

Emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA)

Torbay Educational Psychology Service

What will today's training cover?

- What is EBSA? (Emotionally Based School Avoidance)
- Which CYP are most susceptible to EBSA?
- What are the symptoms/traits of EBSA?
- Models to help us understand anxiety and EBSA
- Strategies and approaches

Headlines

Number of children in A&E with serious mental health issues jumps 50 per cent since start of pandemic

Families reveal the heartbreaking consequences of delays in finding help since lockdown

NHS boosts mental health services in schools as pandemic leaves children struggling

The expanded roll-out comes amid concerns about children's mental health in lockdown



The new/online has had an impact on children's mental health (Photo: I. Ann Naei/Getty)

Dr Ranj Singh: 'I've seen first hand what lockdowns have done to our children's mental health'

Children face 'agonising' waits for mental health care

By Nick Triggle
Health correspondent
10 hours ago

Coronavirus pandemic



Children struggling with mental health problems during the pandemic are facing "agonisingly" long waits for treatment, a BBC investigation has found.

School refusal almost triples since COVID-19 lockdowns, say parents and expert



▲ Pupils at a school in Stalybridge this month. Education leaders have called for upwards of £5.8bn over the next three years for schools catchup. Photograph: Anthony Devlin/Getty Images

Forty per cent of girls aged 16 to 17 are unhappy with their mental health, more than double the rate for boys, according to a landmark report that calls for the "greatest investment possible" in catchup for schools as part of a "new deal" for children.

What is EBSA?

- EBSA is used to describe CYP who find it difficult to attend school due to emotional difficulties.
- Other terms include: School phobia, School refusal, Extended school non-attendance, Anxiety-based school non-attendance.
- “EBSA” is preferred: ‘can’t over won’t’
- Research suggests that rates of EBSA range from 1% to 5% of the school population



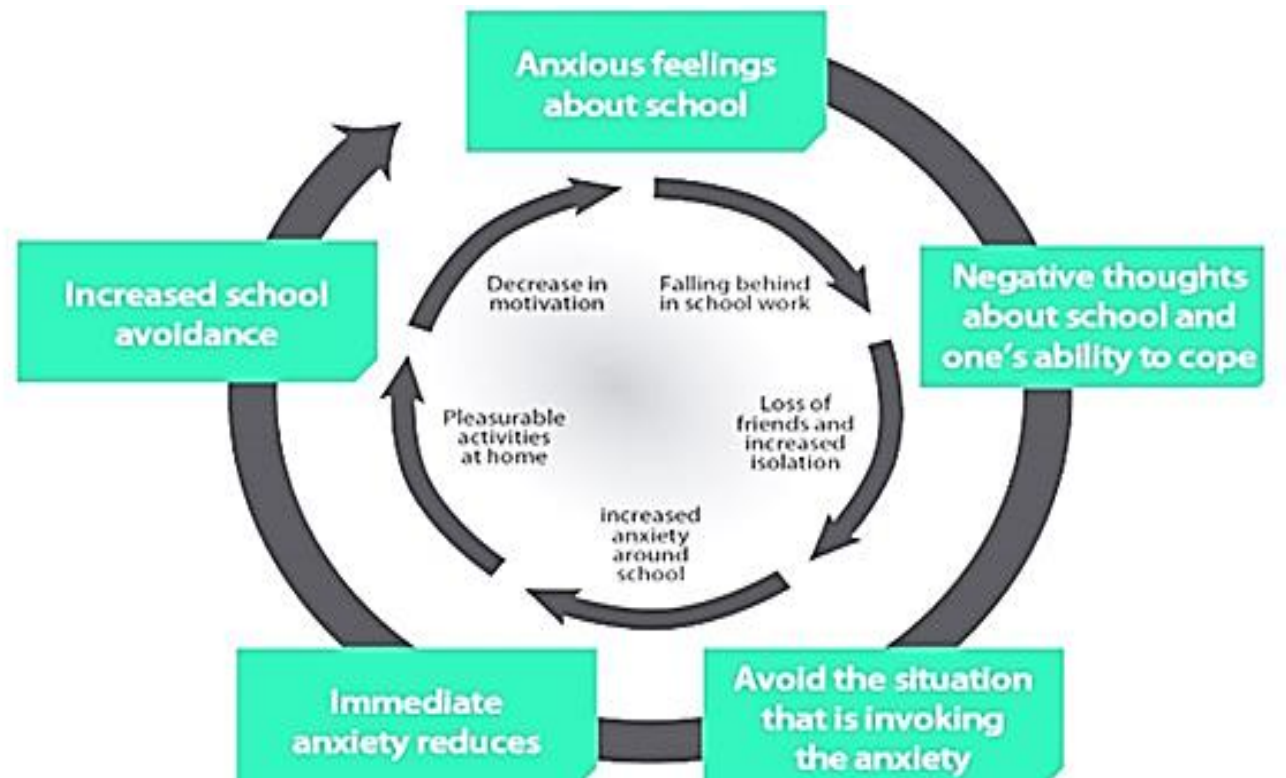
What is Anxiety?

- DSM-IV and ICD-10 make an explicit distinction between 'normal' and 'abnormal' anxiety:
 - 1. The duration and intensity does not correspond to the real danger of the situation
 - 2. It occurs in situations where there is little actual threat
 - 3. It lasts over a long period of time
 - 4. It causes impairment and interferes with psychological, academic and social functioning



EBSA and Anxiety

- Anxiety is seen as one of the most significant factors associated with school non-attendance. Research indicates nearly 50% of school and non-attenders have an anxiety disorder



Time with
parent/carer

Concern
about
wellbeing of
parent/carer

Need for
contact and
attention

School
avoidance
behaviours




-
- Risk factors – some young people are more at risk of EBSA.
 - Within Child; Home factors; School factors



A young person with dark hair, wearing a dark jacket and blue jeans, is sitting on a set of wide, grey stone steps. They are looking down at a smartphone in their hands. The steps are made of large, rectangular stones, and there are some fallen leaves scattered on them. In the background, there is a blue wall with vertical panels. The overall lighting is somewhat dim, suggesting an overcast day or a shaded area.

Child-specific Factors

- Temperament style.
- Fear of failure and poor self-confidence.
- Physical illness.
- Learning difficulties.
- Separation anxiety.
- Traumatic events.
- Previous exclusions.



Risk Factors At Home

- Separation and divorce
- Siblings being at home,
- Limited social interactions
- Mental health of family members
- Absence of a parent/caregiver
- Being the youngest child in the family
- Loss and bereavement; high levels of family stress

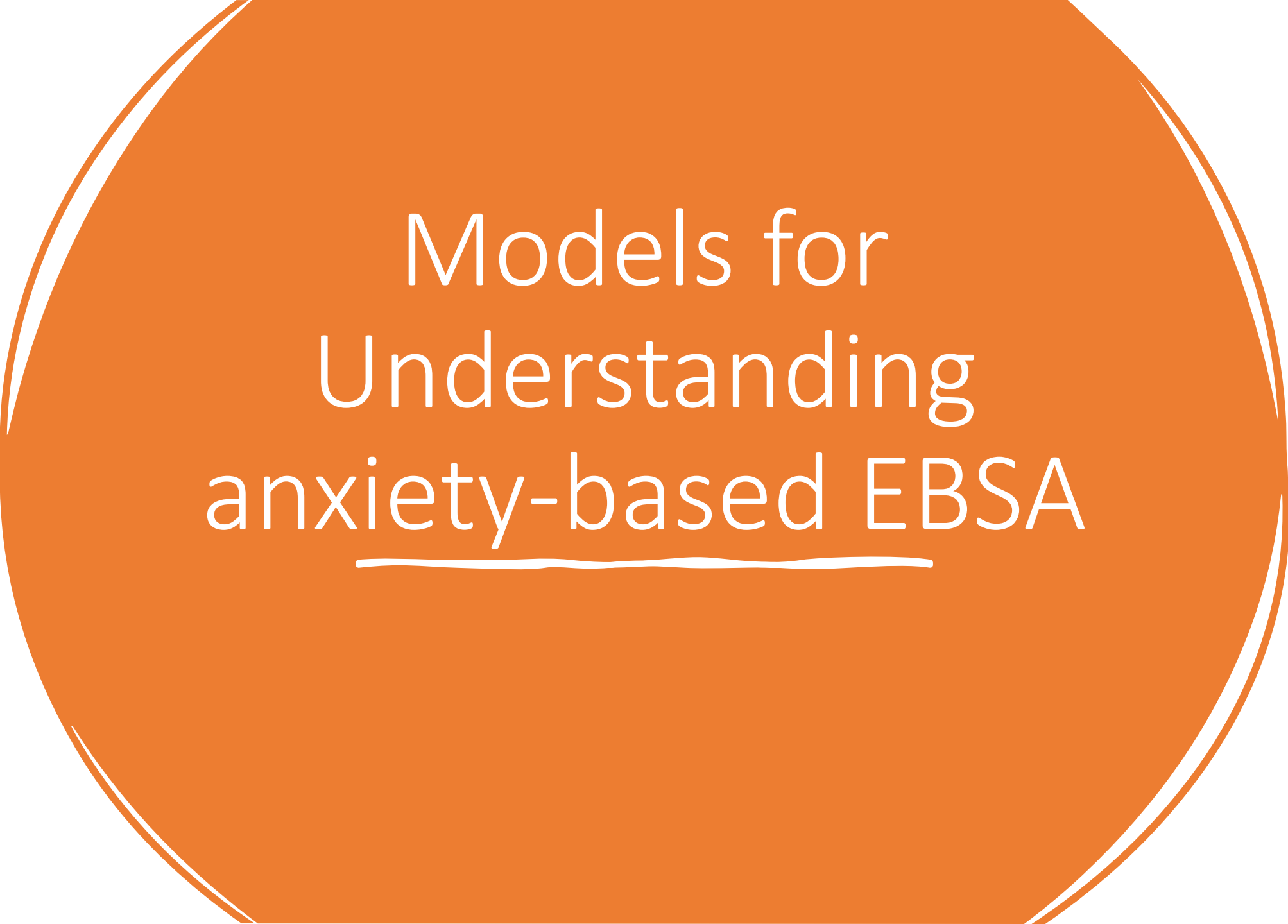
A young boy with brown hair, wearing a brown sweater over a light blue collared shirt, is sitting at a desk in a library. He is looking down at an open book on the desk. The background is filled with bookshelves packed with books. A large, semi-transparent white circle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing text.

Risk Factors At School

- Bullying
- The school environment
- Difficulties in a specific subject
- Transition
- Teachers
- Academic demands/ exams
- Transport
- Peer relationships

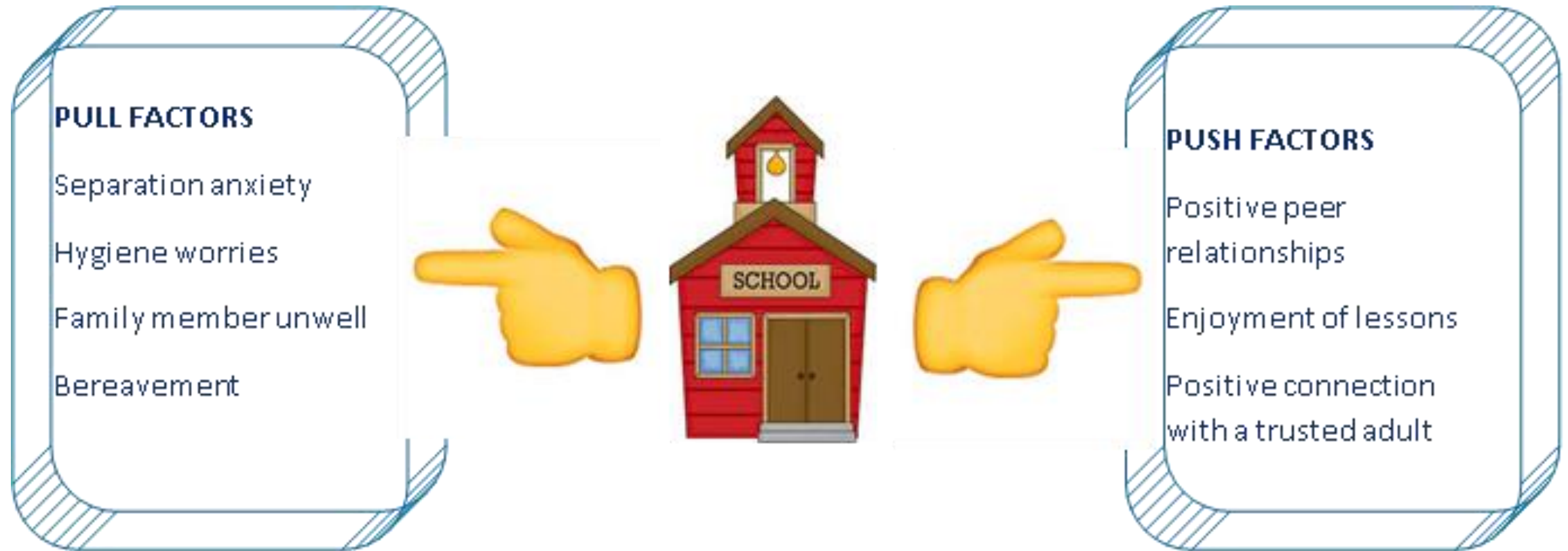
What might EBSA look like?

- Talking negatively or sharing worries about school
- Becoming anxious on separation from caregiver
- Experience physical symptoms of anxiety e.g. heart rate, sick tummy, sweaty palms
- Refusing to get ready for school or to leave the house- Crying/pleading
- Difficulties sleeping
- Becoming distressed when school is talked about.
- Becoming withdrawn
- Engaging in self-harming behaviours

A large orange circle with a thin white border, centered on a white background. Inside the circle, the text "Models for Understanding anxiety-based EBSA" is written in white. The word "anxiety-based" is underlined with a white line.

Models for Understanding anxiety-based EBSA

The push and pull model



What is meant by Cognitive Behavioural Approaches?

- An approach which helps to identify unhelpful patterns of thinking and behaving
- Gives us a 'here and now' perspective
- Helps make clear the links between thinking, feeling, doing and the physical changes we experience
- We can use simple ideas from CBT to help children or young people with anxiety

The Cognitive idea

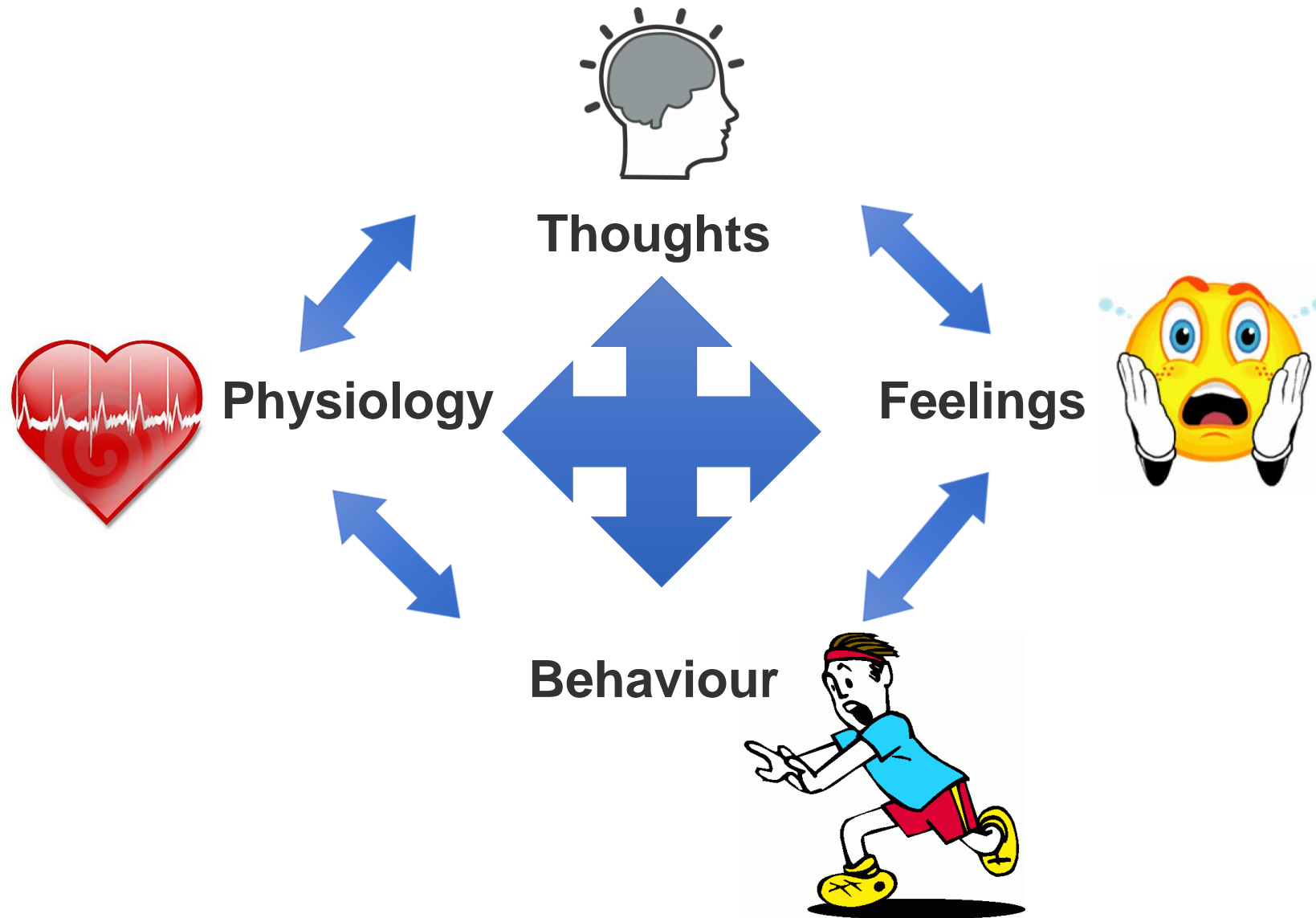
- Negative/anxious thinking can be automatic in certain situations (NATs)
- People may react differently to the same event – therefore it is the interpretation, not the event itself that matters
- Anxious thinking is typically defined by an overestimation of threat or negative outcome and an underestimation of ability to cope with an event

The behavioural idea

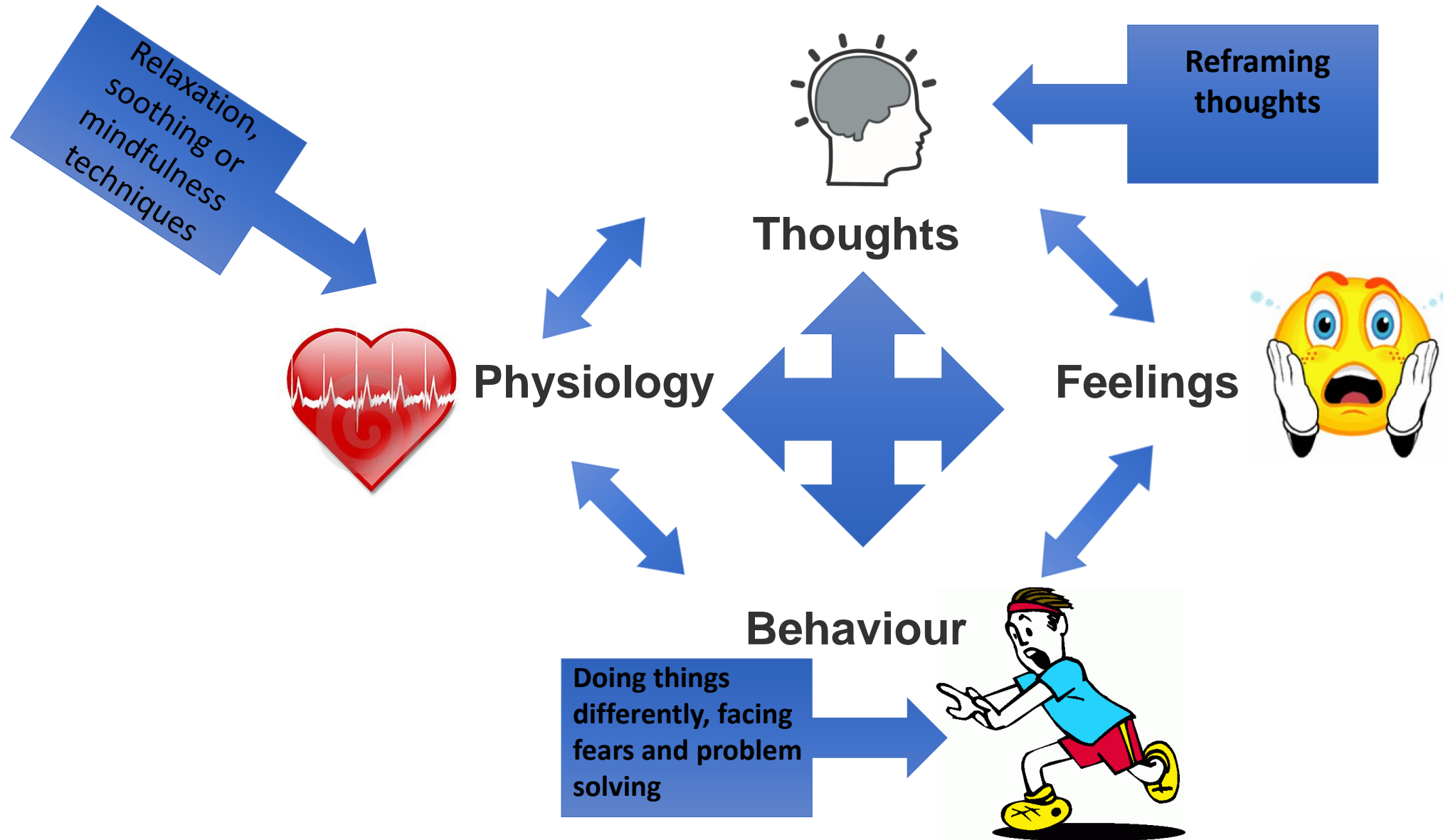
- We behave in a way that is consistent with our beliefs and this can become a habit
- Behaviours can become unhelpful e.g. avoidance because this reduces uncomfortable feelings
- Therefore we do not get the opportunity to challenge our assumptions
- We miss out on opportunities to gather evidence that might lead to new, more helpful ways of thinking
- To challenge negative beliefs it is necessary to change our behaviours



Beck's Cognitive Model



Using CBT approaches



Safety Behaviours



Avoidance



Being on the
lookout



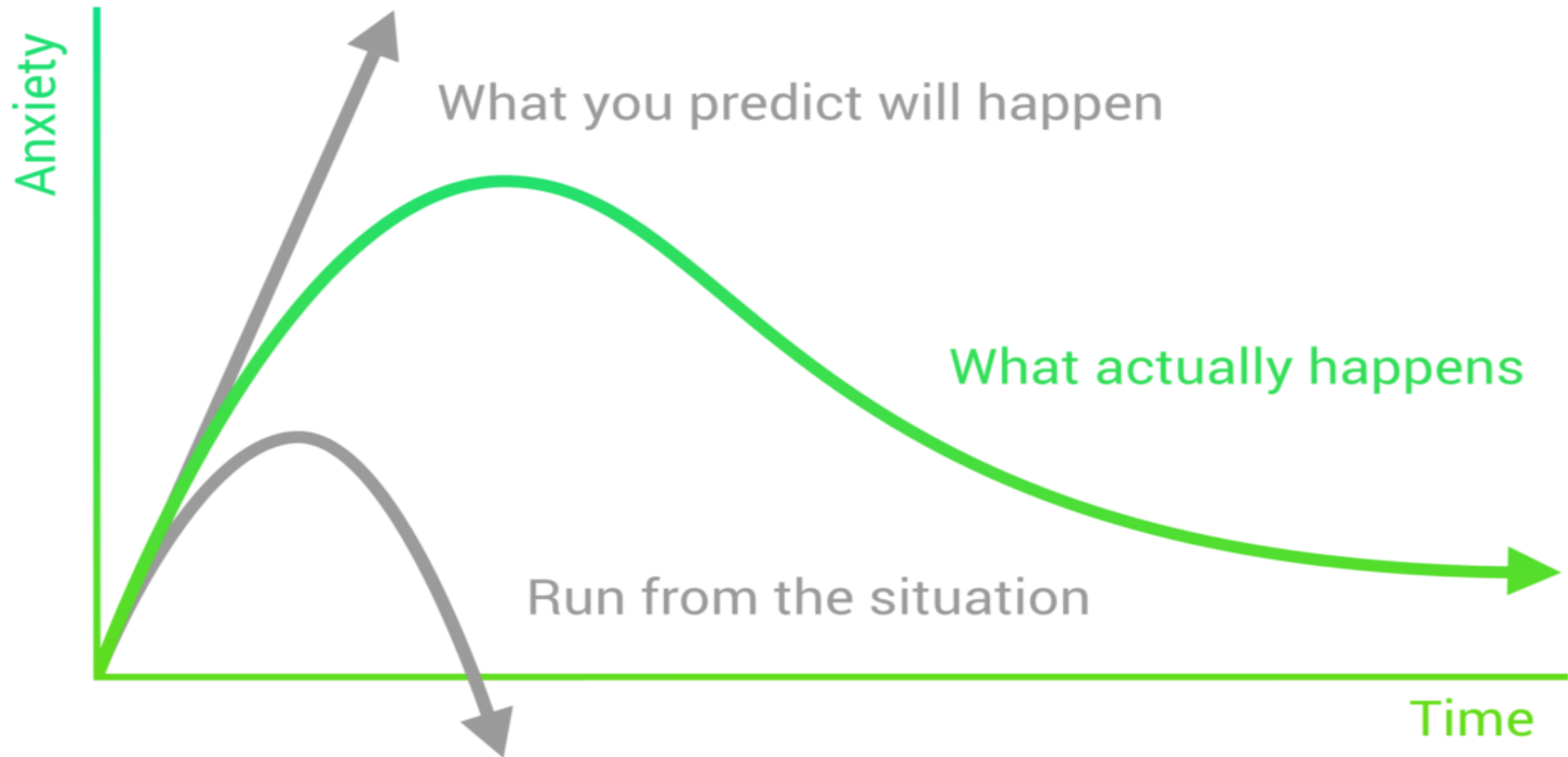
Checking



Reassurance
seeking


If I can't do the work...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I can ask my TA or teacher for help. They will be pleased I asked.• I can look and see what other children are doing• I can look at the board or books to give me ideas about what to do.
If it starts to get too noisy....	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I will ask my TA for my ear defenders• I will signal to the teacher that I need a 2-minute time out and she will let me go to the library.
If I worry about seeing my bully in break/ lunch time...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I will take three big breathes in and out.• I will remember that my buddy will stay with me during break.• I will remember that I can go to lunch club whenever I want.

Facing fears



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How to overcome EBSA

- Early intervention is key
 - Relationships
 - Collaboration between school and home/family
 - Listening to the views of the child or young person
 - Therapeutic interventions?
- 
- A series of yellow dashed lines in the bottom right corner, forming a curved shape.

The Child's Voice

- Children or young person's perspective
- Creative ways of supporting CYP to express their views
- The importance of trusted adults



Activities and Strategies

Techniques to Help CYP Think Differently

- 1) Cutting down on vague reassurance
- 2) Finding exceptions
- 3) Give attention to brave behaviours
- 4) Recording and noticing 'having a go' behaviours
- 5) Generate evidence for an alternative explanation
- 6) Be mindful of how you deal or manage your own anxiety in front your child



Questions to help someone think differently:

- What else could happen?
- What has happened before when you had this worry?
- Are there any times when this hasn't come true?
- Is there anyone you know who doesn't feel worried in this situation? What would they think?
- What would you tell a friend in this situation?
- Is there a more helpful way of thinking?
- What might someone else think in this situation?



The Judge: Evidence for and Against

The Thought (negative automatic thought): “Everyone will think I am stupid if I answer a question wrong in class”

The Defence (evidence for the thought):

- I saw someone look at me when I answer a question

The Prosecution (evidence against the thought):

- Not everyone looks at me
- No one has ever told me I am stupid when I answer a question
- The class tend to look at whoever is answering a question – this is normal

The Judge’s Verdict:

Behaviour experiments

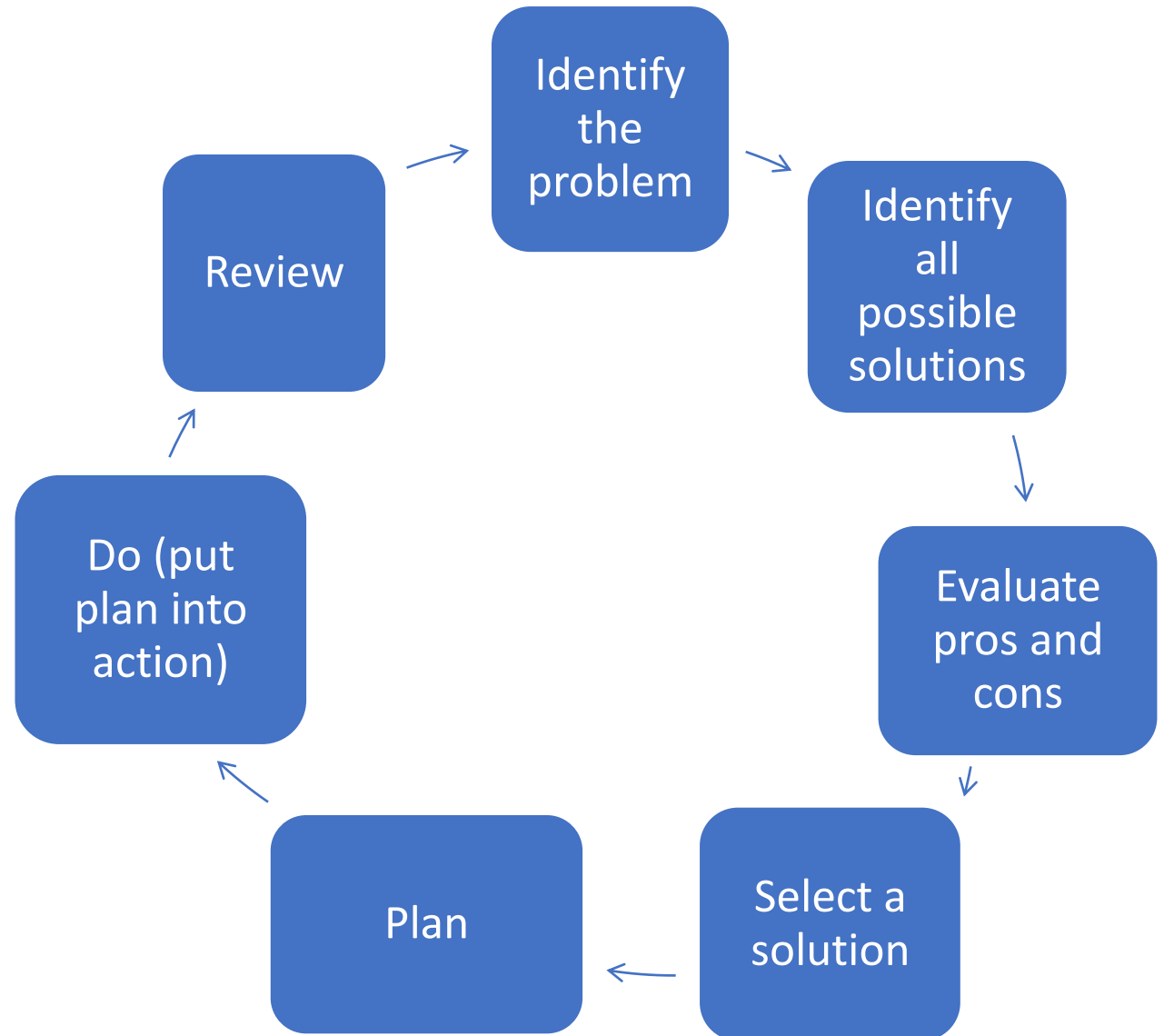
- Typical activities include:
 - Exposure (gradually facing fears and testing worries)
 - Ask other people what they think (record it)
 - Slowly removing ‘safety behaviours’
 - Finding examples of people who have overcome similar difficulties

[illegible]

Problem Solving

Work through the following steps:

- What is the problem?
- Encouraging the child to think of as many solutions as they can, even ones that seem bizarre
- Help the child work out which solution is best – consider the immediate and long-term pros/cons
- Make a plan and have a go
- Carry out the plan
- Review the plan



Exercise and activity scheduling

- Exercise is very effective at boosting mood
- Many forms of exercise are effective
- Can lead to change in thinking due to achievement
- Schedule activities which bring pleasure no matter how small
- Leads to changes in beliefs about mood, coping and greater optimism

Summary of Useful Approaches/Techniques

Try to reduce

- Vague or non-specific reassurance
- Supporting avoidance
- Offering to solve problems for the CYP
- Minimising difficulties
- Showing unhelpful anxious behaviours

Things to do

- Ask curious questions
- Encourage 'having a go' and being brave
- Reward and incentivise brave behaviour
- Joint problem solving
- Model healthy ways of handling anxiety

Appendices

Checklist of signs for parents/carers

Profile screening for vulnerable pupils at risk of long-term EBSA

Push and Pull Factors – CYP Version

Risk and Protective Factors Checklists

Risk and Protective Factors Sorting Cards

EBSA Card Sorting Activities

Emotionally Based School Avoidance: Guidance for Torbay Educational Settings

April 2021



Focus

[Educational Psychology & Specialist Teaching Service \(TEPATs\) | Torbay FIS Directory](#)

Google “Torbay Local Offer Educational Psychology Service”

- Emotion Coaching
- The Landscape of Fear
- Ideal Classroom
- Landscape of Fear
- Think Good Feel Good
- Published books such as:
'Starving The Anxiety Gremlin',
'The Homunculi Approach',
'Helping your Child with their
Fears and Worries'
- Judge/Court Room Activity- [Court Case | Get.gg - Getselfhelp.co.uk](#)
- [Putting Thoughts on Trial | CBT Challenging Thoughts | HopeWay](#)
- Ladder Activity- Activity-[Fear Ladder Worksheet - Exposure \(trailstowellness.org\)](#)



Useful Approaches
and Resources