

**EXPLORING PARENTAL EXPERIENCES OF EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL AVOIDANCE:
USING INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

By

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ABSTRACT

Emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) is a term that has evolved over time and is used to describe a child's non-attendance to school as a result of emotional factors. There has been a greater focus on school absence and reintegration following the reopening of schools after the partial school closures, between March 2020 to March 2021, due to Covid-19 Pandemic.

This research aims to explore parental perspectives of their children's experience of emotionally based school avoidance, since parents are important stakeholders who may be able to support the understanding of a child's attendance difficulties and assist in their return to school.

Interviews were conducted with three mothers and one father of secondary school aged children, using a semi-structured interview guide. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyse data. This involved following the seven stages of IPA, where Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) were constructed for individual participants before Group Experiential Themes (GETs) across participant accounts were formed.

The five GETs were: Understanding and Meeting Special Educational Needs, Sacrifice and Loss, Impact on Health, Battle for Support and Power Imbalance.

Implications for educational psychologists, school staff and parents are discussed. The key messages which emerged from this research include the importance of trust in building relationships with parents, the impact of power imbalances between school staff and professionals on parents and the difficulties that poor communication can cause.

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I extend my sincere thanks to the participants who kindly agreed to take part in this research to share your experiences and views with me. I hope this research will help you and other parents to feel heard and valued.

I am extremely grateful to my friends and family for your unwavering support. I would like to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to my beloved parents for all you have done throughout my life, for always being there and believing in me. You have been a great source of inspiration and I could not have completed this journey without your love and prayers.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my beautiful parents, amazing siblings and dear grandmother, I love you.

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List of Abbreviations

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
CYP	Children and Young People
EBSA	Emotionally Based School Avoidance
EBSNA	Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance
EHCP	Education Health and Care Plan
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
GETs	Group Experiential Themes
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
PETs	Personal Experiential Themes
SEMH	Social Emotional Mental Health
SEND	Special Educational Needs and/or Disability
SENDCo	Special Educational Needs and/or Disability Coordinator
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist
UK	United Kingdom

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to Chapter

This chapter introduces emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA), terminology related to school non-attendance is discussed, and rationale for using EBSA as the preferred term for the current research is provided. Key research relating to the context and impact of school non-attendance will be explored, including the current prevalence of EBSA.

1.2 Terminology

Various terminology has been used to describe school absenteeism including; truancy, school withdrawal, school phobia, school refusal behaviour, and school refusal.

Whilst specific definitions may vary slightly, truancy generally refers to unauthorised or unexcused absence from compulsory education, without permission or parental consent. Parents of children who truant are usually unaware of their child's absence from school as children will attempt to hide their absence (Keppens & Spruyt, 2017). Some definitions of truancy highlight that the absence is deliberate and has no legitimate reason or good cause (Malcolm et al., 2003; Reid, 2010).

School withdrawal is defined as child absence from school that is initiated by parents (Malcolm et al., 2003). Parents may withdraw their child from school in this way for various reasons, including: to support family members with income, errands or health problems, parents lack of care for the child or parents hold a critical view of the school, teacher or education provided (Kearney, 2008). Since the absence is parent-motivated rather than initiated by the child, school withdrawal is distinct from truancy (Reid, 1999).

1.2.1 Terminology Capturing Emotional Reasons for Non-Attendance

Broadwin (1932) first noted school absence due to excessive anxiety. The term school phobia was developed by Johnson et al. (1941) within clinical literature to describe school attendance problems that are characterised by fear and distress (Leduc et al., 2022). Reasons for school phobia varied and developed over time. Initially it was thought the fear was caused by separation anxiety (Estes et al., 1956) which later changed to fear surrounding the school environment (Berg et al., 1969). Whilst the term school phobia is now considered outdated (Tyrrell, 2005), it acknowledged an important link between non-attendance and emotional well-being. Following this, various terms that focused on this relationship were developed, including school refusal behaviour, school refusal, extended school non-attendance and EBSA.

School refusal behaviour is a construct describing a spectrum of child-motivated unexcused school absenteeism (Kearney & Silverman, 1990), that may or may not relate to emotional distress about school (Kearney et al., 2019). More recently, practitioners have used the term 'school refusal', which differs from 'school refusal behaviour' due to the focus on not attending school for emotional reasons (Havik & Ertesvag, 2014). Criteria for school refusal include: a reluctance to attend school resulting in prolonged absences, remaining at home during school hours with parental knowledge, experiencing emotional distress linked to attending school, the absence of severe antisocial behaviour, and parental efforts to secure their child's attendance to school (Berg, 1997; Berg, 2002).

The term 'extended school non-attendance' (Pellegrini, 2007) is used by some authors to highlight prolonged school absences, whilst others use the term EBSA which is recognised as a form of absenteeism caused by emotional factors (Corcoran et al., 2022). There is a distinction between children who are absent from school for other reasons, such as truancy,

and those who are unable to attend due to emotional reasons (Thambirajah et al., 2008). Signs and indicators for EBSA include: persistent and prolonged school absences, being hesitant to leave home for school, lack of participation and engagement within school activities, high levels of anxiety and excessive worrying, and signs of physical changes and cognitive difficulties (Havik et al., 2015).

It is important to recognise the variations in terminology and definitions that have been discussed, as the lack of agreement can impact on the correct identification of children experiencing attendance difficulties (Woolfson, 2011). The full extent of children unable to attend school for emotional reasons is still unclear and this could be due to terminology categorising absences differently. Alterations in terminology can also contribute towards misunderstandings about the reasons for a child's absence and affect the selected approach to resolve the situation, and the support offered (Ingul & Nordahl, 2013).

1.2.2 Using the Term 'Emotionally Based School Avoidance'

Terminology used will vary depending on how the author conceptualises the non-attendance (Kearney, 2003).

The term EBSA could be criticised for overly locating the 'problem' within the school setting or reducing emphasis on other environmental factors such as the home (Corcoran et al., 2022). The inclusion of the word 'avoidance', as with 'refusal', could be perceived as reflecting a 'choice' of behaviour (Callwood & Goodman, 2018). I recognise the contentious issues surrounding the choice of terminology as part of the selection process. Finally, it is important to recognise the consequences of labelling CYP, using the term EBSA or any other associated terminology, as research suggests the potential risk of stigmatising children and limiting future opportunities (Harpin, 2005).

Whilst acknowledging these difficulties, I have chosen to use the term EBSA for my thesis. EBSA has been selected over other similar terms such as 'school refusal' which could imply that children do not want to attend school, when often it is the case that children want to attend but find it difficult (Thambirajah et al., 2008). Whilst the term extended school non-attendance (Pellegrini, 2007) attempts to be neutral and avoid locating the attendance difficulties within the child, it fails to highlight the emotional basis of the problem (Tobias, 2019). The term EBSA is favoured for this research as it captures the emotional difficulties experienced without implying placing 'blame' on the child or school, as other terms might suggest.

Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) is another term used within literature explored and it has been suggested to be less controversial (Callwood & Goodman, 2018). However, since this study aims to explore the views of parents within a Local Authority where EBSA is term used by professionals, including the Educational Psychology Service (EPS), it is important to provide consistency and familiarity for parents.

1.3 Impact of Emotionally Based School Avoidance on Children and Young People

The importance of school attendance is emphasised in guidance to schools (Department for Education, 2022). Research suggests that school absenteeism has both short- and long-term effects for children and young people (Heyne & Brouwer-Borghuis, 2022) across a range of factors including: educational attainment (Allen et al., 2018; Allison et al., 2019; Gottfried, 2014; Sosu et al., 2021), social support (Allen et al., 2018; Gottfried, 2014), employment status (Allen et al., 2018; Attwood & Croll, 2017) and health outcomes (Allen et al., 2018; Allison et al., 2019; Rogers et al., 2013), as summarised in Table 1. This is relevant as EBSA is characterised by prolonged absences (Havik et al., 2015).

Table 1.

Impact of prolonged school absence.

Key Theme/Outcomes	Effect of Prolonged School Absence
Educational outcomes	Reduced educational engagement (Allison et al., 2019) Lower academic achievement (Carroll, 2020; Gottfried, 2010)
Sociability	Decreased social engagement (Lawrence et al., 2019) Reduced social functioning (Gottfried, 2014)
Career prospects	Reduced employment opportunities (Carroll, 2020; Pellegrini, 2007; Taylor, 2012) Economic hardship (Kearney, 2001)
Health	Mental health difficulties (Lawrence et al., 2019; Planty et al., 2005; Walter et al., 2010) Lower life expectancy (Rogers et al., 2013)

There are possible links between the negative effects of EBSA that have been noted by authors such as Heyne et al. (2021). For example, Halligan & Cryer (2022) report that EBSA has a negative impact on educational outcomes which subsequently reduces social opportunities for the individual and eventually decreases employment prospects in later life. Connections have also been made between EBSA and adult health difficulties (Maynard et al., 2015; Planty et al., 2005; Walter et al., 2010).

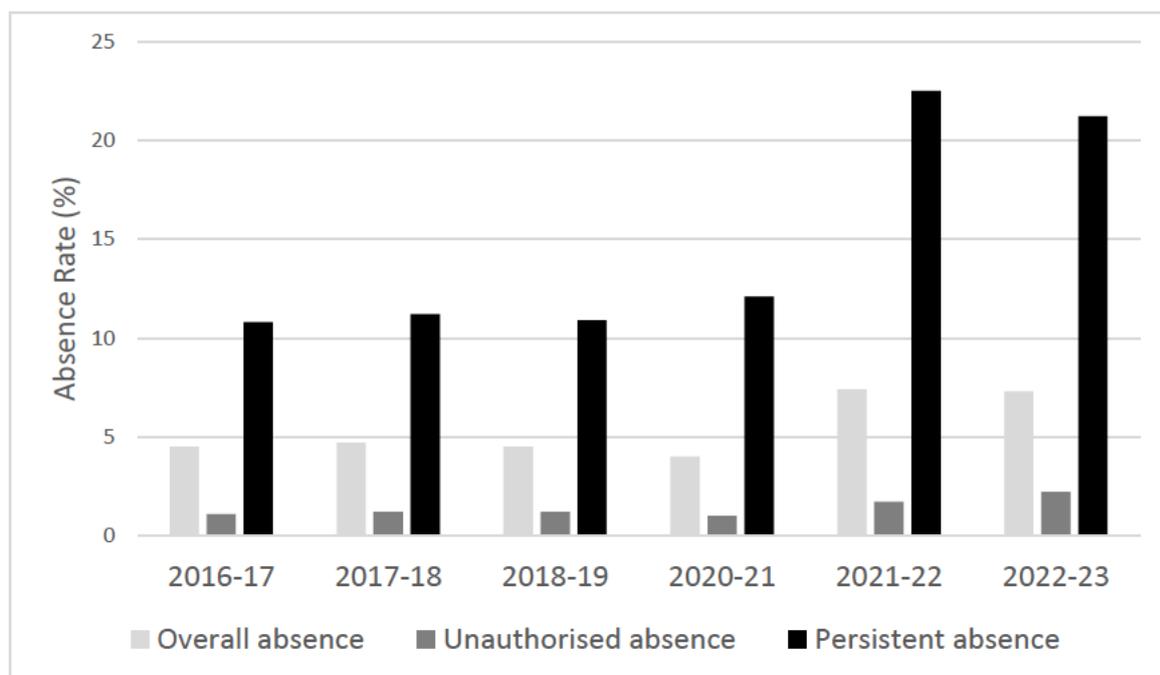
1.4 The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on School Attendance

The partial school closures as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic, between March 2020 to March 2021, brought increased attention to the issue of school reintegration (Corcoran et al., 2022). There has been an increase in absence rates and persistent absence, including

unauthorised absence, over the last five years, as can be seen in Figure 1, with a significant increase since the Covid-19 Pandemic. It is believed that the pandemic had a negative effect on the mental wellbeing of children and young people (Jeffery et al., 2021). Some children experienced 'Covid-specific' anxiety, worrying whether they would catch and concerned about the possibility of spreading Covid (McDonald et al., 2022). For other children, the time spent at home during the pandemic exacerbated pre-existing anxieties (Tamlyn, 2022). When schools reopened access for all children, some experienced increased levels of anxiety, potentially causing increases in the rates of absence as CYP preferred to remain within the home to maintain lower levels of anxiety (Rae, 2020). Whilst the long-term impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on absence rates is unclear, it has highlighted the difficulties associated with returning to school following an extended period of absence and therefore is an important area that would benefit from further exploration (Chian, 2022).

Figure 1.

Overall, unauthorised and persistent school absence rates for children and young people in the United Kingdom for Autumn and Spring terms from 2016-17 to 2022-23 (Office for National Statistics, 2023)



1.4.1 Prevalence of Emotionally Based School Avoidance

It is difficult to capture an accurate representation of the proportion of CYP who are affected by EBSA, as published data regarding absence from school, does not distinguish reasons for absenteeism or how EBSA is reflected within this data (Chian, 2022). There is variation across schools with regards to definitions and thresholds for school attendance, further exacerbating difficulties with gaining a comprehensive picture of school absence (Wilson, 2012).

Previous research estimated the prevalence of EBSA as approximately 1–2% (Elliot & Place, 2019 as cited in Egger et al., 2003). More recent research by Kawsar et al. (2022) suggests that approximately 2–5% of pupils meet EBSA criteria. However, due to the complexity of

investigating the prevalence it is not possible to ascertain how accurate this figure is. Prevalence rates of EBSA across genders are similar, suggesting that males and females are equally susceptible to non-attendance (Berg, 1997; Fremont, 2003; Kearney & Bates, 2005; Kearney, 2008; King & Berstein, 2001; Pellegrini, 2007). However, the prevalence rate of EBSA appears to be higher in children who are transitioning to or already attending secondary school (Browne, 2018; Gulliford & Miller, 2015).

1.5 Rationale for the Current Research

There has been growing interest with regards to school reintegration since the Covid-19 Pandemic and the closure and reopening of schools to the majority of CYP (Corcoran et al., 2022). Given the higher prevalence of unauthorised and persistent absence, it is important to explore this area in more detail.

It is important to acknowledge and state my own positionality and personal experiences in relation to EBSA. I have previously worked as a secondary school teacher where I had direct involvement with children who had difficulties attending school that appeared to be related to emotional factors, and I also had regular contact with their parents. These experiences were challenging and often difficult to navigate. Since I was also a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENDCo) at my secondary school I noticed a high number of children on the SEND register who struggled to attend school. Therefore prior experiences as a secondary school teacher and SENCo, managing pupil's unauthorised absences and difficulties attending school, have resulted in an interest to explore this area further.

As a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) working within a West Midlands Local Authority where there were increasing referrals for EBSA I became interested in how EBSA is understood by and affects parents. It is hoped that exploring existing literature regarding

EBSA in addition to conducting research on this topic will bring a greater professional awareness to an aspect of practice that is demanding more time and a greater focus in my current role.

Whilst working with parents in my various roles I noticed some tensions in the differing views between school staff, professionals and parents regarding the child's non-attendance to school. Since parents are valuable stakeholders who also hold a legal responsibility to ensure their child's attendance to school I believe it is important to explore and understand the views of parents. Also, few studies focus exclusively on parental views of EBSA and therefore I feel it is important to focus on parents, to ensure their voices are captured and heard. The next chapter will review literature concerning EBSA before going on to outline the methodology of this thesis. The data analysis will be presented and discussed, in line with existing literature, and conclusions drawn.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction to Chapter

This chapter reviews literature focusing on non-attendance more broadly before considering EBSA in particular. There will be discussion of reasons for school non-attendance, the impact of EBSA in addition to the risk and protective factors for EBSA. The importance of gaining parental views is discussed before examining research that has included parental views regarding their child's experience of EBSA. Whilst the term of choice for this thesis is EBSA, alternative terms used by the authors when exploring the literature, such as ESBNA or school refusal, will also be used to accurately reflect their research.

2.2 Reasons for School Non-Attendance

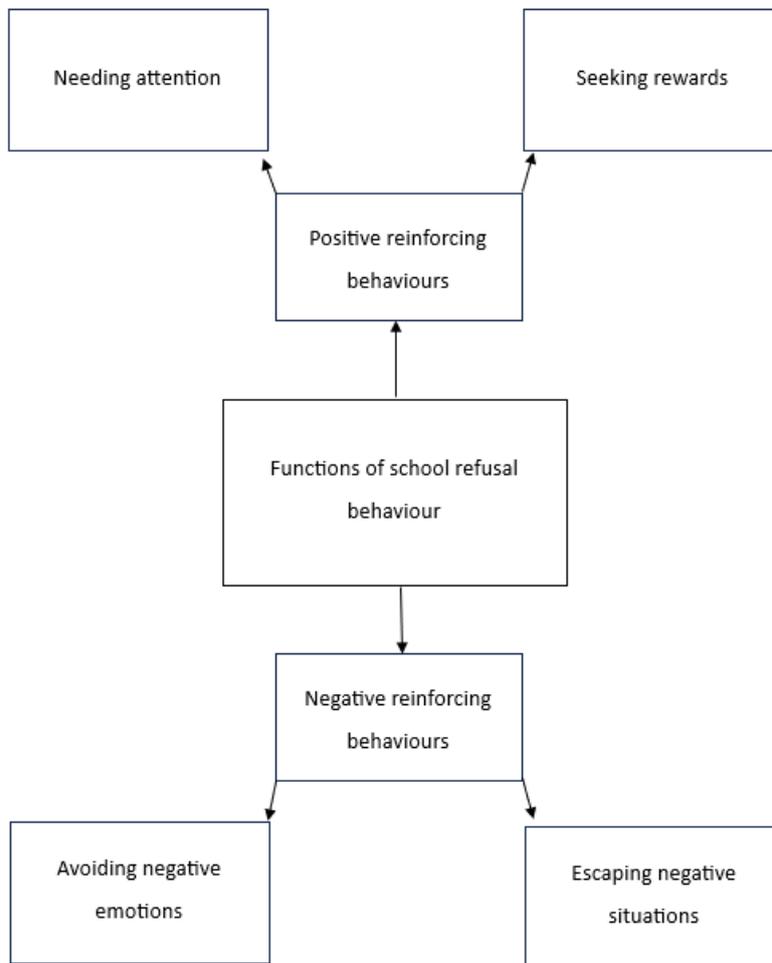
Research conducted, using interviews and questionnaires, involving over 750 young people, their families, school staff and professionals in local authorities across England found that there were varying reasons for pupil non-attendance (Malcolm et al., 2003). This signals that there is likely to be a combination of factors at the root of a young person's difficulty to attend school, as factors rarely occur in isolation (Berends & Diest, 2014; Maynard et al., 2015).

2.3 Functional Model of School Refusal Behaviour

The Functional Model of School Refusal Behaviour explains four functions, which can be categorised as either negatively or positively reinforcing (Kearney & Silverman, 1990) which are summarised in Figure 2. The reinforcing behaviours can be understood as 'push' factors which promote school avoidance and 'pull' factors which encourage school attendance (Kearney, 2003). There are four main functions of school refusal behaviour, which can be organised into two categories: negatively and positively reinforcing behaviours (Kearney, 2001).

Figure 2.

Functions of school refusal behaviour (Kearney & Silverman, 1990)



Positively reinforcing behaviours of non-attendance relate to CYP needing attention and therefore struggling to engage in school related activities because they prefer to remain at home or with a significant adult. The function of their non-attendance is related to separation anxiety rather than viewing the school as negative. Seeking rewards is also a positive reinforcing behaviour and non-attendance is connected to children and young people wanting to remain outside of school to pursue other activities that they find more positive such as sleeping or spending time with family or friends.

Negatively reinforcing behaviours refer to non-attendance associated with school-related activities that may be due to either low mood or general anxiety linked with these activities. Some examples of school-related activities may include the journey to school, entry into the school building or classroom transitions. Another function of negatively reinforcing behaviours include children and young people wanting to avoid situations they perceive as anxiety inducing, including social pressures or academic demands.

The Functional Model of School Refusal (Kearney & Silverman, 1990) has been criticised for locating the problem within the child (Sawyer, 2022) and more recently there has been a move away from within child explanations, towards a combination of factors at different levels which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

2.4 Risk and Protective Factors for Non-Attendance

Bronfenbrenner (1992) recognised the multiple factors that can affect the development of children at various levels, known as the Bioecological Systems Theory. It describes a framework where the individual child is placed at the centre of five systems which include; the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. The microsystem is concerned with the immediate environment of the child such as their family and teachers, the mesosystem explores the connections between different microsystems, the exosystem considers factors that do not directly involve the child such as extended family, the macrosystem involves broader aspects such as cultural elements, and finally the chronosystem relates to transitions over the child's life (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Bronfenbrenner's theory can be useful when considering EBSA as each case of non-attendance is influenced by a range of unique factors at multiple levels which can include factors at home, school or within the community. The child's immediate environment, family,

school and broader cultural values must be considered simultaneously when exploring the reasons behind the child's non-attendance. Whilst I recognise the relevance of the model, it will not be applied within this thesis to avoid moving away from the meaning of the data gained from participants and the inductive nature of the research. Therefore since being led by the participants and their experiences is an integral of this thesis, it is important to remain focused on their individual accounts rather than to impose categories outlined by Bronfenbrenner.

There has been a shift away from 'within-child' explanations of emotionally based school avoidance towards explanations that consider a range factors (Thambirajah et al., 2008). Research acknowledges the influence of multiple systems on a child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) and suggests that the social and environmental systems in which children live interact and influence one another. This indicates a complexity of reasons for non-attendance, justifying a need to explore how different factors interact to better understand such experiences. It is important to acknowledge tensions in differing views between those involved with the child. This sub-section will consider how the individual, family and school may act as either risk or protective factors for EBSA.

2.4.1 Individual Factors

Individual factors refer to CYP attributes, attitudes, and characteristics (Kearney, 2008). In this section, examples of the impact of social class and ethnicity on school non-attendance will be discussed. The incidence of children with diagnosable conditions such as anxiety, separation anxiety, and depression will be presented. Finally the relationship between autism and EBSA, will be considered (O'Hagan et al., 2022).

i. Social Class and Ethnicity

It has been suggested by some research studies that a family's socioeconomic status is a potential predictor of school attendance (Devenney & O'Toole, 2021), and young people from low- and middle-class backgrounds are more likely to experience absenteeism than those from upper-class backgrounds (Sosu et al., 2021) demonstrating the impact of social class on school attendance. Lower rates of attendance could be due to CYP having unequal access to support and resources.

Gee (2018) suggests that children from certain ethnic minority backgrounds may face distinct challenges leading to an increase in school absence in comparison to their non-minority peers. However, it is important to acknowledge that this research was conducted outside of the United Kingdom (UK). It has been noted that ethnically diverse groups are underrepresented in research into school non-attendance and research conducted by Tamlyn (2022) suggests that cultural views may shape relationships with school staff. Data published by the UK Government found that in the school year 2021 to 2022, Irish traveller, Gypsy and Roma pupils have been found to have the lowest attendance rates in the UK (UK Government, 2022). However, it is important to recognise that the reasons for pupils absence are not clear, therefore it is not possible to determine whether Irish traveller children who are absent are experiencing EBSA or whether non-attendance is due to other reasons, such as ill health, non-urgent appointments, holidays, or truanting.

ii. Anxiety

Research suggests a connection between anxiety and non-attendance EBSA (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Egger et al., 2003; Finning et al., 2020; Kawsar et al., 2022). Anxiety is defined as a prolonged state of worry (Knight & Depue, 2019) impacting on the central nervous system, resulting in restlessness, fatigue and inattention (Adwas et al., 2019). Children who are less

able to attend to lessons may find it difficult to keep up with academic demands, falling further behind, thus increasing feelings of anxiety. Prolonged periods of high anxiety can affect a pupil's functioning at school, and may lead to CYP avoiding school to reduce negative feelings (Thambirajah et al., 2008) and therefore increasing non-attendance (Heyne, 2006). The specific cause of the children's anxiety can vary and will differ for individuals (Pascoe et al., 2020). Also, it is difficult to determine whether the anxiety is a cause or consequence of EBSA and each case is likely to be unique and can vary.

iii. Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety refers to the fear and panic experienced by children when separated from their caregivers (Hannah et al., 1999) and it is distinct from general anxiety as it only occurs when the young person anticipates or experiences separation (Bernstein & Feriante, 2020). Separation anxiety is often associated with school refusal (Atkinson et al., 1999; Pini et al., 2014). A study revealed that approximately two-thirds of pupils who experienced separation anxiety showed signs of school refusal (Egger et al., 2003; Masi et al., 2001; Reilly, 2015).

iv. Special Educational Needs and Disability and Autism

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) is an umbrella term which can include a range of needs which includes, but is not limited to, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). A survey by Not Fine in School (2018) explored parental view of why their children avoided going to school and 90% reported diagnosed or suspected SEND needs, 73% referred to inadequate SEND support and 70% felt their child had social anxiety and friendship issues. In 2018 it was estimated that SEND pupils accounted for approximately 20% of all persistent absences (Not Fine in School,

2018) with ASD, SEMH and moderate learning difficulties amongst the most common SEND-related reasons for absences.

Pupils with autism are more likely to have lower attendance at school (Adams, 2021; Krezmien et al., 2017; Munkhaugen et al., 2017) and research suggests a link between autism and EBSA (Finning et al., 2020). Autism is neuro-developmental condition predominantly characterised by social communication and interaction difficulties (O'Hagan et al., 2022). Children may also experience difficulties with sensory processing meaning that the school environment overwhelming and uncomfortable (Munkhaugen et al., 2017). Literature highlights anxieties experienced by children with autism regarding learning if they are not given the support they need (McLeod et al., 2015; Ting & Weiss, 2017).

v. Individual Factors Summary

Individual factors that may contribute towards CYP's school non-attendance can include, social class and ethnicity, anxiety, separation anxiety, and SEND including autism. It is important to recognise the range of factors that can affect CYP in order to identify the reasons for non-attendance. It may be that some CYP experience more than one of these factors, making attendance to school more challenging.

2.4.2 External Explanations of Emotionally Based School Avoidance

Over time there has been less of a focus on 'within child' explanations and a move towards more external explanations when identifying the causes of EBSA (Halligan & Cryer, 2022). I will be presenting an overview of family and school factors.

2.4.3 Family Factors

Kearney and Silverman (1995) outlined five different types of families describing their family dynamics and how they impact on absenteeism. Families were described as being either;

enmeshed, conflictive, detached, isolated or healthy. However, there are concerns about labelling and placing blame on families, as this may lead to feelings of hopelessness for families which may then reduce their expression of feelings, acting as a barrier to collaborative working (Sawyer, 2022). Whilst this research will not focus on 'labelling' families it is important to recognise the influence of families on a child's attendance and allow all stakeholders, including families, to work together to support CYP.

Research highlights the contribution of family factors which may also influence attendance, such as the CYP's family and how they may affect the pupil's school experience (Havik & Ingul, 2021). Some risk factors emanating within the family unit include: attachment and parenting style (Sawyer, 2022), loss, grief and bereavement (Nuttall & Woods, 2013), parental health (Adams, 2021; Hendron & Kearney, 2016), and parental educational levels (Ingul et al., 2013).

i. Attachment and Parenting Style

It is suggested that insecure attachments are considered a contributor towards the development of EBSA in children. Schafer (2011) suggested a correlation between non-attendance and conflictive families. If conflict continues unsupported it can contribute towards school disengagement (Patterson, 1982). Non-attendance to school was described as a result of family disturbance and he suggested treatment should be directed at mothers to resolve (Davidson, 1961). Research also suggested that addressing parent-child relationships is the key to overcoming non-attendance to school (Scott et al., 1995).

Research also suggests certain parenting styles contribute towards non-attendance to school, by leading to poor emotional regulation, increased externalising behaviours, greater levels of anxiety and eventually could lead to EBSA (Hughes et al., 2020). However, it is important to

acknowledge that these are considered risk factors rather than causes of EBSA (Sawyer, 2022).

ii. Loss, Grief and Bereavement

Tamlyn (2022) highlights the emotional impact of bereavement which brings about changes in home-based routines, which can lead to children struggling to keep up with work and additional stress. Bereavement and loss can lead to trauma (Devenney & O'Toole, 2021). Archer et al. (2003) also mentions the traumatic effects of bereavement. Malcolm et al. (2003) highlighted the need to include sessions of bereavement counselling to support non attenders to return to school.

iii. Parental Health

Parent mental health is suggested to contribute toward the negative emotions and anxiety observed in cases of EBSA (Sawyer, 2022). Pupils may worry excessively about their parents' when they are at school, which can increase risk for non-attendance to school (Hendron & Kearney, 2016; McShane et al., 2001). Bahali et al. (2011) found higher levels of anxiety in parents of CYP experiencing EBSA. Although Gregory and Purcell (2014) point out that this could be due to the way parents perceive themselves to be blamed for school absence which then leads to parental anxiety, making anxiety a consequence of EBSA rather than a contributing factor. However, it must be acknowledged that this research can be considered outdated however it provides some context and background information for more recent research.

iv. Parental Employment and Income

Ingul et al. (2013) found that family work is amongst the factors identified as contributing towards school non-attendance, with parental long term unemployment being the strongest

predictor. This indicates parental absence from work is associated with adolescent school non-attendance. Research also suggests that high income families may be more motivated to support their child to re-engage with school by working with staff if they experienced non-attendance (Devenney & O’Toole, 2021). Research also implies that low-income families are more likely to be blamed for their child’s experience of EBSA (Devine, 2021) which could reduce family engagement school and willingness to work with staff.

2.4.4 School Factors

Various school-related factors have been identified as contributing towards a CYP EBSA, such as the physical environment of the school, academic expectations of teachers, relationships with adults and peers, experiences of bullying and transitions during the school day and between schools as children progress through their educational journey. Whilst some literature refers to primary schools, much of the research mentioned below focuses predominantly on secondary schools, since the prevalence rate of EBSA appears to be higher in children who are about to or who have already transitioned to secondary school (Browne, 2018; Gulliford & Miller, 2015).

i. Physical Environment and Academic Expectations

EBSA can stem from difficulties CYP have coping within their physical environments (Lauchlan, 2003). Some CYP may struggle with large populations within mainstream schools, causing anxiety (Knollman et al., 2010). These difficulties may be amplified for children who experience sensory difficulties as they find their ability to participate in school affected negatively (Van Eck et al., 2017). In addition to this, long lesson hours may also increase anxiety (West Sussex Educational Psychology Service, 2022). It may not be possible for children to get the close support they require due to staffing restrictions in large schools

(Havik et al., 2014). Further difficulties children may experience include a lack of support during examinations (Putwain, 2007) usually during secondary school.

ii. Relationships with Adults and Pupils in School

Children's relationships with their peers can also be a factor that leads to either school attendance or avoidance (Hendron & Kearney, 2016). Acceptance from peers has been found to predict school experiences. Children who lack a sense of belonging to school often experience social exclusion, damaging self-esteem and confidence (Finning et al., 2018). Friendships and positive teacher-pupil relationships serve as a protective factors, increasing school attendance (Greenberg et al., 2016; Havik et al., 2015; Moses & Validos, 2017). Another strong predictor of school attendance is a child's relationship with their teachers. Some students have reported that their relationships with teachers defined their school experience (Wilson, 2012). Secondary school aged children who experience social difficulties, including children with autism, may struggle to form and maintain relationships with peers and staff may be more likely to avoid school, lowering attendance (Baker & Bishop, 2015).

iv. Bullying

Literature outlines a correlation between bullying and EBSA (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Clissold, 2018; Egger et al., 2003; Gregory & Purcell, 2014; Havik et al., 2014; How, 2015; Hutzell & Payne, 2012; Randa & Wilcox, 2010; Sobba, 2019; Swahn et al., 2013). Pupils who experience bullying report poorer school experiences and increased non-attendance served as a means to avoid negative situations caused by incidents of bullying (Hutzell & Payne, 2012; Smith et al., 2008). Bullying can occur verbally, physically and on online platforms (Sobba, 2019). There has been more recent research describing online bullying via social media and the negative

impact it has on secondary school age CYP (Clissold, 2018; Katzer et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2008).

Research highlighted that children attending secondary school (Malcolm, 2003) and children diagnosed with autism were at higher risk of bullying and subsequent school avoidance (Bitsika et al., 2021; Cook et al., 2018; Honeybourne, 2015; Hwang et al., 2017; Ochi et al., 2020; Zeedyk et al., 2014). However, the directions of causality remain unclear with regards to whether the absences from school increase CYP's risk of bullying or if bullying increases a CYP's risk of EBSA (Burrows, 2020). Protective factors include, connectedness with peers and adults (Sobba, 2019). Positive relationships with a member of school staff was highlighted by CYP as an important source of support (Nuttall & Woods, 2013; Smith, 2020; Want, 2020) and one-to-one support for children with co-occurring conditions, such as ASD and ADHD.

v. Transition

Moving between school phases, for example from primary to secondary school, can increase pressure on CYP (Fremont, 2003). School transitions are linked to an increase in anxiety within CYP, as suggested by a study that involved secondary school aged children (Nuttall & Woods, 2013), which in turn leads to school non-attendance as CYP struggle to cope with additional demands placed upon them. Curson et al. (2019) highlighted the need to ensure transitions are supported appropriately and this requires early intervention. There are various reasons children may find the transition between primary and secondary school difficult, some of which include anxiety about navigating a larger school site, the increased need to be independent and greater academic demands. Transition is likely to be more challenging for CYP with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (Devenney & O'Toole, 2021) and therefore may require additional time and support to manage.

2.4.4 Tensions concerning the reasons for non-attendance to school

The reasons for non-attendance to school across literature were often conflicting and appeared to vary according to the stage of education (Pellegini, 2007). Families and parents often attributed their children's non-attendance to school-related factors and rarely identified home factors (Pellegini, 2007)). Pupils, specifically secondary aged, cited school related reasons, such as difficulties with lessons, challenges with teachers, being bullied, peer pressure and social isolation (Malcolm et al., 2003). However, schools and professionals frequently expressed family-related factors (Lauchlan, 2003). Teachers often regarded non-attendance to truancy and attributed pupils' non-attendance to parents who placed a low value on education and poor parenting skills, therefore being more likely to condone absence (Malcolm et al., 2003). Most primary school teachers believed non-attendance is always parentally condoned and most secondary school teachers felt the school curriculum was not always suited to the needs of the child, leading to the child struggling to engage and eventually their non-attendance (Archer et al., 2003).

2.5 Parental Views of Emotionally Based School Avoidance

National legislation documents the importance of gaining family views regarding matters which affect them and stresses the need for professionals to consult with families (Department for Education, 2015). Despite this emphasis within UK law, detailed views of parents are noticeably missing from literature regarding EBSA (Heyne et al., 2020). Only a small number of studies explore parent voice (Havik et al., 2014; Malcolm et al., 2003; Place et al., 2000; Gregory & Purcell, 2014) and those that do rarely focus on the parental experience in their own right with a larger proportion of findings instead focusing on professional views. This following section will review literature focusing on the views of parents regarding their children's EBSA to explore existing research.

2.5.1 Parental Views of their Children's Emotionally Based School Avoidance

After reviewing literature concerning EBSA, the tensions surrounding the reasons for non-attendance between pupils, parents and school staff became apparent. Since I had a particular interest in the importance of parent voice I chose to focus on identifying research that considered parental views of EBSA. Therefore searches were performed to identify literature focusing on parental views of their children's experience of EBSA. Searches were refined to ensure the identification of papers from the last 10 years and only included studies from the UK to ensure they were relevant to the current research, as other countries may have education systems and factors that affect education that differ to the UK. Relevant papers focused on EBSA were identified where parents participated and a summary of these can be seen in Appendix 1. Some papers identified were peer-reviewed journal articles and others were unpublished theses completed by trainee educational psychologists as part of their doctoral studies. The findings for the papers identified will be discussed in the next subsection. The next section will explore what existing research suggests about parental views of the causes and impact of EBSA, in addition to the support parents share would be needed to manage their child's experience of EBSA.

2.5.2 Parental Views of Causes of Emotionally Based School Avoidance

Parents expressed feelings of uncertainty with regards to the exact cause, alongside a need to seek an understanding of their child's non-attendance (Burrows, 2020). The process of understanding the needs of their children appeared to be confusing and ongoing for parents (Want, 2020), and many touched upon the difficulties they had gaining the views of their children (Burrows, 2020). The confusion and uncertainty around their child's difficulties impacted the relationship with their child and wider family (Browne, 2018). Parents reported

factors they felt contributed towards their child’s non-attendance, a summary of these can be found in Table 2.

Table 2.

Parent views of factors contributing towards their children’s Emotionally Based School Avoidance at different levels.

Level	Factors
Individual	<p>Anxiety (Burrows, 2020; Clissold, 2018; Havik et al., 2014)</p> <p>Social anxiety/demands (Aucott, 2014; Gregory & Purcell, 2014)</p> <p>Relationship difficulties with staff and peers (Aucott, 2014)</p> <p>Lack of friendships (Havik et al., 2014)</p> <p>Medical concerns/problems (Aucott, 2014; Gregory & Purcell, 2014)</p> <p>General illness (Aucott, 2014)</p> <p>Child’s mood (Aucott, 2014)</p> <p>Child’s behaviour (Aucott, 2014)</p> <p>Mental health or wellbeing (Burrows, 2020)</p> <p>Autism (Burrows, 2020)</p>
Family	<p>Parenting ability (Aucott, 2014)</p>
School	<p>Academic pressures/concerns (Burrows, 2020; Havik et al., 2014; McDonald et al., 2022)</p> <p>Boredom at school (Aucott, 2014)</p> <p>Environmental factors (Burrows, 2020)</p> <p>Inability to access work (Burrows, 2020)</p> <p>Transition to secondary school (Burrows, 2020)</p>

Parents expressed individual factors as contributing towards their child’s experience of EBSA, which included anxiety. Parents reported that their children had experienced anxiety for a range of reasons, including: unexpected changes to routines; using the changing room or showering after physical education; swimming lessons or other factors they viewed as chaotic and stressful due to the ‘unknown’ (Havik et al., 2014); the lack of understanding regarding

the child's needs, such as autism; and inconsistency of support (Clissold 2018). More recently parents shared that their children, who had no pre-existing anxiety problems, had experienced attendance difficulties due to Covid-specific anxiety, worrying they would catch and spread Covid (McDonald et al., 2022).

Many parents suggested more than one cause was responsible for their child's experience of EBSA. Regardless of the perceived causes, the greatest improvement in attendance was evident when there was a shared understanding of the causes of the child's experience of EBSA by at least the parent and teacher (Aucott, 2014). Agreeing on the 'push and pull' factors affecting a child's attendance was seen as positive by parents as it allowed for appropriate strategies of support to be implemented (Corcoran et al., 2022).

Parents reflected on the importance of understanding their child's needs as this positively impact the provision offered to them (Browne, 2018; Want, 2020). Hindsight was suggested to be an important factor that enabled parents to consider past events to help them make sense of their child's development to in an attempt to understand their difficulties. Parents later recognised characteristics and traits that they had not initially noticed. Parents expressed feelings of guilt and self-blame when looking back at opportunities for support that were not accessed (Browne, 2018).

2.5.3 Impact of Emotionally Based School Avoidance on Parental Relationships

The far-reaching impact of EBSA on parents and their family relationships was evident across literature. At times, parents described how their experiences of their children's EBSA lead their family to breaking point (Want, 2020). The consequences of EBSA on relationships across the whole family unit were mentioned, often resulting in fractured relationships and highlighted the importance of parents and families needing to work together to support each

other (Browne 2018). Having a positive relationship with their children was regarded as essential for parents, as it enabled important conversations surrounding feelings and problem-solving to take place (Corcoran et al., 2022).

2.5.4 Impact of Emotionally Based School Avoidance on Parental Anxiety

Parents reported high levels of anxiety regarding their child's non-attendance (Browne, 2018; Clissold, 2018) which was exacerbated by threats of being taken to court and fined (Gregory & Purcell, 2014; McDonald et al., 2022). Punitive measures were considered problematic when attempting to manage the difficulties, particularly when child or parent mental health problems were factors that influenced the CYP's non-attendance (McDonald et al., 2022). Whilst some parents felt that keeping their child at home and away from school was unhelpful, they emphasised how difficult it was to force an anxious child go to school and expressed a sense of helplessness not knowing what else to do (McDonald et al., 2022).

2.5.5 Impact of Emotionally Based School Avoidance on Parental Employment

The negative consequences of their children's EBSA on parents ability to work and their career progression was also highlighted. Parents often felt unable to work as they were responsible for their child's education whilst they were not attending school. They stated that this was a forced rather than elective choice (Gregory & Purcell, 2014). Parents reported that they had to make difficult decisions, such as leaving their jobs to support their child, otherwise their child would have been at home alone, which was stressful for both parents and children (Browne, 2018). Parents mentioned difficulties with physically taking the child to school around their work, and those who were able to do this had very understanding line managers allowing them flexibility in their work hours (Myhill, 2017).

2.5.6 Parent Views about Home-School Communication

The need for effective home-school communication was mentioned by parents (Corcoran et al., 2022; McDonald et al., 2022; Havik et al., 2014). Parents expressed it was an essential element that contributed towards the identification of their child's experience of EBSA, as it was often the parents who noticed signs of anxiety before they were noticed within school, supporting early intervention (Corcoran et al., 2022). Parents also cited home-school communication as helpful in supporting their children's return to school, particularly where school would frequently initiate contact with parents (Mortimer, 2018).

Parents emphasised the need for communication to be regular and positive (Corcoran et al., 2022) and timely (Mortimer, 2018) in order to manage their child's difficulties (McDonald et al., 2022) and offer the most appropriate support (Havik et al., 2014). A single point of contact was seen as important (Mortimer, 2018). Also, parents who felt valued were more likely to engage in dialogue with school staff (Corcoran et al., 2022).

Negative experiences of communication were mentioned by parents of children with persistent absences (McDonald et al., 2022) which resulted in parents feeling frustrated and reluctant to share their views (Corcoran et al., 2002).

Despite parents acknowledging home-school communication as an important factor, it was seen as challenging by parents with many feeling dismissed (McDonald et al., 2022), needing to persevere to be heard (Corcoran et al., 2022) and only being taken seriously after the EBSA had started (Havik et al., 2014). Since parents have a legal obligation to ensure their child attends school (Department for Education, 2014), it is essential for parental voices to be heard if their child is experiencing EBSA (Burrows, 2020).

2.5.7 Parent Views about Relationships between Parents and Professionals

Parents felt that school staff underestimated the severity of distress demonstrated by their children which limited the support offered (McDonald et al., 2022). Parents reported professionals held different conceptualisation of their children's non-attendance, the consequences of such early misunderstandings resulted in lost time as their children's needs had not been identified which led parents voicing the need for staff to have more training to better understand the needs of their children (Burrows, 2020). Parents felt it was important for practitioners to regularly reflect on their practice, to work flexibly and responsively, adapting their practice and expectations to support their children whilst implementing a whole-school approach (Corcoran et al., 2022).

Parents often felt blamed for their child's non-attendance (Burrows, 2020; Want, 2020) which resulted in them feeling alone in their experiences (Want, 2020). Mothers and fathers both felt that the mother was accused of being a bad parent and blamed for their child's experience of EBSA, suggesting a gender imbalance which regards to parental responsibility (Browne, 2018). The loss of confidence as a parent was apparent, which many questioning their parenting ability and expressing a sense of failure (Browne, 2018). Some parents specifically voiced a lack of parenting ability as a contributor to their child's non-attendance and attended parenting courses where they met other parents who also felt they were to blame (Aucott, 2014).

Parents shared that punitive responses were often used by school staff in the initial stages of their children's non-attendance, with teachers refusing to provide work for their children due to concerns this would encourage their non-attendance (Burrows, 2020). The lack of understanding by staff was constructed as a contributory factor to non-attendance (Clissold,

2018). Many parents reported that they had received no formal support, particularly during the early phase of their child's difficulties (McDonald et al., 2022).

Positive relationships with school staff were regarded as crucial to enable open discussions about their children's difficulties without judgement (McDonald et al., 2022). Trusting relationships with outside agencies was seen by parents as key to supporting their children's attendance to school (O'Hagan et al., 2022). Parents cited listening, being genuine and accessible as key qualities that they perceived as most important in supporting relationships with professionals (Mortimer, 2018).

Whilst some parents shared positive experiences and felt school staff were supportive, they expressed a need for more support with accessing external agencies (Mortimer, 2018). Parents expressed frustration regarding the lack of collaboration between external agencies supporting children (Want, 2020). Power imbalances between school staff, professionals and parents resulted in a battle for parents to be heard (Want, 2020), a loss of trust in school staff and professionals (Browne, 2018), and the seeking of additional support such as a change in provision or the involvement of outside agencies for themselves and their children (Myhill, 2017).

Trust in school staff also broke down when they were unable to provide important information to parents, such as evidence of interventions being implemented to support their children (Myhill, 2017). It is important to consider whether parent's lack of trust in school staff and professionals has been influenced by their own experiences of education, with some parents referring to negative experiences they had during school (Sawyer, 2022).

2.5.8 Parent Views about the Support that Parents Need to Manage their Child's Experience of Emotionally Based School Avoidance

Themes of parental desperation and a perceived lack of support were evident across literature with parents expressing feeling powerless and desperate as they had no one to turn to in their difficult situations (Mortimer, 2018). This suggests parental perceptions that support was not easily available to them when they felt they needed it (Mortimer, 2018). Parents emphasised the importance of school-related support (Havik et al., 2014) to manage their children's behaviour and address their non-attendance (Aucott, 2014). Parents mentioned staff they felt were supportive and found them to be easily accessible and approachable (Aucott 2014; Myhill, 2017). If parents felt supported they could work together to implement strategies to support the children's attendance (Myhill, 2017).

Parents often expressed a preference for seeking advice from other parents who had similar experiences, rather than consulting with school staff (McDonald et al., 2022). It is possible that this could be due to the perceived lack of support from school staff. Also sharing experiences with peers can provide validation and emotional support (Mortimer, 2018). Parents spoke about appreciating support from other parents in similar situations and suggested that peer discussions should be encouraged (McDonald et al., 2022)

2.6 Chapter Summary

The importance of all stakeholders having a shared understanding of a child's experience of EBSA to enable appropriate support to be put in place (Aucott, 2014) and the importance of regular and positive home-school communication (Corcoran et al., 2022) has been highlighted in the literature. Parents reported, feelings of frustration and a reluctance to share their views

with school staff in cases where they had shared concerns about their child which were not acted on leading to the worsening of their child's situation.

The need for good working relationships between parents, school staff and professionals has been reported and it could be that poor working relationships affect effective home-school communication and the ability to reach a shared understanding of the child's needs.

Parents who worked to support their children's experience of EBSA reported feelings of anxiety for various reasons including: feeling judged by others, being blamed for their child's experience of EBSA, threats of fines and being taken to court and disruption to careers. This could be detrimental to a parent's mental health and eventually their ability to support their child to resolve their EBSA. A lack of support from school staff, professionals, friends and family were seen to exacerbate the difficulties already being experienced by both parents and their children.

2.7 Rationale For Exploring Parental Perspectives of Emotionally Based School Avoidance

Ecological approaches to EBSA intervention recognise the role of parents within successful reintegration of pupils back to school (Corcoran et al., 2022). Parents were seen to play a key role in the early identification of EBSA as children may be more open at home than school, supporting earlier identification of their attendance difficulties (Corcoran et al., 2022; Want, 2020). However, despite these findings there seem to be little research available focusing solely on parental perspectives.

Recent studies identified that have explored parental perspectives of EBSA also included the views of professionals (McDonald et al., 2022), school staff (Corcoran et al., 2022) and pupils (O'Hagan et al., 2022). Four unpublished theses conducted in the UK have focused purely on the parental experience of EBSA within the last 10 years (Browne, 2018; Burrows, 2020;

Myhill, 2017; Sawyer, 2022). The remainder of this section will explore how the current research builds on past research to offer a distinctive contribution to the literature.

The current research was conducted after the Covid-19 Pandemic and explored the views of parents whose children were attending mainstream secondary school. This is because the research by Browne (2018) included parents whose children who were no longer able to attend a mainstream secondary school. Browne (2018) therefore suggested further research could explore the experiences of parents whose children were still attending mainstream school but with low attendance rates. It is also important to consider that Browne's study was conducted before the Covid-19 Pandemic.

This research also builds on the work of Burrows (2020), Myhill (2017) and Sawyer (2022) who also explored parental views of EBSA. Burrows (2020) used narrative approaches, which focuses on how participants make sense of their life's history with less emphasis on getting as close as possible to their lived experience (Griffin & May, 2012). Myhill (2017) used thematic analysis and focused on identifying patterns within large amounts of qualitative data, but lacked an epistemological position and the deeper, more meaningful exploration of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). Sawyer (2022) used reflexive thematic analysis to analyse data, which does not allow for an analysis that goes beyond simply examining the text from transcripts and failing to capture a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of participants (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). This current study will explore parental views of their child's experience of EBSA, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA offers a unique perspective as it focuses on the lived experiences of participants in comparison to other methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). IPA captures a deeper understanding (Brocki & Wearden, 2006) of parents experiences of their child's EBSA, prioritising staying

close to their meaning, which is important considering the tensions in differing accounts of EBSA.

My research will provide up to date information, following the Covid-19 Pandemic, on how EBSA is experienced from the view point of parents.

As a trainee educational psychologist (TEP), working in a Local Authority within the West Midlands, I work to support pupils experiencing EBSA and when reflecting on this work I feel it would be useful to explore ways to improve my own practice with regards to working alongside parents. It is hoped that increasing professional understanding of the parental experience of EBSA may contribute towards developing more effective approaches of support so parents are able to help their children. It is acknowledged that this will be based on individual experiences of a small number of parents, so the aim is not to generalise, it is to understand, in depth, the parental experiences in their own right as a result of their child's experience of EBSA. Research questions were developed following the exploration of existing research and Table 3 demonstrates how research questions were derived from the literature.

Table 3.*Development of research questions in relation to literature*

Research questions	Existing Literature
1. What are parents understanding of their child's experience of EBSA?	Research reports conflict between parental, staff and professional views with regards to the causes of the child's experience of EBSA (Corcoran et al., 2022). Therefore it would be useful to explore parental perspectives further as research highlights that children may be more open at home than school, supporting earlier identification of their attendance difficulties (Corcoran et al., 2022; Want, 2020).
2. How has EBSA impacted on parents, including homelife, family interactions and the family unit?	Whilst research has explored how EBSA has affected children in the short- and longer-term (Carroll, 2020; Heyne et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2013), little research exists exploring the wider impact on parents and families. It would be useful to explore the impact of EBSA on the parents and wider family to draw on their lived experiences (Browne, 2018; McDonald et al, 2022).
3. What are parent views on factors that help or hinder parents work with school staff and external professionals when managing their child's experience of EBSA?	Exploring what parents have found as helpful or a hinderance would support staff and professionals to foster positive relationships with parents (Corcoran et al., 2022). Gaining a better understanding of the factors that affect co-working would enable staff and professionals to work more effectively alongside parents to support pupil reintegration within school (Wimmer, 2010).

Following on from the exploration of literature in this area, the research aim of this thesis emerged, which is to explore parental experiences of their child's experience of EBSA and three specific research questions have been developed, which include:

1. What are parents understanding of their child's EBSA?

2. How has EBSA impacted on parents, including homelife, family interactions and the family unit?
3. What are parent views on factors that help or hinder parents work with school staff and external professionals when managing their child's experience of EBSA?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction to Chapter

This chapter focuses on the methodological principles that underpin this research study. It will begin by stating the research aims and rationale, followed by the research questions. An overview of the research philosophy will be given, describing my ontological and epistemological position. The research design, methods of data collection and data analysis will be explained. Participant recruitment and sample characteristics will be overviewed. Finally, ethical considerations for this study will be discussed.

3.2 Research Aims and Questions

The aim of this research is to explore parental experiences of their child's experience of EBSA and there are three research questions:

1. What are parents understanding of their child's experience of EBSA?
2. How has children's experience of EBSA impacted on parents, including homelife, family interactions and the family unit?
3. What are parent views on factors that help or hinder parents work with school staff and external professionals when managing their child's experience of EBSA?

3.3 Research Philosophy

3.3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Position

As a researcher it is important to consider my world view, and how I position myself has a direct impact on the methodology chosen for this research (Cohen et al., 2011). Ontology considers the nature of 'reality' and attempts to define what reality is (Crotty, 1998). Reality can be considered as a spectrum, with objectivism at one end, and subjectivism at the other (Madill et al., 2000). Objectivism assumes that a 'real world' exists where truths can be

discovered, whereas subjectivism suggests that individuals all experience separate realities, with some developing shared understandings of reality (Madill et al., 2000). As a researcher I uphold a subjectivist ontological position because I am interested in exploring alternative realities and how EBSA is experienced.

Epistemology focuses on understanding how individuals acquire their knowledge about their reality (Crotty, 1998) and there are two main approaches, positivism and interpretivism (Schwandt, 2003). Positivism states there is an objective truth in how knowledge is created (Robson, 2002) and knowledge of the world can be objectively obtained through the application of scientific methods. Alternatively, interpretivism suggests that 'absolute truths' do not exist as individuals all interpret the world through their own subjective stance. Our subjectivity is influenced by a range of factors including an individuals personal, historical and cultural backgrounds; factors which may not remain constant, and which may affect our world view over time (Schwandt, 2003). My philosophical position within this research has an interpretivist epistemological stance, suggesting that knowledge is socially constructed and this is important because I am interested in the multiple realities of parents and how each is understanding EBSA.

3.4.2 Phenomenology

In order to explore lived experiences, this research adopted a phenomenological methodology. Phenomenology was introduced by a philosophical movement that opposed research exploring an objective truth to understand human experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Phenomenological studies explore the human experience and how humans understand their lived experiences (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2020). There have been debates as to the researcher positioning within phenomenological research. For instance Husserl

suggested it was possible to make sense of experiences without preconceptions and presuppositions, isolating the 'essence' of a phenomenon whilst doing so (Giorgi, 1997). Heidegger disagreed with Husserl and argued that it is not possible to separate people from their individual social contexts (Smith et al., 2009), therefore it is not possible for individuals to withhold their own judgements or assumptions (Langdridge, 2007). Rather, Heidegger suggests that we make sense of human experience through our own understanding, both consciously and unconsciously (Smith et al., 2009). In relation to the research presented I have worked towards being both reflective and reflexive, having an awareness of my own role in the research and its effect on outcomes, throughout this research study, by keeping a reflective journal whilst carrying out my research. An extract from my reflective journal can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3.

An extract from the researchers reflective journal that demonstrates reflexivity regarding the formation of the interview guide.

Some questions are leading and need rewording, they are also closed and participants can only answer with 'yes' or 'no' e.g. 'has your child's EBSA...'. There also needs to be greater sensitivity here when referred to EBSA, instead of saying '...your child's EBSA...' this should be reworded to 'how has your child's experience of EBSA...?'

I didn't feel there was a good 'flow' to interview schedule and will change the order of the questions. I could start with more general/open questions, letting participants answer in anyway they choose, and then ask more specific questions based on their responses and use prompts to extract more information from participants e.g. 'what has helped you during these experiences?' or 'who has helped you?'

3.3.3 Hermeneutics

Exploring the perspectives of parents will require the researcher to be highly involved in the interpretation process (Smith, 2011). In order for researchers to understand their participants they must stand in their shoes in order to interpret meaning (Smith et al., 2009). Hermeneutics refers to the theory of interpretation and considers the intentions and meaning of the researcher when exploring their data (Langdrige, 2007). Hermeneutics is connected to phenomenology as it is suggested that we draw upon our knowledge from prior experiences when attempting to interpret the world (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, it is important to recognise and be aware of our own bias when attempting to draw meaning from experiences of others (Gadamer, 1960).

This study aligns with hermeneutic phenomenology, and emphasises a double hermeneutic position, as it acknowledges the researcher trying to make sense of others' experiences, through their own interpretations, whilst being aware of preconceptions (Smith et al., 1995). My previous experience as a teacher and SENCo and current role as TEP could contribute towards preconceptions of parental responses. Therefore it was important to recognise and challenge any thoughts that I may have that stemmed from these roles that could impact on the interpretation of results. Due to my previous and current roles part of my identity can be recognised as 'school staff' and a 'professional', however my role within this thesis is a 'researcher' so it is crucial not to disregard any negative comments about either school or professionals or to be defensive about them. The experiences of each participant must be reflected as near to their meaning as possible, regardless of my own experience or views. Some biases are not always obvious to individuals therefore it is important to understand these prior to my analysis of participant data to ensure I am aware of the impact on the outcomes of my analysis.

3.3.4 Idiography

This research does not seek to discover universal claims, rather the focus is on understanding experiential phenomena of a particular group within a particular context. Idiography is the focus on a particular phenomena, which might be an event, process or relationship, from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context (Smith et al., 2022). The intended aim of this research aligns with the idiographic element of this study, as it can be used to examine individual cases before searching for similarities and differences across participant accounts. This research aligns with an idiographic stance, as the intention is to examine individual cases within the unique context, before searching for similarities and differences across participant accounts (Smith, 2011).

3.4 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a methodology underpinned by phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith et al., 1995). IPA is appropriate for analysing data in this research, as it has a focus on the interpretation of individual experiences, which aligns with my research aim of exploring parental experiences (Smith et al., 2009). My research is underpinned by the notion that individuals view the world through their own subjective lens based on their own personal knowledge, experience and context. Therefore, IPA aligns with my ontological and epistemological positions which are subjective and interpretivist, and enables me to explore the lived experiences of parents.

This topic of EBSA resonates with me on various levels through personal experience during my career. My interest in this topic began during when I encountered some incidences of CYP struggling to attend school as a teacher, as a form tutor for some of these pupils I found myself emotionally invested in trying to understand their difficulties and how to support them. When

I then began my role as a SENCo I encountered a greater number of cases of ESBA from students with SEND. I began my doctoral training during the Covid 19 Pandemic. As a Year 1 TEP, when schools fully reopened to all pupils I noticed a rise in reports of children struggling to transition back into school, even if they had attended with little difficulty before. I engaged in regular discussions with school SENCos about the increase in numbers of SEND children struggling with school attendance. This sparked an interest to explore this further and became the focus of my research as I began my second year as a TEP.

3.5 Research Participants

3.5.1 Recruitment Process

In line with recommendations, approximately four to six parents/carers/adopted special guardians of children currently experiencing EBSA were sought for this research project (Smith et al., 2022). Participants were recruited according to the following criteria, they had to be:

- a parent of a child,
- living in Local Authority A.

In addition to what has been listed above for participants, the children of participants also needed to meet the following criteria:

- be aged between five – 16 years,
- to have missed 10% or more of their school sessions,
- to have experienced difficulty attending school,
- remained at home with parental knowledge,
- became emotionally upset about attending school.

Participants were recruited by liaising with colleagues within the same EPS as the researcher. Schools within the local authority were also contacted in an effort to recruit participants through the sharing of a recruitment advertisement (Appendix 2) to disseminate to parents of children experiencing EBSA, who would be able to contact me using the details provided, if they were interested in taking part in the research project.

3.5.2 Participant Characteristics

Participants comprised of three mothers and one father, aged between 38 - 56 years old. They were parents of secondary school aged children and young people experiencing EBSA within the local authority where the researcher was based on placement. All participants were white British. It is important to highlight that two of the participants were husband and wife. Additional characteristics of participants are described in Table 4 to ensure a full focus on participant individual experience.

Table 4.

A summary of individual participant characteristics.

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Employment status
Anna	Female	38	Unemployed
Chloe	Female	56	Self-employed
Mary	Female	47	Unemployed
Paul	Male	48	Employed

It is also necessary to outline some of the participants children’s characteristics, which are included in Table 5. Whilst the children are not considered participants in this study, the parents are, it is important to provide further context for participants, by assigning pseudonyms for their children in addition to other crucial pieces of information. Pseudonyms were chosen by the researcher.

Table 5.

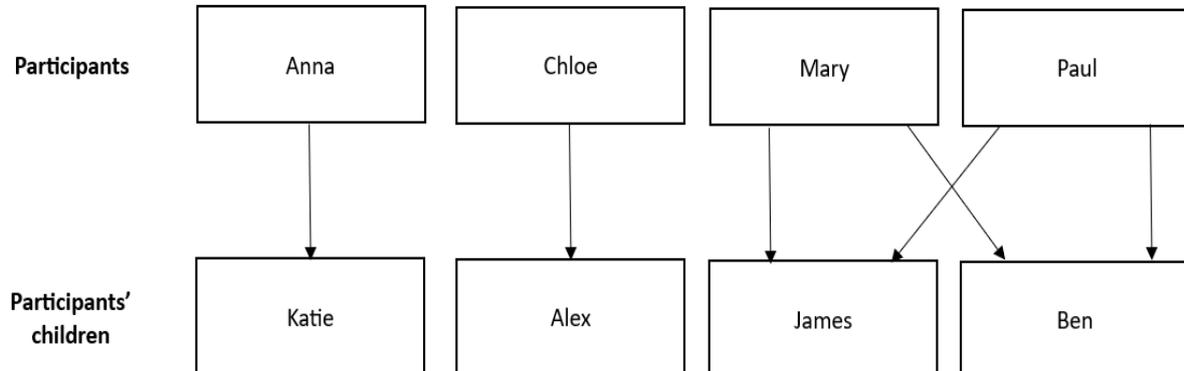
A summary of participants' children's characteristics.

Child Pseudonym	Parent/s	Gender	Child Age	School Attendance (%)
Katie	Anna	Female	14	86
Alex	Chloe	Male	15	81
James	Mary	Male	16	75
	Paul			
Ben	Mary	Male	14	83
	Paul			

Since there is an inclusion of a married couple within this study, Figure 4 aims to demonstrate and visually clarify the relationship between participants and children to clarify this further.

Figure 4.

A diagram to show how participants and children are connected.



It was important to work towards homogeneity for this research since it is a crucial component of IPA (Larkin & Thompson, 2011). Homogeneity was worked towards through the selection of participants. All participants were selected from the same local authority and the children of all participants were all attending secondary school. Also each participant in this research is connected through their child's EBSA experiences. Therefore the sample represent a perspective, rather than a population (Smith et al., 2009) referring to parents who

have a child experiencing ESBA, to ensure meaningful data is collected in relation to the research aims.

It is important to acknowledge limitations as there are factors identified that work against homogeneity in this study, such as gender. The sample consists of three mothers and one father. However, difficulties experienced including time restrictions, did not allow for the recruitment of a more homogenous sample. It was important to value the views of both fathers and mothers and not excluding fathers views seemed important. Participants are introduced in more detail below, in the order they were interviewed, summarising their characteristics.

3.5.2.1 Anna's Characteristics

Anna is 38 years old, she has three children in total and currently lives with her husband and two of her children. Anna's daughter, Katie, is currently experiencing EBSA. Anna's current husband is not Katie's biological father. Anna does not currently live with Katie as Katie was violent towards Anna and her children when she was younger. Anna worried for her own safety and the safety of her other children and made the difficult decision for Katie to live with Anna's mother. Anna's ethnicity is White British.

3.5.2.2 Chloe Characteristics

Chloe is 56 years old, she lives with her husband and son. Chloe's son, Alex, is currently experiencing EBSA. Chloe's ethnicity is White British.

3.5.2.3 Mary's Characteristics

Mary is 47 years old, she lives with her husband, Paul and two children. Paul, is also a participant in this study. Mary and Paul's son, Ben, is currently experiencing EBSA and his older brother also has prior experience of EBSA. Mary's ethnicity is White British.

3.5.2.4 Paul Characteristics

Paul is 48 years old, he lives with his wife and two children. Paul's son, Ben, is currently experiencing EBSA. Ben's older brother has also previously experienced EBSA. Paul is the husband of Mary, who is also a participant in this study. Paul's ethnicity is White British.

3.6 Data Collection Method

3.6.1 Interviews

Qualitative research lends itself particularly well to hearing individual voices and understanding participant experiences through the eyes of those affected (Hardy & Majors, 2017). Interviews were selected as an appropriate qualitative method of data collection (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) to address the aim of the research, which was to explore parental experiences of EBSA. Since IPA is best suited to a data collection method that allows participants the opportunity to share a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences, in-depth interviews have been highlighted as one of the best means of accessing such accounts (Smith et al., 2009).

Interviews facilitate the elicitation of stories, thoughts and feelings about the target phenomenon. They focus on one person's experience and therefore are optimal for IPA studies as a phenomenological approach is interested in using methods which enable the collection of naturalistic first-person accounts of experience (Langdridge, 2007). IPA requires 'rich data' which refers to participants being able to tell their stories, to speak freely and

reflectively, and to develop their ideas and express their concerns at some length (Smith et al., 2022). Whilst there are other methods available that also align with IPA, such as questionnaires and focus groups, interviewing was preferred for this study. The reason for this is that the role of the researcher is to facilitate participants to share their lived experiences about phenomena (Giorgi, 2010) and allows the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified following participants' responses, allowing further enquiry for matters of interest that arise. During an interview the interviewer is present, involved and responsive, moving the participant from typical generic and superficial ways of talking to the more detailed and experiential discussions (Smith et al., 2022).

The interview guide was developed in order to address each research question, as can be seen in Table 6. Open ended questions were used, followed by prompts and follow-up questions that enabled the participant to expand on their answers by expressing their thoughts further (Davis, 1960; Lofland et al., 2022). The loose nature of an interview guide allows for a natural flow of conversation between researcher and participant, with the researcher being able to respond to the participants answers accordingly (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The inclusion of both questions and prompts was to gain an understanding of experiential phenomena, gather good quality data, whilst maintaining a degree of flexibility and opportunities for deeper exploration with areas of interest depending on responses provided by the participant (Smith et al., 2009)

Participants were given a choice of completing interviews face to face, virtually using teleconferencing software such as Microsoft TEAMS or on the telephone. As the researcher I offered to meet with participants in person at their preferred location, but implications of this

on the parent and/or child made this difficult due to the EBSA related difficulties. All participants chose to take part in interviews on Microsoft TEAMS. Reasons given for this preference included convenience, which has been cited as an advantage of online interviews (Sah et al., 2020; Varma et al., 2021). Parents explained their busy schedules, which centred around managing their children's routines and appointments making it difficult to attend interviews in person. The benefits to conducting online interviews has been explored, which include: avoiding the need to travel, being less time consuming, and allow the inclusion of participants from a range of geographical locations (Brown, 2022). All participants were able to join online from home using a personal device, which may have contributed towards feelings of familiarity and comfort, reducing power imbalances (Newman et al., 2021).

However, disadvantages of online interviews must also be considered. Research suggests online interviews reduce opportunities to build rapport with participants (Roberts et al., 2021). Providing a visual aspect by being able to see the interviewer via camera was important towards building a rapport, whilst participants were given the choice to be seen on camera depending on how comfortable they felt. All participants chose to use their camera and be seen by the researcher which was helpful. However, it is important to recognise the potential to miss out on subtle meanings whilst carrying out interviews online that may only be detectable when conversing face to face (Tremblay et al., 2021). During the interviews, I remained receptive to signs of distress or discomfort through regular pauses. This is because Brown (2022) mentioned that discomfort was easier to detect during face-to-face interviews and more difficult to detect online.

Additional factors that were considered in the planning stage for online interviews included: the need to make contingency plans if there were breaks in connectivity whilst carrying out

interviews online, contemplating situations where the participant may have other family members present within the home whilst taking part in the interview so suggesting the use of headphones and using an area of the house where they were unlikely to be overheard, particularly if their child experiencing ESBA was home, and allowing participants to pause if they were unexpectedly interrupted by others. Also, whilst all participants opted for online interviews and most participants were already familiar with TEAMS, , one parent required support to download TEAMS whilst on the telephone.

Table 6.*Interview guide constructed for the current research.*

Research Question	Interview Questions	Possible follow up questions/prompts
1. What are parents experience of their child's EBSA?	1. Can you tell me about your child's experience of EBSA?	Then what happened? What has been most important to you/mattered to you most when thinking about your child's experience of EBSA?
	2. Are there things you think that contribute towards your child's experience of EBSA? Can you tell me about these?	Can you say more about...? What did you notice? Can you think of any other factors? Prompts; school elements; out-of-school; peers
2. How has children's experience of EBSA impacted on parents, including homelife, family interactions and the family unit?	3. I wonder if you feel okay talking about how your child not attending school has impacted on you?	How did that make you feel? Prompts; your wellbeing; any other areas?
	5. How has your child not attending affected your relationship with your child?	Can you tell me more?
	6. What effects, if any, has your child's experience of EBSA had on your family?	I wonder why this was?
3. What are parent views on factors that help or hinder parents work	7. How have you found working with school to work through this situation?	What has been most helpful/worked well?

with school staff and external professionals when managing their child's EBSA?

8. How have school staff supported you during your child's experience of EBSA?

9. Can you tell me about any support that you have received that has been helpful from other agencies?

10. What support might you have found helpful?

Who supported...?

Who did you speak to first when...?

What do you mean by...?

Have you found the support to be helpful?

How have you found this?

What else could school staff have done to support you?

What has helped you during these experiences?

3.7 Ethical Considerations

University of Birmingham Ethics Committee granted ethical approval for this study on 15.08.2022 (Appendix 3) and this research strictly abides by the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2021). Key ethical considerations for the current study are discussed and include, gaining consent from participants and explaining their right to withdraw, ensuring participant confidentiality and anonymity, keeping participants safe, and keeping data safe.

3.7.1 Gaining Consent

Participants, who were parents of children experiencing EBSA, were required to sign and return a consent form before interviews took place, consent forms can be viewed in Appendix 4. At the outset of the interviews, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the interview process, should they wish to, without needing to provide an explanation. Participants were also told they had the right to withdraw their data up to 14 calendar days after the interview taking place, once again without needing to justify their decision. Contact details for the researcher were provided to enable withdrawal.

3.7.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

It was important to take appropriate action to ensure that data collected was anonymised, which was achieved by using a preferred pseudonym.

Confidentiality was also considered, however it was explained to parents that should any concerns or risks related to safeguarding arise, appropriate people, such as safeguarding officers, would be informed. Also, audio recordings of interviews were used solely for transcription purposes and were to be stored according in line with both the General Data Protection Regulation and the UK Data Protection Act (UK Government, 2022). All interview

recordings will be destroyed, after 10 years, in line with the University of Birmingham's requirements on data retention and disposal.

3.7.3 Participant Safety

In order to reduce any potential risk or harm to participants, various aspects related to the research were considered. A participant information sheet (Appendix 5) was given to participants to share the research aims and outline what taking part in the research would entail. An introduction was included at the outset of each interview in order to verbally share this information once more to ensure all who had consented to take part understood these details and were reminded about their right to withdraw should they feel uncomfortable at any point during or following the interview. A debrief was also conducted following the interview. No significant harm or risk to participants were identified prior to this research taking place. In order to ensure participant safety it was important to consider potential for memories triggering negative thoughts and participants were regularly asked how they were feeling, if they felt ok talking about their experience and offering breaks from the interview if needed.

3.7.4 Data Safety

It was essential for all information to be stored on encrypted documents on password protected devices. Any physical copies of information were stored in locked cabinets to which only the researcher had a key to. All electronic or physical documents were saved or stored under the participants pseudonym names rather than their real names, to ensure their identities would be protected.

3.8 Pilot Study

Since the researcher is the primary instrument in data generation (Paisely & Reeves, 2001) and the interview questions are at the heart of interviewing, piloting for interviews is important prior to conducting a study (Majid et al., 2017). Not only does piloting allow for the testing of questions but it also allows the inexperienced researcher to gain some practice for interviewing (Majid et al., 2017). Therefore, the interview guide was piloted before use in the study with participants to receive feedback regarding how effectively the interview questions and prompts addressed the research questions. One pilot study was conducted with two parents who have children currently experiencing EBSA, as Turner (2010) suggests pilot interview participants should share similar criteria as possible to the group of participants for the actual study. The pilot study was not included in the research analysis as the purpose of its purpose was to try out the questions to strengthen the interview guide and protocols.

The pilot study shone a light on areas that had not previously been considered. It highlighted the need for pauses and periods of silence, which could feel uncomfortable for an interviewer, to enable participants to think about their responses and to feel they have space to share these without needing to rush through the questions (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Also, the wording of some questions were modified to enhance clarity in line with reflections from the pilot study, the initial draft of the interview guide can be seen in Appendix 6. It can be seen that the first interview question is essentially the research question and Smith et al., (2022) mentions to not simply ask participants the research questions, rather the researcher should develop questions, when answered by participants, that provide the researcher with an opportunity to answer the research questions.

The time taken to conduct interviews in the pilot study ranged between 40 to 50 minutes which led to estimate that the time needed was 60 minutes. Research demonstrates ‘respondent fatigue’ can be caused by longer interviews, resulting in participants being unwilling to continue interviews (Axinn & Pearce, 2006). Smith et al., (2022) mentions that a guide containing approximately six to ten open questions, along with possible prompts, will occupy between 45 to 90 minutes of conversation. It was identified that there were too many questions in the initial interview draft, which were redrafted numerous times until the questions were refined. A supervisor was also able to provide feedback of the questions on the interview guide draft and there were questions which needed to be reworded so they were asked in a softer way to avoid causing any potential distress to participants, for example, *“how have you personally found the experience of your child’s EBSA?”* was amended to, *“I wonder if you feel okay talking about how your child not attending school has impacted on you?”*.

Participants within the pilot study also expressed an interest in hearing information about the researcher in order to help them feel more at ease. Similarly it was suggested in research that when introducing themselves it would be useful for the interviewer to tell the interviewee something about themselves, such as: their background, training and interest in the area of inquiry (Hancock et al., 2001). Some prompts were recorded to support my introduction to participants, to ensure the same information was included for consistency and relevant details were included.

3.9 Interview Procedure

At the outset of the interviews, participants were asked about their day in order to help them to feel more comfortable and relaxed and to build a rapport. Time was set aside before starting interviews to read through the participant information sheet and consent form with each participant in order to remind participants of the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw from the interview and research process. All participants agreed to the Microsoft TEAMS meeting to be video recorded and also consented to an audio-recording of their interview for later transcription.

Interviews were estimated to last for approximately 60 minutes, however they ranged between 70 – 100 minutes. The time needed to fully explore participant views was underestimated and there was a need to find an appropriate balance between keeping to timings whilst not interrupting parents as they shared and opened up about their personal experiences. Since participants were initially told interviews would last approximately 60 minutes, once this point had been reached it was important to ask if they would consent to continuing beyond this time frame and all participants were keen to continue to give their views. Since participants Mary and Paul are married and living together it was important to interview both separately on different days and they were asked not to discuss the interview with each other until both had taken part so I could gain individual experiences in their own right first.

3.10 Data Analysis

Data was analysed according to the seven sequential stages of IPA analysis, summarised in Table 7. The process of IPA involved numerous stages which took place over time. It required the researcher to become fully immersed in the data (Smith et al., 2022). Whilst there is no

prescribed single 'method' for working with data when using IPA, the focus of analysis directs researcher analytic attention towards participants' attempts to make sense of their experiences. IPA is characterised by a set of common processes and principles which are applied flexibly and will be used as part of data analysis for this research (Smith et al., 2022).

Each participant's transcript was analysed using IPA, which led to the formation of subthemes and eventually Personal Experiential Themes (PETs). This ensured the individual sense-making of each participant was understood. PETs are 'personal' because they are at the level of the person, all deriving from the particular person whose case is being examined. PETs are 'experiential' because they relate directly to the participant's experience or their experience of sense-making. PETs are 'themes' because they are no longer tied to specific and local instances within the transcript, rather they reflect analytic entities present within the transcript as a whole. Individual PETs across transcripts were compared to identify patterns which were then used to form Group Experiential Themes (GETs).

The stages of IPA were closely followed, with Anna's transcript being the first case. During stage one of analysis Anna's transcript was read several times, whilst also listening to the audio-recording during some of the reads, in order to immerse myself into Anna's world. Stage two involved noting down any thoughts electronically alongside Anna's transcript that seemed important, known as exploratory notes. Attention shifted away from the original transcript during stage three and moved towards the exploratory notes in order to form experiential statements. Appendix 7 shows an extract of Anna's original transcript, exploratory notes and the experiential statements formed. Once all experiential statements were formed, in stage four, they were handwritten and laid out in no particular order before being organised into groups, this can be seen in Appendix 8. Once groups of experiential

statements were formed, they were named in stage five. Tables were constructed to reflect Anna's PETs and sub-themes. Stage six of IPA involved repeating the same process, stages one to five, with Chloe, Mary and Paul's transcripts, forming an individual table of PETs and subthemes for all participants. The final stage of IPA, stage seven, involved looking for similar meaning across all participant accounts, PETs and subthemes were analysed and GETs were eventually formed.

Table 7.

Stages of data analysis when using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2022).

Stages of IPA	Description	Steps taken
1. Starting with the first case: reading and re-reading	This involves the immersion of the researcher in the original data, the first interview transcript, by reading it numerous times. It is recommended to listen to the audio-recording, if available, at least once whilst first reading the transcript. Imagining the voice of the participant during subsequent readings of the transcript assists with a more complete analysis.	I read the interview transcript several times, at least 5. I also listened to the audio-recording during the first and last readings. Listening to audio allowed me to match the correct intonation, volume and expression in the participant's voice. This gave me a sense of entering into the participant's world. It also allowed me to internalise their account rather than simply analysing words on the page alone, helping me to recall the interview in depth. Any initial thoughts that struck me upon the first reading were noted in my reflective diary.
2. Exploratory noting	This step examines semantic content and language use on a very exploratory level. The researcher maintains an open mind and notes anything of interest within the transcript. This process ensures a growing familiarity with the transcript and begins to identify specific ways the participant talks about, understands and thinks about an issue.	This took longer than expected, as each line of the transcript was examined thoroughly for semantic content and the language used was also considered. I inserted a column next to the participants' transcript on the electronic document, and notes were made within this. I attempted to look for meaning whilst trying to stay as close to the participants experience as possible. Analysis included the identification of: descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments. This process was carried out several times to ensure the exploratory notes captured all that I felt was important.

3. Constructing experiential statements	In this step experiential statements are constructed from the exploratory notes made from the previous step. The experiential statements should relate directly to the participant's experiences. The statements should reflect the participant's original words and thoughts and the researcher's interpretation.	My attention shifted away from the original transcript and more towards the exploratory notes. The reason for this was to reduce the amount of data so it was more manageable to explore. However, at times I did refer back to the original transcript for clarification, to make sure I was not moving away from the participants experience.
4. Searching for connections across experiential statements	This step involves mapping out how the researcher thinks the experiential statements fit together. Some experiential statements may be discarded if they are not relevant to the research question. The researcher draws together the experiential statements and produces a structure that highlights the important aspects of the participant's account.	Now that experiential statements had been constructed I began to search for connections between them. This was done by writing all experiential statements down on paper and cutting them out. I then attempted to organise them into groups. I attempted to group all experiential statements that felt meaningful, however some did not seem to fit into any particular group. It was important to stay close to participant experience whilst trying to illuminate important points against my research questions.
5. Naming the personal experiential themes (PETs) and consolidating and organising them in a table	Once a clustering of the experiential statements has been produced they are arranged into a table of all the Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) for that participant. PETs are then divided into sub-themes. Sub-themes show the set of experiential statements that were formed in the previous steps of analysis. Each experiential statement is linked to a page number from the transcript.	Once experiential statements were grouped together I considered the connections and links between different groups of statements. Once groups were ordered, each was given a name that I felt reflected the participants experience captured within the group, known as 'sub-themes'. Various sub-themes were then organised as PETs. I made sure that I completed a table of PETs on a separate day.
6. Continuing the individual	This step involves moving to the next participant's transcript and repeating the process. it is essential to treat each case a complete universe of inquiry. In order to	After completing this process, stages 1–5, for the first participant, the same process was completed for the remaining participants. I wanted to focus on capturing

analysis of other cases	maintain IPA's idiographic commitment, it is important not to reproduce ideas from the analysis of the first case whilst working on the second.	each individual's specific experience and to focus on their specific account in line with the ideographic principles of IPA. I was able to do this by focusing on no more than one participants in a day to remain true to their experience and immerse myself into their account.
7. Working with personal experiential themes to develop group experiential themes across cases	In this step the researcher looks for patterns of similarity and differences across the PETs generated in the previous step and produces a set of Group Experiential Themes (GETs). This is to highlight the shared and unique features of the experience across the contributing participants. This helps to explore the points of convergence and divergence at the level of the contributing cases.	Once all four transcripts had been analysed I then began to look for similar meaning across participant accounts. I had hand-written PETs and sub-themes to work with. I looked for both convergence and divergence to try to make sense across participant experiences. Once themes were grouped, names were allocated, referred to as GETs.

3.10.1 Research Credibility

Yardley (2000) argued for the importance of research being high quality in order to be meaningful, however traditional criteria that may be used to ensure research quality in quantitative research are not deemed suitable for qualitative research methods. Therefore criteria have been suggested as a guide to promote the quality of qualitative research, with some qualitative researchers arguing the need for criteria needing to be appropriate to the specific qualitative approach (Langdridge, 2007). Yardley's (2000) criteria include: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence and impact and importance. I will describe Yardley's criteria in relation to my research.

3.10.2 Sensitivity to Context

This criteria refers to the researcher's involvement in the research process and being aware of and sensitive to context throughout. I have demonstrated sensitivity to context in various ways including; examining existing literature, considering methodology so it aligns with IPA, considering and reducing power imbalances, and taking care during the interpretation of data.

I examined and immersed myself into relevant literature in this area, as can be seen from the introduction and literature review chapters toward the beginning of this thesis. This allowed me to develop an awareness of what has already been researched, suggested and current theories about EBSA. This existing research influenced and shaped my thesis and also informed my research design and questions. The findings of my study will also be considered in relation to existing literature which was discussed in previous chapters.

The use of IPA as part of this research also demonstrates sensitivity as IPA researchers should use open questions and respond to the interviewee's answers. I discussed potential questions

with my tutor prior to the initial interview schedule being drafted. The use of piloting the interview schedule was useful in carefully considered the exact wording of each question to ensure they were fit for purpose and there were no controversial or potentially upsetting words used. I did modify the wording of some questions following piloting and changed some questions so they were more open.

Power imbalances often exist between researchers and participants, however I sought to reduce these as much as possible. I asked participants their preference regarding the venue for the interview with face to face and online options offered. Participants were given information sheets about the research and consent forms to sign if they chose to take part. They were also reminded of their right to withdraw without needing to offer an explanation. I also shared some information about myself with participants and I explained my motivation behind carrying out this research. Participants were given opportunities to asks questions if they wanted to.

Sensitivity was also needed during the interpretation of data. It was important to illuminate each participants unique experience and provide deeper interpretations of their responses, whilst remaining close to their accounts. This was done by regularly returning to the original interview transcript.

3.10.3 Commitment and Rigour

This criteria refers to the way in which the researcher approaches data collection, analysis and the reporting of findings. Various factors are important here, including; planning and preparation for the study, the sample used in the research and it's homogeneity, the skills of the researcher and how carefully the stages of IPA were followed.

Ethical approval was gained prior to beginning the research process and recruiting participants. I adhered to all ethical guidelines, including those set by the University's Ethics Committee, throughout the process. There was a thorough selection process for the recruitment of participants, and this was adhered to despite an initial difficulty in recruiting participants to ensure a homogenous sample for this study. This meant it took longer than expected until I was able to fully recruit the desired number of participants needed.

This research followed an iterative process, exploring question prompts in collaboration with several university tutors, making changes, returning to key texts about IPA, making changes, demonstrating diligence and a commitment to IPA. Carrying out pilot interviews prior to collecting my data allowed me to test out and amend my questions accordingly to ensure they were suitable to gather information needed to eventually answer my original research questions. Four interviews were completed with all four participants. The data collection can be considered complete, as all questions were asked by the researcher and answered by the participant.

An IPA researcher must attend to the data collection process to demonstrate 'rigour' as mentioned by Smith et al. (2022). I was able to do this by transcribing all interviews myself. This was a lengthy and time consuming process, however it allowed me, as the researcher, to familiarise myself with each participants account. Careful attention was given to ensure accuracy in transcribing, often meaning each interview was listened to at least five times or more, to focus on good quality transcription. I then followed the stages of IPA guidance as outlined by Smith et al. (2022). During analysis I was able to engage with the data whilst being critical of my own thoughts, which were recorded in my reflective diary.

3.10.4 Transparency and Coherence

This refers to the way in which the research is reported. I have attempted to present a transparent and coherent account throughout this thesis by detailing all decisions made throughout the research process. This can be seen from the beginning where it was clarified how the existing literature was used to inform my rationale and the research questions for this study. My philosophical stance was then presented alongside the selected research design.

Since IPA does not aim to make generalisable claims it is important for research to be transparent throughout the research reporting so it can be open to critical review. To ensure a high level of transparency, important decisions were detailed, such as how the research questions arose from the literature review. I have also inserted steps carried out as part of data analysis and a section of a participant's transcript that was fully analysed are included in the Appendix 7 so the steps of data analysis can be clarified. The findings are then presented using direct quotes from participant's transcripts to show how the final themes relate to the original data. Sections from my reflective diary at various points of my research journey were also included to ensure full transparency.

3.10.5 Impact and Importance

This criteria refers to how useful the research is and the impact it has on the world. Yardley (2000) suggests that the research must be useful for practitioners, policy makers, or the general community. It is important to recognise that I am not aiming to gather data to be generalisable, rather the focus is on the unique perspectives of parents regarding their child's experience of EBSA. Therefore, the findings are not generalisable to the wider population, however they can be useful in guiding me to reflect on and challenge my own professional

practice with regards to working with parents whose children might experience EBSA. This may also be informative for other professionals who also work with parents.

This research aims to offer an original contribution to this particular under-researched area, as there are very few studies currently explore parental experiences of their child's EBSA. The findings may also be valuable to the local authority I am currently on placement within, to better understand parental experiences and how to support them. Understanding what parents find helpful and a hindrance could be valuable for EP practice more generally.

3.10.6 Reflexivity

To add credibility to the study it is important for the researcher to have an awareness of their role throughout the study and how this could impact outcomes, also known as reflexivity (Weick, 2002). It is suggested for researcher to reflect on: their motivation for completing the research study, underlying assumptions the researcher may already have, how the researcher is connected to the research: theoretically, experientially, and emotionally, and the effects of these on the researchers approach (Haynes, 2012). To facilitate this process, a reflective diary was kept throughout the research, noting down thoughts and feelings, which was critical for maintaining a good level of self-awareness and identifying unconscious biases (Haynes, 2012).

As a researcher with a specific interest in EBSA and a motivation to support parents, it is important to recognise assumptions that may already exist. An example of an assumption may be that parents hold negative views about schools and their staff. It is important to be reflexive by recognising such thoughts and ensuring the impact they may have on the research is fully considered. This is known as 'bracketing' and it is an essential aspect of transparency.

As a current TEP and former teacher it was important to identify any potential preconceptions I may have held, to write these thoughts down in my reflective diary and discuss with my

supervisor in an attempt to bracket off previous knowledge. This ensured I was interpreting the data within their own right in relation to participant's experience rather than through my own bias. It was important to position myself as a researcher within this study, this had meant that if participants made a negative comment about EPs or teachers it was important not to react in a defensive or offended manner but to remain immersed in parents views.

I was also part of an IPA research group to discuss factors related to analysis and themes related to the coding of data. A peer from this group was able to review the data analysis and subsequent findings to help uncover any areas that could be considered either unclear or biased, that I may not have been aware of during the data analysis process. Having those external to the process review and comment on my work allowed me to reflect on areas I may not have considered.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction to Chapter

This chapter presents the data analysis. Each interview was analysed using the seven steps of IPA: reading and re-reading, exploratory noting, constructing experiential statements, searching for connections across experiential statements, naming the PETs and consolidating and organising them in a table, continuing the individual analysis of other cases, and working with PETs to develop GETs across cases (Smith et al., 2022). The steps of IPA were followed in order to explore parental experiences of their child's EBSA.

I will begin this section by presenting the research questions before presenting the PETs for each participant, along with the sub-themes derived from the exploratory notes that were initially made when carrying out the first stage of analysis, which involved reading and re-reading the transcripts. The PETs will then be developed into GETs, which will also be discussed, in relation to literature previously mentioned in Chapters One and Two, as well as new literature. PETs and GETs will be considered when answering the research questions.

4.2 Research Questions

It is helpful to restate the research questions before presenting the analysis and discussion of data gathered in this study:

1. What are parents experience of their child's EBSA?
2. How has their child's experience of EBSA impacted on parents, including homelife, family interactions and the family unit?
3. What are parent views on factors that help or hinder parents work with school staff and external professionals when managing their child's experience of EBSA?

4.3 Participants' Personal Experiential Themes

This section summarises the personal experiential themes (PETs), which are a collection of experiential statements clustered together (Smith et al., 2022). PETs from each participant's transcript will be discussed, illuminating experiences within their individual contexts, allowing participants to tell their stories and thus providing 'rich data'. Direct quotes from participants interview transcripts will be used when discussing PETs to hold onto unique features of each account, since IPA considers the importance of individual context, remaining 'experience near' and close to sense making. In the next sub-sections, PETs for each participant are presented and then interview responses are presented to illuminate each PET across participants. Presenting PETs in this way allows for transparency, retaining individual lived experiences and constructing key meaning across participant accounts.

4.4 Anna's Personal Experiential Themes

Anna's daughter, Katie, is of secondary school age and is currently experiencing EBSA. This section summarises the PETs that appear across Anna's personal experiences and presents interview responses to illuminate each PET. Anna's PETs include: 'Difficulties Supporting Special Educational Needs', 'Questioning Parenting Choices', 'The Emotional Strain on Parents', 'A Need To Sacrifice', 'The Importance of Good Communication with Staff and Professionals', and 'A Lack of Support from Staff and Professionals'. The PETs have been summarised in Table 8 and will be discussed further below, with quotes taken from Anna's original transcript that illuminate each PET.

Table 8.*Overview of Anna's Personal Experiential Themes*

Personal Experiential Themes	Sub-themes	Research Question the PET relates to
Difficulties Supporting Special Educational Needs	The Fight for an Autism Diagnosis	1
	The Need for an Education Health and Care Plan	
	Lack of Appropriate Provision	
Questioning Parenting Choices	Questioning Herself	2
	Blame and Guilt	
The Emotional Strain on Parents	Worry for the Future	2
	Cycles of Depression	
	Impact on Relationship with Mum and Husband	
A Need to Sacrifice	Disruption to Daily Routine	2
	Inability to Work	
The Importance of Good Communication with Staff and Professionals	School Staff Not Listening To Me	3
	Taken too Long to Respond to Concerns	
	Need for Reassurance from Professionals	
	Fear of Being Judged	
A Lack of Support from Staff and Professionals	No Compassion or Help for Parents	3
	Lack of Information about the Education and Health Care Plan Application Process from School Staff	

4.4.1 Personal Experiential Theme: Difficulties Supporting Special Educational Needs

This PET focuses on Anna's experience with regards to understanding and managing Katie's special educational needs, which she feels is a contributory factor towards Katie's experience of EBSA. Anna states the importance of gaining an autism diagnosis an EHCP for Katie and the difficulties she encountered along this journey.

i. Sub-theme: The Fight for an Autism Diagnosis

Anna noticed Katie struggling to attend educational settings and her social difficulties from a young age. Anna describes Katie masking her difficulties which she felt to be a big factor contributing towards her experience of EBSA. Katie received an autism diagnosis at the age of nine but Anna shared the fight for this. Anna mentions Katie's sensory difficulties, related to her autism which has impacted Katie's life.

“We've had to fight from day one right up until Katie was nine in order to get someone to say, 'you know what you're actually right mum there is something not right' and she was diagnosed with autism.”

Anna feels Katie's autism affected her academic progress which then contributed further towards her experience of EBSA. The time taken to acquire the autism diagnosis has impacted Anna significantly and has been detrimental to Katie in prolonging her difficulties with regards to attending school.

ii. Sub-theme: The Need for an Education Health and Care Plan

The significance of acquiring an EHCP is apparent throughout Anna's account. An ongoing battle for four years has taken place to convince the school to apply for an EHCP.

“School are telling me they can manage her and social services said it was not about whether the school can manage, it’s about whether Katie can manage. If Katie can’t manage she needs an EHCP. So it’s took us from year 7 until now for the school to actually say they’ll put her down for an EHCP...”

Anna regards Katie not acquiring an EHCP as the biggest barrier to her experience of EBSA and expresses the importance of ensuring she acquires one.

iii. Sub-theme: Lack of Appropriate Provision

Anna attached importance to acquiring an EHCP as she mentions not having one as the biggest block to Katie due to limiting her choices for provision.

“...because the school has refused to apply for an EHCP it’s put a block on to where Katie’s options are open. So because she hasn’t got one she hasn’t got the option of going to a special school or anything like that, it’s been put a stop to so she’s had to stay where she is which has had a major impact on her because I think she’s suffering and struggling a lot.”

Anna feels the current setting is not the right provision and there is no more the school can do to support Katie. Without the EHCP Katie cannot access a setting that Anna believes will be more suitable for her and Anna expressed the impact taking a long time to pursue an EHCP has had on Katie.

“Katie used to be in the mainstream classroom and we pulled her out ‘cause she couldn’t cope so then they sent her upstairs to the SEND unit and she’s still struggling and they’ve said after this option there is no more options left that they can offer and then we come to a dead end.”

Despite school staff attempting to make adjustments for Katie, such as moving her into the SEND unit, Anna feels this is not enough support as Katie is still struggling to attend school and she also expresses worry as she does not feel school are able to offer anymore support.

4.4.2 Personal Experiential Theme: Questioning Parenting Choices

Anna seems to be questioning herself throughout her account and there are elements of blame and guilt that appear.

i. Sub-theme: Questioning Herself

Anna questions herself throughout her account.

“...have I done the right thing? Am I making a big mistake as a mother? I don’t know...”

Anna seems uncertain about some of the decisions she has made and appears to question her role in Katie’s experience of EBSA.

ii. Sub-theme: Blame and Guilt

Anna’s portrays a sense of self-blame regarding Katie’s experience of EBSA.

“...If I’m honest a bit crappy as a mum, other people seem to manage it and they’ve got other children with SEN needs and they’ve got other children in the same household, so why can’t I?...”

Anna compares herself to other parents who seem to be managing fine, even those who have children with additional needs, and appears to hold a negative view of her parenting.

4.4.3 Personal Experiential Theme: The Emotional Strain on Parents

This PET highlights the emotional difficulties Anna has faced throughout Katie’s experience of EBSA, with many negative feelings. Anna expresses worry for Katie’s future, feeling depressed

and how EBSA has affected Anna's relationships with others and how this has impacted on her.

i. Sub-theme: Worry for the Future

Anna's worries for Katie's future are evident in her use of questions as she discusses her concerns with Katie as she transitions beyond school into adulthood.

“How do I help her go to college or get a job? She needs that statement to follow her through into adulthood so she's still got that help because when she leaves school all the doors will close on her and I don't want that to happen.”

Anna suggests the lack of opportunities and support available to Katie after leaving school is limited due to her not having an EHCP, which further adds to worries about how Katie will cope beyond school.

ii. Sub-theme: Cycles of Depression

Anna had already suffered from depression before Katie's experience of EBSA, however she acknowledges that her depression affects Katie and potentially contributes towards her non-attendance to school.

“I suffer with depression now on and off, every so often I plummet down and it does have an effect on all three children because they see me down and then because Katie's got her own issues as well then Katie will sit there and blame herself and say 'well if mum never had me mum would never feel down' and then it's a knock on effect with the other two children as well...”

A cycle of depression and blame are captured with Anna explaining that Katie feels responsible for Anna's depression which affects Katie's feelings about herself.

iii. Sub-theme: Impact on Relationship with Mum and Husband

Katie's experience of EBSA has created tension within Anna's relationships, particularly between with Anna's husband and mother, since Katie now lives with Anna's mother.

"It's impacted mine and mum's relationship as well. My mum might say yes and I'll come in and say no I'm the mum what I say goes, but in my mum's defence she's got to have a say because she lives with Katie. I can't set the rules in my mum's house because I don't live there."

There are times when Anna would like to make a decision regarding Katie, whether that be regarding her education or personal choices, and at times Anna's mother may oppose these. It becomes difficult for Anna to manage as whilst she remains to be Katie's legal guardian she feels that her mother should have a contribution towards decisions that may affect her in her own household. This means Anna must compromise with her own mother whilst trying to manage Katie's experience of EBSA, which she has found difficult and often causes conflict. There have also been difficulties faced within Anna's marriage as a result of Katie's experience of EBSA.

"...it's caused issues in our relationship because as I said I would like Katie to come and live with us because I believe we should be a family unit and we should all be together. So it has impacted relationship wise because we can't be a family, a conventional family like everybody else..."

There are times when Anna would like for Katie to move back into the family home with her to support her attendance to school and to be together as a family, however Anna's husband does not agree this is safe for her other two children due to Katie's previous concerning

behaviour when she did live in the family home. This has also caused tension, conflict and feelings of sadness for Anna.

4.4.4 Personal Experiential Theme: A Need to Sacrifice

Anna has had to make sacrifices to manage Katie's needs, and these include not being able to carry out tasks during her day as she normally would and affecting her ability to work.

i. Sub-theme: Disruption to Daily Routine

Anna's daily routine has been affected by Katie's experience of EBSA as she is not able to continue throughout her day as she usually receives a phone call from Katie asking to take her home from school as she struggles to manage attending.

“Without sounding selfish, I can't get anything done so I'm always on call if you like, even though Katie's not supposed to call me from school but she does and she'll call me every single time 'Mum can you come and get me? I can't cope mum. I need to come home'.”

Anna's feels 'selfish' about wanting to perform her daily routine without interruption.

ii. Sub-theme: Inability to Work

Anna is no longer able to work as she often has to attend the school at short notice to support Katie if she is struggling to cope.

“If I look for a job, which I have done in the past, I've not been able to start that job because I've had to put everything on hold because Katie needs me. So if I do get the job, as I've said to my husband, the boss isn't going to take too kindly to me coming out every single day because I've got issues at home. I'm going to get the sack before I've even started...I put everything on hold to make sure Katie's ok.”

Anna's mention of putting everything on hold suggests a desire to work but prioritising her support for Katie throughout her experience of EBSA.

4.4.5 Personal Experiential Theme: The Importance of Good Communication with Staff and Professionals

Anna recounts situations where she did not feel heard by staff. She explains how professionals did not listen to her, had taken too long to respond, and the need for reassurance and for communication to be free from judgement.

i. Sub-theme: School Staff Not Listening To Me

Anna recalled a specific situation when her daughter was due to begin nursery, she voiced concerns about Katie's behaviours and the need for staff within the setting to provide a high level of supervision at all times.

“...I said your fencing is not high enough and they didn't listen to me...”

Anna shared that her daughter would be able to get over the fence and the nursery did not act on this. Anna's daughter was able to get over the fence and into the car park in an attempt to get out of the school grounds. Following this incident the nursery replaced their fencing.

“...I think they heard what I was saying but I don't think they was listening to me...it feels as though what I'm telling them doesn't matter...”

Anna mentions school staff 'heard' what she was saying however she did not feel as though they had listened to her.

ii. Sub-theme: Taken too Long to Respond to Concerns

Anna mentions the length of time it has taken for school staff and professionals to respond to communication attempts, especially whilst trying to discuss acquiring an EHCP. Anna feels this delay is one of the main factors affecting Katie's progress with her education.

“...taken too long to get an EHCP, wasted four years watching her struggle and they waited till the last 12 months before she leaves...”

Anna feels that Katie would probably have been a lot further forward in her education if she had received an EHCP sooner, instead they began the process when Katie has little time remaining at the setting before she leaves. The only professional who questioned why it was taking so long to gain an EHCP was the educational psychologist.

iii. Sub-theme: Need for Reassurance from Professionals

Anna mentioned what she had to say did not matter to professionals, because she was a parent. She recalls a situation when an external professional came to visit Katie.

“...at last somebody has seen what me and her nan have seen...”

The professional was able to pick out Katie from a class of 30 students and identify that she was struggling to the class teacher. It seemed as though Anna was relieved to have some reassurance from someone else to confirm what she had been thinking, that her daughter was struggling in school.

iv. Sub-theme: Fear of Being Judged

Anna indicates a fear of being judged, she is unable to express how she feels or the true extent of the situation as others, professionals, can be judgemental.

“People are so judgemental today and I’m afraid to speak up in case we’re judged for whatever reason, you get scared of being judged.”

Anna highlights the importance of checking up on parents and asking them how really feel, suggesting that parents are often inclined to say they are ok when in fact they are struggling but afraid to voice this.

“I think there also should be something out there were people say to the parents ‘How are you really? How actually are you? How are things really going? I know you are telling people it’s going ok but how are you really?’ ...”

The use of the word ‘really’ shows that Anna expects parents to be hesitant to express themselves fully, potentially due to the fear of being judged.

4.4.6 Personal Experiential Theme: Lack of Support from Staff and Professionals

Anna account indicates a lack of compassion and help from school staff and professionals, including with the EHCP application process.

i. Sub-theme: No Compassion or Help for Parents

Anna did not feel those who were involved in working with Katie were compassionate.

“...people should say to parents, ‘how are you really?’ ...”

Anna shared that no one had asked her how she was during the entire experience and she had been seeking support for Katie for a number of years. Anna also shared her views about professionals.

“...help isn’t there from professionals...”

Anna expressed deep gratitude for her family, specifically her mum and sister, who had supported her throughout the ongoing difficulties and Anna mentions they were her only source of help and support.

ii. Sub-theme: Lack of Information about the Education Health and Care Plan Application Process from School Staff

Anna mentions hearing about an EHCP was from someone she knew rather than the school or professionals involved in Katie's case.

“...someone could have supported me with the EHCP application process a long time ago...”

Once Anna became aware of the EHCP she felt the school should have mentioned it a long time ago so they could apply for the additional funding to support Katie's needs sooner whilst at school.

4.4.7 Summary of Anna's Personal Experiential Themes

Anna's PETs 'Difficulties Supporting Special Educational Needs' gives an insight into how she understands Katie's EBSA. It appears that Anna's understanding of her daughter's EBSA centred around Katie's special educational needs and the lack of support with regards to managing these within school. Anna highlighted the importance of gaining an autism diagnosis, as she expressed the autism contributed towards her daughter Katie struggling to attend school. Anna also felt her daughter was not receiving the most appropriate support to manage her autism within school which is why she was seeking an EHCP.

Anna's PETs 'Questioning Parenting Choices', 'The Emotional Strain on Parents' and 'A Need To Sacrifice' reflect how Katie's experience of EBSA has impacted Anna's life more widely. Anna is personally affected in various ways by Katie's EBSA. She makes references to poor

mental health as she worries for the future and experiences cycles of depression. Anna also mentions the negative impact of Katie's EBSA on her relationships, daily routines and her ability to work.

Anna's PETs 'The Importance of Good Communication with Staff and Professionals' and 'A Lack of Support from Staff and Professionals' relate to the helping and hindering factors when working with school staff and professionals whilst managing Katie's experience of EBSA. She expressed school staff not understanding her daughter's needs which meant they were not able to provide the correct support, she also mentioned a lack of support from professionals and limited appropriate provision for Katie to attend. Anna also felt responsible for Katie's non-attendance and questioned her parenting skills and expressed both blame and guilt for Katie's non-attendance, further affecting her mental health. I have inserted an extract from my reflexive journal below to express how I felt after completing Anna's interview, which can be seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5.

An extract from the researchers reflective journal that demonstrates reflexivity following Anna's interview.

Anna's account was really emotional, there were times where I had to ask her if she wanted to take a break from the interview to take some time for herself before continuing, but she didn't. This was a reminder of just how emotional the experience has been so far. It was also important not to react when Anna mentioned anything positive or negative about professionals, particularly EPs as I was there as a researcher to gain a better understanding of her experience and I did not want Anna to feel that she couldn't share that with me.

4.5 Chloe’s Personal Experiential Themes

Chloe’s son Alex is of secondary school age and experiencing EBSA. This section summarises Chloe’s PETs, which include ‘Limited Support for Alex’s Special Educational Needs’, ‘Struggling with Strained Relationships’, ‘Experiencing Sacrifice and Struggle’, and ‘The Importance of Regular Communication’. Chloe’s PETs will be discussed further to capture her views and individual experience. Chloe’s PETs have been summarised in Table 9 below.

Table 9.

Overview of Chloe’s Personal Experiential Themes

Personal Experiential Themes	Sub-themes	Research Question the PET relates to
Limited Support for Special Educational Needs	Education Health and Care Plan is Key	1
	Struggling with Autism	
	School Failure	
Struggling with Strained Relationships	Impact on Marriage	2
	Bond with Son	
	Difficulties with Wider Family	
Experiencing Sacrifice and Struggle	Loss of Career	2
	Financial Impact	
	Disrupted Daily Routine	
	Health Difficulties	
The Importance of Regular Communication	Need for Staff to Keep in Touch	3
	Professionals Took too Long to Respond	

4.5.1 Personal Experiential Theme: Limited Support for Special Educational Needs

Chloe highlights lack of support available at school for Alex. She focuses on the importance of the EHCP for Alex in addition to the difficulties he faces due to his autism.

i. Sub-theme: Education Health and Care Plan is Key

Chloe expresses the difficulties she experienced with regards to obtaining an EHCP for Alex.

“...school have never followed the care plan, the EHCP, it’s not been followed. They don’t follow the care plan and one teacher didn’t even know that he had a care plan, which we fought for the care plan and it’s never been used.”

An EHCP was gained after Chloe ‘fought’ for one however despite the effort to acquire the EHCP Chloe feels the school have never followed the plan and have not been meeting Alex’s needs. Chloe feels this has made it more challenging for Alex to attend school.

ii. Sub-theme: Struggling with Autism

Chloe shares that Alex’s autism contributes towards his difficulty with remaining within the school setting due to the social demands which he finds challenging.

“...he’s had the diagnosis of autism as well and he won’t look at people or talk to people. We’ve just gone to the college and he wouldn’t engage, wouldn’t talk to them, and wouldn’t look at them.”

Alex is experiencing difficulties with his language and communication skills as well as his social skills. Chloe has already explained that Alex is not receiving adequate support to meet his needs which could be preventing him from developing in areas most needed to improve his social communication.

iii. Sub-theme: School Failure

Chloe expressed strong views about the school setting that Alex attends.

“...I can’t blame individual people because it’s the whole school, it’s the whole setting...”

Chloe was unable to locate the difficulty within particular members of staff, rather she felt the whole school setting collectively had failed Alex, indicating a wider systemic issue.

4.5.2 Personal Experiential Theme: Strained relationships

Chloe is feeling the impact of Alex's experience of EBSA on her relationships, including her relationship with Alex himself, her husband and wider family.

i. Sub-theme: Impact on Marriage

Chloe has found trying to understand and manage Alex's experience of EBSA to cause conflict and friction between her and her husband, Arthur.

"It's caused issues between me and my husband, we've had arguments like in the morning. Arthur will blame me and so it's a case of blaming each other..."

Chloe expressed the strain that has been placed on their relationship as a result of the EBSA and uses the word 'miracle' to capture how they are still together to reflect just how difficult the situation has been. There have been arguments and blame which Chloe and her husband have had to work through together.

ii. Sub-theme: Bond with Son

Chloe has experienced difficulties with maintaining a positive relationship with Alex.

"...it's caused too many arguments at home, we used to argue terrible I'd sit there for two hours trying to get him to do his homework in the juniors."

Chloe's attempts to get Alex to do anything related to school, whether that included completing homework or attending school, often led to arguments. Chloe has since found that her relationship with Alex is better when there is no pressure on him regarding school, and so she does not apply any pressure about school.

iii. Sub-theme: Difficulties with Wider Family

Chloe has also encountered difficulties with her wider family who are not always empathetic to their current situation with Alex.

“...it’s caused issues with everybody because if we’ve had plans, we’ve had to stop them so it’s caused issues with our whole family.”

The need to constantly change or cancel plans has upset other family members if Alex is having a difficult time so Chloe has had to resort to not making any plans to avoid the difficulty it causes when Alex remains at home and she is unable to attend plans made.

4.5.3 Personal Experiential Theme: Sacrifice and Struggle

Chloe’s account has reoccurring themes representing the sacrifices made and struggles endured throughout her journey as she support Alex with his experience of EBSA. Chloe has had to leave her job which has had financial consequences as the pressure falls on Alex’s father. Chloe also mentions how her daily life has been affected as a direct impact of Alex’s experience of EBSA.

i. Sub-theme: Loss of Career

Chloe’s job was affected by Alex’s experience of EBSA.

“I didn’t go back to work because then Alex was playing up so I wouldn’t be able to hold a full time job...”

Chloe recalls a time when the school phoned her whilst she was at work some distance away from Alex’s school to pick him up as he was struggling. Following similar incidents like this which were reoccurring Chloe decided she would look for some form of work closer to Alex in case he needed her and she decided to start the dog walking.

ii. Sub-theme: Financial Impact

Chloe was feeling the strain of leaving her job as a greater strain was placed upon her husband. The financial burden has been placed onto Chloe's husband, who also had to cancel work to support with managing Alex's EBSA and to attend important meetings which placed an even greater strain on Chloe and the family as a whole.

iii. Sub-theme: Disrupted Daily Routine

Chloe explains how she has to constantly go back and forth between home and school if Alex is having a bad day and wants to return home..

“There's no areas left really, it throws my plans with my mom out and it's quite upsetting you get to a stage where you can't make plans. You know what I mean? You don't wanna make plans because it's all, it's always disrupted.

The need to collect Alex from school has a particularly significant impact on Chloe's day as she is regularly having to cancel or change plans she has made to support Alex. This eventually has stopped Chloe from making any plans as she often finds they are disrupted so it has become easier to keep her day free so she can support Alex, although she finds this difficult.

iv. Sub-theme: Health Difficulties

There has been consequences for Chloe's health as a result of trying to get Alex to school. Chloe describes both mental and physical health difficulties. She is currently on antidepressants and often feels like giving up and walking out so avoid the situation. Chloe also mentions the impact on her physical health.

“...because Alex's twice my size I couldn't get him out of bed myself, I have difficulty getting him dressed and I can't physically do it cause it's hurt my back. I've had a lot of

backaches, headaches and neckaches from trying to get him up and out in the morning since he's had his avoidance..."

Chloe no longer attempts to physically move Alex in the morning when he finds it difficult to get out of bed or to get dressed for school, and also suffers from physical pain as a result.

4.5.4 Personal Experiential Theme: The Importance of Regular Communication

Chloe's account brings to light the need for school staff and professionals to keep in touch, the difficulties experienced when trying to reach school staff and professionals and time taken to respond to communication.

i. Sub-theme: Need for Staff to Keep in Touch

Chloe values those who keep in touch with her and are easy to reach. Chloe specifically recalls one member of staff within school who would regularly keep in contact with her.

"...any queries I always go to her..."

Chloe would telephone this particular member of staff as she was always willing to help and would answer or return her telephone calls. Chloe then recounts the opposite experience she would have with professionals she worked with.

"...nobody would get back to me and it took me to threatening..."

Chloe struggled to get in contact with professionals and only managed to get some form of communication if she escalated matters in the form of a complaint, which would eventually prompt professionals to contact her.

ii. Sub-theme: Professional Took too Long to Respond

Chloe also suggests professionals took too long to respond to concerns which resulted in further delays.

“...waste of time, all of this is like four years too late and he’s leaving in three months...”

Professionals involved have begun to communicate with Chloe however she feels it is too late now that Alex is about to leave secondary school in a few months.

4.5.5 Summary of Chloe’s Personal Experiential Themes

Chloe’s PET ‘Limited Support for SEND’ suggests how she understands Alex’s EBSA. Chloe expressed the contributing factors towards Alex’s EBSA included: school staff not following Alex’s EHCP, Alex struggling with autism and school failing to support Alex.

Chloe’s PET ‘Struggling with Strained Relationships’ and ‘Experiencing Sacrifice and Struggle’ give an insight into how Alex’s experience of EBSA has impacted Chloe’s life. Alex’s experience of EBSA impacted Chloe in various ways such as: affecting Chloe’s marriage, disrupting Chloe’s relationship with Alex, and encountering difficulties and challenges with her wider family. Chloe also mentions the impact of Alex’s EBSA on various areas of her life: she was unable to continue working which led to financial implications, her daily routine was also disrupted and she experienced health difficulties.

Chloe’s PET ‘The Importance of Regular Communication’ indicates helping and hindering factors when working with school staff and professionals whilst managing Alex’s experience of EBSA. Chloe mentions the support from one member of staff at school was helpful as they would keep in contact regularly and the importance of responding to communication in a timely manner.

4.6 Overview of Mary’s Personal Experiential Themes

This section summarises Mary’s PETs regarding Ben’s EBSA, which can be seen in Table 10. Mary’s PETs include: ‘Unmet Special Educational Needs’, ‘The Impact of Trauma’, ‘Considering Parenting Choices’, ‘Loss and Sacrifice’, ‘The Importance of Empathy for Parents’, and ‘A Lack of Urgency from Professionals’. Mary’s PETs will be discussed in more detail below, using direct quotes from her interview to reinforce the sub-themes and PETs further. At times Mary often also makes reference to her older son, James, when answering questions as he also experienced EBSA.

Table 10.

Overview of Mary’s Personal Experiential Themes

Personal Experiential Themes	Sub-themes	Research Question the PET relates to
Unmet Special Educational Needs	Need for an Education Health and Care Plan	1
	Need for an Autism Diagnosis	
	Need for Specialist Provision	
The Impact of Trauma	Prolonged Distress at School	1
	Difficulties at Home	
Considering Parenting Choices	Questioning Herself	2
	Guilt and Self-Blame	
Loss and Sacrifice	Giving up a Loved Job	2
	Loss of Independence	
	Broken Friendships	
The Importance of Empathy for Parents	Being Understood by Professionals	3
	Kindness and Care from School Staff and Professionals	
	Fear of Judgement from Friends and Staff	
A Lack of Urgency from Professionals	Time Taken to Respond	3
	Poor Communication	

4.6.1 Personal Experiential Theme: Unmet Special Educational Needs

Mary's account of Ben's experience of EBSA draws attention to the need for Ben to acquire various levels of support such as an EHCP, an autism diagnosis, and specialist provision.

i. Sub-theme: Need for an Education Health and Care Plan

Mary attributed part of Ben's struggle with attending school to him not having an EHCP.

"...it was clear that he was struggling, he hadn't got an EHCP..."

An EHCP was eventually gained for Ben. Whilst Mary did not experience any difficulty in attaining the EHCP she did explain she felt it was necessary for Ben in order to get him the support he needed at school.

ii. Sub-theme: Need for an Autism Diagnosis

Mary described the difficulties Ben was experiencing that she felt were related to autism and therefore she mentioned the importance of seeking a diagnosis. Mary described Ben's presentation at school as highly distressed.

"...no diagnosis, but it was getting increasingly difficult to get Ben through even the gate, let alone into the building and he was becoming very distressed...started having quite bad panic attacks and shutting down and not wanting to speak and he did start hitting himself..."

Mary expressed how the difficulties Ben experienced were escalating due to not yet having a diagnosis for autism. Mary believed the diagnosis could lead to additional support for Ben.

"...the long wait for it took a really, really long time for the paperwork to be filled in and sent off for Ben's multi agency assessment. We could have done with knowing, we've been talking about it for a really long time but it seems to have taken a really, really long

time for that paperwork to go in, knowing that there's up to a year for waiting lists for the panel date..."

Mary shared that the long wait for the autism assessment referral was problematic and there was a need to complete this as soon as possible.

iii. Sub-theme: Need for Specialist Provision

Mary felt that Ben was not suited to a mainstream setting and specialist provision was necessary. Since Ben had an EHCP it was possible to request a place within a specialist setting however Mary described the difficulties she encountered with this.

"...I have spent so many, so many hours on car parks with distressed children, trying to get them into school that they clearly don't want to go to and possibly isn't suitable for them...there aren't enough suitable provisions for children like James and Ben. It's all very overwhelming because you absolutely want to find the right place. People don't wanna recommend schools, you've got to do it through word of mouth. I don't know of any other children or families that are in specialist provision so I find it really hard..."

Mary mentioned that it was difficult to find a specialist school near to where she lived and she was looking for provision for both Ben and specialist post-16 provision for Ben's older brother, James. Reasons for the challenge include the lack of appropriate provision and not being able to speak to others about specialist provision.

4.6.2 Personal Experiential Theme: The Impact of Trauma

Mary described Ben's prolonged distress at school as well as difficulties he has been exposed to at home in relation to his older brother, James.

i. Sub-theme: Prolonged Distress at School

Mary shared that Ben's difficulties began in year 7 and it was clear that he was struggling at school. Ben did not have an EHCP or an autism diagnosis and Mary found it increasingly difficult to get Ben through the school gates as he was becoming more distressed over time.

“...it just became more and more unbearable for him and unbearable for us, and what they did was then they put him on a very reduced timetable...”

When Ben was present at school he began to display increasingly concerning behaviours such as having panic attacks, hitting himself and not wanting to speak. Mary found it uncomfortable to continue sending Ben to school where she knew he would be distressed.

ii. Sub-theme: Difficulties at Home

Mary acknowledges some difficult experiences that Ben has observed within the family home, pertaining to his older brother, that may also have contributed towards his experience of EBSA.

“...he's witnessed and heard some quite awful things happening in the house with James, there's been a lot of self injurious behaviour, suicidal ideation, meltdowns and particularly through COVID we were very isolated in the house...”

Ben's older brother, James, has experienced some mental health difficulties which may have affected Ben and added to the trauma he has experienced.

4.6.3 Personal Experiential Theme: Considering Parenting Choices

Mary appeared to be questioning herself during her account and her choice of words indicated elements of guilt and self-blame when discussing Ben's experience of EBSA.

i. Sub-theme: Questioning Herself

Mary used a range of questions within her responses to describe Ben's experience of EBSA from her perspective.

“...did we miss something? is it something we've done? have I done something wrong?...”

There appeared to be a lot of uncertainty as Mary reflected on Ben's situation and her use of multiple questions highlight this further. Mary also wonders whether she is responsible for Ben's experience of EBSA.

ii. Sub-theme: Guilt and self-blame

In addition to Mary questioning herself, she also comments on her parenting ability.

“...you actually feel like you've failed...”

Mary does not hold positive views regarding her role and her use of the word 'failed' when discussing her parenting suggests a sense of guilt and self-blame.

4.6.4 Personal Experiential Theme: Loss and Sacrifice

The theme of loss throughout Mary's account was apparent. She has sacrificed various elements of her life such as her career, independence, identity and her friends.

i. Sub-theme: Giving Up a Loved Job

Mary seems to be affected greatly by having to leave her job to take care of Ben whilst he remains at home for a significant period of time.

“...I was increasingly having more time off and couldn't think of any other solution of what to do. It got to a point where I either left or I was going to be sacked, which was really, really hard because I really enjoyed my job...”

Mary really enjoyed her job which made it difficult to quit. Mary also expressed embarrassment when she compares herself to her friends as they have got what Mary considers to be really good, successful jobs and careers.

ii. Sub-theme: Loss of Independence

Mary is unable to carry out her day to day life in a way that suits her.

“...the biggest impact is the fact that I don’t get that break when he should be at school. I just can’t pop out and go out and do things that I’d like to do.”

With Ben being at home for longer periods of time Mary cannot visit the shops or carry out errands as and when she needs to, which she appears to find difficult.

iii. Sub-theme: Broken Friendships

Mary has had a different experience of raising her children than those in her friendship circle.

“...it’s hard to relate to some friends because they’re living quite different lives to yourself and we have lost some friends along the way I would say with this journey because not everyone understands it...”

Since Mary’s friends were unable to relate to her situation it resulted in a growing distance between them which eventually led to the end of some friendships.

4.6.5 Personal Experiential Theme: The Importance of Empathy for Parents

Mary shared the need to be understood, kindness and care, and the fear of judgement from others.

i. Sub-theme: Being Understood by Professionals

Mary was very passionate about supporting Ben through his experience of EBSA and would often spend time researching information prior to meeting with professionals. Mary would

often vocalise her views if she felt strongly about them and felt this was usually misunderstood for confrontation if she disagreed with a professional.

“...there’s a misunderstanding, I have said oh you know mum’s anxiety is rubbing off on Ben and stopping him from coming to school and I’ve actually had that statement used against me and I said it’s the situation that’s making me anxious, you know, and this is what people don’t understand. It’s easy for professionals to say it’s to do with mum’s anxiety without understanding the situation and then I’m sort of at this battle where the situation it’s making me anxious.”

Mary felt she sought help from professionals as a parent but has not received any. She mentioned that help only arrives once crisis has been reached rather than preventing the situation from escalating at an earlier stage. Mary’s does not always agree with what professionals say and does not feel they always get things right for her child. In some situations she has felt the need to challenge professionals and their decisions. Mary feels this disagreement is misinterpreted as her being a difficult parent.

ii. Sub-theme: Kindness and Care from Staff and Professionals

Mary shared her experience of working with school staff and professionals.

“...you don’t often get asked how you are as a parent...”

Mary shared that she did not find the majority of those who were involved in Ben’s case to be particularly kind or caring towards her, nor did they ask how she was. It seemed to be important to Mary to be asked how she was by others involved in managing Ben’s experience of EBSA.

iii. Sub-theme: Fear of Judgement from School Staff and Friends

Mary feels she has received judgement from friends disguised as advice. She also felt school staff have been judgemental about the decisions she has made.

“I do listen to what he’s saying and the school don’t like it. I take him home and they (school staff) say you’re never gonna get him in if we don’t get past this stage.”

Mary has made choices that she feels are in Ben’s best interest to support his wellbeing whereas she feels this is viewed negatively by the school and feels as though she is being judged as exacerbating Ben’s experience of EBSA.

4.6.6 Personal Experiential Theme: A Lack of urgency from Professionals

Mary sensed a lack of urgency in responding to Ben’s situation, she expressed others took too long to respond and communication was poor.

i. Sub-theme: Time taken to Respond

Mary mentioned a long wait for CAMHS and the time taken for the autism assessment paperwork to be completed was very long.

“...there never seems to be a rush...”

Mary did not feel that her desire as a parent to solve Ben’s difficulties straight away was shared with others, particularly external agencies, as they seemed to act quite slowly.

ii. Sub-theme: Poor Communication

Mary highlighted communication as an important factor related to the urgency of the response provided.

“...I do find it hard to get hold of some people sometimes which is difficult and I think where my frustration has come that you can’t contact people and then you try email...”

Not being able to speak to professionals was a struggle and frustrating for Mary as she explored various methods of communication, including telephone and email.

4.6.7 Summary of Mary's Personal Experiential Themes

Mary's PETs 'Unmet Special Educational Needs', and 'The Impact of Trauma' give an insight into how she understands Ben's EBSA. Mary expressed the need for various levels of support such as an EHCP, an autism diagnosis and specialist provision. Mary also shared how distress experienced at school and difficulties within the home may have contributed towards Ben's EBSA.

Mary's PETs 'Considering Parenting Choices' and 'Loss and Sacrifice' captured how Ben's EBSA impacted her personally. Mary expressed feelings of guilt and self-blame which had a negative impact on her wellbeing. Mary also gave up a job that she enjoyed, she had lost a sense of her own independence and suffered broken relationships with her friends who did not understand her situation.

Mary's PETs 'The Importance of Empathy for Parents' and 'A Lack of Urgency from Professionals' refer to the helping and hindering factors when working with school staff and professionals whilst managing Ben's experience of EBSA. Mary felt school staff and professionals did not always understand her and were not always kind or caring. Mary also portrayed a lack of urgency with school staff and professionals taking too long to respond to concerns and not always keeping lines of communication open.

4.7 Paul's Personal Experiential Themes

This section summarises Paul's PETs which are: 'Seeking an Autism Diagnosis', 'Traumatic Experiences', 'The Need for Peace', 'The Need for Training School Staff and Professionals', 'Power Imbalances between School Staff Professionals and Parents', and 'The Importance of Empathy for Parents'. An overview of Paul's PETs can be seen in Table 11. Each PET will be discussed further, using direct quotes from Paul's transcript. Paul also often refers to his older son, James, in his account when discussing Ben's experience of EBSA as James also experienced EBSA when he attended school.

Table 11.

Overview of Paul's Personal Experiential Themes

Personal Experiential Themes	Sub-themes	Research Question the PET relates to
Seeking an Autism Diagnosis	Autistic Traits	1
	Difficulties Maintaining Friendships	
Traumatic Experiences	Difficulties Within the Home	1
	Separation Anxiety	
The Need for Peace	Loss of Own Company and Time	2
	Conflict and Disagreement	
	Impact on Personal Wellbeing	
The Need for Training School Staff and Professionals	Unprofessional Behaviour from Professionals	3
	Lack of Knowledge and Skills in School Staff	
Power Imbalance between School Staff, Professionals and Parents	Being Judged by Friends and Professionals	3
	Feeling Intimidated by Staff and Professionals	
The Importance of Empathy for Parents	Understanding and Compassion for Parents from School Staff	3
	Impact of Unhelpful Words from School Staff	

4.7.1 Personal Experiential Theme: Seeking an Autism Diagnosis

Paul describes Ben's autistic traits and how these have impacted on his ability to attend school and these include masking and difficulties with friendships.

i. Sub-theme: Autistic Traits

Paul shared that Ben is currently undergoing an assessment for autism and Paul feels this may be one of the contributing factors towards his non-attendance to school. Paul expressed Ben's struggles which could be related to autism.

“...he's majorly masking which leads to meltdowns...”

Paul described how the school would share that Ben appeared to be fine at school as they would not see the meltdowns that Ben would experience once he arrived home and Paul felt this was due to Ben masking his difficulties throughout the school day. Paul also shared that staff seemed to struggle to understand why autistic children may present differently at home and school and suggested staff receive more training on autism to develop their understanding.

ii. Sub-theme: Difficulties Maintaining Friendships

Paul noticed that Ben would also struggle with relationships, particularly his friendships.

“...he has had some issues with his friends and his school friends are no longer his friends...”

Paul explained Ben's difficulties with relationships could also be related to his potential autism, which Paul felt would explain why Ben found himself in conflict with his friends on a regular basis and why he found repairing and maintaining friendships a challenge. Falling out

with his friends would then lead to Ben not wanting to attend school to avoid particular individuals.

4.7.2 Personal Experiential Theme: Traumatic Experiences

Paul describes a range of negative and potentially traumatic experiences that Ben has encountered within the family home.

i. Sub-theme: Difficulties Within the Home

Another factor that Paul feels has led to Ben's experience of EBSA are difficulties that Ben has experienced within the home.

"I think his school avoidance it comes from the situation at home. So as Ben was growing up like the last three years I'd say he's had to witness a lot of things. I feel that's kind of played a lot of into how he has progressed through his childhood, through school, especially into secondary school..."

Ben's older brother, James, has experienced mental health difficulties and EBSA. Paul feels this has affected Ben a lot.

ii. Sub-theme: Separation Anxiety

Paul indicated that Ben's previous difficult experiences may have eventually led to him wanting to remain at home to be close to his parents out of worry and fear for what might happen whilst he would be out at school.

"...I think there's a lot of separation anxiety. Ben didn't want to leave us, you know, he was scared that something might happen to us..."

Paul expresses Ben's worries about attending school could be driven by separation anxiety, not wanting to leave his parents out of fear something negative might occur, which is deep rooted in previous negative home experiences.

4.7.3 Personal Experiential Theme: The Need for Peace

There are various times during Paul's account where it becomes apparent that he is feeling overwhelmed about various factors related to Ben's experience of EBSA, and these include the loss of his own company and time, conflict and disagreement, and the impact on his personal wellbeing.

i. Sub-theme: Loss of Own Company and Time

Paul expresses frustration about losing aspects of his daily life that would normally be a source of comfort for him.

"...selfishly I would do what I wanted when I come out of work, everyone's in bed, so you know I had that time then, but now we're all there together at the same time. You know it can get a bit frustrating really. I love my own company and just having that time to myself."

However, now that Ben is at home in addition to his wife, he finds that alone time has been taken away.

ii. Sub-theme: Conflict and Disagreement

Paul mentions conflict between him and his wife with regards to Ben's experience of EBSA, which has been challenging.

"...we do have different views on certain things, sometimes and that can create issues or friction, we can conflict on ideas."

Paul has found differing views with his wife difficult to manage and the couple have attended family therapy together as a means to resolve their conflict.

iii. Sub-theme: Impact on Personal Wellbeing

Paul finds the mental toll the situation regarding Ben's experience of EBSA is taking on him personally being too much to manage.

“...we just need a break, like with Ben and it's not worked out you know.”

There is a sense of struggle in Paul's reflection with regards to the impact of Ben's EBSA. Paul mentions how difficult it has been to manage Ben's experience of EBSA, particularly when he arrives to school and begins to cry and hit himself. Paul had thought the situation would improve over time but has found it increasingly challenging and his worry for Ben's wellbeing has affected Paul in many ways and to physically distance himself from the situation feels like the only way to feel relief.

4.7.4 Personal Experiential Theme: The Need for Training School Staff and Professionals

Paul highlights his experience of unprofessional behaviour from professionals who have been involved in Ben's case and suggests there is a lack of knowledge and important skills amongst school staff and professionals.

i. Sub-theme: Unprofessional Behaviour from Professionals

Paul expressed his disappointment at the way professionals approached meetings that were held to support Ben.

“...multiple meetings where they haven't turned up and it's almost like they've washed their hands of him, maybe there was a reason for that maybe they were busy but to not even say they couldn't attend was disappointing...”

There were instances where some professionals did not arrive to meetings which was disappointing. Paul accepted that a valid reason may have arisen due to the busy schedule of professionals however felt they should have informed them they would not be able to attend.

ii. Sub-theme: Lack of Knowledge and Skills In School Staff

Paul mentioned in his account that those working with him, particularly school staff, lack important knowledge and skills needed to do their roles effectively.

“...we just want someone to say ‘we understand, we understand it’s not home’...”

Paul expressed his anger at the terms staff were using when discussing Ben’s difficulties, particularly ‘school refusal’. Paul attributed a lack of understanding toward their inability to adequately support Ben and suggested they needed more training.

4.7.5 Personal Experiential Theme: Power Imbalance between School Staff, Professionals and Parents

Being judged and feeling intimidated were also identified as important aspects of Paul’s account which will be explored further.

i. Sub-theme: Being Judged by Friends and Professionals

Paul seemed concerned about revealing the extent of the family difficulties with regards to his parenting skills from both friends and professionals. This prevented him from being able to be open and vulnerable with them regarding the situation with Ben.

“...our friends and people who we associate with, not all know the full story...”

This portrays a sense of worry with regards to what others might think as he revealed not sharing full details of the situation with those who he considered friends.

Professionals were quick to make judgements about Paul despite not being aware of the full situation.

“...the social worker...we said like do you know what our situation is? She’s said no no I’ve not read the notes. Now so I was like shocked, this is because you know she’s been making snap judgements, really she doesn’t know the ins and outs of what we’ve been through.”

Paul was frustrated that some professionals he had worked with failed to read important notes about the families situation but still judged the family and their situation. It also caused Paul to have to retell his story which was difficult as he continues to relive each difficult moment every time he must do so.

ii. Sub-theme: Feeling Intimidated by Staff and Professionals

Paul felt particularly uncomfortable during meetings with others when discussing Ben’s experience of EBSA.

“...if there’s something I wanted to say, you know I should feel comfortable in front of all these people, but sometimes, you’ve got 10 people there and it’s quite intimidating. “

Paul describes a power imbalance between himself and others attending meetings which is caused by the large number of professionals and school staff in attendance. Paul does not feel comfortable sharing his views and thoughts in front of all those present.

Paul did not always feel he was able to speak up and challenge those he thought were wrong.

“...I’ll be thinking about it, like I wish I would have said that or you know, I wish I would have backed Mary up on that one...”

Paul expressed regret in hindsight and he wished he had said more during meetings, particularly when he disagreed with others or when there were missed opportunities to support his wife. There was a strong sense of intimidation during meetings which Paul was hindered by.

4.7.6 Personal Experiential Theme: The Importance of Empathy for Parents

There are various times throughout the interview where Paul references the needs for school staff and professionals to be understanding and compassionate whilst considering the impact of their words.

i. Sub-theme: Understanding and Compassion for Parents from School Staff

Paul describes the support he received from the school's family liaison officer and details why he felt she was a source of support.

“...family liaison officer is really supportive for us...understanding, softly spoken, compassionate...”

Key qualities the family liaison officer possessed, which Paul identified as being helpful, included being understanding and compassionate.

ii. Sub-theme: Impact of Unhelpful Words from School Staff

Paul gave specific examples of situations when he felt school staff were unsupportive and unhelpful and this included the verbal interactions they would have. Paul felt strongly about the choice of words used by staff.

“...enrage us...the wording ‘school refusal’ ...”

The term ‘school refusal’ was a particular trigger for Paul and often led to him feeling angry as he felt it portrayed Ben as choosing to not attend school, whereas Paul understood that

Ben wanted to attend school but there were various factors that resulted in him finding this difficult.

4.7.7 Summary of Paul's Personal Experiential Themes

Paul's PETs 'Seeking an Autism Diagnosis' and 'Traumatic Experiences' portray how he understands Ben's EBSA. Paul attributes Ben's EBSA to his undiagnosed autism, which include masking and difficulties maintaining friendships. Paul also considers how difficulties within the home and separation anxiety have affected Ben.

Paul's PET 'The Need for Peace' suggests how Ben's experience of EBSA has affected him and his relationships. Paul mentions how Ben's experience of EBSA has affected him as he experienced the loss of his own company and time, it caused conflict and disagreement within his marriage, and it has had a negative impact on his personal wellbeing.

Paul's PETs 'The Need for Training School Staff and Professionals', 'Power Imbalance between School Staff, Professionals and Parents' and 'The Importance of Empathy for Parents' indicate the helping and hindering factors when working with school staff and professionals whilst managing Ben's experience of EBSA. Paul felt professionals were unprofessional at times and school staff needed further training. Paul also shared he felt judged by others and struggled when friends who discuss their children as he felt they were comparing and he also often felt intimidated, particularly during meetings. Paul expressed the importance of professionals and school staff needing to be empathetic, he was supported by the school's family support worker who demonstrated empathetic skills. Paul also highlighted the significance of the language used by those involved in Ben's case and how crucial it is to select appropriate wording.

4.8 Overview of Group Experiential Themes

The PETs generated from each individual account were compared for patterns to produce group experiential themes (GETs), as shown in Table 12. This section introduces each GET and then summarises the PETs that appeared across participant experiences for each GET. Presenting data in this way think provides transparency, retains individual lived experiences and allows for the construction of key meanings across participants.

Table 12.

Group experiential themes and related personal experiential themes.

Group Experiential Themes	Personal Experiential Themes	Research Question GET relates to
Understanding and Meeting Special Educational Needs	Receiving an Autism Diagnosis	1
	Acquiring an Education	
	Health and Care Plan	
	Finding Appropriate Provision	
Sacrifice and Loss	Strained Relationships	2
	Impact on Career	
Impact on Health	Mental Wellbeing	2
	Physical Consequences	
Battle for Support	Need for Communication	3
	Importance of Empathy	
	Time to Respond	
Power Imbalance	Being Judged	3
	Feeling Intimidated	

4.8.1 Group Experiential Theme: Understanding and Meeting Special Educational Needs

All participants made some mention of their child having SEN needs, some of which were not being met. Participants described their journey, and often difficulty, in gaining an autism diagnosis, trying to acquire an EHCP and finding suitable provision that catered for their needs.

i. Personal Experiential Theme: Receiving an Autism Diagnosis

All participants talked about the importance of receiving a diagnosis. Anna's daughter and Chloe's son both received an autism diagnosis, but they found the process difficult to navigate. Anna describes sensory difficulties which she felt contributed towards her daughter's experience of EBSA. Chloe mentions Alex struggling with the social demands of school which she felt was a reason for him finding it difficult to attend. Paul also mentions the social challenges faced by his son, which he felt were due to his autism even though he had not yet received a diagnosis. Paul highlights the conflict his son experienced with his friends and difficulties maintaining his friendships as a result of a lack of social skills. Paul also shares his son masking his difficulties whilst at school and then having meltdowns at home. Mary also recognised the importance of gaining an autism diagnosis, she felt her son was becoming distressed, potentially due to his autism, further highlighting the need for a diagnosis to understand his difficulties.

ii. Personal Experiential Theme: Acquiring an EHCP

Anna, Chloe and Mary all highlight the significance of acquiring an EHCP in order to gain support for their children, however they all had varying experiences. Anna describes persisting for a number of years until school agreed to request an EHCP for Katie, which they were currently in the process of doing. Chloe had already acquired an EHCP for her son, which

she fought for and felt was essential for him, however she expressed how school staff did not follow the advice suggested in the plan. Mary describes her son's struggle being down to not having an EHCP in place, however she did not describe difficulties in obtaining one as Anna and Chloe did.

iii. Personal Experiential Theme: Finding Appropriate Provision

Anna, Chloe and Mary all discussed the type of provision needed for their child. All children of the participants were attending mainstream settings. Mary expressed the need for specialist provision for Ben and despite having an EHCP which would enable a request for change of provision to a more specialised setting, Mary was not able to locate a setting she felt would meet her child's needs. She expressed concern over the lack of specialist provision. Anna also voiced a concern over lack of appropriate provision for her child however Katie did not yet have an EHCP so they were unable to request a change to specialist provision. Chloe shared concerns that the school was to blame for her child's experience of EBSA.

4.8.3 Group Experiential Theme: Sacrifice and Loss

All participants shared ways in which their lives were affected by their child's experience of EBSA and included an impact on relationships and careers.

i. Personal Experiential Theme: Strained Relationships

All participants worried about the impact of EBSA on their relationships. Anna, Chloe and Paul all mentioned how it caused difficulties within their marriages, due to regular occurrences of conflict and disagreement. Chloe also mentioned an impact on her relationship with both her child and her wider family. Mary talked about how her child's experience of EBSA disrupted her friendships. She preferred to see friends who did not have any children attending the same school to avoid hearing comparisons between her child and other children.

ii. Personal Experiential Theme: Impact on Career

Participants mentioned the effect of their children's experience of EBSA on their careers. Mary was particularly affected as she had to leave a job she really enjoyed due to having to remain at home with her son. Chloe was also not able to return to work as she felt she would not be able to keep a full time job, because she was having to take time away for her son so she decided to take up dog walking which allowed her to remain close to home and be more responsive to her son's needs. Anna also felt working would be difficult as she would need to constantly cater to her daughters needs which would interfere with work.

4.8.4 Group Experiential Theme: Impact on Health

Participants accounts all referenced their child's experience of EBSA having a negative effect on either their mental or physical health.

i. Personal Experiential Theme: Mental Wellbeing

Anna, Chloe and Paul mentioned the impact their child's experience of EBSA had on their mental wellbeing. Anna was worried about the future and experienced cycles of depression. Chloe's need to leave work had financial implications which then resulted in a negative impact on her wellbeing, contributing towards her needing to take antidepressants. Paul witnessed his son struggling with his attendance to school, witnessing him being distressed resulting in him hitting himself, this was difficult for Paul to see and lead to him also feeling distressed. I also sensed that participants questioned their parenting throughout their child's experience of EBSA, which appeared to impact on their mental wellbeing. I sensed feelings of blame and guilt from Anna, Mary and Paul. Anna used a lot of questions within her account, particularly when sharing and decisions she has previously made. Mary and Paul both share difficulties within the home contributing towards her child's experience of EBSA.

ii. Personal Experiential Theme: Physical Consequences

Chloe describes the impact her son's experience of EBSA has had on her physical health, in attempts to get Alex to school she has physically tried to prompt him out of bed and this has resulted in physical pain in her head, neck and back.

4.8.5 Group Experiential Theme: Battle For Support

Participants shared how they battled for support from school staff and professionals. The importance of communication became apparent, in addition to having empathy for the participants and needing to reply in a timely manner.

i. Personal Experiential Theme: Need for Communication

The need for communication appears across all participant accounts. Some divergence was identified with Anna, Mary and Paul all indicating particular experiences that were negative. Anna did not feel as though she was listened to, even though she voiced her concerns, Mary found it difficult to get hold of professionals despite using various channels and Paul was angered by the choice of words used by school staff when discussing EBSA. However, Chloe mentioned examples of a member of school staff who demonstrated good communication. They would respond promptly and keep in touch regularly. However she also experienced professionals who she was not able to make contact with without escalating to a complaint.

ii. Personal Experiential Theme: Importance of Empathy

Anna, Mary and Paul suggested the importance of being empathetic. Anna voiced concerns that no one asking her how she was throughout her child's experience of EBSA. Mary also mentioned not being asked how she was. Some divergence was noted in this PET as Paul specifically mentions how one member of school staff was compassionate and understanding, which he found supportive.

iii. Personal Experiential Theme: Time to Respond

The amount of time taken for school staff and professionals to respond to parents was raised by Anna, Chloe and Mary. Both Anna and Mary mentioned their children struggling for four years and both their children being ready to leave school. Anna felt it took too long for school staff to apply for an EHCP. Chloe shared professionals have wasted the four years she had been asking for support. Mary expressed the long wait for her child to get seen by CAMHS and to get an autism assessment.

4.8.6 Group Experiential Theme: Power Imbalance

Participants shared a sense of an imbalance of power. It seemed as though school staff and professionals had more power than parents. Participants expressed feeling judged and intimidated.

i. Personal Experiential Theme: Being Judged

Anna, Mary and Paul mentioned feeling of judgement from others, and being afraid to disclose too much information due this worry. Anna mentions a need for professionals to ask parents how they really feel, suggesting they would be afraid or reluctant to share this initially. Mary expressed feeling judged by school staff for worsening Ben's experience of EBSA. Paul also mentioned professionals made quick judgements without knowing the context and background.

ii. Personal Experiential Theme: Feeling Intimidated

Paul describes instances where he has experienced intimidation when in meetings with school staff and professionals. He has felt overwhelmed by the number of people attending meetings which has inhibited his ability to share his voice.

4.9 Chapter Summary

The data analysis suggest that parents understanding of their child's experience of EBSA are centred around understanding and meeting their special educational needs, including: autism, EHCPs, and provision.

There are various ways in which children's experience of EBSA impacted on parents which include: sacrifice and loss resulting in strained relationships and impact on careers. The impact on health included mental wellbeing and physical consequences.

The factors that help or hinder parents work with school staff and external professionals when managing their child's experience of EBSA include: a battle for support requiring communication, empathy and time responses. Power imbalances also seem to be important, being judged and feeling intimidated are hindering factors.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction to Chapter

This chapter will focus on attempting to answer the research questions proposed earlier in this study. The research aim was to explore parental experiences of their child's EBSA and the three research questions stated earlier in this study were as follows:

1. What are parents experience of their child's EBSA?
2. How has their child's experience of EBSA impacted on parents, including homelife, family interactions and the family unit?
3. What are parent views on factors that help or hinder parents work with school staff and external professionals when managing their child's experience of EBSA?

Following the data analysis process, using IPA, five group experiential themes were formed. The GETs are as follows: understanding and meeting SEND needs, sacrifice and loss, impact on health, battle for support and power imbalance. These will be referenced when discussing each research question. This discussion will explore deeper understandings of participant experience with reference to literature reviewed in chapter two as well as new literature. Participant quotes will be used to illuminate the participant experiences further and to ensure answers to the questions are grounded in the data.

5.1.1 Research Question One: What Are Parents Experience of Their child's Emotionally Based School Avoidance?

The first GET related to this research question is 'Understanding and Meeting Special Educational Needs' which includes the PETs 'Receiving an Autism Diagnosis', 'Acquiring an EHCP', and 'Finding Appropriate Provision'. Through my interpretations I understood parental experiences of their children's EBSA to be underpinned by; a need to understand their child's difficulties, which related to SEN and autism in particular, and the need to acquire support for their child to meet their individual needs, whether this be through the form of an EHCP or change of school provision.

Parents highlighted autism as a contributing factor towards their understanding of their children's EBSA, similar to existing research (Burrows, 2020). Parents conveyed the difficulties experienced whilst seeking an autism diagnosis for their children which can be felt through Anna's use of the word 'fight' and Mary's emphasis of the 'long wait'. A potential barrier towards gaining diagnosis could be due to the children masking whilst at school as described by Paul. This means children may appear to cope within the school setting, hiding their difficulties, however once they return home they are no longer able to manage and this is where some more challenging behaviours may become apparent, often referred to as 'meltdowns'. With children who mask their difficulties at school, it is most likely that their parents are amongst the first to identify the early signs of their child's difficulties.

Parents also shared the difficulties they encountered whilst trying to gain an EHCP for their child and the word 'fought' was used again by another participant, Chloe. I felt that gaining the EHCP was directly linked to provision. Anna mentioned that she wanted to pursue specialist provision for her daughter however she 'hasn't got the option' to do this as her

daughter did not have an EHCP. Therefore it felt as though the fight for the EHCP was a gateway for what parents considered to be more appropriate provision. In contrast Mary shared how there was little difficulty experienced with gaining an EHCP for her son however there was uncertainty regarding where to select as an educational setting. Mary also described a sense of loneliness as she shared 'I don't know of any other children or families' who attended specialist provision. The importance of appropriate provision was highlighted by Browne (2018) and Want (2020).

Parental experiences of needing to fight for an autism diagnosis and EHCP suggest that there was not a shared understanding of the causes of EBSA with the participants involved in this study, which Aucott (2014) suggested as being important. I felt that participants experienced not being heard, feeling isolated and frustrated due to the long waits.

5.1.2 Research Question Two: How Has Their Child's Experience of Emotionally Based School Avoidance Impacted on Parents, Including Homelife, Family Interactions and The Family Unit?

The first GET which relates directly to this research question is 'Sacrifice and Loss' which comprises of the PETs 'Strained Relationships' and 'impact on Career'. The second GET 'Impact on Health' is defined by the PETs 'Mental Wellbeing' and 'Physical Consequences'.

Participants expressed the impact of their children's experience of EBSA on their relationships. They shared that those affected included: their spouse, parents, children and friends, highlighting the far-reaching impact of EBSA on parents and their relationships as mentioned by Want (2020) with them often reaching breaking point. Both Anna and Chloe described 'issues' with their relationships and Chloe specifically highlighted arguments with both her husband and son. Mary found her friendships to be affected the most with her

friends being 'hard to relate to' as they did not understand her experience of her child's EBSA and this resulted in friendships being lost completely. I sensed this resulted in feelings of loneliness and isolation for parents.

I also interpreted the data to suggest a disruption to parents jobs and careers. Mary, Chloe and Anna all had to leave their jobs, Mary was particularly affected as she enjoyed her job. Research suggested parents felt they had no choice but to leave their jobs as a direct result of their child's experience of EBSA (Gregory & Purcell, 2014) in order to support their child and found this to be stressful (Browne, 2018). When referring to her job Anna shared she had to 'put everything on hold' and Chloe shared she 'wouldn't be able to' keep a job. Mary was sad as she 'really enjoyed' her job and this further illuminated existing research that suggested it was a difficult decision for parents to give up working (Browne, 2018).

It was apparent to me that participant's health was affected as they shared their experiences. Anna asked questions with uncertainty and worry and described her depression. Mary shared that she does not get a break and Paul also emphasised the need for a break, suggesting the experience was overwhelming. Mary also mentioned anxiety when sharing her account, which links to research which suggested parents reported high levels of anxiety regarding their child's experience of EBSA (Browne, 2018; Clissold, 2018). Parental experiences of blame and guilt also seemed to impact on their mental wellbeing. Chloe also referred to the physical consequences of her son's experience of EBSA as she had hurt her back, neck and was suffering from headaches trying to get her son out of bed and to school.

5.1.3 Research Question Three: What Are Parent Views on Factors That Help or Hinder Parents Work With School Staff and External Professionals When Managing Their Child's Experience of EBSA?

The first GET related to this research question was 'Battle for Support' which comprised of the PETs 'Need for Communication', 'Importance of Empathy' and 'Time to Respond'. The Second GET was 'Power Imbalance' and this included the PETs 'Being Judged' and 'Feeling Intimidated'. Through these GETs and PETs I understood the helping and hindering factors when parents work with school staff and external professionals, whilst managing their child's experience of EBSA.

Poor communication was considered a hinderance to parents. Anna shared she was not listened to whilst Mary felt as though school staff and professionals did not understand what she was trying to communicate. Both Chloe and Mary highlighted the difficulties associated with irregular communication, explaining how they would reach and struggle to get in touch with people and they would not return calls or messages. This illuminates research mentioned in the literature review which suggest the importance of effective home-school communication (Corcoran et al., 2022; McDonald et al., 2022; Havik et al., 2014) with some parents feeling dismissed (McDonald et al., 2022) which led to them only being taken seriously after the EBSA had begun rather than being able to intervene and prevent (Havik et al., 2014).

The length of time taken for school staff and professionals was noticed across accounts. Anna and Chloe both mentioned it taking four years before they felt heard or acknowledged and 'this was 'too long' and 'too late' as both children were now coming towards the end of the secondary phase of their education. Mary also felt school staff and professionals were in 'no

rush' to respond to concerns raised before taking any sort of action. This links to research with suggests parents emphasised the need for regular, positive and timely communication (Corcoran et al., 2022; Mortimer, 2018).

A lack of empathy was noted by participants. Anna said she felt it was important for parents to be asked 'how are you really?' and Mary similarly mentioned 'you don't get asked how you are'. Paul shared 'we want someone to say we understand' and he referred to only one member of staff at school who he felt was 'compassionate', which he valued. Paul also mentioned feeling 'enraged' by the choice of words used by school staff when they were not being considerate or sensitive to the situation, the word 'refusal' was particularly difficult for him to hear. This could lead to parents feeling less valued and less likely to engage in dialogue with school staff as mentioned by Corcoran et al. (2022).

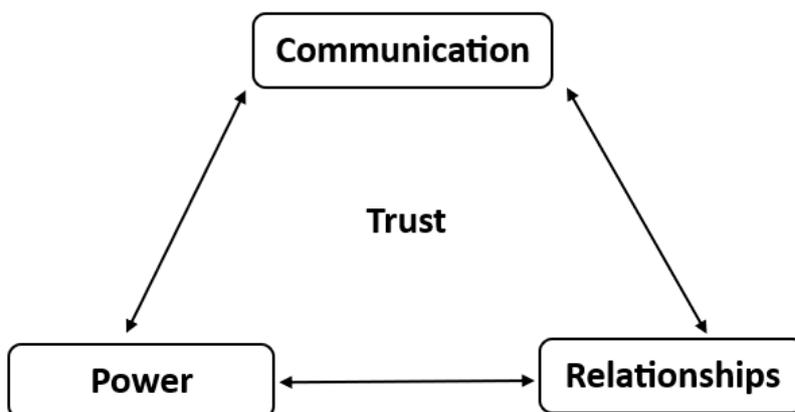
Parents who felt judged by others were less likely to share information with school staff and professionals. Anna mentioned she was 'afraid to speak' due to people being 'judgemental'. Mary felt a sense of judgement from staff who told her that she was 'never gonna get him in'. Paul mentioned professionals making 'snap judgements' without knowing all the relevant information. Research by Burrows (2020) and Want (2020) highlighted how parents often felt blamed for their child's experience of EBSA, feeling like it was due to their poor parenting, leading them to feel alone in their experiences and losing confidence in their parenting (Browne, 2018). Paul also expressed feeling intimidated by the number of school staff and professionals who would attend meetings and not always being able to express himself. Feeling judged and intimidated could lead to parents perceiving them to be unapproachable and therefore unsupported as mentioned by Mortimer (2018), potentially impeding the ability to work collaboratively (Myhill, 2017).

5.1.4 Connections between Themes

Whilst all themes were important and valued I felt there were certain themes, which were directly linked to the GETs, that stood out, which were: communication, relationships, trust and power. It is possible that the sacrifice and loss felt by parents led to a lack power. I wondered whether the parents' battle for support damaged their relationships with school staff and professionals. There is also the potential that power imbalances disrupted parents' communication with staff and professionals. Poor communication may then have weakened parents' sense of trust in those they needed to work with whilst managing their child's experience of EBSA. I sensed some links and connections between the key themes identified which can be seen in Figure 6.

Figure 6.

A diagram to show how key themes identified could be connected.



There various ways in which I felt these themes could be connected, which is why there are double ended arrows between themes within a cyclical model. Trust lies at the centre of the diagram as I felt it was a central theme that is underpinned by communication, relationships and power. I wondered if participants who did not feel heard in their communication and felt dismissed have then experienced a negative impact on their relationships with school staff

and external professionals. This potential breakdown in the relationship could then affect parental sense of power. It is also possible that a sense of powerlessness from parents affects their communication and relationships negatively. For example, those who feel a lack of power may struggle to share their concerns with school staff and professionals, leading to strained relationships. It could be argued that parents could be attempting to seek and regain a sense of lost power through acquiring an EHCP. This could also explain why the 'fight' for the EHCP was so important to participants. Previous literature reviewed by Want (2020) suggested that that power imbalances between school staff and professionals resulted in a battle for parents to be heard. The distribution of power within parent-teacher relationships appears to strengthen communication (Taylor, 2015).

I sensed that the nature of parents relationships with school staff or external professionals either helped or hindered support when managing their child's experience of EBSA. I felt that relationships seemed to be affected by a range of factors, including trust. Having an element of trust meant that positive relationships were formed, which then enabled open discussions. This then led to parents communication being received and often valued. I consider parents' difficulties in effectively sharing their concerns that their child might be autistic and suggesting the need for an assessment, which did not happen according the accounts shared. Parents described years of fighting to seek an autism diagnosis, as it often relied on difficulties being predominantly viewed at home due to their children masking and therefore parents needed to be able to communicate openly with school staff and being heard and valued. Hussain (2020) shared how parents felt that the 'experts', referring to professionals, were listened to rather than the parents.

Trust has been referred to in literature an important component in building collaborative relationships (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Trust influences parental involvement which affects parent-teacher relationships (Santiago et al., 2016). Research suggest the importance of two-way communication in forming strong parent–teacher relationships, which are based on building trust before being able to have effective communication (Leenders et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important to consider various ways of working towards building trust within relationship with parents, in order to manage power. For instance, communication through parent-teacher meetings to build trusting relationships has been suggested as a way to ensure a balance of power between parents and teachers (Bilton et al., 2017). Also, informal and positive communication strengthens trust and adds to a cohesive parent-teacher relationship.

5.1.5 Chapter Summary

The three research questions were considered and discussed using both the data analysis and existing literature. Parental experience of their child’s EBSA appeared to be centred around understanding and managing their special educational needs, specifically gaining an autism diagnosis, acquiring an EHCP and finding appropriate provision. Children’s experience of EBSA affected parents relationships, jobs and health negatively. Factors that appeared to hinder parents ability work with school staff and professionals included the lack of effective and timely communication and the absence of empathy. Parents also struggled to work effectively with others when they felt judged and intimidated. I felt the key themes identified throughout participant accounts to be, communication, relationships and power, with trust lying at the centre of these themes. In order for parents to have establish effective relationships. Have good communication and a sense of power, they needed to feel trusted. It is therefore important to consider various strategies of building trust with parents.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter draws conclusions to this study, considering the strengths and limitations of the research. Areas for future research will also be discussed.

6.1 Strengths of Research

This study adds to an area of research where few studies have explored parental perspectives of their child's experience of EBSA using IPA. The choice of IPA for data analysis was appropriate as the research concerned the individual lived experiences of parents with regards to their child's experience of EBSA. This study followed guidance for IPA as detailed by Smith et al. (2022). The use of an interview guide enabled the exploration of key areas that allowed research questions to be answered whilst providing some flexibility to enable participants to answer in the way they felt best and steering the conversation in new directions based on their own individual experience and leading the discussion. Themes were formed which captured the phenomenon of interest (Wiling, 2008).

6.2 Limitations of Research

Data collection is limited by the researcher's ability to gather information through the use of interviews, although conducting a pilot study was useful in refining skills needed to conduct interviews. IPA is limited by the researcher's ability to reflect and analyse data (Baillie et al., 2000).

Whilst the purpose of this research was to explore individual perspectives of parents in depth, not to generalise findings to a wider population, it is important to recognise limitations of the sample involved. Whilst participant involvement was voluntary it may be that parents who felt more confident about expressing their experiences were more likely to participate, and it may have also been possible that those who had a negative experience were more likely to

voice their journey to make school staff and professionals aware, which may have impacted on the experiences expressed in this study. Also, whilst the sample size was appropriate for an IPA study, the sample is also purposively selected to work towards a homogenous sample. A homogenous sample was sought to align with IPA guidelines which resulted in a group of individuals who were all white British, a group of participants who are already overrepresented in previous research conducted in this area. The lack of diversity in previous research has not been addressed in this study and it would be important to explore the reasons for this and to consider how to make research more accessible for those of a wider variety of heritage and backgrounds.

Another aspect of the sample to consider is the inclusion of a married couple, both were interviewed separately on different days and were asked not to discuss the questions so as not to affect each others responses and retain individual and authentic answers. However, there is no way of knowing whether this was the case. It is difficult to know if or how the inclusion of a couple influenced the findings and themes which emerged. Including one male participant may also have affected the homogeneity of the sample, as it is not known the impact gender differences may have on the data. However, it was not possible to be more selective regarding the gender of participants within this thesis due to difficulties recruiting an appropriate sample size to ensure IPA was viable. The way in which homogeneity is defined depends on the study (Smith et al., 2022) and within this thesis I feel I worked towards homogeneity by including participants who had a shared experience of their child, attending a mainstream secondary school, experiencing EBSA.

Since qualitative research involves a researcher's subjective interpretation of findings, it is important to acknowledge that other researchers may interpret the findings differently. The

interpretative nature of IPA therefore involves inevitable bias, this was addressed by being aware of my own preconceived notions. Reflexive practices were taken by meeting with an IPA research group regularly to discuss coding and to increase analytical trustworthiness.

6.3 Impact and Implications

The importance of establishing effective working relationships and having good communication between home and school emerged as an important factor across participant accounts. This research also highlighted power imbalances perceived by parents between themselves, school staff and professionals. Parents expressed that they did not always feel they could be honest about their personal family situation for fear of being judged. Finally, trust appeared to be a key theme that underpinned and linked together communication, relationships and power. The impact and implications of these findings on my own practice and wider implications will be discussed.

In my role as an EP I will consider how to facilitate collaborative relationships and efficient communication between school staff and parents so that parents feel acknowledged and heard. EPs regularly provide staff with whole school training and this could focus the importance of listening to and understanding the experiences of parents and families. Improving communication and relationships could lead to greater levels of trust and more positive parental experiences (Bilton et al., 2017; Leenders et al., 2107). Training could also include knowledge about EBSA so staff are better able to understand parental experiences.

There are also wider implications for Educational Psychology Services and schools. This thesis demonstrates that systematic considerations relating to policies, processes, and practice must be reviewed so there is a greater focus on learning from the research and parent experiences. The use of audit tools may be helpful for schools to implement so they can learn

about the views of their parent population and are able to adjust their practice for the local parent community. Parental perspectives of school could be explored through consultation or, on a wider scale, by EPs supporting the school to complete auditing exercises so that they understand parental views and how they can work towards positive change.

Parents participating in this research expressed concerns about the lack of early involvement and timely responses from professionals, leading to an implication for our individual process and those of services to ensure children vulnerable to EBSA are discussed during planning meetings with schools, allowing space for appropriate information to be collated and next steps to be decided as early as possible. EPs could also help to facilitate EBSA meetings where there are difficult conversations to help parents feel heard.

To increase accessibility of the EP profession, parents can be supported to understand the role of an EP, and the support they offer through drop in sessions or coffee mornings where parents are able to interact with EPs and ask various questions that might be related to either SEN, EBSA or EHCPs and understand how EPs may be able to help. The use of tools to seek parental views following involvement from the EPS would allow feedback to be gathered.

6.4 Future Research

This research sought to explore parental perspectives of their children's EBSA, despite aiming for homogeneity with the sample it could be suggested that this was not achieved due to the inclusion of a married couple and one male. It could also be argued that the sample was limited, since all participants were white British backgrounds. Further research could explore samples considered to be more homogenous and include the experiences of those from more diverse heritage.

6.5 Conclusions

The aim of this research study was to explore the perspectives of parents who had children experiencing EBSA. A semi-structured interview guide was used to gather information and IPA was used to analyse the data. Five group experiential themes emerged: Understanding and Meeting Special Educational Needs, Sacrifice and Loss, Impact on Health, Battle for Support and Power Imbalance.

Parent's understanding of their child's experience of EBSA included needing to understand and support their SEND needs. Parents highlighted a need to gain an autism diagnosis, acquire an EHCP and to find appropriate provision for their child. Various aspects of parental life was affected by their children's experience of EBSA, including: the loss of jobs, a negative impact on mental and physical health and broken relationships. Parents reported that they did not feel supported by school staff and found some professionals more helpful than others. Power imbalances had an impact on effective collaboration and communication. Relationships were deemed important with many feeling they had broken down during the journey whilst navigating their children's EBSA.

This research provides an insight into the experiences of parents and reveals the many challenges and difficulties they encounter during the process of supporting their children who are experiencing EBSA. As an EP it is important to consider various ways to support parents during this sensitive time by facilitating methods to increase trusting relationship so that parents feel empowered to communicate and share their perspectives. Encouraging positive communication and relationships between parents, school staff and other professionals by distributing power is also needed to ensure parents do not feel powerless.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Summary of existing literature exploring parental experiences of Emotionally Based School Avoidance.....

Authors	Year	Paper Title	Paper	Participants	Methodology	Conclusions
Corcoran et al.	2022	Emotionally based school non-attendance: two successful returns to school following lockdown	Peer-reviewed journal article	Parents of primary age children Professionals School staff	Reflexive thematic analysis	When considering successful returns to school following lockdown, the following factors were considered facilitators, which included: effective home-school communication, engaging with professional support, and positive relationships.
McDonald et al.	2022	‘She didn’t know how to go back’: School attendance problems in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic–A multiple stakeholder qualitative study with parents and professionals	Peer-reviewed journal article	Parents of primary age children Professionals	Mixed-methods	In order to support school attendance problems, interventions must be easy to access and personalised for children’s individual context, considering the risk and protective factors and family systems and the home-school relationship.
O’Hagan et al.	2022	Autistic girls and emotionally based school avoidance: supportive factors for successful re-	Peer-reviewed journal article	Parents of secondary age children School staff	Thematic analysis	When considering the supportive factors for autistic girls when re-engaging with education following EBSA, educators having a good understanding of female autism,

		engagement in mainstream high school		Pupils		safe spaces and person-centred interventions were important.
Sawyer	2022	Parents' views on EBSNA: A solution-based exploration into successful reintegration	Unpublished thesis	Parents of primary and secondary age children	Content analysis and reflexive thematic analysis	Positive facilitators to support successful school reintegration include, the need for individual support for the CYP, increased support and understanding for parents and families.
Burrows	2020	Listening to the stories of parents whose children have experienced school non-attendance	Unpublished thesis	Parents of secondary age children	Narrative approach	Parent stories highlighted professional power imbalances and professionals not always understanding their child's needs. Parents believed school-based factors and their child's mental health contributed towards their EBSA. Parents valued a diagnosis from professionals.
Want	2020	A Narrative Oriented Inquiry into emotionally based school avoidance: hearing the voices of young people and their parents	Unpublished thesis	Parents of secondary age children Pupils	Narrative oriented inquiry	Various key themes were identified which included, parents lacking clarity in relation to their child's need and EBSA, the wider impact of EBSA on family interactions and the home context, and parents feeling unheard, unsupported and blamed by school and professionals.
Browne	2018	An exploration into the parental experience of Emotionally Based School Non-	Unpublished thesis	Parents of secondary age children	Interpretative phenomenological analysis	This study highlighted the impact of EBSA on the whole family and on all aspects of the lives of the parents. This included their confidence in their parenting capacity,

		Attendance in young people: an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis				relationships with their spouse and children, employment and career, and the impact on their own mental health and emotional wellbeing. Parents reported they did not feel supported by schools who they perceived as accusatory and blaming.
Clissold	2018	A Qualitative Exploration of Pupil, Parent and Staff Discourses of Extended School Non-Attendance	Unpublished thesis	Parents of secondary age children Pupils	Discourse analysis	The study highlights conflicting accounts regarding the causes of EBSA, between parents and school staff. Parental accounts of the causes of EBSA were dominated by anxiety and the school system.
Mortimer	2018	Going back to school following a period of extended school non-attendance: What do secondary-aged young people and their parents find supportive? An Appreciative Inquiry	Unpublished thesis	Parents of secondary age children Pupils	Thematic analysis	Young people and parents found trusting relationships important in supporting a return to school and suggest that these facilitated environments of collaborative working in which the child and parents were put at the centre of decision-making processes and their needs were understood. Factors that may support a return to school following EBSA are multi-faceted, dynamic and interactive.
Myhill	2017	Parents' Views of their Involvement During Extended School Non-Attendance	Unpublished thesis	Parents of primary and secondary age children	Thematic analysis	The needs of parents, in order to manage their children's EBSA, are not consistently being met. Parents delay coming to school when their children became reluctant to attend because of a fear of judgement. This

Aucott	2014	An Exploration of Pupils', Parents' and Teachers Perceptions of the Causes of Pupil Non-Attendance and the Reasons for Improvements in Attendance	Unpublished thesis	Parents of primary age children School staff Pupils	Thematic analysis	<p>suggests creating a community ethos in school is important to ensuring early intervention. Supportive parent/home relationship is crucial for the resolution of EBSA. when parents felt listened to and involved in decisions they were more engaged with school staff and confident in both their personal management and school's management of EBSA.</p> <p>The greatest improvement in attendance was seen when there was a shared understanding of the causes of non-attendance between at least the parent and teacher, the interventions put in place were aimed at addressing these causes and there was a shared responsibility for improving attendance. Other factors that may lead to further improvements in pupil attendance include: teachers recognising and addressing school related factors, a greater understanding of the reasons for pupils' refusal behaviour, pupils' views being acted upon, and consideration of the impact of pupils' non-attendance. It is argued that EPs are well placed to support</p>
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Gregory & Purcell	2014	Extended school non-attenders' views: developing best practice	Peer-reviewed journal article	Parents of secondary age children Pupils	Interpretative phenomenological analysis	school and families in addressing these factors. The EP is well placed to bring a holistic view of the child's needs whilst considering family, social, school and child factors. Each case is different and complex and professionals must consider the impact of a range of factors, such as medical information, social environment, school experiences and the voice of the child, to gain an understanding of EBSA and how to support families.
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Research Project

“Exploring Parental Experiences of Emotionally Based School Avoidance”

We are looking for parents who have children experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance to participate in a new research project.

If you are the parent of a child:

- between 5 - 16 years
- who is currently missing 10% or more of their school sessions
- who is currently experiencing difficulty attending school
- who currently remains at home with parental knowledge
 - who becomes emotional about attending school

We would love to hear from you.

Why take part in this research project?

To help students with emotionally based school avoidance and to provide an opportunity to support other parents in the future by sharing your experiences.

If you are interested or would like further information, please contact the researcher using the details below



Application for Ethics Review Form

Guidance Notes:

What is the purpose of this form?

This form should be completed to seek ethics review for research projects to be undertaken by University of Birmingham staff, PGR students or visiting/emeritus researchers who will be carrying out research which will be attributed to the University.

Who should complete it?

For a staff project – the lead researcher/Principal Investigator on the project.

For a PGR student project – the student’s academic supervisor, in discussion with the student.

Students undertaking undergraduate projects and taught postgraduate (PGT) students should refer to their Department/School for advice

When should it be completed?

After you have completed the University’s online ethics self-assessment form (SAF), **IF** the SAF indicates that ethics review is required. You should apply in good time to ensure that you receive a favourable ethics opinion prior to the commencement of the project and it is recommended that you allow at least 60 working days for the ethics process to be completed.

How should it be submitted?

An electronic version of the completed form should be submitted to the Research Ethics Officer, at the following email address: aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

What should be included with it?

Copies of any relevant supporting information and participant documentation, research tools (e.g. interview topic guides, questionnaires, etc) and where appropriate a health & safety risk assessment for the project (see section 10 of this form for further information about risk assessments).

What should applicants read before submitting this form?

Before submitting, you should ensure that you have read and understood the following information and guidance and that you have taken it into account when completing your application:

- The information and guidance provided on the University’s ethics webpages (<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-of-Research.aspx>)

- The University's Code of Practice for Research (<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/research.pdf>)
- The guidance on Data Protection for researchers provided by the University's Legal Services team at <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/legal-services/What-we-do/Data-Protection/resources.aspx>.

Section 1: Basic Project Details

Project Title: Parental Experiences of Emotionally Based School Avoidance: Using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Is this project a:

- University of Birmingham Staff Research project
- University of Birmingham Postgraduate Research (PGR) Student project
- Other (Please specify below)
- [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Details of the Principal Investigator or Lead Supervisor (for PGR student projects):

Title: Dr
 First name: Huw
 Last name: Williams

Position held: Tutor in Educational Psychology
 School/Department College of Social Sciences

Telephone: 0121 414 4453
 Email address: H.Williams.bham.ac.uk

Details of any Co-Investigators or Co-Supervisors (for PGR student projects):

Title: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
 First name: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
 Last name: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Position held: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
 School/Department [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Telephone: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
 Email address: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Details of the student for PGR student projects:

Title: Miss
 First name: Zara
 Last name: Shah

Course of study: Doctorate of Applied Education and Child Psychology

Email address: [REDACTED]

Project start and end dates:

Estimated start date of project: 07/03/2022

Estimated end date of project: 31/08/2023

Funding:

Sources of funding: Department for Education

Section 2: Summary of Project

Describe the purpose, background rationale for the proposed project, as well as the hypotheses/research questions to be examined and expected outcomes. This description should be in everyday language that is free from jargon - please explain any technical terms or discipline-specific phrases. Please do not provide extensive academic background material or references.

The purpose of this proposed project is to explore parental experiences of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA).

I have encountered cases of EBSA on placement, therefore research into this area would be beneficial for the Local Authority in addition to developing my own knowledge and informing my own practice with regards to parents and EBSA. There is limited published research available that explores parental perspectives of EBSA.

Research aims include: exploring the views of parents who have children who are EBS avoiders and are struggling with getting their child back to school; explore the views of parents who have experienced success with their child, who was an EBS avoider, returning to school.

Research questions include: what is parent understanding of EBSA?, what do parents consider to be contributing factors towards EBSA?, how are parent voices heard/captured within discussion in schools?, how do parents with EBS avoider children feel?, did parent experience EBSA during their schooling?, what support/intervention do parents need to support their child to go back to school?, for parents who have been successful at getting their child back into school, what has helped achieve this?

Section 3: Conduct and location of Project

Conduct of project

Please give a description of the research methodology that will be used. If more than one methodology or phase will be involved, please separate these out clearly and refer to them consistently throughout the rest of this form.

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to gather data. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) will then be used to analyse this data.

Geographic location of project

State the geographic locations where the project and all associated fieldwork will be carried out. If the project will involve travel to areas which may be considered unsafe, either in the UK or overseas, please ensure that the risks of this (or any other non-trivial health and safety risks associated with the research) are addressed by a documented health and safety risk assessment, as described in section 10 of this form.

West Midlands, UK

Section 4: Research Participants and Recruitment

Does the project involve human participants?

Note: 'Participation' includes both active participation (such as when participants take part in an interview) and cases where participants take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time (for example, in crowd behaviour research).

Yes

No

If you have answered NO please go on to Section 8 of this form. If you have answered YES please complete the rest of this section and then continue on to section 5.

Who will the participants be?

Describe the number of participants and important characteristics (such as age, gender, location, affiliation, level of fitness, intellectual ability etc.). Specify any inclusion/exclusion criteria to be used.

Approximately 6 - 8 participants are desired for this research project. Selected participants must be parent of a child:

between 5 and 16 years

who is currently missing or has previously missed 10% or more of their school sessions

who is currently experiencing or has previously experienced difficulty attending school

who currently remains or has previously remained at home with parental knowledge

who becomes or has previously been emotionally upset about attending school

How will the participants be recruited?

Please state clearly how the participants will be identified, approached and recruited. Include any relationship between the investigator(s) and participant(s) (e.g. instructor-student). Please ensure that you attach a copy of any poster(s), advertisement(s) or letter(s) to be used for recruitment.

I am currently on placement with a Local Authority in the West Midland, I am able to recruit participants in the following ways:

I can liaise with colleagues, qualified EPs within the same LA who are currently working with parents of EBSA children. The EP working with the child/family can approach parents to inform them about the research, if they show interest in taking part or discussing the project further I would contact them directly

I can also discuss with other professionals who work or the same LA, such as Early Help, who work directly with families who have EBSA children on their caseload. Information will be given to the Lead Officer who has agreed to disseminate the research information to Early Help Officers, who can ask parents directly if they would like to take part/find out more information

I can contact SENCOs of secondary schools within the LA who have children attending their setting that fit the criteria listed above, they can ask parents if they are interested in the research project and pass information on to myself to contact directly

Section 5 Consent

What process will be used to obtain consent?

Describe the process that the investigator(s) will be using to obtain valid consent. If consent is not to be obtained explain why. If the participants are under the age of 16 it would usually be necessary to obtain parental consent and the process for this should be described in full, including whether parental consent will be opt-in or opt-out.

Participants (parents) would be given a participant information sheet containing details of the project to read. I would also be able to describe the research project to them and be available to answer any questions they may have about the project before giving verbal consent and signing a consent form.

Please be aware that if the project involves over 16s who lack capacity to consent, separate approval will be required from the Health Research Authority (HRA) in line with the Mental Capacity Act.

Please attach a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (if applicable), the Consent Form (if applicable), the content of any telephone script (if applicable) and any other material that will be used in the consent process.

Note: Guidance from Legal Services on wording relating to the Data Protection Act 2018 can be accessed at <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/legal-services/What-we-do/Data-Protection/resources.aspx>.

Use of deception?

Will the participants be deceived in any way about the purpose of the study?

Yes

No

If yes, please describe the nature and extent of the deception involved. Include how and when the deception will be revealed, and the nature of any explanation/debrief will be provided to the participants after the study has taken place.

n/a

Section 6: Participant compensation, withdrawal and feedback to participants

What, if any, feedback will be provided to participants?

Explain any feedback/ information that will be provided to the participants after participation in the research (e.g. a more complete description of the purpose of the research, or access to the results of the research).

After taking part in the study a thesis will be written as part of my Applied Educational and Child Psychology Doctorate course, which will include an anonymised account of my findings. I will also produce a short summary of the key findings for participants.

What arrangements will be in place for participant withdrawal?

Describe how the participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project, explain any consequences for the participant of withdrawing from the study and indicate what will be done with the participant's data if they withdraw.

Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the research project when verbal consent is sought, it will also be communicated on the consent form that participants are required to sign. If participants choose to withdraw any physical copies of their data will be destroyed and any electronic copies will be permanently deleted.

Please confirm the specific date/timescale to be used as the deadline for participant withdrawal and ensure that this is consistently stated across all participant documentation. This is considered preferable to allowing participants to 'withdraw at any time' as presumably there will be a point beyond which it will not be possible to remove their data from the study (e.g. because analysis has started, the findings have been published, etc).

Participants can withdraw up until 14 calendar days after being interviewed.

What arrangements will be in place for participant compensation?

Will participants receive compensation for participation?

Yes

No

If yes, please provide further information about the nature and value of any compensation and clarify whether it will be financial or non-financial.

n/a

If participants choose to withdraw, how will you deal with compensation?

n/a

Section 7: Confidentiality/anonymity

Will the identity of the participants be known to the researcher?

Will participants be truly anonymous (i.e. their identity will not be known to the researcher)?

Yes

No

In what format will data be stored?

Will participants' data be stored in identifiable format, or will it be anonymised or pseudo-anonymised (i.e. an assigned ID code or number will be used instead of the participant's name and a key will be kept allowing the researcher to identify a participant's data)?

Participant data will be stored in a pseudo-anonymised format, such as a unique ID code, and a key will be kept for the researcher. Information pertaining to the participant's children will also be kept confidential and stored in such a way that they will not be identifiable, using ID codes. The researcher will keep the key in a file that will be stored on the university's systems, where only the researcher and researcher's supervisors have access. The key will be deleted once the thesis has been submitted.

Will participants' data be treated as confidential?

Will participants' data be treated as confidential (i.e. they will not be identified in any outputs from the study and their identity will not be disclosed to any third party)?

Yes
No

If you have answered no to the question above, meaning that participants' data will not be treated as confidential (i.e. their data and/or identities may be revealed in the research outputs or otherwise to third parties), please provide further information and justification for this:

n/a

Section 8: Storage, access and disposal of data

How and where will the data (both paper and electronic) be stored, what arrangements will be in place to keep it secure and who will have access to it?

Please note that for long-term storage, data should usually be held on a secure University of Birmingham IT system, for example BEAR (see <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/it/teams/infrastructure/research/bear/index.aspx>).

Physical data, such as signed consent forms, will be stored in a locked cabinet in a home office that only the researcher will have access to. Electronic data will be stored on a secure University server, BEAR, that only the researcher and supervisors have access to.

Data retention and disposal

The University usually requires data to be held for a minimum of 10 years to allow for verification. Will you retain your data for at least 10 years?

Yes
No

If data will be held for less than 10 years, please provide further justification:

n/a

What arrangements will be in place for the secure disposal of data?

Paper copies of data will be shredded and electronic copies of data will be permanently deleted.

Section 9: Other approvals required

Are you aware of any other national or local approvals required to carry out this research?

E.g. clearance from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), Local Authority approval for work involving Social Care, local ethics/governance approvals if the work will be carried out overseas, or approval from NOMS or HMPPS for work involving police or prisons? If so, please provide further details:

No

For projects involving NHS staff, is approval from the Health Research Authority (HRA) needed in addition to University ethics approval?

If your project will involve NHS staff, please go to the HRA decision tool at <http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/> to establish whether the NHS would consider your project to be research, thus requiring HRA approval in addition to University ethics approval. Is HRA approval required?

- Yes
No

Please include a print out of the HRA decision tool outcome with your application.

Section 10: Risks and benefits/significance

Benefits/significance of the research

Outline the potential significance and/or benefits of the research

Potential benefits/significance of the research include:

- This project will contribute towards an area of research that is limited
- Findings will inform my own practice with regards to supporting families who have EBSA children

Risks of the research

*Outline any potential risks (including risks to research staff, research participants, other individuals not involved in the research, the environment and/or society and the measures that will be taken to minimise any risks and the procedures to be adopted in the event of mishap.) **Please ensure that you include any risks relating to overseas travel and working in overseas locations as part of the study, particularly if the work will involve travel to/working in areas considered unsafe and/or subject to travel warnings from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (see <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>). Please also be aware that the University insurer, UMAL, offers access to RiskMonitor Traveller, a service which provides 24/7/365 security advice for all travellers and you are advised to make use of this service (see <https://umal.co.uk/travel/pre-travel-advice/>).***

The outlining of the risks in this section does not circumvent the need to carry out and document a detailed Health and Safety risk assessment where appropriate – see below.

n/a

University Health & Safety (H&S) risk assessment

For projects of more than minimal H&S risk it is essential that a H&S risk assessment is carried out and signed off in accordance with the process in place within your School/College and you must provide a copy of this with your application. The risk may be non-trivial because of travel to, or working in, a potentially unsafe location, or because of the nature of research that will be carried out there. It could also involve (irrespective of location) H&S risks to research participants, or other individuals not involved directly in the research. Further information about the risk assessment process for research can be found at

<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/worksafe/policy/Research-Risk-Assessment-and-Mitigation-Plans-RAMPs.aspx>.

Please note that travel to (or through) 'FCO Red zones' requires approval by the University's Research Travel Approval Panel, and will only be approved in exceptional circumstances where sufficient mitigation of risk can be demonstrated.

Section 11: Any other issues

Does the research raise any ethical issues not dealt with elsewhere in this form?

If yes, please provide further information:

Should any safeguarding issues arise whilst conducting the interviews, appropriate safeguarding policies will be followed and designated safeguarding leads will be informed immediately if there are any concerns for the safety or well-being of the participant's children.

Do you wish to provide any other information about this research not already provided, or to seek the opinion of the Ethics Committee on any particular issue?

If yes, please provide further information:

n/a

Section 12: Peer review

Has your project received scientific peer review?

Yes

No

If yes, please provide further details about the source of the review (e.g. independent peer review as part of the funding process or peer review from supervisors for PGR student projects):

n/a

Section 13: Nominate an expert reviewer

For certain types of project, including those of an interventional nature or those involving significant risks, it may be helpful (and you may be asked) to nominate an expert reviewer for your project. If you anticipate that this may apply to your work and you would like to nominate an expert reviewer at this stage, please provide details below.

Title: Click or tap here to enter text.

First name: Click or tap here to enter text.

Last name: Click or tap here to enter text.

Email address: Click or tap here to enter text.

Phone number: Click or tap here to enter text.

Brief explanation of reasons for nominating and/or nominee's suitability:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Section 14: Document checklist

Please check that the following documents, where applicable, are attached to your application:

- Recruitment advertisement
- Participant information sheet
- Consent form
- Questionnaire
- Interview/focus group topic guide

Please proof-read study documentation and ensure that it is appropriate for the intended audience before submission.

Section 15: Applicant declaration

Please read the statements below and tick the boxes to indicate your agreement:

I submit this application on the basis that the information it contains is confidential and will be used by the University of Birmingham for the purposes of ethical review and monitoring of the research project described herein, and to satisfy reporting requirements to regulatory bodies. The information will not be used for any other purpose without my prior consent.

The information in this form together with any accompanying information is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.

I undertake to abide by University Code of Practice for Research (<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/research.pdf>) alongside any other relevant professional bodies' codes of conduct and/or ethical guidelines.

I will report any changes affecting the ethical aspects of the project to the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer.

I will report any adverse or unforeseen events which occur to the relevant Ethics Committee via the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer.

Please now save your completed form and email a copy to the Research Ethics Officer, at aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk. As noted above, please do not submit a paper

Appendix 4: Participant Consent Form

Consent Form

Name:

Contact Number:

Email Address:

1. I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet.
2. I understand that the data produced will contribute to Zara Shah's research for the University of Birmingham and that the research will be written and submitted as her thesis.
3. I understand that the research findings are likely to be communicated orally and in written reports within the local authority to inform developments to policy and/or practice, and that Zara may also present the research at professional conferences and/or for publication in relevant professional journals. In all cases, full respect for participant confidentiality is assured.
4. I know that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study should I choose, with no need to offer an explanation. It is possible to withdraw up until 14 calendar days after the interview.
5. I have received assurances that a high standard of care will be exercised to safeguard the confidentiality of my own and other participants' contributions to this research and to ensure that neither I, nor any other participant or her/his school/workplace is identifiable.
6. I appreciate that, as is always the case within my workplace, confidentiality may need to be waived in circumstances in which there were grounds for concern that I or any other person may be at risk of harm, in which case, local authority safeguarding requirements would take precedence.
7. I have been assured that a high standard of care will be exercised to safeguard the secure storage of all research data and their deletion from the University of Birmingham's secure electronic data storage systems after ten years have elapsed.
8. I have had the opportunity to ask questions to inform my decision about participation in this study

I agree with the above statements and I give my consent to participate in this research project.

Signed:

Date:

Participation Information Sheet

About the research project

I, Zara Shah (researcher), am a trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Birmingham. As part of my course I am carrying out research which aims to explore the experiences of parents who have children with Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). EBSA refers to children who find it difficult to attend school due to emotional factors. I would be interested to hear experiences of parents who currently have children experiencing EBSA.

Taking part in the research project

If you agree to take part, I will arrange a date and time for interview in order to ask you some questions about your experience. If you currently have a child experiencing EBSA I am interested in exploring your experiences with regards to; your understanding of EBSA; how you feel about your child's EBSA; what support your child has been given by school; additional support you feel you would be helpful for your child from school; what support you have been offered by school; additional support you feel would be helpful for yourself from school; and whether you feel your voice has been heard by the school.

The interview can take place in person, location to be agreed, on Microsoft Teams or by telephone. The interview would last approximately 40-60 minutes. The interview will be written up. To ensure I have captured your responses accurately the interview will be audio-recorded so I am able to refer back to it. When I write up the recording I will change your name to keep the research confidential, it will not be possible for you to be identified from the information used in this project. Your interview data will then be analysed by me. I will handle your data in compliance with the Data Protection Act (2018), General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the University of Birmingham Code of Practice for Research and Ethics.

Why take part in this research project?

It is hoped that this research will contribute towards supporting students with emotionally based school avoidance and to provide an opportunity to support other parents in the future by sharing your experiences.

If you are interested, what next?

If you agree to take part in this research project a consent form will be issued for you to complete and sign. The consent form must then be returned to the researcher. Once consent has been received the researcher will contact you to arrange a date and time for your interview. You have the right to withdraw if you change your mind, you can withdraw consent up until 14 calendar days after the interview, you do not have to provide a reason.

Please do contact the researcher if you are interested in taking part or have any questions

Email: 

Appendix 6: Initial draft of interview schedule.

Research Question	Interview Questions
What are parents understanding of their child's EBSA?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you tell me about your understanding of your child's EBSA? 2. What factors do you think are contributing towards your child's EBSA?
How has EBSA impacted on parents, including homelife, family interactions and the family unit?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. How has your child's EBSA impacted upon your family? 4. Has there been any impact on your relationship with your child? 5. How has EBSA impacted your relationship? 6. Has EBSA impacted on how you feel? 7. How has EBSA impacted on how you feel?
What are helping and hindering factors when parents work with school staff and external professionals?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Have you received any support during your child's experience of EBSA? 9. Are there any ways in which school staff have been helpful during your child's EBSA? 10. Is there anything else school staff could have done that would have been helpful? 11. Are there any ways in which professionals have been helpful during your child's EBSA? 12. Is there anything else professionals could have done that would have been helpful?

Appendix 7: Extracts of IPA from Anna's Interview transcript.

Interview Transcript	Exploratory Notes	Experiential statements
<p>Anna Oh, if I'm honest, a bit crappy as a mum because then I sit and think other people seem to manage it, and they've got other children with SEN needs and they've got other children in the same household but at the same time, have they got the fears that I have about Katie, have I done the right thing? Am I making a big mistake? As a mother, I don't know.</p>	<p>Feels like a bad parent 'crappy mum' Comparing herself to other parents</p> <p>Other parents have children have SEN needs</p> <p>Use of double questions Uncertain about decisions she has made</p>	<p>Negative views about her parenting choices, she compares herself to other parents and questions decisions she has made.</p> <p>Questions parenting and whether she done something wrong.</p>

Interview Transcript	Exploratory Notes	Experiential statements
<p>Anna I think what's hurting the most is because I can see Katie hurting and struggling so much, but I'm not medically trained to help in the areas that she needs to be helped, and everywhere that I've gone to ask for help, it's like the doors been shut in our face and I'm sitting there watching her struggle, knowing there's nothing I can do and then sitting there thinking I'm wondering is Katie blaming me because I'm not getting the help that she needs, does she blame me for that?</p>	<p>Can see Katie struggling but can't help</p> <p>Not been able to get help needs from professionals</p> <p>Can't do anything to help</p> <p>Use of questions Worried what Katie thinks of her</p>	<p>Recognises Katie is struggling but can't access the help she needs even though she has tried.</p> <p>Seems to feel powerless and unable to help.</p> <p>Worries about being blamed by Katie.</p>

Appendix 8: Showing stage four of IPA, the scattering of Anna's experiential statements in no particular order before organising experiential statements into groups

