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***A discursive analysis of post-16 females'
stories of educational reintegration and non
attendance experiences***

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Declaration

I, the author, confirm that this thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

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Abstract

Emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) is associated with significant negative social, academic and health outcomes for young people and their families. Female adolescents from marginalised backgrounds including those with diagnosed mental health conditions are more likely to experience EBSA and school absence. Rates of persistent non attendance are continuing to rise, highlighting the need to understand how to effectively support adolescents to remain and reengage in education.

This study presents the experiences of four female post-16 students who have experienced persistent non attendance in secondary school. They have since returned to education and now attend college on a full time basis. The study used Discursive Psychology to analyse participants' discourses to gain an understanding of their attendance experiences. Data was gathered through an initial narrative interview. Participants structured their retrospective narratives by using life charts (Moyse, 2021) and engaged in a second interview in which they were requested to bring a non-verbal representation of their educational experiences.

Participant narratives are structured and framed in relation to two theoretical frameworks which have been applied to promote attendance, the systems view of school climate (SVSC) (Rudasill et al., 2018) and the persistent educational absence & reengagement with learning and school (PEARLS) model (Baron Williams, 2021). Consideration was also given to how participants used discourse to position themselves and construct their emotions, the impact of COVID and chosen personal connection items (non-verbal representations) were also considered. The study highlights the use of a multi-tiered systems approach to promote attendance within educational settings and outlines the role of the educational psychologist (EP) within these processes.

The findings emphasise the importance of relationships and emotional validation within educational environments. Participants mainly cited environmental strategies as effective in

supporting them with their non attendance. The study concludes by discussing the implications of the research for educational psychology practice, Local Authorities and educational settings.

Glossary of abbreviations

<i>Acronym</i>	<i>Definition</i>
CAMHS	Child and adolescent mental health services
CYP	Children and young people
EBSA	Emotional based school avoidance
EP	Educational psychologist
HYM	Healthy young minds
MTSS	Multi-tiered systems of support
PEARLS	Persistent educational absence and reengagement with learning and school model
SEN	Special educational needs
SENCO	Special educational needs coordinator
SVSC	Systems view of school climate model
TEP	Trainee educational psychologist

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Chapter 1: Literature review

1.0 My values & positionality

My journey into educational psychology started by working with adolescents and adults with differing levels of learning difficulties. One of these experiences included supporting carers in Romanian orphanages, caring and assisting with children's development and play skills. For me, these roles highlighted the importance of the autonomy of children and young people (CYP) and lead me to consider the value of eliciting and acting on their voices. This particular value has influenced and guided my chosen approach and methodology for this study. It is my belief that the lived experiences of CYP can provide value when creating policy related to persistent absence, also by listening to the stories of CYP the social justice agenda can progress as young people are heard and their views acted on. The role of social justice within this study is explored below in section 1.2. Throughout my training I have worked in two Local Authorities (LAs), both of which cover areas of differing levels of deprivation. Working with families from marginalised groups (e.g. those from lower socio-economic or ethnic minority backgrounds) have lead me to reflect on the disparities of resources and additional barriers which some of these families face. These experiences have lead me to reflect and place the value of social justice as central to my practice as I hope to engage and support those from marginalised groups.

Literature suggests that individuals from marginalised backgrounds are more likely to experience absence from schools (Klein, 2020; Hancock et al., 2013). In particular this study will present the voices of female adolescents who have been persistently absent from school, the majority of whom have mental health diagnoses. The involvement of this group in the research seeks to progress the social justice value underpinning the study, which is further explored in this chapter.

A narrative approach was chosen for this research as it correlates to the interpretivist philosophical stance I adopted and aligns with discourse analysis as it is underpinned by language (Haydon et al., 2018). A narrative method aligns with the inductive, exploratory nature of the research as it is not concerned with making predictions or hypotheses (Mishler, 1995). The adopted narrative approach also recognises each individual experience as valuable and acknowledges that different perceptions of the same phenomena can be true. This aspect was particularly important for me as a researcher as the voices of the post-16 population are rarely acknowledged in the current literature base. It was important for me to listen to this relatively unheard group and present their voices to add to the current literature. Hence, eliciting non-attendance stories of post-16 individuals through a narrative methodology will help to address this by allowing participants to tell their stories the way they would like to.

1.2 Importance of social justice

Social justice is a multifaceted concept and one which has no universal, single definition. A widely cited description of social justice outlined by Bell (2016) states that social justice seeks to achieve the full and equal participation from all members of society which meets their needs. Definitions of social justice also encompass constructs relating to equity theory and fairness (Sullivan et al., 2023). Equity theory promotes equitable distribution of resources as opposed to groups and individuals being offered the same. This method of distribution recognises that individuals or groups may require different or additional access and provisions to reach the same outcome or position (Tyler, 2000). More recent discussions relating to social justice have involved procedural justice, which relates to equal involvement in decision making processes (Graybill et al., 2018).

It has been additionally suggested that the difficulty in establishing a universal definition of social justice may be partly explained by the impact of individual's personal experiences which shape their understanding of the term (Winter & Hanley, 2015). My experiences, particularly those from working in Romanian orphanages have certainly influenced my understanding of social justice, and I also consider this term to encompass every member of society being able to access equitable resources and participate in the community. Throughout my experiences I have also observed how involving pupils and their families in educational decision processes can be empowering, impactful and effective in achieving positive change.

EP's are considered to be placed in a role which provides opportunities to promote social justice (Schulze et al., 2018). Throughout my time on each of my placements I have observed and participated in social justice opportunities with the aim of ensuring that CYP and their families can access equitable support by removing potential barriers and are involved in decision making processes. An example of this ensuring an interpreter is present when meeting with families who have English as an additional language and listening and acting on the voices of pupils and their families.

EP's can also contribute to the social justice agenda by presenting dissenting voices which address inequalities in current policies or systems, even if these views conflict with dominant narratives or stakeholders (Mercieca & Mercieca, 2022). Participants' narratives and voices in the current study can be considered as dissenting as they critique school systems, policies and government legislation, and as such presenting these can be considered to progress the value of social justice.

1.3 Chapter Overview

This literature review will outline the contextual background and rationale of the study. The first section will consider the context of school attendance within the UK education system. It will then examine the significance of school attendance, particularly for the post-16 and female population as well as the distinctions and differentiation of the terminology used to refer

to school attendance in the literature. Female adolescents will be specifically referred to within the literature review due to the female participant sample of this study. Emotional based school avoidance (EBSA) will be explored with its common functions, related terminology and prevalence outlined. Successful reintegration and theoretical models supporting attendance will be discussed. This will be followed by a section acknowledging the role of pupil voice within the research base. The chapter will conclude by stating the aims and rationale of the research

1.4 Current context of educational attendance within the UK education system

UK government statistics referring to school attendance are published three times a year and currently consider school absences in three categories; authorised absence, unauthorised absence and persistent absenteeism (GOV UK, 2020). School attendance guidance (GOV UK, 2020) states authorised absences occur when the school has approved a pupil's absence in advance or has accepted an explanation for absence after it has occurred. Unauthorised absences are recorded when school are not satisfied with the reasons for a pupil's absence. A pupil is labelled as a persistent non attendee when they have missed 10% or more of their school sessions due to unauthorised absences (DfE, 2023). The DfE's (2023) updated documentation calls for schools to 'sensitively' consider the reasons for pupil absence and cautions against settings which immediately threaten or implement punitive consequences.

It has been argued that government documentation regarding attendance does not reflect the complexities associated with persistent non attendance as schools are forced to adopt a 'within child' medicalised approach to determine criteria for an acceptable absence (Want, 2020). Adopting a medicalised approach may see schools recording non attendance as a mental health illness which holds particular risks for adolescents. This labelling may lead to a greater risk of that individual experiencing stigma and marginalisation, with adolescents who experience stigma less likely to engage in help seeking behaviours (Clement et al., 2015).

This approach also fails to acknowledge wider systemic influences or emotional distress which impacts a young person's decision to attend school and instead adopts a blaming approach. Research indicates that the longer an adolescent experiences EBSA the more challenging it can be for them to return, as their avoidance of school reinforces their anxiety cycle (West Sussex, 2020). Hence, it is likely that the early identification of pupils who are at risk of or who are experiencing EBSA will support schools in acting preventatively to support them to return to school before their anxieties exacerbate.

Recent DfE (2023) statistics show that in 2021/2022 the impact of COVID on UK school absence in primary and secondary settings has decreased significantly to 1.0% compared to the academic year of 2020/2021 where it was recorded at 21.3%. Despite this, persistent absence rates in secondary schools rose from 14.8% in 2020/2021 to 27.7% in 2021/2022. This supports the view that the impact of COVID will result in an increase of pupils refusing to attend school due to mental health issues and attainment anxiety (Nathwani et al., 2021). This further presents the need for research in this area to understand non attendance and support schools, pupils and their families who experience it. The significance and impact of attending school for adolescents is discussed below.

1.5 The significance of educational attendance for the outcomes of adolescents

School attendance is considered to be crucial in the development of adolescents' emotional, social and academic skills (Finning et al., 2019). The UK government's attendance policy further highlights the impact school absences have on adolescents' academic performance with documentation stating that persistent non attendees are at a 'considerable disadvantage'. Statistics support this as research shows that pupils with higher attainment report lower levels of absence compared to their lower achieving peers (GOV UK, 2019). It is not surprising that school attendance is positively correlated with academic performance (Crede et al., 2010). If young people do not attend school they will not be able to engage and access their curricular learning (Duran-Narucki, 2008). However, frequent repeated absences from school have been shown to also have negative long term consequences for pupils including poorer self-esteem, increased feelings of anxiety, depression and

not engaging in education, employment or training (NEET) in adulthood (Attwood & Croll, 2015; Reid, 2013; Kearney, 2008). Research suggests there is also an association between school absenteeism, antisocial behaviour and non-violent crime (Rocque et al., 2017). Hence, the literature presents the implications of persistent school absenteeism as influencing the lives of adolescents after education and into adulthood.

School routines and responsibilities assist in developing the skills which are needed for adulthood and employment e.g. (norms for conduct, emotional regulation etc) (Heyne et al., 2019). Schools help prepare adolescents for adulthood by supporting them to participate within society through accessing social-emotional learning and practical life lessons (Zaff et al., 2017). It is likely that adolescents who miss these opportunities to practice and hone these skills may find it difficult to transition and integrate into the community.

Adolescence can be a tricky period for young people as they begin to experience rapid hormonal development and physical changes (Dahl, 2004). It has been described as a period of vulnerability which can make it easier for emotional difficulties to develop (Collishaw et al., 2010). Statistics support this as unauthorised school absences are consistently higher in secondary settings compared to primary (DfE, 2019). This may also be explained by pupils undergoing the transition from primary to secondary education and adapting to new, often larger environments and attempting to establish new relationships.

Adolescence also marks a new period of development and maturity for young people as this typically coincides with transition from primary to secondary school. Havighurt (1948) proposes that this period brings new societal developmental tasks which need to be achieved to transition successfully into adulthood and include acceptance of one's body, becoming more self-sufficient, establishing relationships with peers of both genders, acquiring personal values to guide behaviour, preparing for an occupation, marriage and participating in society as a responsible individual. Arguably, the school environment provides opportunities for adolescents to work towards and achieve these goals. However, adolescents engaging in persistent

absence will miss out on these. Evidence has suggested that successfully achieving developmental tasks in one period is associated with achieving and successfully participating in the next (Roisman et al., 2004), therefore Havighurt's view would assert that school attendance can influence and impact adolescents' transition to adulthood. Scholars have challenged the deterministic perspective of Havighurt (1948) by questioning the content and timing of the developmental tasks as these are constructed from social norms and are likely to differ in various cultural and historical contexts (Schulenberg, Bryant & O'Malley, 2004; Brandtstadter & Lerner, 1999). Schulenberg, Bryant & O'Malley (2004) examined the association between adolescent wellbeing and developmental tasks during the transition to adulthood. Their study used a large sample size (3518 participants) and highlighted a reciprocal relationship between achieving developmental tasks and feelings of wellbeing, for example, adolescents reported increased feelings of wellbeing when they progressed with developmental tasks and experiencing a level of wellbeing was associated with more success and less stalling in developmental tasks, indicating wellbeing also plays a role in positive transitions to adulthood. The study also stated that developmental pathways are not static; adolescents who seemingly succeeded in developmental tasks can become struggling young adults and adolescents who may appear to be maladjusted can become well-functioning adults. The achievement of developmental tasks may contribute to positive transitions to adulthood but as discussed above it seems unlikely that this relationship can be considered to be causal.

Gender differences related to achieving developmental tasks during adolescence have been reported, with females typically accomplishing more developmental tasks compared to their male counterparts (Seiffge-krenke, Kiuru & Nurmi, 2010). This longitudinal study involved 228 adolescents ranging in ages from 11-20 years old. Participants completed self-report measures to record their progress with the developmental tasks cited by Havighurst (1948). The self report measure of this study can be viewed as a limitation as achieved developmental tasks were evaluated by participants, which can be impacted by social desirability and participants over or underestimating their development. Despite this critique, previous research has

highlighted similar differences among genders, with females achieving more developmental tasks than males in both an adolescent and the young adult period (Heckhausen, 2000; Seiffge-Krenke, 1998). It has been suggested that this may be due to females' earlier maturation and increased importance they assign to developmental tasks especially tasks concerned with relationships (Magnusson & Stattin, 2018; Mortimer & Shanahan, 2004). If female adolescents do place more importance on relationships, deteriorating or broken relationships may act as more impactful stressors within their environments. The literature has identified that females are more likely to cite peer conflict and relationship breakdowns as a reason for absence from school compared to males (Clissold, 2018), which strengthens the argument that female adolescents may be particularly sensitive to relationship breakdowns within the school environment.

Seiffge-Krenke, Kiuru & Nurmi (2009) also highlighted that high or continued exposure to stress has been found to negatively impact or stall the attainment of developmental tasks as this can disrupt or distract adolescents from progressing. Stress was measured in age-specific domains including problems experienced in school, with peers, with parents, self-related problems, problems with romantic relationships and leisure time using the Problem Questionnaire (PQ; Seiffge-Krenke, 1998). This suggests that adolescents who experience high levels of stress are at risk of stalling or negatively impacting their development and pathway to adulthood, this is a particular concern for adolescents from marginalised groups as they are at greater risk of experiencing stress and adversity (Murthy, 2022). This reinforces the importance of creating protective educational climates for all adolescents to thrive.

Arguably, the implications of persistent absence for Year 11 pupils who are engaging in their final examinations of secondary school and who are on the cusp of transitioning to further education, employment, developing their self identity and moving towards independent living (Hayton, 2009) could be critical in determining their lives as adults.

Consideration of the, financial, social, emotional and mental health implications of non school attendance discussed above and the added vulnerability of Year 11 pupils, who are approaching major transitional life events, highlights the necessity to understand these pupils' stories regarding their school experiences. Listening to the non attendance stories of adolescents may assist in developing policy and support to provide them with a positive transition into adulthood. This is particularly true for pupils from marginalised backgrounds who may not have access to the same support from family, friends or who have not developed the skills and resilience associated with positive transitions (Cockerill & Arnold, 2018). Literature has highlighted that female adolescents and those with mental health diagnoses are more likely to be absent from school compared to non-disadvantaged peers (Klein, 2020; DfE, 2018, Hancock et al., 2013). These mentioned groups can be considered marginalised, as this term is defined as individuals or groups in society who are excluded or disadvantaged due to their involvement or connection to disability, socio-economic status, mental health needs, sexual minority status, gender or immigration status (Sapiro & Ward, 2019). Persistent school absence can be considered to disadvantage and marginalise adolescents as they have limited access to opportunities in developing their social, emotional, academic and life skills. Arguably, educational settings use of policies which continue to negatively impact adolescents' attendance (e.g. behaviourist punishments, policies etc) reinforce the marginalisation of persistent non attendees making settings compliant in this process, with a portion of school staff citing that behaviour policies can at times contrast with the need to be flexible and consider pupils emotional needs (Chambers, 2021). Medical labels and diagnosis can also act to reinforce the marginalisation of adolescents, with Foucault (1965) arguing that mental illness and associated labels are social constructs which enables the separating of others based on historical and societal beliefs. This separation from others can be damaging to individuals and negatively impact their sense of identity, self-concept and transition to adulthood (DeLuca, 2020).

The vulnerabilities of adolescent females in relation to non attendance will be discussed below.

1.6 The vulnerabilities of adolescent females in relation to non attendance

Internalising emotions refers to when an individual experiences emotional distress internally as opposed to expressing this externally (Babicka-Wirkus et al.,2023). Previous research has consistently suggested that females internalise their emotions more frequently than their male counterparts (Kelly et al., 2016; Green et al., 2005). Persistent internalising has been associated with adolescents developing anxiety and depressive disorders, engaging in substance abuse and failing to reach their academic potential (Danneel et al., 2019; McLeod et al., 2016).Gutman & McMaster (2020) and Durbeeji et al's., (2019) studies highlighted that females typically cite higher levels of internalising behaviours and emotions (Gutman & McMaster, 2020; Durbeeji et al.,2019). This is a significant finding when we consider that internalising behaviours, anxiety and depressive disorders have been associated with a greater likelihood of engaging in educational absence (Heyne et al., 2019) offering an explanation as to why female adolescents may be more likely to experience this. While both Gutman & McMaster's (2020) & Durbeeji et al's., (2019) studies have a number of methodological strengths including large sample sizes and longitudinal designs, there are some limitations which should be considered. Gutman & McMaster's (2020) research assessed internalising behaviours from parental perspectives only. These perspectives could have been influenced by societal gender norms as parents may view their male children as being less emotional than their female children (Chaplin, 2015). Similarly the emotional expressions of children may be influenced by their parents view of gender. Chaplin (2015) provides an example of this by describing a mother who may model an acceptable pattern of 'feminine' emotional expression to her daughter which could involve suppressing feelings of distress and may differ from emotional modelling provided to her son. Durbeeji et al.,(2019)'s study involved adolescents using self-report measures to record the level of their internalising symptoms. The use of self-report

measures raises risks such as social desirability or recall bias (Doan et al., 2020). It has been suggested that societal gender norms may influence adolescent males emotional expression, as Rev (2015) suggests that males are encouraged to externalise emotions such as anger and suppress displays of sadness. This behaviour may imply reluctance from male adolescents to report emotional distress which may have influenced the self report measure of the study. This would suggest that adolescent males may face additional barriers in reporting anxiety or emotional distress. Despite these limitations both Gutman & McMaster's (2020) & Durbeeji et al., (2019) studies contribute to and strengthen the finding that female adolescents are particularly vulnerable to experiencing emotional distress, internalising behaviours and experiencing anxiety.

A number of reasons have been offered to explain the gender difference in relation to internalising including the use of social media (Twenge et al., 2018) and puberty (Lewis et al., 2015). Twenge et al., (2018) identified an association between increased use of social media, texting and gaming with anxiety disorders. While Twenge et al.,(2018) found that females engaged with social media slightly more than males (1.7% vs 1.8%), other studies with larger sample sizes show a greater prevalence of female engagement with social media compared to males (Kelly et al.,2018). This suggests that females' greater use of social media increases the likelihood of them reporting an anxiety disorder which in turn may be a contributory factor in their educational attendance. Arguably, this suggestion can be viewed as simplistic as the impact of social media on wellbeing is multifaceted with some of its uses highlighted as improving wellbeing (Verduyn et al.,2017). As such, the role of social media in relation internalising must be considered alongside environmental and external factors.

While there is no universal explanation for the gender differences associated with internalising and externalising, research findings do position female adolescents as being particularly vulnerable to experiencing emotional distress and educational absence. This is illustrated through DfE (2018) findings which highlight that after the age of thirteen female pupils are more likely to experience non school attendance than their male counter parts. The data

analysed in the DfE's (2018) research was collected from school attendance records from 2015/2016. More recent records (Welsh Gov, 2023) also present a slight increase of female adolescents' reporting non attendance compared to male pupils. Hence, female adolescents' vulnerability to experiencing non attendance presents the need for research to explore the experiences of this group.

Distinctions and differentiation of the terminology used to discuss non attendance within the literature is outlined below.

1.7 Difficulties associated with definitions of educational non attendance

The complexity of non attendance is widely acknowledged in the literature, with scholars accepting that it is made more complicated due to the inconsistent and interchangeable use of terms within educational settings and research. Non school attendance is an umbrella term which describes pupils who do not attend school (Salford Educational Psychology Service, 2020). Further distinctions are made using various terms including 'truant' which refers to a pupil who is absent from school without parental consent (Heyne et al., 2019). Truancy is not considered to relate to an individual's anxiety of attending school but to a disinterest or unwillingness to engage with education (Havik et al., 2015).

'School avoidance', 'avoiders', 'school refusal' and 'refusers' are common terms used to refer to pupils who have difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors such as anxiety or fear (Egger et al., 2003). Further confusion arises from the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V) in which school refusal is listed as a symptom associated with diagnoses ranging from social anxiety disorder to oppositional defiant disorder (Karthika & Devi, 2020).

Over the last decade, non school attendance and the EBSA term has been widely used and despite a general consensus among professionals that non attendance is a growing concern, there are differences and variations regarding how it is viewed, studied and reported (Knage, 2021). Differences in terminology relating to absence can also impact and influence

staff perceptions of pupils. Torrens's et al., (2011) study showed staff made a distinction between pupils who were considered legitimately ill and 'school phobics'. The study highlighted implications for these pupils as staff were found to pass more judgment on them, including making off hand remarks etc. It is likely that these negative perceptions may exacerbate pupils' school refusal behaviours and reinforce general negative stereotypes (Torrens et al., 2011). School attendance has been associated with pupils feeling a sense of belonging within their school settings (Johnson, 2009). Pupils may pick up on negative staff perceptions and this may act to further reinforce their cycle of anxiety, increasing their difficulty to attend school. This highlights a need for staff to recognise the emotional issues underpinning non attendance, as they have the potential to perpetuate or deescalate these. Interestingly, there appears to be a lack of studies concerned with understanding how pupils view terminology relating to absence and in particular the EBSA term. Understanding how pupils perceive the term EBSA would be useful to explore how they perceive their non attendance. Using a term to describe non attendance which resonates with young people would support them to feel listened too, understood and provide them with a degree of ownership.

The point has been raised that the terminology 'school refuser' presents a 'problem' within the young person and does not consider impacting environmental factors (West Sussex, 2020). This term also carries connotations suggesting that the young person is in control and is choosing not to attend. This reinforces the idea that non attendance is a choice and further promotes unsympathetic narratives regarding adolescents who are struggling to attend their educational setting. A recent systematic literature review from Corcoran & Kelly (2023) highlighted that the majority of adolescents felt that their attendance difficulties initially started due to issues stemming from relationships with adults and peers, academic worries and transition. This questions the use of the EBSA term as non attendance is positioned as a response to a situation which resulted in anxiety as opposed to being based from initial emotional distress (Clissold, 2018). Due to the complexity and varied nature of non attendance attributions and preferred terms may differ between individuals. Educational professionals

should consider which terminology an individual may relate and respond to. It is important that the term used to describe an individual's non attendance is shared and agreed with them.

Multiple scholars have voiced their concern regarding the over simplification and generalisation of terms relating to absence and call for a shift on widening perspectives to consider systemic, societal factors relating to school absence (Birioukov, 2016; Ekstrand, 2015). Arguably, the EBSA term allows the complexities and wider factors influencing the phenomena to be acknowledged. Knage (2021) cautions that although the term EBSA seems to highlight the multifaceted nature of non school attendance its complexities are often simplified in the research and therefore result in less effective targeted approaches. Therefore, the chosen research methodology and epistemological position for this study will attempt to capture some of the complexities of non attendance in order to accurately present participants' school experiences.

The underpinnings of EBSA will be presented next.

1.8 The underpinnings of EBSA from the literature base

The term EBSA refers to pupils whose absence from school is caused by emotional or physical distress manifesting in anxiety related to attending school (West Sussex, 2020). This term is considered to have strengths as it enables the acknowledgment of emotional factors impacting a pupil's attendance, while also differentiating between pupils engaging in truancy (Thambirajah, Grandison & De-Hayes, 2008; Pellegrini, 2007).

A diagram illustrating how the EBSA cycle is maintained over time is presented within the Appendix A (Figure A1). 50% of clinic-referred pupils who are classed as non attenders were found to have an anxiety disorder (Maynard et al., 2015) with 80% of these reporting physiological symptoms such as headaches and stomach aches (Honjo et al., 2001). Although findings suggest there is a link between anxiety disorders and non school attendance, Finning et al (2019) makes the point that there is little longitudinal evidence to support a causal relationship between the two. It also must be noted that not every individual who experiences

non attendance has a diagnosed medical condition even when anxiety may be experienced (Egger et al., 2003).

However, when an individual experiences anxiety or feelings of fear associated with attending school this may be accompanied by physiological symptoms. The individual may wish to protect themselves from these emotions and avoid their educational settings through refusing to get ready for school or leave the house. Individuals may also exhibit externalising, outwardly displayed behaviours to avoid what they perceive as a threatening situation to remain in a place of safety e.g. home (Thambirajah et al., 2008). Although initially this avoidance may ease feelings of anxiety, continued avoidance will exacerbate anxious feelings increasing the difficulty of breaking this cycle the longer it continues.

Prevalence and functions of EBSA are explored below.

1.9 Common functions and prevalence of EBSA highlighted within the literature

Some researchers suggest that experiencing anxiety is an evolutionary trait which allows individuals to protect themselves, however continued exposure to heightened anxiety can prove to be maladaptive. Current EBSA literature reflects this and incorporates Kearney & Silverman's (1990) research relating to the function of anxiety by stating four key functions for non school attendance as set out below. As discussed EBSA is a complex, multifaceted phenomena so these functions may interlink.

- To avoid anxious or physiological feelings associated with school e.g. sore head, nausea (associated with general anxiety)
- To avoid social situations within the school environment (associated with social anxiety)
- To increase or prolong attention and interaction from a significant other e.g. caregiver (associated with separation anxiety)
- To seek out more motivating experiences outside of school e.g. playing computers

It is difficult to establish prevalence rates of ESBA due to the discrepancy in terminology and different LA approaches to monitoring and recording attendance (Baker & Bishop, 2015).

Research has estimated that the figure may range between 1% and 5% of school populations (Pellegrini, 2007). Havik et al., (2015) provides a more specific statistic stating that approximately 4% of 11-15 year old pupils reported refusing to attend school. While this study used a large sample size, 16% of the overall sample did not participate due to school non attendance. Arguably this group would have some of the most relevant views when discussing non attendance and its causes. The study did not include measures associated with separation anxiety or fear of being separated from a caregiver, one of the functions of anxiety cited by Kearney & Silverman (1990). Hence, this study may not accurately reflect the prevalence or causes of non attendance in a school population. Despite this, the research provides us with a baseline figure as it can be argued that the real statistic of non attendance is likely to be higher.

The literature highlights that EBSA is not solely experienced by any particular group or sex (Pellegrini, 2007) and it typically develops gradually (Gulliford & Miller, 2015). Non school attendance behaviours have been shown to peak around key transition points for example, entry into secondary school, with research showing an increased likelihood of adolescents engaging in school refusal between the ages of eleven and seventeen, particularly for females (DfE, 2018; Maric et al., 2013; Pellegrini, 2007). A number of additional risk points for EBSA have been identified including moving to a new school and struggling to access academic work (West Sussex, 2020).

Factors influencing EBSA which are cited within the literature will be examined in the following sections.

1.10 Within child factors associated with EBSA identified from the research base

In the literature, there is a dominant narrative that has historically attributed non school attendance to difficulties experienced by the pupil (within-child) (Baron Williams, 2021; Want, 2020; James, 2016). A large amount of research has adopted a clinical approach to prolonged absence which has resulted in attributing medicalised within child explanations to account for and explain attendance behaviours such as mental health and psychiatric conditions (Adams,

2022; Kearney, 2008). This narrative is further reinforced by literature attaching clinical language to non school attendance such as 'treatment', and 'symptoms'. (Pellgrini, 2007).

Findings do show that adolescents who struggle with attending school are more likely to report mental health and emotional difficulties, particularly disorders related to anxiety and depression which are considered to be the most common diagnosis within the EBSA population (Havik et al., 2015; Van Ameringen et al., 2003; Egger et al., 2003). However, the causality of non attendance and mental health conditions cannot be assumed. Individuals with previous mental health diagnoses and those predisposed to be sensitive towards stressors may be exposed to factors which further exacerbate their difficulties.

This predominant research focus has resulted in a lack of large studies exploring possible school and family factors relating to EBSA (Havik et al., 2015). These findings should be considered with caution as exploring EBSA using diagnostic questionnaires and clinical samples arguably captures a restricted view of the phenomena providing one perspective from one domain and ignoring school and environmental factors (Want, 2020). This discourse will continue to reinforce a within-child narrative regarding EBSA and ignore environmental factors and strategies which could be considered to support attendance. While medical diagnosis forms a large part of the research relating to within child non school attendance factors, other risk factors include pupils with special educational needs, those who use alcohol, drugs or those with physical health conditions (Allison et al., 2019; Heradstveit et al., 2017; Hadvick et al., 2015).

Gender differences in attributions relating to non attendance appear to be inconsistent. Females have been found to cite slightly more somatic symptoms and health complaints as a reason for their non attendance compared to their male peers (Kaspersen et al., 2012). Havik et al., (2015) highlights a weak finding which shows a slight decrease in the number of females who report truancy reasons for absence compared to males. It was suggested that this could be due to females' greater motivation to academically achieve (Wigfield et al., 2006). Duckworth et

al's., (2015) research challenges this view as they found no difference between male and females motivation levels. The ambiguous research base suggests that gender differences related to attributions of school absence should be interpreted with caution. Although there is little difference in the attributions of male and female non attendance, it may be that females are more vulnerable to the stressors which exacerbate non attendance behaviours. This may explain why females are more likely to experience this.

1.11 Potential contributory factors of EBSA identified from the research base

Family and parental factors can also influence pupils' attendance behaviours school activities, domestic violence and mental health issues (Hendron & Kearney, 2016; Thorton et al., 2013). The literature has consistently highlighted that teaching professionals associate poor attendance with parental education, poor parenting and deprived home environments (Gren-Landell et al., 2015; Malcolm et al., 2003). This blaming narrative reinforces the construct that EBSA behaviours can be attributed to the home environment. Conversely, parents are more likely to attribute non attendance behaviours to problems within school, including bullying, poor relationships with teachers and challenging school work (Pellegrini, 2007). Pupils rarely select home factors as reasons for their non attendance (Pellegrini, 2007; Malcolm et al., 2003). More recent studies presented a parenting perspective of EBSA behaviours indicating that those who felt less able to cope with their children's challenging behaviour found it more difficult to promote school attendance (Kearney, 2008). This concept of parental self-efficacy (PSE), a parent's belief in their capacity to fulfil the obligations of the role of caregiver was explored by Carless et al., (2015). This research found an association between parent perceptions of their PSE and EBSA behaviours. Those who reported lower senses of PSE were more likely to parent young people who exhibited EBSA (Carless et al., 2015). Want (2020) critiqued this study, highlighting that the small sample size used undermined the validity of the findings and asserted there is a need for longitudinal research to further clarify the relationships between parental ability, perceptions and EBSA behaviours. Therefore it would seem that concerned parties appear to construct differing explanations to make sense of EBSA. Gren-Landell et al., (2015) suggests

that this may highlight a difficulty among teachers to identify multiple, interactive issues impacting attendance within the school environment.

In order to help adolescents break the EBSA cycle it is important for parents and staff to engage in joint planning to provide consistent support across both home and school settings (Finning et al., 2019). Focusing on attributing blame for the cause of non attendance arguably could lead to conflict and damage the relationship and communication between home and school. Adopting a solution focused approach, such as Harker, Dean & Monsen's solution orientated framework (2016) could be an effective mechanism in validating both parental and school stakeholders while moving away from appropriating blame for the non attendance.

This presents a clear role for the EP to facilitate and defuse these difficult conversations in order to place the young person at the centre of discussions and assist in bringing about effective change.

1.12 School factors associated with EBSA identified from the research base

Studies show that adolescents are more likely to identify features of the school environment as influencing and impacting their decision to attend (Pellegrini, 2007; Malcom et al., 2003). These features include low feelings of school connectedness, belonging, school safety, peer conflict, bullying and poor relationships with teachers (Van Eck et al., 2017; Ingul et al., 2012; Egger et al., 2003; McShane et al., 2001). Feeling physically and emotionally safe within school settings have been associated with developing and maintaining positive relationships with both staff and peers (Mortimer, 2018). This concept has a biological, evolutionary basis and is underpinned by the Social Safety Theory hypothesis (Slavich, 2020). This asserts that forming and maintaining supportive social bonds is critical for protection against threats and survival. The majority of studies investigating the impact of school factors relating to EBSA have mainly adopted a qualitative methodology and consisted of small sample sizes, apart from Egger et al (2003). Egger's (2003) sought to understand if there was an association between psychiatric disorders and non attendance behaviours. This resulted in a

medicalised, within child outlook and was critiqued for its methodological limitations including its lack of a multivariate approach (Hadvik et al., 2015). Hadvik's et al, (2015) study aimed to rectify this by conducting a large scale sample study and considering the specific roles that teachers may play in EBSA. The research highlighted the importance of both peer and teacher relationships when considering pupil attendance supporting previous literature. Corcoran & Kelly's review of the literature (2022) highlight teacher relationships as being central to attendance with some pupils feeling that their teachers disliked them (How, 2015). This suggests that the link between EBSA and mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression may be exacerbated by poor teacher relationships, as this contributes to negative emotional experiences and therefore can be considered as a risk. Research also identified the impact that teachers' classroom management styles played, as these had the potential to enable bullying and peer exclusion leading to a direct association to EBSA (Clissold, 2018; Beckles, 2014). However, it can be argued that causality between a teacher's classroom management style and attendance cannot be confirmed, as absence may also increase peer exclusion. Future study designs that consider the association between contributory factors will be useful in establishing the nature of relationships between variables related to non attendance.

Scholars have highlighted numerous initiatives designed to adapt the school environment to assist adolescents in attending. Suggested interventions include increasing feelings of school connectedness, peer mentors, offering additional support during transitions and timetable modifications (Havik et al., 2015; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014; Elliot & Place, 2019). Parents also recognise the significance of the school environment and name supportive teaching staff as playing an essential role in successful reintegration to school (Havik et al., 2015). Despite certain groups placing more importance on specific factors relating to non attendance, research consistently promotes and highlights the importance of a collaborative, team approach involving all concerned parties (Gren-Landell et al., 2015; Nuttall & Woods, 2013). Interestingly, responding to EBSA with consequences and penalties has been found to be ineffective and Apter (2017) suggests punishment for non attendance should be avoided as this can further

alienate individuals from their educational setting. This contrasts sharply with the current government legislation which outlines how parents can receive fines as a result of their child's prolonged school absence (GOV UK, 2020). This approach arguably reduces the complexity of non attendance and places blame within the family environment, ignoring the school and individual child factors. Dalziel & Henthorne (2005) interviewed parents who felt the current policy of fining for non attendance resulted in parents feeling a lack of control and agency. This strengthens the argument for a coordinated, collaborative approach to empower parents, pupils and school staff in relation to attendance. The criteria of what constitutes a 'successful' reintegration will be examined next.

1.13 Views of a successful reintegration after experiencing EBSA

From a school and LA perspective the success criteria associated with reintegration is typically associated with an individual physically attending their setting and following a full school timetable (Baron Williams, 2020; Mortimer, 2018). However, there do not appear to be many studies which focus on pupils' perceptions of what constitutes a 'successful' reintegration. Grandison (2011) directly asked five secondary school pupils about their conceptions of reintegration. These five pupils, two of whom were female, were persistent non attendees who had spent some time in a Short Stay school which supported pupils who engaged in school refusal behaviour. At the time of the research each pupil had either successfully reintegrated into mainstream or was in the process of doing so. Only one pupil considered returning to an educational setting fulltime as constituting a successful reintegration. The rest of the participants (including the two female participants) instead identified an increased sense of emotional wellbeing as a main feature of successful reintegration.

Nuttall and Woods (2013) suggest combining both measures; an individual's school attendance and a reduction in their anxiety as a more effective method when considering what constitutes a 'successful' reintegration. Arguably, this suggestion is valid as an adolescent may be able to re-attend their setting but mask their emotional distress. With this in mind, making

emotional wellbeing a focus of a 'successful' reintegration will lead to long term attendance and positive transitions to adulthood.

1.14 Adolescent voice related to non attendance within the literature

Listening to the voices of adolescents and involving them in decisions relating to their education has a number of benefits including improved relationships between teachers-pupils and increased feelings of well being (Graham et al., 2018; Fielding, 2015). Listening to the voices of adolescents also encompasses the social justice value of this study as this can lead to researchers effectively capturing their lived experiences promoting more inclusive practice and research (Mansfield, 2014).

The majority of educational non attendance research which presents the sole voices of female adolescents tends to focus on those females with special educational needs, particularly autistic females (O'Hagan, Bond & Hebron, 2022; Moyses, 2021). There is a lack of research presenting the sole narratives of other marginalised female groups including those from a lower socio-economic background and those with a mental health diagnosis.

Legislation such as the SEND Code of Practice (2015) and the Children and Families Act (2014) supports the concept that every adolescent has the right to express and have their views acknowledged on decisions which affect their lives. This has helped promote person centred practice and highlighted that adolescents are best-placed to identify their needs, strengths and preferred support (Atkinson et al., 2015). It has been argued that these principles are difficult to put into practice within educational settings and research (Cremin, Mason & Buser, 2011). One such difficulty in capturing and eliciting pupil voice is tokenism, which refers to instances where young people are provided with opportunities to express their voice but this does not lead to their tangible input or involvement (Barton, 2008). Tokenism can lead to adolescents feeling disempowered and can result in their disengagement (Herriot, 2013). However, Lundy (2018) comments that direct participation of the young person provides valuable information so fear of tokenism should not prevent professionals eliciting the views of adolescents. Researchers

attempting to elicit and gather the voices of adolescents should also be aware of their own biases which may influence how they interpret these.

The majority of research related to non attendance is dominated by adult lead voices (James, 2016) which highlights a power imbalance and asserts that the experiences of adults are more valued than young people. This research will seek to partly readdress this imbalance by listening to and presenting the voices of female adolescents.

The representation of the Post-16 demographic within the literature base is discussed below.

1.15 The post-16 population and non attendance literature

Following the revision of the SEND Code of Practice (2015) and the Children and Families Act (2014) young people up to 25 years of age were eligible for educational psychology involvement. Atkinson et al., (2015) described it as 'one of the most significant developments the profession has ever seen'. Currently there is a small but emerging base of research examining the post-16 population and the role of the EP within this (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). It has been suggested that EP contributions when working with this group mainly involve supporting transitions to further education, employment and are underpinned by the goal of preparing adolescents for adulthood (Bason, 2012).

The post-16 population are on the cusp of adulthood and experience a number of significant transitions as they move towards independent living (Hayton, 2009). Therefore, this age group is at an increased risk of experiencing mental health needs (Dahl, 2004) which presents them as a group warranting the support of EPs.

The aim of the research will be stated below.

1.16 Aim of research

The aim of this research is to gain an increased understanding of female adolescents' attendance and reintegration experiences following EBSA. This will be achieved by exploring how females use discourse to construct their educational non attendance narratives. Practical strategies which female adolescents consider to be effective in supporting attendance will also be examined.

In order to accomplish this aim, females within the post-16 demographic who experienced non attendance while attending secondary school were recruited. Participants were currently attending college. In line with the title of this study, participants were encouraged to reflect on facilitating factors which helped them to feel able to reengage with education. Hence this research will provide an understanding of reintegration barriers and facilitators relating to non attendance. Participant narratives will be multifaceted in nature with no single causes or universal truths. Therefore, experiences of non attendance will be referred to using the language chosen by participants within their interviews. This will help to ensure narratives reflect each individual and consider the multiple influences which may have impacted their educational journeys.

Presenting the stories of four female adolescents, the majority of which have mental health diagnoses progresses the social justice aspect of this study by capturing the lived experiences of this marginalised group. Involving the post-16 population also seeks to readdress the lack of literature involving this group within educational research. The majority of the research with the post-16 population follows a predominately small-scale, exploratory, qualitative approach which makes generalisability difficult (Giles & Rowley, 2020). This limitation will apply to the current study but the narratives collected will address some of the gap in involving post-16 individuals in non attendance research and assist with promoting successful transitions for this group progressing to further education and adulthood.

Chapter 2: Methodology & data collection

2.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the methodological approach adopted in this research. The following sections outline the aim of the research and the implications of the ontological and epistemological positions adopted. The chapter then outlines the research design, procedure and data collection. Next the chapter states the demographics of participants and the ethical considerations related to recruitment.

2.1 Research question and aims

The research will answer the following question:

- How do post-16 females use discourse to represent and re-construct their experiences of educational non attendance?

This transformative research will support professionals in designing systems and creating preventative strategies for future female adolescents and their families impacted by non attendance. The research will also progress the value of social justice as it captures the voices of a marginalised group in society, females with mental health diagnoses, as this group can be considered to be excluded or disadvantaged in their communities (Sapiro & Ward, 2019).

The study will also add to the existing literature base by increasing the understanding of post-16 females' attendance experiences. It is hoped that the retrospective research process will enable the identification of supportive features which helped participants to break their cycle of non attendance. By asking participants to acknowledge their reengagement in education as a success, the research will empower and motivate participants to continue to progress in their education journeys.

2.2 Research Paradigms

It is important that researchers recognise and acknowledge how they view the world. Being aware of our worldview is important as philosophical assumptions, values and stances influence the design and direction of research (Merterns, 2015). The belief systems and theoretical assumptions an individual holds about reality are labelled as paradigms and make assumptions about beliefs related to ontology, epistemology and research methodology (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Mills, Bonner & Francis (2006) comment that researchers must apply a research paradigm which asserts 'their beliefs about the nature of reality' in order to create a strong research design.

An interpretivist paradigm presents multiple interpretations of the studied phenomena and therefore does not claim to discover one, single truth (Levers, 2013). The language in which individuals choose to tell their stories can be interpreted to present their experiences (Boscolo et al., 1987).

2.3 Ontology of the research

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and asks the question, 'do things exist independently of our mind, or is our world something constructed from our thoughts?' (Levers, 2013). This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm which acknowledges that the knower creates the world, hence this ontological stance asserts that reality is constructed from social contexts, interactions and interpretations (Scotland, 2012). This perspective allows individual experiences and truths to be recognised and valued. It also aims to understand the lived experiences of participants. This position has been said to inform qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and therefore was considered suitable for this study. I adopted a critical realist ontology when conducting the research as this allowed the acknowledgement of existing structures and instances of power within female environments which may be relevant to and appear in participant narratives.

2.4 Epistemology of the research

Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge (Tuli, 2010) in particular it considers the relationship between the known and the knower, what is knowledge and how we know it (Tubey, Rotich & Bengat, 2015). This research has been governed by the interpretivist paradigm which asserts that reality and meaning is subjective, can have multiple versions and is constructed through interactions with others, external environments and society (Crotty, 1998). The study's interpretivist epistemology accepted that although an objective reality does exist, the pursuit of truth was not of central importance, rather the focus was on how experiences and knowledge were constructed.

According to this epistemological perspective, a person's experience cannot be judged to be "real" or "false," and asserts that there are multiple realities. As a result, this perspective recognised that participants created their non attendance experiences through language and these were not static or fixed but diverse and dynamic. Hence, participant narratives were captured and corresponded to a specific context and point in time.

As such, my viewpoint and stance throughout the research process has been one based between a relativist and critical realist perspective. Adopting an interpretivist epistemology and critical realist ontology allowed the acknowledgement of multiple truths, validated each participant's experiences and allowed comments to be made on existing structures such as both school and government policies and systems.

2.5 Key features of qualitative research within the study

The key features of qualitative research are listed by Marriam (2002) and align with the philosophical, ontological and epistemological positions above. In summary, they include viewing the world as a socially constructed reality, where there is no one fixed truth and where facts and experiences can change over time. Qualitative approaches are often used to deliver

rich, in-depth accounts which result in gaining a deeper understanding of social contexts (Willis, 2007). The proposed study will take place in a natural setting (participants' current college), involve various data collection methods and adopt an inductive approach (where themes are created and not assumed). An inductive approach values and gives importance to the participants' chosen language and narratives while allowing them to raise issues that matter most (Baron Williams, 2021; Yauch & Steudel, 2003).

2.6 Research design

2.6.1 Analysing narrative accounts through examination of discourse

Narratives are considered to be stories involving a sequence of events which attribute agency and roles to characters and infer causality between events (Murray, 2015). Narrative psychology is underpinned by the concept that individuals construct and tell stories to make sense of their experiences and identity (Schiff, 2012). Narrative research methods are exploratory, interpretative and present the participants' narratives as the object of study (Bruner, 2004). McAdams (2013) argued that individuals also present themselves and who they are through the stories they chose to tell. Narratives may also help individuals to reflect on the past actions of themselves, others, discuss the present situation and consider the future (Hiles et al., 2008).

Narratives are not only written and spoken, but can be presented through art, colours, objects, music etc (Murray, 2015). Researchers can be creative when considering methods of eliciting narratives but need to ensure participants feel safe and comfortable to ensure they are able to present their narratives authentically.

2.6.2 Importance of narratives

Listening and presenting individuals' narratives through a discursive perspective allows for a deeper understanding of how they view their experiences and how these have been shaped by cultural, social or institutional influences (Clandinin, 2006).

Traditional interviews tend to follow a structured approach where participants answer pre-selected questions and participant led stories can be considered a deviation and ignored in the data analysis process (Murray, 2015). Narrative interviews seek to listen to participants' narratives by adopting a semi-structured or unstructured approach in which the researcher is led by the participant. This creates a shift away from the traditional roles of interviewer-interviewee to narrator-listener (Kartch, 2017)

2.6.3 The design of the study

This research adopted a qualitative approach which aligns with its philosophical position as it aims to increase understanding of adolescents lived experiences of non attendance in a social context. Considering the limited number of studies solely involving female adolescents in the educational non attendance field, it is fitting that this study be exploratory (Grbich, 2012). As a result, the study used a narrative methodology to capture and present the stories of pupils who had experienced non attendance and analysed these through discursive psychology.

The research design included conducting face-to-face reflective narrative interviews with four post-16 females who had previously experienced non attendance in secondary school but who now attended college. Participants were given a choice to select their preferred method of communication for the interviews, either online via a platform such as Microsoft Teams or face to face in their college. All participants chose to participate in face to face interviews and all attended the same college. By providing participants with a choice of how they could participate in the interview, I hoped to increase their feelings of autonomy and control. This was especially important when I considered that adolescents who experience non attendance report feeling

'powerlessness' (Wilkins, 2008). The majority of current research involves individuals who are presently engaged in a cycle of non attendance. While this approach has its strengths as it captures pupils' present emotions and experience it can be criticised as non attendance experiences are likely stressful and upsetting (Havik et al., 2015) which may make it challenging for participants to describe, recall, and reflect on these experiences. Speaking with adolescents who have broken the cycle of non attendance and have returned to school may, in some cases, yield different perspectives and insights. A retrospective approach may provide participants with a wider perspective and enable them to consider the influencing factors and features of their experiences in more detail. Evidence for this has been presented from previous research which showed that adolescents who have experienced non attendance discussed the importance of having time to reflect to make sense of their experiences (Mortimer, 2018; Nuttall & Woods, 2013).

2.6.4 Sampling of the study

The sample size of the study was informed by Haydon et al., (2018) who recommended that studies adopting a narrative approach should involve a few participants (between one and six) due to the approach's in-depth data collection and analysis. Four participants were decided on as this number would ensure an in-depth analysis for each participant narrative. The study aimed to highlight themes which could be subsequently investigated quantitatively with larger sample sizes. The inclusion of one college was selected as it was felt that this would assist in making the findings from the research more meaningful for the setting.

2.7 Research participants and college context

2.7.1 Context of the participating college

The college is situated within the North West of England in a highly deprived area. The North West region's rate of persistent school absence in primary, secondary and specialist

settings is 22.6% which is slightly lower than the national average of 24.2% (Gov UK, 2022; Gov UK, 2023).

2.7.2 Participant criteria & recruitment

The following criteria were used to identify suitable participants for this study.

Participants must be attending college on a full time basis and be sixteen or over. They will have missed 10% or more of their previous secondary school experiences. Participants will initially be identified by staff and consider themselves as having an emotional basis for their non attendance. Non attendance experiences must have occurred within the last five years.

Participants were recruited by the following process:

- College special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCO) in my local area were approached and informed of the study via email. A call was arranged with the SENCO from the participating college to discuss further details related to the research.
- The SENCO was provided with participant and parent information sheets and consent forms (see Appendix B and C). The SENCO agreed to approach potential participants and invite them to take part in the study. Interested participants completed consent forms which were returned and a date was agreed for me to meet with each participant for an introductory session prior to beginning the research. During these sessions I met with each participant and explained the research aim and requirements. Participants reaffirmed their wish to participate in the research and dates were arranged for initial face-to-face interviews.

2.7.3 Participant demographics

Participant demographics are recorded in Table 1 below. For further details relating to each participant's life experiences please see the background section within each participant narrative (sections 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8).

Table 1:

Participant demographics

This table outlines demographics of each participant within the study

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Ethnic background</i>	<i>Diagnosis</i>	<i>Number of attended secondary schools</i>
Louise	Female	17	White British	Generalised Anxiety Disorder	1
Joanne	Female	18	White British	Generalised Anxiety Disorder & Obsessive Compulsive Disorder	3
Marie	Female	17	White British	Depression	3
Abby	Female	17	White British	N/A	2

2.8 Data collection & research procedure

Pilot interviews were completed before initial meetings with participants were held. For details and reflections relating to these please see Appendix D. An overall view of the research process is displayed in Figure 1 and outlined below. At the introductory sessions, participants were given a life chart template, completed example and instructions on how to present their educational experiences (life chart resources adapted from Moyses et al., (2021). See Appendix E). Moyses et al., (2021) used life charts to support autistic female adolescents to retell and structure their primary and secondary school experiences. In the current study, life charts were used to support participants to present their stories of secondary school and college. The life charts are discussed and presented in more detail below in Figure 2.

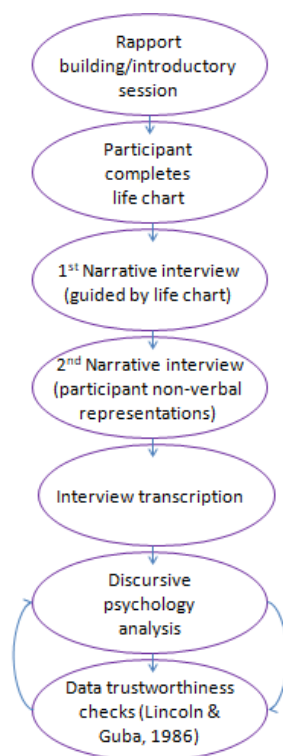
Participants were given the choice of completing their life charts in school supported by a trusted adult or at home. Three participants chose to complete the life chart or wrote notes relating to their experiences at home. One participant (Marie) preferred to discuss her experiences without using a life chart or writing about her experiences.

Participants shared a non-verbal representation of a source of support or a representation of their non attendance experiences during a second interview, which was conducted a week after the first. Thirty minutes were allocated for participants second interviews. It was explained to participants that they could select whatever they would like for their non-verbal representations including an item, colour, picture, sound etc. The time scale between interviews was intended to give participants an opportunity to process and reflect on their interview to ensure they selected an appropriate non-verbal representation.

Figure 1

Method of data gathering & analysis

The sequential approach to collection and cyclic process of analysing and checking data

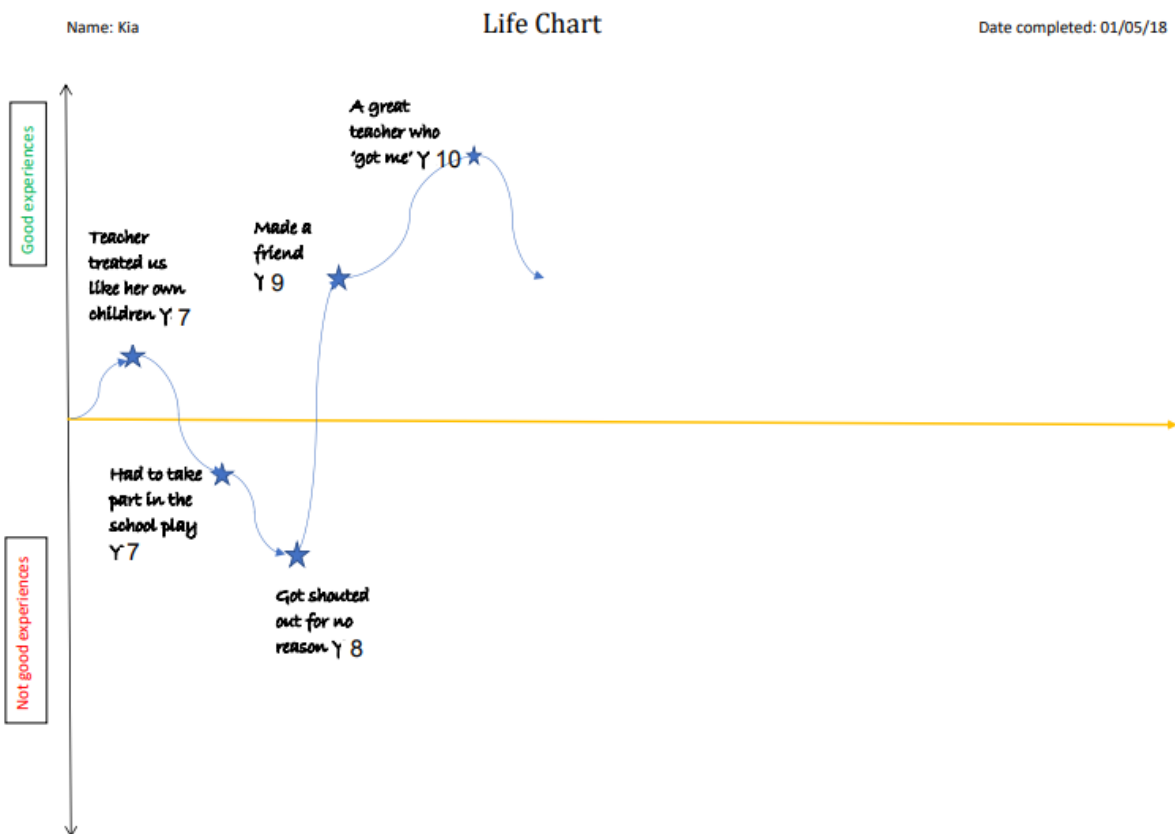


2.8.1 Life charts

The life chart template enables participants to label positive and negative experiences of school which they consider to be significant (Moyses et al., 2021). An example of a completed life chart is shown below in Figure 2. Instructions of how to complete this were shown to all participants.

Figure 2

Example of a completed life chart



Two participants, Joanne and Abby completed their life charts at home prior to their first interviews. Louise chose not to use the life chart and prior to the interview chose to write notes related to her educational experiences at home. Marie preferred not to structure her experiences through writing and chose to discuss these with no written prompts.

The completed life charts were used by participants to share, structure and discuss their stories within the first interview. It was felt that the life charts would give participants a framework for their narratives, easing their anxiety and enabling them to take an active, cooperative part in the research process (Moyse, 2021). The life charts were also thought to support the participants in framing their stories and determine if there were any incidents that they would not wish to share. Completed life charts are presented within Appendix F.

The life charts also assisted in creating prompts for the participant without extensively directing them to certain topics, for example, prompts such as, '*You mentioned that this was a positive experience for you, can you describe how that made you feel?*' and '*I can see that you have a spike on your life chart in this area, could you tell me more about that?*'.

Full details of all prompts are outlined within interview transcripts in Appendix G.

2.8.2 Narrative interviews

The interviews started with the statement, '*Tell me about your school experiences*' and this statement was shared with participants during the introductory session. Flick et al., (2012) describes this style of interviewing as episodic. An episodic interview is used to gain an understanding of a phenomenon through presenting stories of experience (Mueller, 2019). The researcher uses open ended prompts when necessary to encourage the participant to continue with their story (Flick, 2017). This approach was selected as it initially guided the participant while also enabling them to control the narrative's structure and sequence of events. All interviews included additional time to debrief and reflect on the process.

Participants shared their experiences of secondary school and college before being redirected back to answer further questions about events and their feelings. I adopted an empathetic stance and used language to convey and validate the feelings of participants through statements such as, '*that sounds like it was really hard for you*', to support participants to feel comfortable in telling their stories (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007).

Where necessary I also prompted participants to expand on their narratives by echoing their words using statements like '*you said there were peers there that you liked. What else was there?*'. By using and mirroring the words chosen by participants I hoped to strengthen the rapport between us as this would reassure participants that they had been listened to (Sandoval & Adams, 2001). This also ensured that the prompts were partially participant led. Due to this I acknowledge the participants and I co-constructed their narratives.

2.8.3 Non-verbal representations

Discourse can take many forms including pictures, music, drawings and symbols (Bloomaert, 2005). The study hoped to gain added insights into participants' experiences by requesting them to select a non-verbal representation of how they overcame their non attendance. Framing this request in a positive way provided participants with an opportunity to acknowledge their achievements as they reflected on their successes and re-engagement with education.

The purpose of ending the second and final interview in this way was to reduce any anxieties felt by participants and to create a space where they could recognise their strengths. Involving participants in the research in this way incorporates the values of participatory action research (Ozanne & Sattcioglu, 2008). This has been demonstrated to result in a greater sense of control and empowerment experienced by participants (Baum, MacDougall & Smith, 2006).

2.8.4 Ethical considerations of recruitment & data collection

As discussed within the participant criteria & recruitment section, participants were initially selected and approached by the college SENCO using the provided participant criteria. This meant that an adult was deciding if the basis for participants' non attendance had an emotional basis and if they had successfully reengaged in further education. Following successful confirmation of ethics from the University of Sheffield ethics panel, participants and their parents were provided with information sheets and consent forms which outlined the limits of confidentiality and advised them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, (in line with the British Psychological Society (BPS) 2021 guidelines). Participants were also verbally reminded of this during the introductory session and at the beginning of each interview. It was also explained that if participants did withdraw all of their information and data would be destroyed. As discussed above, non attendance can be distressing for those who experience it. Therefore, in line with the HCPC (2023) and BPS guidance (2021) related to minimising risk and dangers for participants, both the college SENCO and I made participants aware in the

introductory session, before the interview and at the beginning of the interview that a member of staff was available for them to seek additional support if required. I also provided participants with the contact details of external counseling services. Participants were also informed that they could choose a trusted adult to be in the room with them during the interview. None of the participants requested a trusted adult to be present. During the introductory session participants were reminded that they did not have to answer or discuss any questions which they did not wish to. It was also explained that they could take a break from the interview at any time. I asked participants what they would like to do if they became upset during the interview. Participants named a range of options including having a trusted adult to come and see them, to get a drink of water or to have a short walk outside.

2.8.5 Selected analysis method

The data was analysed using discursive psychology, a form of discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherall, 1987). Both fields are presented in more detail below. The application of discursive psychology is justified and adopted stages of analysis outlined.

2.8.6 The origins and branches of discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is an umbrella term referring to analytical approaches that focus on the use and function of discourse within interactions (Wiggins, 2009). Discourse analysis emerged in the 1980's and is now a popular qualitative research method adopted by researchers (Willig, 2015). It is a multidisciplinary field influenced by concepts from ethnomethodology, semiology and post-structuralist theorists like Foucault and Derrida (Wiggins, 2009). The term discourse can hold differing meanings. Some hold that it refers to communicative interactions using language whereas others assert that discourse can refer to any 'meaningful symbolic behaviour' (Bloomaert, 2005). Johnstone (2017) states that using the term 'discourse analysis' instead of 'language analysis' makes a distinction from focusing purely on spoken language as images and latent meanings underpinning the chosen language can

also be commented on. Johnstone (2017) goes on to state that understanding discourse is essential in understanding human experience and behaviour.

According to Willig (2003), there are two main branches of discourse analysis namely, discursive psychology and Foucauldian discourse analysis. Other scholars such as Ahmadvand (2011) highlight more forms of discourse analysis including conversation analysis and psycho-discourse analysis. Branches of discourse analysis have some similarities as all focus on the role of language in relation to human experience, view discourse as central to everyday life and consider social action to be produced as a result of differing discourses (Wiggins, 2015; 2009).

2.8.7 The justification of discursive psychology as the chosen analysis method

The study will utilise a discursive psychology analysis approach which suggests that language is constructive and functional (Potter & Wetherall, 1987). It focuses on how individuals make use of discursive resources and how these enable the construction of accounts. Examples of these include investigating metaphors, descriptions and the creation of objects (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

As this study was concerned with understanding individuals' experiences of non attendance, discursive psychology was felt to be a suitable analytic method as it focuses on how females construct their lived experiences using language. As discussed, the study adopted an exploratory and inductive approach as the majority of research conducted in this area has been adult-led. As discursive psychology enables the exploration of participants' narratives through language, and does not attempt to identify a universal truth, it was felt that this analytic method would provide a deeper, less diluted understanding of female experiences and would be appropriate to use within the research.

Discourse analysis has faced criticisms from scholars with some arguing that the approach produces interpretations and therefore its findings cannot be applied practically (Taylor, 2013). This critique is fostered from the assertion of the existence of a single truth of which discourse analysis challenges. The research acknowledges that discourse analysis is

interpretive but that interpretations of individuals' experiences are valid and valuable. Discursive psychology was selected as it is concerned with identifying individuals 'stake' or position within their discourse (Potter, 2004). The research sought to understand how female participants positioned and perceived their roles and the roles of others within their attendance narratives. As such, discourse analysis was considered an appropriate analysis for the current study.

Chapter 3: Analysis

3.0 Chapter overview

This chapter will outline the stages of analysis before presenting each participant's narrative. These narratives are presented in their own words within their individual transcripts located within Appendix G. Participants completed life charts and notes are presented in Appendix F. Significant discourses and their constructions including imagery, metaphors and literary devices used by participants are discussed below. Participant narratives have been mapped onto two theoretical models, both the SVSC (Ruadsill et al., 2018) and the PEARLS model (Baron Williams, 2021). These models will be presented and outlined below with attention to positioning, descriptions of emotions including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each participant's personal connection item and identified effective methods of support are then outlined. For a list of mentioned strategies to support attendance please see Appendix H.

3.1 Theoretical models applied to participant discourse

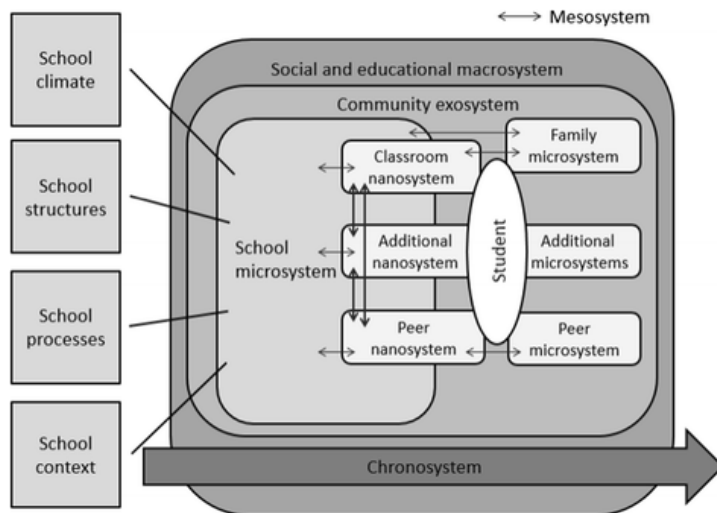
3.1.1 Systems view of school climate (SVSC) model in relation to non attendance

School climate is typically used as an umbrella term to describe the various components which make up the school environment (Konishi, Miyazaki, Hymel & Waterhouse, 2017). It has been defined as referring to aspects of school including relationships, policies, perceptions of teaching and structural systems (Wang & Degol, 2015). These components have included relationships, rules and values (Fan et al., 2011). However, it is widely acknowledged that there is a lack of consensus regarding the definition of school climate and therefore a lack of certainty of the most effective method of measuring it (Rudasill et al., 2018). O'Malley et al., (2012) offers an explanation for the differing definitions by stating that as school climate cannot be directly observed what constitutes it can be subjective and debated.

Rudasill et al., (2018) proposed a systems based framework (see Figure 3) which could be applied broadly to school climate by adapting existing models, themes from previous literature and definitions of school climate by drawing on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory (1994). The systems view of school climate (SVSC) (Rudasill et al., 2018) characterises school climate using three key features; shared beliefs and values, relationships and social and safety. The shared beliefs and values component refers to expectations for pupils and staff, trust and respect between them and school policies. The relationship domain relates to relationships between key stakeholders such as pupils, staff, peers and parents which are considered central to school climate. Safety is the third component of school climate and refers to physical, social and emotional safety within the school environment. These three factors are mapped onto Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems (1994) model. The SVSC adds an additional system called the 'nanosystem' which is presented as being unique to school environments and refers to interactions between the following subsystems; the classroom, peer groups and school clubs. The microsystems of family and peers are seen to directly influence pupil environments, and the mesosystem is made up of interactions across microsystems and nanosystems (Marraccini et al., 2020).

Figure 3

Systems view of school climate framework (SVSC) (Rudasill et al., 2018)



Marraccini's et al., (2020) systematic review examined thirty one articles which evaluated multiple instruments measuring pupil perceptions of school climate. Despite these instruments developing from different frameworks nearly all of them addressed the main components of Rudasill et al's., (2018) SVSC framework, supporting the framework as a useful, practical tool to measure and understand school climates. Research has also highlighted an overlap between supportive attendance factors and features of school climate such as positive peer relationships and feeling emotionally and physically safe at school (Mortimer et al., 2018; Hughes et al., 2015). This association between supportive attendance factors and the SVSC suggests that enhancing school climate is likely to promote attendance (Van Eck et al., 2017).

The association between attendance and school climate was explored by Van Eck et al's., (2017) study which involved capturing pupils' perceptions of their school climate and attendance levels. Perception of school climate were gathered through the School Climate Survey (Van Eck et al., 2017) which consisted of ten subscales representing five domains of school climate identified

within the literature as: safety, learning, relationships, teaching and external environment. It is worth noting that these domains could also apply to the dimensions of school climate identified by Rudasill et al., (2018). Pupil perceptions of school climate were grouped into 'positive', 'moderate' or 'negative' categories. Results showed that schools where participants perceived 'positive' climates reported higher levels of attendance and schools identified by participants as having 'moderate' or 'negative' climates reported lower attendance rates. This supports the view that school climate is an influencing factor and can promote or reduce attendance. It is worth reflecting that although this was a large scale study involving 25, 776 participants and 106 schools, the population consisted largely of an African-American demographic which does impact the generalisability of results.

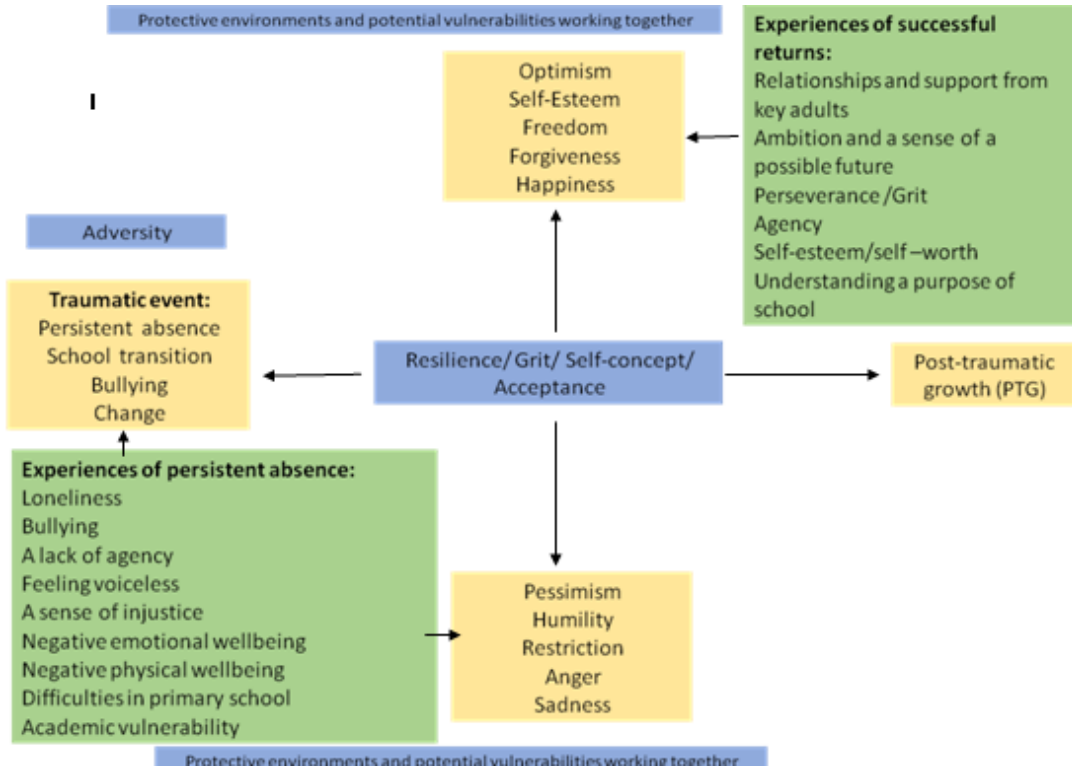
Arguably, both pupils and staff contribute to school climate through their combined interactions and behaviours however, Van Eck et al's., (2017) study did not include the perceptions of school staff in relation to school climate. As school staff play a vital role in influencing the climate of school it would be useful to understand their perceptions of it and explore how these are similar or different to pupils. Van Eck et al's (2017) study also did not specifically focus on pupils who had experienced prolonged absence so it is not possible to determine how this group perceived school climate. Despite these limitations the study presents school climate and SVSC as a potential effective intervention and framework to promote attendance.

3.1.2 Persistent educational absence & reengagement with learning and school (PEARLS) model in relation to non attendance

The Persistent educational absence & reengagement with learning and school (PEARLS) framework was created to provide a model of understanding school absence and reintegration. Baron William's (2020) proposed model incorporates the resilience matrix from Daniel & Wassell (2002) and second wave positive psychology (SWPP). This approach identifies wellbeing as involving interplay between positive and negative events and qualities (Lomas, 2016). The PEARLS model is presented in Figure 4 below. The essential factors related to reengagement are presented within the centre of the model; Resilience, Grit, Self-concept and Acceptance.

Figure 4

Persistent educational absence and reengagement with learning and schools (PEARLS) model



The PEARLS model is underpinned by the dialectic nature of post-traumatic growth (PTG). PTG refers to positive psychological changes within an individual arising after exposure to traumatic or challenging circumstances (Tedeschi & Blevins, 2015). These changes are listed by the post-traumatic growth inventory (PTGI; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) and consist of a perceived increase in personal strength (e.g. more resilience), altered life philosophy (e.g. increased existential awareness), changed priorities (e.g. greater appreciation of life) and enhanced relationships (e.g. feeling more appreciative of relationships).

In order to experience PGT and thrive, Lomas & Ivtzan (2016) cites the 'principle of complementarity' which asserts that personal wellbeing and growth is achieved through the balance of traumas, challenging life experiences, individual traits and positive environments. This asserts that wellbeing and the idea of discomfort or ill-being are co-dependent with both being necessary for growth. By considering non attendance experiences as challenging or traumatic events, the PEARLS model provides a potential pathway for individuals to make sense of their experiences, reframe their trauma and develop strength as a result. According to Baron Williams (2021) reengagement and reintegration with education is not seen as the goal of the model, rather a step towards personal wellbeing and development.

Lomas & Ivtzan (2016) identified five paired domains which form the structure of the PEARLS model, which include optimism and pessimism, self-esteem and humility, freedom and restriction, forgiveness and anger and happiness and sadness. Each paired domain is outlined in more detail in Appendix I.

Both the SVSC (Rudasill et al., 2018) and the PEARLS (Baron Williams, 2021) models overlapped and aligned with participants' attendance narratives, therefore, it was felt following analysis that these models were appropriate to present and structure participants' discourses.

3.2 Stages of analysis

The adopted stages of analysis were chosen in accordance from Potter and Wetherell's (1987) recommendations, who assert that each category is not sequential and can be applied at multiple stages when analysing data using discursive psychology. An completed example of analysis can be found in Appendix J. The stages of analysis are outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2:

Features of discursive psychology applied to the data set

Adopted analysis stages	
Coding and grouping of data	<p>Created coding categories were associated with the research questions and were key aspects of participants' experiences. An open coding technique was used to codify all discourse that was relevant to the research questions. Open coding refers to the process in which the researcher identifies concepts and themes which can be categorised into similar groups (Williams & Moser, 2019). This was in accordance with Potter & Wetherell's (1987) comment that coding should be applied in a inclusive approach to consider appropriate discourse.</p> <p>The term interpretative repertoire was coined by Potter & Wetherell (1987). Something can be considered a interpretative repertoire if it serves a function in a discourse (McCullough & Lester, 2022). This may involve presenting the narrator in a certain position or highlighting certain aspects of an experience. Interpretive repertoires such as metaphors, descriptive language, repeated words and phrases, use of humour and repetition were coded for each participant's narrative.</p>
Identifying patterns within narratives	<p>Similarities and disparities in participants' narratives were highlighted in accordance with Potter & Wetherell (1987). Interpretive repertoires such as metaphors and analogies were compared between participant narratives to understand common constructions and differing features of experiences.</p>
Examining discursive objects	<p>Discursive objects were identified as features of non attendance experiences and the way in which these were constructed by female participants.</p>

Data functionality	<p>This refers to considering the action orientation of participant narratives; where do participants position and place themselves within their stories? What are they trying to achieve by this?</p> <p>Individuals' attributions for their non attendance and subject positions were examined and listed within Appendix K.</p>
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Each participant narrative is presented below in the following sections 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6.

3.3 Louise's story:

Background and overall experience:

Louise is in Year 13 and previously attended one secondary school. She is now attending college and hopes to attend University to study Politics. Louise has a diagnosis of generalised anxiety disorder (GAD). Louise presents her story as an experience of significant challenges with a number of triumphs and defeats. Her story concludes with a hopeful and positive ending.

Louise attended a small primary school and found transitioning to a much larger secondary school challenging. Louise regarded her transition from primary to secondary as a big change and struggled to cope with the increased pressure of the secondary environment: *"it was like massive change, and I didn't really know how to adjust to it"*. Louise experienced peer conflict and felt pressured by the policies and expectations of her secondary school. Phrases like *"I'd carry on"* and the repeated use of the words *"make"* and *'made'* to refer to her attempts of attending school reinforce the idea that attending school is perceived as an obstacle or something to persevere through, *"sometimes I'd make it", "I don't think I made it in"*. Eventually Louise was allowed to access 'the bungalow' (a smaller building within the main school ground) to engage in academic work with a smaller number of peers. Louise described the bungalow as *"a little chill place that was just like, what I needed"* which was *"the turning point"* for her. Louise was supported by Healthy Young Minds (HYM) (an organisation which provides young people with tools to support their mental health).

Louise was apprehensive about beginning college but after attending a meeting with the college SENCO and her mum prior to starting her anxieties eased. During this meeting Louise was asked what she felt would help her at college and a support plan for her was agreed. She is currently enjoying attending college, despite at times still finding it difficult to attend. Louise

views college as her *'fresh start'* and acknowledges the personal development she has made over her educational experiences.

Positioning:

When discussing her experiences, Louise appears to be reluctant to place blame for her non attendance on school policies despite stating that they involved making minor incidents into a *"massive deal if you did forget your pen"*. Instead she positions herself as needing different support than her peers, *"That's fine for everyone else. But like, for me, it was just like, so much pressure"* and appears to support the policies describing them as *"valid in a way"*. By doing this Louise constructs a within-child reason for her anxieties; however there appears to be some polarity in her account as she goes on to say that policies could have been difficult *"for other people as well"*. This statement contradicts her previous within-child attribution and suggests that she perceives the school environment to be at fault.

Louise differentiates and separates herself from *"naughty kids"*, *"all the like naughty kids went and then there was just me"*. This phrase creates a distinction between Louise and her peers showing that she considers herself to be different from them. She seems to suggest that these young people may also struggle academically and implies that as she is considered to be academically capable this caused staff to perceive her differently, *"I think they felt that I sort of was like too clever to be there"*.

Louise also makes a distinction between herself and truants stating that *"most people don't attend school because they don't like it"*, whereas she had a *"genuine fear of going"*. She goes on to explain that she felt that school staff misunderstood this and felt her non-attendance was a choice.

The use of humour:

Louise appears to use humour as a strategy to help her cope with the strong emotions she experiences when recalling her time at secondary school, “*I can look back and sort of find it, I can find the funny side. I just got to laugh about it*”. However, Louise’s repeated use of the word ‘*why*’ highlights the frustrations she feels with the response of school to her non-attendance, “*it’s all done but at the time I was like why, it was why, why? Just why? Why?*”. This suggests that Louise may still hold some feelings of anger and frustration over her school’s response to her non attendance. Louise’s difficulties in discussing some of her secondary school experiences suggest that it is still challenging for her to relive these difficult emotions, “*I don’t remember much from Year 8, because I think I just sort of like, that was when I was like, the lowest point*”. The phrase “*I don’t remember much*” suggests that Louise may block out experiences to protect herself when she feels emotionally vulnerable.

Descriptions of emotions:

Louise uses dark imagery to convey how she felt attending secondary school, describing this time as “*black*” and “*grey*”. She describes herself as feeling like a “*tiny person*” with people “*pointing*” at her. This overall picture creates an image of isolation and feeling judged by others. This is further reinforced by her use of the word, “*alone*”. Louise also implies that she felt uncertain of what she was experiencing during secondary school using descriptive words like “*lost*” and “*confused*”. The “*black*” and “*grey*” colours she described add to this idea of having no clear direction or clarity of the situation. This idea of confusion is further presented by Louise as she states “*I didn’t understand what I was feeling or why I was feeling it... And that made me feel worse*”.

Louise describes how actions from school resulted in increased feelings of stress for her, using the word *“threatened”* to explain school warning her mum about the risk of fines she could incur from Louise’s non attendance. The word *“threatened”* positions school as an opponent who wishes to inflict harm on Louise and her mum, rather than as a supportive force. This in turn increased Louise’s feelings of anxiety and caused her to feel a degree of guilt and depression. This is seen through Louise’s repeated use of the word *‘guilt’* in her narrative and repeated use of the word *“very”* in the following statement *“I was very, very, very depressed”*. The use of medical labels when describing her feelings may suggest that these provide Louise with a sense of understanding and an explanation for her non attendance. It is also worth considering that some argue the term depression is becoming more commonplace in describing low mood and sadness, which may result in the label losing aspects of its medical connotations (Broer & Besseling, 2017) and result in its greater use in society.

It may be that Louise has adopted a medical discourse to explain her attendance difficulties as this is likely to have been the dominant discourse used by adults supporting her e.g. medical professionals, educational staff etc. For example, Louise explains that a teacher *‘got’* and understood her because she also *‘struggled with depression and anxiety’*. Louise’s medical attribution for her anxiety and attendance contrasts with strategies she cites as supportive in promoting both her wellbeing and attendance. These strategies mainly focus on environmental aspects of the school context and do not include any medicalised components.

Factors involved in systems view of school climate (SVSC) (Rudasill et al., 2018)

Shared beliefs and values

Louise found the school’s policy of tracking students’ behaviour pressurising and described this as a *“negative point system”* with *“credits and referrals”*. She used descriptive language to explain how this system caused her to *“feel very pressured to be like, perfect”* and that it added anxiety around her presentation and performance in school, *“Oh God, I don’t want to do anything wrong”*.

Louise also mentioned finding the expectations of remembering items for class pressurising, as this was often seen to be met with an exaggerated response. Staff handling these situations in a calmer way was highlighted as helpful to young people, *“say I said, oh, I forgot my booklet, it's like, okay, here's a spare. It's like, that's easy. Just do that. Rather than make it a massive thing”*.

Relationships

Louise presents having positive relationships with peers and school staff as a supportive factor of her attendance. The importance of connectedness is linked to school attendance as Louise uses a figure of speech, *“knocked my confidence”* to explain the impact that her deteriorating peer relationships had on her. The word *“knocked”* suggests this conflict had a physical impact on her confidence and well-being as Louise explains that this caused her to start *“really not attending”*.

Louise's use of language reinforces the idea of school staff not understanding her, she repeatedly refers to school as *“they”* throughout her narrative, stating *“they didn't like really understand”*. The word *“they”* distances school staff from Louise and depersonalises them, suggesting she may view them as different and opposing to her. This contrasts to Louise's language when she names one specific teacher, with whom she had a positive relationship, commenting that she *“got it”*. This phrase implies that this teacher understood Louise and this feeling of connection reassured her. Louise states that this teacher and a teaching assistant would *“make you tea, make you toast”* creating a *“nice environment”* that she *“needed”*. The word *“needed”* suggests that this feeling of connection and nurture was essential to Louise in helping her to feel understood and heard.

Emotional and physical safety

Louise presents relationships as underpinning her feelings of emotional and physical safety. She constructs physically being with peers as having a protective nature stating *“then*

we'd walk in together, it was fine". The word "*fine*" strongly contrasts with her description of going into school on her own, choosing words like "*terrified*" and "*alone*". This discourse presents the idea that there is increased safety in numbers.

Peer conflict also affected Louise's emotional safety as she recalls that when her peers made comments '*attacking*' her, this '*knocked*' her '*confidence*' and caused her to feel '*terrified*'.

Applying the PEARLS model to Louise's narrative

Post-traumatic growth

Louise recognises and acknowledges that she has changed and positively grown as a person throughout her challenging school experiences. She uses words like "*massive*" to illustrate the extent of this change. Louise wanted to share the following with her younger self, "*You're going to be doing the college production, not on it, or in it, but you're doing the music for it and it's like whoa*". The word "*whoa*" conveys how surprising Louise's younger self would find this and further reinforces the difference in Louise during her secondary and college years.

Louise positions herself as a confident, resilient individual who has learnt how to cope with her anxieties as she uses positive self talk saying "*we can do this*". By describing her college days as being "*mostly good*" Louise implies that she still sometimes struggles to attend. However, after describing one of these incidents she commented that "*they talked to me about it and then I felt better. And I came in again*". This suggests that Louise's wellbeing is central to her attendance as once she was feeling better she was able to re-attend.

Louise uses the colour green to represent how she feels about the future. Louise explains that this colour is “*calm*”, “*new and fresh*” and signifies that she feels the future will be a “*total new start*”. The colour green can also symbolise growth and maturity reflecting the progress Louise feels she has made.

Impact of COVID

Louise presents the COVID-19 pandemic as being a positive experience for her. Her words portray the pandemic as a time for her to re-focus and reflect on her school experiences and goals for Year 11, “*gave me a chance to sort of think about how, like everything*”. This statement suggests that Louise may not have felt able or had the time to reflect in her daily life before the pandemic. This time seems to have provided Louise with a sense of strength and resilience as she again uses self-talk to encourage herself when she thought about returning to school, “*just do what we can and go for it*”.

Personal connection item

Louise chose to create a music playlist, selecting songs which she feels represent her educational experiences. These are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3:

Louise’s choice of song to illustrate her attendance experiences

<i>Song title</i>	<i>Artist</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
Mr. Blue Sky	Electric Light Orchestra	<p>Louise would listen to this song with her mum as they were driving to school.</p> <p>Louise uses positive language to describe the impact this song has on her, stating “<i>it makes you feel good</i>”. She feels reassured when listening to this song which is reinforced by her repeated</p>

		use of the word okay, <i>"just make me think like, okay, it's okay"</i> .
How Does it Feel?	Slade	This song was a part of Louise's daily routine which she conveys by using the word <i>"ritual"</i> to describe it. Again this song seems to have a positive impact on Louise's emotional wellbeing which is communicated by Louise's choice of words to explain that her teacher would play it, when Louise had a <i>"bad morning"</i> or had been <i>"struggling"</i> .
The Walk of Life	Dire Straits	Louise uses positive imagery to express that listening to this song has an impact on her mood, explaining that this song is <i>"happy"</i> and <i>"makes you feel good"</i> . It is one of her mum's favourites.
Everywhere you look	Carly Rae Jepsen	This song increases Louise's motivation and can impact her behaviour commenting that listening to it makes her want to <i>"go and do stuff"</i> .
Chiquitita	ABBA	Louise appears to contradict herself when discussing this song mentioning that it is <i>"sad but it's also uplifting"</i> . She explains that she can relate to the lyrics stating, <i>"it's like try once more like you did before, like keep going. So I think I like that about it subconsciously"</i> .

Practical strategies:**Expectations**

Louise mentioned that she found it easier to engage with staff and attend lessons when there were no expectations placed on her, *“When they came with that attitude, it definitely helps because then it's like, okay, it's not, there's no expectation, there's no pressure”*. This implies that removing expectations also removes a fear of failure.

Mentors

Louise praised the mentoring system at college and explained that she found it reassuring to know that she had time dedicated to speak to her mentor each week, *“I talk to someone like on a weekly basis about everything, anything. If it's just like, what you did at the weekend whatever. Umm so that was like, huge in like making me feel a lot calmer”*.

Gradual return to lessons

Louise shared that after a period of absence she tried to rapidly return to all of her lessons. This resulted in her using a figure of speech to explain that she *“burnt myself out”* and led her to regress, *“then it was sort of like, back to how it was in year nine, when I wasn't going in much”*. The phrase *“burnt myself out”* illustrates that Louise felt exhausted and overwhelmed as a result of rapidly returning to school. This suggests that a gradual approach to re-engaging with lessons may be more successful.

Environment

Louise described the bungalow as a *“turning point”* in managing her anxieties suggesting that she needed a quieter, less pressured space than the main school environment. In literature, a turning point is typically a point in the narrative where a decisive change takes place indicating that for Louise the bungalow would change the course of her school experiences.

Access to class work

Louise was not allowed to receive her class work unless she attended her lessons. This exacerbated her anxieties as when she did attend she had missed the previous learning, “*we’re on chapter seven and I was like, I don’t even know chapter one. And then that is sort of the thing that would be like, oh my God, oh my God.*” The repetition of “*oh my God*” portrays Louise’s feeling of panic. This suggests that providing additional academic support to young people who have missed learning could help to reduce anxieties related to attending lessons.

Clear communication

Louise commented that “*one of the big issues is that there wasn’t really communication*” and this resulted in decisions being made about her timetable which were not shared with her beforehand. Louise described this as “*very jarring and not very well thought out for someone who is anxious*”. The word “*jarring*” indicates that Louise felt this decision caused her to have a physical shock indicating how struck she was by it. Having an initial meeting with college staff to speak about the type of support young people may benefit from when they attend college was cited as being helpful and reassuring, “*huge in like making me feel a lot calmer about starting college*”.

3.4 Joanne's story

Background & overall experience

Joanne is in Year 13 and previously attended three secondary schools. She found the transition from primary to secondary school challenging, describing it as a *'big step'*. Joanne attended her first secondary school for two months and left due to peer conflict. She enjoyed the second secondary school she attended as she found *'friends'* and a *'sense of community'* despite not feeling as if she was *'learning'*. Joanne found it difficult when this school unexpectedly closed. She attended her third secondary school for three years and described this as a *'happy'* *'academic'* time.

Joanne took a year out of college before starting Year 13 as she felt like it was not feasible to go to college *'straight away'* after the COVID-19 pandemic describing this time as *'stressful'* and *'mentally'* difficult. She shared that there were also two deaths in her family in the same year which were *'particularly hard'*.

Joanne is now attending college and hopes to attend University to study Film and History. She has a diagnosis of GAD and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). Joanne received support from HYM and feels this involvement helped her to develop resilience and understand her emotions.

Joanne constructs her experiences as a narrative which involves *"ups and downs"* and one in which she is the victor concluding her story with a happy ending. Joanne explained that her

school experiences were made up of both positive and negative moments. This highlights that the presentation of her narrative does not solely focus on an single aspect but one which encompasses a variety of experiences and at times contradictions, *"it's easy to kind of focus on oh, it was so it was so negative, or but a lot of the time it was happy."* Joanne's story has a positive, triumphant ending compared to the distressing events she describes in the beginning.

Positioning

When discussing her non attendance, Joanne appears to attribute blame to herself and attempts to position school in a more positive light. This is evident through the following statement, *"it became apparent that it just wasn't, you know a good space? Not good space, but it just wasn't tailored to me. And I kind of had to leave"*. Joanne is positioning herself as needing something different from her school environment than the majority of her peers. We see evidence of Joanne's apologetic nature and reluctance to place blame on school, note her correction in the following, *"it just wasn't you know a good space? Not good space but..."*. Joanne uses clinical terms such as *'anxiety'* and *'OCD'* to discuss her attendance experiences describing her OCD as *'paralysing'*. Like Louise, it is worth considering that Joanne may be adopting clinical language to make sense of her experiences as this language is being used by adults supporting her e.g. HYM. It is also telling that Joanne cites the COVID-19 pandemic as her *'darkest moment'* and details this time as feeling *'unstable'* and full of *'irresolution'*. During this time Joanne also experienced two deaths in her family. She presents the pandemic and these events as having a significant impact on her wellbeing which contradicts a sole medical explanation for her difficulties and presents a multi-faceted view of Joanne's attendance experiences.

While Joanne recognises that aspects of her school experiences were challenging she minimises previous incidents and her emotions, *"I don't want to sound like a kid crying over my really insignificant... I guess in terms they are really light"*. This statement may suggest that Joanne is anxious to convey that she does not perceive herself as a victim. She goes on to use

battle imagery and tragedy discourse to further minimise her experiences and force a comparison of her school experiences with war, *“they aren’t tragedy, of course not, they’re not experiencing war”*. The function of this comparison discourse may act as a method in supporting Joanne to process and discuss her experiences. There is also some disparity in Joanne’s narrative as after minimising events at school she describes them as *“challenges”*.

Use of humour

Joanne uses humour to help her discuss particularly difficult experiences, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Joanne uses dark imagery to describe this time as she felt this lead her to *“plummet”* to her *“darkest moment”*. The word *“plummet”* conveys that Joanne’s emotional wellbeing rapidly deteriorated during this time. Joanne appears to be satirical and make light of her situation commenting, *“it’s not funny, but it’s kind of, you’ve got to laugh at it”*.

Descriptions of emotions

Joanne constructs her experiences using descriptive language to discuss how she felt her emotions had a physical presence labeling them as a *“big feeling”*. She uses the medical labels ‘OCD’ and ‘*anxiety*’ to characterise some of her feelings describing these as a *“really big part”* of her experiences.

Joanne’s discourse presents her feelings as having an isolating impact on her emotional wellbeing and behaviour as she explains it resulted in her *“wanting to isolate myself”* and as something that physically prevented her from speaking to people, *“alone and not alone but uncommunicative”*. This creates a picture which conveys that although Joanne was physically close to people, mentally she felt isolated. Joanne personifies her emotions by stating that it *“prevented”* her *“from doing something”*. This is likely to have further increased Joanne’s feelings of isolation.

Joanne's 'anxiety' also impacted her practically as she mentions it prevented her from doing activities she wanted to but did not feel physically able, "*it was that idea of wanting to do something, and it prevented me from doing something. That's what I associate with anxiety, it's the feeling but it's a constant fear of will I or will I not do it?*". It is likely this further added to Joanne's feelings of isolation.

Joanne uses the following descriptive terms to present her emotional state at this time, "*bit cloudy*" and "*numbness*". This language would suggest that Joanne found it difficult to understand and make sense of her experiences. It may also indicate that during this distressing time, Joanne tried to repress her emotions as a coping strategy. This repression seemed to heighten Joanne's anxieties as she explains that "*if I did communicate, it would be quite umm.. say to communicate my emotions I'd start crying. So it'd be kind of two extremes and not extremes. But it would be either you know, not saying anything at all or saying a lot in a short space of time*". This is further reinforced by Joanne's choice of metaphor to describe anxiety, "*if you shake a bottle, and it kind of, you know, (used hands to show overflow of bottle) that's, that's kind of what anxiety is. It's that build up of pressure*".

Factors involved in systems view of school climate (SVSC) (Rudasill et al., 2018)

Shared beliefs and values

Joanne discusses her expectations of educational environments as providing and supporting pupils in learning as well as acting as a place in which positive peer relationships can be established. She mentions that although her second secondary school was '*fun*' and she '*found a lot of friends*', it was a '*rocky*' time with not '*a lot of learning*'. This contrasts with Joanne's description of her third secondary school environment which she considered to fulfil her expectations of both providing an academic environment with positive peer relationships stating she was '*happy socially*' and in an '*academic*' environment where she was '*learning*'. Joanne associates these environmental factors with improving her emotional wellbeing explaining that she perceives her time at this school as a '*happy experience*'.

Feeling understood by staff and peers was highlighted as a supportive factor for Joanne. She spoke about feeling like part of a *'community'* explaining that she met people who had experienced similar emotions and feelings, *'people who recognise anxiety my anxiety and people who have anxiety, like me'*. It is interesting to note Joanne's use of medical labelling in this statement and may indicate that this medical discourse is still dominant within schools when considering non attendance. Joanne goes on to say that she found it helpful to *'swap and share experiences'* with these individuals, highlighting that despite Joanne's medical labelling of her non attendance, a supportive response to this did not need to be medical. This questions the necessity and purpose of considering non attendance from a purely medical viewpoint.

Relationships

Joanne highlighted the significance of having positive relationships and feeling connected to her peers. She uses the words *"a sense of community"* to describe having positive peer friendships. This phrase highlights the sense of belonging and acceptance that Joanne felt as a result of her friendships. Joanne explains that during this period of her schooling she felt it was *"kind of fun"* which implies that her friendships also acted as a protective factor for her emotional wellbeing and attendance.

Joanne's phrase *"kind of fun"* contrasts strongly with the language she uses to describe the impact peer conflict had on her emotional wellbeing, *"a weird space"*. When Joanne discussed peer conflict which she experienced she stated that she did not *"consciously know what my actions were like"*. This phrase would suggest that Joanne has blocked out certain incidents due to finding these extremely distressing. She goes on to say that her mum noticed that she *"went extremely quiet"* which illustrates that experiences of peer conflict had an impact on Joanne's behaviour.

Emotional and physical safety

Joanne makes reference to feeling '*consistent*' and stable at school when she experienced learning and positive peer relationships. She mentions that feelings of stability promoted her feelings of wellbeing and emotional safety allowing her to mature and '*grow*'. In contrast, Joanne described the pandemic as '*unstable*' and '*difficult*', negatively impacting both her emotional and physical safety causing her to feel '*deflated*'. Joanne uses nature imagery to further highlight that she views maturity and growth as being linked with consistency and stability. When she perceives that she has stability in her life she is able to develop, "*like a tree with that kind of, I guess subconsciously that's like, you know, growing or some maturity*". However, this personal growth can be halted by instability such as when her school closed, "*I guess maturing, it's kind of weird to be stopped multiple times*". Joanne's use of descriptive language reinforces the impact of environmental factors and importance of ensuring adolescents feel emotionally and physically safe when considering their attendance.

The impact of peer conflict on Joanne's feelings of emotional and physical safety is evident as she states that an incident where a peer made a '*comment*' caused her feelings to '*snowball*' and exacerbated her '*anxieties*'. We see Joanne's emotional distress then impacting her feelings of physical safety as she states that she '*had to find another school*'. Joanne's reluctance to place blame on her peers is evident as she positions herself as the one at fault for reacting strongly to the comment made by one of her peers. She is quick to state that "*it was not bullying*" and uses discourse to redirect the narrative to her emotions, "*but perhaps embarrassment*". Joanne goes on to adopt an almost apologetic tone commenting "*it wasn't necessarily a big thing. It was just something that affected me. And it really got to me*". This statement is slightly contradictory as Joanne minimises the actions of her peers but also acknowledges her distressed emotional state. This construction of discourse may make it easier for Joanne to process and discuss this.

Impact of COVID

Joanne describes the COVID-19 pandemic as *“one of the hardest times”* and explains that she felt out of control during this time. These feelings are reinforced through her listing and repeating the phrase out of control, *“the pandemic was out of my control”, “then GCSEs were out of my control”*. Joanne also repeats the word *“irresolution”* conveying the uncertainty she felt during this time, *“there was a lot of irresolution”, “I came to expect a lot of irresolution at that time”*.

Joanne’s distress at this time is evident as she shares that this was when her OCD behaviours began, describing these as *“almost paralysing”*. This indicates that these behaviours were so severe they impacted Joanne physically as well as emotionally. The combination of Joanne’s perceived lack of control, worries about adjusting after following lockdown rules and OCD behaviours became overwhelming. Joanne reinforces this feeling by using the word *“and”* to list the multiple factors she was concerned about, *“it was becoming extremely stressful and anxious and there was just all these feelings that were kind of a mixing pot and it was just a lot”*.

Applying the PEARLS model to Joanne’s narrative

Post-traumatic growth

Joanne makes numerous references to experiencing growth and personal transformation as a result of her experiences. She uses building imagery to convey that receiving support from HYM and having a break from school to process her feelings strengthened her, *“after being broken down, I was allowed to build myself back up. And over that year, it was just kind of a reconstruction of who I, and this is, again, so existential but it was kind of a build up of who I was, and kind of building that up again”* and *“So kind of building up, not a wall, but a strength, that’s really important”*. Using language such as *“broken”*, highlights the impact Joanne’s emotions had on her wellbeing.

Joanne expresses that overcoming challenges and experiencing difficult times caused her to gain strength and resilience. She communicates this through metaphors and fairy tale imagery stating, *“there are ups and downs, you learn that there’s always going to be something*

there's always a silver lining" and *"to expect stuff isn't always gonna go right, but knowing that there will be a happy ending"*. Joanne was able to confidently state that she now feels she has the *"tools"* to manage these and uses weather imagery to explain her developing resilience, *"I know that I'm strong enough now to, if there is another storm like that to weather it"*. Joanne's experiences of *'anxieties'* led her to view them as an *"incentive"* as she explains that they gave her clarity of what she wants for her future, *"to carry on, and to come in every day, and you know, you know, live life"*.

Joanne uses a metaphor to describe her outlook for her future, describing it as *"the open road, and you know, there's a ton of pathways to drive down, but they're all kind of straight and narrow, and you know, it's really positive, and you're excited to carry on"*. This suggests that although Joanne is not certain on what her future will hold she is optimistic about the possibilities.

Joanne presents the COVID-19 pandemic as a particularly challenging time for her. She comments that the instability of this time lead her to ask *'existential questions'* such as *'what am I going to do?'*, *'where do I go now?'* and *'what is everyone thinking of me?'*. These questions and Joanne's struggles during this time provided her with *'clarity'* and a sense of resolution as she comments, *'I know I don't want to be off anymore'* and adds that this provided her with an *'incentive'* to *'come in every day'* and *'live life'*.

Personal connection item

Joanne brought a school tie from her most recent secondary school. She explained that the tie was important to her as she had a gold badge which she was awarded for her work in humanities pinned to it. The badge was engraved by a staff member who Joanne had a positive relationship with, *"got a really special message on the back that I really liked that someone wrote, I'm a big Bowie fan, David Bowie and someone wrote on it, 'Is there Life on Mars?'"*. Joanne goes on to explain that the phrase, *'Is there Life on Mars?'* has become her personal mantra and one which she uses to support herself during difficult times, *"I've used that phrase*

when I've come through the other side of something, or when I'm about to go through something". This phrase also reminds Joanne that overcoming struggles can increase her own understanding of herself and her inner strength as she explains this with a metaphor, "you'll be able to answer some questions and resolve some things and be stronger. And so I guess, to me, it means there will be a light at the end of the tunnel."

Practical strategies:

Mentors

Joanne spoke of the effectiveness of the mentoring programme in college describing it as a "big help". She explains that an allocated mentor will "meet with you weekly, or every two weeks, and they'll just go over how you feel and your progress in school as well. And having that consistency of having someone speak to every week, that's really helped".

Healthy Young Minds (HYM)

Joanne received external support from Healthy Young Minds (HYM) and used building imagery to discuss their support as being a key part of her personal transformation, "I think it was Healthy Young Minds. And they are spectacular, they really kind of helped, and if I talk about reconstruction, they were the ones who helped me get those pieces back together".

Break from school

Joanne expressed that for her, having a year out from school was fundamental in her progress. She described this time as an opportunity to increase her understanding and strength in herself, "it was really important to me that I took time out between secondary school and college. And I felt like that was the year of a lot of reflection" and "that was what really helped me to become someone who's resilient to a lot of tough challenges".

Understanding anxiety

Joanne explained that by increasing her understanding of her anxiety helped her to recognise and manage this, "because I feel like pinpointing a feeling before it gets

overwhelming has become an important thing. And as I say beforehand, I don't really think I recognized anxiety”.

3.5 Marie's story

Background & overall experience

Marie is in Year 12 and previously attended three secondary schools. She attended her first secondary school for a year and a half before moving to her second school halfway through Year 8. Marie moved school in order to live with her nan who lives outside of Marie's local area. Prior to this move, Marie shared that she had attempted suicide on more than one occasion and wanted to leave her current area. After a year, Marie's mum asked her to return home which involved her transitioning to her third secondary school halfway through Year 9. Marie stated that she initially had a negative perception of her third school but did make friends there.

Marie has a diagnosis of depression and is receiving therapy for Borderline Personality disorder (BPD). While at secondary school, Marie received support from HYM but did not find this helpful. Marie now attends college and is repeating Year 12 as she felt she needed time off from school when she was midway through Year 13. She hopes to go to University and study Psychology.

Marie presents her narrative as a challenging experience involving struggles and inequalities, some of which she is still experiencing currently at college, *"a tough one. Definitely a challenging one"*, *"I hate to say but it's just same as high school"*. There is some polarity in Marie's account as she does acknowledge that she feels *"a lot more supported"* at college compared to secondary school despite stating that she perceives them as the *"same"*. Marie uses descriptive language to convey that she feels college is just a requirement to reach her career goals, a necessity which she does not enjoy calling it a *"chore"*.

Positioning

Marie attributes her non-attendance to a within, medicalised explanation explaining that she considers herself to be *“extremely, you know, unwell”*. This explanation highlights how Marie views her emotions, depression and how she makes sense of her school experiences. It is worth noting that Marie is currently engaging in therapy and sees a doctor frequently to review her prescribed medication for depression. Therefore, it is evident that Marie is exposed to medical discourses and explanations in relation to her emotions and behaviours, which may partly explain why she has also adopted a similar medical discourse. While this explanation may provide Marie with an understanding of her non attendance it does not consider additional influencing factors. For example, Marie describes her childhood and school experiences as *‘traumatic’*, explaining that she finds it hard to discuss these and in an attempt to protect herself has *‘blocked out’* emotions related to her past. Despite identifying that she has experienced trauma and significant life events, Marie fails to incorporate or consider the impact of these experiences by adopting a solely medical discourse.

Marie’s use of a medical discourse may also act to reduce any feelings of guilt she may have and position blame away from herself, *“it’s not really my fault”* and constructs the narrative that she was abandoned and failed by school. One way in which Marie presents this concept is by her repeated discourse referencing that she received no support from school, *“there wasn’t a lot of support for me”, “I got no support for all of that, it was difficult”*. This admission and use of the word *“traumatic”* to describe her experiences may indicate that Marie feels that adults at school failed to protect her.

Marie makes a distinction between herself and misbehaving students using the phrase *“you’re with, with the students who misbehave”*. Her use of the words *“you’re with”* separates her from her peers as she does not use grouping language such as we or us. Marie implies that she wants to learn by making the assumption that misbehaving students do not, *“when you want to learn it’s very difficult”*.

Descriptions of emotions

As discussed in the previous section, Marie uses medical terminology to discuss her non-attendance citing the term ‘*depression*’ multiple times throughout her narrative. She constructs the emotions she associates with depression by choosing dark colours like “*grey*” to describe them. Choosing the colour grey may convey that Marie felt confused and uncertain during this time, which is further reinforced by her description of weather imagery “*cloudy and foggy*”. Marie goes on to say that she “*started to sort of numb*” her feelings and that she “*rarely felt properly happy*”, indicating that at this time Marie closed down emotionally to protect herself.

Marie describes her emotions as having an impact on her behaviour and physically preventing her from getting out of bed, using the word “*struggling*” to convey this. She constructs her emotions as something powerful as she explains that when these are heightened she struggles to “*have energy to do absolutely anything*” or “*care*” despite wanting to, “*I wanted to*”.

Marie demonstrates an awareness of when she is struggling and needs support with her emotions, “*I was deteriorating... deteriorating*, and “*I know when it’s past breaking point*”. The phrase “*breaking point*” and repetition of the word deteriorating convey the impact of Marie’s emotions and suggests that she has reached crisis point before.

Factors involved in systems view of school climate (SVSC) (Rudasill et al., 2018)

Shared beliefs and values

The value and importance of equality is evident throughout Marie’s narrative. She perceives multiple injustices and inequalities within her secondary schools and this negatively impacted her relationships with school staff and certain peers. She uses the word “*they*” repeatedly to refer to school staff, “*they just refused*” and peers in higher sets, “*they would get more*”. She also makes use of the grouping word “*us*” to refer to herself and peers in lower sets, “*us being left out*”. This presents staff and pupils in higher sets, and Marie and lower set pupils as two separate distinct opposing groups, highlighting the lack of unity and connectedness

Marie felt during this time. The importance of all pupils feeling heard and understood by staff is also evident in Marie's narrative as she states the *'inequalities'* were *'extremely unfair'* as she shared that staff prioritised pupils from higher sets. By doing this Marie is asserting the need for all pupils to be treated equally, regardless of what set they are in.

Marie questioned school policies of organising class sets in relation to academic ability, stating that this caused her to feel *'insecure'* about her *'intelligence'*. She goes on to say she understands why this policy is helpful but voices her frustrations stating that she *"did not belong"* in the *"lower sets"* but despite this staff refused to let her move classes describing her as a *"special case"*. This description separates Marie and categorises her as being different from her peers. This would illustrate that Marie perceived that staff viewed her differently and likely added to her feelings of not belonging. After moving school Marie was placed into *"too high of a set"* and again felt like her views were not listened to, *"they wouldn't move me down, and even with like a lot of pestering"*. Her use of the word *"pestering"* highlights the difficulties she perceives in communicating and having her views listened to. Marie's frustration is shown by her statement, *"it put me in jeopardy, and I didn't really appreciate that"*. Her choice of the word *"jeopardy"* illustrates the importance she places on her education and learning.

Relationships

Marie's perceived injustices within her secondary school systems negatively impacted her relationships with staff. She comments that *"there was definitely favouritism"* and explains this by saying *"teachers will sort of favourite or put more of the attention on to the misbehaving students"* and *"they would definitely prioritise the highest sets compared to us"*. Marie's exasperation and irritation is evident as she says this *"Makes me feel a bit left out"* and that *"teachers who don't care about you"*. Her use of the phrase *"I just didn't really care to be honest"* appears to be contradicted by her describing feeling *"disregarded and just left alone"*. The use of the word *"really"* is used as an attempt by Marie to convince the listener that she felt indifferent to her teachers actions. However, her following statement would indicate that this did cause her upset and suggests that she did want to be noticed and feel cared for by staff.

Towards the end of her narrative Marie appears to contradict herself by stating “*I really did have a good relationship with my teachers*”, this contrasts strongly with her previous statement that they did not “*care*” about her.

Emotional & physical safety

Marie’s strained relationship with staff can be seen to decrease her feelings of emotional and physical safety. For example, Marie recalls how she overheard a staff member telling their colleagues that Marie was ‘*lying*’ about her ‘*mental health*’. Marie commented that she ‘*didn’t go in for a while*’ after this incident as she felt ‘*extremely angry*’. Incidents like these caused Marie to feel misunderstood and not listened to by staff reinforcing her view of school as an unsafe, uncaring environment.

Marie also highlights school ineffectiveness with managing peer conflict. For example, she explains how some of her peers would be ‘*getting heavily bullied*’ but they would be ‘*less inclined to report bullying*’ as ‘*nothing would be done about it*’. This would suggest that Marie does not have confidence in staff to protect and ensure the safety of pupils.

Applying the PEARLS model to Marie’s narrative

Post-traumatic growth

Despite acknowledging her ‘*traumatic*’ experiences Marie finds it difficult to identify her successes seen through her statement, “*All I can think about is I could have done better and that is just true*”. Her choice of words “*that is just true*”, convey a certainty and she may have used them to prevent the listener from offering another perspective. Marie goes on to say that recently her mum “*told me that she’s proud of me*”. This contradicts Marie’s perception and her discomfort is evident from her response when asked how hearing this comment made her feel, “*I don’t know*”. These opposing perspectives continue in Marie’s discourse as she begins to accept that she has had some success but recognises this is difficult, “*I am starting to think I have done really well for what’s happened but it’s a bit hard*”. This suggests that Marie’s mental health journey and acceptance of her previous school experiences are still developing.

Marie acknowledges that she is still on a journey with her mental health and views her future with a degree of uncertainty. This is communicated through language which reinforces an aspect of confusion by Marie's repeated use of the phrase, "*I don't know*", "*I don't know what's gonna happen regarding my health. I don't know if it's gonna go down, if it's gonna go up*". Marie uses descriptive imagery to add to this picture of unclearness describing her future as "*a lot of blurriness*". Marie positions herself as taking an active role in seeking support for her mental health. She uses battle imagery to do this while also portraying the difficulties she has experienced in obtaining this, "*it's one that I've been trying to fight for*".

Impact of COVID:

Marie found the pandemic difficult and expressed that it had a significant negative impact on her mental health. This is evident through her personification of the pandemic as she states it "*enabled*" her depression. Initially, Marie found the lockdown restrictions and forced isolation reassuring; however she then recognised the harmful impact this had on her. This is evident through her use of juxtaposition, achieved through closely placing contrasting sentences together, "*to just sort of be absorbed by all of them feelings, it is a bit comforting but you know, in the back of your head it's really bad for you*". Marie uses discourse to construct the idea that the pandemic exacerbated her depression and left her physically unable to overcome it, "*you don't have the energy to sort of overcome that*".

Practical strategies:

Increased staff understanding and awareness of mental health

Marie called for school staff to be more aware and understanding of mental health difficulties. She feels that staff *currently “rely on stereotypes”* when working with young people who have *“bad attendance”* and are likely to believe that these students are choosing not to attend and they do not wish to learn. She uses battle imagery to convey how difficult mental health journeys can be while calling on staff to be more empathetic, *“they're trying to sort of overcome that battle themselves. You don't know what's going on”*.

Opportunities to repair relationships

Marie describes feeling *“alone”* and interacting with staff who did not *“care”* about her. These words highlight the impact of damaged relationships between staff and Marie. Marie explains that one of her teachers *“couldn't apologise for anything”*. The use of the word *“couldn't”* presents the idea that her teacher was physically unable to apologise suggesting that this is something he never does. Providing opportunities to repair relationships may help to increase understanding between pupils and staff members.

Communication related to safeguarding

Marie mentioned the importance of handling information sensitively. Marie explained that she had previously discussed incidents with staff members who were obligated to pass this information to the safeguarding team and her parent. While this practice is designed to keep young people safe, Marie commented that it would be better if staff could discuss the incident with the young person before contacting their parents and include young people in these discussions, *“so instead of telling your mum straight away, for example, you should talk about it first. You should have a discussion between the three of you, they should talk about it. But instead no they just constantly, not constantly, instantly pick up the phone, when you tell them not to. You know, they wouldn't talk about it first”*.

Marie's use of the word "*they*" presents school as an opposing force who are against her.

These incidents resulted in Marie feeling "*less inclined*" to confide in adults.

3.6 Abby's story

Background & overall experience

Abby is currently in Year 12 and attends college. Chronologically she should be in Year 13 but decided to take a break from college before restarting Year 12. She has attended two secondary schools in the past and has no medical diagnoses. Abby attended her first secondary school for one year before moving due to bullying. In Year 8, Abby had transitioned to her second secondary school. During this time Abby was admitted to hospital for surgery and missed a period of school. After returning to school after her surgery Abby stated that she *"had been off for so long. It felt like a slap, to fit back in you know?"*. Abby's use of the word *"slap"* conveys the idea that returning to school felt physically painful for her. On Abby's return to school she made a number of friends before experiencing bullying again.

The COVID-19 pandemic struck when Abby was in Year 9 forcing her to remain at home. During this time Abby's Nan passed away and she completed her exams in Year 11. Abby began Year 12 and found it difficult to attend her lessons during this time. She got to a *'really low point'* and decided she needed *'time off'* and would start Year 12 again. Abby spent this time working in a nursery, a bar and as an exam invigilator. Abby returned to school to complete her A Level exams and would like to study Law at university.

Abby presents her experience of secondary school as a series of challenges which she was able to overcome. In contrast, she constructs a more positive view of college comparing her experiences using juxtaposing statements with contrasting adjectives *"school is more bad than good. And college is more good than bad"*.

Positioning

Abby constructs the cause of her non-attendance as stemming from bullying and struggling to engage with lessons. By doing this she attributes blame towards certain peers and specific staff, positioning herself as a victim who required support but did not receive it. This is evident through her statement about her first secondary school's response to the bullying, "*they didn't seem to care*". The use of "*they*" immediately positions school staff as individuals that are separate and opposing to Abby suggesting she feels a lack of connection towards them. Abby describes her peers as being "*really, really nasty*" positioning them as villains and reinforcing their negative behaviour through her repeated use of the word "*really*".

Abby makes reference to experiencing negative emotions related to her academic studies. She repeatedly explains that she was not "*enjoying*" certain lessons in college initially saying she "*got really bored of them*". There is some variability in Abby's account as she goes on to offer another explanation for her reluctance to attend these lessons commenting that she "*just didn't understand*" the subjects. These factors impacted Abby's attendance and she attempts to seek confirmation from the listener that this was a valid response using a rhetorical question in the following statement, "*if I'm not enjoying something I'm not going to try in it because you know, why would I?*". It appears that Abby may want to mask or conceal that she was struggling to access her lessons as she mentions this once and then resumes the narrative that she "*disliked*" her subjects. This may also suggest that Abby has not considered the possibility that the reason she disengaged from certain lessons was due to her finding the content difficult. Pushing the narrative that this disengagement was down to her not finding the lessons interesting may be a safer, easier recollection for Abby.

Descriptions of emotions

Abby describes the emotions she experiences in relation to her non attendance by using the term '*anxiety*'. It is interesting to note Abby's use of the term '*anxiety*'. As discussed this is a medical term portraying Abby's non attendance clinically. Abby appears to later contradict this in her narrative as she states that she feels her teacher should have asked her about her attendance as '*there's not like a medical reason*' to explain it. She details bullying and bereavements as impacting her attendance suggesting her use of the term '*anxiety*' explains her emotional response to these events. These normal emotional responses associated with trauma arguably do not need to be viewed in a medical way and may reflect the dominant within child clinical discourse which is associated with non attendance.

Abby characterises her '*anxiety*' as a large, overwhelming feeling which impacts her physically and prevents her from communicating. This is constructed through Abby listing the impact of her emotions by using the same phrase, "*wouldn't be able to talk, I wouldn't be able to move*". The extent of her emotions on her attendance is conveyed through Abby repeating "*I wouldn't go... I just wouldn't go*". Abby found it difficult to discuss her emotions explaining "*I didn't know how to say it*". These words imply that Abby may have felt uncertain or confused by her emotions suggesting that she was still processing and attempting to make sense of them.

Abby's sense of isolation and loneliness is illustrated by the following statement, "*I felt like no one was there and everyone was against me*". This constructs an image of Abby as being alone with no support. This image is further reinforced by the juxtaposition of "*I*" and "*everyone*" indicating that Abby feels singled out and on an opposing side to everyone else. This sense of isolation impacted Abby significantly as she used descriptive language and a figure of speech to express how this negatively impacted her mental health, "*I just got to a really low point*". This negative descriptive language contrasts sharply with Abby's phrase to describe how she felt when she eventually shared her feelings with her family, "*it was like lifted off when I did tell*". This phrase suggests that Abby felt a sense of physical relief after this disclosure.

Factors involved in systems view of school climate (SVSC) (Rudasill et al., 2018)

Shared beliefs and values

It is clear from Abby's narrative that she values feeling respected and understood by staff. Abby spoke about the importance of staff approaching young people in relation to their non-attendance in a non-confrontational, curious way. She imagines herself as a teacher to explain how she would initiate a conversation with a young person regarding their attendance, *"I'd say well, there's obviously something going on, what's wrong, you know, why don't you take like, take a minute to explain"*. This highlights that for Abby she would like staff to ask her exploratory questions instead of making assumptions about her attendance. She goes on to explain how her teacher's response did not meet her expectations, *"If I as a teacher was picking up that someones not in lessons, and they're not trying much...I wouldn't turn around and be like, oh, well. You know, if you don't try you are just going to waste away"*. This remark would imply that Abby's previous teacher struggled to understand that for her not attending school was not a choice, but something her emotions prevented her from doing.

Abby discussed how feeling disconnected to and misunderstood by staff can reinforce non attendance. Abby described one incident in which she felt one of her teachers confronted her in an accusatory way about not attending lessons. She stated that her teacher said, *"I think you underestimate how important these exams are, there's nothing worse than feeling like you could have done better. Don't waste your potential"*. This language strongly contrasts with how Abby said she would like to be approached, using questions instead of making assumptions and placing blame, *"if he would have turned around and said like is something wrong, like can we do anything to help? I would have liked that a lot more"*. The significance of this interaction is evident as Abby uses *"pushing"* an intransitive verb to convey that she felt her teacher's response made a physical impact on her and her attendance stating that *"he like pushed me, pushed me out and made me not want to come in"*.

Relationships

Abby identified positive relationships with peers and school staff as significantly promoting her wellbeing and attendance. This is evident through Abby's description of having a friend stating she *'felt better. You know that I had someone' which contrasts sharply with the language she uses when she was being bullied, 'I felt like that. Like there wasn't really a point anymore'*. Abby also constructs her experience of bullying as relentless as she explained that due to her peers having phones she *"never got a break from it"* illustrating her constant exposure to it. Her use of the phrase *"I had someone"* implies that before meeting this peer Abby felt she had no one supporting her in school.

Emotional & physical safety

Abby portrays peer relationships as being both protective and harmful. She conveys being on her own without positive peer connections as something dangerous. She uses battle imagery and the repetition of the phrase *"I don't want"* to express this, *"I don't want to be stood on my own. I don't want to be like a target"*. These feelings of insecurity and anxiety are further reinforced by Abby's use of the phrase, *"oh god it's break time. What am I gonna do?"*. This rhetorical question may reflect the uncertainty and dread Abby felt and imply negative incidents did occur when she was on her own in school. In contrast, Abby presents the protective nature of positive peer connections. Despite experiencing bullying in her second secondary school, Abby explains that she had *"one friend throughout it, like everything. And it was literally just me and her"*. This contrasts significantly with Abby's previous phrase *"no one was there and everyone was against me"* reinforcing the protective aspect of friendships. Abby's word *"me and her"* convey that Abby and her peer are connected and on the same side. Abby uses a metaphor to explain that her peer constantly supported her, explaining her friend *"never left my side"* and this further increased her feelings of safety.

Abby reflects that supportive staff who helped her when she was being bullied increased her feelings of safety within school. She uses a simile to describe her Head of Year in her

second secondary school stating he would “*speak to you as if you was his friend*”. This contrasts with Abby’s views of staff at her first secondary school stating that “*they didn’t seem to care as much*”. For Abby having staff members who she perceived cared for her increased her feelings of emotional and physical security thus supporting her attendance as she expressed this with the metaphor, “*there was like some kind of safety net*”.

Applying the PEARLS model to Abby’s narrative

Post-traumatic growth

Abby recognises that “*a lot happened*” during her time at secondary school and college. She credits her challenging past experiences as allowing her to develop and mature stating she has “*had to grow up very quickly, obviously, because of everything I’ve been through*” and that this resulted in Abby perceiving and thinking about “*things different*”. Hence, Abby is presenting the idea that overcoming negative situations can be beneficial to individuals as they develop resilience evident through her use of the phrase, “*It was a bit of a rough time, but I made it and I did it*”. The phrase “*I made it and I did it*” almost sounds like an affirmation as Abby acknowledges her achievement.

Abby uses descriptive language to mention her optimistic outlook for the future stating she feels “*really positive*”. Abby acknowledges that at times life does not go to plan but presents a resilient message urging young people not to “*give up*.”

Impact of COVID

Abby discussed the COVID-19 pandemic using descriptive language to communicate its impact, *“then obviously COVID hit”*, signifying Abby’s perception that the pandemic as having an abrupt, almost violent impact on her life. During this time Abby felt school provided little support commenting *“you have to just go through it yourself”*. This statement illustrates that for Abby the pandemic was an obstacle she had to persevere through independently.

Abby presents the COVID pandemic as an event which exacerbated a number of pre-existing stressors already present in her life. She conveys feeling overwhelmed by listing these factors, *“my Nan passed away during COVID. But then I had to sit all my exams...obviously throughout all this with all these nasty girls. And obviously through my Nan dying and I’m trying to be there for mum”*. Abby concludes this list with a short phrase, *“So I literally, I quit”*. This further reinforces Abby’s feelings of being overwhelmed and needing a break. The significant life events Abby experienced highlights how external factors impacted her attendance, shifting away from a purely medical explanation.

Personal connection item:

Abby brought a picture of a ring which contained her *“Nan’s ashes”*. She explained that she will wear this ring during important events or challenging times as this helps Abby to feel close to her Nan. This is conveyed to the listener as Abby states when she wears the ring she feels like her Nan is *“there”*. This implies that wearing this ring enables Abby to feel that her Nan is physically close to her and they are also emotionally connected. Abby comments that the ring was particularly significant to her *“through secondary school”* indicating that she felt she needed extra support during this challenging time. Abby shared that she feels *“proud”* talking about her Nan’s ring which may indicate that she thinks her nan would be proud to see what she has achieved.

Practical strategies:

Break from education

Abby recognised that she needed a break from education after completing her exams. She listed the challenges she faced including her father's and Nan's death, coping with bullying, supporting her mum, the pandemic and completing her exams. Abby constructs these experiences as obstacles explaining that despite the summer holidays she does not feel that students "*get a long time to like go through stuff*". This implies she needed extra time to process her emotions and experiences. Abby perceives this break as being essential in supporting her to re-engage with education commenting that if she did not take a year out of school she , "*wouldn't have been doing what I'm doing now, probably just would have left that permanently*". Abby uses metaphorical language to explain how happy and relieved she felt when she initially stopped attending college, "*I just felt over the moon*". Abby also appears to be reassured by the fact that she knows this break is temporary, "*knowing that I was going to go back*".

Mentors

Abby discusses finding it difficult to discuss her emotions and concerns with adults including her family explaining, "*I felt like I couldn't even though I had people to talk to*". Although Abby is aware she has individuals she could seek support from, the word "*couldn't*" suggests her emotions are physically preventing her from doing so. Throughout Abby's narrative she shares that through her experiences she learned that despite finding expressing her worries difficult, speaking about these minimised her feelings of anxiety in the long term, "*I know when I've told them, it's just made everything a lot easier*". She states how her emotions can be magnified if she does not seek support, "*I know when a problem starts to just speak about it as early as you can, so it doesn't get any bigger*".

Abby speaks positively about the college's mentoring program while also again highlighting that she feels increased feelings of safety being with individuals who she feels connected to, *"I don't have to stress in that I know that if anything happens, I won't be on my own, you know, that there's other people there."* This system also removes the pressure of Abby needing to approach unfamiliar adults to seek support, *"it's not the step of me, having to go to someone I don't know and, you know, say, like tell them"*.

Strategies associated with successful reintegration

Participants cited various strategies which they felt were effective in supporting their attendance. For a list of this please see Appendix H. The majority of the mentioned strategies focus on supporting pupils to feel connected to others and providing them with academic work. A gradual return to school and lessons was highlighted by three of the participants as a key policy in reengaging with education. This seems to contradict current guidance which asserts that a rapid return to school is more successful for young people in the long term (Salford Educational Psychology Service, 2020; West Sussex, 2020). Louise described her experience of a rapid return to her lessons as resulting in her feeling *"burnt out"* requiring her to take a number of weeks off school to recover. Participants spoke about recognising when they needed a break from school and the importance of giving themselves time to reflect on their current position as key to re-attending. Louise also mentioned the expectations of staff as a barrier to attending school. She explained that the expectations of staff members relating to which and how many lessons she would attempt to attend would further increase her anxieties. This would then cause her to feel shame and guilt if she was unable to meet those expectations.

It is also worth noting that only one within child strategy was mentioned as effective in promoting attendance by participants and involved adolescents developing their emotional understanding and awareness. The majority of strategies highlighted by participants involved making changes to the school environment. Arguably this would suggest that adolescents do not consider medical intervention to be helpful despite each partly attributing a clinical explanation to their non attendance.

Chapter 4.0: Discussion

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter will focus on discussing the research findings presented in Chapter 3.0 in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 1.0. It will explore how the research question has been answered and apply the findings to both the SVSC (Rudasill et al., 2018) and the PEARLS model (Baron Williams, 2021). The chapter will then examine the contributions, limitations of the research and my personal reflections. It will conclude by considering the implications for future research and the professional practice of EPs and other educational staff.

4.2 Research Rationale

This study aimed to gain an increased understanding of how female adolescents used discourse to construct their experiences of non attendance. The majority of literature focuses on adult perspectives of non attendance (see the Literature Review in Chapter 1), who are often professional adults who have had succeeded in education (Mortimer, 2018) and therefore may have their own biases related to absence. Hence, by involving female adolescents who have experienced non attendance, this study sought to illuminate their voices. The study also sought to highlight effective support strategies in relation to non attendance as identified by female adolescents. Involving female adolescents from the post-16 population was important to me as I recognised the lack of representation of this group within educational research.

4.3 The research question

This section will outline how the research question has been answered. The similarities and discrepancies between the current study and the research presented in the literature review will also be considered. The study proposed the research question below:

- How do post-16 females use discourse to represent and re-construct their experiences of educational non attendance?

Considering the variety and complexity of narratives it is not possible to provide a unified, simplistic answer to the question. Each participant's experience was individual and personal to them which aligns with views of previous researchers (Gregory & Purcell, 2014). While acknowledging the individual differences between accounts, it is possible to identify shared external influences between adolescents' experiences of non attendance (Baker & Bishop, 2015).

Mortimer (2018) argued that developing a "gold standard" intervention to support adolescents may not be realistic due to the complex and varied nature of non attendance. Nuttall & Woods (2013) suggest that instead, developing evidence based practice may be more effective as young people are likely to differ in what they find supportive. While I recognise that no experience of non attendance is universal and that specific support strategies may not work for every individual, there was some significant overlap between strategies which the participants perceived to be effective. Hence, while I have drawn out the learning points and potential strategies related to non attendance they may not apply to all pupils.

As this was a small scale study its findings are not able to be generalised, although they may be transferable. It is worth noting that strategies mentioned by participants directly stemmed from key features of their experience, which have also been highlighted within previous research (Mortimer, 2018; Nuttall & Woods, 2013). Mortimer (2018) spoke to two male secondary school pupils while Nuttall & Woods's (2013) study involved two female secondary school pupils. Participants across both studies regardless of gender, shared similar features of their educational experiences and cited overlapping strategies to support attendance, such as the importance of relationships and gradual return to their settings. As the current research highlighted similar results this would suggest that the findings of this study can be applied to both male and female secondary school adolescents. The implementation and format of these strategies may vary among individuals but arguably there is similarity between the principles that underpin them.

There is a lack of research examining reintegration factors within the post-16 population which is something this study sought to address. While the findings of this study may not be able to be generalised to other post-16 settings there are a number of similarities between each participant narrative. This would imply that the results and implications of this study are relevant and useful to the participating college.

The literature review listed four main functions of non attendance, two of which were echoed by each participant. These were avoiding anxious or physiological feelings associated with attending school and avoiding social situations with peers. The remaining two functions of non attendance not mentioned by participants included increasing interaction with a significant other such as a caregiver and seeking out more motivating experiences.

Each participant's discourse was examined in relation to the SVSC (Rudasill et al., 2018) and PEARLS model (Baron Williams, 2021). These are examined in more detail below.

4.4. Descriptions of emotions and adopting a medicalised view of non attendance

All participants labelled their emotions as either 'anxiety' or 'depression' and described these as causing physiological symptoms preventing them from speaking, moving or attending school. Similar to the current research, Woodgate, Tennent & Legras's (2021) study found that female adolescents described the psychological and physiological impact of anxiety using dark imagery and metaphors to convey their emotional experiences. This contrasted with the use of nature imagery when participants discussed their personal growth and future aspirations. Both Woodgate, Tennent & Legras's (2021) and the current study would support discussing and encouraging adolescents to apply metaphors and imagery when conveying their experiences of emotion.

Participants' use of medical discourses when discussing their non attendance aligns with the historically dominant within child narrative, which places responsibility solely on the individual adolescent and their family (Adams, 2022; Devenney, 2021). This perspective fails to acknowledge the impact and influence of adolescents lived experiences and multiple social

environments in relation to attendance, and results in pathologising understandable reactions to life events. Considering attendance holistically using a model like Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1994) to account for wider contexts would arguably provide a greater understanding of influencing factors of each individual. Nuttall & Woods (2013) applied the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) to map the reintegration journeys of two participants. The research highlighted how adapting each system led to interactions between and across them which resulted in positive outcomes for both pupils. This highlights that considering attendance holistically can be effective in supporting reintegration and reinforces the importance of the SVSC mesosystem which considers the interactions of pupils wider environments such as home and community environments on attendance. The multiple social environments of adolescents can also be helpful when considering post- traumatic growth as to achieve this individuals need to experience a balance of protective environments and potential vulnerabilities (Baron Williams, 2021). While it is unrealistic that educational professionals will have the ability to remove potential stressors from every social environment of an individual (e.g. the wider community, or home environment), adapting the school environment to create a protective setting can act as a buffer, supporting adolescents through challenges arising from different social contexts assisting them in achieving post-traumatic growth.

All participants viewed their non attendance negatively and as something that they knew would be emotionally and academically detrimental to them in the future. This perspective is strengthened by Davies & Lee's (2006) research who found that adolescents viewed their absence as a short term solution to their emotional distress. Like the participants in the current study, adolescents in Davies & Lee's (2006) research acknowledged the impact of non attendance on their future career aspirations. The participants in the current study acknowledged that despite wanting to attend lessons and recognising the negative impact their absence could have on their future career prospects, they felt this was not an option. For two of them this recognition that their non attendance was harmful further impacted their mental health as it caused them to experience feelings of guilt and increased anxiety. Adolescents in Davies &

Lee's (2006) study did not refer to emotional distress associated or caused by their non attendance, instead they focused on naming environmental school factors. This differed to the current study, it is worth noting that the participants in this research had a degree of distance while recalling their experiences. Hence, this may have provided them with a greater degree of perspective and understanding of their experiences compared to those participants in Davies & Lee's (2006) research who were interviewed while they were still experiencing non attendance. This could also be said for participants in more recent studies who also shared their views while they were currently experiencing non attendance or those who had recently returned to education (Higgins, 2022; Mortimer, 2018).

Three out of four participants spoke about how their own understanding of their emotions and thought processes increased throughout their experiences. This understanding appeared to be achieved through persevering through their difficulties and successfully attending college. Again, participants' distance from their non attendance experiences may also have made this understanding more evident. Beckles (2014) suggested in previous research that participants may have struggled to make sense of their experiences due to a lack of understanding related to their thought patterns. Similarly to other studies mentioned, participants in Beckles (2014) study were currently not attending school.

More recent research by Mortimer (2018) highlighted that adolescents wanted support to make sense of and understand their experiences and emotions linked to non attendance. Three participants in the current study were able to access external support from the Healthy Young Minds (HYM) service, which offers specialist services to support young people experiencing mental health difficulties. This agency forms part of the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) offer which provides mental health support for young people. Two of the participants praised HYM as playing a pivotal role in helping them understand their anxieties; one participant did not feel their support was effective. Interestingly, these three participants were critical of their schools' position in supporting young people with their mental health. Participants felt that their schools did not provide support for pupils' emotional wellbeing in the

same way as providing support for their learning. Nuttall & Woods (2013) showed that providing this support to young people assisted them in reframing their thinking. Baron Williams (2021) study outlined similar findings as participants displayed awareness of their strengths, areas of development and a degree of self worth to motivate and inspire them. This could be considered as participants demonstrating a degree of resilience and self belief in their ability to reengage with their educational settings.

Participants also discussed academic attainment in relation to their anxieties and perceptions of themselves. In settings where participants perceived that they were academically achieving all of them reported feeling an increased sense of emotional wellbeing. Three participants felt that this had a direct positive impact on their attendance. Academic achievement seemed to increase participants' motivation and confidence to attend. This suggests that academic achievement may enhance young peoples' self-concept. This is significant as not only does research show that academic self-concept is positively associated with academic attainment (Ghazvini, 2011), but also suggests that increasing young peoples' belief in their academic abilities may help to reduce some of their attendance anxieties.

4.5 Applying the findings to the discussed theoretical frameworks

The research findings were applied to the two theoretical models discussed in the literature review in Chapter 3.0.

4.5.1 Factors involved in systems view of school climate (SVSC) (Rudasill et al., 2018):

Each participant's narrative maps onto the SVSC framework (Rudasill et al., 2018) (see Figure 3) and are discussed below.

4.5.2 Shared beliefs and values

Half of the participants discussed how they felt staff perceptions of them were unfair and influenced by their academic abilities and gender. This contrasted with the expectations of participants who felt staff should treat all pupils equally and negatively impacted their relationships. Marie made a distinction between male and female behaviour, stating that males were more likely to receive support for engaging in externalising behaviours. This view contrasts with recent literature which showed that a portion of secondary school pupils perceived pupils' externalising behaviours to be associated with poorer pupil-teacher relationships (Holen, Waaktaar & Sagatun, 2018). This was supported by Roorda & Koomen's (2021) study which in addition found no association between pupils' perceptions of how internalising pupil behaviours impact the pupil-teacher relationship. It could be suggested that pupils' behaviour is also influenced by the quality of the pupil-teacher relationship. Longobardi et al., (2019) found that negative pupil perceptions of pupil-teacher relationships resulted in increased incidents of externalising and internalising behaviours. This implies that both pupil behaviour and perceived pupil-teacher relationship quality are inter-related with both constructs affecting and influencing each other. Roorda & Koomen's (2021) finding of no association between internalising behaviour and pupil-teacher relationship quality and Marie's perceptions may be explained as internalising behaviours are less identifiable and more difficult for teachers to recognise. This is especially true of mainstream secondary school teachers who will see less of individual pupils throughout the week. This finding is particularly relevant when we consider that the research relating to non attendance repeatedly highlights that adolescents feel unseen by staff (Baron Williams, 2020). Considering the numerous budget cuts impacting schools, poorer staff wellbeing and increased behavioural needs of pupils since the COVID-19 pandemic (NAHT, 2022; Sharp & Nelson, 2021) it is not difficult to understand why behaviours which are not seen to be disruptive can be missed. A whole-organisation approach to enhance the climate of educational settings may support in reducing both externalising and internalising behaviours of all pupils. Due to the study's female participant sample and the increased likelihood that this group will engage in internalising behaviours (Hendron & Kearney, 2016) suggest that identified

strategies may be particularly beneficial in supporting the needs and reducing the absence rates of female adolescents. Similar features of non attendance experiences have been highlighted by both genders (Mortimer, 2018; Havik et al., 2015), which may imply that strategies cited by female participants could also be effective when applied to a male population. A universal, preventative approach may also make it easier for teachers to identify and offer support to all pupils who exhibit internalising behaviours.

4.5.3 Relationships

Consistent with findings from previous literature relationships were a main theme present in all participant narratives and one which had the potential to directly influence attendance. Relationships with staff were raised by all participants as main features of their non-attendance experiences. As discussed, perceived injustices and inequalities negatively impacted participants' relationships with staff resulting in them feeling misunderstood by staff, which reinforced their absence. These findings are supported by previous studies which discuss how pupil-staff relationships impact attendance and echo frustration from adolescents who are not typically asked for their views on their non attendance (Billington, 2018; How, 2015).

Positive peer relationships have been found to increase school and lesson attendance (Smith, 2020). Higgins (2022) also states that providing young people with the opportunity to establish relationships with peers acts as a protective factor in relation to attendance. Similar to the assertions of the Social Safety Theory (Slavich, 2020), positive peer relationships were described as increasing participants' feelings of safety and security within school settings. At times, participants seemed to view school as a threat and as such considered peers to be protective factors against isolation and rejection such as bullying.

All participants shared that positive peer relationships increased their emotional wellbeing and supported them to attend school. Interestingly, this may not suggest that peer relationships increased participants' feelings of belonging at school. Wilkins (2008) differentiates between feeling a sense of belonging and having supportive relationships. The two do not appear to be mutually exclusive, as it would be possible for adolescents to report feeling a low sense of school belonging while having positive relationships and vice versa. Van Eck et al's., (2017) study discussed within the literature review, implied that school climate may have a greater association with belonging than individual relationships. In this study, three participants made reference to their school environments and presented smaller settings, with fewer pupils, higher amounts of adults and more available academic support as safer environments in which they felt they belonged.

Personal connection items chosen by participants strengthened the significance of connections evident throughout their accounts. Each participants chose items which were associated with a person who they perceived as supportive and someone who had assisted them with their attendance journeys, reinforcing relationships as being central to individuals' attendance journeys.

4.5.4 Emotional and physical safety

Consistent with findings from previous research, feeling unsafe at school was cited as negatively impacting attendance whereas consistent policies and positive relationships were associated with increased feelings of safety (Williams et al., 2018). For example, when Abby reported incidents of bullying she felt disappointed by the response of staff as she felt like no action had been taken. However, when she attended a different school Abby perceived the response of staff to bullying to be like a '*safety net*'. This supports literature on school climate which asserts that pupils' perception of schools responses to bullying also impacts pupils' perception of staff's abilities to ensure their safety (Barboza et al, 2009).

Pupils who feel emotionally and physically unsafe at school are reported to experience lower levels of engagement and social emotional wellbeing (Fite et al., 2019) which is also highlighted within the current study. This provides an alternative perspective to the medical explanations participants attributed to their non attendance and normalises their emotional experiences.

4.5.5 Persistent educational absence & reengagement with learning and school (PEARLS) model (Baron Williams, 2018)

4.5.6 Post-traumatic growth and success criteria

Post-traumatic growth (PTG) was evident in all the participants' accounts. The majority of participants easily discussed this and acknowledged their successes in reengaging in education. Marie found this more difficult to acknowledge but did share that she was beginning to think she had achieved success. Participants had similar multifaceted perceptions of what they felt constituted success in relation to non attendance. One aspect of success which all participants named was attending college consistently on a full timetable. This somewhat obvious classification of non attendance success is often the view adopted by educational settings. This is evident through this study as the college selected participants based on their attendance levels. Baron Williams (2021) found the same as their nominated school identified participants who had successfully reintegrated back to school. This was despite one of the participants expressing the difficulties he still faced. Similarly, Marie shared that despite maintaining a consistent attendance level at college, her mental health struggles were ongoing and something which she considered to be prevalent in her daily life.

Basing success purely on returning to school contrasts with Grandison's (2011) study who asked participants how they would categorise success in relation to non attendance. Only one participant cited returning to an educational setting fulltime. The majority of answers instead focused on pupil well-being and how comfortable they felt in the school environment.

Participants in the current study also made reference to their social emotional skills. They shared that they felt proud of themselves for preserving and '*getting through*' their difficulties. Two spoke of their success as being able to manage challenging situations and emotions. The young people expressed that their challenging experiences benefited their development by building their resilience and maturity. This presents the need for staff and young people to agree what their overall goal is in relation to their attendance and the criteria for its success. This research would assert that a young person's success should be considered in terms of their wellbeing as well as their actual level of attendance.

Participants also discussed how they viewed attending college as a step towards their future goal of securing a University place. All were vocal about their desire to achieve the necessary grades in order to access their preferred course. This highlights that participants recognise that attending college has a purpose for their future successes.

4.5.7 Reflections on the PEARLS model

While aspects of this model strongly overlap with features of participants' experiences, particularly the PTG domain, the model does present with some weaknesses when considering non attendance. Baron Williams (2021) acknowledges that the model may seem to focus on within-child factors but argues that these factors are influenced by the systems around them. While this is true, arguably the model places an expectation on the individual to change, not their surrounding systems. The current study would indicate that timing is key in supporting individuals to reflect on their attendance experiences and again raises the question of when reintegration has been successful. If an adolescent is attending their educational setting but still experiences distress they will still be involved in traumatic experiences and not able to engage in PTG. This model could be a useful tool in supporting individuals to reframe past trauma, consider the potential benefits of this and create meaning. Hence, the model can be used as a reactive method to support attendance and could operate within a multi-tiered system of support (further outlined in the next section 4.13). While the model incorporates the push and pull

factors of attendance outlined by West Sussex (2020) it does not provide detailed, practical strategies for supporting reintegration. This is something which the current study suggests (see Appendix H).

4.6 Applying multi-systems of tiered support to promote attendance

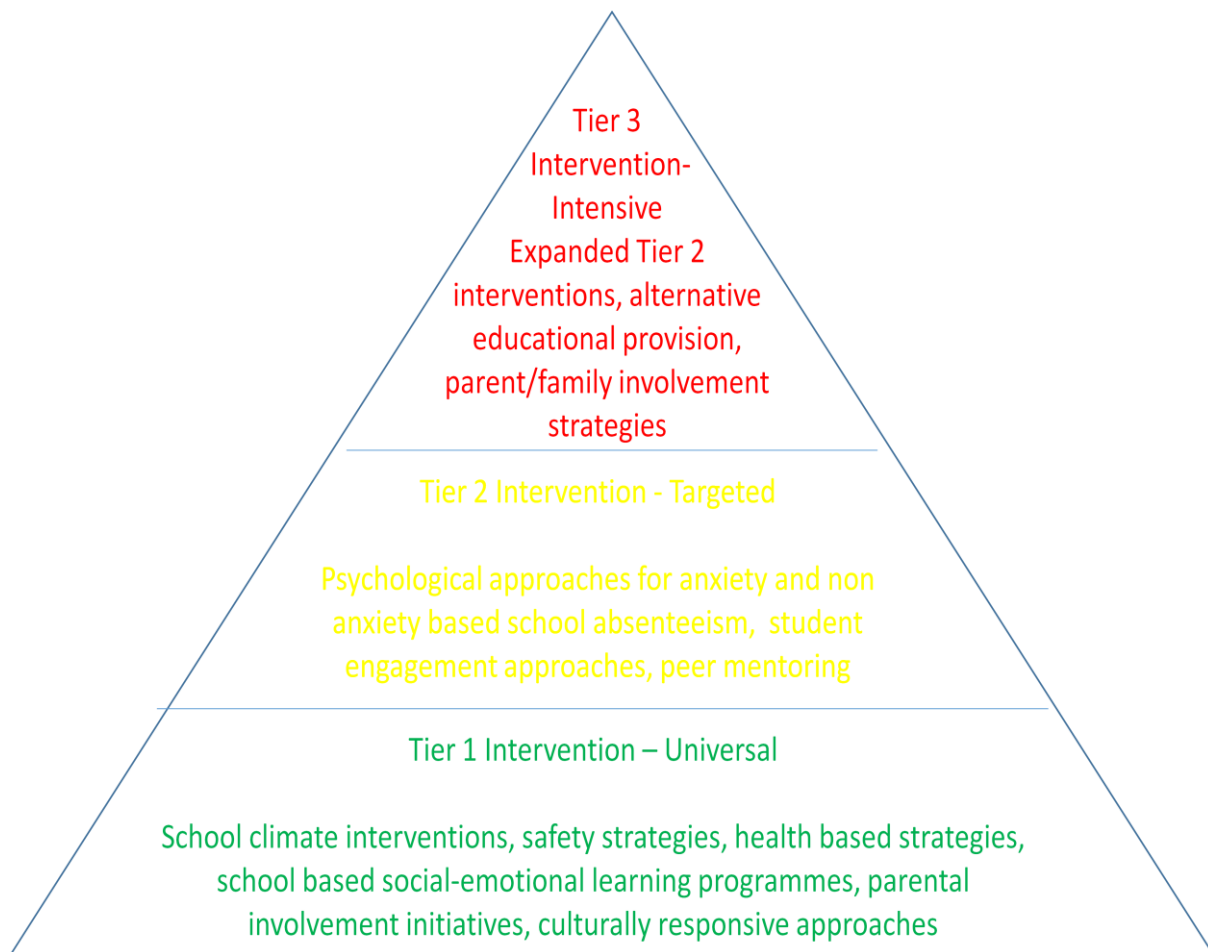
The shared environmental features of participants' narratives and features of the SVSC (Rudasill et al., 2018) suggests that by supporting schools to develop positive climates may help to promote attendance. Therefore, focusing on promoting positive school climates using a graduated, whole-organisation response such as a multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) model could address these factors. MTSS models are commonly used by educational settings to promote pupil academic attainment and behaviour (NCSMH, 2019) and can be viewed as one cohesive model which aims to address all pupil needs including social, emotional, behavioural and academic (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

MTSS models are typically structured in three levels: universal or primary (level one), targeted or secondary (level two) and intensive or specialised (level three). Kearney et al., (2020) describe strategies within each level, level one strategies are designed with all pupils in mind and usually focus on creating a positive school environment and culture. Level two strategies involve supporting a portion of pupils who require additional support as well as accessing level one strategies, and level three strategies refer to supporting pupils with complex needs who may require more individualised or specialised support. Hence, the model can be considered a guide or structure to aid intervention. See an example of a MTSS model (Figure 5) which could be applied to promote educational attendance.

Arguably, applying a MTSS model to support attendance would provide a mechanism for early identification and may reduce the number of adolescents who experience entrenched and prolonged absence. Kearney & Graczyk (2014) asserted that the use of a MTSS in relation to attendance would be effective as attendance could be considered at various contextual and severity levels.

Figure 5

Illustration of a multi-tiered system of support model to promote attendance (Kearney et al., 2019)



4.6.1 The role of the EP in supporting schools in implementing multi-tiered support systems

Arguably creating a positive school climate (operating within level 1 of a MTSS) will benefit all pupils and minimise stressors which can negatively impact attendance. Individuals who are still considered to be vulnerable or at risk of experiencing non attendance could be identified and receive targeted support from level 2 or level 3 of the MTSS. Kearney & Graczyk (2020) state that the next challenge in tackling non attendance is not questioning if an MTSS should be used, but rather considering the most effective and feasible methods of applying this framework within a school environment. The challenges and potential role of the EP in supporting schools to do this are explored below.

Measuring school climate and identifying individual pupil needs within secondary and college settings can be challenging, lengthy and impractical for settings. This presents an opportunity for EPs to consider their role in supporting schools to implement MTSS. Eagle et al., (2015) argues that psychologists have a central role in supporting schools with the core components of MTSS implementation, these include assisting with universal screening of pupils and staff, ensuring consistency, fidelity and providing opportunities for evaluation and reflection. Ormiston, Nygaard & Heck (2020) add that while the EP's role is central in this process, it is one of support and guidance rather than being the sole leader. Ensuring school staff are leading the implementation process will help to increase its chances of success, as research has found that whole organisation initiatives are embedded more effectively when leaders are actively involved in the process of goal setting, implementation and monitoring (Maxton & Bushe, 2017).

Through my work as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), I have supported secondary school settings in gathering staff and pupil perceptions of their wellbeing by using whole-school audits in the form of self-report surveys. Arguably, a similar approach could be adopted when considering an effective method of measuring school climate. Van Eck's et al., (2017), school climate survey could be adapted to reflect Rudasill's et al., (2018) categorisation of

school climate and provided to pupils and staff to complete in school during a designated date. The EP could analyse and present the audit results to the schools senior leadership team (SLT) and create actions to promote specific aspects of school climate with this approach becoming part of a graduated response to support attendance rates.

4.7 Practical strategies to support the attendance of female adolescents

Participants also discussed and reflected upon practical strategies in relation to their attendance experiences. All participants suggested strategies which their educational settings could implement to support them with attendance (see Appendix H). The majority of strategies mentioned by participants were environmental in nature and can be mapped onto the SVSC framework (Rudasill et al., 2018). Interestingly, only one within-person strategy was mentioned by the majority of participants. Instead environmental strategies were cited as supporting participants to feel able to attend their settings. This would strengthen the application of using a MTSS in promoting positive school climates to initially support attendance. The only within child strategy mentioned by participants involved them receiving support to gain an understanding of their thought patterns and emotions. Adolescents involved in recent non attendance research by Higgins (2022) and Corcoran et al.,(2022) did not cite an increased understanding of their anxieties as something central to their reintegration. This may be due to the retrospective nature of the current study as participants had a greater time period to reflect on and process their secondary school experiences. Three of the four participants seemed to some degree have overcome their attendance difficulties and therefore found it easier to discuss their successes. Marie was less vocal about the need to understand her thought patterns and seems to still perceive herself as struggling with attendance. This may suggest that individuals who have processed their attendance experiences are able to recognise the importance in understanding their thinking patterns. This may be an important consideration for researchers who complete future non attendance research.

4.7.1 Importance of understanding emotions

Understanding thought patterns and associated behaviours has clear links to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), an approach which is becoming more popular in supporting individuals with their attendance (Maynard et al., 2018). The effectiveness of using these approaches has had mixed results. Some research found that participants anxiety reduced as a result of engaging in CBT based interventions (Heyne et al., 2011), while other studies found that although CBT intervention impacted participants' attendance, there was no significant impact on anxiety (Maynard et al., 2015). This would imply that CBT may treat the symptom (non attendance) as opposed to the cause (heightened feelings of anxiety). Maynard et al., (2018) also highlighted the variability of CBT interventions which make it difficult when comparing studies efficacy when used in relation to attendance.

Arguably, gaining knowledge about oneself is powerful and motivating. Perhaps supporting adolescents to become aware of their thought patterns does not need to take a prescriptive CBT format, but instead this can focus on providing them with tools to manage their thoughts and emotions. It should be noted that all participants with a mental health diagnosis shared a number of environmental strategies which they perceived to be effective in supporting attendance. This would suggest that while it is useful to be mindful of adolescents' diagnoses considering non attendance through a purely medical lens provides a restricted view of the phenomena and may lead to environmental factors being ignored. The research would suggest that making changes in the school environment and increasing adolescents' feelings of connection can reduce their anxieties. Hence, despite their medical diagnoses, effective support for their attendance is not required to also be medical e.g. medication etc.

4.7.2 Additional environmental strategies

4.7.3 Additional academic support

Three out of four participants asserted that having more academic support would be beneficial. Missed learning was constructed as a further barrier to attendance as participants who were able to attend a lesson felt unable to engage with learning due to their previous absences. This finding has been found in previous literature (Clissold, 2018). Louise described a policy of her school as preventing her from receiving the work she had missed in class. She felt this action was intended to encourage her attendance but in reality it increased her feelings of stress.

4.7.4 Pupils developing positive relationships with staff

Similar to previous research and as discussed above pupil-staff and pupil-pupil relationships were mentioned as central to attendance (Smith, 2020; How 2015). This corresponds to the SVSC interaction and relationships domain. All participants spoke of the mentoring system at college and how having an allocated time with a consistent adult each week was reassuring and supportive of attendance. This was not something which was available at any of the secondary schools participants attended. As all participants felt more supported at college this may be of particular significance to professionals working in secondary settings. Louise and Marie also spoke about the importance of clear communication between school staff and themselves. Strategies such as meetings with college staff, participants and their parents before starting college to discuss the support they would find helpful, were considered beneficial. Clear communication relating to safeguarding procedures were highlighted by Marie and in particular ensuring the involvement of the young person in these discussions.

4.7.5 Increasing pupils' feelings of physical and emotional safety

Strategies related to physical and emotional safety were also highlighted. These included staffs' responses to peer conflict (physical safety), participants taking periods of time or a break from their educational settings (emotional safety) and a gradual return to lessons (emotional safety). Joanne and Abby both chose to take breaks from their education. They recognised that they required space from their educational settings to process their emotions and experiences. Both Joanne and Abby felt without these breaks from education they would not have been able to successfully re-attend college. Louise also spoke about timing. She recalled how she was encouraged to try and attend all of her lessons. She was able to do this for a *'couple of weeks'* but then shared she needed to take a substantial amount of time off school to recover. This would support a gradual return to school and lessons as being an effective approach to helping individuals with attendance difficulties. .

These views challenge the current literature which states that the longer the absence the more difficult the individual can find returning to school (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). This is also reflected in multiple LA's current policy relating to non attendance which states that a rapid return to school and lessons should be encouraged (Salford EPS 2020; West Sussex EPS, 2020) Support for this can be found in the literature and through an approach known as 'flooding' where individuals return to a full school timetable rapidly (Maeda & Heyne, 2019). Some researchers consider this approach to be the most effective albeit more distressing for the pupils (Kearney & Beasley, 1994; King et al., 1998). This research would suggest that using a 'flooding' approach could have negative long term implications.

Although the small sample size of this study prevents findings being generalised it can present areas for consideration. Arguably, an individual's return to school needs to be balanced with ensuring the individual's emotional wellbeing in order to achieve long term success. Baker & Bishop (2015) highlighted that pupils were expected to resume full school timetables quickly and support was often withdrawn once this had been achieved. This leads us to the perception of a successful reintegration as one which is linked to attending a full timetable while ignoring

the emotional wellbeing of pupils. Supporting adolescents to reintegrate and reengage with educational settings is a long term process and one which the wellbeing of the individual should be a central goal.

4.8 Research Reflections

4.8.1 Reflections on the analytical process

The interpretivist nature of this study recognised that knowledge would be constructed and interpreted during the interviews by myself and the participants. It was hoped that this would create an environment for participants to reflect. Kvale (1996) suggested that this space could enable participants to recognise themselves as having a degree of power in situations where previously they felt powerless. I felt this was particularly important for participants who are likely to have felt voiceless during their non attendance experiences (Baker & Bishop, 2015). I felt participants would also feel a sense of power by choosing which aspects of their experiences to discuss through the use of life charts.

I acknowledged that a challenge of conducting qualitative research would be ensuring that my previous experiences and biases would not influence or misinterpret participant stories (Bruner, 2004). Hence, I adopted a reflexive approach and perspective when considering participant accounts by sharing interview transcripts and findings with professional peers. This process enabled me to question and justify my thoughts.

I used Lincoln & Guba's (1986) checklist which focused on ensuring the trustworthiness of the data and is outlined in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Applied actions to ensure trustworthiness of data from Lincoln & Guba's criteria (1986)

<i>Rigour criteria</i>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Applied actions in study</i>
Credibility	To strengthen confidence that the presented results are credible and reliable interpretations of participants' experiences.	<p>All participants attended an introductory session where the research aims were explained and rapport was developed.</p> <p>I met with participants on three separate occasions (introductory session, initial interview and final interview). It was hoped participants would feel more comfortable in sharing their experiences with me after multiple meetings.</p> <p>Interview structure, use of life charts and prompts used to guide participant narratives were tested during the completion of pilot interviews.</p> <p>Completed life charts, concept maps focusing on non attendance strategies and interview transcripts were kept and presented within the Appendix.</p>
Dependability	To establish the confidence that the research findings are repeatable if the study was completed within the same context and with participants with similar demographics.	Detailed guides of the research procedure and data collection methods are outlined and presented.
Confirmability	To strengthen the confidence that the research findings would be supported and confirmed by other researchers.	<p>I discussed the research findings with my research supervisor during regular supervision meetings.</p> <p>Peer reviewed finalised research findings with colleagues.</p>
Transferability	To present the degree to which the research findings can be generalised or transferred to other settings or educational environments	The findings of the current research are supported by results from previous literature.

This enabled me to reflect on my data and further reduce bias. Although the selection of participants was the responsibility of the SENCO (acting gatekeeper) the provided participant criteria and meeting participants before the interview would ensure that individuals were not chosen because they were deemed to be 'good' for interviews. I considered the method of data collection by asking participants open ended questions to avoid leading their narratives. I considered the reflexivity and transparency criteria to be achieved through the mentioned peer review and supervision processes.

4.8.2 Reflections on the interview process

The life charts were effective in assisting participants to sequence and retell their accounts. Marie and Louise chose not to complete the life charts and instead shared their experiences using notes or by discussing experiences in a less structured way. This caused me to reflect on the importance of flexibility within the research procedure in order to ensure participants feel safe and comfortable. In Louise's case her chosen approach allowed her to provide detailed accounts of specific school experiences. As Marie did not use any written prompts to support her in retelling her experiences she appeared to lose her place at certain points and required additional prompts from me. Marie also did not participate in a second interview and therefore did not select a personal connection item. As Marie presented as being at a different stage of her reintegration journey it is possible her personal connection item may have differed from the other participants and may not have been associated with connections to others.

During the interviews I drew on consultation skills which I have developed over my training. These included active listening, open questions, validating participants' thoughts and not immediately speaking to fill silences, all of which have been said to add to the therapeutic alliance between interviewer and interviewee (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007; Sharpley et al., 2005). Although these mechanisms assisted in further developing rapport between myself and the participants, I feel the introductory session was essential in supporting participants to feel

comfortable in sharing their experiences in the interview. McGrath, Palmgren & Liljedahl (2018) agree and assert establishing rapport with participants before the interview can be pivotal in developing trust. Participants expressed that they felt more informed and less anxious about completing the research after the introductory session, as they knew what to expect. This resulted in me acknowledging the importance of holding introductory sessions when conducting research.

4.9 Limitations of the research

Due to the interpretivist nature of the research, it was not my intention to establish an objective account of individuals' non attendance. Instead my methodology focused on participant discourse rather than providing an absolute truth. As such, the findings can provide an increased in-depth understanding of specific aspects of non attendance, highlighting potential supports and present areas for future research. As I adopted a view point between a relativist and critical realist perspective this approach enabled me to comment and consider the systems involved within participants' experiences.

I chose not to involve participants' parents or staff members within the research. I made this decision as I wanted to readdress the balance within the current non attendance literature, which is dominated by adult voices. The lack of parent and staff voices means that it is possible that they may disagree with participants' perceptions of their experiences. Due to the nature of this study, individual experiences are considered to be true to that person, so I did not feel it was necessary to fact check or verify young peoples' narratives. Baron Williams (2021) cited a strength of this approach, asserting that listening to young peoples' experiences without the voices of adults avoids diluting their stories.

Research states that female adolescents are more likely to experience educational non attendance than their male peers (DfE, 2018). This was reflected in the all female white British sample of the study. The homogeneity of the sample prompted me to reflect on the characteristics of this group and consider their vulnerabilities in relation to school attendance. It

should also be noted that the four females who participated in the study were the four individuals initially identified by the SENCO, meaning no males were approached to take part in the research. Perhaps the SENCO was influenced by societal gender norms, considering females to be more likely to experience internalising emotions and males less open to discussing their emotions (Chaplin, 2015). Although the current literature reports small gender differences in relation to contributory factors of non attendance, it is held that females are more likely to experience educational non attendance. While this presents the need to understand female adolescents' attendance experiences and justifies the studies sample, male adolescents also engage in non attendance but may find it harder to report their experiences.

A more diverse sample may have expressed different experiences and stories. Research shows that an increased number of young people from ethnic minority backgrounds experience non attendance compared to their white peers (GOV UK, 2023). It is also worth noting that research samples generally consist of predominately white populations resulting in minority groups being under represented in the literature (Lyon & Cotler, 2007). Medin & Lee (2012) assert that social scientists, a predominately white group tend to utilise white populations for research samples. Therefore, results from these studies may not be generalisable to all pupils. Future research is needed to represent and understand the non attendance experiences of individuals from black and ethnically diverse backgrounds.

4.10 Unique contributions & implications of research

4.10.1 Unique contributions of research

The current research makes the following unique contributions to the literature base. This study presents the educational non attendance experiences of post-16 female adolescents and the value of listening to retrospective stories when considering effective attendance support strategies and relevant policies. It suggests the role of the EP in supporting schools to implement a multi-tiered systems approach in relation to non attendance.

All participants involved in the research attended the same college provision and different secondary schools. While this means that the results cannot be generalised to other college provisions it does provide specific information relating to the systems and strengths of the participating college. Despite attending different secondary schools similarities were found across each participant narrative. Participant accounts did not differ significantly from previous non attendance research suggesting that the findings and suggestions can be considered more broadly across both secondary and college settings.

4.10.2 Implications for educational settings

In addition to the practical strategies outlined in Appendix H, previous literature reinforces the importance of the school environment in relation to attendance. Rudasill's et al., (2018) SVSC's framework presents a whole-school mechanism encompassing domains frequently and consistently associated with attendance and well-being, which could be used to promote and create positive school climates. This preventative approach includes enhancing aspects within the three key areas: shared beliefs and values, relationships and interactions and physical and emotional safety. These three areas encompass the main features of young peoples' experiences of non attendance within this study and previous research. Arguably, strengthening and creating protective school environments can be considered a preventative approach to attendance and as something which will benefit all pupils and staff. The study also highlights the impact of young people having ambitions or future goals. In this study we see that all participants wanted to go to University and saw college as a stepping stone towards this goal. Hence, having a goal made attending educational settings meaningful and acted as a motivating factor for participants. This would suggest that schools supporting young people to identify clear personal goals and aspirations can act as a protective factor for attendance. The Department of Education (2017) echoes the importance of this through their 'Preparing for Adulthood' programme which asserts that settings should make use of pupil voice and person centred approaches to support young people in identifying and achieving their goals. Settings could make use of such resources as Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH)

(Pearpoint & Forest, 1993). This is a person centred planning approach which draws on positive and humanistic psychology to create meaningful change for individuals by supporting them to reach their aspirations (Wood et al., 2019; White & Rae, 2016). Research has indicated PATH's effectiveness in increasing young peoples' confidence and motivation in achieving their goals (Bristow, 2013). The EP typically acts as a facilitator within PATH meetings (Bristow, 2013). When considering how to work systemically, EPs could deliver training for staff in how to facilitate PATH meetings and supervision sessions for specific cases if this is considered necessary by staff. Working in this way would develop the skills of school staff and also help to build positive relationships with young people and their families.

A gradual return to lessons and school was considered more realistic and achievable by participants. This approach should be considered by school staff when supporting young people to reengage after prolonged absence periods.

Although female adolescents are more likely to engage in non attendance than their male peers (DfE, 2018), both genders highlight similar features of their experience, including importance of relationships, feeling emotionally and physically safe (Mortimer, 2018; Van Eck et al., 2017; Ingul et al., 2012), suggesting that the strategies identified in this study can be effective in promoting attendance across both genders. Professionals should be aware of the increased likelihood of female adolescents engaging in non attendance behaviours but recognise that male adolescents also experience it and may face additional barriers in discussing and reporting this.

4.10.3 Implications for educational psychology practice

The findings present a role for the EP to assist in supporting schools, young people and their families in promoting attendance. Drawing on the multi- tiered systems of support (illustrated through Figure 5) the EP can be said to have a role operating within each level. Firstly, the environmental factors of the school environment are considered key in promoting attendance. EPs could operate within the universal level by supporting schools to identify areas of their climate which could be strengthened and enhanced, potentially through initiatives such as the Compassionate Schools framework and the Emotionally Friendly schools program. EPs and educational staff could then co-create action plans and strategies in order to do this. For more information about this suggested process, please see section 4.14. EPs may also have a role in providing training to professionals related to non attendance. This could focus on shifting from a within-child perspective on non attendance towards more environmental factors. Drawing on the current research it may also be helpful to inform staff of the emotional implications of non attendance and this often not being an active choice adolescents make.

Moving onto the second level and focusing on providing more targeted support for individuals experiencing mild, acute or moderate non attendance, EPs could directly support these individuals to assist them in making sense of their emotions. This support could be through various forms including therapeutic CBT based interventions focusing on psycho-education of anxiety and through DNA-V Act therapy (a combination of acceptance and commitment therapy combined with aspects of positive psychology) to support adolescents to cope with challenges and change. Providing further targeted support may involve EPs using the PEARLS framework to help young people to reframe their previous trauma, reflect on and make sense of their experiences. If more specialised support is required, EPs can have a role in working within the third level which may include working with multi agencies or external professionals or agencies to best support the needs of the individual. This may include exploring alternative provisions or accessing specialised programmes.

Participants' choice not to use the word EBSA when discussing their non attendance raises the question if this term is an accurate reflection of their experiences. If participants do not relate or connect to this term it could lead to them feeling misunderstood and further reinforce their feelings of being ignored. Due to the high level of variability within non attendance experiences perhaps a universal term such as EBSA is not something which is considered applicable to all participants. The EBSA term may also carry connotations of within child factors as it suggests that individuals exhibit emotional difficulties associated with attendance. A neutral term which does not suggest blame or a causal explanation of an individual's non attendance may be perceived as less threatening and more acceptable. Future research could explore various descriptive terms and labels with young people.

4.10.4 Implications for Local Authorities

Current non attendance guidance recommends a rapid return to lessons and schools (Salford EPS, 2021; West Sussex, 2020). This is challenged by previous literature which asserts that pupils respond better to a gradual planned return to school (Higgins, 2022). This research also highlighted that a rapid return can be overwhelming for pupils and could be said to have created the need for two of the participants to take a prolonged planned break from school before restarting the year. This calls on the LA to consider adapting guidance to reflect the importance of balancing the emotional wellbeing of pupils with a planned, gradual return to school and in some cases, consider providing young people with time away from their setting to process their experiences.

4.10.5 Future research

This study listened to the voices of female pupils from the post-16 population who experience non attendance. This group is rarely represented within the current literature. There is a need for future research to capture the voices of marginalised groups who also have a lack of representation within the non attendance research base, such as those from ethnic minorities, those with disabilities and pupils from LGBTQ backgrounds.

Future studies could involve participants who have had time to reflect on their experiences, similar to the approach adopted in the current research. This would be helpful to understand if the retrospective nature of the study enables participants to reflect, make sense of and verbalise their experiences.

Participants' perceptions and understanding of the term EBSA would be useful to understand when considering the appropriateness of this term within current policy and literature.

4.10.6 Sharing the research

The main research findings will be shared with participants through the provision of an executive summary sent via email. This has been included in the accepted ethics application, (see acceptance letter in Appendix L). Participants will then be provided with the opportunity to discuss and reflect on the findings with myself via an online meeting. A summary of the main findings and list of attendance strategies cited by the young people will also be shared with the participants' college setting.

I intend to disseminate the research within my current LA by presenting to the wider EP team. I also hope to support informing my current LA's policy related to non attendance and the post-16 population. I will do this by sharing my research findings with a number of colleagues who are creating a post-16 EBSA pathway and attend meetings to support said professionals in creating this.

Additionally, I hope to disseminate my findings through my practice, by continuing to support schools and young people experiencing non attendance.

4.11 Conclusion

The current study sought to understand how female adolescents construct their experiences of non attendance through discourse. While the current literature highlights small gender differences in relation to attributions of educational non attendance, there is a higher prevalence of female adolescents experiencing this phenomenon. Due to the similarities between both male and female educational non attendance journeys it is likely that the mentioned strategies will also be applicable to the adolescent male population.

The research also explored what female adolescents considered helpful in promoting their attendance and amplified their voices within the current literature base. The research findings were similar to those from previous studies with participants citing connections, feeling understood, school environments and policy as features of their non attendance experiences. Participants also reflected on their personal growth and sense of achievement from their attendance journeys. Similar to previous research, the study presents non attendance as a concept involving multiple influences and factors. Both the SVSC (Rudasill et al., 2018) and PEARLS model (Baron Williams, 2021) are presented as tools which may be helpful for EPs and educational staff to consider in relation to attendance. The research presents a multi tiered system of support as an appropriate model to be used to promote attendance. The research raises questions related to the effectiveness of EBSA as a term and the 'success' criteria of reintegration. The findings challenge current policy which recommends a 'flooding' approach or rapid return to lessons and school. This suggests the need for a gradual, paced reintegration which is balanced with challenge and support.

Through the articulate reflections and thoughtful contributions of Louise, Joanne, Marie and Abby the study adds to the understanding of non attendance and reintegration experiences. Their narratives have also shed light on potential effective support strategies and highlighted areas for future research.

4.12 References

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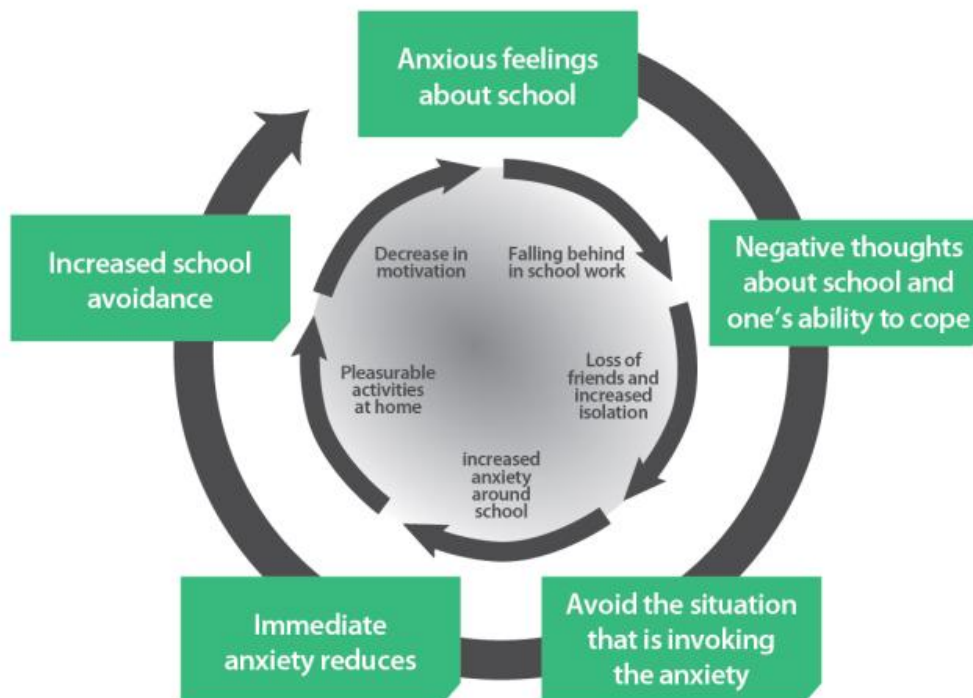
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4.13 Appendices

Appendix A

Figure 1

Diagram presenting the cycle of anxiety and maintenance factors in relation to non school attendance. (West Sussex Educational Psychology Service, 2018)



Appendix B

Participant information sheet



Young people's narratives of success: The journey back to education after experiencing emotional based school avoidance (EBSA)



You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Get in touch if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who am I?

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) from the University of Sheffield. My name is Ruth Babington.

Part of a TEPs job involves working with young people in different schools to find out about their educational experiences.

I am interested in your stories, experiences and views to help us, and schools, understand what is important to young people.

If you choose to take part in this research you will be working with me.

Things you need to know



- Young people like you who found it difficult to attend secondary school due to emotional reasons such as anxiety, but who now attend college are being invited to take part in this study. You will be invited to take part in some conversations with me. I am interested in listening to your stories and understanding how you found it easier to attend school.

What would you be asked to do?



- Before our conversation I would come into your school to meet you and discuss the research. I would spend some talking about what you would be asked to do and when you would be asked to do it. The research would involve talking about your secondary school and college experiences. You would be given a chart to fill out, on which you can label positive and negative school events during school time. If you would like you can have an adult to help you do this. Once you have completed the chart you would then be asked to discuss the chart with me during a 1 hour conversation.
- In our conversation we will talk through your experiences of school. You would also have the chance to ask any questions you may have. If you do not want to discuss certain memories that is okay and you can stop the conversation at any time. At the end of the conversation you will be asked to meet me again (one week after the first interview) and to bring an item, picture, and piece of music, drawing or something which represents or shows something that helped you to attend college.
- All interviews will be recorded using a dictaphone. The audio recordings of the interviews made during this research will be used only for analysis and may be used in presentations. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.'
- Please note that that by choosing to participate in this research, this will not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University of Sheffield.

What happens to your



ideas and views?

- The information you share with me will be written up as part of my research thesis for the University of Sheffield.
- All the information that we collect about you during the research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to the researcher. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications unless you have given your consent for this. If you agree to share the information you provide with other researchers (e.g. by making it available in a data archive) then your personal details will not be included unless you request this.
- I will share a copy of the findings with your school and your name will not be included unless you want them to be shared. This information will also be shared with your local council in order to improve the experiences of future young people who struggle to attend school.
- The University of Sheffield is the Data Controller. This means that The University of Sheffield is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.
- I will make sure that no one knows you have chosen to take part in the study and will also not share any information you have given. To do this I will use a process called anonymising, which means that I will generate a secret code for you and make sure that your name is stored in a different place to the rest of the information given.
- According to data protection legislation the legal basis that will be applied in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice [https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general)
- Due to the nature of this research it is very likely that other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. You will be asked for your consent for your data to be shared in this way.
- This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the school of Education.



Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact your school SENCO or me.

Potential risks

The research will involve you speaking about your past educational experiences. This may be upsetting and involve you remembering negative, distressing events. If you become upset during the interview the researcher will stop and ask you if you would like to stop the interview or have a break. The interview question will be shared with you before hand to help reduce any anxieties you may be feeling. You do not have to answer any question you do not wish to.

Research benefits

Whilst there are no immediate benefits from participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will help schools and families to support young people experiencing EBSA. It is also hoped that this research will empower young people who are experiencing EBSA by presenting successful reintegration stories.

What if you wish to report an incident or concern?

If you are concerned or unhappy with any aspect of the research and wish to make a complaint, please contact [Victoria Lewis; v.lewis@sheffield.ac.uk] in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of the Department of Education [**Professor Rebecca Lawthom; r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk**]. If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear about taking part in this project or if there is something you would like more information about.

I am happy to help in any way that I can to help you take part. I also understand that at any time during the project you may not want to take part anymore. This is absolutely fine too, just let me know. Remember there are no right or wrong answers and you do not have to answer any question you do not want to.

Thank you for reading this!

Contact for further information:

Researcher – Ruth Babington

Rbabington1@sheffield.ac.uk

Research supervisor and tutor – Dr. Victoria Lewis

v.lewis@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix B

Parent Information sheet



Young people's narratives of success: The journey back to education after experiencing emotional based school avoidance (EBSA)



Your child is being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not you would agree to them participating in the research, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Get in touch if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish your child to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who am I?

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) from the University of Sheffield. My name is Ruth Babington.

Part of a TEPs job involves working with young people in different schools to find out about their educational experiences.

I am interested in your child's stories, experiences and views to help us, and schools, understand what is important to young people.

If you agree for your child to take part in this research they will be working with me.

Things you need to know



- Young people who found it difficult to attend secondary school due to emotional reasons such as anxiety, but who now attend college are being invited to take part in this study. Your child

will be invited to take part in some conversations with me. I am interested in listening to your child's stories and understanding how they found it easier to attend school.

What would your child be asked to do?



- Before our conversation I would come into your school to meet your child and discuss the research. I would spend some talking about what they would be asked to do and when they would be asked to do it. The research would involve talking about their secondary school and college experiences. They would be given a chart to fill out, on which they can label positive and negative school events during school time. If they would like to they can have an adult to help them do this. Once they have completed the chart they would then be asked to discuss the chart with me during a 1 hour conversation.
- In our conversation we will talk through their experiences of school. They would also have the chance to ask any questions they may have. If they do not want to discuss certain memories that is okay and they can stop the conversation at any time. At the end of the conversation your child will be asked to meet me again (one week after the first interview) and to bring an item, picture, and piece of music, drawing or something which represents or shows something that helped them to attend college.
- All interviews will be recorded using a dictaphone. The audio recordings of the interviews made during this research will be used only for analysis and may be used in presentations. No other use will be made of them without your and your child's written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.'
- Please note that that by choosing to participate in this research, this will not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between your child and the University of Sheffield.

What happens to your child's ideas and views?



- The information your child shares with me will be written up as part of my research thesis for the University of Sheffield.
- All the information that is collected about your child during the research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to the researcher. Your child will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications unless you and your child have given consent for this. If you both agree to share the information you provide with other researchers (e.g. by making it available in a data archive) then your child's personal details will not be included unless you request this.
- I will share a copy of the findings with your child's school and your child's name will not be included unless you both want them to be shared. This information will also be shared with your local council in order to improve the experiences of future young people who struggle to attend school.
- The University of Sheffield is the Data Controller. This means that The University of Sheffield is responsible for looking after your child's information and using it properly.
- I will make sure that no one knows your child has chosen to take part in the study and will also not share any information they have given. To do this I will anonymise all personal information.
- According to data protection legislation the legal basis that will be applied in order to process your child's personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.
- Due to the nature of this research it is very likely that other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. You and your child will be asked for your consent for their data to be shared in this way.
- This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the school of Education.



Does my child have to take part?

No. It is up to you and your child to decide whether or not they take part. If you and your child agree for them to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and so will your child. They can still withdraw at any time without any negative consequences and do not have to give a reason. If they wish to withdraw from the research, please ask them to contact their school SENCO or me.

Potential risks

The research will involve your child speaking about their past educational experiences. This may be upsetting and involve them remembering negative, distressing events. If they become upset during the interview the researcher will stop and ask them if they would like to stop the interview or have a break. The interview question will be shared with your child before hand to help reduce any anxieties they may be feeling. They do not have to answer any question they do not wish to.

Research benefits

Whilst there are no immediate benefits from participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will help schools and families to support young people experiencing EBSA. It is also hoped that this research will empower young people who are experiencing EBSA by presenting successful reintegration stories.

What if you wish to report an incident or concern?

If you are concerned or unhappy with any aspect of the research and wish to make a complaint, please contact [Victoria Lewis; v.lewis@sheffield.ac.uk] in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of the Department of Education [**Professor Rebecca Lawthom; r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk**]. If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear about taking part in this project or if there is something you would like more information about.

I am happy to help in any way that I can to help your child take part.

Thank you for reading this!

Contact for further information:

Researcher – Ruth Babington

Rbabington1@sheffield.ac.uk

Research supervisor & tutor – Dr Victoria Lewis

v.lewis@sheffield.ac.uk

Project contact details for further information:

Researcher – Ruth Babington

Rbabington1@sheffield.ac.uk

Research tutor & supervisor – Dr Victoria Lewis

v.lewis@sheffield.ac.uk

Head of Education Department – Professor Rebecca Lawthom

r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix C
Parent consent form

Young people's narratives of success: The journey back to education after experiencing emotional based school avoidance (EBSA)

<i>Please tick the appropriate boxes</i>	Ye s	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated DD/MM/YYYY or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your child's participation in the project will mean.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree for my child to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include my child completing a life chart outlining their school experiences and taking part in two audio recorded interviews each of which will last 1 hour.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield and my child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my child's involvement in this study is voluntary and that they can withdraw from the study at any time. They do not have to give any reasons for why they no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if they choose to withdraw.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my child's personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that my child's words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that my child will not be named in these outputs unless they specifically request this.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my child's data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright my child hold's in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of parent [printed]

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher [printed] Signature Date

Project contact details for further information:

Researcher – Ruth Babington

Rbabington1@sheffield.ac.uk

Research supervisor & tutor – Dr Victoria Lewis

v.lewis@sheffield.ac.uk

Head of Education Department – Professor Rebecca Lawthom

r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix D

Pilot interview reflections

Conducting the pilot studies allowed me to recognise the importance of not attempting to fill silences during the interview. Throughout both the pilot interviews I identified that when I provided participants with more time before offering verbal or non-verbal prompts they would add more information or detail to their narratives. Providing silence within interviews to participants has been linked with interviewees feeling increased rapport and adding to the Therapeutic Alliance (Sharpley et al., 2005). I felt this was an effective technique to use within this study's interviews and enabled participants to feel listened too and increased their feelings of safety. Echoing what the participant said and asking if they could 'tell me more' was also an effective tool in promoting more discourse without imposing a direction on individuals' narratives.

Pilot interviews also provided an opportunity to practice using and incorporating participant life charts, something which I had not previously used before. It was useful to redirect participants back to their life charts and ask them about particular events they had described. This enabled me to encourage participants' discourse in the research interviews without leading their narratives.

When participants presented their non-verbal representations during the pilot interviews I asked how they felt about where they were now in their educational journeys. After the pilot interviews the participants shared their views and stated that reflecting on where they were now allowed them to vocalise their progress and evoked feelings of achievement. I reflected that this prompt would be an empowering way to finish the interviews and allow participants to feel hopeful about their future in education.

Appendix E
Life chart templates, example & instructions

Secondary school life chart template

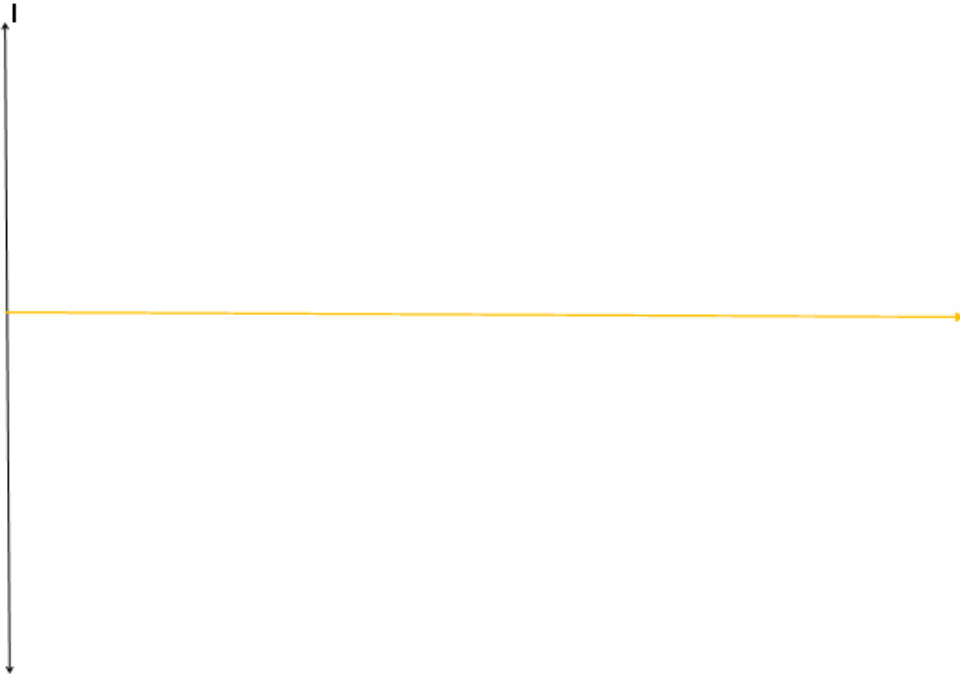
Name:

Life Chart

Date completed:

Good experiences of secondary school

Bad experiences of secondary school

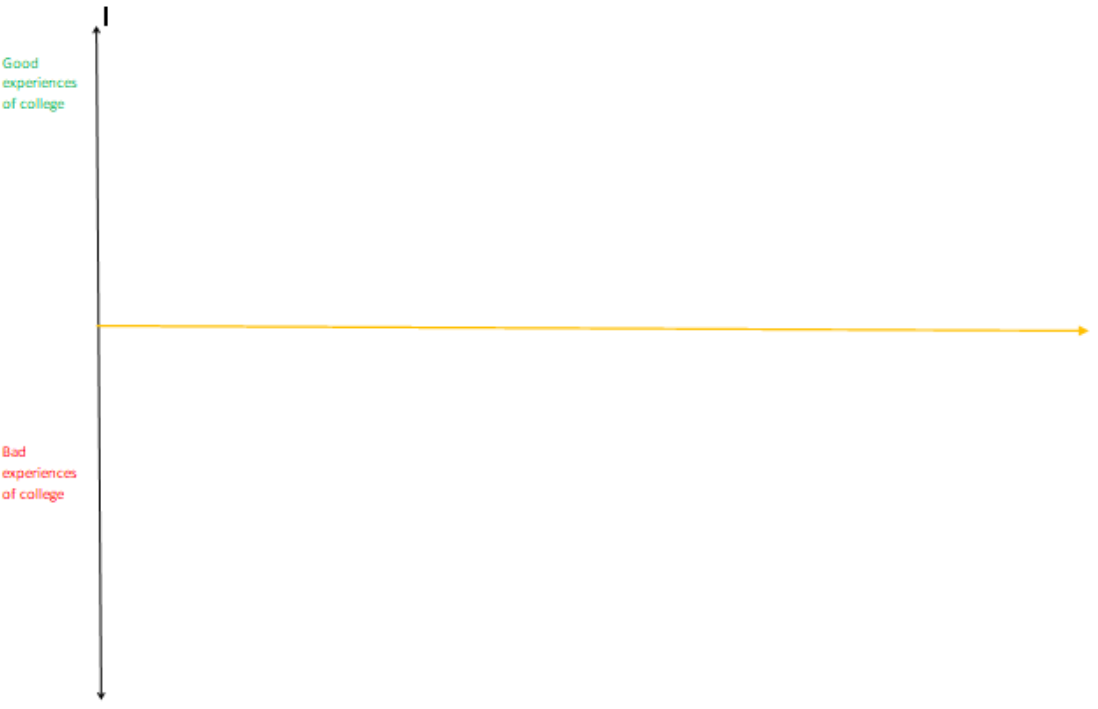


College life chart template

Name:

Life Chart

Date completed:

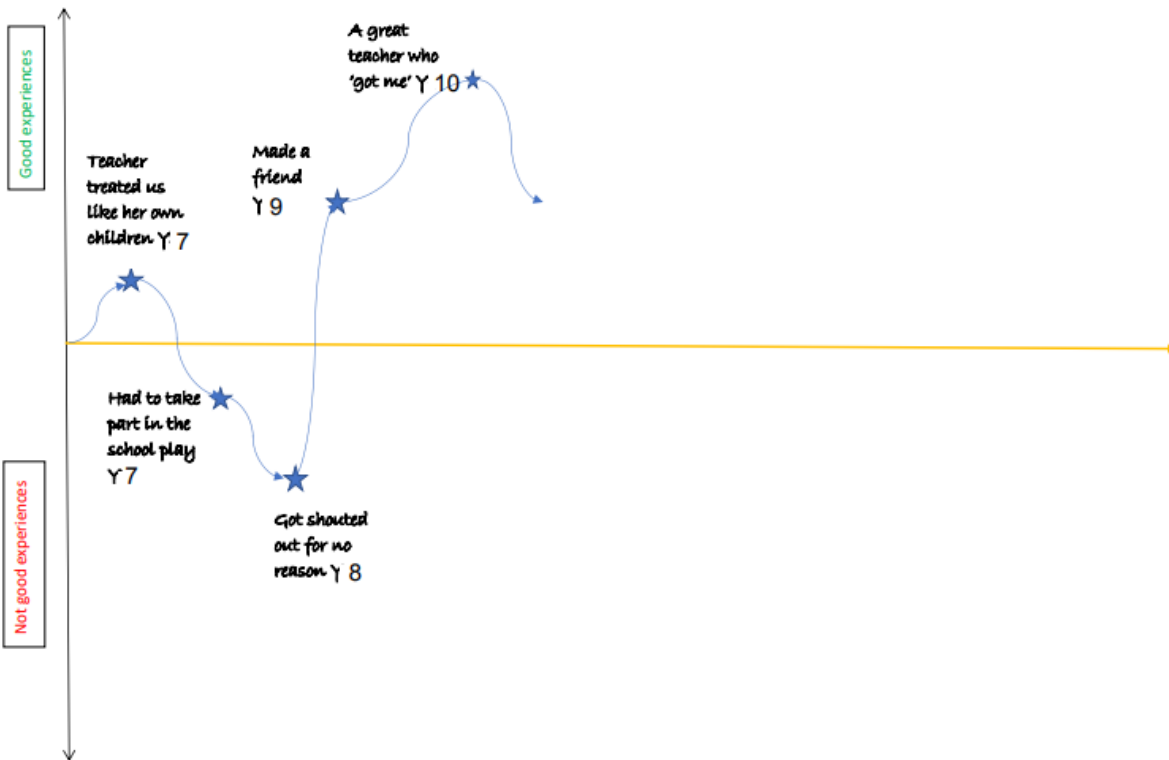


Life chart example

Name: Kia

Life Chart

Date completed: 01/05/18



Life chart instructions & questions



Life Chart Questions and Answers:

1. *Do I need to use the blank chart you have given me, or can I make my own?*
You can choose. You can use the blank chart I've given you or make your own on a different piece of paper, or perhaps make one on the computer. It's up to you.
2. *What sort of things should I put on the chart?*
Use it to record your strongest memories of your time at school – the good times as well as the difficult times.
3. *Do I need to put things in the order in which they happened?*
Yes please.
4. *How do I show which events were better than others?*
Put positive events above the horizontal line. The happier the memory, the closer to the top of the page. Put events that were negative below this line, and the worst events nearest the bottom of the page.
5. *How much information do I need to put against each mark?*
Just write the school year you were in, and a few words to say what happened.
6. *Do I have to add something for every year I was at school?*
No. You might not remember anything about some years, and that's fine. Just write about the important times for you at secondary school and college.
7. *Can I add more than one memory for some school years?*
Yes, add as many as are important to you about your time in school.
8. *What about the times after I stopped attending school?*
Yes, please add memories and events to do with your education after you stopped attending school.
9. *I don't like writing. Can I ask someone at home to help me?*
Yes, you can ask someone to write or type for you. If you would like you could use the computer to type and list your memories.

10. *Someone says I've forgotten something important – should I add it to the chart?*

No. People remember things differently, and I'm only interested in what is important to you.

Adapted from Dr Ruth Moyses, 2021

Y9

- Was now in 'the bungalow'
- Would try and get me to go in lessons if I wasn't able to then I would go back and stay in bungalow.
- Did not receive work to do from lessons if I hadn't attended leading me to fall behind and feel worse and more anxious.
- Started opening up more to staff and students who were in the bungalow - more.
- During this whole period my mum was trying to get a referral to healthy young mind.
- Still had a lot of absence, teachers would come and try to motivate me to come which sometimes worked and sometimes didn't.
- End of year, went bowling and Nandos with staff and students from bungalow.
- Since day finally went to a few school appointments at 11 AM.

Y10

- For week went in too strong and burnt myself out making me not attend for a while.
- Similar to Y9 for a period.
- Had School Admin 2 meet me in the bungalow and tried to move me into the learning base which didn't end up working.
- Started seeing a counsellor from healthy young minds & started a course of CBT.
- Had a meeting with me, my mum, counsellor, head of year and personal support staff about letting me stay in bungalow.
- Still not really receiving work from lessons if I hadn't attended.
- Joined in with lessons for another student who had hearing in the bungalow.
- Got back into playing guitar from teachers.

would try and
go up to some
lessons with support
e.g. music + maths.

- Both good relationships with Shy and other student. Helped me to attend in the day class
- CAT + tea.
- Diagnosed with Generalised anxiety disorder
- Started medication for anxiety.
- After starting medication started attending every day in the bungalow.

My Mum had to ask her friend who was the chief of board of governors to talk to Shy to look into it. and eventually decision was made to allow me to stay in Bungalow full time with teaching in Y11.

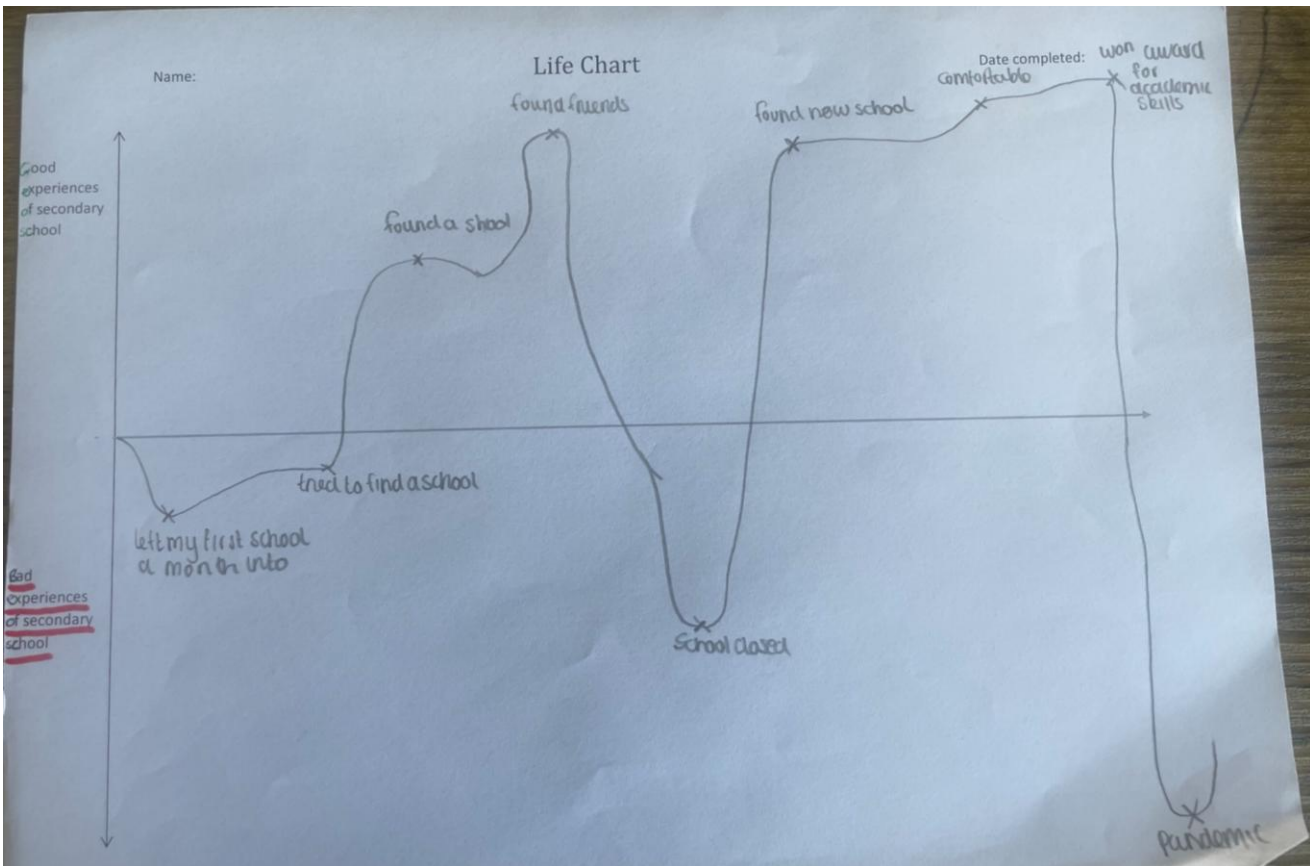
but Shy's case COVID

9/11

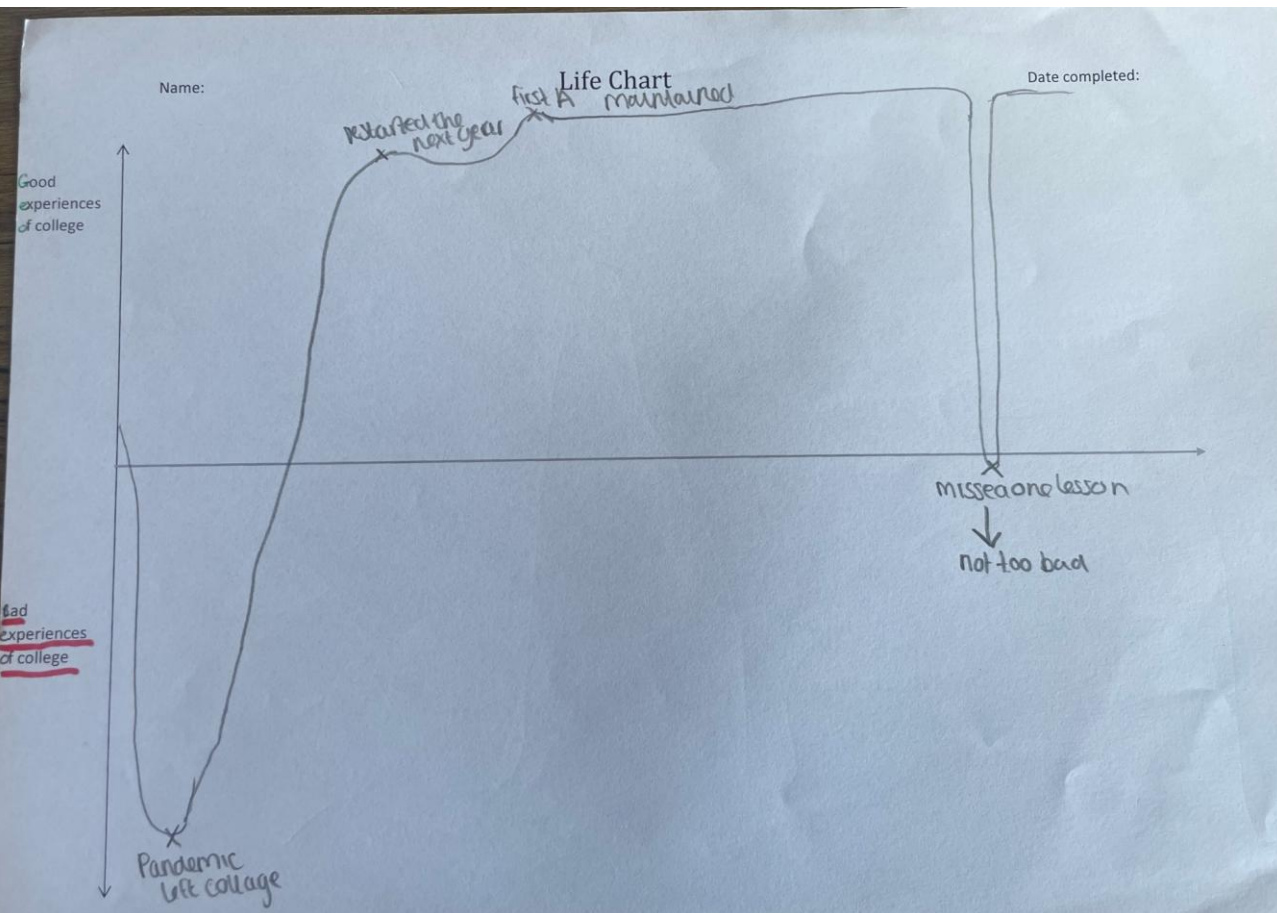
At 100% attendance down from lockdowns etc.

- Had time tabled lessons in bungalow and was gaining in confidence. Still had bad days but was attending.
- Basically just day only work
- As Shy stopped 11 y.m. that was a whole thing.

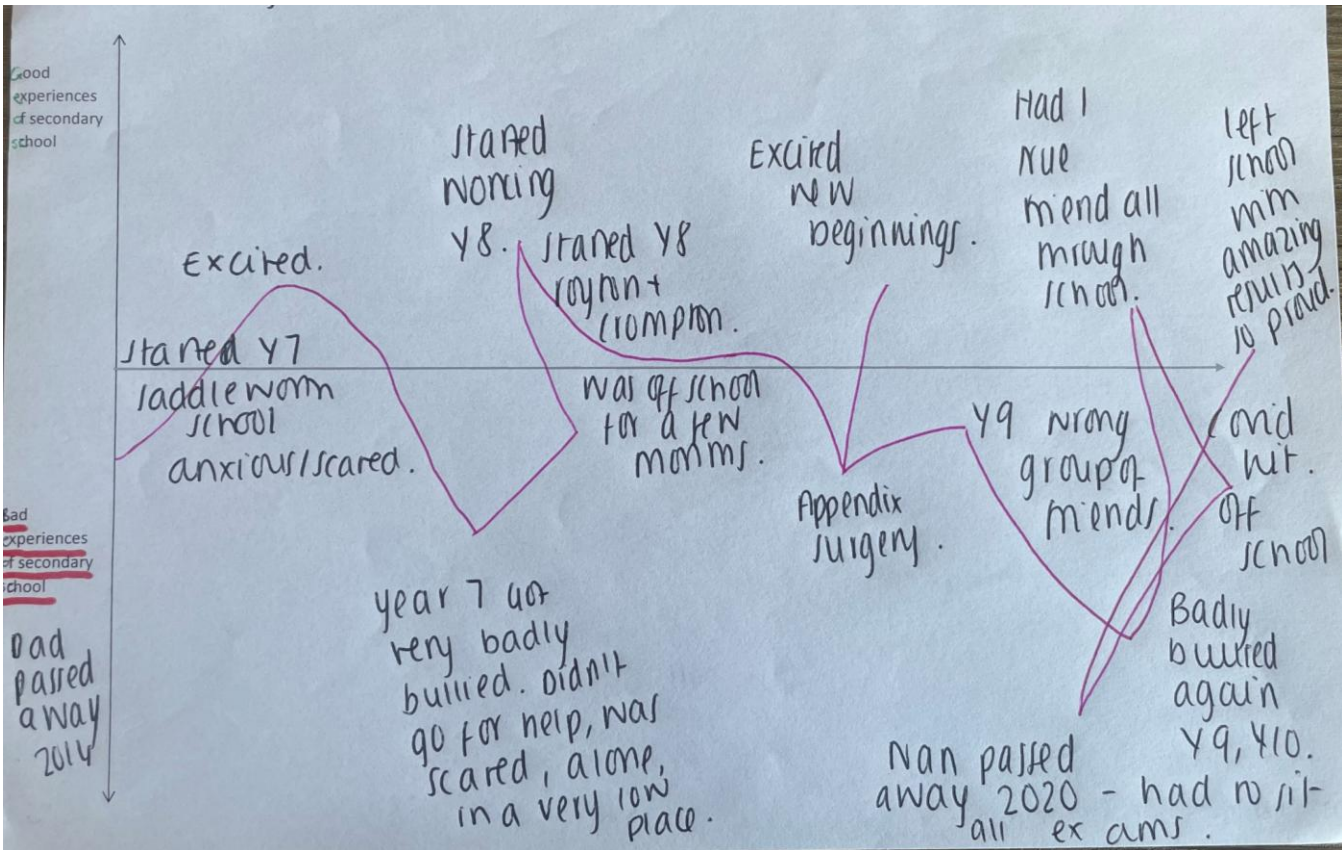
Joanne's completed life chart outlining her secondary school experiences



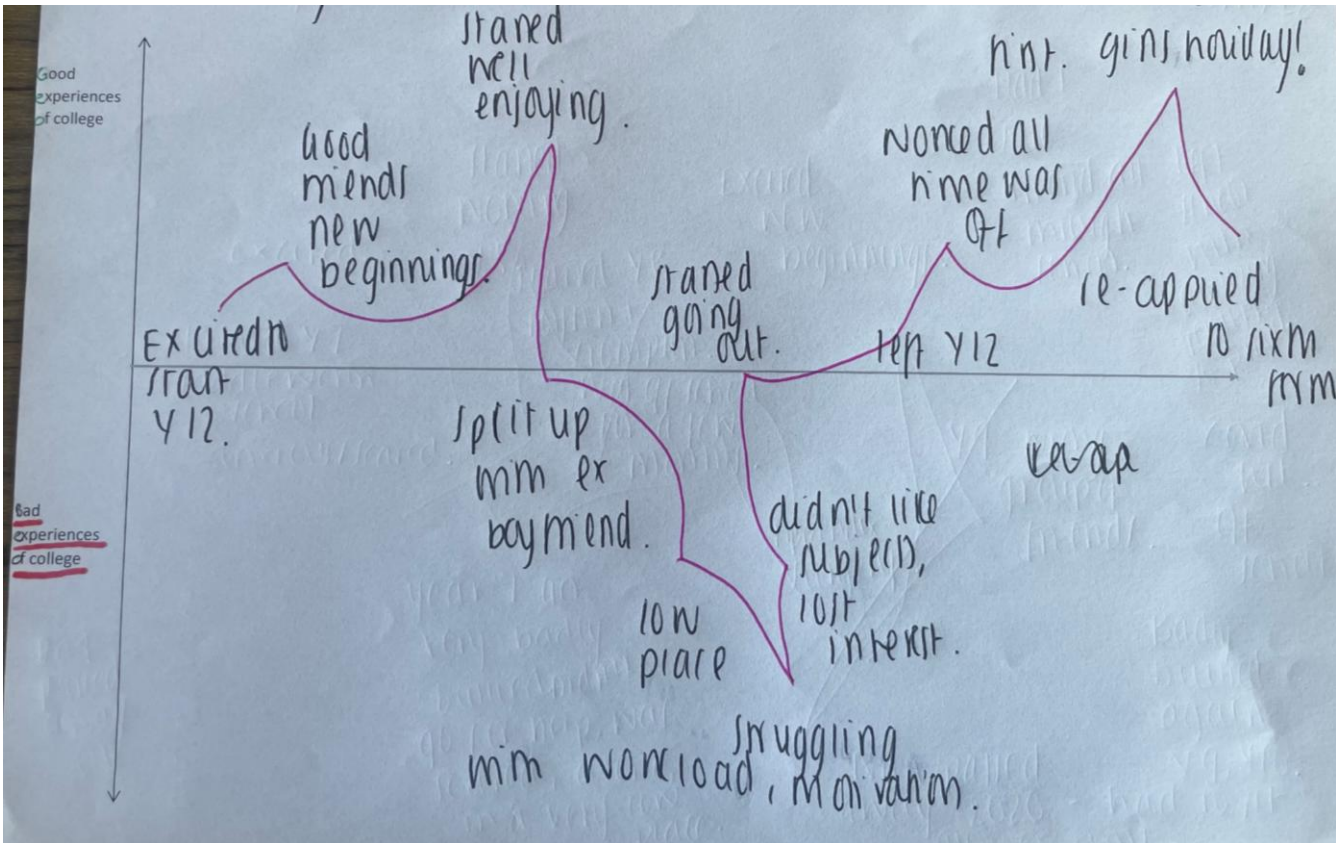
Joanne's completed life chart outlining her college experiences



Abby's completed life chart outlining her secondary school experiences



Abby's completed life chart outlining her college experiences



Appendix G

Participant interview transcripts

Louise's interview transcript

Comment [VL1]: Is there any risk to anonymity by enclosing full transcripts?

Ruth Babington

I just wanted to ask you as well, because I didn't ask you on Tuesday how old you were?

LOUISE

Uhh 17

Ruth Babington

And what year are you in?

LOUISE

Year 13

Ruth Babington

And how many secondary schools was is that you attended?

LOUISE

Just one

Ruth Babington

Do you have any, like medical conditions or any diagnoses?

LOUISE

I'm diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder and I take medication for it

Ruth Babington

And the last time we met we spoke a bit about the subjects you were doing. So I just wanted to know, sort of what are your hopes and like your wishes for after you leave college?

LOUISE

I mean, hopefully go to uni. Umm I'm pretty set that I'm going to do politics, because I'm very interested in it. And it's annoying as it is because of how, like, bigoted, that the people are in it. I feel like I have a desire to like, want to make it better for people I think and it's just interesting.

Ruth Babington

Politics need people like that. Where is it you're thinking of going to uni? Umm I've been applying to York, applied to Manchester and Man Met. And then like, I think I'll do one in like Glasgow or something just cause why not? Umm and then the other one was like, either Huddersfield or Sheffield. You've got a big selection.

LOUISE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

Is York your first choice?

LOUISE

Yes, because I've been there for the open day. It's like really good.

Ruth Babington

That's great. I'm interested in politics, too. So how did you find making the notes for this? (referring to life chart)

LOUISE

Umm okay, I think it's like sort of just, I spoke to my mum about it as well. Because obviously, she knows what happened because she was there and thought of some things that I don't remember she does. So it's just, for me to jog my memory.

Ruth Babington

I suppose when you write down your experiences, like you sort of go through them again. Was that something that you found?

LOUISE

A little bit like I sort of found myself thinking a bit like oh yeah remember when that happened, but I feel like where I am now, I can just look back and sort of find it, I can find the funny side. I just got to laugh about it rather than feel like guilty or whatever.

Ruth Babington

Yeah now you've had that bit of distance. Okay, so I'm gonna hand it over to you, and ask you to tell me about, if we start with secondary school first, if that's okay. So yeah, tell me about secondary school, what was it like for you?

LOUISE

Umm so like, in the start, it was honestly, like, my primary school was really, really small, it was literally like 100 people total in the school. So then jumping from that primary school to secondary school with like, over 1000 people, it was like massive change, and I didn't really know how to adjust to it. And the school sort of didn't offer much support for it, they just sort of say, go in, find it, you'll be fine. So ahh that was like sort of a bit, like for the first like term to sort of like, okay, I sort of missed a few days, like if I felt ill or something. Some days if I like felt anxious about a lesson beforehand, but I didn't, I didn't understand what I was feeling at the time. I just said, I don't feel good, I don't want to go. So that like happened for the first few weeks. Umm then also, like the school, like sort of had a reward and like, negative points system with like credits and referrals, . But I just sort of felt that it was like done in a sort of way that made it made me feel very pressured to be like, perfect, because its sort of like if you had one referral for something like oh, you've forgot your pen, it was like, that's a huge deal, which I thought was like, Oh, God, I don't want to do anything wrong. Like, like, we sort of made it into a massive, massive deal if you did forget your pen or like so obviously, ike you're shouting or whatever, that's like, valid in a way. Umm but yeah, and then the form tutor who I had at the time was sort of very, like oriented on, like get all good credits don't have referrals, because then I think, because then it's sort of like, what year, or what form group was doing best with like get extra credit as well. So that sort of was like, it makes me look good. And then it makes the form look good, and then makes the school look good. And it's just sort of a whole thing and just caused a load of pressure, umm so that didn't help as well. And then umm my brother who was older than me, but he was in school at the same time, he so my mum dropped us both off together. And in like the beginning, I'd meet up with two of my friends from primary school, and then we'd walk in together was fine. But then my brother started like getting ready later, so then it means that I'd get to school later,

like very quite last minute. Umm so my friends would go in, obviously, because they don't want to be late either, which I completely understand, so then I'd be going in on my own stressing cuz I was late. And then a few times I'd went, I'd gone in, and I'd be like, having a panic attack about it. Because I was like, oh my god, I'm late, I'm late I'm late. I'm terrified, and I'm alone, everything. Umm so then this like, sort of, just like the teachers and support, people sort of put me in a room somewhere. It was like near reception and had windows on it, and it was just sort of like loads of people walking past it wasn't exactly the best environment when your having a panic attack. I can see all the children running past. And you know, just going ahh I don't want to go.

Ruth Babington

That sounds like it was really hard for you.

LOUISE

Yeah. Umm so then eventually, I'd like they'd sit with me for a bit and calm down, and then they'd take me to my lesson and I'd carry on. And then it's always just like, kept going like that for a bit. Umm what else... and then sort of after that, like continued happening for a while, because I was, it made me struggle to want to go in because I was getting so stressed about it, because I was going to be late, one of my friend's mums said, oh, I can, I can drop you off as well with this other girl, and we can do it that way, so you won't be late. So we did that for a while as well, but I ended up like stopping. I can't remember why we stopped but we did some reason or whatever. Umm and then like gradually throughout, like the year, it's still before Christmas. My two friends from primary school sort of started to be a bit like funny with me, like they'd sort of just make offhanded comments, like sort of attacking me in a way. Umm like, at one point, one of them said to me, like we were eating dinner in cafeteria, whatever. And then she said to me, like you eat really funny. Like, why do you eat like that, and I was just like, what I'm eating? How can you eat funny? So then that caused me to like, sort of those it was like comments like that. Or they just sort of brush off something that I said as being like stupid or irrelevant, or whatever. So then I just sort of like knocked my confidence loads. So then that's when I sort of started really not attending, like at all. So then people from school, obviously they come into the house and be like, why is she not in? Why is she not in? I think yeah, this is like after Christmas now umm because I had issues with like, feeling terrified about going into school. They just sort of thought I was being at home, because I didn't like school, which I understand, because that's like the typical, I guess stereotypical way of most people don't attend school because they don't like it. It's not because they like have a genuine fear of going. So they sort of would come and like threaten my mum with fines and things, cause obviously, I wasn't going in and then that didn't help, that made me feel worse. Umm so yeah. And then like, yeah, at the end of the year, I've like not been in for weeks, I don't think I think I made it in like a couple of days at the end of the year or like the very last day. Umm and like that was it for Year 7 and then in Year 8 it was just sort of like, started again, and I just like felt like terrified of school. I like really was hardly going in at all Like, obviously that meant that I was falling behind in work, in all the work and stuff, because they weren't, they weren't providing the work, either. Like, they just sort of said, if your not in you don't get the work, so stuff like that

Ruth Babington

They weren't giving you any work?

LOUISE

No. So obviously, I was stressing about that as well, because when I would go in, I'd be like, what is going on here? I don't understand anything. Umm overall, I don't remember much from Year 8, because I think I just sort of like, that was when I was like, the lowest point, I think, because I just like, really, I think, in year 11, I ended up with one of the teachers who I like had quite a good relationship

with when I when we went over my attendance, like overall the years it was like, it was just so interesting. I think the year 8 was something like 11%

Ruth Babington

Oh, really?

LOUISE

Yeah. It was like, ooh, I just think that's depressing. Wow. And then at the end of, towards the end of year eight, the pastoral support for the year suggested umm this, like place within the school but sort of off main school ground, but it's still part of the school, and it's called, it was called the PLC or the PSC at the time, everyone just call it the bungalow cause it was a bungalow. Umm and they said, right, we can, put you in here and then we're sort of like, let you adjust to going in there, and then we can try and get you back into main school. Then that was sort of just like right to the end, and then they just sort of just did that for a bit. And I went in a couple of lessons if I'd gone in and just stayed in there.

Ruth Babington

Stayed in for the lessons in the main school in the main building?

LOUISE

Yeah. So I'd have to like go with a teacher from the bungalow to school, and then do that.

Ruth Babington

What did you think about the bungalow?

LOUISE

Oh yeah, the bungalow was like, the turning point.

Ruth Babington

And were there other people your age in the bungalow or was it just you?

LOUISE

The thing is the way it was, is it was set up for people who like weren't allowed on school grounds because of behaviour. So so it was sort of last resort for me, they were like right, what are we going to do to get her in, we'll put her in here, temporarily at the time. So it was where all the like naughty kids went and then there was just me, sat there with a sandwich. But, so yeah, and then so that's the end of year 8, then year nine, started again. And I was like in in between main school and the bungalow. Umm so I, if I was, like, feeling really anxious that day, I'd spend most of my time in the bungalow, and like, and then they'd say, right, should we go and try and go to science whatever, I'd be like okay we'll go and then I'd try, and I'd get there, I'd get to the door, and then just be like, nope, can't do it. So then they'd like sort of stand there for a bit and then try and get me in, which sort of made it worse, because then I started having panic attack. And then we just went back and like chilled, umm, and then during the year nine, the whole well the whole time, my mum was like trying to get hold of trying to get referral for healthy young minds. And it was just, like, kept getting rejected and whatever. So she just kept trying. And then, while I was in the bungalow, I thought I was I was like, talking, excuse me, talking to the staff in there and the other students and sort of like, there's one teacher, Mrs. Brandon, who got it because she struggled herself with like depression and anxiety and taking medication for it in the past. So she got it and was like, yeah, okay, it's okay, don't, don't fret. Your good and like the other ones as well. Like, I feel like, in a way I sort of helped the sort of

naughty kids in a way because they were like, oh, there's a chill person here. Well, I wasn't chill but more chill than them.

Ruth Babington

How do you feel that you helped the naughty kids?

LOUISE

Well sort of like... this was a year 10, there was a lad called James who was like not allowed on school grounds. So he was in there full time, and I was in there like, 90% of the time, so we just sort of like talked to each other and stuff. And in that time, I like bought a Rubik's Cube, and like figured out how to do it and stuff. Yeah, and I can do it. I can if I have time, I could do it in like two minutes. So yeah, so I brought it in one day and I was like, just like they're doing it and he was like what, you can do a Rubik's cube, that's mad and then he said, I've got one at home like ones that like for people who do it really fast he's like, I'll bring it in for you, and then he did bring it in. And it was like, oh, bless him. And he's like this, it was like everyone everyone in all the teachers in school knew him because of his behaviour and then I'm just there like he's bringing in a Rubik's Cube and stuff it was like umm so then in yeah, year 9, I was still not in a lot. I was in more than a year 8 but that was still not in a lot. And the staff who were in the bungalow would come and try and like get me to come in and then like take me (coughs).

Ruth Babington

Do you want me to get you a glass of water?

LOUISE

I need one. I'll go and get it

Ruth Babington

So you were talking about how the staff in the bungalow would come and get you and try and get you to come in?

LOUISE

Yes. Umm and like most of the time, like that did work. But obviously sometimes it's like, just not the day and it's like no, I can't do it, umm also like slight sidetrack, but I've got dog called Jess. She's adorable. She's a border collie and she's a rescue. I'll get a picture, but yeah, we got her like in 2017 which is when I was like, I think it was in between year seven and year eight so she was like helped, because she just like so chill.

Ruth Babington

Aww what type of dog? She's gorgeous. Do you find having her around sort of calms you?

LOUISE

She's so chill and so cute and just is like insane. So yeah, she obviously helped me like be chill. Yeah, because, I mean, how can you not? How can you not?(shows picture of Jess) Okay, so she was grumpy with me because I woke her up. Well, yeah, so during that time the dog helped. Just like for my coping. I think it was, was it in Year 11 I brought her in or was it in Year 10? At one point I brought her in or in the last day, because it's because it's so separate. They were like, okay, we'll bring her in for a bit. And aww she's so cute. Everyone was like, oh my god, dog! Speaking of animals, again, in the bungalow, there was a cat.

Ruth Babington 20:37

Oh that like belongs to the bungalow?

LOUISE 20:39

yeah, well during like, like this, like the first... I can't remember what year it was, but they had cats there. They had two cats, two kittens. Sadly, the both died, umm hit by cars. Yeah. So they also had guinea pigs.

Ruth Babington 21:03

They didn't get hit by cars did they?

LOUISE

No, they had loads of babies, so they have to give them away. Umm so because there was two cats, there was another cat that lived down the road, but used to like come in, because of like, I don't know, do cat things. And he still kept coming. He was called Noah. Umm so he used to just like come in at random times. Like, just just for a mooch to see what's happening. Usually would roll on something and get hair everywhere, umm but that was obviously it's like there's a cat there. So I want to go in and see the cat, so the cat obviously helps. And also tea, because they had it's like a full on bungalow. It's like a house, because I think way, way back some like school caretaker used to live there.

Ruth Babington

Oh so its a proper house with a kitchen? Did you ever find out what the reason for that was?

LOUISE

Yeah, kitchen, bathroom. Bedrooms, not bedroom anymore, computer rooms and offices. Yeah. So it's proper, like a little chill place that was just like, what I needed, basically. But still, in this time, and school, they still want me to be going to main school. Because I think they felt that I was based on my SAT, I think they thought I was quite intelligent, which I don't know I'm wanting to say in this sort of was like I was in the top sets and things. So I think they felt that I sort of was like too clever to be there. And but at the same time, it's like, you could give me the work, so they still weren't giving me the work if I hadn't been in the lessons. I think it's just because they didn't want me in there. They wanted me in main school so they decided like, oh, don't give her stuff so she'll go in main school cause she wants to learn right. Didn't work that way, so yeah, a lot of the time I was in there, and I wasn't doing, I had no work to do. So I just be like sat doing like maths online, or the same, like 10 French words online. And using what I could to like do stuff for the whole time. And then slight positive, well, very positive, actually. At the end of the year nine they like took us for a day out, all the students in the bungalow for bowling and Nando's.

Ruth Babington

Oh, that sounds nice.

LOUISE

So we all just went, like had a chill. And then that same day. I had an appointment with healthy young minds for like the first like meeting, seeing things like whether or not I was eligible, whatever, what I needed. Umm so I went to that as well. And then it was like, okay, yeah, you need help. It was just like I've been asking but obviously there was a waiting list. So it was a while before I started seeing someone properly. But it was there and it was on its way. And now we get to year 10. Umm I was sort of like on the first in the first week back in year 10, I was sort of like, had a bit of a mad one and just went in and did everything.

Ruth Babington

Oh, wow. You went straight back?

LOUISE

Yeah. Which obviously is not a good idea because then I burnt myself out and I'd been going for like a few weeks so then it was sort of like, back to how it was in year nine, when I wasn't going in much. Umm and like school still didn't want me to be there, they wanted me in main school. Umm so at one point they, there's another building block on like school main site, that was called the learning base. And that was more for like, it wasn't really for mental health but it's more for like, those who have learning difficulties and like dyslexia, things like that. So it's like a place for them to go and get extra support for those things, which totally understandable. And obviously, it is a really good place for people to go, but it just wasn't for me, it was quite a big space, and it was quite busy, which wasn't what I was needing. And the way it was going from like, six people max to like a room of 20 was like, not good. Umm so then, eventually, umm I don't, I don't remember the order which things happened, but something happened and then I wasn't going in because I didn't like it there. So I was like don't go in. Ahh so then, at one point, we had a meeting with me, my mum, head of year and pastoral support. And Justin, who was my counsellor from healthy young minds. And they basically had a meeting, to say what can we do to help you get in school. So then, my mum was saying everything... everything that she felt, and then obviously Justin knew from like, a clinical point of view what I was struggling with. So then they eventually caved in and was like, okay, you can stay there. You can stay in the bungalow, and we'll facilitate that umm but that, yes, the meeting had already happened because my mum umm she does like singing, and like amateur dramatics, she's quite good actually. But someone she knows from doing that, just so happens to be the chief Board of Governors at the school. Like she was sort of like she basically got fed up and she was like, right, can you please do something because it's not good. So then this, the governor got into contact with some of the senior leadership team, and said, can we sort this out? And then it just sort of went from there, and then they set the meeting, and then they said, okay, but for it to take that long, and to get to that point, and then everything was like, mmm wasn't difficult. So, like, this is sort of like, January, I think. And I was still not getting much work from like, lessons, but I was getting more, but I wasn't getting everything. So this lad James, I sort of joined in with a couple of lessons with him. He was in Year 11. I was in Year 10. Umm but his English lessons, I would sort of sit in with him for doing that. Because I was quite, I was quite good at English. I'm quite creative and weird ideas about things. So I joined in with that and that was good.

Ruth Babington

Was that in a one to one lesson?

LOUISE

So that was he was getting teaching one to one in the bungalow so so like we knew it was possible to do it because other people had it, but they just didn't want to do it for me, for whatever reason.

Ruth Babington

How did that make you feel that they were doing it for some pupils but didn't seem to want to be able to do it for you?

LOUISE

I don't know. I thought it was a bit like why, bit weird and after I'd left, annoyed for a period. But now I'm just sort of like meh because I'm saying there's no point dwelling on it now because it's all done but at the time I was like why it was why? Just why? Why? Umm and then, in this time as well, I was I got back into playing the guitar, because I played it all throughout primary school, and had like

proper lessons and stuff. And then year 10 because the English teacher was also quite musical, he had a guitar. And then Mrs. Brandon was also quite musical and had a guitar. So they brought one in at one point and said let loose. So I did and I just, I was like, oh, I forgot I enjoyed doing this. So then I started doing that again, with teaching myself everything. Yeah, and at one point, I was like, gonna do something with the English teacher to do with guitar, while another teacher was singing. I don't know, I can't remember much, but it was something along those lines. (Looking at notes) Where are we now? Yeah, and then so I was, for the lessons where I wasn't getting work, I'd still, we'd still sort of try to go up to some, for example, music because I enjoyed music and do music now. And also maths, because maths, the lesson was just very, very calm. The teacher was very good at like keeping the class calm. So that was a good one to just like be in for a bit. Umm and then that was also when I started the medication after meeting with the psychiatrist, my GP and stuff. And then, after I'd started with medication, it was like, a switch had like flicked, I was like going in every day and like not feeling like wow, umm so it's like really weird. It was like, it was like, I thought I think it was like that, like part of my brain had just been like put on mute. It was so nice I was like oh it so quiet.

Ruth Babington

So you really noticed the medication? So you were getting these timetabled lessons, teachers from the main school would come down to the bungalow?

LOUISE

Yeah. But then, and I was like going in everyday and then COVID. What can you do? After COVID went back in September in year 11. For the whole of year 11 I went in every day. Apart from lock downs, and anything like that, like I couldn't help. And that was because I was like finally getting the support I needed. And I was like getting further timetables, lessons from like, from teachers from main school, they would come down and then set us work, do work with us. Umm and it was like, like before, I didn't have a timetable. Like I had a timetable it was the one for main school, so it wasn't relevant to me. So I just thought aww I'm supposed to be in maths now. Do I want to do maths now? No I'll do French. Yeah. Umm so a part of me still only thinks that like I was getting lessons because there was another boy as well in my year, who had been put down there permanently as well, because of his behaviour. But that's okay, I don't mind. I was getting lessons, so it's fine. Umm I think that's like, I don't remember much well, I do but there was nothing drastic that happened.

Ruth Babington

It's been really interesting to listen to. So I just made a couple of notes, there's just a couple of things I'd like to go back to if that's okay? But I mean, I do need to say like, you've done so well to get here, considering like it's not been like smooth sailing for you. Right so just taking you right back to the start again. So you mentioned the referral point system. And it sounds like that put pressure on you to be a certain way?

LOUISE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

So I suppose thinking about that and thinking about Year 7 and like you were having panic attacks. Is that the first time you had a panic attack?

LOUISE

Umm to do with school, yes, because I think I had them previously because I used to be terrified with rain. Because when I was like three, we went camping in Scotland, and it was a really, really bad storm. And just like it was terrible storm and the water was like coming out from under the tent. It was just like you can see it all and it was terrifying for me. So that traumatized me, so then I was scared of the rain for like 10 years. And we've got a conservatory as well, so it's really, really loud when it does rain. So I would sort of be, I don't know, not panic attacks, but I sort of got upset when it rained. Because I didn't like it. Like that in year seven, those were the first times where I had panic attacks. When I was like, I can't breathe.

Ruth Babington

You couldn't breathe? So physically that's how it made you feel?

LOUISE

Yeah, hyperventilating. I get I get anxious, I get very sweaty. Fun times.

Ruth Babington

So if I asked you to draw me a picture of the beginning of secondary school before the bungalow periods pre bungalow, if I asked you to draw me a picture of that, what would it look like? What would be in it? What colour would it be?

LOUISE

Probably like lots of black, grey, sort of like, a tiny person. A like massive building, like loads of people. And then like, sort of like, fingers? I don't know, like pointing like fingers like you (pointing). You.

Ruth Babington

Did you feel a bit like under the microscope?

LOUISE

Yeah, kind of I just felt quite lost and confused. And yeah, alone at one point.

Ruth Babington

Well, I know you mentioned when you weren't coming, sometimes teachers from school would come. And when you first said that, I was like, well that sounds like they are coming to talk to you. But then you said that they were you know, like talking to your mum about fines. I just wanted to know how did that make you feel? Like what was that like for you?

LOUISE

It made me feel like pretty guilty. Because I didn't understand what I was feeling or why I was feeling it. I just knew that I was like, I don't want to go to school because I mean, it makes me feel horrible. But I don't know why. And that made me feel worse. And then obviously getting told of like fines and stuff from my mum how it's like, I thought I don't know what to do. So then I was sort of very, very, very depressed. Basically. Just anxious all the time. Before like, very, like few weeks, last few weeks of year seven. I just like didn't get out of bed, basically, because I just felt so horrible about the pressures and stuff. And it was just like, they just sort of didn't really do anything. They just sort of, like threatened with fines not offer any sort of support. It's like, it's not how it works. If it's not working, it's not going to work.

Ruth Babington

100%, I mean, you were so young, that would be hard for an adult to deal with, never mind a year 7 or year 8. Yeah. It must have been really overwhelming.

LOUISE

Yeah. Poor little eleven year old me

Ruth Babington

And then you mentioned in year 8 you sort of started going in and then they didn't you felt like they didn't want to give you work. In case you sort of saw it as like, oh, I don't need to go to lessons because I have the work. And then you mentioned that, that actually made you more stressed?

LOUISE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

So it was sort of twofold that it was sort of like the environment was a bit stressful. But also so was this potentially falling behind?

LOUISE

Yeah. Yeah, definitely.

Ruth Babington

And then we were talking about the bungalow. So it's obvious you really liked the bungalow.

LOUISE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

You know, you said like, there were peers there that you liked. What else was it? What was it about the bungalow?

LOUISE

I think it was the staff, yeah, the staff. Because it was like there's two main when I first went there was like two main people there. There was Miss Leach she was head of like, safeguarding and I think and then there's Mrs. Brandon who was basically the teaching assistants support person who'd help people. There was another teacher on point I can't remember. But yeah, they just basically sort of sit with you, chat with you about anything. If you're feeling rubbish, they'd be like, okay, well, what's up? What? How do we help? Like they'd make you tea, make your toast like, like it just it was such a nice environment to be in because that's what I needed. Like it I don't know. It's really weird.

Ruth Babington

It make sense what you're saying. Sounds like a very safe environment compared to the school, was it very big?

LOUISE

It wasn't necessarily, like big building but it was a big building, but it was like a lot of people crammed into spaces that didn't necessarily fit among the people. Yeah, but yeah, safe is like the word I'd use. Like, even though it's where naughty kids went, I never felt I never felt like, out of place or, like vulnerable there. Because it was just sort of away. People I didn't question like, if people were in there for whatever reason, I was like, Okay. Welcome, how would you take your tea?

Ruth Babington

So when I asked you how you would describe school, and you said a lot of blacks if I asked you the same question with the bungalow, I asked you to draw me something that was like that. What would it be like? What colour would that be?

LOUISE

I'm visualizing yellow because it's sort of, like, I think I still say a lot of like, good memories with it. And also, like, even though it was a place where it's like, supposedly not very happy, because it's where people went when they weren't allowed to be in school. It really did, it never felt like that. Like the people there just made it feel like nice. And like we all have problems, we all have them. Okay, we can just chill about them here and we can figure them out. So it's sort of like yellow, have the cat in there. So I just like yeah, maybe like rays in the background. Oh, music speakers. That was a thing, that Mrs Brandon did cause shes very into her music. She used to be a music teacher. And now shes like a teaching assistant and stuff. Umm but yeah, she used to like just get me to calm with some happy song. I don't know something from like the 80s or 90s, and just blast it. Like many people, at one point, this is something that happened, at one point she started dancing to Kate Bush, Wuthering Heights. I looked, I looked through the door and I see her doing a headstand (laughs). Right. Wow. And then, like five minutes later, the head teacher came down.

Ruth Babington

Oh, I love that. I'm gonna ask you a difficult question.

LOUISE

Okay.

Ruth Babington

I know you said that sometimes you end up in the bungalow and staff were trying to encourage you to go to lessons. And sometimes you would get to the door, and you wouldn't be able to go in. Can you talk to me about why it was that you couldn't go in?

LOUISE

It was sort of like I think I'd like build myself up to be like right, okay, we can do this, do this. And I'd sort of be like, beating myself up a lot to get myself there. But then it was also almost like, it was just too much, because I'd beat myself up to get there and I've, I've gone and I've got to the door, and then it's like, oh, it's honestly felt like all that motivation is like, gone. And then I look in and it's like I see people all sat down, and then they like look at something on the board and I'm like I don't know what that is, it's like in English, we're on chapter seven and I was like, I don't even know chapter one. And then that is sort of the thing that would be like, oh my god, oh my god. Sometimes I'd make it I actually be able to sit down. And then they would like sort of be standing at the door just sit there checking I'm alright for a minute. And then I just sort of say to them no, no. I'm going back down, which sort of like, sometimes I felt a bit in the beginning when I was doing that I felt bad because I hadn't been able to do it, but then as I've like, gone through it, and I was like okay, no, it's good. I made it there but then I just couldn't do the next bit, but that's okay, because then I can just get there another time, and I didn't beat myself up, I got a solution. But yeah, so I just like felt incredibly intimidated when I got to the door was like completely unknown. I think because I've been apart from it for so long. It was just sort of like, I don't know what this is. I didn't know how to act. I don't know.

Ruth Babington

I thought it was interesting, because you were saying that sometimes adults would come to the house and try and get you into school. I just wondered, did you find that helpful?

LOUISE

Sometimes, yeah. Sometimes I did find it helpful. If they like, sort of they come like, just like, with no expectation of me like doing anything, just getting in and staying in the bungalow and just like doing work from there. When they came with that attitude, it definitely helps because then it's like, okay, it's not, there's no expectation, there's no pressure. Whereas sometimes if they'd come and be like, okay, well, we'll do this, we'll see how we go, and then we might be able to go to one lesson, and it's like, no, no, no, no, I'm not sure. Like, if I have no expectations, and no pressure, and no limits to reach that's good. And they also just, like, come in, like, sit down for a minute, like seeing the dog, fuss the dog. And just talk to me, like, how about, like, what I was feeling how I'm feeling, like sort of how bad it was. So some that it changes every day, like, sometimes you feel great. Sometimes you feel no, sometimes you just like meh. So when they'd like, talk to me about that, and then it's sort of like, okay, well, we can just do nothing or we can like do this. And then we might be like, oh, we can you can walk up and do some photocopying with me. Would that be all right? Like things like that helped. So yeah, I think just when they know, when they had, when they said, look, there was no pressure and there was no expectation apart from you just come in. That was it.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, that makes sense. And thinking, from your perspective, because I think you've obviously been through this, you've got through this, and you're doing really well. What do you think it would be helpful for other adults and thinking about staff in school sort of specifically, what do you think would be helpful for them to know?

LOUISE

Just to know, that, school is bloody terrifying for some people. And just sort of like, be aware, though, sometimes how you sort of, like, even if it's something that you've always done, and it's always been fine. Some times, like, that little way of doing things can just affect someone its like the credit and referral system. That's fine for everyone else. But like, for me, it was just like, so much pressure and it could be it could have been for other people as well. I don't know.

Ruth Babington

I'd say it probably was.

LOUISE

So yeah, just like, be aware of that and then, sort of just like, check in with people. Like if there's someone who you know, is like, who struggles with like being quiet or is quite quiet. You can sort of tell an anxious person in general, to sort of check in and be like, you alright, today? How you doing and then just sort of say, right, okay, good day, bad day? If it's a bad day, okay I won't bother you just do you, do the work whatever. Having also like setting up things like having a pass to leave, if it's getting too much. I'd probably, that like, should be a thing. Definitely. Like they have that here. Where, like, you have a card and you can show it and be like right miss bye.

Ruth Babington

You can just like pop out and then you can come back in if you want to, if you're able to?

LOUISE

Yeah. I've not used it here, because I've sort of been like, okay, umm but I think had I been in secondary school, and I'd had that I would have definitely used it.

Ruth Babington

I was quite interested in what you mentioned about in Year 10 when you went to the learning base and it sounds like you quite quickly knew that that wasn't what what you needed.

LOUISE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

But I just wondered like, how did that happen? Were you told that you were going to be moved there? Was that a conversation that was had?

LOUISE

Umm, it was all like, really abrupt the way it happened. I think I remember something happened, where he was like, okay, we'll need to move you for a minute, and then they just sort of didn't want to move me back. Umm but it was all I think someone was off. Some a teacher was off in the bungalow and then they said, okay, well, they're off, so we'll move you up here. And then once they're back, you can come back down there, which didn't happen. They just sort of she left with no, she didn't leave, well, she was off. I went up there, she came back, I stayed up there. And they there was like, no warning for anything. Like, it was just like, okay, you're in here now, stay there. And then there was sort of expectation that I'd be in there and then go to lessons as well, because I was before, that was before we'd had the meeting with everybody. And so yeah, just very jarring and not very well thought out for someone whose anxious.

Ruth Babington

They are big changes that they're asking you to make. And just picking up on what you said about the meeting as well. So that was with Justin your councillor from healthy young minds and your mum. Were you at the meeting?

LOUISE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

And how did you find being there?

LOUISE

Ummm, I sort of felt quite like intimidated at first was like, people, teachers, but then, obviously, my councillor Justin was like, you're anxious. Just like, spread out, relax, do this and just chill, like unclench. I did that so then I was feeling a lot more relaxed. And they sort of said to me like just say what you need to say and then we can do the rest and that's okay. Funnily enough off tangent again but he was also Irish.

Ruth Babington

You mentioned COVID as well. I was interested to see how that sort of played a part in things because it seems to be that you know, things are going quite well and then COVID happened. So how did you find that change, and being at home?

LOUISE

Umm in the sense of staying at home, it was fine because I don't leave the house anyway, its a personal preference not to leave the house, but in terms of like the work, thankfully, my, the English

teacher who was helping out with the year 11, he'd given me loads of GCSE work on USB memory stick, just for me to like work through stuff like An Inspector Calls, Macbeth, etc. Just work through that, at your own pace, go for it. So thankfully, I had that sort of English was like, okay, but I everything else, they just sort of, I didn't really do anything. I sort of did it for a week but then I stopped because it's like, I don't know any of this stuff anyway. I don't want to, like stress myself out. So I messaged them, I messaged Mrs. Brandon and I was like, Is it okay if I just like, do the bare minimum? She was just like, yep. So it all sort of worked out. I think that's, I think it sort of gave me a chance to sort of think about how, like everything and just sort of be like, okay, year 11 fresh start. Just do what we can and go for it.

Ruth Babington

So and then coming back. Because how did COVID fall, was it when you were in college or secondary?

LOUISE

It was COVID in secondary COVID again, I had exams, then college.

Ruth Babington

How was it going back to school after having been at home, was that difficult?

LOUISE

A little bit. Like I was sort of like I felt funny about it, which I sort of accepted. Because I always struggle after like, a half term or Christmas or something. I always struggle to get back into the routine of going, getting up, going things like that. Umm so I'm sort of like I did like preparation. I was like, right, okay, week before, we'll get up early, and just sort of do stuff like that. So I did and then that helped sort of just like, got me in the mindset, I think so then by the time I was actually going back, I sort of felt okay, then after the first few weeks after I like, settled in with all the other people who were in there as well, it was like, okay, this is okay, we can do this. Then my year off for, like the whole year of year 11 was off for something to do with COVID like, oh, someone's got COVID, if one person has COVID in the year everybody's off which is really dumb, given I wasn't even in the same building.

Ruth Babington

So then, obviously we have the summer and then college so how was starting college for you?

LOUISE

Nerve racking. Umm I, before I came here, I had a meeting with Jenny with my mum just to like set out everything. What my struggles are. Like, if I want support, what would I need in place. So that was like, okay, that was a massive like, it's like, okay, wow they like actually can help. Like, you know, like, do you need people who listen to you? Yes, like, yeah, probably. Umm just as like, as somebody there to be like, okay, I feel horrible can we go, so that was like a huge woosh and they set up like mentoring appointments, and I talk to someone like on a weekly basis about everything, anything. If it's just like, what you did at the weekend whatever. Umm so that was like, huge in like making me feel a lot calmer about starting college, because it's like, so new. I remember on the first day that I was coming in, like properly on the phone to my mum, and I was just like, oh god, I can't do it and she was like no,, you got it, you got it, you got it. It's okay. We got it. I was like right okay, just go in. That's like, okay, I'll just go in. Okay, right bye and I just walked in and it's like okay. And then I went and met up with somebody from the support team who's going to be in my lessons with me. And then their like hi how are you, are you alright, I'm like feeling weird, they are like okay, okay, I'll go

and sit for a minute, and then we'll go to lesson. I'm like okay. And then it was like, just went from there.

Ruth Babington

I think that's amazing. So you've been coming since September, what's your attendance been like?

LOUISE

Ahh last year, it was sort of like, mostly good. But like, I sort of had days off sometimes, because I was, I ended up getting anxious about a music thing. Because I was like, I didn't really understand it. But then rather than saying, I don't understand it, I just sort of hid it. So I was like, oh, I don't want to do that. But then they talked to me about it and then I felt better. And I came in again and then it was summer and now I'm back.

Ruth Babington

Thinking about your college experiences, so you know, I've asked you sort of if you were drawing a picture so if I asked you about college and I asked you to draw a picture about what what would that look like? Like what color would it be? What would be in it?

LOUISE

Weirdly green. Greens, like a calm colour, I think. Just feel calm here. And it's like well, we can do this, it's also it's like new, new and fresh. Yeah, because it's so different and just it's a total new start. Like compared to like, compared to how I was in secondary school is like massive, like I would have hated this, just sitting and talking to somebody like no.

Ruth Babington

Just from listening to where you've come from, you have come such a long way. So like thinking about the future, and I know you've spoken about like wanting to go into politics. Asking you my question of drawing and colouring and things. What would the future look like?

LOUISE

Ahh money. I don't know. Sort of like I'll go for a teal, I like teal. It's one of my favourite colours. Green Blue. Something new. My theme fresh. Yeah, I just don't like don't know what to expect, sort of sort of expect anything. See what happens. Yeah.

Ruth Babington

So thinking about like, I know we've said that secondary school has been very different from your college experiences. Why do you think that is?

LOUISE

I think it's the way you're treated. And sort of like, just like, structurally different, because it seems like a sort of it's very, like strict strict strict, lesson, lesson, lesson, lesson which obviously is understandable because there's so much you need to learn in those like, what is it five years? Whereas here, you're sort of like, okay, lesson lesson, okay, you got free, free for a bit. So you can, like do studying, etc. There's just a lot less like there's pressure, because it's A level, so it's important, but it's, it doesn't feel like it, in secondary school its sort of the sort of the way that they like, hover over you, and it's like, Come on, do this, do this, do this, but in here, its sort of like, okay, do this in your own time.

Ruth Babington

So is it fair to say then that it's a less pressured environment?

LOUISE

Yeah. Like, it, obviously is still pressured, because it's important, but it's not, it doesn't feel like it. And I think that's to do with, like, the fact that there is, like, I think there is some sort of like, a commendation thing for if you do something really well, and it's like, so so parents can see it. But there's no like credit referral. It's not like a massive thing. Even if there is something like, obviously, unless its something terrible.

Ruth Babington

Yeah you because you mentioned earlier, didn't you like if you forgot a pen?

LOUISE

Yeah where as if you forgot a pen here they'd be like okay. Or like you forget your notepad or something it's like, okay, it's like, in politics, for example, we have a lot of booklets, because there's a lot of content in it, say I said , oh, I forgot my booklet, it's like, okay, here's a spare. It's like, that's easy. Just do that. Rather than make it a massive thing. Just say okay, don't write on it.

Ruth Babington

Is there anything else that you feel like you want to mention about secondary school or college?

LOUISE

I don't know. I don't think so.

Ruth Babington

I mean, it's been a really good interview, from my perspective, because I'm thinking about some of the people that I'm working with, it will be helpful for them. I think they'll be even just like here, and where you started and where you are. And also for them will be like, really just like, inspirational. Cuz I think I mean, you probably know, when you get into that cycle, it's really hard to, to break. I think it's not often you hear positive stories, just like why I wanted to do this research. And thank you so much, because I think your story will be so so helpful.

LOUISE

That was my hope doing it. It's a little bit like this could help someone. And like, if if I goes into something huge, and then change is made. And that's like, amazing. Because like, if these ships, basically. It was like, I don't want people to go through that. It was like, Yeah.

Louise's second interview transcript**Ruth Babington**

So, before we get started, I just wanted to check in to see how you felt after our interview on Friday.

LOUISE

Good. Yeah, I felt like kind of, I don't know, relieved in a way. But I got to like, say what I felt about it.

Ruth Babington

Oh good. Yeah.

LOUISE

Because like, I only talk to my mum about it before and like people here but to like, get it out all completely, it's like, really nice. Okay,

Ruth Babington

Yeah because I can imagine like, you wouldn't have had many opportunities to do that.

LOUISE

No, not really.

Ruth Babington 00:42

So you were gonna bring something along today, what have you brought?

LOUISE 00:45

I have brought songs plural, because I couldn't decide on one.

Ruth Babington

Love this. Okay.

LOUISE

I like songs, I like music too much. So, first one is Mr. Blue Sky by Electric Light Orchestra because like that song, if I was like, in the car, with my mum going to school or we put that one on, and it just like makes you feel good. And it like just make me think like, okay, it's okay. The other one is, How does it feel? by Slade, I don't know if you know that one?

Ruth Babington

I think I do.

LOUISE

Yeah, it's it's kind of it's good. Umm but that's also a good one. That my teacher introduced to me in one of the times when she was blasting music everywhere. And it's just sort of like became a ritual. Sometimes if I've had a bad morning or something and I've been struggling, she'd should just be like, right flip that one on, have a party for a bit. Then yeah, so now like, I love that song. Next one is Walk of Life by the Dire Straits.

Ruth Babington

I don't know that one.

LOUISE

I blame my mother for that one, because she likes most Dire Straits, and she's very 80s but that's just like another happy song, just like make you feel good. Next one is slightly random. It's the fuller house theme Everywhere you Look by Carly Rae Jepsen.

Ruth Babington

Very different genres.

LOUISE

Yeah. I don't know why. It's just like when I listen to it, I'm just like hmmm hmmm. So I don't know. And then I had to get ABBA, because ABBA is like my thing. So I chose Chiquitita because it's just, it's just good. Isn't it? Its iconic, and the ending is just so good, yeah, everything's good about it. And that's all the songs.

Ruth Babington

I don't know if I know all of those songs. Correct me if I'm wrong, I think all of the songs apart from the ABBA Chiquitita one, they're all quite happy songs. So why did you choose the Chiquitita one?

LOUISE

I think kind of from like, kind of weird, but Mamma Mia. I love Mamma Mia, and I love ABBA, and I just that song even though it's like kind of sad, but it's also like uplifting in a way because it's like try once more like you did before, like keep going. So I think I like that about it subconsciously. I was going to choose winner takes all level, but then I thought that's really depressing. So I'll do Chiquitita. Yeah, I just find it and like my mum loves it. And it's like, when we go round to friend's houses, sometimes everyone's had a couple of, couple of drinks, adults, I say parents and they get a bit delirious and then they'll put ABBA on and then they all just go a bit loony, it's like just a song that's full of nice memories

Ruth Babington

So would you listen to those songs when like you're feeling a bit down, and you want to cheer yourself up?

LOUISE

Yeah. Yeah. Like, I listen to like loads of different songs, but those are the main ones that I know make me feel better. So yeah.

Ruth Babington

I might use that as a playlist for later. How does it make you feel talking about those songs?

LOUISE

Nerdy. This one's in four four. This one is has a key change in like the fifth bar. I don't know. I like talking about music. I like music in general. So yeah, like, like it just like makes me think of happy things and people who I associate them with.

Ruth Babington

I really liked what you said about umm the Slade song and how your teacher used to put that on and blast it out. It seems like they all have quite specific memories, and in the Dire Straits one sort of links to your mum.

LOUISE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

And then what was the other one, oh Carly Rae Jepsen.

LOUISE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

Who was that one?

LOUISE

I honestly don't know. I think I just came on the playlist once, like oh I like this. I think I was in bed or something. Like, I think I'd put on like a playlist, random playlist for like, going to sleep if I'd struggled to sleep or something. And then that one came on, I was like, this isn't going to sleep. This makes me want to go and do stuff. But then I was like, oh, that's quite good that, I'll add it.

Ruth Babington

Love that. I'm thinking about like college, and now would you say, if you are having like, if you were feeling down about college or anything, would they be things that you would listen to?

LOUISE

Yeah. Like, if I've not felt great in the morning, like, especially now when it's so dark, I'll just go on the bus put them songs on others like that, and it's just a bit of a burst.

Ruth Babington

So obviously, after our conversation on Friday, the stuff you said was, like, really powerful and really impactful. But I just wanted to finish with asking you a couple of questions. So I wanted to say to you, what would you like to say to adults in secondary school about your experience?

LOUISE

How do you mean about my experience?

Ruth Babington

I mean, what would you like to tell them that you think might be helpful for them in working with other young people who might experience similar?

LOUISE

Okay. I guess just sort of like, I think if people in my school, my teachers had been sort of more aware of it, but if they had better communication with each other, because I think that was one of the big issues is that there wasn't really communication, between like, some of the form people and other things like in the bungalow it was good communication, and that's why it worked. For the main school, there wasn't really any communication or anything. But if it was, then it wouldn't, like, get back to me even though it's affecting me, they don't, didn't really tell me about it so like the learning base thing, they didn't talk to me. It just sort of happened. So I think like communicating with other staff about students, and then also communicating with students about what would help, or how they can help, or like just anything at all, like, if you're feeling a bit rubbish one day, just like, go and say, like, you alright? Like, things like that. And then like, also just like be understanding of like, if someone's like, with the credit and referral thing I was talking about, I think, if it's someone who is like, consistently,

always doing the right thing, like I was, like I was, I always had to bring things like pens and stuff, and books and everything, and I'd like, never forget anything, but that's also because I was like so worried I'd get in trouble if I didn't like for the people who consistently do have it, don't be harsh on them. And like, even other people who maybe are consistently forgetting things, like, be a little bit harsh, because everyone needs personal responsibility and everything, but don't like, be like, how can you forget your pen? It's like, don't belittle them. Just sort of be like, okay, you've forgotten it again. I'm gonna have to like log that and be like, you need to bring another one, but you can use this for the lesson. Like, just be more compassionate and understanding of things. I think things like that and then put less pressure to be perfect.

Ruth Babington

Yeah.

LOUISE

Because that's what I felt. I just felt pressure to be perfect, get everything done all the time, get it done on time. Everything needs to be like really, really, really high standard. So yeah.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, I think they're really good points. And then I thought we'd end on a nice question. So if you could go back and talk to yourself when you were in secondary school and probably like at your lowest point, what would you say?

LOUISE

Umm that's a good question. I feel like I want to say something like you have people who like care about you and want you to do well in life. You don't feel that right now. Or maybe you do but you like feel guilty about it because you don't feel like your able to do that but don't, like it's like, just be like oh, by the way, we're doing things in college now, it' like what!? You're going to be doing the college production, not on it, or in it, but you're doing the music for it and it's like whoa. Then like other things like that, like you're actually able to speak to people. And that's gonna come and you're gonna, it's gonna be okay, basically, it's gonna be okay. Drink tea.

Ruth Babington

I love that. Well, that's the questions that I wanted to ask you today. So unless there's anything else you want to ask me or share anything else?

LOUISE

No, I don't think so. Just yeah.

Joanne's interview transcript

Ruth Babington

So I meant to ask you on Tuesday how old you were?

JOANNE

I am eighteen, next week's my birthday, I'm going on nineteen.

Ruth Babington

Oh my god, happy birthday

JOANNE

Thanks

Ruth Babington

So what year are you in?

JOANNE

So I'm in year umm, I always get confused year 13. But umm I actually had a gap year in-between umm high school and well high school, secondary school and college.

Ruth Babington

What did you do in that gap year?

JOANNE

Basically, I took, I had to take time out because it was post pandemic. It really got to me in terms of you know mentally my anxiety levels just went through the roof. So I couldn't go on straight away to do college. It just wasn't feasible for me at the time, because it was just really stressful.

Ruth Babington

That's understandable. And I know we briefly touched on this last time, but how many secondary schools was it that you attended?

JOANNE

It was three overall

Ruth Babington

Ok and do you have any, like medical conditions, or any diagnoses?

JOANNE

Yes so I have anxiety And then I don't know if it's diagnosed or not, but OCD. And that's really prevalent in my life. Like, that's a really big part of my anxiety, definitely.

Ruth Babington

Ahh that will be interesting to see if any of that comes out in your experiences, I just wanted to ask as well, sort of what are your plans for after college? You know, what would you like to do?

JOANNE

So umm I want to go to University of Manchester, ideally and do film and history as a joint honours

Ruth Babington

That sounds really interesting

JOANNE

Then after that, just take it from there.

Ruth Babington

So how did you find completing this? Because obviously, you have to reflect back on your experiences, what was it like?

JOANNE

It was a bit difficult at first, because obviously, some of the experiences aren't that... it's hard to go to look back on them. And but overall, looking back, I can see how much difference I made, and that's, that's reassuring.

Ruth Babington

So how did that make you feel, sort of seeing where you are now compared to where you were?

JOANNE

Really good, I think I'm always conscious of that, because I tried to be because it's obviously that year, it was really important to me that I took time out between secondary school and college. And I felt like that was the year of a lot of reflection. And that helped a lot with, you know, with my attitude now. Definitely. So I think that year of reflection kind of always, is really prevalent still now, because I always look back and think that I've done a really, really good job of getting back into the habit.

Ruth Babington

Definitely, it's really nice to hear you say that. I mean, we haven't even really got started, but it already sounds like you've overcome quite a lot.

JOANNE

Thank you.

Ruth Babington

So we'll start off with your secondary school. So if you could just talk me through your experiences of secondary school.

JOANNE

Of course, so leaving primary school, I went to my first, shall I say the name of the secondary school?

Ruth Babington

Up to you, whatever you'd like

JOANNE

Yeah so the umm secondary school I went to was MCMA. And I left that within two months, I think. Because the experience I had there wasn't very good. And it was really strange, because in terms of primary school, I'd managed to I didn't leave Primary School. I was consistent with there all the time. So to change high schools that early on, had I I feel had a big impact on kind of instability that I felt definitely. So yeah, I left that school and had umm it must have been a couple of like about a month where I was just kind of waiting to get into my next secondary school. And I think like most kids who get into a predicament like that they never want to go back to school ever again. So I was very much in that mindset. But I did end up going back to my next umm I did go to another secondary school. And that was another turbulent journey. Ahh so is this sort of... where are we now? (looking at life chart) you tried to find one? Then I found.. I found the school and found friends but umm then there was umm especially in year 8, and this all happened within about three years within, year 8, a school it was called collective spirit and it started to umm go downhill very fast. And they ended up closing the school which is really rare.

Ruth Babington

Oh yeah, oh it is

JOANNE

And that was as I was transitioning to Year 9

Ruth Babington

Right, okay

JOANNE

So I had to find another school at that time. But then the third high school I found was really well suited to me and I was very happy at that school. And I stayed there for three years, obviously. And well, I think interruptions were quite common. And the pandemic kind of interrupted that. So I didn't get to finish the whole of that school. But you know, it was a lot more stable than my past two experiences. Definitely.

Ruth Babington

So as you've been talking, I've just taken a couple of notes, so is it okay, if we just go back to some of the things that you said?

JOANNE

Of course

Ruth Babington

So I know you mentioned in your first secondary school you left after two months, it wasn't a great time. Can you tell me why what made it like that?

JOANNE

So I think in terms of transition, I don't do very well. And in terms of leaving primary school, that was a big step. I mean in a kid's mind, I guess it's not like, it doesn't seem big, but it was.

Ruth Babington

It's a big change.

JOANNE

Exactly. And I remember a couple, well, I remember one incident specifically, where there was a... moment of not bullying, because I would never categorize it as that because it was never repeated, but perhaps embarrassment. And someone kind of made a comment, and it just made me go into a state of, I remember mum saying, because, obviously, I don't really consciously know what my actions were like. But when mum said, during that time, she noticed I went extremely quiet, and was concerned. Umm so leaving that school, that was really why I left, because it was just a snowball. And it just, it ended like that, in a bit of a weird space.

Ruth Babington

Did that make you stop attending that school?

JOANNE

I think so. Yeah. I mean, I guess there's never really one. But it was just the big change. And I mean, looking back at it, that's the only incident I could remember. Or an incident that I associate heavily with that school. So yeah, so that that was kind of, and it wasn't necessarily a big thing. It was just something that affected me. And it really got to me, I just, I think my mum noticing that I cos I guess I didn't really, I think I asked to leave a couple of times. But really, you know, your parents have to notice it.. Yeah, my mum noticed that because, you know, she's my mum. And she noticed that I was

very quiet during that time and umm reserved and not myself. So it was kind of a mutual decision that we kind of had to find another school.

Ruth Babington

And how did you feel around that time?

JOANNE

I guess it was quite looking back on it, it seems a bit cloudy. But I kind of associate and I don't want this to sound weird, but a bit of a numbness I don't want that to sound really it's not like I was totally numb to everything. I guess it was just like, I didn't really notice the feeling because I've not really felt anxiety like that before in my life. So couldn't recognize it as anxiety. So it was more quietness trying to get on with everything. Because I think I have a lot of drive, if I set my mind do something, so I guess I had that. But anxiety was a huge part of that. So I guess in terms of feeling numb, it was kind of not associating, I wasn't able to put an image to anxiety and I couldn't notice Oh, this is definitely my anxiety. It was more like, Oh, what's this? And then I'm just gonna keep on going on then what kind of happened, your parents noticed. And, you know, it became apparent that it just wasn't, you know? A good space, not good space, but it just wasn't tailored to me. And I kind of had to leave like not had but wanted to.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, I think it's really reflective of what you said about like that feeling that you had. Yeah, definitely. About feeling cloudy as well, I think that's a really powerful word. I totally get what you mean.

JOANNE

Yeah. And I guess numbness is a bit of a strong word, because it can be associated with oh, well, I don't feel any of it. I guess it's it's me trying to make sense of what I was feeling. I couldn't identify that

Ruth Babington

So if I asked you to draw me a picture of that time, what would you draw?

JOANNE

Oh gosh..

Ruth Babington

Would it be difficult? It can just be like a shape or a colour?

JOANNE

Yeah, it would probably be. Well, I remember this was another memory because you know, your memories kind of come like images. And it was sitting in the car with my mum. And I guess my mum was trying to gauge a response out of me, but I just wasn't communicating. So I guess it would just be seeing myself sat there kind of alone and not alone but uncommunicative and not talking and quite reserved. Yes, I guess that's what I would do a person, a figure alone just in a grey cloudy space. Definitely.

Ruth Babington

Well, that sounds like it was quite a difficult time for you.

JOANNE

It was and as I said I didn't recognize it at the time. But I tried to look back really hard at umm the life chart and found that perhaps that experience was what, and that instability that I had quite early on

was what triggered kind of absences and anxiety surrounding secondary school. So I guess that was a big point. In my life as a young person, it was and it was only two months, but it was a, you know, it was quite big.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, I think when you're younger, like two months when you think of in terms of school, its actually, it is quite a significant length of time.

JOANNE

I guess it was lessons lost and you know, and then that must have been another month where I was out of school, because it was trying to find the school and it was really hard. And then in that space, there was the reluctantly to go back to school.

Ruth Babington

So in that space, I know you mentioned sort of like your mindset, then what was that like? Because I imagine that you might have felt, but I just have gone on.

JOANNE

So I guess that was around that time that I had often between dropping that school and going to the next one. That was when I really started to notice anxiety as a prevalent thing. Because it was that idea of not wanting to do something, and it prevented me from doing something. That's what I associate with anxiety it's the feeling but it's a constant fear of will I or will I not do it? Will this set me back from I guess that's when I really noticed that. So anxiety was a big feeling. That was when it came. And I guess that was when I started to lose a bit of confidence. And you know, so yeah, I'd associate anxiety with that period.

Ruth Babington

And what was that feeling of anxiety like for you? Because I feel people experience it in different ways.

JOANNE

So I guess, as I said, kind of withdrawn umm a lot of the time it would be me not talking maybe or not as I am usually. And then it would be kind of umm if I did communicate, it would be quite umm.. say to communicate my emotions i'd start crying. So it'd be kind of two extremes and not extremes. But it would be either you know, not saying anything at all or saying a lot in a short space of time.

Ruth Babington

Sounds like it's like a build up for you.

JOANNE

Yeah, definitely kind of like, this is really cringe. But I imagine like, you know, if you shake a bottle, and it kind of, you know, (used hands to show overflow of bottle) that's that's kind of what anxiety is. It's that build up of pressure.

Ruth Babington

I think that's a really good way to explain it. I know exactly what you mean, when you say that. And then for you like physically, what would your physical symptoms of anxiety be?

JOANNE

I guess it's hard because it never really comes. I can never identify it with something that I physically take on. I guess, and this isn't something I identify with that time specifically, but rituals and routine OCD is a physical, even though it's not a symptom, it very much comes out of anxiety. And it's how I express so instead of maybe shaking or you know, having something I associate with it, so say it would be, you know, doing something multiple times or, you know, playing with my hands and stuff like so definitely. I think it's more that I don't really take it on physically. But in the times that I've had anxiety after that, my mum says, Well, my parents and people around friends noticed that I don't eat a lot. And that's not something I can remember from that. But maybe that was something, perhaps not eating and again, becoming very reserved from a situation wanting to isolate myself.

Ruth Babington

Sounds like you have a really good awareness of yourself which is really impressive.

JOANNE

I really try to because I feel like pinpointing a feeling before it gets overwhelming has become an important thing. And as I say beforehand, I don't really think I recognized anxiety, especially in that little period of my first high school. It wasn't so to recognize it now, it's a big thing for me, I try to all the time. And I like to reflect on things even though it can be upsetting. It gives you a sense of who you are now. And, you know, it's, it is just a really healthy thing, I think to process it and let it out.

Ruth Babington

Definitely, I agree with everything you've said. So I've seen here, so you found your friends here. So this is obviously one of your positives?

JOANNE

So I think during that time, it wasn't necessarily, there wasn't a lot of learning going on. And going to be honest, because as I said, the school was quite rocky but I guess I found a sense of community. And I found a lot of friends. Admittedly, I'm not in touch with them now because, again, a year out of college, you know, you don't really have constant contact with people, and you just do lose friends. Well, I guess looking back at that I was really happy and it was just a time when it was kind of fun.

Comment [VL2]: Should the reported speech be in italics?

Comment [VL3]: Why did you not use line numbers?

Ruth Babington

So if I asked you to draw that for me in a picture what would it be?

JOANNE

My favourite colour is green. So it would have to be green umm I guess I will say that, because you know, it was kind of there was a big field at the back of the school. And it has like a lot of trees. So I'd associate like a tree with that kind of, I guess subconsciously that's like, you know, growing or some maturity, I guess, would associate that with it.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, I love that imagery. And then the next thing that happens, obviously, school has now closed?

JOANNE

Yeah, I mean, I think anyone would find that difficult. But it's interesting what you mentioned because yeah, that is completely outside of your control, which is different than the first move. And this is where things you know, I think in terms of my first high school, an element of it was in my control, because it was my feelings, but for the school to close. And it being very out of your control. It kind of I remember a lot of crying and you know, not understanding. And as I think, as I've said, knowing stuff has become and identifying things has become a really big part of me, so not knowing what to

do. It's I hate that feeling of being out of control. So I guess that was quite a shock to the system. And I guess in that period, because people used to say I had a lot of confidence. And I think at that period when that school closed for some reason, that was when I lost all of my confidence. And that was, there was quite a big rise after that finding a good school. I don't think I've ever been as social or, you know, as confident, saying things as I was before. That, that kind of before the school closed, so yeah, it was a bit hard. Definitely. And that was still quite a bit of not instability, but just frustration, and then upset. And then the idea of things being not in my control, it was just a combination of feelings that are so strange. And again, I guess maturing, it's kind of weird to be stopped multiple times. And like, yeah, so I don't really look back at especially that period of the school closing like, oh, I loved it, it was hard.

Ruth Babington

I think it's always hard to deal with change, but especially when you're like, you know, a teenager

JOANNE

I know

Ruth Babington

Especially a big one like that, because that doesn't usually happen

JOANNE

I've been told that it's very rare for a school to close. So it was a real low but as I said, it was fun. Beforehand, and then when it closed, it was like oh, you know, so it was it was strange.

Ruth Babington

So then obviously after school closed then, you found your new school, so in between this period, so when schools closed and you're looking for your next school what was that like?

JOANNE

So it was really fast actually umm there was the holidays, because it closed the school closed right at the umm the end, you know, like the school year. And then the next over this summer, it was preparing to go to a new school, but I was really quite ready for it because I've done it before. I was prepared. And I think I just did quite well. And I'm not trying to like say it was you know what, in terms of compared to having that moment of it was fast but it was good. And I loved that school. I always look back at that like, oh, I loved it.

Ruth Babington

So I know you mentioned that you were happy here in this school. Would you say you were also happy then in the next one?

JOANNE

Definitely. Because I guess it's easy to kind of focus on oh, it was so it was so negative or but a lot of the time it was happy. And I guess those points where it kind of dips were only small, really and I'm full of contradictions. But you know, it was happy, I've always been happy. I think I'm a happy person in general. That was just sustained there, it was really, that was a happy time.

Ruth Babington

That's really good. I mean, I think, you know, you're never gonna have a black and white experience, so it totally makes sense that you've got a bit of contradictions

JOANNE

I know, it was strange, but I can definitely say for certain that that period of being in that in the high school, which was in for three years, so it was the longest I'd been, it was happy for me, and it was a happy experience, and it was fun and everything.

Ruth Babington

Can you tell me what made it happy for you?

JOANNE

So I think there was a level of consistency, it was an Academy. And there were lots of people, and usually that would be intimidating. But the school, it's hard when I say the school because there was two others before, but the previous school, the one that shut was very small. It was not an academy. So to go to something that was quite big, it felt like a community and that was happy. And there was a lot of support there. And people who recognize my anxiety and people who have anxiety, like me, we could swap and share experiences and you know it was very positive. And the thing that I remember, the thing that makes me so happy about that time, most of all, would be what I achieved in terms of my academic studies. Because up until that point, I wouldn't necessarily, I wouldn't necessarily think people would think I was bright. But I started to recognize in myself that, you know, I love going to lessons. And umm whereas probably in the period of my two I'll call them my two high schools, I was in and out inconsistently in terms of attendance. I would say at my third high school, it was consistent. So consistent. I remember spraining my ankle, people thinking that it was broke but I was thinking if it's broke, I'm still gonna go in the last day, like I just didn't want to have any time off because I enjoyed it that much. So it was really happy for me. I just, but yeah umm, I associate education with that time on learning things and being happy socially, but in a state where it's academic, and it was, you know, fun to learn.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, so it sounds for you, like that was such a good experience, because you have that sense of community with everyone. But you also have like that sense of achievement (looking at lifechart) So you've won an award for your academic achievements?

JOANNE

Yeah, it wasn't a big thing. I mean, it's probably one that you'd expect to have at some point but it was, I remember getting a little badge for it, I've still got it. And it was a little gold badge. And it was for Humanities, which that was what I loved history was my favourite. And to get an award and be recognized, and that is not the best in that subject, but probably the most hard working was ohh that made me so happy. That was a real high point, I know that's really like geeky to say but I really, like I enjoyed it.

Ruth Babington

Thinking from like where you'd come from though I mean, like you came from there (pointing to life chart), you didn't really want to come in and then you were like, if you sprained if you broke your leg, you will still go in. I mean, that's a massive change. So now we have a very dramatic drop (looking at life chart). COVID. So talk to me about how that impacted school.

JOANNE

It was oh, yeah, just I love that period. A lot of learning and yeah, it was really good. So umm just before it's not funny, but it's kind of you've got to laugh at it. Just before my GCSEs, the umm I think it was in March the school shut and there was kind of a moment because GCSEs would have been sat in June, no, not June, they would have been sat later, there was so for a couple of months there

was kind of a suspended air of are GCSEs going ahead and that kind of that really shocked me because I didn't know what I was meant to do and you know. And then GCSEs weren't going ahead, so I guess, in some sense, it was a relief. But in another it was inconclusion, and I really would have liked to have done like, GCSEs no matter how much I dreaded it. And then I got my results, and the results were not what I wanted, they were really umm not bad but just not what I would have achieved if I would have done a GCSE. Yes. I remember my teacher, my teacher said to me in Art, oh you're gonna get a nine, and I got six. And not that that's bad. It was just such a big shoot down. I was like, oh, gosh and that just made me kind of plummet. Because I remember my mum and dad planned, like not a party, obviously, because it was COVID. But we were gonna go out and order something to eat and have it at home and you know, a pandemic little, it would just be me and my mum with dad, but we'd have probably my grandma on Facetime or something, and, yeah, when I got when I opened the email that contained my GCSEs, it was like, I don't want to do this. I just would have rather stayed in. And, yeah, so that period was probably as dramatic as this is to say, as I say, a lot of the times I'm happy, but that was probably the darkest moment, you know, and it was really upsetting. And then having the pressure of going to college, and it was, everyone was at home, no one spoke to each other and to have to sit next to someone and speak to them. It was such a huge adjustment. That that was when my OCD started to really it was almost paralyzing. Because rituals in OCD are a big thing. And I just sat there, say so this is random, but if it was you know my OCD was saying right tap the table, you got to tap the table three times in order for this, you know, to be okay. I'd be sat there for 10 minutes, you know, tapping away, and it would be in my head, it was constant anxiety, and it was just that really cemented what I associated with college at that time. So I had to take a year out, or at least that's how I felt. And from about August to September, maybe October, it was really, it was upsetting, and I was just so deflated, and in a state where I was very anxious all the time. And there was a moment, I think, during going back to college, it must have only been a couple of days, I was in college before I left. But umm I went to hospital, I think three times with like, my anxiety. And then I remember I was in bed for I think two days without wanting to get out, which was, um, for someone who's quite happy all the time, that was a big adjustment, like who have, you know, like, how did this happen? And there was a lot of existential questions. Because I think because it's really hard to like, connect the dots, but I think because my GCSEs didn't happen, and there was a lot of irresolution. It's just what I ended up expecting from things, and I guess that also links back to the second school, I was at that closed for no reason. And the pandemic was out of my control, and then GCSEs were out of my control, I came to expect a lot of irresolution at that time. So it was quite instable, unstable up until November, which was when it started to get better. But that was a really difficult time the pandemic.

Ruth Babington

It sounds like it and I think like you summed it up really well there like you sort of cope with these changes (looking at lifechart) and you're sort of on a high and then you're sort of big life changes that happen.

JOANNE

I think I became kind of dependent on you know, being alone in the, in the pandemic, you know, that was you have to isolate and I guess that was why I didn't want to come in anymore to college was because there was so many people that it was just too much for me to handle with my OCD it was becoming extremely stressful and anxious and there was just all these feelings that were kind of a mixing pot and it was just a lot. I know everybody else was in the same boat. Definitely a lot of people went through what I did. And I can safely say that it was one of the hardest times. I don't mean to say this really dramatically, but of my life, because it was like, you know, it was difficult. And it was, yeah, so I just didn't want to go into college anymore and didn't. And then I had a year off. But I will say all that year, again, my anxiety must have lasted until about October. But that's when I started getting

help. And kind of after being broken down, I was allowed to build myself back up. And over that year, it was just kind of a reconstruction of who I, and this is, again, so existential by it was kind of a build up of who I was, and kind of building that up again. And then when it came back to college, it was like a whole different person. And I've got 100% attendance ever since it was just I love it back at college. And it was such a big adjustment for me, yeah it's happy.

Ruth Babington That's amazing. I mean, just the extremes.

JOANNE

I mean, everyone's in the same boat and a lot of people have time off. So yeah, it was pandemic was the worse.

Ruth Babington

I just want to go back to some of the things you said. Speaking about the pandemic, and I know, you said this was probably like the darkest time for you. So how would you draw that for me in a picture? What would that look like?

JOANNE

Probably, again, this is real dramatic, but I know, it would be just a pitch black, that would not a lot of apart from anxiety. There was not a lot of other things. So it would just be darkness. Definitely. Yeah. And again, everyone was in that situation. And that's not something I'd want to, you know, like it wasn't only me, but it was really hard. And I can't help but feel like it was it took its toll at the time it was that was hard writing down on the life chart, because even though I like to look back at things, looking back at that, and analyzing it kind of with a microscope, eugh, it was really... And I guess you get scared that you're gonna go back. So that would be the only anxiety that I've got right now is the idea of what if. But, I know that with the tools I've got, a new not a new person, but I am kind of so I know that I'm strong enough now to if there is another storm like that to weather it.

Ruth Babington

You are a very resilient person from what you told me. I mean, I would have said that before we even got to this point.

JOANNE

A lot of people go through a lot worse, and that always, you know, you know, I remember umm during that year off, the war in Ukraine started oh, no, it wasn't actually it was last year, so it was it was at a time of reflection. Still, I was in college, and happy. But I could still look back and I was thinking I wouldn't probably you know wouldn't have the strength to handle something as severe as that as war. You know. So a lot of people's experiences are a lot worse than mine. But I think for what I've been dealt with, there's no comparison, but I think I've handled it with quite a bit of resilience

Ruth Babington

I would say definitely. You mentioned the existential questions that you were asking yourself, which I was quite interested in. Could you give me an example of one?

JOANNE

Yeah, it was kind of like umm, you know, that irresolution and then you'd ask, you know, kind of after leaving college, it would be oh, where do I go now? You know, if you're not even getting out of bed, and you all you've got is you thoughts, your alone with your thoughts. It's like, you ask quite the big questions like, you know, what, what am I going to do? You know, what is everyone thinking of me? And I'm not a self conscious person in terms of what other people think of me. But I've never want to

let anyone down. And I guess in that time, well, I let friends down because they were in college and I was off. And yeah, so there was a lot of questions that I had to ask myself, and I guess answers were you know, they are hard to come by it's existential questions are impossible. Yeah, I think it was just a time of real ambiguity. And not knowing where life was gonna go from there. Because you have all these big plans as well, and to the pandemic to just kind of, you know, your like oh was what is, you know, maybe a bit kind of you question, and really, I don't want this to go dark, we kind of question, why do we have to do this? It's just, yeah, so that was a really hard time. But I guess if I bring it back to attendance, having that year off, meant that kind of, you know, spent all my coupons, I kind of knew that I don't have an excuse to be off anymore. But also, I have clarity that I know, I don't want to be off anymore, because if that's what if that's what being out of the circle and being out of curriculum means then that is not something I want. So if anything that I experience is incentive to carry on, and to come in every day, and you know, you know, live life.

Ruth Babington

It's a really strong way to look at it, I really liked the reframe. And I know you said then that you started to get help. I just wanted to ask like, it was that help from college, where was that help coming from?

JOANNE

So it was CAMHS. So after going to the hospital a few times, it was kind of put on referral, and just going to hospital that speeded it up. So I was then on a little program in the hospital. And I didn't have to stay in overnight, but it was kind of they'd asked me to come in, I think it was it was something like every week, and you know, I'd talk over what I felt and stuff, and then after a period of that still not going back into college it was and that was over probably a couple of weeks, so that was still in that period, where it's like very much a what am I going to go from here I started to become more clear headed. And then I went to CAMHS, and that just the people there are amazing. I think it was healthy young minds. And they are spectacular, they really kind of helped, and if I talk about reconstruction, they were the ones who helped me get those pieces back together and build myself up and someone who's a lot more tougher and not tougher in a hard way but in like a resilience, and emotionally I know I can navigate stuff better than I could have done before. So yeah, help in terms of professionals. Yeah, it's just really good, really good people. Thank you, because I know stuff like that can be hard like going to seek help, but for me it was very much, like I was excited to go and see them, but you like, oh, this is helping I can really feel the benefits of it. And yeah, so that was really positive getting help. Definitely. I think at one point, this is really crazy, but I even tried hypnotherapy, which was that was outside. But that was kind of to me that that was a bit that didn't work for me, but there was a lot of experimenting as well, but mostly it was the people at Healthy Young Minds and CAMHS who were tremendously, you know, just really cool.

Ruth Babington

Sounds like you were quite proactive in trying to seek help?

JOANNE

I tried because I think understanding emotions are really important, that's why looking back can be hard, because I think we've talked about kind of resetting back, you never want to do that. So kind of building up, not a wall, but a strength, that's really important, and that's something that I try to have now.

Ruth Babington

And so moving on, so talk about your college experiences.

JOANNE

So that was the pandemic and then that year off and then I came back and that was just and I got the first day and that was and then that was maintained and I was like As, and I was just so happy, and it was really gratifying after going through something that was a bit, and not that this is only a couple of weeks ago because a lot of my happiness and enthusiasm was maintained for throughout the past year. And then just a couple of weeks ago, this is probably my only negative experience. I was a bit stressed over EQP or EPQ and I missed a lesson and having 100% attendance to and I actually forgot to go to the lesson and it wasn't like oh I want to miss it, then it was just it went completely out of my mind, and that kind of sent me into a tailspin. I was like, oh, you know, and that that was upsetting to a point, but, but being able to build yourself back up, and that kind of having that resilience, I was just like, Oh, it's a mistake. And instead of worrying about it, I'm gonna drop EPQ and focus on, you know, what happened there, yeah, and that got solved, and it's a lot better. Yeah, I feel a bit more confident. Well, a lot more confident, but yeah, that was just like a little fluke.

Ruth Babington

Well, it sounds like you handled that well, you knew how to cope with it.

JOANNE

Of course. And, yes, so it was just, and I got my attendance mark anyway, so I'm still 100%. Which I'm really happy with because that was what was important to me. After the pandemic, as we've talked about having so much time off maintaining a good attendance was important, so to have to miss a lesson out of pure, you know, stress, it was like, but yeah, so I've got that back and it got resolved.

Ruth Babington

So it seems like college is going really well for you. I mean, a lot of that, I think is the work that you've done yourself. I was wondering is there anything in college which supports you?

JOANNE

So umm the college have been amazing, as well, they have an absolutely amazing support system, and umm mentors, and you have anxiety or something like that everyone, you get a mentor, who will meet with you weekly, or every two weeks, and they'll just go over how you feel and your progress in school as well. And having that consistency of having someone speak to every week, that's really helped. That's been a big help. It kind of keeps you on track. Yeah, so the college have been amazing in terms of support.

Ruth Babington

So if I asked you to draw me a picture of college, so what would that look like? What color would it be?

JOANNE

Probably be green again, because green, you know, green is my favourite colour. Umm an image though it would be perhaps you know those little circles with the marking like what you'd get on a paint pot.. That's what I'm, that's what sustained me in terms of, you know, academia, getting those A's, because I've never been like that before. I've never been someone to get straight A's. I didn't know I was capable of that. So it was really, it impressed me, and I'm proud of it, to achieve that. Definitely.

Ruth Babington

And then thinking about the future now for you. So what would the future look like for you if I asked you to draw me a picture of that?

JOANNE

I guess, a road, it's really open, kind of like in America, when you see like route six, or whatever it is, it's just like, the open road, and you know, there's a ton of pathways to drive down, but they're all kind of straight and narrow, and you know, it's really positive, and you're excited to carry on.

Ruth Babington

Wow, So I just wanted to ask you, because if we compare these two life charts, obviously, we've got your secondary school one, which is a bit more up and down, and then we've got your college one seems to be a bit more stable. Why do you think that is?

JOANNE

I think, it is because the only thing I can identify is that pandemic. And that was a big shift, and even though it was negative, having that year, as I said, after the pandemic after going to college and quitting, having that year of reflection, and focusing on rebuilding myself and falsifying my anxiety barriers, that was what really helped me to become someone who's resilient to a lot of tough challenges, I would say. So having that time to reflect on yourself, and then work on and build on you know your strengths, that, to me, that's really important.

Ruth Babington

And this time, whenever, you know, you took your time off, and then you came back, was that a plan that you made with college that you would do that?

JOANNE

It was quite spontaneous, which is really which, you know, was a really strange thing I would have carried on with college probably wouldn't have gone as well. But having that time where it was unrehearsed and it was, as I say, it was, even though there was a consistency in building myself for a lot of the experiences or a lot of it was very spontaneous, and it wasn't expected. It wasn't planned yet. It was a time which I, and this is again, another dramatic statement, but I really treasure it. Because it was a time when I found who I was. So I guess that time was the biggest incentive, and has been probably, even though it wasn't necessarily happy, well it it was, but even though it wasn't being in college and being social, it was still, you know, a good time. It was a time of reflecting and rebuilding. So definitely.

Ruth Babington

So did you get to a point when you were having time off that you felt you were ready to go back? And then that's when you went back? Or was like, was it your family wants you to go back? Or was it college that were get trying to get you back in?

JOANNE

Because it was quite spontaneous. The idea of college and as I said, there was quite a lot of existential questions at the start with that. So college was always my mom says she, she was quite a while, for a moment there I didn't think you were going to go back, which I guess is true. It was kind of a balancing act. But I knew what I had to do for myself. And I think when you kind of it was became my only option to because even though I became really well, mentally, I still wanted to create a life. Because staying at home or not, it wasn't staying at home, but not being or not achieving your up most is not living life. So I guess, you know, going back to school was kind of that definitely. I keep on going off the question

Ruth Babington

No, no, this is perfect. I'm getting loads of information.

JOANNE

Thank you. But yeah.

Ruth Babington

I feel like as well, it's really nice to hear you talk about the future in such a positive, hopeful way. Is there anything else that you want to add that you think is important about your school experiences or your college experiences?

JOANNE

Not really, I think it's just, even though there are ups and downs, you learn that there's always going to be something there's always a silver lining, even though it's sometimes it can be can seem really unlikely, there will always be something that is that will happen to you, that is great. And people evolve. And I guess a lot of these ups and downs coincided with maturing in terms of young adulthood. So these two kind of feed together and you know, created someone who, you know, who knows to expect stuff isn't always gonna go right, but knowing that there will be a happy ending,

Ruth Babington

Is there anything from your perspective that you think it would be useful for secondary schools or colleges to know about a young person who might be feeling anxiety about coming in?

JOANNE

Definitely, I guess, the idea of instability, even though it might not seem like a good thing to experience something like that, as to this kind of fortified barrier, and it will make you stronger, at least that's what I believe. I also believe in getting help if you need, definitely, that's really important. Because without it, it's all well and good like me saying that, but without people to help them me it wouldn't.. so yeah, help and being willing, being willing to embrace stuff that isn't always gonna go right. I think it's important, and that's what I'd recommend anyone in that situation.

Ruth Babington

Okay. Well, honestly, I think your story is so powerful, like what you said, you should be really proud of yourself.

JOANNE

I don't want to sound like a kid crying over my really insignificant. I guess in terms they are really light. Again, they aren't tragedy, of course not, there not experiencing war, but there personal, I guess, challenges. That's what life is, it's a set of challenges, and you just gotta plough through and you know, but yeah. It was would have been easy or not easy to stay at home but, especially with the pandemic you become very reliant on being isolated, but that isn't healthy at all. So you always need to navigate out of that. Definitely if you're ever in that situation you need to find a way to get out definitely.

Ruth Babington

well thanks so much for sharing your story

JOANNE

Thank you

Joanne's second interview transcript

Ruth Babington

So tell me a bit about what you brought.

JOANNE

So I've brought in a, it was a tie I got from school, my second, well no out of the chronicles at school, it was the third one, so my last one. And we weren't meant to keep it, but I wanted to keep it was like a little clip on tie, it's purple. And I, on the front of it I've pinned my badge, do you remember me telling you I got like a certificate for good work in humanity?

Ruth Babington

Yes, yeah

JOANNE

I got the gold badge for it, and I pin that on the front. And then it's got a really special message on the back that I really liked that someone wrote, I'm a big Bowie fan, David Bowie and someone wrote on it, is there life on Mars? That's kind of been my ethos now, to going out there and conquering everything, anything I do that's new. It's really cringe. But I ask the question to myself, you know, is it possible and what will I find? And that's kind of the same as is there life on Mars? And it was, it was so cute, I just, I've kind of made that everything new I do now its that message that's on the back of the tie, kind of song for a lot of things, definitely

Ruth Babington

I might start using that as well.

JOANNE

Definitely, It's just such a good quote like when you're, especially when you've gone through a hard time, and you've come out the other end of it. And you can reassess it like is their life on Mars? You know, was there something new that I've learned from it? Did anything come from it that's good? That I grow about, did I grow from it? And it's just oh, yeah, that's so that's kind of a motto now. And I forgot to say a couple of umm when we had our meeting last, there were a couple of because I guess it's a bit hard to talk about it. But there were two deaths in my family last year, and one, one was one was hard. But then another was particularly hard because of the kind of emotions for someone you love. And it happened to someone who I love. And not that death happened to them. But someone they knew died, they were very close to them, and just to see this person struggle a lot. And I remembered that phrase, is there life on Mars? And it was kind of just speaking to myself, I will get through this. I'll come out at the end of it and be able to ask was there life on Mars? I forgot to mention that last week, but that was due to particularly hard times, you know but, you do come out the other end of things. Definitely.

Ruth Babington

That sounds like a lovely message.

JOANNE

Thank you. And it's just it was, it was just on the back of this tie someone wrote it and I'm like, wow, that's and especially because they wrote it with in mind that I'm going to another college starting something new. It's like, go out there and see if there is anything that you can take from it. And, you know, it was like aww yeah, I love it.

Ruth Babington

Do you know who wrote it?

JOANNE

It was a teacher actually a music teacher, and he was so lovely, and is actually a big support throughout my time school, and just the fact that he wrote that and probably won't remember me now, but like, I remember that, and it meant a lot to me, and it was just so sweet.

Ruth Babington

Yeah and obviously it means a lot because you kept it.

JOANNE

Definitely, of course, and there were other messages written on the tie, because it was one of those things that you take around the people instead of people signing the shirt. I didn't really want anyone to sign my shirt. So I just thought, wow, take off my tie, and you know, but yeah, well, that message in particular meant something to me.

Ruth Babington

How does it make you feel like talking about it with me now?

JOANNE

Happy, because a lot of the times the amount of instances, especially that one that I just said that I've used that phrase when I've come through the other side of something, or when I'm about to go through something, and I can probably count. I probably can't even count how many times I've done that and how important that phrase means to me. So to be able to look back on it, it makes me really happy, because each time I've asked that question. Even though it might have been something bad at first something has come out with it. And wherever its strengths or you know, I did find out that that there was life on Mars and, you know, it was it's just such a so it's really nice to talk about and share it with someone cause you don't really get opportunities to share it with people, cause it's such a little idiosyncrasy but aww yeah.

Ruth Babington:

Am I right in thinking, it sounds to me like what you're saying is that even though things are going to be difficult and you're going to struggle, you are going to come out the other side?

JOANNE

Exactly, of course, there is a silver lining, and you'll be able to look back on it, and you know, that question you posed at the start, you'll be able to answer some questions and resolve some things and be stronger. And so I guess, to me, it means there will be a light at the end of the tunnel. That's what it means to me. Definitely.

Ruth Babington

That's so insightful. It's really nice to hear you speak about it.

JOANNE

Thank you so much.

Ruth Babington

I just had a couple of questions. So I thought back to our, when we spoke on Friday, I just wanted to ask you, what would you like or do you think would be helpful to say to adults in secondary school, about your experience? What do you think would help?

JOANNE

Of course, so I think the key thing is if you're going through something really bad, or if you're going through a hard time is to seek help. That's instrumental. And then, I guess, another thing, another element of that is that no one can help you if you don't help yourself. So you have to be ready with that mindset of, I'm going to make some changes, and I am going to do this, and just go through everything with try to see the bright side of things, and know that you're going to get through something, you know, even if that's just the consolation that is going to be done soon, you know, just look for something good like that, and keep with it.

Ruth Babington

And what would you say to adults in college, about your experiences, like, what would you think would help in the college?

JOANNE

Okay, I think, probably on a more practical level, it's a time when you have to get your head down a lot more. And it's harder than high school art was or secondary school. But there is definitely things you can do to benefit yourself, it can't you can't invest your self entirely into work and stuff, you have to be prepared in terms of happiness, and you have to focus on yourself a lot of the time. So whilst there is an element of selflessness, I think you kind of have to be a little bit selfish, and think this what I have to do. So that's the advice I'd give to someone who is in college right now be selfish, even though you know, you know, because you do everyone makes so much time for other people., and for other things, you do have to give a little bit to yourself, because it's such a hard time. And it's strenuous. You have to yeah, so be selfish.

Ruth Babington

And this is my last question for you. If you could go back and talk to yourself when you were in secondary school, and when you were really struggling, so I think we spoke about it for you being during the pandemic, what would you say to yourself?

JOANNE

I would say that all hope is not lost, because you can go through that time with tunnel vision, and be like, nothing's gonna get better, and it's gonna be this way forever. But I would say, I'd like to present myself with like, a little image of myself now, because I don't think I'd believe you. If I said to myself, that it's, it's going to be okay, I don't think I would have believed it. Because you get into such a rut. So I would like to, like kind of present an image of how I'm living now. And kind of just, it's cliché, but just say it will be okay. And everything's gonna sort itself out definitely, and be willing to grow.

Marie's interview transcript

Ruth Babington

So before we get started, I forgot to ask when we last met, how old you were?

MARIE

I'm 17.

Ruth Babington

And what year are you in?

MARIE

I'm in Year 12. I had to restart Year 13.

Ruth Babington

Ahh, right, okay. We can talk a bit about that as we go through, and I know we mentioned it, how many secondary schools had you attended?

MARIE

Three.

Ruth Babington

And do you have any, like medical diagnoses or any conditions or anything like that?

MARIE

Regarding mental health, it's mainly depression. But then physical, I suffer a lot with migraines.

Ruth Babington

Migraines are difficult, alright and last time we spoke, we talked about the subjects you were doing and about potential careers, and I know you said you were interested in potentially a psychology career.

MARIE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

So I thought like, what are your goals and hopes for when you leave college and thinking about different Unis and things like that?

MARIE

Yeah, I am definitely thinking about going to certain Unis because they offer the course I want to do, but ideally it's York.

Ruth Babington

Fingers crossed, so I just wanted to start by asking you how you found sort of looking back on your school experiences?

MARIE

I found it...just looking back, I find it quite difficult, because there wasn't a lot of support for me, regarding both just helping me advance my learning, but then also helping me with my mental health. Because obviously, depression would be a very big factor in my life, and to say, I got no support for all of that, it was difficult.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, so it sounds like for you it was sort of twofold. So do you feel like you didn't get support with your learning and with your depression, so you didn't get support with either?

MARIE

Yeah, I didn't get support.

Ruth Babington

That must have been really hard. Okay, so if we just want to start and you can just tell me about your secondary school experiences to begin with?

MARIE

Yeah. Okay. So in year seven, I was put into the lower sets. And with them, you don't receive any help whatsoever, because you're with, with the students who misbehave. But when you want to learn, it's very difficult. And that is actually when I started my therapy. So it was just a lot of emotions put into one. Yeah, that was just mainly my year seven really. Umm but again, with my education there's just no support whatsoever, and I just felt like because you were in year seven, the teachers didn't exactly care about teaching you well, that was in North Chatterton which was known to be like one of the best schools around here.

Ruth Babington

Okay, so if we move on to think about Year 8

MARIE

I'm trying to think now... I kind of blocked out a lot of secondary school but halfway through year eight, that is when I moved to my second school. And again, I was put into the lower sets, were I obviously did not belong, and the only support that I had was by being given extra work in that same topic. So I was obviously I was doing really well in the subject because I was the highest achiever in that class because I was supposed to be in higher sets, but they just refused to send me up, yeah it's a bit strange. Umm just trying to think now, because obviously, it's been a while. But yeah, regarding education, there was just nothing there at all. I just felt like I was just put into a room, I could do .whatever I want. Yeah,

Ruth Babington

So you didn't really get a lot of guidance?

MARIE

Not at all. In year nine, it was quite similar because I moved to my third school then. Yeah. And they would even put me into, too high of a set for me, and then they wouldn't move me down, and even with like a lot of pestering, so I didn't understand the work being given to me at that point. But then, when I finally moved into my correct sets, I felt a lot more secure. I was a little more happier then umm I didn't get support for my mental health throughout all this time and that was just a founder, like a factor. Sorry. You how know I like achieved and stuff, and that went on until Year 11, but when Corona hit, I struggled a lot with the online learning, I couldn't do it, because that is when everything got way worse for my mental health. So I couldn't attend the online classes I fell really behind but I still passed all my GCSEs, but I could have done so much better if you know I actually had support, because they didn't. I feel like it went a bit mad during Corona, because I did all my GCSEs through it.

Ruth Babington

Aww yeah

MARIE

Yeah. There was just nothing there at all. But when we was in school, so in year 10, when we didn't get sent home, all of the best teachers were given to the Year 11s, because they were doing their GCSEs, actually thinking back now, during year seven, and year eight, they would also do that with the teachers in North Chadderton, they would put them all into like the higher years, but then it would be us being left out a lot. So during like mandatory classes like food tech, we wouldn't be allowed to do that, because the Year 11s had to do it.

Ruth Babington

Okay

MARIE

So we didn't get a lot of stuff for what we needed to learn. We were just shoved into what was left. But then, yeah, there was just no support at all. The only support that I did actually see was for the higher set students.

Ruth Babington

What kind of support were they getting?

MARIE

After school hours, they would literally have a brew with the teachers and just have discussions with them after school hours, which I don't even think is legal. Umm but yeah, there was definitely favouritism throughout the teachers, umm just thinking now of examples.

Ruth Babington

That favouritism you mentioned is that something that you saw through all the schools you were in, or was it just one?

MARIE

Every single school. So there's a theory in sociology, where the teachers will sort of favourite or put more of the attention on to the misbehaving students which are typically the boys, and that has happened throughout all the schools I've been to. And I have seen it in this one in fact. So it's quite funny to learn about it and witness it.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, that is interesting, so how does that make you feel?

MARIE

Makes me feel a bit left out, because I want to learn, but I'm not exactly getting the support I need. Because I can easily do the work by my, my teachers I've said I teach myself. But to want to learn and to not get it properly is so frustrating.

Ruth Babington

So what was your attendance like in secondary school?

MARIE

We didn't exactly have a number, but it was horrific. It was horrific.

Ruth Babington

And what was it sort of this might be difficult question, but what do you think made it difficult for you to attend?

MARIE

It was just my depression, mainly just struggling to get out of bed. And during Year 11 my migraines started, it's physically like horrible, so yeah, for me it's a lot of mental health.

Ruth Babington

So I'm just gonna go back and pick up on some of the things you said if that's alright? So yeah, it sounded like Year 7 was quite overwhelming for you then because obviously that was when you started your therapy. And you didn't feel that the teachers were taking you seriously. What kind of support do you think that you would have would have been helpful for you at that time?

MARIE

I feel like just thinking back, I feel like it would have been helpful for the not not really a support group. But just sort of like a Support Hub like here, because there wasn't any at all. But if there was there were for, like people who had learning difficulties, but not the ones who suffered mentally. So even that or just extra classes, do you know what I mean? With like more one to one support, because there was just none of that at all.

Ruth Babington

And you mentioned the Support Hub here, how does that work, can you tell me a bit about that?

MARIE

So typically, if you need it, you can just come down and you can talk to someone. But then if they know you quite well, they will have more conversations with you. You can have actual counselling in the school. I'm in like, I think I'm in CAMHS. Yeah. So they won't correlate, like they won't clash. So that's quite good. But with the school in like high schools, they would normally refer you to like healthy young minds, then that would just not help at all.

Ruth Babington

You didn't find that helpful?

MARIE

Have you heard about CAMHS here? Healthy Young Minds?

Ruth Babington

Yeah, I've heard of them through work.

MARIE

Yeah, they're not the greatest when you're like 14, 15 they'll still treat you like you're eight. There isn't any age differences. So I feel like school should have their own sort of counselling like they do here, because the only ones that they did, would be with the head of safeguarding, and even then it was very, very limited, she would always have to go to meetings and stuff during your appointment. So you just felt very disregarded and just left alone. It's not exactly what you need.

Ruth Babington

Did school try and support you with your non-attendance?

MARIE

No.

Ruth Babington

So what happened, was there any attempt to try and get you back in or?

MARIE

No.

Ruth Babington

So it was really just up to you?

MARIE

Doing whatever I thought of, yeah. They would talk to me about my attendance very rarely, but I just didn't really care to be honest, because their focus was on other students who had like, just sort of things going on.

Ruth Babington

How do you think they viewed you?

MARIE

Well, I had a teacher, so the head of year for me, tell a bunch of other teachers that I was lying about my mental health.

Ruth Babington

Can you tell me more about that?

MARIE

And I'm getting, I'm in therapy for BPD, as well. So you can imagine how that made me feel. I almost made a scene to be honest.

Ruth Babington

That's awful.

MARIE

So having teachers sort of say that about you, it's not, it's not the greatest. No,

Ruth Babington

I can imagine that's not going to make you want to come in?

MARIE

I didn't go in for a while after that, because I was just extremely angry about it.

Ruth Babington

So I was gonna ask you when you moved on to talk about Year 8. And I thought it was interesting, you said you sort of blocked out most of secondary school.

MARIE

I have

Ruth Babington

Can you tell me a bit about why you blocked it out?

MARIE

I mean, I've learned about it in psychology, and it is a perfectly reasonable explanation. So you, I appreciate you know this already, you tend to block out your emotions to sort of protect yourself from that traumatic past. So I believe that is what's happened. I've blocked out a lot of my childhood, for I think that exact reason, but, yeah,

Ruth Babington

It's really interesting to hear you talk about your experiences, because you're so reflective and self aware. And it's really difficult. I think for, you know, we can read about things, but I think it can be difficult to apply things to ourselves, but I think it's really impressive that you can

MARIE

That's mainly I I want to go into psychology. I've been through it. I know sort of things on how to help. But yeah

Ruth Babington

I think you'd be a really good psychologist. And then, so you said that you moved to, you moved school in Year 8, so why was it that you moved?

MARIE

Because I was heavily suicidal, I was attempting it quite frequently. And my Nan, who lives in Cambridge said, come on, come over here, we'll try and make you better. It did work, then my mum sent me back here. So yeah.

Ruth Babington

So Cambridge helped, do you think moving to a new school, a new place did that help?

MARIE

I think it did. Because I didn't have any ties here. So I just I felt like a new person, and I made new friends. It did take a while to make friends, but I just felt a lot more different, so how I normally do, I felt more active and stuff. But yeah.

Ruth Babington

So when you moved back was that in year nine?

MARIE

Nods

Ruth Babington

So you moved back and then in that move, you went to different schools is that right?

MARIE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

Okay, and how was coming into that school in Year 9?

MARIE

I felt like it was difficult because I'd heard sort of rumours about that school. I just I expected it to be quite bad. But I did have friends there, well very few friends. So it was kind of nice to have them. But I just had a bad sort of view on the school in general.

Ruth Babington

Before you arrived?

MARIE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

So did it surprise you then?

MARIE

It kind of surprised me because they were in the middle of like a big renovation. They were making a whole new school, so you'd have tiles falling down in the old school. The drama hall was so the drama classroom was about the same size, just the normal classroom, so you couldn't do anything. It was a bit strange. There was also an incident with the teacher, a supply teacher. Yeah, he was umm a bit strange.

Ruth Babington

Oh okay.

MARIE

Yeah. And there was a known umm there was a geography teacher who'd had intercourse with a student there. So having two occasions where, when you've like heard about that, or when it's happened to you, it's about like, you know, what was going on?

Ruth Babington

Yeah, that's a lot. So you mentioned that sort of the only support that you seemed to get was really extra work?

MARIE

Extra work in the Cambridge School, so it wasn't even support. It was just, oh, you finished this work, oh here have this, you know, get it done. So it was just to keep me busy, but there was just not enough support.

Ruth Babington

And you mentioned I think it was maybe one of your earlier schools that you felt like you were in the wrong set. But there was no, like they were sort of reluctant to move you?

MARIE

So that was in all of my schools. So I was first put into set five, and it just kind of.. how can I explain it? So seeing other people doing like, much more difficult stuff compared to you when you're doing extremely easy stuff. It was kind of umm I'm trying to put a word on it, made me feel a bit insecure, because I'm thinking like, I'm doubting my intelligence. So having sets definitely, is difficult, because it does put that mindset on you. That people are better than you, but I do think it is mandatory because you can't put someone who's more do you know what I mean? A bit more academically inclined and then make the other person do much harder work. But yeah, but in Crompton so my third school I

was put into set four in English. And I would ask to be moved up, because I would do exceptionally well. I was getting like sixes and sevens, in my exams I came out with a five, which is a bit strange. But whenever I'd asked to be moved up, they told me I was a special case. So I couldn't.

Ruth Babington

Interesting.

MARIE

It is I think it's because teachers sort of get aww what's it called now? So they have to bump up their sort of grades. So if a bunch of people are failing, and two people are overachieving, it'll balance it out. I think that's what it meant. But it put me in jeopardy, and I didn't really appreciate that.

Ruth Babington

So did you sort of feel like, sort of like your academic ability was not being prioritized for the class because of the teachers marks?

MARIE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

We've already sort of briefly talked about your secondary school experiences, I feel like there's quite a lot, you've experienced quite a lot there with it. So then, I know, you said there was no internal support for mental health. And that's something we spoke about, potentially you think it might be beneficial to have like a hub or something like that in secondary compared to here.

MARIE

Yeah

Ruth Babington

So going on to think about Year 11, and COVID, and online learning, so how did COVID impact you mentally, but also, I suppose, you know, like your experience of school?

MARIE

I think enabled my depression. So I could just stay in bed, I could just do that. I didn't really have to care. But then when you're in that mindset, from the age of 11, until you're 16, it sort of impacts you a lot. So being able to just sort of be absorbed by all of them feelings, it is a bit comforting, but then, you know, in the back of your head it's really bad for you. But you don't have the energy to sort of overcome that. So then, when you're just sat at home and expected to sort of do the work, like it's not enforced at all. It's just sort of like, oh, I don't really have to do it. then. I can just play my games, stay in bed sort of thing. So yeah.

Ruth Babington:

Was there anything because I know we've had, it's hard to hard to keep track, was it three, three lock downs that we had?

MARIE

Oh God, we had... I remember two. So there was the big one, and then there was one, in the January, December, January afterwards. So yeah.

Ruth Babington

Did you struggle throughout lockdown or was there any sort of particular maybe points that you felt, sort of that it was easier to manage?

MARIE

Do you mean during work?

Ruth Babington

Just in general yeah, just like with work, or with you mentally like, was there any sort of bit in lockdown where you did find it easier was it all sort of continually hard?

MARIE

I felt like it was easier to sort of feel better in myself, but it was a lot more harder for me to do the work. Because at that point, I just didn't care about my work but I wanted to sort of. So it was just a lot of being enabled no enforcement whatsoever. That yeah, that was literally all it was.

Ruth Babington

So thinking about secondary school, if I asked you to draw me a picture of your secondary school experiences, so I'm thinking like colours, shapes, what would it look like what would be in it?

MARIE

To be honest, I think it would just be gray, gray, because I started to sort of numb my feelings a lot. And the only ones I would feel was to be like upset and anger and rarely felt properly happy. And again, I've blocked a lot of it out, so even then just remembering things. It's just it's quite difficult. So it is just pretty cloudy and foggy.

Ruth Babington

It's a good visual. And then you mentioned that you weren't really getting any support at all with your mental health in school. Were you getting that externally?

MARIE

No, not really.

Ruth Babington

No. So you mentioned healthy young minds, have you had experience with them?

MARIE

I had around four years experience with them and then I decided it was absolutely not, it was just not helpful at all. And you'll find a lot of young people say that around my age, just not helpful.

Ruth Babington

And you said before about them sort of talking to you like you were a lot younger?

MARIE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

So what do you feel like they just weren't really seeing you as like a more of an adult?

MARIE

Yeah, they would definitely see me as sort of just a child really, and when I explained how I felt they sort of put my feelings down, like sort of invalidated, how I felt, there was a lot of pretty much that or I'd be discharged, because they would see I was getting better, but then I would like take a really bad sort of turn for the worst, and then I'd just be discharged and on to a different person, and I'd have to explain it all again, and it would just be that sort of cycle being put with different people. So not very helpful.

Ruth Babington

It doesn't sound it. And you mentioned that sometimes, you know, with your depression, you would feel like you physically couldn't get out of bed. So in terms of I'm just thinking about, like, you know, not attending for a long time. Did you have any specific worries about that, about missing school?

MARIE

When I'm in that state, I don't. I just I don't have energy to do absolutely anything. So at that time, I don't really care. But then afterwards, I'm like, what on earth was I doing? You know.

Ruth Babington

It's hard to see it, isn't it when you're in that, in that moment. Umm I know we talked about this, but you were saying school didn't really seem to make any effort to to bring you back. So you didn't have any home visits or anything like that from school?

MARIE

No.

Ruth Babington

Was that from any of the schools that you'd been to?

MARIE

No.

Ruth Babington

So how did that make you feel that there was sort of no attempt?

MARIE

To be honest, I honestly don't know. I just felt like they didn't really care.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, well, I mean, I think it's amazing where you are now. So we're gonna obviously move on to your college experiences now, so I'm really excited to hear sort of where you went from. So we sort of left it off, you were in year 11. Yeah, so you were in year 11, and you were doing your online learning, and you did your GCSEs, and you said you didn't do as well as you thought?

MARIE

I could have done so much better, but again, just lock down and the grades were bumped down anyway. So that was a bit annoying. I might not even be able to get into the university I want because of it.

Ruth Babington

Because of your GCSEs?

MARIE

You'd have to have a five in maths, I got a four. And not having teachers, like who don't know, no having teachers who don't care about you, and who don't explain what they're saying, it doesn't help when you're trying to get good GCSEs.

Ruth Babington

So thinking then about college, so we've got your GCSEs and now you're going to attend college. So how did you feel about going to college?

MARIE

I was really positive about actually, I really wanted to do it. Because I was always told its a different experience from high school, you'll love it, blah, blah, blah. Yeah.

Ruth Babington

So then when you started attending here, so like your first day, was it what you expected?

MARIE

Obviously it's over a year ago now, umm I wasn't sure what I expected. Just I don't know really. I just thought to myself, I'm just gonna get on with it, you know, do whatever get your work done. But yeah, I think a lot of umm trying to explain it. I don't I can't explain it. I thought I would be able to make a lot of friends easier. That was not the case. I think, I don't know, I thought it'd be different to how it is, but it's not really it's pretty much the same as high school.

Ruth Babington

Interesting. So how's it been for you then like the experience of college so far?

MARIE

Well, last year, I had 54% attendance because of my migraines. So it was a lot of no energy, just struggling a lot. So much struggling umm it's just, yeah, mental health, migraines. I could do the work. I was really good at the work. They didn't let me restart originally because of my grades because they were really good.

Ruth Babington

So they wanted you to keep going?

MARIE

Yeah, but I was I was deteriorating.. deteriorating. Yeah. I was going really bad.

Ruth Babington

It sounds like you know yourself really well, so I'd imagine that you know when you are finding it difficult?

MARIE

I know when it's past breaking point, I'm actually going back into sort of re-evaluating my medication because it's not helping anymore. I might be getting brain scans and stuff soon, I might even be going on medication for them. So it's quite a big, big thing for me.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, it seems like it's quite like a big part of your life, so obviously, it's going to impact your educational life.

MARIE

Yes.

Ruth Babington

So at the minute with college, how are you feeling about it?

MARIE

I don't exactly have an opinion on it. It's just sort of, I feel like it's a chore. Just come and do the work, go home, do more work, go to sleep, go to work, you know,

Ruth Babington

Part of the day?

MARIE

Yeah, I don't exactly see it as anything over than just school.

Ruth Babington

It's interesting, because I know we mentioned at the start, you have quite a clear goal of where you want to be. Do you think you sort of see college just as like a step towards that?

MARIE

I don't see it as anything more than just a requirement

Ruth Babington

And I know, we spoke about secondary and how, you know, you didn't really feel supported. How do you feel here in terms of support?

MARIE

I feel a lot more supported here. However, this sometimes I feel too supported.

Ruth Babington

Okay

MARIE

So they will, say with my migraines. If I have a really, really bad episode, they will try and push me to go home, but I'm like, I need to say for my attendance, because even now my attendance is quite low because of migraines and stuff. But then they'll sort of push me to go home and stuff. I can't, I don't have another chance at restarting, I have to do this. I know where they're coming from. They do care, but yeah.

Ruth Babington

It's difficult for you though, because I can imagine like, obviously, you physically feel it, it's really difficult. But you feel like you have to stay?

MARIE

I have to stay mainly because my mum will go mad at me if I go home. Yeah.

Ruth Babington

So how was your mum sort of through like your pattern of non attendance?

MARIE

Umm she sort of just put it mainly as being my fault. But it's not really my fault, if I'm extremely, you know, unwell, I can't read sort of. It's a lot of just confliction, conflict Is that right? Yeah. Yeah, I've got a migraine right now, so I can't think.

Ruth Babington

Do you want to get some water or something?

MARIE

I'll be fine.

Ruth Babington

Are you sure? Well, if you want to take a break or anything, just let me know. Umm so I'm just thinking about going back to secondary school, and you mentioned like having that sort of internal base, like an internal sort of counselling would have helped you. Is there anything that you think would be useful for you to say to staff members from secondary school?

MARIE

Don't label and don't sort of rely on stereotypes on students, because, yeah, they might have bad attendance, but they're trying to sort of overcome that battle themselves. You don't know what's going on. That's my main sort of thing.

Ruth Babington

I think that's really powerful what you said, because I think that's really easy for adults to do.

MARIE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

And obviously, you've been there. So looking back, and sort of where you are now, to where you were in secondary, so if we think at the beginning of secondary and now that you're here in college, how do you feel sort of overall, looking back on that journey?

MARIE

I feel like it's been a tough one. Definitely a challenging one. Yeah, that's mainly it really, I could have done better, but obviously, I don't think I could have sort of. Does that make sense?

Ruth Babington

Yeah, I mean, you had a lot of obstacles and like, things in your way. I mean, I think you should feel really proud of , yourself, because the things that you're telling me that you've like dealt with, I mean, I think like adults who have a job and don't have to go to school and do exams would struggle. So I think it's really impressive where you are today.

MARIE

Mmmm

Ruth Babington

So if I asked you to draw me a picture of your college experiences, you know, like we asked about your secondary school, what would that picture look like? What colour would it be? What would be on that image?

MARIE

I hate to say but it's just same as high school.

Ruth Babington

The same?

MARIE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

And is there anything that you think that could improve it?

MARIE

Tell you what is annoying, the only support that we receive mainly is during our lunches.

Ruth Babington

Lunches?

MARIE

So there isn't like a dedicated period, it's in our lunch. So it's sort of you either eat, you have your energy bag or you have support, it kind of conflicts.

Ruth Babington

Right, so are you saying then potentially having something timetabled?

MARIE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

That you could go to and seek support then?

MARIE

Yeah. Just not sort of in our lunch when that is our time. Because last year for me my lunch on a Friday was my only time. Because I was in from nine until the end of the class, I get home at five sort of. So I feel like there are definitely just needs to be like a sort of dedicated time slot for it, not just in our lunch, because then if it's in our lunch no one really wants to go to it, do they? They'd rather eat and spend it with their friends.

Ruth Babington 3

Yeah, and that's your time, isn't it? And would you say that that's, we were talking about college there, would you say that that's something that that will help at secondary school as well?

MARIE

I think it would honestly. But then in secondary school, the only time when you can properly do that is that like, after hours so when they all want to go home. So what I feel like we'd be better off for high school, say if, because we have to do a sort of double English. So we do English lit and language. So

I'd say for one of the lessons in language, and one of the lessons in lit, there could be a sort of support for whichever one you needed, so you'd get four lessons, and no it wouldn't be four, say, for example its four, you'd have two lit, two lang, if you needed help with your lit, you'd have one of that other lessons in that with a sort of just a, you know, an available member of staff to help you a lot, even if it's like with four other people, because then you're still getting a lot more help than you are in a class full compared to four. So I feel like that would definitely help and then like opposed to the language, do you know what I mean?

Ruth Babington

And you've spoken quite a lot about your sort of like academic experiences, and you'd be in those lower sets and the frustration with that. Do you feel like that sort of like, is that in your depression very separate things?

MARIE

Yeah

Ruth Babington

So that's not related to your... that's more just frustration with the system maybe?

MARIE

Nods

Ruth Babington

And when we spoke on Tuesday, I thought it was really interesting. You mentioned like feeling like a sense of like inequality almost, like you said that some of you felt like the teachers reacted a certain way to you because of a particular class that you were in?

MARIE

Kind of, I felt like they would definitely prioritize the highest sets compared to us, which it does make sense I've learned about it in sociology, it does make sense to me. But then, you know, it's, it's extremely unfair for when the people actually want to learn, they're trying to move up into different sets, but then you're not letting them. And then, you know, they have the, like, the opportunities to do really better, but then your not letting them sort of, so there definitely is inequalities with that, and seeing other students stay behind after hours having a cup of tea with the bloody teachers you know

Ruth Babington

I can imagine, yeah, that's really difficult.

MARIE

But then you see that as well in the consequences. So if someone was to have a sort of fight with another student, but then if that student was sort of in like a higher set or more popular, they would have less repercussions than the other person, and you would see that.

Ruth Babington

Oh. I mean, I can't imagine how you would have felt like seeing that.

MARIE

It actually happened with me. Yeah. So I had a fight with a person, and they were the one who started a really bad rumour about me, I personally hate rumours, because it really affects me. And I think that does link a lot, if I do have BPD, which it my therapist pretty much said I have it. So having

that and having that much anger, but then they get nothing at all, no repercussions, and then it was me who got it all. You know, there should be sort of, like, you know what I mean? But because they saw that she experienced a lot more than me, they would sort of prioritize her, you know, like, keep her, you know, sort of in a bubble. Do you know what I mean? It's hard to explain

Ruth Babington

No, no, you are explaining it. I'm just like, annoyed for you that that happened. So when you said that they thought that she'd experienced more than you what do you mean?

MARIE

So you would see it a lot because she was a sort of individual to always get into fights, but then that was because of how she acted. So she would constantly make lies about people, and then that would affect other people. So for example, this girl lied about we was in year seven at this point, he was a year 11, and he died and he died from a car crash, but then she said that he assaulted her. But then a lot of people hated her for that she'd get a lot of stuff inflicted on her, but then she would carry it on. And then whenever she would sort of do that people would retaliate. The retaliators would get more of a consequence than her, because obviously, she had experienced a lot of hate from the stuff that she's done, but then she would never get in trouble for it. And I feel that is extremely unfair. And, you know, there definitely is flaws in sort of the sanctions in schools and you see it especially in boys as well.

Ruth Babington

That's really interesting, what you're saying. I think it's really reflective of you as well, like just thinking about you seeing skills that in the schools that you've been in.

MARIE

But it links a lot in with bullying as well. So when you know that the sanctions are extremely unfair, you're less inclined to report bullying, because you know, nothing's going to be done about it. And that ties in a lot with because I've seen in some of my friends, they would be getting heavily bullied, they would underachieve, teachers would be like what are you doing, you know, do something about it, or they would witness the bullying actually happening and then nothing would be done about it. And then you would fall under and they would get more attention because they are misbehaving, they would get more you would get less, it's extremely unfair. So having that sort of feeling against your teachers, why you just don't like them, for that reason. Definitely needs to have like a change in that.

Ruth Babington

Definitely. And I'm just think going back to think about your experiences. Was there any school that you had a really good relationship with a member of staff?

MARIE

Typically, I really did have a good relationship with my teachers, because I cared about what I was doing. But even then, you know, there were flaws.

Ruth Babington

Were there any members of staff that you felt like you could talk to about, you know, what you were going through, like with your mental health and obviously struggling to come in?

MARIE

To be honest, no. I could talk to them, yes. But then I couldn't talk to them properly about stuff that I was experiencing, because they'd run and tell safeguarding and then they would contact my mum, and then it would just be a lot of that.

Ruth Babington

Do you think having someone like that at school would have helped?

MARIE

I feel like it would, but then they would have the sort of similar rules as the safeguarding team, if you tell them one certain thing, they're gonna break that confidentiality and tell someone else, it makes a big deal about it. So I feel like, yes, you are under 16, but you should help, you should have a say, you know, so instead of telling your mum straight away, for example, you should talk about it first. You should have a discussion between the three of you, they should talk about it. But instead no they just constantly, not constantly, instantly pick up the phone, when you tell them not to. You know, they wouldn't talk about it first.

Ruth Babington

Right, okay, has that happened to you?

MARIE

A lot of times, but then I get in trouble with my mum because of it.

Ruth Babington

Right.

MARIE

So when I'm trying to explain, don't tell my mum, I'll get in trouble. They do it anyway, you know, I get in trouble. I'm less inclined to tell them.

Ruth Babington

I can see how that happens. Before these conversations do they have they would they say to you before you know, if you tell us certain things, we are going to have to tell a parent?

MARIE

Very few.

Ruth Babington

Oh so a couple of times that happened you didn't know that that was going to happen?

MARIE

When I was younger, yeah. But then when I got older, I witnessed it. And I'm like, why should I tell them about this? I'm gonna get, you know? Yeah.

Ruth Babington

No, it's really, I think all the points that you're making are really important and really interesting, so sort of thinking about where you are now, going to ask my favourite question about drawing a picture of the future for you. What would that look like?

MARIE

To be honest, I'm not entirely sure. Because I don't know what's gonna happen regarding my health. I don't know if it's gonna go down if it's gonna go up. It's just a lot of blurriness at the minute.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, a bit uncertain. Yeah. I mean, you said that you've got like some changes coming up with like, your medication and things. And are you still going to be doing your therapy, is that like a long term thing?

MARIE

Yes. I hope so. Anyway,

Ruth Babington

Do you feel like that helps?

MARIE

I'm currently waiting for this new therapy, so I don't know how good of it how it'll work for me, because it's group therapy, I've not tried that before. And I know it's one that I've been trying to fight for, so I'm really like I'm optimistic about it. But yeah.

Ruth Babington

Well, is there anything else that you think would be useful for you to share about your experiences or that you think would be helpful for other adults who work at schools to know about?

MARIE

I feel like they should definitely be more educated on mental health difficulties, because they just read stereotypes. So for example, the teacher who said, I lied about my depression. He said that because he saw me laugh once with my friends. And he actually said that to the teachers who explained it to me, because I laughed.

Ruth Babington

So with that incident that you mentioned, did he ever apologize to you?

MARIE

No, absolutely not.

Ruth Babington

So there was no sort of attempt?

MARIE

He saw his authority as something of the utmost importance, he could not sort of admit when he was wrong. He couldn't apologize for anything. So I got in trouble with him for helping my friend, to talk to someone about her mental health. But he thought I was skipping class so he screamed at me. When my friend told him about this, he said, oh, tell her I'm sorry. Never did you know, he just never admitted his mistakes at all. They definitely need to be a bit more educated.

Ruth Babington

And what would you say to any young people who might be going through a similar thing, like you were in secondary?

MARIE

I honestly don't know.

Ruth Babington

It's a hard question.

MARIE

It's honestly because I've dealt with it all myself. I've sort of just learnt to accept it, because I know, at this point, and now that it's only just recently started becoming a really big thing, mental health. But there isn't a lot in place yet, so I'm hoping for them that it will be there when they need it. But otherwise, I don't really have anything to say.

Ruth Babington

I think it's amazing what you have said, I mean, I think it's clear to me, like looking back, it's really impressive what you've managed to overcome, like, do you feel a sense of like pride that you know that you are here you're doing this?

MARIE

All I can think about is I could have done better and that is just true.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, I know you mentioned COVID had an impact on your GCSEs

MARIE

Yeah. I'm just thinking actually, only recently, my mum told me that she's proud of me. So having that sort of that I don't know. I am starting to think I have done really well for what's happened but it's a bit hard.

Ruth Babington

It might be a thing that you know, because you've been so in it, I think it's hard to take a step back and look at it like it's easy for me to say because obviously I didn't go through it, you did. But how did it make you feel when your mom said that?

MARIE

This is unbelievable. She's just not like that at all. So, yeah.

Abby's interview transcript**Ruth Babington**

So before we get started, I just wanted to ask what year you were in.

ABBY

So I should be in the year 13. But I left and restarted. So obviously, I'm turning eighteen soon whereas everyone else in my year is, like 16 turning 17.

Ruth Babington

I see. Right. And I know I'm going to be taking some notes as well, just as my laptop. We spoke briefly about secondary schools, didn't we? So how many secondary schools did you attend?

ABBY

Two

Ruth Babington

Two. And do you have any, like medical conditions or any diagnoses or anything like that?

ABBY

No

Ruth Babington

And last time we met, I know we spoke about the subjects that you were doing.

ABBY

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

So I just wondered, What do you want to do after college?

ABBY

Umm law.

Ruth Babington

Oh amazing.

ABBY

Yeah. I've always wanted to do law, too. So I don't know. It just it just seems interesting doesn't it? I think I, it's never like changed and thought, oh, I don't want to do that anymore. Like, I've always wanted to do it.

Ruth Babington

Do you enjoy doing it here?

ABBY

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

Fab, so how did you find doing the live chart? What was it like?

ABBY

Pretty easy

Ruth Babington

Was it?

ABBY

Yeah. Like it's a bit skew whiff this. Like I just go like from wherever.

Ruth Babington

How was it sort of reflecting back on your experiences at secondary? Because that was a bit of time ago

ABBY

Mmmm, to look, there's a lot more bad than there is good.

Ruth Babington

Oh

ABBY

Whereas compared to that one, there's a lot more good than there is bad. You know.

Ruth Babington

Interesting.

ABBY Yeah. So yeah, so school is more bad than good. And college is more good than bad

Ruth Babington

So it seems like you are saying you are having a better experience now?

ABBY

Yeah

Ruth Babington

So we'll start with your secondary school experience.

ABBY

Yes.

Ruth Babington

So if you just want to take the floor and tell me about your secondary experiences

ABBY

So starting year seven at Saddleworth, I was excited, obviously, to start, but I was a bit scared, because obviously, it's a like new beginning, none of my friends went there. But my dad passed away when I was in like, the last few years of primary school. So yeah, so obviously, I started I was very excited. But then obviously, I didn't really like none of my friends were going. Ahh so then I think it's about six months into year seven, and I got really close to this big group of girls. And like, I was,

like, really liking it. Like, my mom was letting me go out more like go out further, you know, to them where I've been, met what I thought was really, really nice girls, like I was loving, like learning and stuff like that. And then one of the girls was starting to turn really funny. And she was like, like, I'd say that oh, what you doing at the weekend. And she but oh, I'm doing nothing, but she would be doing something. But she, like not told me or not invited me. And then she was the main one. And then a lot of the other girls started to join in. And they just started being really, really nasty to the point where I wouldn't go to school. I just I wouldn't go. But I never told anyone because I didn't know who to tell. I felt like like everyone was against me like that. Because they were it was like a mess. You know, in year seven big groups. And it would do is just like a massive group. But no one I felt like no one was there. Like because everyone had turned. So it was really, really tough. Because I felt like I couldn't even though I had people to talk to I felt like I didn't know how to come out and say I'm being bullied.. I didn't know how to say it. Ahhh but eventually I did tell my mum and she went through all the things with school. And it was I decided that it was best if I move schools because I just thought I don't want I don't want to stay there you know, so I moved. So I had about a good few months off school where I just wasn't doing anything really. I was still only young. So I left then and I started Year 8 at Royton and Crompton but I got a job in the summer holidays of year seven to year eight. Ahh my uncle owns a skip hire business. so I worked there in the in the offices in the school holidays and I loved it and I felt like when I started getting a bit of money I was like oh I've got money to do stuff and I don't need to ask my mom cos my mom's always like it's just always been her obviously cuz my dad passed away it's literally just been her so I never liked asking and said you know, so I always felt bad. So yeah, I started Year 8 and then my appendix I had a thing where I went in hospital, so I missed a lot of time at school and they said that there was nothing wrong. I just had cysts on my ovaries so they said that nothing was wrong. So then I was back to school and then I was rushed back into hospital and I had to have surgery because it burst.

ABBY

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

Oh no

ABBY

I know. So then I was off for quite a while because obviously I had to recover and stuff. Amm and then the same thing kind of happened again. Met a really nice group of girls, that I thought were really nice. So getting really close, and then they just turned again. So then I like went through it again. But luckily I had one friend like throughout it, like everything. And it was literally just me and her. Amm so secondary school was a bit even even like moving Royton and Compton was a bit like, oh, because you're older. And you know, like I was like it's happening again. And I can't move again because it's too far into it. And then obviously COVID hit. So that was about year nine, I think the end of year nine, year ten. So then that hit and obviously it was the thing that you can't see family you can't go out, you can't do this, you can't do that. Amm so then my nan passed away during COVID. But then I had to sit all my exams so but obviously because it was they weren't proper exams we did that forty four minute I did forty four minute exams, like obviously throughout all this with all these nasty girls. And obviously through my nan dying and I'm trying to be there for mum. So I literally I quit, I had one day of school because I couldn't I just physically couldn't miss it. But I sat on my exams and did brilliant like, I got like I got a nine four eights two sevens and a six. So obviously I was like, so like good. And so yeah, that was pretty much school. Yeah, it was secondary schools. It was a bit of a rough time, but I made it and I did it.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, I mean, listening to what you said..

ABBY

Yeah when I read it back. I'm like, Wow, a lot happened.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, definitely. So I just want to go back over some of the things you said. So I know you were talking about in year seven, you had that group of friends. And you said that you felt like you had no one to go to. When you say like no one to go to are you talking about like staff as well?

ABBY

Yeah. Like, even though they was all lovely and when they when they did know, but it's just like, unless you've been through it. And you're in that situation you just feel like you don't want to talk to anyone and you don't you don't want to tell them you don't you don't know how to sit down and say, Oh, look like I'm being bullied. But you don't you don't know how to come out with it. Like even now sometimes I think if I've got something I need to say I just think I don't know how to say it. Like I physically can't come out with it. And it was actually my brother that come in my room. And obviously I was really, really upset. My younger brother and he told my mum, and she sat there and she made me like, tell her what was wrong. And she wouldn't leave. You know. And obviously when I did, I felt like it was like lifted off when I did tell someone, but it's definitely hard to think oh, I don't know how to say I don't know how to come out with this, you know?

Ruth Babington

Yeah, definitely. And whenever you were sort of in that phase, of you not being able to tell anyone, how did that feel for you?

ABBY

It was just awful. I felt like that. Like there wasn't really a point anymore. Because I didn't know what to do. Like, there was obviously a lot of support and people to go to but I just didn't know how to go to. And to just come out with it. You know? So yeah.

Ruth Babington

And then you mentioned obviously that you had to go to the hospital with the cysts?

ABBY

Yeah. So it was like, like one week I was in for like a week. And then like six weeks later, I was back in for another week. Because they just didn't know what was wrong. I kept saying, my mum kept saying it's definitely her appendix they said it's not, you know, we can't see it on the scans, you know, but they obviously couldn't see it because it burst. Then I felt like when I come back into school, like I felt like it because I've been off for so long. It felt like a slap, to fit back in you know? And it was hard to like go back in when everyone's already been settled back in, if that makes sense.

Ruth Babington

Definitely. And then you mentioned when you went to Royton, wasn't it the next school? And you've got a good group of friends and then sort of similar things started happening. So how did that make you feel?

ABBY

So that was awful as well. But I think I'm pretty sure I came out with it right away and went and but then again, at Royton and Crompton I has a really lovely head of year. And he was just he was just

like a friend. He weren't like they weren't like like obviously he was a teacher and he was very professional but he wasn't like like he's speak to you as if you was his friend and you know, you could go speak to him and I went and told him as soon as it started happening and showed him everything and said and that got dealt with straight away and like there was there was all severely punished. Whereas at Saddleworth I didn't feel like the teachers, I could go to them and tell them because they weren't as you know, they didn't seem to care as much where as he was just you know Oh, he was so lovely. And he just, you could just tell him and he'd sort it out straightaway.

Ruth Babington

So that seems like that made the difference for you. It enabled you to stay then?

ABBY

Yeah knowing that there was like some kind of like safety net. And obviously we've having like one of like my friend that's been there throughout all of it. And she's like, never left my side. Obviously, I felt better. You know that I had someone. But then there was also a worry of like, if she weren't in, I felt like I couldn't go in because I thought, Where am I gonna go at dinner? And lunchtime? What am I gonna do? I don't want to be stood on my own. I don't want to be like a target. You know, so there was like that worry as well. But I managed to get through it.

Ruth Babington

So how did you feel whenever she was in then because I know you said you sort of felt potentially sometimes like a target when she's not in?

ABBY

Yeah so I felt like, I just felt safe. Like, there was someone like there, you know, that I wasn't like on my own in anything, you know, I had someone with me

Ruth Babington

Yeah, that's really nice. And then I know, you mentioned about COVID and how that impacted so obviously, you couldn't see anyone, were you coming into school during COVID or were you at home?

ABBY

No homeschooled. So in the very first locked down when it was very serious, I got up every single day, I logged on did extra work, like went for walks, you know, like, started being a bit healthier, you know, all stuff like that. And then I know the first one, I didn't know, sorry, I've got that mixed up. The first one, I didn't do anything I didn't log on, I didn't take it serious. Because like the teachers weren't really, like working on the computers were so new to everyone. No one, you know, especially when a lot of the teachers were older, like they didn't, they didn't know, you know, how to use the stuff and the work. Like it won't be like meetings, like a FaceTime, call it just be this is the work, you have to upload it yourself. You know, you have to just go through it yourself. But then the second one when it comes to that when everyone has to stay, and that's when I proper, like tried really hard in it. And then after COVID Did you go back into school? Yeah

Ruth Babington

How was that going back?

ABBY

That was fine. Like I was excited to go back because I've not seen my friends you know, not seeing any of the teachers like just to not be stuck in the house.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, you were looking forward to getting back?

ABBY

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

So going back to your first school in year seven, whenever you found that a bit difficult. How did that make you feel when you were going in? If you had to draw a picture of that, of your year seven experience what would be in that picture?

ABBY

Just like loads of worry, like anxiety, stress, like, like I felt like I wouldn't be able to talk I wouldn't be able to move like, I just don't think I would. I know I never went in I just physically would not go in. I said I was poorly. Or like, I can't go in today, you know, you're just off of so much stress. And like literally just worry like, if I did go in it just be worry. Like I've just been crying all the time. It just wasn't obviously a nice experience.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, definitely. And how long were you in that school for?

ABBY

About six months

Ruth Babington

Okay and then you made the move?

ABBY

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

So then thinking about where you are now and looking at the next place. So if you want to talk me through this?

ABBY

Yeah, so so in the summer holidays of like, year 11 to year 12. I, we finished school on the 31st of May, because obviously it was COVID so the exams are done so they thought, there's no point keeping them in so we got to finish. So I already had a job working in a pub. I left the umm what's it called, I left the like the skip hire business and I started working in a pub. I've worked in the pub since 2020. But obviously lock down and then I got a job in a nursery because I thought I've got all this much time off. I might as well like earn money you know, there's no point being sat at home doing nothing. So I worked in the six weeks holidays like plus June I worked seven till half four at the nursery and then did five to like 10 at the pub every single night. And I saved up so much money I was so proud of myself thought nobody else has got this much money at my age like I've literally been working forever but I love doing it, I love working it was such a new experience to like like feel like I have to be responsible for these like little children. You know, it was a really good experience to work work in there and obviously then I started Year 12. So obviously I told the nursery that I could only come back in the school holidays you know because of that. So I have good friends because like some of my some people I knew from other schools obviously come here. So I had a really good

group of friends here. And then throughout it I split up with my ex boyfriend. A bit like through it that wasn't like, I'd already knew that it wasn't for me anymore. So I'd already like pictured it. So when it happened, it wasn't that oh my god, but what am I gonna do because I'd already processed and that wasn't really a big impact. And then I did my subjects I used to do English Literature, History, law and sociology now sociology, history and English I studied at school. And I liked sociology, I was doing really well in it, but I knew it like the back of my hand, so it was boring. I've literally just sit there and know it all. Law I really loved I love my teachers, and I loved everyone in the class. English was okay, but it just I didn't really like it much. And history, it was not like it was at school, I loved it, I got grade eight in history at school, and it just was nothing like it was so boring. I just didn't understand it and I didn't like it. And then I got really, really bad migraine. So I was under the doctors for like having migraines. And I used to like, I used to say, like I used to ring up and say I can't come in, I've got a migraine and they be like, well, it's just a migraine. I said but if you don't get migraines you don't know like physically, like violently throwing up, you know, my head's throbbing, like you just need to be sat in a dark room. So then I just like lost interest in English, I've got to drop history because of the stress, because obviously you do four, but then you do three. So I don't know if that's a bit. I feel like that's a stress because you feel like you've got you've got four to do in the first year. I think this is the only place that you've got four to do. But then you know that you drop it, and you only do three next year, and you only come out with three A levels and half an a level. So to me, and when I spoke to a lot of my friends, they said I just don't see the point in it. Because you know, you're just going to drop it, you can't go to university with one half an a level and get in. You know, I just feel like it's not really worth the stress. That's in my opinion, because I only do three now. And I didn't like that used to like it's a lot like a lot of content and a lot of stuff to remember without the added one. So I got to drop that. And I was feeling a bit better. I was like, oh, like, I can just work on these. And then I just started to I just really started to dislike them. And I got really bored of them. And like I've told them that like I wasn't I wasn't liking it. You know, they tried to try to help but I just, I just didn't understand it. And I weren't enjoying it. So if I'm not enjoying something I'm not going to try in it because you know, why would I?. And then there was an instance where I've not I've not come in, I think it was the second lesson of the week I had not come in. And one of my teachers emailed me and he said umm, like what are you doing, why you not in? And I said, I don't feel well, I'm not coming in today. And he sent me a really nasty message that like an actual text message off his phone saying, I think you underestimate how important these exams, there's nothing worse than feeling like you could have done better. Don't waste your potential. So I read that. And I thought one it's come off your personal phone number, it's not even come off your email, and this man is supposed to be the principal or whatever he is. And I just thought, if you're picking up that some if I as a teacher was picking up that someone's not in lessons, and they're not trying much and they'd been in to say, I'm not really enjoying it. I wouldn't turn around and be like, Oh, well. You know, if you don't try you are just going to waste away. You know, I wouldn't I wouldn't say something like that. I'd say well, there's obviously something going on, what's wrong, you know, why don't you take like, take a minute to explain that was one of my English teachers. And then I went to my other English teacher, the woman one and I told her everything that was going on. And she said, I'd like noticed like that something something's not right, you know, like you missing a lot of these lessons. And I said, I'm just really not enjoying it. And it's just not for me. But it was two far, it was about Christmas time it was too far into the course to swap and learn three new subjects. So she said book a careers appointment. So I booked one and we spoke about everything and he said, Now I don't know where we got it from. But I was always under the impression that if you want to do law, you need to do three really traditional A levels to go to university but you don't have to at all you can do that you can go and do an apprenticeship at college and then go to university to do it. So I just got to a really low point, but I'd noticed and I'd been for help to say I think it's best now for me if I leave, have time off, you know, and then come back you know and start again in Year 12 and picked something different, you know. So we went through the process of that and I left. And I was so happy when I left, like my headache, the medication I've been

given had worked, so I stopped getting migraines I'd had my tonsils took out at the start of the year. So that was good because I always had tonsillitis. And I was always I felt literally woke up and I couldn't breathe. I literally couldn't swallow anything. So I'd had them taken out and I had time to recover and was working more. And then I bought my first girls holiday for July last year, just started going out all the time, really, really, like loving life and having fun, you know? So went on the girls holiday, and then come back, and then I said, right, like, I need to think about what to do, do I want to and I pictured it. So I did exam invigilation in a school. Like because I'd left the nursery. So I was like working in the pub and doing that. I really loved it. But then I thought and then they'd said to me, like there's a position like to train to be like a school TA. But then I just sat back. And I thought, in my mind, I thought, I don't want to work in a school for the rest of my life. And I don't want to work at the pub for the rest of my life. So she said, so if you want to do something, you've got to go back now because obviously you can't come back after your 18, you've got to come back before, you know. So she said you need to do that. And you need to think so I said I'm gonna go back. So I booked an appointment with Emma. And I said, she went right, pick complete different subjects what you did, she went so you wanted to do law, so she went pick law she went and just pick two other subjects that you think might be interesting for you. So I said, Well, what about psychology? So I said, Yes, I'll pick psychology. And then I picked biology, but purely on the fact that I did really well in school. So I thought, oh, like it's right or wrong, you know, as psychology, stuff like that you can, as long as you can persuade what you want to say, you know, you can pick marks up so that I picked that because it's like a right or wrong answer. So obviously, I started off doing all of that. And then, like a bit into the course of biology I went to so I have a mentor on Friday mornings because that obviously I'd left and come back literally just to make sure that I'm okay. We're able to speak about anything, you know, that was really helpful, because I just think it's a bit of time to just like, cool off. And, you know, she can tell me what she thinks, you know, she didn't tell me to do anything or ask anyone for anything. So and I said to her, I said, I'm not struggling, I said, but because everyone's just left school when she's talking about things to catch up, like, like, you know, just come from GCSE. I said, I don't really remember because it's like two years since I left school, obviously, where everyone else has just left. I said, so I don't really like remember stuff. She went, okay. So I went to my teacher, and I said it's like a workshop, but look, because we do workshops, you know, wherever your falling behind, you can go and it's like a one to one. So they are really helpful. So she said, they don't do them at this time of year, they only do it if you've got a low GCSE grade, like not people that have like got an 8 in biology. So she give me this book. And she said, once we've done our next like assessment, if you feel like you're still not like picking it up, or you're not understanding, she went then we can think about, like putting you into the workshop, but they don't really open up until after you've done an exam because there's nothing to prove that you're struggling. So I booked another careers appointment yesterday umm purely on the fact because I was worried if I want to go. Because obviously the entry requirements for law are quite high, you know? So I was worried like, if I do well in psychology and law, if I don't do well in biology, then I feel like I don't know what I'm gonna do because I've, like I wouldn't I wouldn't get the requirements to get in. So he said to me, mostly to get into law to do law, you need like three A's. And he said and off your GCSE results. Obviously, you could get three A's. I said, but I just feel like with biology, I'm not going to do that well. I said I probably get an A star in law and psychology like in all my tests, I've got full marks, you know, so I feel like I'm really confident in them, but not so much biology. So he said umm, he said I can apply for a thing where it can reduce your grade by two. So you can get like if your predicted three A's you can get an A and two B's. So it's like if your parents have never been to university or no one in your family, you can get grade reductions. He said but even if you didn't get three A's, he said a lot of them take like like Manchester Met takes three B's for law. He said so obviously it's a more it's that more thing and then he said and if worse comes to it you can do a year where you go to university but it's like a foundation year where you like build up the knowledge and then you start the university next year he said oh, there's loads of options. But he's put on a point that, like if I could have a bit of more

help with biology, you know, so he said once it comes from that, so I was feeling like really positive about it. So yeah, that was college.

Ruth Babington

I mean you've got so much detail, you've only been at college since September.

ABBY

Yeah. I mean, I did. I did last September till Christmas. Yeah. So yeah, pretty much.

Ruth Babington

So there was just a couple of things I wanted to go back on, it's really nice to hear the way you talk about your jobs, because you obviously worked really hard.

ABBY

Yeah, I can't believe I've had so many jobs. Like when I say to people, like, I was writing a CV, and they're like, how have you had that many jobs, but I've just been lucky to have the opportunities to know people to get into and you know, to do it, but I really, like I love work. I love having my own money and being able to do whatever, I bought a car, like I've been able to save up and like buy a car, you know? And yeah, it's like, because of people I work with, like, they're all different ages, but we're all like, so close, like, I think of them as my friends. So when I go there, it's just like, like, I'm doing something other than, you know, work.

Ruth Babington

Yeah.

ABBY 26:21

I think obviously, sometimes it can be a bit much like when I first started. And when I first did Year 12, I just did loads and loads of hours. And then when I said when I would go when I was going back, I want set days and set hours. So I know like I work on Monday, Thursday, Wednesday night. And then all day Sunday. So now I've got Tuesday and Saturday, and Friday, obviously to catch up and like do whatever. But I think it is, I think it is really useful to have a job because then you don't have the stress like oh, well, I'm not gonna be able to, like if your friends are going out. Like you're not gonna be like oh well I can't pay for anything. But I think just don't overdo it too much. Because that's what I did the first time around.

Ruth Babington

Yeah.

ABBY

So it's just that trying to balance it all. Like, don't get me wrong, like so like, when I'm at college, like a Wednesday and Thursday, I'll start at nine. And I won't get I'll go straight to work. So I finish at four from here. And I won't get home till like half ten. So some days are very long, but I enjoy doing it.

Ruth Babington

Do you think there's anything you've got from working that has helped you in college?

ABBY

Umm I don't know. Like I just I don't know off the top of my head, I don't think so. There probably is but can't just think, you know what I mean?

Ruth Babington

Yeah. I thought it really interesting what you were saying about you know, you were finding English difficult and you weren't enjoying it? And then you got that message from your teacher?

ABBY

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

And you said that, you know, you didn't want him to respond in that way. And you'd prefer it if, it sounded like you wanted him to check in?

ABBY

Yeah, it was like I just thought if that was me in that situation. And like, I know, like a lot of it like my last teacher even said to me, like I can tell something's wrong. If I didn't attend the lesson she wouldn't be like, why are you not in like, you're not gonna do well. She'd be like what's wrong? It's not like you to not be in you know, and he just didn't and he just come across really nasty. Whereas I thought he should have turned around and been like, what's wrong? I can tell something's up, but he didn't.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, so what would you like? Well, what do you think he should have been?

ABBY

If, if you know, someone's always in, and they do really well, you know, they're always attending, they're always doing the homework. I think if there's a change in the pattern, where they're not in, they're not doing the homework, I think instead of being like, like, why you not in, and like, just say, like, is something wrong, you know, that's not like you, I think, to just obviously, we don't come in all the time. It's obvious, you know, but I still think you know, if there's not like a medical reason, and you just like, the response seems a bit thing, I think you should just turn around and say look is something wrong? Because I would have if he would have turned around and said like is something wrong, like can we do anything to help? I would have liked that a lot more because I feel like in a kind of way, he like pushed me pushed me out and made me not want to come in. You know?

Ruth Babington

Yeah, so how did that make you feel whenever you got that message from him?

ABBY

It was just, I showed my mum and she said that's bang out of order. Like I felt a bit upset and like, like I couldn't believe I was being spoken to like it's just the way it was worded and I just thought it was very unprofessional. Yeah.

Ruth Babington

And then we were talking about umm the way that you do four subjects to start off with and then you drop one. So when you dropped that one, how did you feel then when you dropped it and you were just doing three?

ABBY

Like a lot of relief. Not as much stress because obviously, I just felt like, if you got four A levels at the end of it, I thought, well, at least you've got four but you don't you just, you just get three. So I just feel like it's a waste of stress.

Ruth Babington

And then you mentioned that you were really happy when you did take that break and you did leave, so I just wondered, if you had to draw that for me to picture how you felt what would be in that picture?

ABBY

It just like, I just felt over the moon, like, just really like really loving, like how everything was going and knowing that I was going to go back. But knowing that I had a lot of time left and speaking to a lot of people that I know that are a bit older, like from work, a lot of them dropped out, you know, and just had a break, because you know, like you get six weeks, but you don't really get, you don't get a long time to like go through stuff, you know, and obviously, in six form because you you get older you want to start going out and you know, doing stuff that you've not been able to do before and you feel like you can't because you've got work to do or whatever. So for me, that was such a good decision to take, like half a year out. And it just had such a good time. I feel like if I wouldn't have done that, you know, then I wouldn't. I wouldn't have been doing what I'm doing now, probably just would have left that permanently and like then looked back in a few years and be like, oh, well, I've not got anything I can actually do other than work in a pub and I don't want to do that.

Ruth Babington

So it sounds like that time was really important for you?

ABBY

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

And what did you do with that time, I know you mentioned like you did some things like going out and things like that. Were you working at that time as well?

ABBY

Yeah

Ruth Babington

Yeah.

ABBY

So I did that and worked in the school. And then I worked in, obviously, the pub. I've always worked there.

Ruth Babington

And then talking about your mentor so you see them every Friday?

ABBY

Friday. Yeah, yeah.

Ruth Babington

And you mentioned that you find that really helpful?

ABBY

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

So how do you feel after those sessions that you have?

ABBY

Just like, I know that someone knows if anything's going wrong, you know, like, I know, she'll always check in, and I know that she'll be able to spot when something's wrong, you know, and she'll be able, like, when she spots it, if she spots something, she'll be able to go and report it where like, or I know that, like, because I'm like, on a level with her where I feel like I can trust her and tell her stuff. I know that if something was to go wrong, I can tell her and know that she'll tell someone and then it's not the step of it's not the step of me, having to someone I don't know and, you know, say, like tell them. Yeah, very.

Ruth Babington

And I thought it was interesting at the beginning you were saying that your college ones have a lot more positive things than your secondary school. Why do you think that is?

ABBY

I don't know if it's because I've grown up. Well, I feel like I've always had to grow up very quickly, obviously, because of everything I've been through, you know, that obviously, when my dad died, I was like, well, I need to look after my mum, you know, I felt like I've so I felt I've always felt like that and everyone I've ever met, like when I go to work and you know, like new people started and said like oh, how old are you? And I tell them they don't believe me because you say your so much older for your age, like so I just feel like I've obviously grown up a lot more and look at things different. But I've been through so much and never told anyone. But then I knew like I know when I've told them, it's just made everything a lot easier. So I know when a problem starts to just speak about it as early as you can, so it doesn't get any bigger.

Ruth Babington

Yeah

ABBY

So I thought that was, you know, very, like a big part of it.

Ruth Babington

And do you think at college it's easier to do that, , maybe than it was for you in secondary?

ABBY

Yeah, I think because they were, a lot more. A lot more like accessible, you know, like so you could send an email and say, look, this is happening and it's not as big thing of having to go find them and say in person, you know, that's a it's a lot more helpful, I think.

Ruth Babington

So how does that make you feel having more accessible support in college?

ABBY

Like I don't have to stress in that I know that if anything happens, I won't be on my own, you know, that there's other people there.

Ruth Babington

So if I asked you to draw a picture of your college experiences what would be in that picture?

ABBY

I don't know it definitely be positive, but there would be, obviously there would be negative things in it. Umm but I think it mostly be be positive, you know? Yeah.

Ruth Babington

So could you tell me, going back to secondary school could you tell me what a bad day at secondary school would have looked like for you?

ABBY

Probably just go in and like it's like something that happened outside the gates in the morning you know and then when I go into my lessons things would be said in my lessons and then and then I think oh god it's break time What am I gonna do and then be really upset and then think aww I've got that all day left then just constant things happening throughout the day and then thinking ohh I can go home but then even when you go home it never stopped because everyone's got a phone now you know everyone can send stuff like feels like I never like I never got a break from it

Ruth Babington

It sounds like it was really tiring for you?

ABBY

Yeah, but like they like when they've done presentations before they say like like back then it was like oh you've got to go to school but you know when you go home nothing else is gonna happen because no one had a way of getting you know getting in touch with you so yeah.

Ruth Babington

And then what would a good day of secondary school been like for you or a slightly better day?

ABBY

Probably just going in you know feeling well like let's say we've got a test back or something and seeing that I'd done well on it that I've been positive you know, and then texting my mum and say you know what, I've done like I've done well in this and then yeah, just feeling okay and then just going home and knowing that I don't have the stress of it anymore.

Ruth Babington

Yes. And what would a good day in college look like for you?

ABBY

Probably the same like come in I think it's better that like your timetables more flexible you know like the times you start and stuff so come in you know, like again getting that I love getting tests back like and I like like writing lists and setting things out to do and you know then ticking it off and I love when I've done well to send it to our family and be like oh look what I've got you know then yeah, probably even go home I'll go to work, so yeah.

Ruth Babington

What would a bad day look like in college for you?

ABBY

I'm late, I hate being late, like what the traffic is just horrendous there's temporary traffic lights everywhere. I hate being late because then like you have to walk into the lesson late and like everyone's looking and then you've got to stand there and write the book to why you late and then you've got to like get all your stuff out. And then yeah, just being late it's one of the things that puts me off I just hate being late.

Ruth Babington

Yeah

ABBY

Even when I can set off like today I set off at 20 past nine and then the traffic coming down and then I'm there at the petrol station physically not going to move out the car park cos my car won't start with no petrol but the queue was just massive.

Ruth Babington

Is there anything else that you'd like to mention about either secondary school or college?

ABBY

I don't think so? I think I've pretty much covered everything

Ruth Babington

You've done really well. So I suppose like a last question for me would be, how do you feel about where you are now? So after we sort of have gone through everything that happened at secondary, up to now?

ABBY

Really positive.

Ruth Babington

Oh, good.

ABBY

Yeah. Really positive.

Ruth Babington

How do you feel about yourself?

ABBY

Really good. Yeah.

Ruth Babington

You should be really proud of yourself. I mean it hasn't been smooth sailing.

ABBY

Aww thank you, definitely not.

Ruth Babington

So thank you so much for talking to me about that.

Abby's second interview transcript**Ruth Babington**

So before we get started and talk about what you brought, I just want to check in and see how you felt after our conversation on Friday.

ABBY

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

How did you feel after it?

ABBY

Really positive

Ruth Babington

Okay, good.

ABBY

Yeah umm I don't really know what to say.. I thought it was really helpful

Ruth Babington

Is that the first time you've actually talked about it through from beginning to where you are now?

ABBY

Yeah, yeah. Like when I said to you I looked and there was actually a lot of stuff that did happen, like when you read it back to yourself you think there is a lot that has happened. But then umm you just think how far you have come instead.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, is it a nice feeling?

ABBY

Yeah, yeah.

Ruth Babington

Okay, so tell me what you brought

ABBY

So umm it is a ring that's got my umm nan's ashes inside it, obviously, I didn't want to bring it in cause I didn't want to lose it. Umm and I often wear it like whenever I've got an exam or something, so I know that, obviously, like she's there and stuff.

Ruth Babington

That's so nice. How do you feel talking about it?

ABBY

Okay, proud really. Yeah, I don't, I don't know, like, yesterday, it was her anniversary. And I felt, I felt a bit guilty. Like, I was like, oh, it's not really hit me, but then I don't know.

Ruth Babington

When was it that she passed away?

ABBY

Two years ago yesterday. So obviously, she I wasn't like didn't happen throughout primary school umm but definitely through secondary school that was really important to have something like that.

Ruth Babington

So you mentioned you wore it during exams?

ABBY

Yeah, just when I've got an exams, like when I did my driving test I wore it. So mostly, if I don't if I don't have it on I feel like I'm not going to do well.

Ruth Babington

Yeah.

ABBY

Do you know what I mean? I remember when I went to do my theory test, I forgot it. And I just couldn't, my mind just couldn't process it, I was like oh my god, I forgot it, I don't know what I'm going to do about it.

Ruth Babington

So you wear it whenever you've got like something important coming up?

ABBY

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

Well thanks for sharing that. And so I sort of just wanted to round up and ask you, what would you like to say to adults in secondary school? What do you think would be helpful for like, staff members in secondary school to know about people who struggle to come in?

ABBY

Umm something I touched on last time to not like, be like, oh, why you're not coming in and have a go and to try and get to the bottom of it in a nicer way, if that makes any sense? I don't know if it does, but to like, not not be like shouting at you, just be like, oh, like, there's obviously something going on, what's the matter and try and get to the bottom of it, because more often than not, it's not just that your poorly or whatever, it is because there's something underlying going on, which you feel like you can't talk about. So if someone was to approach you instead and say, is there something happening? It's a bit easier to bring up rather than you having to go to someone. I think that's really important.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, and that really ties into what you said the first time.

ABBY

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

So is there anything you'd like to say to staff members in college?

ABBY

Ummm

Ruth Babington

Because I know you said in your first one, you felt quite supported since you've been in college?

ABBY

Yeah. Again, like say if you're late or I know, a few of my teachers have been like, oh, well, like why are you late? In a really like not in a aggressive way, but not in a nice way, you know, and like, it genuinely will be a reason I get dizzy quite a lot. So sometimes that I passed out not long ago, because I got dizzy. So whenever I get dizzy, now, I literally have to sit on that wherever I have to sit on the floor. So that obviously sometimes I can set off in much time, but that will really delay me. So I'll have to say well, I've had to stop and sit down, or I've had to get a fizzy drink. So so just be a bit considerate, you know, in a lot of things like if you've not done something, instead of having a go just say, well, how come you've not, you know, just be a bit more reasonable.

Ruth Babington

Yeah

ABBY

Because you obviously don't know what anyone's going through. That's really important. Yeah

Ruth Babington

It sounds like you're saying not assume the worst?

ABBY

Yeah like you couldn't be bothered or you know, especially with someone like I'm not normally late, so when I am I don't know, I don't expect them to be like, well, why are you late you know, you're missing, you know, just say oh what's actually happened, you know, because sometimes there is stuff going on and you just can't speak about it unless your asked.

Ruth Babington

So I wanted to ask, what would you say to yourself if you could go back to you in secondary school compared to where you are now?

ABBY

Umm that it always gets better and there is like an end. And that's so important, like when you're in that when you're there in the thing you can't see what's happening and you just you just don't think it's ever going to get better but it does 100% But you just can't see it at that point, so just always not give up.

Appendix H

Strategies to support attendance mentioned by participants

Mentor schemes: All participants mentioned the value of having timetabled sessions with a consistent person which they had the opportunity to discuss whatever they wanted to.

Academic support: Having access to missed class work and opportunities to catch up on missed content either in small groups or 1:1 with a staff member was suggested as supporting attendance.

Gradual return to lessons: A rapid full time return to school and lessons was considered overwhelming for students. A planned gradual return which could be built up over time was thought of as being more beneficial in the long term.

Environments: Access to quieter, calmer environments within the school site was mentioned as a supportive factor of attendance.

Increased staff understanding of non attendance and mental health: It was discussed that increasing staffs' understanding of non attendance and mental health would support staff in interacting with students in empathetic and non-confrontational approaches. It was also felt that this would shift the stereotypical view of non attendance being viewed as a choice.

Opportunities to repair relationships with staff: Interactions with staff relating to a student's non attendance could at times result in the student feeling misunderstood and lead to conflict. Providing opportunities to repair relationships with staff when this occurs was highlighted as being beneficial.

Communication related to safe guarding: If a participant makes a disclosure to a staff member it should be clearly communicated to the student that caregivers have to be informed. Involving students, caregivers and staff in further discussions about the disclosure was highlighted as helping students to feel involved and listened to.

Expectations: Students can sometimes feel pressure to meet the expectations of staff in terms of how many lessons they will attend that day. Students can then feel guilt and added anxiety when they are unable to do this. It was mentioned that a more helpful way to approach this would be having the overall aim as coming into the school building, then gradually building this up to include doing different jobs e.g. going to the office for photocopying before building this up to attending one lesson.

Peer group support: Having opportunities to speak and share experiences with peers who are also experiencing non attendance was cited as something that students would find helpful.

Short term break from education: For some students having a short term break or restarting their current year of study was something they deemed necessary to support their attendance in the long term. Students used this time to seek external support to understand their anxieties, process their experiences and have a break from the stress they associated with the school environment.

Increased understanding of own anxieties and thought pattern: Students found it helpful and reassuring when they had increased their own understanding of their thought patterns and how this was impacting their behaviours and emotions. For some this increased understanding was gained through external agency support from Healthy Young Minds, for others having time to process their experiences provided this. None of the participants felt this support was offered within their secondary schools. Some felt that the mentoring system at college provided this.

Information sharing meetings: Meetings between college staff, parents and students before students started college were mentioned as helping to reduce anxieties of students by agreeing on the types of support which could be provided.

Staff response to peer conflict: Staff taking observable actions and communicating these actions to students to reduce peer conflict was highlighted as supporting students to attend.

Appendix I

Table A1:

Domains located within the PEARLS model

<i>Paired Domains</i>	<i>Impact to wellbeing</i>
Optimism and pessimism	<p>Optimism is commonly associated with positive wellbeing and as such pessimism is often perceived to impact wellbeing negatively (Augusto-Landa et al., 2011). Lomas & Ivztan (2016) discuss the importance of context, stating that an excess of optimism can be maladaptive and lead to risk taking behaviours. Baron Williams (2020) asserts that optimism is effective in wellbeing when it is applied in positive thinking to change behaviours. It has also been argued that pessimism can act to prompt individuals to prepare for potential challenges (Baron Williams, 2020). An example of this may be a pupil being realistic about their abilities to pass an exam so they devise a revision schedule.</p>
Self-esteem & humility	<p>High levels of self esteem are generally considered to be beneficial to wellbeing, but Lomas & Ivztan (2016) again warn of the potential risks. They call for the need for this to</p>

	<p>be balanced to avoid an inflated view of one's abilities which may lead to an increased risk of failure. Humility is presented as a trait which can allow individuals to recognise their areas of development and promote growth.</p>
Freedom & restriction	<p>It is no surprise that denying an individual their freedom has negative implications for their wellbeing and mental health. However, Schwartz (2000) asserts there must be a balance between a life of no restrictions and minimal freedom. For example, routines may act in alleviating the numerous daily choices which individuals would have to make (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016). School routines and structures can also provide young people with a degree of certainty and consistency. Hence, this must be balanced with an individual's autonomy.</p>
Forgiveness & Anger	<p>A positive association between forgiveness and PTG has been identified within the literature (Bechara et al., 2021), reinforcing Lomas & Ivtzan (2016) positioning forgiveness as a concept that is beneficial to wellbeing. Belicki et</p>

	<p>al., (2008) warns of the potential harm forgiveness may cause if it causes an individual to remain in an unsafe situation. An example of this may be a pupil continuing to attempt to maintain friendships with peers encouraging them to participate in unsafe behaviours. Anger has been cited as impacting PTG and research indicates it may be useful in galvanising and motivating individuals to engage in positive change (Strasshofer et al.,2018</p>
Happiness & sadness	<p>Happiness and Sadness is the dichotomy which is considered to be central to SWPP (Lomas & Ivztan, 2016). Philosophers have debated the question can we be truly happy when we are seeking happiness? (Baron Williams, 2021; Frankl, 1963). Sadness is suggested to play a role in meaning making (Lomas & Ivztan, 2016). When the mentioned dialectic pairs are balanced, personal growth is proposed to occur.</p>

Appendix J

Example of applying discursive psychology to participant transcript

Ruth Babington

I just wanted to ask you as well, because I didn't ask you on Tuesday how old you were?

LOUISE

Uhh 17

Ruth Babington

And what year are you in?

LOUISE

Year 13

Ruth Babington

And how many secondary schools was is that you attended?

LOUISE

Just one

Ruth Babington

Do you have any medical conditions or any diagnosis?

LOUISE

I'm diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder and I take medication for it

Comment [VL4]: Are you showing examples of coding here? Or is it just raw data? Can we discuss?

Ruth Babington

And the last time we met we spoke a bit about the subjects you were doing. So I just wanted to know, sort of what are your hopes and like your wishes for after you leave college?

Comment [u5]: Medical language and intervention

LOUISE

I mean, hopefully go to uni. Umm I'm pretty set that I'm going to do politics, because I'm very interested in it. And it's annoying as it is because of how, like, bigoted, that the people are in it. I feel like I have a desire to like, want to make it better for people I think and it's just interesting.

Comment [u6]: Planning for future

Ruth Babington

Politics need people like that. Where is it you're thinking of going to uni?

LOUISE

Umm I've been applying to York, applied to Manchester and Man Met. And then like, I think I'll do one in like Glasgow or something just cause why not? Umm and then the other one was like, either Huddersfield or Sheffield.

Ruth Babington

Is York your first choice?

LOUISE

Yes, because I've been there for the open day. It's like really good.

Ruth Babington

That's great. I'm interested in politics, too. So how did you find making the notes for this? (referring to life chart)

LOUISE

Umm okay, I think it's like sort of just, I spoke to my mum about it as well. Because obviously, she knows what happened because she was there and thought of some things that I don't remember she does. So it's just, for me to jog my memory.

Comment [u7]: Parents as having been impacted by non-attendance too – not just YP

Ruth Babington

I suppose when you write down your experiences, like you sort of go through them again. Was that something that you found?

LOUISE

A little bit like I sort of found myself thinking a bit like oh yeah remember when that happened, but I feel like where I am now, I can just look back and sort of find it, I can find the funny side. I just got to laugh about it rather than feel like guilty or whatever.

Comment [u8]: Idea that distance makes it easier to reflect on what's happened

Comment [u9]: Implication that she did feel guilty about experience

Ruth Babington

Yeah now you've had that bit of distance. Okay, so I'm gonna hand it over to you, and ask you to tell me about, if we start with secondary school first, if that's okay. So yeah, tell me about secondary school, what was it like for you?

LOUISE

Umm so like, in the start, it was honestly, like, my primary school was really, really small, it was literally like 100 people total in the school. So then jumping from that primary school to secondary school with like, over 1000 people, it was like massive change, and I didn't really know how to adjust to it. And the school sort of didn't offer much support for it, they just sort of say, go in, find it, you'll be fine. So ahh that was like sort of a bit, like for the first like term to sort of like, okay, I sort of missed a few days, like if I felt ill or something. Some days if I like felt anxious about a lesson beforehand, but I didn't, I didn't understand what I was feeling at the time, I just said, I don't feel good, I don't want to go. So that like happened for the first few weeks. Umm then also, like the school, like sort of had a reward and like, negative points system with like credits and referrals, . But I just sort of felt that it was like done in a sort of way that made it made me feel very pressured to be like, perfect, because its sort of like if you had one referral for something like oh, you've forgot your pen, it was like, that's a huge deal, which I thought was like, Oh, God, I don't want to do anything wrong. Like, like, we sort of made it into a massive, massive deal if you did forget your pen or like so obviously, like you're shouting or whatever, that's like, valid in a way. Umm but yeah, and then the form tutor who I had at the time was sort of very, like oriented on, like get all good credits don't have referrals, because then I think, because then it's sort of like, what year, or what form group was doing best with like get extra credit as well. So that sort of was like, it makes me look good. And then it makes the form look good, and then makes the school look good. And it's just sort of a whole thing and just caused a load of pressure, umm so that didn't help as well. And then umm my brother who was older than me, but he was in school at the same time, he so my mum dropped us both off together. And in like the beginning, I'd meet up with two of my friends from primary school, and then we'd walk in together was fine. But then my brother started like getting ready later, so then it means that I'd get to school later, like very quite last minute. Umm so my friends would go in, obviously, because they don't want to be late either, which I completely understand, so then I'd be going in on my own stressing cause I was late. And then a few times I'd went, I'd gone in, and I'd be like, having a panic attack about it. Because I was like, oh my god, I'm late, I'm late I'm late. I'm terrified, and I'm alone, everything. Umm so then this like, sort of, just like the teachers and support, people sort of put me in a room somewhere. It was like near reception and had windows on it, and it was just sort of like loads of people walking past it wasn't exactly the best environment when your having a panic attack. I can see all the children running past. And you know, just going ahh I don't want to go.

Comment [u10]: Idea of change as anxiety provoking – transition from primary to secondary especially – sig life event

Comment [u11]: Lack of support to manage this transition – practical strategy?

Comment [u12]: Idea of not understanding feelings of anxiety or cycle

Comment [u13]: Pressure to be perfect – descriptive

Comment [u14]: Worry about getting in trouble – adds to the pressure

Comment [u15]: Escalated responses to minor things

Comment [u16]: Doesn't want to blame or accuse school – maybe separating herself from needing something different?

Comment [u17]: Increased pressure – consequences and rewards system – school policies

Comment [u18]: Idea being together brings protection and safety

Comment [u19]: Being on own is dangerous, scary, stressful and coupled with doing something wrong – overwhelming feelings

Comment [u20]: Practical strategy – think about appropriate support rooms for YP

Ruth Babington

That sounds like it was really hard for you.

LOUISE Yeah. Umm so then eventually, I'd like they'd sit with me for a bit and calm down, and then they'd take me to my lesson and I'd carry on. And then it's always just like, kept going like that for a bit. Umm what else... and then sort of after that, like continued happening for a while, because I was, it made me struggle to

Comment [u21]: Descriptive language – carrying on – struggling through something that is causing effort

want to go in because I was getting so stressed about it, because I was going to be late, one of my friend's mums said, oh, I can, I can drop you off as well with this other girl, and we can do it that way, so you won't be late. So we did that for a while as well, but I ended up like stopping. I can't remember why we stopped but we did some reason or whatever. Umm and then like gradually throughout, like the year, it's still before Christmas. My two friends from primary school sort of started to be a bit like funny with me, like they'd sort of just make offhanded comments, like sort of attacking me in a way. Umm like, at one point, one of them said to me, like we were eating dinner in cafeteria, whatever. And then she said to me, like you eat really funny. Like, why do you eat like that, and I was just like, what I'm eating? How can you eat funny? So then that caused me to like, sort of those it was like comments like that. Or they just sort of brush off something that I said as being like stupid or irrelevant, or whatever. So then I just sort of like knocked my confidence loads. So then that's when I sort of started really not attending, like at all. So then people from school, obviously they come into the house and be like, why is she not in? Why is she not in? I think yeah, this is like after Christmas now umm because I had issues with like, feeling terrified about going into school. They just sort of thought I was being at home, because I didn't like school, which I understand, because that's like the typical, I guess stereotypical way of most people don't attend school because they don't like it. It's not because they like have a genuine fear of going. So they sort of would come and like threaten my mum with fines and things, cause obviously, I wasn't going in and then that didn't help, that made me feel worse. Umm so yeah. And then like, yeah, at the end of the year, I've like not been in for weeks, I don't think I think I made it in like a couple of days at the end of the year or like the very last day. Umm and like that was it for Year 7 and then in Year 8 it was just sort of like, started again, and I just like felt like terrified of school. I like really was hardly going in at all Like, obviously that meant that I was falling behind in work, in all the work and stuff, because they weren't, they weren't providing the work, either. Like, they just sort of said, if your not in you don't get the work, so stuff like that

Comment [u22]: Worried about being late/being in trouble – not being 'perfect'

Comment [u23]: Friends protective – where as peer conflict massive push factor towards non-attendance and danger

Comment [u24]: Peer conflicts knock confidence and this impacts attendance

Comment [u25]: Lack of understanding from school about root cause of anxiety – like it's a choice

Comment [u26]: Excusing school?

Comment [u27]: Idea of a typical non-attender and idea that this YP is different from that

Comment [u28]: Makes a difference between choice and genuine fear – YP wants to attend but can't

Comment [u29]: Powerful word – threaten

Comment [u30]: Added pressure on YP to see parents under 'threat'

Comment [u31]: Descriptive language – difficulty to 'make it in' – not easy, challenging

Comment [u32]: Reinforces how powerful her feelings were – 'terrified', 'genuine fear'.

Comment [u33]: Falling behind – going to increase anxiety
Practical strategy – provide work to YP

Comment [u34]: Missing out on work is another barrier to attending and breaking cycle of anxiety

Comment [u35]: Blocking out memories which are hard to remember

Ruth Babington

They weren't giving you any work?

LOUISE

No. So obviously, I was stressing about that as well, because when I would go in, I'd be like, what is going on here? I don't understand anything. Umm overall, I don't remember much from Year 8, because I think I just sort of like, that was when I was like, the lowest point, I think, because I just like, really, I think, in year 11, I ended up with one of the teachers who I like had quite a good relationship with when I when we went over my attendance, like overall the years it was like, it was just so interesting. I think the year 8 was something like 11%

Ruth Babington

Oh, really?

LOUISE

Yeah. It was like, ooh, I just think that's depressing. Wow. And then at the end of, towards the end of year eight, the pastoral support for the year suggested umm this, like place within the school but sort of off main school ground, but it's still part of the school, and it's called, it was called the PLC or the PSC at the time, everyone just call it the bungalow cause it was a bungalow. Umm and they said, right, we can, put you in here and then we're sort of like, let you adjust to going in there, and then we can try and get you back into main school. Then that was sort of just like right to the end, and then they just sort of just did that for a bit. And I went in a couple of lessons if I'd gone in and just stayed in there.

Comment [u36]: Practical strategy – providing more suitable environment

Comment [u37]: To encourage attending she would be in school but not in main building

Ruth Babington

Stayed in for the lessons in the main school in the main building?

LOUISE

Yeah. So I'd have to like go with a teacher from the bungalow to school, and then do that.

Ruth Babington

What did you think about the bungalow?

LOUISE

Oh yeah, the bungalow was like, the turning point.

Comment [u38]: Descriptive language – 'turning point' – significant part in journey – effective strategy for her

Ruth Babington

And were there other people your age in the bungalow or was it just you?

LOUISE

The thing is the way it was, is it was set up for people who like weren't allowed on school grounds because of behavior. So so it was sort of last resort for me, they were like right, what are we going to do to get her in, we'll put her in here, temporarily at the time. So it was where all the like naughty kids went and then there was just me, sat there with a sandwich. But, so yeah, and then so that's the end of year 8, then year nine, started again. And I was like in in between main school and the bungalow. Umm so I, if I was, like, feeling really anxious that day, I'd spend most of my time in the bungalow, and like, and then they'd say, right, should we go and try and go to science whatever, I'd be like okay we'll go and then I'd try, and I'd get there, I'd get to the door, and then just be like, nope, can't do it. So then they'd like sort of stand there for a bit and then try and get me in, which sort of made it worse, because then I started having panic attack. And then we just went back and like chilled, umm, and then during the year nine, the whole well the whole time, my mum was like trying to get hold of trying to get referral for healthy young minds. And it was just, like, kept getting rejected and whatever. So she just kept trying. And then, while I was in the bungalow, I thought I was I was like, talking, excuse me, talking to the staff in there and the other students and sort of like, there's one teacher, Mrs. Brandon, who got it because she struggled herself with like depression and anxiety and taking medication for it in the past. So she got it and was like, yeah, okay, it's okay, don't, don't fret. Your good and like the other ones as well. Like, I feel like, in a way I sort of helped the sort of naughty kids in a way because they were like, oh, there's a chill person here. Well, I wasn't chill but more chill than them.

Comment [u39]: Idea of no alternative solution

Comment [u40]: Making distinction between herself and 'naughty' kids

Comment [u41]: Us and them – they'd say – idea of school staff and YP being separate – there is no we

Comment [u42]: Success in getting to bungalow and walking to door – but its too much to go in – guilt and fear take over with that failure – leads to panic attack – practical strategy – implications for expectations

Comment [u43]: Talking to someone with similar experiences helpful – idea that 'she got it' – other staff members did not

Comment [u44]: Medical language – why is this being adopted – could be linked to dominant discourse of adults and medical intervention. May help to provide understanding of emotions/provide reassurance as explanation

Comment [u45]: Acknowledging her achievements – helpful to recognize something positive going on for her

Comment [u46]: Differentiation between herself and naughty kids

Ruth Babington

How do you feel that you helped the naughty kids?

LOUISE

Well sort of like... this was a year 10, there was a lad called James who was like not allowed on school grounds. So he was in there full time, and I was in there like, 90% of the time, so we just sort of like talked to each other and stuff. And in that time, I like bought a Rubik's Cube, and like figured out how to do it and stuff. Yeah, and I can do it. I can if I have time, I could do it in like two minutes. So yeah, so I brought it in one day and I was like, just like they're doing it and he was like what, you can do a Rubik's cube, that's mad and then he said, I've got one at home like ones that like for people who do it really fast he's like, I'll bring it in for you, and then he did bring it in. And it was like, oh, bless him. And he's like this, it was like everyone everyone in all the teachers in school knew him because of his behaviour and then I'm just there like he's bringing in a Rubik's Cube and stuff it was like umm so then in yeah, year 9, I was still not in a lot. I was in more than a year 8 but that was still not in a lot. And the staff who were in the bungalow would come and try and like get me to come in and then like take me (coughs).

Ruth Babington

Do you want me to get you a glass of water?

LOUISE

I need one. I'll go and get it

Ruth Babington

So you were talking about how the staff in the bungalow would come and get you and try and get you to come in?

LOUISE

Yes. Umm and like most of the time, like that did work. But obviously sometimes it's like, just not the day and it's like no, I can't do it, umm also like slight sidetrack, but I've got dog called Jess. She's adorable. She's a border collie and she's a rescue. I'll get a picture, but yeah, we got her like in 2017 which is when I was like, I think it was in between year seven and year eight so she was like helped, because she just like so chill.

Comment [u47]: Dependent on the day – descriptive

Ruth Babington

Aww what type of dog? She's gorgeous. Do you find having her around sort of calms you?

LOUISE

She's so chill and so cute and just is like insane. So yeah, she obviously helped me like be chill. Yeah, because, I mean, how can you not? How can you not?(shows picture of Jess) Okay, so she was grumpy with me because I woke her up. Well, yeah, so during that time the dog helped. Just like for my coping. I think it was, was it in Year 11 I brought her in or was it in Year 10? At one point I brought her in or in the last day, because it's because it's so separate. They were like, okay, we'll bring her in for a bit. And aww she's so cute. Everyone was like, oh my god, dog! Speaking of animals, again, in the bungalow, there was a cat.

Comment [u48]: Calming having animals

Comment [u49]: Calming having animals

Ruth Babington

Oh that like belongs to the bungalow?

LOUISE

yeah, well during like, like this, like the first... I can't remember what year it was, but they had cats there. They had two cats, two kittens. Sadly, the both died, umm hit by cars. Yeah. So they also had guinea pigs.

Ruth Babington

They didn't get hit by cars did they?

LOUISE

No, they had loads of babies, so they have to give them away. Umm so because there was two cats, there was another cat that lived down the road, but used to like come in, because of like, I don't know, do cat things. And he still kept coming. He was called Noah. Umm so he used to just like come in at random times. Like, just just for a mooch to see what's happening. Usually would roll on something and get hair everywhere, umm but that was obviously it's like there's a cat there. So I want to go in and see the cat, so the cat obviously helps. And also tea, because they had it's like a full on bungalow. It's like a house, because I think way, way back some like school caretaker used to live there.

Comment [u50]: Having animals/pets, making tea there – reminds her of house?

Ruth Babington

Oh so its a proper house with a kitchen? Did you ever find out what the reason for that was?

LOUISE

Yeah, kitchen, bathroom. Bedrooms, not bedroom anymore, computer rooms and offices. Yeah. So it's proper, like a little chill place that was just like, what I needed, basically. But still, in this time, and school, they still want me to be going to main school. Because I think they felt that I was based on my SAT, I think they thought I was quite intelligent, which I don't know I'm wanting to say in this sort of was like I was in the top sets and things. So I think they felt that I sort of was like too clever to be there. And but at the same time, it's like, you could give me the work, so they still weren't giving me the work if I hadn't been in the lessons. I think it's just because they didn't want me in there. They wanted me in main school so they decided like, oh, don't give her stuff so she'll go in main school cause she wants to learn right. Didn't work that way, so yeah, a lot of the time I was in there, and I wasn't doing, I had no work to do. So I just be like sat doing like maths online, or the same, like 10 French words online. And using what I could to like do stuff for the whole time. And then slight positive, well, very positive, actually. At the end of the year nine they like took us for a day out, all the students in the bungalow for bowling and Nando's.

Comment [u51]: Suitable environment in bungalow – implication school is not what she needs

Comment [u52]: Distinction between naughty kids and under achieving YP with those who do achieve academically

Comment [u53]: Contradictory nature of school – want her to be in there and learn but wont give her work

Comment [u54]: Misunderstanding YPs anxiety – she wants to go in but isn't able – makes anxiety worse withholding work

Comment [u55]: YP has a want to learn and progress – doing this independently with no support

Comment [u56]: Opportunities to develop relationships outside of school important

Ruth Babington

Oh, that sounds nice.

LOUISE

So we all just went, like had a chill. And then that same day. I had an appointment with healthy young minds for like the first like meeting, seeing things like whether or not I was eligible, whatever, what I needed. Umm so I went to that as well. And then it was like, okay, yeah, you need help. It was just like I've been asking but obviously there was a waiting list. So it was a while before I started seeing someone properly. But it was there and it was on its way. And now we get to year 10. Umm I was sort of like on the first in the first week back in year 10, I was sort of like, had a bit of a mad one and just went in and did everything.

Comment [u57]: Support from HYM

Comment [u58]: Idea going back and doing everything was too much
Practical strategy – goes against current guidance recommending rapid return to school

Ruth Babington

Oh, wow. You went straight back?

LOUISE

Yeah. Which obviously is not a good idea because then I burnt myself out and I'd been going for like a few weeks so then it was sort of like, back to how it was in year nine, when I wasn't going in much. Umm and like school still didn't want me to be there, they wanted me in main school. Umm so at one point they, there's another building block on like school main site, that was called the learning base. And that was more for like, it wasn't really for mental health but it's more for like, those who have learning difficulties and like dyslexia, things like that. So it's like a place for them to go and get extra support for those things, which totally understandable. And obviously, it is a really good place for people to go, but it just wasn't for me, it was quite a big space, and it was quite busy, which wasn't what I was needing. And the way it was going from like, six people max to like a room of 20 was like, not good. Umm so then, eventually, umm I don't, I don't remember the order which things happened, but something happened and then I wasn't going in because I didn't like it there. So I was like don't go in. Aah so then, at one point, we had a meeting with me, my mum, head of year and pastoral support. And Justin, who was my counsellor from healthy young minds. And they basically had a meeting, to say what can we do to help you get in school. So then, my mum was saying everything... everything that she felt, and then obviously Justin knew from like, a clinical point of view what I was struggling with. So then they eventually caved in and was like, okay, you can stay there. You can stay in the bungalow, and we'll facilitate that umm but that, yes, the meeting had already happened because my mum umm she does like singing, and like amateur dramatics, she's quite good actually. But someone she knows from doing that, just so happens to be the chief Board of Governors at the school. Like she was sort of like she basically got fed up and she was like, right, can you please do something because it's not good. So then this, the governor got into contact with some of the senior leadership team, and said, can we sort this out? And then it just sort of went from there, and then they set the meeting, and then they said, okay, but for it to take that long, and to get to that point, and then everything was like, mmm wasn't difficult. So, like, this is sort of like, January, I think. And I was still not getting much work from like, lessons, but I was getting more, but I wasn't getting everything. So this lad James, I sort of joined in with a couple of lessons with him. He was in Year 11. I was in Year 10. Umm but his English lessons, I would sort of sit in with him for doing that. Because I was quite, I was quite good at English. I'm quite creative and weird ideas about things. So I joined in with that and that was good.

Comment [u59]: Descriptive language – had to recover after – full return too much

Comment [u60]: Rapid return caused regression

Comment [u61]: Support in place for learning difficulties but not for those with mental health needs

Comment [u62]: Strong idea of what she needs – quieter environment* (practical strategy)

Comment [u63]: Increasing size and number of people anxiety causing

Comment [u64]: Change in environment resulted in non-attendance.

Comment [u65]: School eventually caved – idea getting what she needed was a struggle

Comment [u66]: Frustration around why school took so long to have meeting and let her go back to bungalow

Comment [u67]: Some progression with getting work but still not everything

Comment [u68]: Receiving lessons helped

Ruth Babington

Was that in a one to one lesson?

LOUISE

So that was he was getting teaching one to one in the bungalow so so like we knew it was possible to do it because other people had it, but they just didn't want to do it for me, for whatever reason.

Comment [u69]: Idea of unfairness – is possible to support with lessons in bungalow but not for her – idea she is different

Ruth Babington

How did that make you feel that they were doing it for some pupils but didn't seem to want to be able to do it for you?

LOUISE

I don't know. I thought it was a bit like why, bit weird and after I'd left, annoyed for a period. But now I'm just sort of like meh because I'm saying there's no point dwelling on it now because it's all done but at the time I was like why it was why why? Just why? Why? Umm and then, in this time as well, I was I got back into playing the guitar, because I played it all throughout primary school, and had like proper lessons and stuff. And then year 10 because the English teacher was also quite musical, he had a guitar. And then Mrs. Brandon was also quite musical and had a guitar. So they brought one in at one point and said let loose. So I did and I just, I was like, oh, I forgot I enjoyed doing this. So then I started doing that again, with teaching myself everything. Yeah, and at one point, I was like, gonna do something with the English teacher to do with guitar, while another teacher was singing. I don't know, I can't remember much, but it was something along those lines. (Looking at notes) Where are we now? Yeah, and then so I was, for the lessons where I wasn't getting work, I'd still, we'd still sort of try to go up to some, for example, music because I enjoyed music and do music now. And also maths, because maths, the lesson was just very, very calm. The teacher was very good at like keeping the class calm. So that was a good one to just like be in for a bit. Umm and then that was also when I started the medication after meeting with the psychiatrist, my GP and stuff. And then, after I'd started with medication, it was like, a switch had like flicked, I was like going in every day and like not feeling like wow, umm so it's like really weird. It was like, it was like, I thought I think it was like that, like part of my brain had just been like put on mute. It was so nice I was like oh it so quiet.

Comment [u70]: Feelings of frustration – now distance has happened trying to move on and let go but repeated use of why shows feelings of frustrations

Comment [u71]: Playing guitar as coping strategy

Comment [u72]: Lessons you enjoy and feel calm in are 'good' ones to try to attend – calm classrooms, calm teachers

Comment [u73]: Switch has flicked, lights come on – brains on mute and brought her some peace

Comment [u74]: See above

Ruth Babington

So you really noticed the medication? So you were getting these timetabled lessons, teachers from the main school would come down to the bungalow?

LOUISE

Yeah. But then, and I was like going in everyday and then COVID. What can you do? After COVID went back in September in year 11. For the whole of year 11 I went in every day. Apart from lock downs, and anything like that, like I couldn't help. And that was because I was like finally getting the support I needed. And I was like getting further timetables, lessons from like, from teachers from main school, they would come down and then set us work, do work with us. Umm and it was like, like before, I didn't have a timetable. Like I had a timetable it was the one for main school, so it wasn't relevant to me. So I just thought aww I'm supposed to be in maths now. Do I want to do maths now? No I'll do French. Yeah. Umm so a part of me still only thinks that like I was getting lessons because there was another boy as well in my year, who had been put down there permanently as well, because of his behaviour. But that's okay, I don't mind. I was getting lessons, so it's fine. Umm I think that's like, I don't remember much well, I do but there was nothing drastic that happened.

Comment [u75]: Finally – its been a struggle to get support but is aware of support she needs.

Right environment and receiving lessons

Comment [u76]: Idea that lessons weren't provided for her, – fairness questioned and differentiation between behavior and emotional needs

Ruth Babington

It's been really interesting to listen to. So I just made a couple of notes, there's just a couple of things I'd like to go back to if that's okay? But I mean, I do need to say like, you've done so well to get here, considering like it's not been like smooth sailing for you. Right so just taking you right back to the start again. So you mentioned the referral point system. And it sounds like that put pressure on you to be a certain way?

LOUISE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

So I suppose thinking about that and thinking about Year 7 and like you were having panic attacks. Is that the first time you had a panic attack?

LOUISE

Umm to do with school, yes, because I think I had them previously because I used to be terrified with rain. Because when I was like three, we went camping in Scotland, and it was a really, really bad storm. And just like it was terrible storm and the water was like coming out from under the tent. It was just like you can see it all and it was terrifying for me. So that traumatized me, so then I was scared of the rain for like 10 years. And we've got a conservatory as well, so it's really, really loud when it does rain. So I would sort of be, I don't know,

not panic attacks, but I sort of got upset when it rained. Because I didn't like it. Like that in year seven, those were the first times where I had panic attacks. When I was like, I can't breathe.

Comment [u77]: Showing extent of distress – can't breathe – physical display

Ruth Babington

You couldn't breathe? So physically that's how it made you feel?

LOUISE

Yeah, hyperventilating. I get I get anxious, I get very sweaty. Fun times.

Comment [u78]: Physical impact of emotions/anxiety

Ruth Babington

So if I asked you to draw me a picture of the beginning of secondary school before the bungalow periods pre bungalow, if I asked you to draw me a picture of that, what would it look like? What would be in it? What colour would it be?

LOUISE

Probably like lots of black, grey, sort of like, a tiny person. A like massive building, like loads of people. And then like, sort of like, fingers? I don't know, like pointing like fingers like you (pointing). You.

Comment [u79]: Dark imagery – on own and being singled out, on own

Ruth Babington

Did you feel a bit like under the microscope?

LOUISE

Yeah, kind of I just felt quite lost and confused. And yeah, alone at one point.

Comment [u80]: See above

Ruth Babington

Well, I know you mentioned when you weren't coming, sometimes teachers from school would come. And when you first said that, I was like, well that sounds like they are coming to talk to you. But then you said that they were you know, like talking to your mum about fines. I just wanted to know how did that make you feel? Like what was that like for you?

LOUISE

It made me feel like pretty guilty. Because I didn't understand what I was feeling or why I was feeling it. I just knew that I was like, I don't want to go to school because I mean, it makes me feel horrible. But I don't know why. And that made me feel worse. And then obviously getting told of like fines and stuff from my mum how it's like, I thought I don't know what to do. So then I was sort of very, very, very depressed. Basically. Just anxious all the time. Before like, very, like few weeks, last few weeks of year seven. I just like didn't get out of bed, basically, because I just felt so horrible about the pressures and stuff. And it was just like, they just sort of didn't really do anything. They just sort of, like threatened with fines not offer any sort of support. It's like, it's not how it works. If it's not working, it's not going to work.

Comment [u81]: Feelings of guilt

Comment [u82]: Not understanding cycle of anxiety or what was happening – this lack of understanding made anxiety worse/increased

Comment [u83]: Threat of fines is a build up of pressure – increases negative feelings

Comment [u84]: Physically not being able to get out of bed

Comment [u85]: School offered no support, idea that schools actions actually increased anxiety and pressure

Ruth Babington

100%, I mean, you were so young, that would be hard for an adult to deal with, never mind a year 7 or year 8. Yeah. It must have been really overwhelming.

LOUISE

Yeah. Poor little eleven year old me

Ruth Babington

And then you mentioned in year 8 you sort of started going in and then they didn't you felt like they didn't want to give you work. In case you sort of saw it as like, oh, I don't need to go to lessons because I have the work. And then you mentioned that, that actually made you more stressed?

LOUISE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

So it was sort of twofold that it was sort of like the environment was a bit stressful. But also so was this potentially falling behind?

LOUISE

Yeah. Yeah, definitely.

Ruth Babington

And then we were talking about the bungalow. So it's obvious you really liked the bungalow.

LOUISE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

You know, you said like, there were peers there that you liked. What else was it? What was it about the bungalow?

LOUISE

I think it was the staff, yeah, the staff. Because it was like there's two main when I first went there was like two main people there. There was Miss Leach she was head of like, safeguarding and I think and then there's Mrs. Brandon who was basically the teaching assistants support person who'd help people. There was another teacher on point I can't remember. But yeah, they just basically sort of sit with you, chat with you about anything. If you're feeling rubbish, they'd be like, okay, well, what's up? What? How do we help? Like they'd make you tea, make your toast like, like it just it was such a nice environment to be in because that's what I needed. Like it I don't know. It's really weird.

Comment [u86]: Staff as making difference to feelings

Comment [u87]: Supportive environment – ask how you are- reassuring to make you tea and listen to you

Ruth Babington

It make sense what you're saying. Sounds like a very safe environment compared to the school, was it very big?

LOUISE

It wasn't necessarily, like big building but it was a big building, but it was like a lot of people crammed into spaces that didn't necessarily fit among the people. Yeah, but yeah, safe is like the word I'd use. Like, even though it's where naughty kids went, I never felt I never felt like, out of place or, like vulnerable there. Because it was just sort of away. People I didn't question like, if people were in there for whatever reason, I was like, Okay. Welcome, how would you take your tea?

Comment [u88]: Description of main school building as cramped

Comment [u89]: Idea of bungalow as welcoming, safe environment – even with the naughty kids – idea naughty kids might have scared her before – away from main building and perhaps away from pressure she associated with school?

Ruth Babington

So when I asked you how you would describe school, and you said a lot of blacks if I asked you the same question with the bungalow, I asked you to draw me something that was like that. What would it be like? What color would that be?

LOUISE

I'm visualizing yellow because it's sort of, like, I think I still say a lot of like, good memories with it. And also, like, even though it was a place where it's like, supposedly not very happy, because it's where people went when they weren't allowed to be in school. It really did, it never felt like that. Like the people there just made it feel like nice. And like we all have problems, we all have them. Okay, we can just chill about them here and we can figure them out. So it's sort of like yellow, have the cat in there. So I just like yeah, maybe like rays in the background. Oh, music speakers. That was a thing, that Mrs Brandon did cause shes very into her music. She used to be a music teacher. And now she's like a teaching assistant and stuff. Umm but yeah, she used to like just get me to calm with some happy song. I don't know something from like the 80s or 90s, and just blast it. Like many people, at one point, this is something that happened, at one point she started dancing to Kate

Comment [u90]: Opposite of negative place

Comment [u91]: Idea of supportive staff in bungalow – talking about problems in a safe space

Comment [u92]: Sunshine, rays, happiness associated with bungalow

Comment [u93]: Using interests of YP to help them calm *practical strategy*

Bush, Wuthering Heights. I looked, I looked through the door and I see her doing a headstand (laughs). Right. Wow. And then, like five minutes later, the head teacher came down.

Ruth Babington

Oh, I love that. I'm gonna ask you a difficult question.

LOUISE

Okay.

Ruth Babington

I know you said that sometimes you end up in the bungalow and staff were trying to encourage you to go to lessons. And sometimes you would get to the door, and you wouldn't be able to go in. Can you talk to me about why it was that you couldn't go in?

LOUISE

It was sort of like I think I'd like build myself up to be like right, okay, we can do this, do this. And I'd sort of be like, beating myself up a lot to get myself there. But then it was also almost like, it was just too much, because I'd beat myself up to get there and I've, I've gone and I've got to the door, and then it's like, oh, it's honestly felt like all that motivation is like, gone. And then I look in and it's like I see people all sat down, and then they like look at something on the board and I'm like I don't know what that is, it's like in English, we're on chapter seven and I was like, I don't even know chapter one. And then that is sort of the thing that would be like, oh my god, oh my god. Sometimes I'd make it I actually be able to sit down. And then they would like sort of be standing at the door just sit there checking I'm alright for a minute. And then I just sort of say to them no, no. I'm going back down, which sort of like, sometimes I felt a bit in the beginning when I was doing that I felt bad because I hadn't been able to do it, but then as I've like, gone through it, and I was like okay, no, it's good. I made it there but then I just couldn't do the next bit, but that's okay, because then I can just get there another time, and I didn't beat myself up, I got a solution. But yeah, so I just like felt incredibly intimidated when I got to the door was like completely unknown. I think because I've been apart from it for so long. It was just sort of like, I don't know what this is. I didn't know how to act. I don't know.

Comment [u94]: Such an effort to get there – already made achievements but used up all energy and determination and going in step too far – physical stress of this – 'beat myself up'

Comment [u95]: Anxiety spirals when coupled with anxiety around falling behind in learning

Comment [u96]: Descriptive language – idea making it is difficult

Comment [u97]: Back to safe space

Comment [u98]: Progression in her own thoughts – her response and recognising her own successes have developed and changed

Comment [u99]: Longer out of it more difficult to get back in – worried about unknown *practical strategy – minimizing academic anxiety providing lessons might help*

Ruth Babington

I thought it was interesting, because you were saying that sometimes adults would come to the house and try and get you into school. I just wondered, did you find that helpful?

LOUISE

Sometimes, yeah. Sometimes I did find it helpful. If they like, sort of they come like, just like, with no expectation of me like doing anything, just getting in and staying in the bungalow and just like doing work from there. When they came with that attitude, it definitely helps because then it's like, okay, it's not, there's no expectation, there's no pressure. Whereas sometimes if they'd come and be like, okay, well, we'll do this, we'll see how we go, and then we might be able to go to one lesson, and it's like, no, no, no, no, I'm not sure. Like, if I have no expectations, and no pressure, and no limits to reach that's good. And they also just, like, come in, like, sit down for a minute, like seeing the dog, fuss the dog. And just talk to me, like, how about, like, what I was feeling how I'm feeling, like sort of how bad it was. So some that it changes every day, like, sometimes you feel great. Sometimes you feel no, sometimes you just like meh. So when they'd like, talk to me about that, and then it's sort of like, okay, well, we can just do nothing or we can like do this. And then we might be like, oh, we can you can walk up and do some photocopying with me. Would that be all right? Like things like that helped. So yeah, I think just when they know, when they had, when they said, look, there was no pressure and there was no expectation apart from you just come in. That was it.

Comment [u100]: Coming with no expectation important – minimizes pressure and removes fear of failure

Comment [u101]: No expectations

Comment [u102]: Practical strategy – offer non-threatening jobs like photo copying. Checking in – asking about YPs feelings and emotions.

Ruth Babington

Yeah, that makes sense. And thinking, from your perspective, because I think you've obviously been through this, you've got through this, and you're doing really well. What do you think it would be helpful for other adults and thinking about staff in school sort of specifically, what do you think would be helpful for them to know?

LOUISE

Just to know, that, school is bloody terrifying for some people. And just sort of like, be aware, though, sometimes how you sort of, like, even if it's something that you've always done, and it's always been fine. Some times, like, that little way of doing things can just affect someone its like the credit and referral system. That's fine for everyone else. But like, for me, it was just like, so much pressure and it could be it could have been for other people as well. I don't know.

Comment [u103]: Shows intensity of emotions

Comment [u104]: Small adjustments – idea people are not the same and small adjustments can be monumental

Ruth Babington

I'd say it probably was.

LOUISE

So yeah, just like, be aware of that and then, sort of just like, check in with people. Like if there's someone who you know, is like, who struggles with like being quiet or is quite quiet. You can sort of tell an anxious person in general, to sort of check in and be like, you alright, today? How you doing and then just sort of say, right, okay, good day, bad day? If it's a bad day, okay I won't bother you just do you, do the work whatever. Having also like setting up things like having a pass to leave, if it's getting too much. I'd probably, that like, should be a thing. Definitely. Like they have that here. Where, like, you have a card and you can show it and be like right miss bye.

Comment [u105]: Importance of checking in with people

Comment [u106]: Making adjustments to help people feel safe

Ruth Babington

You can just like pop out and then you can come back in if you want to, if you're able to?

LOUISE

Yeah. I've not used it here, because I've sort of been like, okay, umm but I think had I been in secondary school, and I'd had that I would have definitely used it.

Comment [u107]: Time out card
practical strategy

Ruth Babington

I was quite interested in what you mentioned about in Year 10 when you went to the learning base and it sounds like you quite quickly knew that that wasn't what what you needed.

LOUISE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

But I just wondered like, how did that happen? Were you told that you were going to be moved there? Was that a conversation that was had?

LOUISE

Umm, it was all like, really abrupt the way it happened. I think I remember something happened, where he was like, okay, we'll need to move you for a minute, and then they just sort of didn't want to move me back. Umm but it was all I think someone was off. Some a teacher was off in the bungalow and then they said, okay, well, they're off, so we'll move you up here. And then once they're back, you can come back down there, which didn't happen. They just sort of she left with no, she didn't leave, well, she was off. I went up there, she came back, I stayed up there. And they there was like, no warning for anything. Like, it was just like, okay, you're in here now, stay there. And then there was sort of expectation that I'd be in there and then go to lessons as well, because I was before, that was before we'd had the meeting with everybody. And so yeah, just very jarring and not very well thought out for someone whose anxious.

Comment [u108]: Importance of communicating changes and preparing YP

Ruth Babington

They are big changes that they're asking you to make. And just picking up on what you said about the meeting as well. So that was with Justin your counsellor from healthy young minds and your mum. Were you at the meeting?

LOUISE

Yeah.

Ruth Babington

And how did you find being there?

LOUISE

Ummm, I sort of felt quite like intimidated at first was like, people, teachers, but then, obviously, my counsellor Justin was like, you're anxious. Just like, spread out, relax, do this and just chill, like unclench. I did that so then I was feeling a lot more relaxed. And they sort of said to me like just say what you need to say and then we can do the rest and that's okay. Funnily enough off tangent again but he was also Irish.

Comment [u109]: Meetings can cause anxiety despite wanting to be involved

Comment [u110]: Guidance for involving YP in meetings

Ruth Babington 52:11

You mentioned COVID as well. I was interested to see how that sort of played a part in things because it seems to be that you know, things are going quite well and then COVID happened. So how did you find that change, and being at home?

LOUISE

Umm in the sense of staying at home, it was fine because I don't leave the house anyway, its a personal preference not to leave the house, but in terms of like the work, thankfully, my, the English teacher who was helping out with the year 11, he'd given me loads of GCSE work on USB memory stick, just for me to like work through stuff like An Inspector Calls, Macbeth, etc. Just work through that, at your own pace, go for it. So thankfully, I had that sort of English was like, okay, but I everything else, they just sort of, I didn't really do anything. I sort of did it for a week but then I stopped because it's like, I don't know any of this stuff anyway. I don't want to, like stress myself out. So I messaged them, I messaged Mrs. Brandon and I was like, Is it okay if I just like, do the bare minimum? She was just like, yep. So it all sort of worked out. I think that's, I think it sort of gave me a chance to sort of think about how, like everything and just sort of be like, okay, year 11 fresh start. Just do what we can and go for it.

Comment [u111]: COVID as having minimal impact on mental health

Comment [u112]: COVID as time of reflection and time to breathe and restart

Ruth Babington

So and then coming back. Because how did COVID fall, was it when you were in college or secondary?

LOUISE

It was COVID in secondary COVID again, I had exams, then college.

Ruth Babington

How was it going back to school after having been at home, was that difficult?

LOUISE

A little bit. Like I was sort of like I felt funny about it, which I sort of accepted. Because I always struggle after like, a half term or Christmas or something. I always struggle to get back into the routine of going, getting up, going things like that. Umm so I'm sort of like I did like preparation. I was like, right, okay, week before, we'll get up early, and just sort of do stuff like that. So I did and then that helped sort of just like, got me in the mindset, I think so then by the time I was actually going back, I sort of felt okay, then after the first few weeks after I like, settled in with all the other people who were in there as well, it was like, okay, this is okay, we can do this. Then my year off for, like the whole year of year 11 was off for something to do with COVID like, oh, someone's got COVID, if one person has COVID in the year everybody's off which is really dumb, given I wasn't even in the same building.

Comment [u113]: Difficult to get back into something – hard after covid

Comment [u114]: Practical strategy – helping YP to get back into small routines at home

Ruth Babington

So then, obviously we have the summer and then college so how was starting college for you?

LOUISE

Nerve racking. Umm I, before I came here, I had a meeting with Jenny with my mum just to like set out everything. What my struggles are. Like, if I want support, what would I need in place. So that was like, okay,

Comment [u115]: Starting college / new experience

Comment [u116]: Practical strategy – sharing information, asking YP what they need – evidence this YP has a good understanding of what she needs

that was a massive like, it's like, okay, wow they like actually can help. Like, you know, like, do you need people who listen to you? Yes, like, yeah, probably. Umm just as like, as somebody there to be like, okay, I feel horrible can we go, so that was like a huge woosh and they set up like mentoring appointments, and I talk to someone like on a weekly basis about everything, anything. If it's just like, what you did at the weekend whatever. Umm so that was like, huge in like making me feel a lot calmer about starting college, because it's like, so new. I remember on the first day that I was coming in, like properly on the phone to my mum, and I was just like, oh god, I can't do it and she was like no,, you got it, you got it, you got it. It's okay. We got it. I was like right okay, just go in. That's like, okay, I'll just go in. Okay, right bye and I just walked in and it's like okay. And then I went and met up with somebody from the support team who's going to be in my lessons with me. And then their like hi how are you, are you alright, I'm like feeling weird, they are like okay, okay, I'll go and sit for a minute, and then we'll go to lesson. I'm like okay. And then it was like, just went from there.

Comment [u117]: Physical sense of relief

Comment [u118]: Importance of having someone to talk to about everything – removes pressure

Comment [u119]: Idea mum and YP in this together – mum as source of support – 'we got this' contrasts with language used to describe school and staff – 'they' and 'us'

Comment [u120]: Having person to meet you on first day – massive help – practical strategy

Ruth Babington

I think that's amazing. So you've been coming since September, what's your attendance been like?

LOUISE

Ahh last year, it was sort of like, mostly good. But like, I sort of had days off sometimes, because I was, I ended up getting anxious about a music thing. Because I was like, I didn't really understand it. But then rather than saying, I don't understand it, I just sort of hid it. So I was like, oh, I don't want to do that. But then they talked to me about it and then I felt better. And I came in again and then it was summer and now I'm back.

Comment [u121]: More understanding of anxiety now – knows speaking about it will help – progression – can see how YPs understanding has changed

Comment [u122]: Journey not linear – may still have some bumps in road and that's fine

Ruth Babington

Thinking about your college experiences, so you know, I've asked you sort of if you were drawing a picture so if I asked you about college and I asked you to draw a picture about what what would that look like? Like what color would it be? What would be in it?

LOUISE

Weirdly green. Greens, like a calm color, I think. Just feel calm here. And it's like well, we can do this, it's also it's like new, new and fresh. Yeah, because it's so different and just it's a total new start. Like compared to like, compared to how I was in secondary school is like massive, like I would have hated this, just sitting and talking to somebody like no.

Comment [u123]: Fresh start, nature imagery, growth/maturity etc

Ruth Babington

Just from listening to where you've come from, you have come such a long way. So like thinking about the future, and I know you've spoken about like wanting to go into politics. Asking you my question of drawing and colouring and things. What would the future look like?

LOUISE

Ahh money. I don't know. Sort of like I'll go for a teal, I like teal. It's one of my favourite colours. Green Blue. Something new. My theme fresh. Yeah, I just don't like don't know what to expect, sort of sort of expect anything. See what happens. Yeah.

Comment [u124]: Hopeful for future – many possibilities – not definite plan but looking forward to it

Ruth Babington

So thinking about like, I know we've said that secondary school has been very different from your college experiences. Why do you think that is?

LOUISE

I think it's the way you're treated. And sort of like, just like, structurally different, because it seems like a sort of it's very, like strict strict strict, lesson, lesson, lesson, lesson which obviously is understandable because there's so much you need to learn in those like, what is it five years? Whereas here, you're sort of like, okay, lesson lesson, okay, you got free, free for a bit. So you can, like do studying, etc. There's just a lot less like there's pressure, because it's A level, so it's important, but it's, it doesn't feel like it, in secondary school its sort of the sort of the way that they like, hover over you, and it's like, Come on, do this, do this, do this, but in here, its sort of like, okay, do this in your own time.

Comment [u125]: Treated more like an adult than child at SS

Comment [u126]: Flexible timetables, but despite it being A levels do this in your own time not a strict timeline everyone has to follow – more inclusive?

Ruth Babington

So is it fair to say then that it's a less pressured environment?

LOUISE

Yeah. Like, it, obviously is still pressured, because it's important, but it's not, it doesn't feel like it. And I think that's to do with, like, the fact that there is, like, I think there is some sort of like, a commendation thing for if you do something really well, and it's like, so so parents can see it. But there's no like credit referral. It's not like a massive thing. Even if there is something like, obviously, unless it's something terrible.

Comment [u127]: Not as pressured as secondary

Comment [u128]: Feels like less likely to get in trouble at college over minor things

Ruth Babington

Yeah you because you mentioned earlier, didn't you like if you forgot a pen?

LOUISE

Yeah where as if you forgot a pen here they'd be like okay. Or like you forget your notepad or something it's like, okay, it's like, in politics, for example, we have a lot of booklets, because there's a lot of content in it, say I said, oh, I forgot my booklet, it's like, okay, here's a spare. It's like, that's easy. Just do that. Rather than make it a massive thing. Just say okay, don't write on it.

Comment [u129]: Not escalating responses like secondary – makes it feel safer

Ruth Babington

Is there anything else that you feel like you want to mention about secondary school or college?

LOUISE

I don't know. I don't think so.

Ruth Babington

I mean, it's been a really good interview, from my perspective, because I'm thinking about some of the people that I'm working with, it will be helpful for them. I think they'll be even just like here, and where you started and where you are. And also for them will be like, really just like, inspirational. Because I think I mean, you probably know, when you get into that cycle, it's really hard to, to break. I think it's not often you hear positive stories, just like why I wanted to do this research. And thank you so much, because I think your story will be so so helpful.

LOUISE

That was my hope doing it. It's a little bit like this could help someone. And like, if it goes into something huge, and then change is made. And that's like, amazing. Because like, if these things, basically. It was like, I don't want people to go through that. It was like, Yeah.

Appendix K

Table A3

Participant attributions of non attendance

Participants	Attributions for non attendance
Louise	Less specific attributions for non attendance. Initially began with negative peer interactions then were exacerbated by environmental anxieties impacting Louise's physical and emotional safety. Reluctant to direct blame at school and at times during her narrative blames herself for her non attendance.
Joanne	Less specific attributions for non attendance. Initially began with negative peer interactions then were exacerbated by environmental anxieties impacting Joanne's physical and emotional safety. Reluctant to direct blame at school and at times during her narrative blames herself for her non attendance.
Marie	Medicalised attribution for attendance. Marie cited depression as a main contributory factor of her non attendance. Casts school in a blaming role for her non attendance.
Abby	Attributes non attendance to difficulties with relationships with peers (e.g. bullying) and staffs' responses to her non attendance. Casts school in a blaming role for her non attendance.

Appendix L

Confirmation of research ethical approval



Downloaded: 25/04/2023
Approved: 13/06/2022

Ruth Babington
Registration number: 200112714
School of Education
Programme: Doctorate of Child and Education Psychology

Dear Ruth

PROJECT TITLE: Young people's narratives of success: The journey back to education after experiencing emotional based school avoidance (EBSA)

APPLICATION: Reference Number 046416

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 13/06/2022 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 046416 (form submission date: 06/06/2022); (expected project end date: 20/08/2023).
- Participant information sheet 1105135 version 3 (06/06/2022).
- Participant information sheet 1105128 version 5 (06/06/2022).
- Participant consent form 1105130 version 2 (11/05/2022).
- Participant consent form 1105129 version 2 (11/05/2022).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Anna Weighall
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics-integrity/policy>
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/po/po/poly_js/1_671066/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.