

Considerations: School Stress

Children today are under more stress than ever before.

A survey conducted by the American Psychological Association found that 27% percent of adolescents indicated that they had experienced "extreme stress" within the past year.

Hope For The Future

- Art Break (Ziff, Ivers, & Shaw 2015): Providing art therapy in school settings significantly reduced stress levels in children amidst a hectic school day.
- Humor in The Classroom (Skinner, 2010): Humor can be used as a tool for reducing stress and increasing engagement in curriculum
- Teaching Mindfulness to Middle School Students (Viafora, Mathiesen, & Unsworth 2014): teaching mindfulness in the classroom may lead to a reduction of stress and anxiety in middle school students

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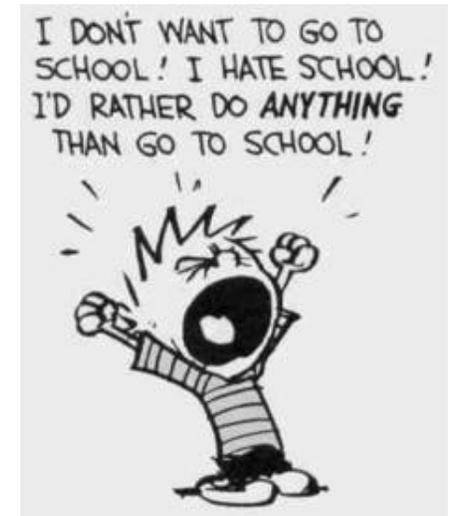
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When Kids Refuse School:

Ways to Help the School-Anxious Child



The purpose of this Casual Conversation is to provide pre-service teachers, school counselors, mental health counselors, and marriage, couple, and family counselors with strategies to assist children struggling with school refusal behavior.

Definitions of School Refusal vary.

- General Definition: Child motivated refusal to attend school and/or difficulties remaining in class for an entire day do at least in part by anxiety or mood problems
- Can include kids who are anxious or sad for reasons other than an internal disorder, provided the emotions are driving the avoidance of school

Symptoms and Epidemiology

Physical Symptoms	Behavioral Symptoms
Stomach Aches	Separation Anxiety
Headaches	Inflexibility
Nausea	Tantrums, Defiance
Diarrhea	Avoidance

School Refusal affects 2 to 5 % of children. Youth who exhibit S.R. are fairly equal among gender, racial, and income groups. Transitions such as moving to a different school and other stressful life events often trigger school refusal behavior. Generally, students exhibiting school refusal have average to above average intelligence.

The Problem of School Refusal:

- Youth exhibit attendance problems an average of two years without receiving formal treatment (Bernstein, Svingen, & Garfinkel, 1990)
- School Refusal is often comorbid with disorders such as separation and generalized anxiety disorders, oppositional defiant disorder, and depression (Kearney & Albano, 2004).
- Short term consequences include child and family distress, academic problems, legal and financial problems, and lack of supervision of the child
- Long term consequences include economic deprivation, marital and occupational problems, need for psychiatric assistance, and social adjustment (Hibbett & Fogelman, 1990)

Assessment:

A comprehensive assessment from a mental health professional is needed for students refusing to go to school for emotional reasons.

Diagnostic Interviews, questionnaires, school based data, and behavioral observations are used to examine school refusal behavior

The School-Refusal Assessment Scale is used to discriminate between the four functions of school refusal:

- avoidance of stimuli provoking negative affect
- escape from aversive social and evaluative symptoms
- attention seeking
- tangible awards

Evidence Based Treatment Options

"In general we advocate a problem solving, capacity building, team approach when addressing this problem"- Kearney & Bates 2005

General Recommendations

- Validate and discuss the fears and anxiety
- Try different coping mechanisms such as relaxation techniques (envision the end of a successful school day, take deep breaths)
- Emphasize the positive aspects of school
- Encourage hobbies and interests
- Help child establish a support system in the school
- Help parents establish routines at home
- Apply cognitive-behavioral techniques such as reframing, challenging maladaptive thoughts. Problem solving, and goal setting
- Consider family therapy which provides communication and problem solving skills

School-Based Approaches

- Send "letters of concern" home to parents before attendance becomes critical
- Encourage regular conferences about the school refusal intervention and progress
- Delay referral to legal agencies contingent on cooperation from family
- Adjustments as necessary and appropriate to child's class schedule
- Assign a buddy who helps child attend class on time and complete assignments
- Provide mediation and resolution of problems with teachers and peers