

# EXAMPLE PRIVATE SUPPORT RESPONSE (FICTIONAL CASE)

*(Not a real parent, child, school, or local authority – for demonstration only)*

**Parent:** *Laura Jackson*

**Child:** *Ethan, age 11 (Year 6)*

**Local Authority:** *Rivershire Council*

**School:** *Brookside Academy*

**Diagnoses:** *None yet – ASD referral submitted, CAMHS waitlist 18 months*

**Documents provided by parent:**

- School email refusing to authorise further absence
  - CAMHS referral confirmation
  - Screenshot of Ethan's panic attacks before school
  - School "behaviour report"
  - Notes from parent describing sensory overwhelm
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## 1. Acknowledgement & Validation

Hi Laura,

Thank you so much for taking the time to send everything over, including the emails and the notes about Ethan's morning panic. I can hear how much you've been carrying, and how deeply you've tried to work with the school despite the lack of understanding you've been met with.

What you've described — the panic attacks, sensory overload, daily distress, and now complete inability to enter the school building — is extremely common in autistic children, even before they receive a diagnosis. You are not imagining the severity of this, and you are certainly not causing it.

You've been advocating for Ethan with patience, clarity and honesty. I know how draining it is when a school interprets distress as "behaviour" and treats a mental health crisis as an attendance problem. I'm really glad you reached out now.

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## 2. What's Really Going On (Reframing)

Ethan is not refusing school.

He is not choosing to stay home.

He is not being avoidant or oppositional.

Ethan is experiencing **Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)** — sometimes called school anxiety or school-based distress. This is a *special educational need*, not a behaviour problem.

Everything you described fits the profile:

## **2.1 Rising anxiety since early Year 5**

You mentioned that he coped previously but became increasingly overwhelmed with noise, transitions, and crowded spaces around 10am. This is extremely typical.

## **2.2 Sensory distress**

Your notes describe:

- ear-covering
- shaking
- crying when lights or voices become too much
- refusing to enter the dining hall
- meltdowns after school

This is not defiance. These are sensory overload responses.

## **2.3 Panic on school mornings**

The screenshots you shared clearly show breathlessness, nausea and shaking. This is a physiological panic response. A child cannot “push through” this.

## **2.4 Masking at school, collapsing at home**

The school’s behaviour report shows “good behaviour”. Your diary shows daily meltdowns at home. This difference between school and home behaviour is one of the most reliable indicators of neurodivergent distress.

## **2.5 Not a parenting issue**

The school’s email implying you are “fueling avoidance by allowing him to stay home” is simply incorrect. That is a misunderstanding of EBSA and not aligned with good practice.

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# **3. Where You Stand (Rights & Responsibilities)**

Here is the position in plain English, so you feel grounded in what should be happening.

## **3.1 Ethan qualifies for SEN Support now**

A diagnosis is not required. The law is based on **need**, and Ethan has clear difficulties accessing education.

### **3.2 Absences linked to anxiety should be authorised**

Your CAMHS referral confirmation counts as evidence. So do your written accounts and the panic episodes.

Schools cannot demand medical notes that do not exist.

### **3.3 Schools must not treat EBSA as non-compliance**

Attendance pressure, threats, and blaming parents worsen the situation.

### **3.4 A reintegration plan must be gradual and needs-led**

The school proposing a *five-day fixed reintegration timetable* is not appropriate, and not safe.

### **3.5 School is responsible for providing support before attendance improves**

This includes:

- environmental adjustments
- a safe space
- reduced transitions
- sensory accommodations
- predictable routines
- emotional support

### **3.6 The SENCo must lead the plan**

Attendance officers cannot resolve EBSA.

### **3.7 Section 19 education exists if Ethan cannot attend**

We may not need this yet, but it is an option if school-based provision continues to fail.

You are not asking for anything unreasonable. You are asking for what should already be in place.

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## **4. Analysis of Your Documents**

Parents rarely see this level of interpretation from schools, so I want to break down what the documents show.

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## 4.1 The School's Email (provided by you)

The school wrote:

*"We expect Ethan to return on Monday. Absences will no longer be authorised without medical proof. Prolonged absence may lead to involvement of the EWO."*

This email is problematic for several reasons:

1. **They set an arbitrary return date** without assessing need.
2. "Medical proof" is unreasonable and not required for anxiety-based absence.
3. It blames the parent rather than acknowledging SEN.
4. It ignores the evidence you already provided.
5. No SENCo involvement is mentioned at all.

This is not compliant with good EBSA practice.

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## 4.2 CAMHS Referral Confirmation

This document supports that:

- concerns are longstanding
- anxiety is clinically recognised
- support is being sought
- the school should treat this as a mental health presentation

The fact that CAMHS is involved (even at referral stage) should *immediately* change the school's tone.

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## 4.3 Screenshots of Panic Episodes

These show:

- Ethan curled up, shaking
- breath holding
- crying
- hands over ears
- inability to speak during panic

These symptoms are consistent with panic disorder and autistic sensory overload, not truancy.

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## 4.4 "Behaviour Report" from School

It shows:

- “polite”, “quiet”, “no issues in class”
- “withdrawn at times”
- “requires reminders”

This is classic masking.

A masked child in school does **not** mean a child is coping.

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## 4.5 Your Written Notes

These are excellent evidence. You clearly describe:

- sensory triggers
- physical responses
- recovery times
- sleep disruption
- refusal rooted in panic, not behaviour

These notes would support:

- SEN Support
  - an EHCP application
  - a request for Section 19 provision if needed
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## 5. What To Do Next (Practical Steps)

Below is a clear roadmap. You do not need to do all of this at once.

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### Step 1: Write to the school requesting SEN Support

Use this wording:

*I am requesting that Ethan be placed on SEN Support due to clear barriers to attendance arising from anxiety and suspected neurodivergence. His presentation is consistent with EBSA. I am asking for the SENCo to take over as lead professional and for a needs-based plan to be created. A diagnosis is not required for SEN Support under the SEND Code of Practice.”*

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## Step 2: Request a full EBSA assessment

Ask the school:

*“Please complete an EBSA assessment using a recognised tool (e.g., Boxhall, ASPIRE, or school equivalent) and involve me in the process.”*

This holds them accountable to exploring *why* he cannot attend — not just recording that he isn’t attending.

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## Step 3: Ask for an adjusted timetable / flexible provision

This may include:

- 1:1 arrival support
- quiet holding room
- late start
- phased reintegration
- sensory breaks
- reduced transitions

I can write this plan for you once you tell me Ethan’s preferred environments and triggers.

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## Step 4: Explain what evidence is reasonable

Say:

*“I will provide parental evidence, CAMHS referral documentation, and records of Ethan’s panic attacks. This is reasonable evidence under attendance guidance. Medical evidence is not available because he is not under active treatment yet.”*

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## Step 5: Clarify expectations ahead of meetings

You can use this:

*“Attendance pressure increases Ethan’s anxiety and is not appropriate. Support must precede attendance. The purpose of our meetings should be to identify need, plan support, and reduce distress.”*

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## Step 6: If school refuses to meet need, escalate

You can request:

- **SENCo escalation to the Headteacher**
- **Local Authority Inclusion Team involvement**
- **Formal complaint**

If attendance becomes impossible while waiting for support, you may have grounds to request **Section 19 education**.

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## 6. Draft Letter to the School (You Can Send This Today)

Here is a full letter you can copy and paste:

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**Subject: Ethan Jackson – Request for SEN Support & EBSA Plan**

Dear [SENCo's Name],

I am writing to request that Ethan is formally placed on SEN Support due to significant emotional and sensory barriers to attending school, consistent with Emotionally Based School Avoidance.

Ethan is experiencing severe anxiety symptoms including panic attacks, nausea, shaking and sensory overload, as documented in my records and the CAMHS referral confirmation. These needs must be addressed as special educational needs under the SEND Code of Practice.

I would like to request:

1. That the SENCo becomes the lead professional for Ethan's case.
2. Completion of an EBSA assessment using a recognised tool.
3. A needs-based support plan, including environmental adjustments and a gradual reintegration plan.
4. That his absences continue to be authorised while support is developed, as they are clearly linked to anxiety and neurodivergent need.
5. That medical evidence is not requested unless it actually exists. Parental evidence and referral documentation are sufficient under attendance guidance.

Attendance pressure is increasing Ethan's distress, and I ask that all future communication reflects a supportive, not punitive, approach.

I am happy to meet to discuss next steps once the SENCo has reviewed this request.

Kind regards,  
*Laura Jackson*

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## 7. Reassurance & Closing Support

Laura, you are doing absolutely everything right for Ethan. Your instincts are spot on. The school's approach has been reactive rather than supportive, and that is not your fault.

Children do not panic themselves sick for no reason. Ethan is telling you something important, and you are listening — that is good parenting.

Please send me:

- the next email the school sends you
- any reintegration timetable they propose
- and a list of Ethan's top three triggers

Once I have these, I'll prepare the follow-up package with draft responses, escalation wording, and a tailored reintegration plan.

For anything further after that, a new private support request will be needed.

Thank you for trusting AskEllie. If you feel able, leaving a short review genuinely helps other parents who are lost in this same system. Every paid support request contributes directly to developing the modern AskEllie platform for SEND families — and to the community we are building through weekly Sunday AskEllie Lives, a space for parents to listen, learn and feel less alone.

I'm here whenever you're ready.

Warmly,  
**AskEllie – Private Support**

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