

How does EBSA affect a child's learning?

An anxious child who is forced into school can be traumatised and can often experience a 'fight, flight or freeze' response when there, alongside all the other anxiety symptoms they experience.

The fight-flight-freeze response is your body's natural reaction to danger. It's a type of stress response that helps you react to perceived threats, like an oncoming car or growling dog. The response instantly causes hormonal and physiological changes. These changes allow you to act quickly so you can protect yourself. It's a survival instinct that our ancient ancestors developed many years ago. Fight-flight-freeze isn't a conscious decision. It's an automatic reaction, so you can't control it.



Now imagine you're a child. You have no idea why you're experiencing these symptoms, you have no idea how to cope with them. In this state, a child is unlikely to be able to take in information or process it effectively. It's likely that they won't be able to gain the educational benefit from being in school that their peers may have.

Masking and camouflaging are terms used to describe neurodiverse individuals who seek to hide or minimize their natural personality, anxieties, or autism traits to fit in with the world around them. You may have a child who comes home from school feeling distressed and overwhelmed, however school are not seeing the same behaviours and report that your child is doing "fine", and they have no concerns. If this sounds familiar to your situation, your child may be masking their needs in school. If their needs are left unsupported at school, this could lead to EBSA. You can find out more about Masking and what you can do to help in our [Masking in School factsheet](#).

How does this relate to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)?

Special Educational Needs (SEN) is defined as a learning difficulty and/or disability which requires Special Educational Provision (SEP). [Section 20 Children and Families Act 2014](#)

A learning difficulty is a significantly greater difficulty learning than the majority of others the same age.

A disability is a physical or mental condition that has a substantial long-term adverse effect on carrying out normal day-to-day activities. [Section 6 Equality Act 2010](#)

In this type of case, the child is disabled because of a mental condition (Anxiety) preventing them from making use of general facilities provided in mainstream schools. Therefore, a child experiencing EBSA requires SEP in order to successfully access their education.

The SEND Code of Practice identifies four broad areas of need. These give an overview of the range of needs that should be planned for. It is likely that a child experiencing EBSA will have needs that fall under the category of Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH), possibly other areas as well.

A detailed assessment of need should ensure that the full range of an individual's needs is identified, not simply the primary need. The support provided to an individual should always be based on a full understanding of their particular strengths and needs and seek to address them all using well evidenced interventions targeted at their areas of difficulty and where necessary specialist equipment or software. [6.27 SEND Code of Practice 2015](#)