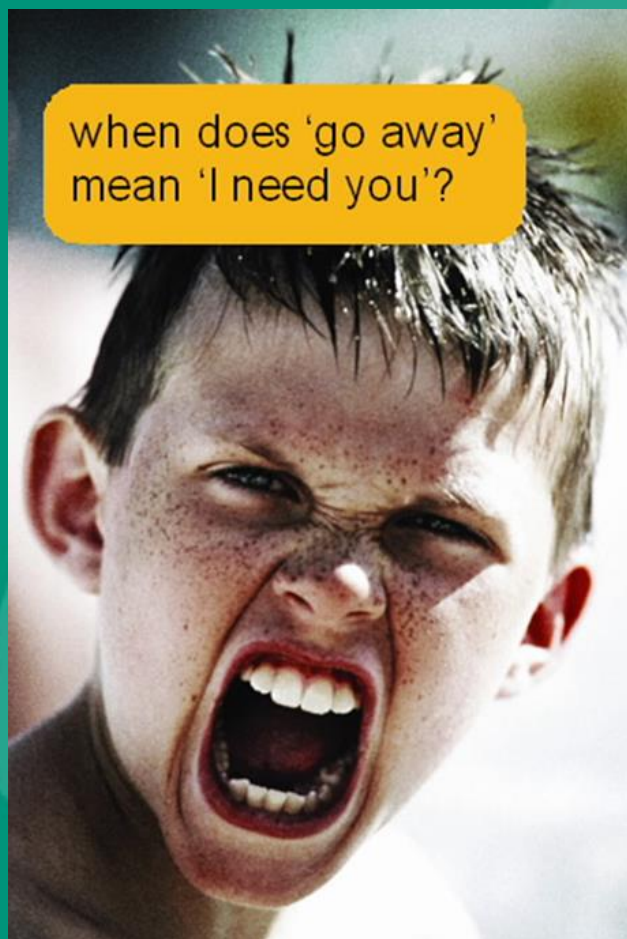
## Academic highway - Why involving parents is vital for building trust, supporting recovery and promoting sustainable change.





**A systemic formulation is a working hypothesis which describes the child in the context of the family and wider social network.**

**Different contributing factors are explored to see how they may trigger or maintain problematic behaviours and beliefs**





## Creating a safe space

# Crucial conversations: tools for talking when the stakes are high

Patterson, Grenny, McMillan and Switzler's (2002)

A crucial conversation is a discussion between two or more people where:

- 1.The stakes are high
- 2.Opinions differ
- 3.Emotions run strong
- 4.The outcome significantly impacts their lives and there is significant risk of negative consequences



## Recipe for The Pears Family School 'Engendered Trust'

1. Marinade your Parents and Children in the **Active Warmth**, until their hearts soften and their temperatures increase.
2. Gently, take your Parents and Children and add a large dollop of **Respectful Curiosity** and ask questions to engage with and better understand them.
3. When this understanding tastes right, stir in as much **Hopeful Motivation** as you need until you see optimism rising. If optimism is stubborn, keep adding.
4. When optimism has sufficiently risen, thickly spread your '**Supportive Challenge**' all over your Parents and Children.
5. When they are ready, serve them with pride



### Ingredients

- ❖ **Parents and Children**
- ❖ **Active Warmth**
- ❖ **Respectful Curiosity**
- ❖ **Hopeful Motivation**
- ❖ **Supportive Challenge**

# Regular systemic actions that can lead to initially first order then second order sustainable change

