School Avoidance and Refusal

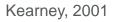
Supporting Students, Families, and School Teams

HEAL Ed Chat May 20, 2020 Karen Sexton MEd



Evidence Based Assessment Scale Reasons Correspond to the Parent Friendly Language in Knowing Note (in same order)





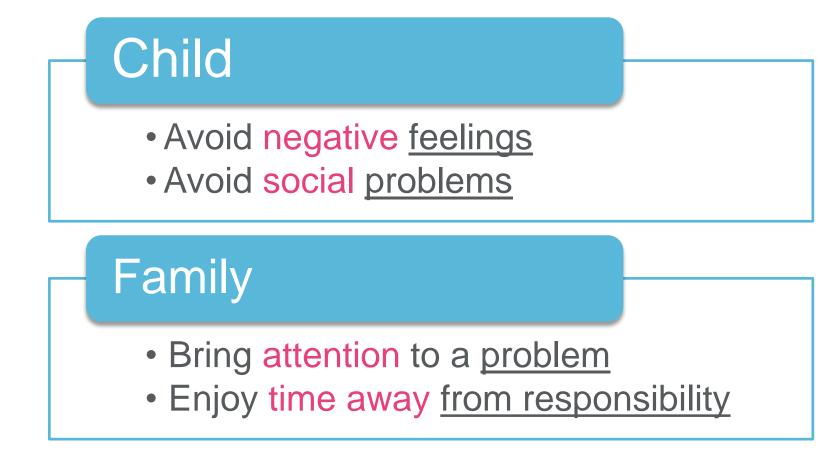


Parent Friendly Language

- Avoid negative feelings
- Avoid social problems
- Bring attention to <u>a problem</u>
- Enjoy time away from responsibility









Kearney, 2001

Resources to Guide Discussions

Two Knowing Notes

- "Understanding Your Child's Reasons"
- "Helping Your Child with School Avoidance"

School Refusal Assessment Scale

Developed by Christopher Kearney

- Confirms your observations
- Provides documentation to family



Reason #1 (Knowing Note)



- Your child may not know how to solve a problem at school
- Children can be upset about school work, tests, friends, gym, and expectations

Therapy will help your child's independence and self-confidence.



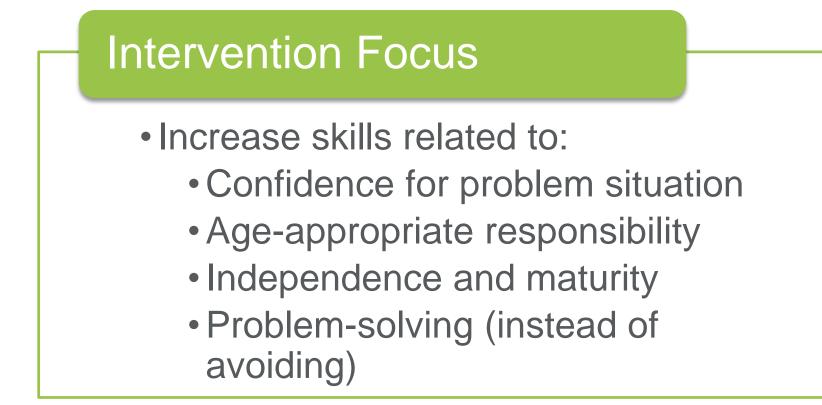
Avoiding Negative Feelings

Student Tendencies

- Avoid acknowledging the "real" reason
- Offer "contrived" reasons
 - Somatic complaints / other explanations
- Adaptation struggles
- Sometimes considered "over-protected", "very capable"



Avoiding Negative Feelings









- Your child may feel judged by self and others
- Children may feel confused about their ability to make or keep friends

Therapy will help your child's social abilities and self-esteem.



Avoiding Social Problems

Student Tendencies

- Real or perceived ideas about self/bullies
- Undeveloped social skills
- Negative comments about self/others
 - "Nobody likes me, everybody thinks I'm weird"
 - "I don't fit in, I don't have the right _____"
 - "They think they're wonderful, but I think____"
 - "I don't have any friends"



Avoiding Social Problems

Intervention Focus Increase skills related to: Social confidence and ability Realistic self-perceptions Accuracy in social observations

Self-esteem and emotional growth



Reason #3 (Knowing Note)

To Bring Attention to a Problem

- Your child may be asking for help through behaviors that cause attention
- Children may be upset about family, school, or friend problems
- Children may be expressing concern about their family's future
- Children may be trying to keep their family healthy, happy, and together

Therapy will help your family deal with problems that are upsetting your child.



Bring Attention to a Problem

Family Tendencies

- Adults are pre-occupied with "other" problems
 - Illness or special ability in sibling or parent
 - Divorce or strained parental relationships
 - Parentified child now "requests" help
- Adults acquiesce to child's behavior
 - Parental control problems / imbalance
 - Enmeshed relationships



Bring Attention to a Problem

Intervention

- Address family problems that upset child
- Help adults understand:
 - Child's behavior is a signal
 - Parent's response influences child
- Restore parent-child power imbalance
- Encourage family (therapeutic) growth



Reason #4 (Knowing Note)

To Enjoy Time Away from Responsibility

- Your child may experience more rewards by staying home
- Children may want to stay home to sleep, use electronic devices, eat snacks, or dress differently
- Children may believe that adults will excuse assignments and responsibilities for absent students

Therapy will help your family organize expectations for your child.



Enjoying Time Away

Student Tendencies

- Not anxious, avoiding, or escaping school
- Circumvent parental "hopes and plans"
- Experience a sense of power and fun in school refusal
- Enjoy electronics, food, sleep, relaxed dress
- Cope well with expectations when accountability is enforced



Enjoying Time Away From

Family Tendencies

- Members in conflict, antagonistic to each other
- Adults are pre-occupied with problems unrelated to child
 - Work, finances, marriage/romantic partner, parent's education
- Adults model/possess poor problem-solving abilities
- Parental-power and control problems



Enjoying Time Away

Intervention Focus

- Teach parents to enforce rules and expectations
 - Natural consequences to match maturity
 - Electronics & perks are earned
 - No attendance= no electronics & perks
 - Expect "up the ante"/escalation behaviors
 - Plan "If ..., then..." responses
- Improve parental power imbalance
- Address adult pre-occupations



Individualized Intervention Strategies



My Trouble Spots (Step 1 = List)

Activity	Reason
Math Class	I don't know how to do math
Lunch	I don't know where to sit
Riding Bus	I don't have anyone to talk to
Changing classes	Someone might make fun of me



My Trouble Spots (Step 2 = Prioritize)

Rank	Activity	Reason
4	Math Class	I don't know how to do math
1	Lunch	I don't know where to sit
3	Riding Bus	I don't have anyone to talk to
2	Changing classes	Someone might make fun of me



Student Log

"Detective work" for self-awareness, fact-finding, problem-solving...

Time	l feel	My location is…	l expect	l think
10 am	Sick & Headache	Going to math	l'll be embarrassed	Teacher expects me to have my homework & know ALL the answers
Lunch	Dizzy	Hallway	No one will want to sit with me. I won't know where to sit	Kids will think I am weird. Nobody likes me.



List small steps as script to practice

Getting into my Classroom

Getting out of car

Walking into building

Saying "Hi" to Ms. Office Lady

Walking down the hall

Walking into my classroom

Smiling or saying "Hi" to one classmate

Sitting in my seat

Taking out my work

Starting my work



Increase Familiarity with Building

Detective/Reporter

- Which classmates smile a lot, help others?
- How do other kids handle conflict, difficult work, etc.?

Scavenger Hunt

- · Go into important rooms, learn details about school
- List of questions student can ask specific staff

Helper Role

- Gain a sense of belonging / responsibility
- Help younger students, tutor, pet care, office/teacher/library, team, club, errand assistant



Care for Deficits

Social Skills (Facilitated Groups)

- Led by caring staff member, counselor, professional
- "Lunch Bunch Group" or before/after school
- Referral to professional skills group

Academic Skills (Support Ideas)

- Before/during/after school
- Peer-to-peer tutor
- Upper grade student tutor (benefit: role model)
- Professional tutoring



Expand thinking patterns

Build Accuracy in Perceptions

- How can you truly tell what others are thinking?
- How can you be 100% sure this [event] will happen?

Challenge Tendency to Catastrophize

- Potential negative events
- · Beliefs others "could" have about them

Remind: As Catastrophizing Increases

- Student becomes increasingly overwhelmed
- Anxiety about negative evaluation worsens
- Student uses school avoidance tactics



Family Intervention Strategies



Supporting Parents/Guardians

Appeal to parent's goals for child's future:

- Life, work, responsibilities, independence
- Ability to:
 - Problem-solve
 - Meet obstacles
 - Compete in work force
 - Become effective future parent

Speak to the bigger idea:

The "School of Life"



Prepare Parents/Guardians to:

Anticipate emotional response

• Expect child to mourn or increase behaviors (due to sense of loss as parents regain control)

Be prepared with planned responses

• If..., then.... scenarios



Coach Parents/Guardians for Home

- Simplify routines (morning & evening)
- Use neutral voice with simple directions
- Avoid stalling conversations
- Normalize natural consequences
 - Accustomed privileges become incentives
 - Inexpensive activities can be incentives
- Plan follow-up for incentives/enforcement



School Intervention Strategies



School Supports

- Parent to use car drop-off circle
- Staff go to car
- Peer goes to car or meets at school door
- Check-in &/or check-out with specific staff
- Specific morning "helper task-job"
- Complete school work in office/resource area
- If office privileges overused: proactive schedule
- Enlist parent as volunteer in another area



School Supports

- Creative scheduling for day, week, year
- Long term make-up plan
 - Explain credit status, grade rubrics, GPA
- Collaborative attendance plan
 - Family must bring student to school
 - School nurse can assess for illness
- Truancy provides boundary



Thoughts and Questions?





References

- 1. Kendall, P.C., Chansky, T. E., Kane, M.T., Kim, R.S., Kortlander, E., Ronan, K.R., Sessa, F.M., & Siqueland, L. (1992). *Anxiety disorders in youth: Cognitive-behavioral interventions.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- 2. Kearney, Christopher A. (2001).School Refusal Behavior in Youth. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association



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