

Section 9: EBSA Stories from Children and Young People's and Parents/Care-Givers

Here are some direct accounts given by CYP and their parents/carers about their experiences of EBSA You may find it helpful to review them (what they were thinking/ feeling at the time and what helped?) and see if there are any ideas which could be useful for a situation you are managing.

Children & Young People's Stories.



Molly's Story....

Molly was a student in Fifth Class when she experienced acute problems attending school due to a concern about vomiting in school post-pandemic school closures. Molly's school implemented a plan at the "Support for a Few" level when her difficulties were acute. Now she is at the "Support For All" level of Continuum Of Support. Molly returned to school full time and can look back on her experience. Below is her story.

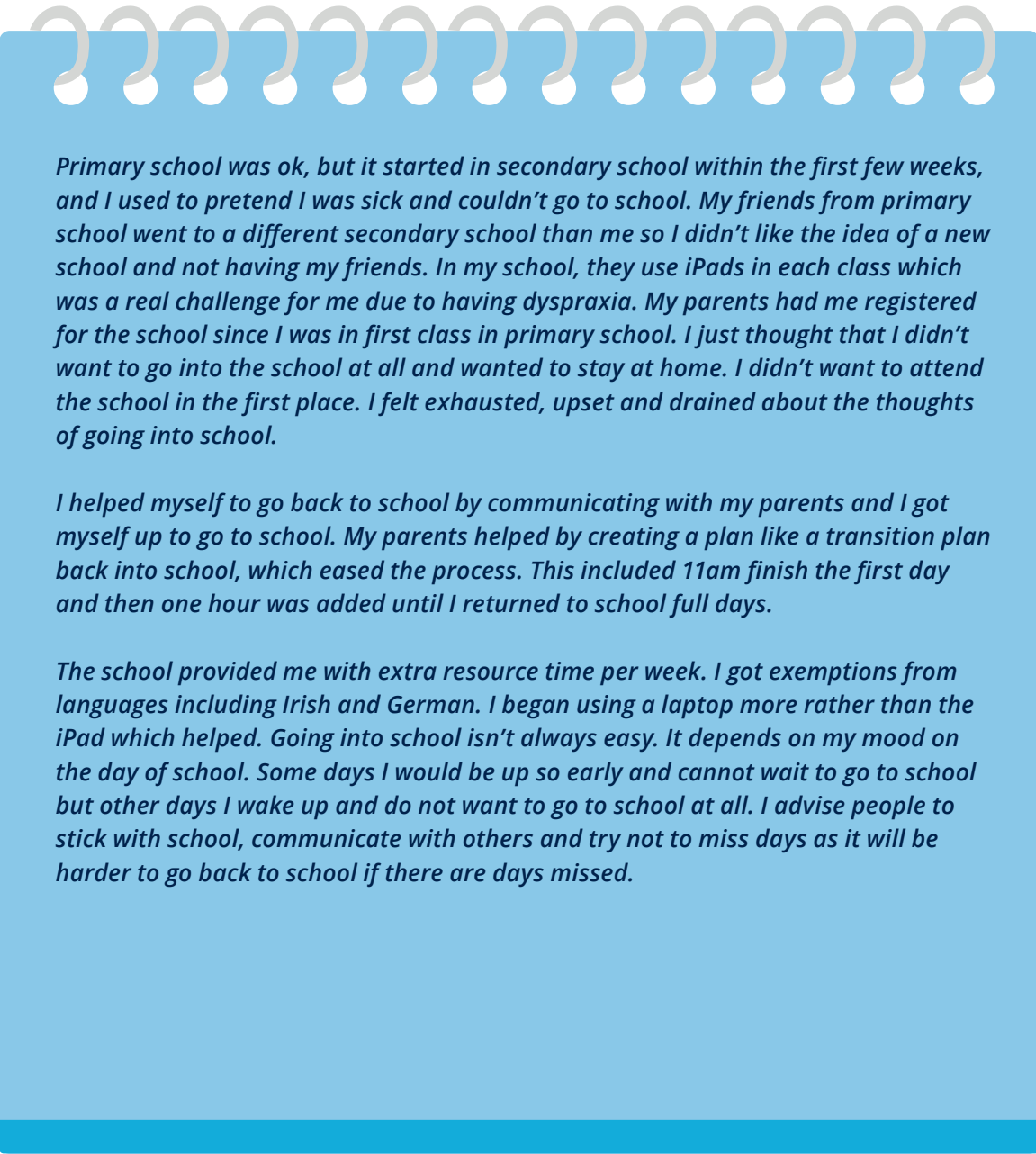
When this problem started, it was because I was worried that I would be sick if I went in and didn't want to leave the house or car. I felt I would be sick in school and didn't want to leave Mammy or Daddy. I thought that my friends didn't like me, that I wasn't good at things and that bad things would happen. I felt terrified. CBT sessions helped me learn lots of coping strategies and how to think positively. I also made a plan with the teacher. My parents listened and that helped. They never said 'don't be silly' or 'you have to go in'. They listened and helped.

My school arranged support sessions with a school completion worker who helped me with mindfulness and relaxation and arranged for play therapy for me. The teacher was in daily contact with Mam. We had a plan that if I got overwhelmed, my teacher would contact Mam. Sometimes a support teacher would meet me at the gate and I would go to her room for 10mins before entering the class. My teacher sat me near the door as I had said I felt more comfortable there. Before I started sixth class, I saw the classroom and met my new teacher before school officially started in September.

As well as support from my school, attending a therapist helped me and a Physio who used a programme called 'Body Talk'. My great friends and my teacher and the SCP worker help me to keep going to school. Now I have strategies that I use to cope if I get worried. If I had to give advice to a CYP who was having an experience of finding it difficult to go to school, I would say everything not just the good things and explain how you feel to somebody you trust. I would want them to know that lots of young people have these feelings and it will get better. Remember school isn't the problem. Once you learn to manage and deal with your worries school will be ok and you will feel happy and proud.

Darren's Story...

Darren is a boy for whom transition from primary to post primary was when his problems started. He now attends school full-time. Here is his story.



Primary school was ok, but it started in secondary school within the first few weeks, and I used to pretend I was sick and couldn't go to school. My friends from primary school went to a different secondary school than me so I didn't like the idea of a new school and not having my friends. In my school, they use iPads in each class which was a real challenge for me due to having dyspraxia. My parents had me registered for the school since I was in first class in primary school. I just thought that I didn't want to go into the school at all and wanted to stay at home. I didn't want to attend the school in the first place. I felt exhausted, upset and drained about the thoughts of going into school.

I helped myself to go back to school by communicating with my parents and I got myself up to go to school. My parents helped by creating a plan like a transition plan back into school, which eased the process. This included 11am finish the first day and then one hour was added until I returned to school full days.

The school provided me with extra resource time per week. I got exemptions from languages including Irish and German. I began using a laptop more rather than the iPad which helped. Going into school isn't always easy. It depends on my mood on the day of school. Some days I would be up so early and cannot wait to go to school but other days I wake up and do not want to go to school at all. I advise people to stick with school, communicate with others and try not to miss days as it will be harder to go back to school if there are days missed.

Kelly's Story....

Kelly is a young person now in a PLC . Her attendance at Junior Cycle was very sporadic and part time. However, it improved at Senior Cycle when she decided on a goal. She tells her story below.

My problem started in sixth class in national school. I straight out told my parents I would not be going to school. I used to be so upset and cried about not wanting to go. I didn't want to go to school. It was because of bullying and isolation from others in the class. Everyone had groups and did not want to include me. When I started in sixth class, the classes got split up and my friends since junior infants were put in the other sixth class and I was left on my own.

Then when I started secondary school, the people in my class were already friends which made me feel isolated. I thought school was hell and I hated it so much and really did not want to go into the place again. I felt lonely because I was socially isolated from everyone else. I felt very down about the thoughts of going into school and wanted to stay at home in an environment that I felt comfortable in and did not have to deal with the situation in school.

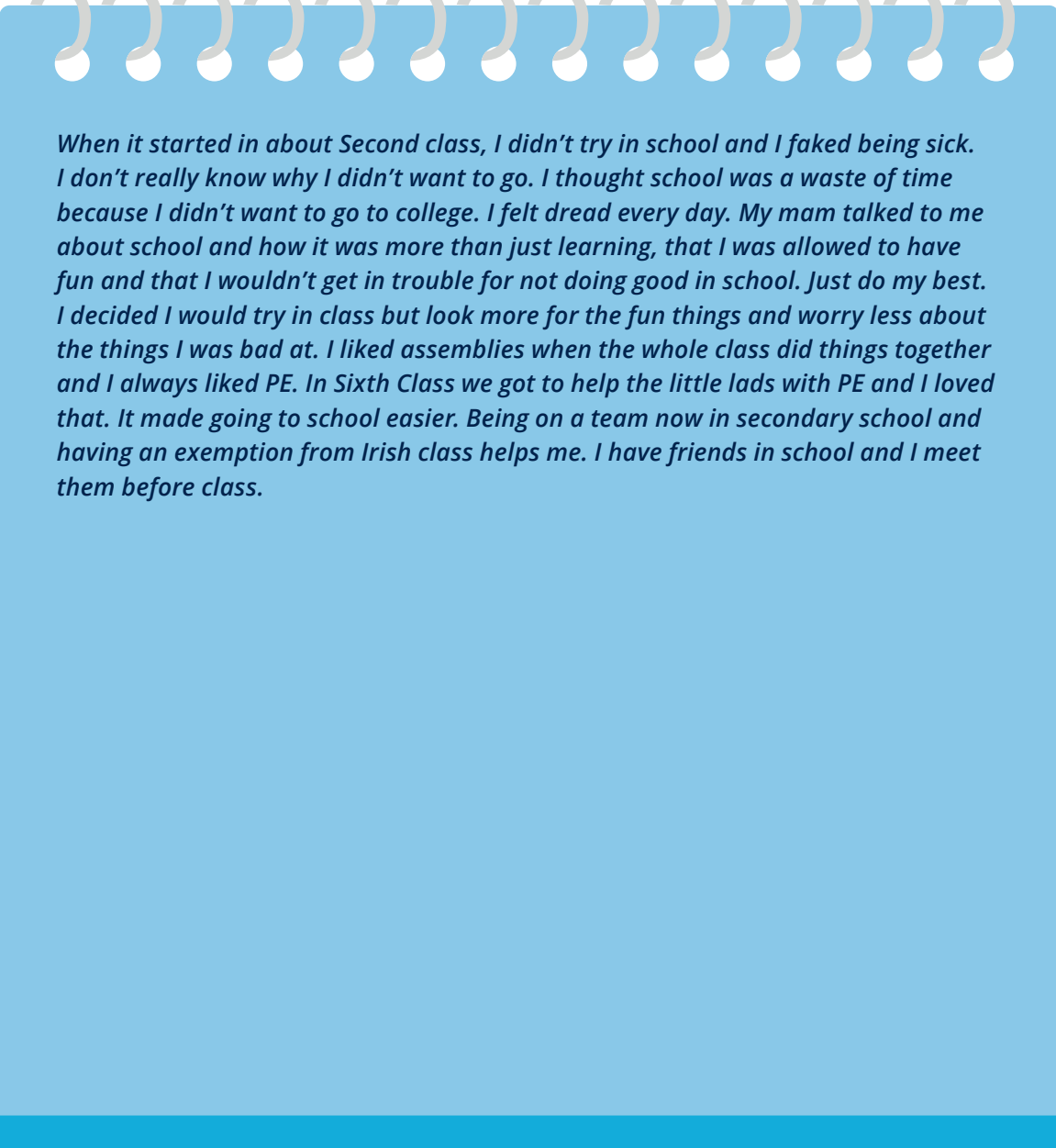
Things started to get better when I decided in my head to try the PLC course because I felt like I had nothing to lose. I got calculated grades for my Leaving Cert and from this after chatting with the Family Project Worker and my Mam, I decided to try a PLC to re-engage in education which I am currently completing. My Mam, Dad, and extended family continued to encourage me to reach goals and my potential. Mam and Dad financially supported me throughout my studies.

The Career Guidance Counsellor and my Year Head continued to provide support throughout my time in school through emails and phone calls with my parents, the GP, consultant and Family Project Worker to check up on me. My parents continue to support me in my journey, and I now have the drive and confidence to continue and to complete it.

My advice is that school is not forever. It is only a stepping stone to the next stage in your life and you will get through it. Seek help, talk to someone you can trust try not to bottle it up. Keep going you will get there. Remember you are there to get your education. You are there for you and not for anyone else and you will not be there forever. I know it's tough but go in and focus on your studies. You will move onto bigger and better things.

Tom's Story....

Tom is a pupil who is in the "At Risk" category. Due to his mix of learning difficulties, he is at the "Support For Some" level, receiving support classes and input from the Guidance Counsellor as needed. He has a Specific Learning Difficulty (Dyslexia). Now in second year, here is his story.



When it started in about Second class, I didn't try in school and I faked being sick. I don't really know why I didn't want to go. I thought school was a waste of time because I didn't want to go to college. I felt dread every day. My mam talked to me about school and how it was more than just learning, that I was allowed to have fun and that I wouldn't get in trouble for not doing good in school. Just do my best. I decided I would try in class but look more for the fun things and worry less about the things I was bad at. I liked assemblies when the whole class did things together and I always liked PE. In Sixth Class we got to help the little lads with PE and I loved that. It made going to school easier. Being on a team now in secondary school and having an exemption from Irish class helps me. I have friends in school and I meet them before class.



Parent/Caregivers Stories

Siobhán's Story...

Siobhán is the parent of a child who had significant difficulties attending school from fourth class. He is now in Transition Year and attends well. He has no Special Educational Needs (SEN). He had SNA support and a high level of support from his schools Guidance Counsellor and Vice Principal for first and second year but SNA support was no longer needed. Now his mother and school Vice Principal connect by telephone when needed.

Siobhán says *"When it started, I was very worried and felt helpless as we didn't know what was going through his head. We had never heard of a child who didn't want to go to school because of his emotions. The school counsellor, principal and teachers were great, the school psychologist as well. We just took it at his pace, tried to understand more and as it went on, got to know the days you could or couldn't push. There was counselling, the psychologist coming in. He was very upset and didn't want to leave us... pains in tummy, head etc. He just didn't want to leave us.*

I would advise parents to listen to them and engage straight away with school. Know that every day is not going to be sorted. Learn to accept bad days but still keep trying. Looking back, I should have been more patient, listened more and not worried about little things. Education is important but it can't be done unless your child is in a good place, so take your time, be patient".

Pauline's Story...

Pauline is the parent of a 15 year old girl who struggled with separation. She has no learning difficulties or special educational needs. She is now in 3rd year and things are much better for her.



Pauline spoke about the stress of trying to get her daughter to school every day. She said *"she was never a big fan of school but once she got to secondary school, she had her mobile phone so was able to contact home at any time. It would start on a Sunday night with stomach pains or headaches which at first we believed and allowed her to stay at home. But then it became a very regular occurrence. If she did go into school she would be texting shortly after with a reason to come home. I know she was always a bit anxious, she had counselling previously and seemed to be ok then.*

I found mornings very difficult and felt bad for making her go when she was upset. I spoke to the year head and the HSCL in the school who were very understanding and gave me some good advice. Sometimes I felt so helpless and stressed about the situation.

Then the school referred my daughter to SCP for support and there the worker talked her through her feelings and they came up with things that might help. My daughter said she found it hard separating from us and always wanted to come home when she had to get out of the car. A plan was made that instead of me dropping her to school her friends' mother would bring them in the morning and I would collect them in the evening. I didn't expect it to work but it did. Now she does still have the odd day where she will text to come home but at least we don't have the morning stress anymore".

"My advice to other parents would be to ask for help early before it gets too bad and give every suggestion a try even when you think it won't work".