Barriers to Attendance

Parent/Carer Workshop

Wednesday 12th November 2025

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With thanks to Dr Kate Billington & Dr Jerricah Holder

**Gloucestershire Educational Psychology Service**

Aims & objectives
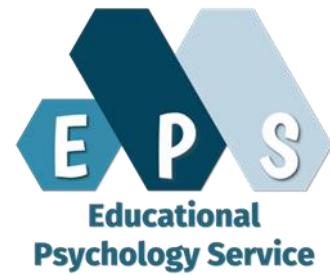
- Supporting your child/young person using your relationship

- Exploring 'Push and Pull' factors

- Working with schools/settings about Barriers to Attendance

- Consider how parents/carers can support:
  - Emotional Literacy
  - Resilience

Using your relationship to support with greater understanding of Barriers to Attendance

Often carers know their children extremely well and may recognise changes or signs that their child may be experiencing Barriers to Attendance or are experiencing distress prior to school staff or other professionals.

Parents/carers provide support to meet the physical and psychological needs of a child, which enables them to feel safe, loved, cared for, and able to develop their skills.
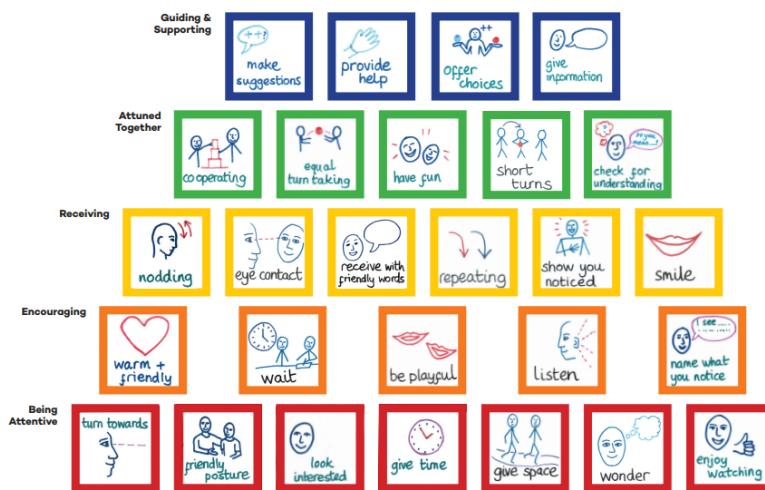

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Effective caregiver attunement helps children feel seen, safe, and understood, which supports emotional regulation and strengthens their ability to engage and thrive in school.

Possible questions to explore with schools: Communication with parents and carers | Gloucestershire County Council

Effective collaboration with parents/carers to promote attendance: Research Findings
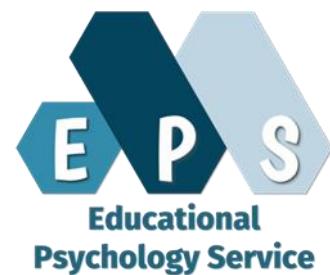
Bodycote (2022): professional-parental collaboration is not actually consistently occurring – it only exists as a policy statement of good practice.

Mullally & Connolly (2024): Significant impacts were evident across all aspects of their lives, including their careers, finances, and other children.

Sawyer (2022): "The current system of prosecuting parents seems ineffective in cases of EBSNA and alternative pathways (solution-oriented framework and individualised approach) should be considered."

How can we make this better?

Anxious	Disbelieved
Blamed	Threatened
Disempowered	Frustrated
Isolated	Belittled

Building trust and relationships through active listening
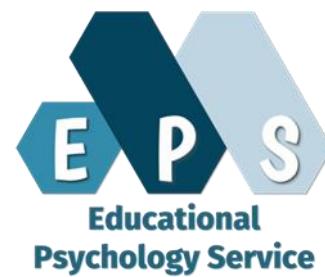
- Make sure you have time for the conversation

- Think about where to talk

- Pay attention to what is being said and communicated to you

- Show that you are listening and interested

- Focus your attention on the person

- Reflect on what has been said/communicated

- Ask open questions

- Summarise what you've heard

- Don't prepare your response

- Notice body language and tone of voice

- Communicate empathy, openness, respect, curiosity

Reflection :
Consider what has previously helped you build collaborative relationships with school/setting staff?

What might be some of the barriers that get in the way of good communication between school staff, and parents/carers?

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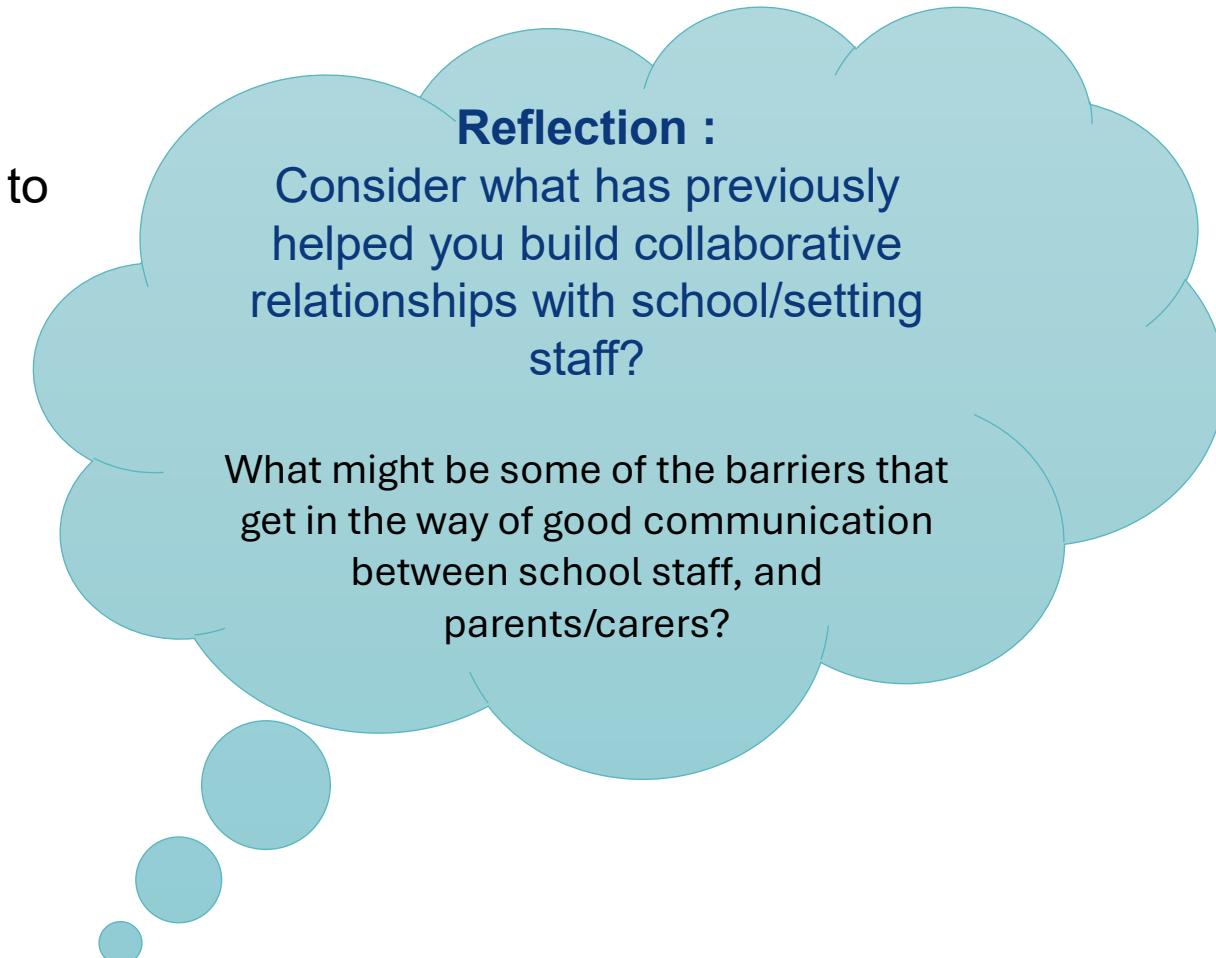
Returning to 'push and pull' factors

'Push and Pull' Factors

A 'Push' factor 'pushes' the child or young person towards attending school.

A 'Pull' factor 'pulls' the child or young person away from attending school
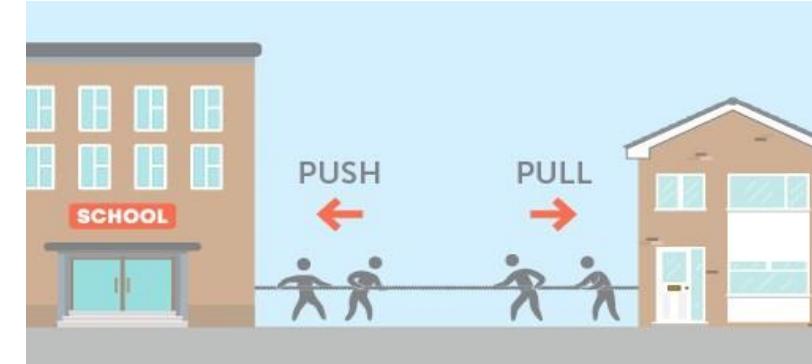
Risk and Resiliency Factors

Through identifying the 'push and pull' factors with the young person, the adults in the system around them can begin to work together with the young person to help form a plan with gradual steps to support their return to school, with a focus on the aspects which are important to the young person.


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'Push and pull' activity

Think about a young person you have cared for who have experienced Barriers to Attendance

Using your sticky notes, write down:
- Push factors which they experienced
- Pull factors which they experienced
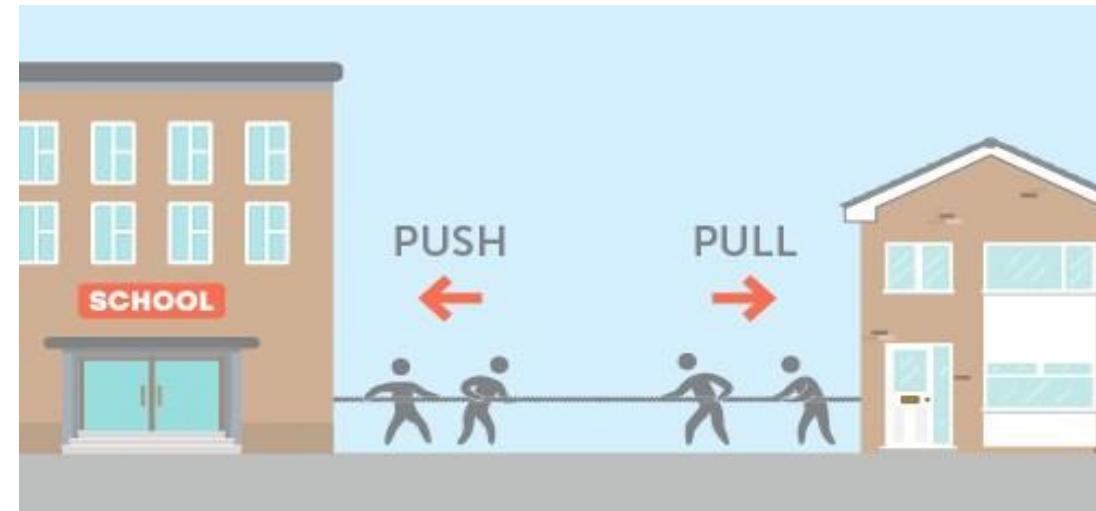
Place your sticky notes onto the large 'push/pull' diagram on your table

# Working collaboratively with schools/settings about Barriers to Attendance

Research indicates that working collaboratively can have positive impact on removing Barriers to Attendance by:

- Gaining a clear understanding of the barriers, as well as strengths and which are understood by parents/carers and school staff and/or professionals, with the child's views at the centre

- Having regularly reviewed plans between all adults supporting the child or young person, with clear, small steps identified and reviewed

- Having a key point of contact between parents/carers and the school or setting to aid communication
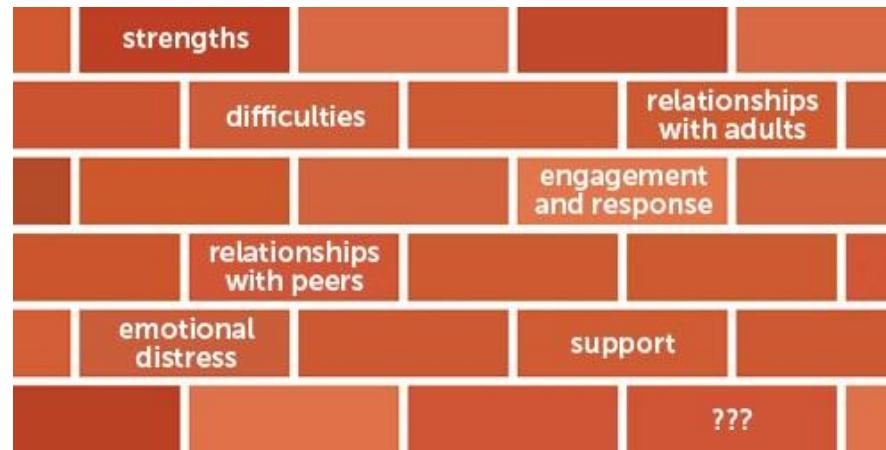
What is Emotional Literacy?

- Knowing when you are feeling a certain way

- Naming that feeling or emotion

- Sharing this feeling with trusted other/s

- Identifying personal strategies that alleviate difficult emotions and encourage feelings of contentment or ease

- Applying useful strategies to promote emotional wellbeing

- Recognising that emotions are transient and will change

- Accepting that there will be commonplace stressors

Five Steps of Emotion Coaching
Dr. John Gottman

STEP 5: Set limits and problem solve.

STEP 4: Communicate empathy and understanding.

STEP 3: Help your child verbally label emotions.

STEP 2: Recognize emotion as an opportunity for connection or teaching.

STEP 1: Be aware of your child's emotions.

The Gottman Institute
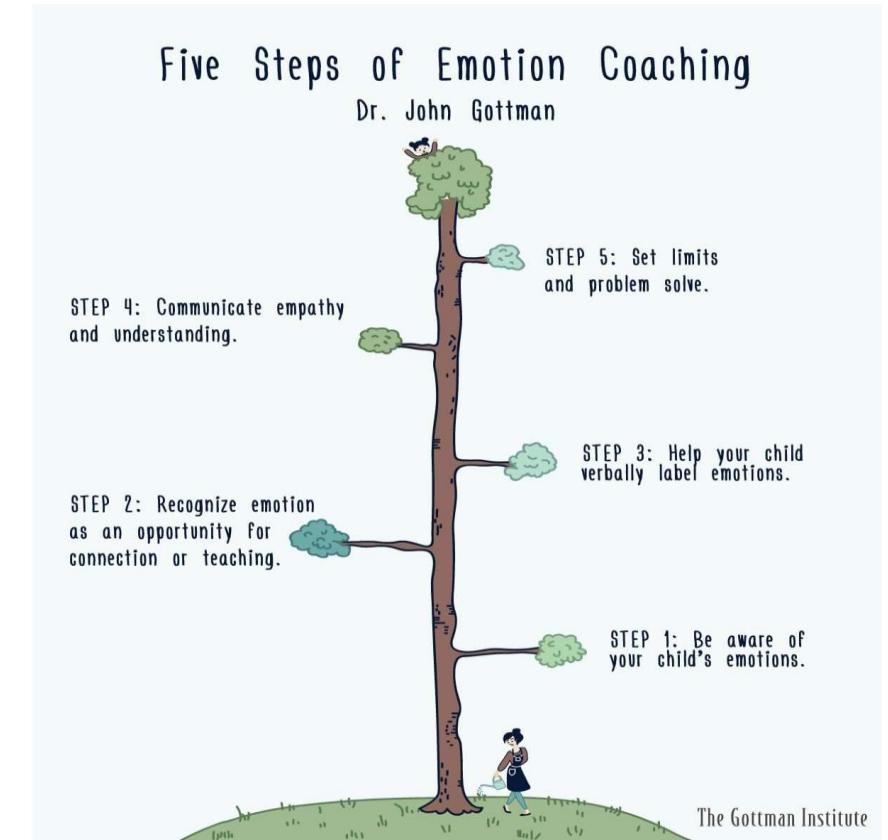
Using emotion coaching language can support with emotional literacy and communication of emotions

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Tools to help to explore children's emotional literacy and understanding of their anxiety

- *Reflecting on Anxiety Cycles*

- Explore how thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviours interact to help children manage anxiety patterns.

- *Card Sorting Activity*

- Use cards with emotions and coping strategies to help children express and organise their feelings effectively.

- *Drawing for Expression*

- Encourage children to visually represent emotions and safe spaces as a non-verbal outlet for expression.

- *Scaling and Externalising Techniques*

- Help children rate emotions and create external figures like 'worry monsters' to separate from anxiety.

EBSA

Thoughts, Feelings, Bodily Sensations & EBSA

Thoughts

Behaviours

Feelings

@DrJerricah
@EdPsychEd

Bodily Sensations

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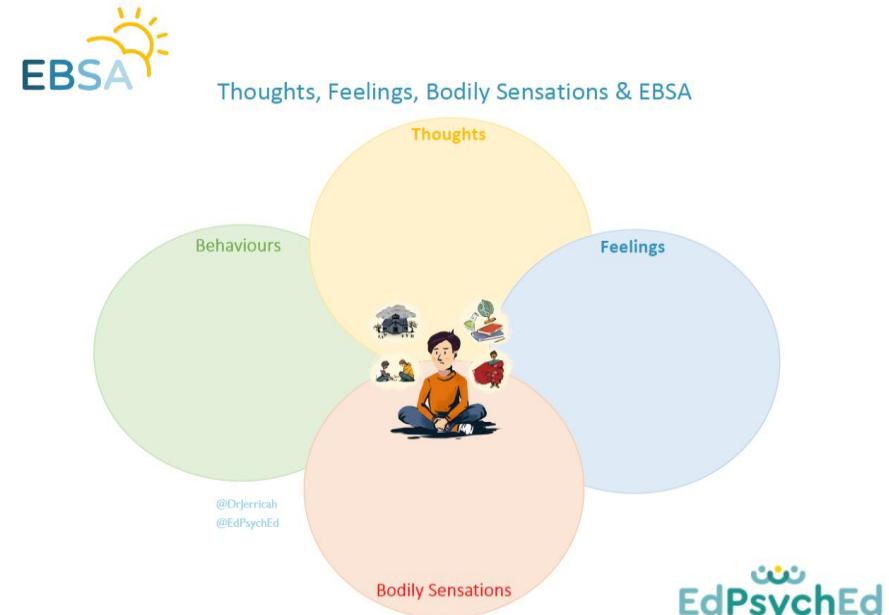
Promoting Resilience

- Considering CYP's ambitions, aspirations and motivations

- Providing access to positive experiences

- Providing opportunities to develop confidence and self-esteem

- Promoting feelings of safety and security

- Providing a sense of belonging

- Supporting development of positive relationships with adults/ peers

- Ensuring CYP feels listened to and understood

- Promoting Emotional Literacy

How can carers support young people experiencing Barriers to Attendance?

Think back to the young person you referred to in the previous 'push and pull' activity, who experienced Barriers to Attendance.

Using the handout, write down:

- What would be your first steps for supporting this young person?
- What approaches or tools might you try?
- What key information would you share with school/setting?
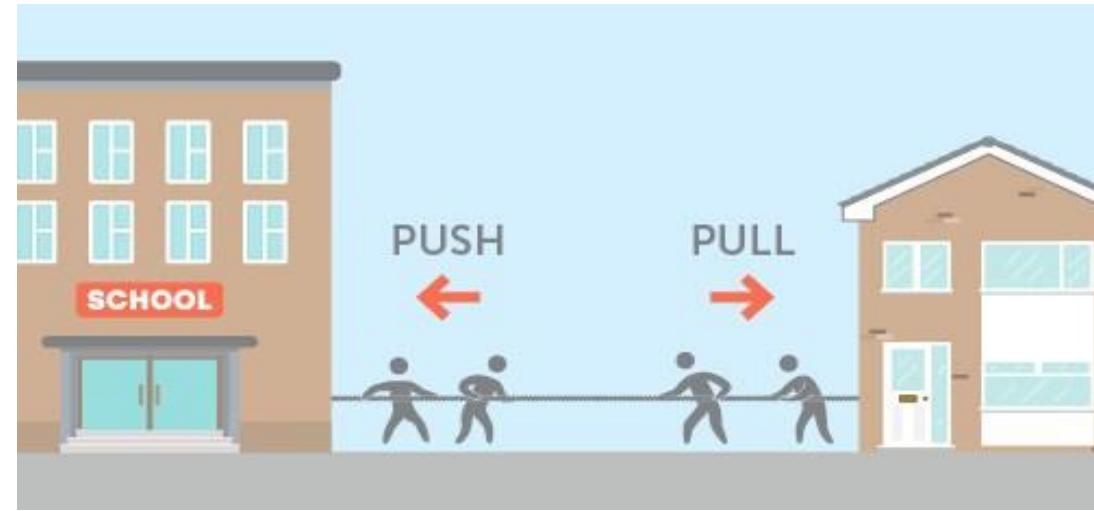
In summary

The key ways carers can support children and young people experiencing Barriers to Attendance are:

- Building trust and emotional safety

- Supporting emotional literacy development and communication

- Promote resilience

- Collaborate with schools/settings & be their advocate

- Understand the 'push and pull' factors to make an effective support plan

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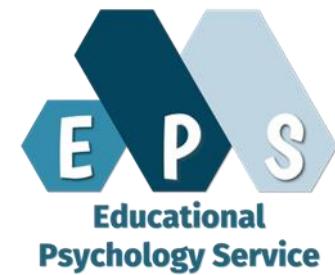
Support Services

Gloucestershire support

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)
- Teens in Crisis (TiC) / TIC +
- Young Minds Matter (YMM)
- Gloucestershire Healthy Living and Learning (GHLL)
- SENDIASS
- ATS and Inclusion Team
- Educational Psychology Service (EPS) | Gloucestershire County Council

Nationwide advice/information

- School attendance and absence (Gov.uk)
- Not Fine in School
- Square Peg
- Define Fine
- Language That Cares - TACT Fostering (tactcare.org.uk)

For more advice and information
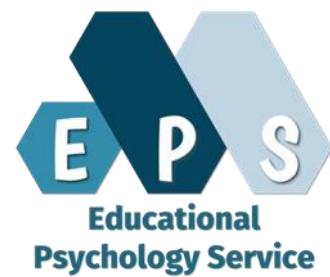
The Gloucestershire Educational Psychology Website has additional advice and guidance for supporting Barriers to Attendance for parents/carers & professionals:

[Barriers to Attendance | Gloucestershire County Council](#)

Considering barriers to school attendance and definitions of terms

Why might children and young people experience barriers to attending school?
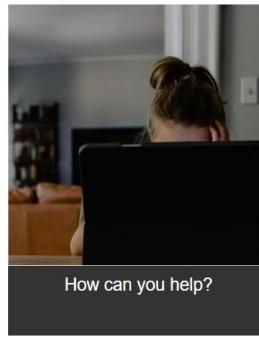

How can you help?

Ideas and resources for supporting children and young people
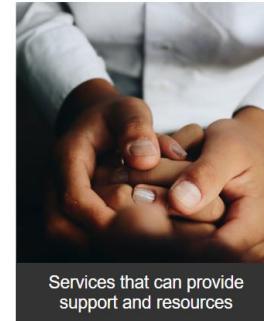
Services that can provide support and resources
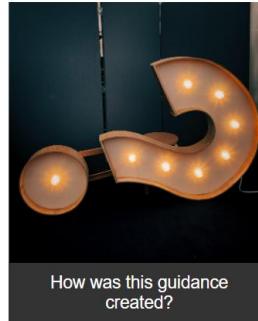
How was this guidance created?
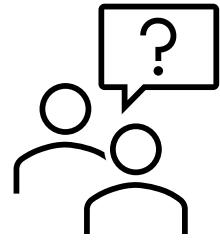
Any questions?
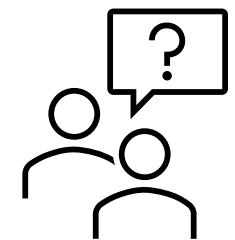
References
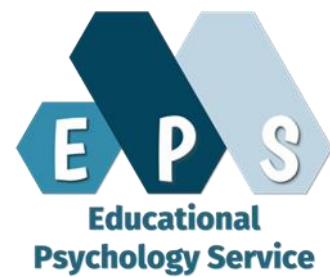
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