

# Children and Adolescents with School Anxiety and Avoidance Behavior

## Strategies for School Personnel

### Identifying a Student at Risk

- Excessive trancies from school
- Avoidance of activities or interactions in which students previously participated
- Changes in homework patterns (refusal, missing, or incomplete assignments)
- Patterns of academic failure, i.e., decrease in grades, changes in test performance
- Patten of negative peer relations, such as decreased social activities/isolation
- Decreased motivation associated with negative feelings towards school

### According to Kearney and Albano (2007) School Refusal can be a result of

- Avoiding school-related stimuli that provoke negative affectivity
- Escape aversive social and/or evaluative situations
- Seeking attention from primary caregivers
- Tangible rewards outside of school

### Strategies and Interventions

1. School personnel should keep track of both excused and unexcused absences; allowing excessive absences without consequences may foster the refusal, anxiety and avoidance behaviors. Once a pattern of excessive school absences has been identified, it may be helpful to schedule a meeting with the school personnel, parents and students to discuss absences and implement a plan for educational success as well as require a medical note on re-entry for all upcoming absences.
2. It is important to initiate and maintain communication between school personnel and parents on the student's progress and expectations. Sending a written weekly report home to parents provides consistent dialogue between home and school of the student's progress.
3. Expectations for attendance, homework, assignments and tests need to be clearly defined for the students and parents.
4. The student may benefit from a designed school personnel, such as the school social worker to check in with the student and help the student to feel more connected to the school.
5. School assimilation is essential for the students with anxiety and avoidance behaviors. Encouragement of extracurricular activities and student participation can decrease anxiety, foster independence and increase connections in the school setting. Students can work in the office, be a classroom helper or teachers assistant to increase integration in the school environment

6. Negative peer relationships need to be addressed in the school environment, such as bullying, teasing, etc. Social skill development may be necessary to promote change. School social workers, counselors, psychologists, teachers and peer groups are resources for intervention. Peer mediation may also be necessary.
7. A psychological/neuro-cognitive assessment and/or intervention may be determined necessary if patterns of academic failure are present. Identifying and implementing emotional/behavioral/academic accommodations for students may be needed.
8. Academic accommodations may be necessary through the development of a 504 Plan and/or case study evaluation. Outside therapeutic resources may also need to be recommended.

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