

School Avoidance & Motivation

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WWP/Rutgers UBHC

UBHC - School Based Counseling

- On-Site Crisis Intervention & Screening
- Access to Mental Health Services
- Collaboration with Mental Health Providers
- Mental Health Awareness & Education
- Consultation to Support Current Practices
- Referrals made through School Counselors

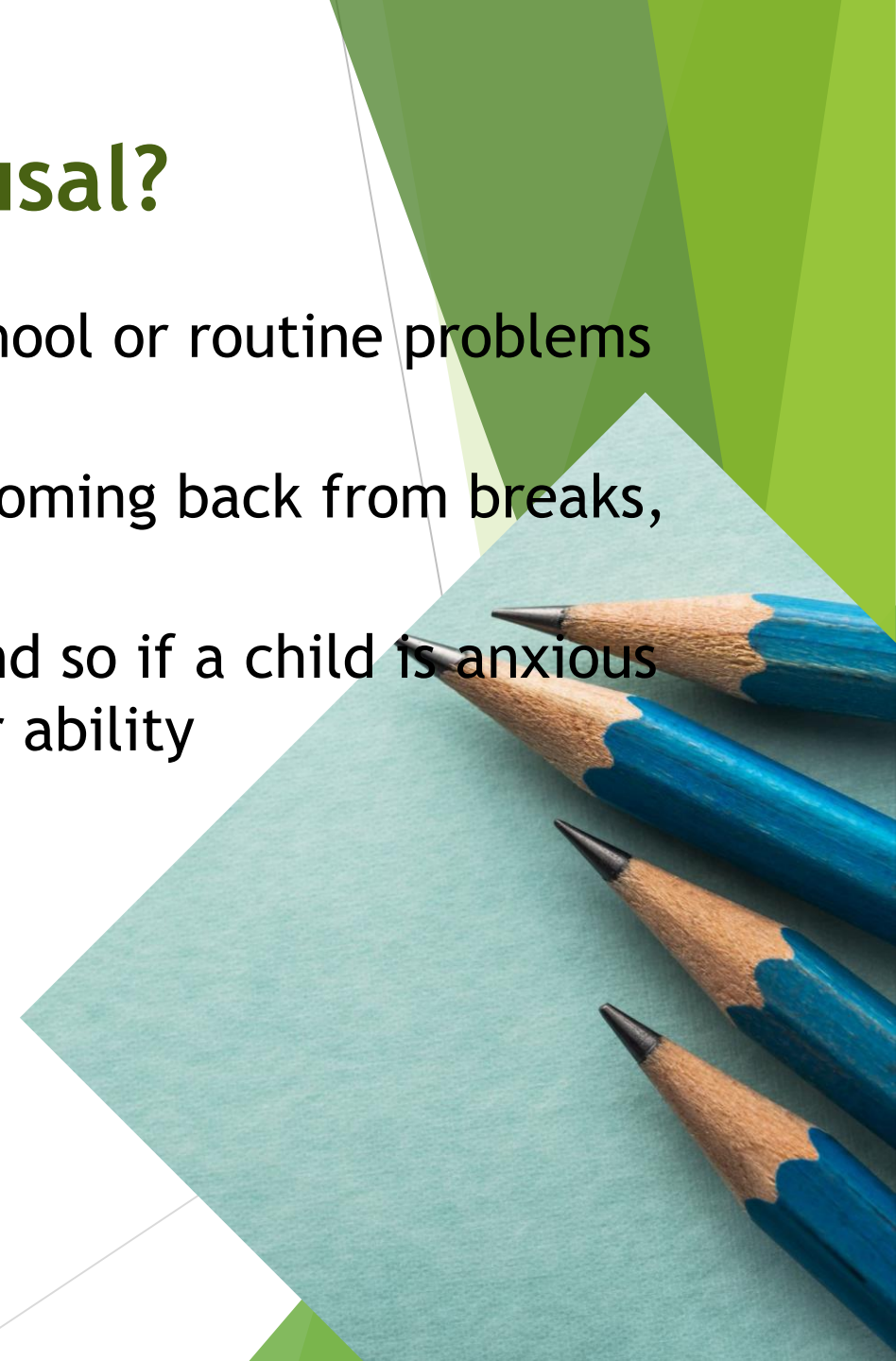
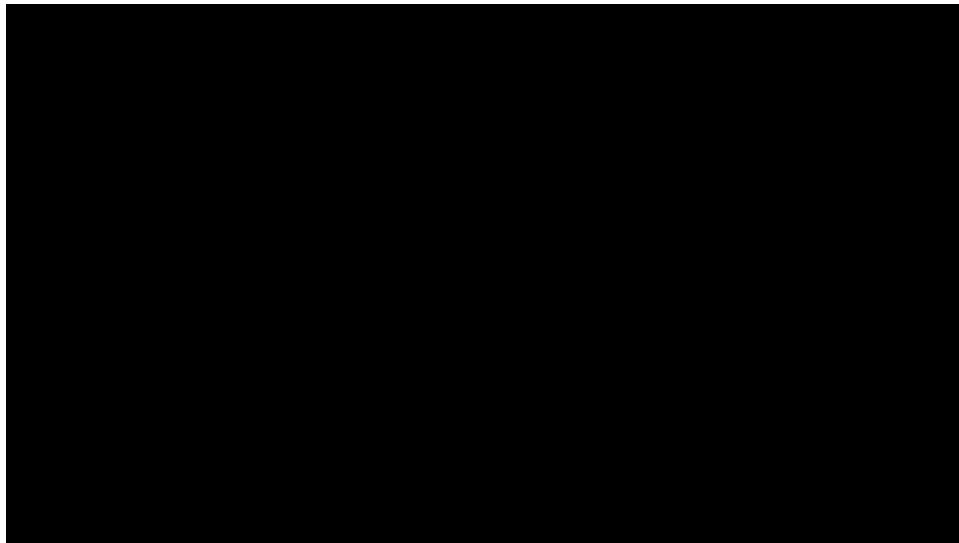
The logo for Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care is displayed within a red rectangular box. The word "RUTGERS" is written in a white, serif font at the top. Below it, the words "University Behavioral Health Care" are written in a white, sans-serif font, stacked on two lines. The background of the slide features abstract green and white geometric shapes.

What is school refusal?

School refusal describes a regular refusal to attend school or routine problems getting to or staying at school.

School refusal commonly happens during transitions (coming back from breaks, etc.)

Anxiety is commonly the base of avoidant behaviors and so if a child is anxious about school they will avoid school to the best of their ability



Four Main Types of School Refusal

Academic, Social, Attention, Reward Based

School Refusal: Academic

Academic or school related activities that cause a child to feel physical or emotional distress



- ▶ Tests
- ▶ Reading out loud or Presenting
- ▶ Athletic Performance
- ▶ Feeling they cannot keep up
- ▶ Trying to hide a learning disability that causes them to feel different from their peers

School Refusal: Social

Social or interpersonal interactions that can cause physical or emotional distress



- ▶ Riding the bus
- ▶ Crowded hallways
- ▶ Where to sit at lunch
- ▶ If they have friends in their classes
- ▶ Anxiety around large groups
- ▶ Feeling as if they need to avoid certain peers for a variety of different reasons

School Refusal: Attention

Refusal to attend school due to getting some form of positive or negative attention from parent, caregiver, friends or school

kids without access to **POSITIVE** attention will settle for **NEGATIVE** attention

- ▶ Having a difficult time separating from parent (seen often in young children following the Covid Pandemic)
- ▶ Wanting someone to notice something is wrong (AKA a cry for help)
- ▶ Wanting to feel noticed either by family or by teachers and school showing concern
- ▶ Seeking attention and validation from friends who may also be engaging in behavioral issues (if student is pretending to go then leaving school)

School Refusal: Reward Based

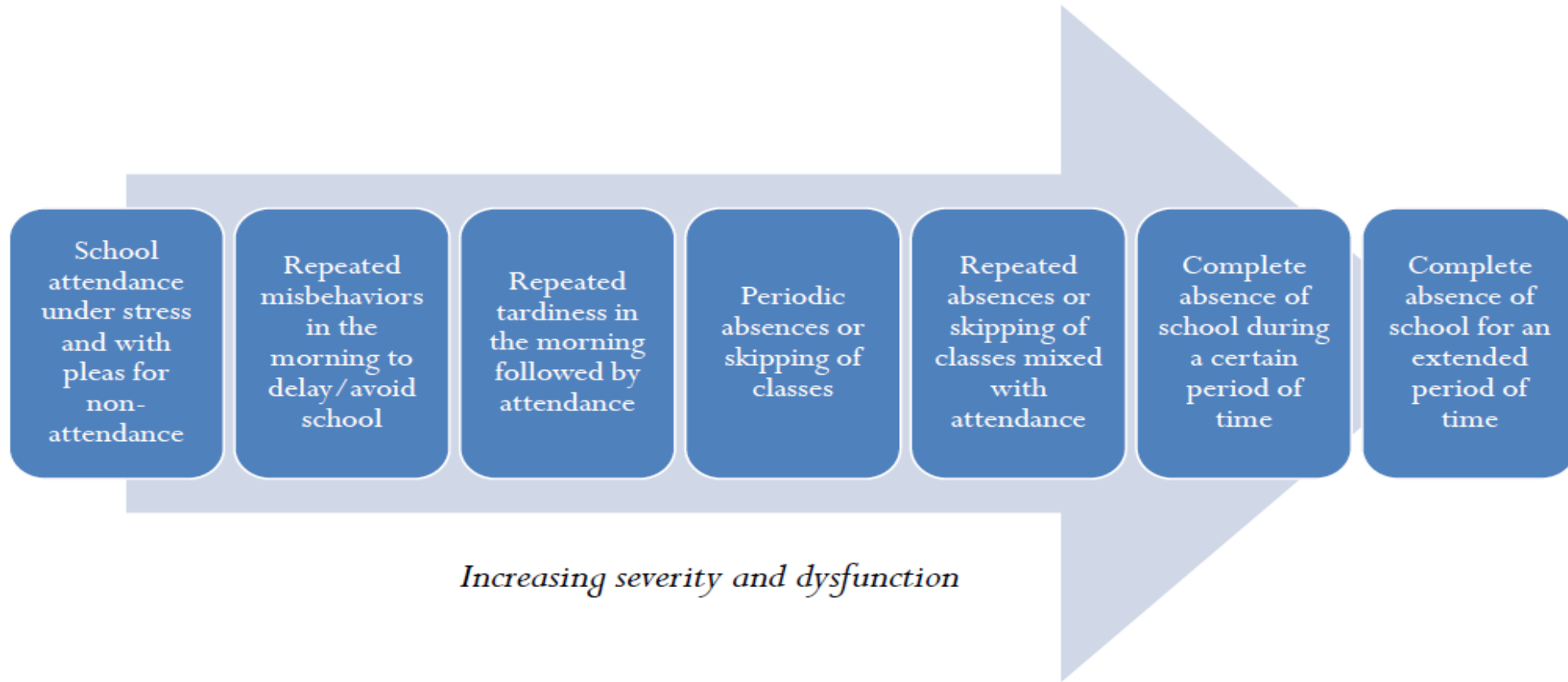
If a child is avoiding school to escape negative emotions they may start to view being at home as getting a reward



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- ▶ They can sleep in/stay in bed which is their comfort zone
- ▶ They can watch television, play video games, do things that make them happy in their leisure time
- ▶ Many families do not have someone home during the day so often if a child is home they have the freedom to do what they want
- ▶ Or a child may get the reward of spending time with their parent if they find it difficult to separate

Spectrum of SR Behaviors



Adapted from Kearney, 2001.

WWP Attendance Policy

▶ DENIAL OF COURSE CREDIT

- ▶ It is the student's and parent's responsibility to manage and keep track of their individual attendance for the year. Parents and students can check attendance online by going to Genesis. Notification of attendance will also be found online on marking period report cards. In the event the student has exceeded the allowable number of absences, the parent/guardian will have five (5) school days in which to appeal the non-credit status in writing to the Assistant Principal.

▶ EXAMPLES

- ▶ Loss of credit will occur after **14** days absent, excused or unexcused, in a **full year** course.
- ▶ Loss of credit will occur after **7** days absent, excused or unexcused, in a **half-year** (semester) course.
- ▶ Loss of credit will occur after **3** days absent, excused or unexcused, in a **marking period** course (such as Health).
- ▶ Loss of credit will occur at the **third cut** in the same course (cannot be appealed).
- ▶ Participation in co-curricular activities is a privilege. A student must attend classes regularly in order to be eligible to participate in these activities. Students who lose credit shall not be permitted to participate in co-curricular activities for the remainder of the school year.

▶ Attendance Appeal Procedure

- ▶ The following procedure will be followed:

- ▶ **1. Petition for Appeal** - A written petition must be submitted to the Assistant Principal by the student's parent/guardian, no later than five (5) school days after the receipt of no credit status. Failure to do so will forfeit the right to an appeal. If the student initiates an appeal, he/she must regularly attend school and class until his/her appeal is heard and a decision is rendered.
- ▶ **2. Attendance Review Board** - In keeping with the dictates of the due process procedure, the School Attendance Review Board shall review cases brought by petition. The appeal committee will be composed of an assistant principal, teachers, school nurse and guidance counselor of the appealing student and child study team caseworker if appropriate.

▶

Levels of School Refusal

Self-corrective

- Less than 2 weeks
- Remits spontaneously

Acute

- 2 weeks to 1 calendar year
- Treatment definitely indicated

Chronic

- More than 1 calendar year
- Often requires higher level of care

Signs of School Refusal

- ▶ Trying to stall before leaving for school (slowly getting dressed, not having stuff together, etc)
- ▶ Separation anxiety
- ▶ Lots of visits to the school nurse if at school
- ▶ Somatic Symptoms: headaches, nausea, diarrhea (these may be genuine but stem from anxiety)
- ▶ Withdrawal from class activities/clubs/friends
- ▶ Missing half of school or less over previous month
- ▶ Difficulty concentrating and completing work at home
- ▶ Often missing the same class (could be due to anxiety with the subject, teacher, or people in class)

School refusal during the Covid-19 pandemic

-Increased rates -Repeated patterns of school refusal -New onset of behaviors

Common worries about returning to school in person:

- ▶ Contracting the virus, passing it onto loved ones or even dying
- ▶ Worry around loss and bereavement
- ▶ Health based concerns regarding socializing with others in person
- ▶ Concerns about losing friendships with former friends due to isolation and fitting into new groups
- ▶ A preference for the slower paced lockdown lifestyle
- ▶ Fear of academic abilities/ or being behind peers
- ▶ Decreased motivation and mood after reduced physical activity
- ▶ Fear of being away from loved ones during the day
- ▶ Worries and Anxiety relating to all of the above factors



Factors and Triggers

stressful life events

major transitions such as starting primary or secondary school

moving or other big change

fear of harm coming to a parent

illness in the family

separation and divorce

academic problems

over

friendship difficulties

separation anxiety

Functions of School Refusal



Somatic Symptoms in Children with School Refusal

Autonomic	Gastrointestinal	Muscular
Dizziness	Abdominal pain	Back pain
Diaphoresis	Nausea	Joint pain
Headaches	Vomiting	
Shakiness/trembling	Diarrhea	
Palpitations		
Chest pains		

<https://www.aafp.org/afp/2003/1015/p1555.html>

Suggestions for Parents

- ▶ Discuss with your child their reluctance and anxiety about going to school
- ▶ Support your child in facing and confronting the fears (where possible)
- ▶ Be consistent and remain steadfast
- ▶ Encourage your child keeping in touch with school friends outside of school clubs
- ▶ Activity and exercise can be a great way for children to help to manage stress and anxiety
- ▶ Preparation
- ▶ Empathize and encourage
- ▶ Don't avoid everything that causes anxiety
- ▶ Be realistic with your expectations

▶ <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/School-Avoidance.aspx>

▶ <https://childmind.org/article/back-school-anxiety/>

Suggestions for Parents continued

- ▶ Don't ask leading questions
- ▶ Calm parent, calm child
- ▶ Try not to reinforce your child's fears
- ▶ Reduce the amount of time your child has to anticipate the event
- ▶ Encourage your child to become a thought detective
- ▶ Maintain a good relationship with your child's school

- Create a structured morning routine
- Ease back into a school based sleep schedule
- Get your family's calendar organized
- Attend school Open House or orientation session
- Talk to your children about any anxiety or worries they are experiencing



Engagement and Motivation

Student engagement: student's active involvement and commitment to academic and social activities in the school

- ▶ Emotional engagement

Thoughts and feelings about school, including teachers and classmates

- ▶ Cognitive-behavioral

Desire and willingness to exert one's best effort toward learning

Student engagement is closely related to motivation, however motivation is necessary but not sufficient for engagement

National Association of School Psychologists: Engagement and Motivation: Helping Handout for Home. <https://www.nasponline.org/>



Recommendations

- ▶ Define your concerns and clarify your expectations
- ▶ Talk to your child's teacher
- ▶ School transitions (elementary → middle → high school)
- ▶ Consider social factors
- ▶ Skills deficit
- ▶ Being bored/Not being stimulated enough in school setting
- ▶ Learning disorders, symptoms of ADHD, Depression, Anxiety, and other conditions

Child Mind Institute: Does Your Child Lack Motivation?/ <https://childmind.org/article/does-your-child-lack-motivation/>

Strategies to Help Your Child Get Motivated in School

- ▶ Get involved
- ▶ Use reinforcement
- ▶ Reward effort rather than outcome
- ▶ Help them see the big picture
- ▶ Let them make mistakes
- ▶ Get outside help
- ▶ Make the teacher your ally
- ▶ Get support for yourself



Child Mind Institute: How to Help Your Child Get Motivated in School/<https://childmind.org/article/how-to-help-your-child-get-motivated-in-school/>

School Refusal Resources for Parents

- ▶ Rogers Behavioral Health/<https://rogersbh.org/school-refusal>
- ▶ School Avoidance: Tips for Concerned Parents/healthychildren.org/<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/School-Avoidance.aspx>
- ▶ When Kids Refuse to Go to School/Child Mind Institute/<https://childmind.org/article/when-kids-refuse-to-go-to-school/>
- ▶ School refusal: When a child won't go to school/Harvard Health Publishing/<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/school-refusal-when-a-child-wont-go-to-school-2018091814756>

Mental Health Hotline Resources

Performcare 24/7 877-652-7624


2nd Floor Youth Helpline of New Jersey: Call or Text 888-222-2228

New Jersey Hopeline: 1-855-654-6735

Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a Crisis Counselor; chat feature also available through facebook messenger

Rutgers UBHC Acute Psychiatric Services: 855-515-5700

Princeton Medical Center ER: 609-853-7730




**During the COVID-19 Pandemic
your mental health is vital.**

**For Free Emotional Support
from Trained Staff**

Call 866-202-HELP (4357)
(Multilingual Service Available)

OR Text NJHOPE to 51684

7 Days/Week, 8 a.m. — 8 p.m.



This program is brought to you through NJ Hope and Healing Crisis Counseling Program (CCP), The Mental Health Association of New Jersey in collaboration with the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services and through the CCP through a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Questions?

