



## Working with Families to Address School Avoidance and Truancy for Children with Mental Health Needs



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### Today's Webinar

- ▶ Scheduled from 12:00 - 1:00p.m.
- ▶ NOTE: If you are unable to listen to the Webinar through your computer speakers you may dial into the Webinar using the phone number listed in the GoToWebinar control bar.
- ▶ Participants are muted.
- ▶ If you are having technical difficulties, please visit [www.gotowebinar.com](http://www.gotowebinar.com) and click on support.

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### Today's webinar- Certificates of Attendance

- ▶ A link to the on-line evaluation survey will be emailed within a few days after the presentation.
- ▶ Please complete evaluation surveys by **Thursday, February 28, 2019**. A link for your Certificate of Attendance will be available at the end of the survey.
- ▶ **If participating as a group**, each person must complete a survey in order to receive a Certificate of Attendance. If you are the organizer, please forward the survey link to each participant.
- ▶ We are unable to provide any Certificates of Attendance to individuals viewing this training as an archived webinar.

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## How mental health impacts school avoidance and truancy in children and youth



## School and Mental Health

### What we know:

- 1 in 7 children aged 2-8 has a diagnosed mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder
- Nearly 1 in 5 youths aged 13-18 live with a mental health condition
- The most common mental health diagnosis are:
  - Anxiety
  - ADHD and disruptive behavior
  - Depression
  - PTSD

<https://www.ehc.gov/childrenewmentalhealth/data.html>  
<https://www.nami.org/getattachment/Learn-More/Mental-Health-by-the-Numbers/childrenewfacts.pdf>  
<https://childmind.org/downloads/2015%20Childrens%20Mental%20Health%20Report.pdf>



## School and Mental Health

- National organizations for social workers, psychologists, and school counselors recommends a ratio of 1 professional per 250 students
  - National average is 1 professional per 482 students
  - Minnesota's average is 1 professional per 723 students
- Models of mental health support in schools may include grant programs or state funded co-located services
- Children's mental health professionals outside of the school system have worker shortages




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## School and Mental Health

- Many children have co-morbid conditions
  - More than one mental health diagnosis
  - A medical condition and a mental health diagnosis
- Children and youth with a diagnosis of an anxiety disorder, depressive disorder, or conduct disorder are most likely to avoid/refuse school




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## School avoidance/refusal

- School refusal – not a formal diagnosis
- Includes high levels of distress about attending school and may include anxiety, depression or other somatic symptoms
- School refusal may be present along with symptoms from other types of disorders
- May serve different functions and often caused by multiple factors
- Can be a sudden occurrence or gradually manifest (increasing reluctance)
- Some examples: fear provoked by something (tests, bathrooms); escaping social situations (teachers, students, large groups); separation anxiety (parent, family member); attention-seeking (complaints of illness)




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## How does a child tell us they are avoiding school?

### Internalizing behaviors

\* Worry about school or being away from parent  
 \* Complaints about school  
 \* Reluctance to go to school



\* Difficulty starting or finishing work  
 \* Little/no peer socialization  
 \* Seeking adult attention frequently



\* Complaints of feeling sick  
 \* Crying or sadness  
 \* Easily frustrated or quick to anger



### Externalizing behaviors

\* Verbal threats to harm self or others  
 \* Physical aggression  
 \* Refuse to leave the home, get on the bus, or walk in the school building

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## How does school avoidance behavior impact attendance?

### Low impact on attendance record

\* Goes to school and stays in the classroom most days, but is often disengaged from classroom activities



\* Goes to school most days, but frequently leaves classroom  
\* Frequent trips to the school nurse, guidance counselor, or other trusted adult



\* Sporadic absences from school  
\* Often late to school or leaves school early



### High impact on attendance record

\* Significant number of absences from school (2 or more per month)  
\* May be absent for several days, weeks, or months at a time

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## Truancy

- Excused vs. Unexcused Absences
- Truancy results from difficulties with school attendance
  - Absent full or part days
  - Late arrivals/early departures
  - Not in expected place
- School responsibilities:
  - Accurately record student attendance
  - Inform parents student is truant after 3 unexcused absences
  - Work with families to improve attendance
  - Inform county a student is truant after 7 unexcused absences

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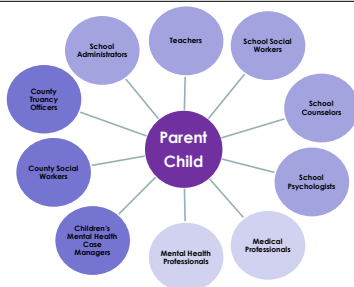
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## Who has a role in addressing truancy and school avoidance?



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## Communicating with Families

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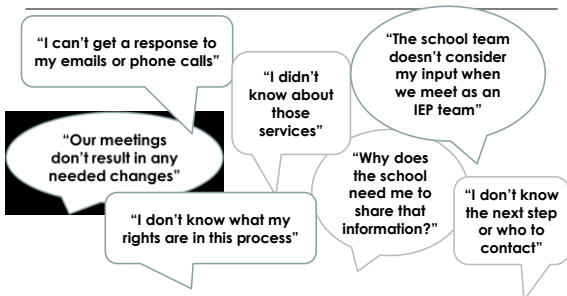
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## Barriers to Parent Involvement



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## Communicating with Parents

- Do I understand the barriers this parent is facing to actively participating in creating a plan to support their child?
- Are there any cultural considerations to take into account?
- What is the best way for the parent to contact me (what works best for me and what works best for the parent)?
- Does the parent understand my role in supporting their child?
- Does the parent understand their role in developing and implementing a plan to support their child's attendance?
- How will I share with the parent the next steps after we meet?

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## Communicating with Children/Youths

- Do I have a clear understanding of why the child/youth experiences distress at school?
- Does the child/youth know what to expect in a meeting?
- Do they understand how adults plan to support their needs after the meeting?
- How can I foster trust and a positive relationship with this child/youth?




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## The Importance of Positive Interactions

- Be an active listener
- Get to know the child/youth
- Include time to talk about the child's strengths when you meet
- Provide positive feedback and encouragement
- Give the parent and child clear action steps they can take
- Communicate what you can/will do to support the family
- Thank parents for their time



Tips for Teachers and school Staff from Students with Mental Health and Behavioral Challenges: <https://www.pacer.org/parent/philp-phil-c-148.pdf>

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## Reinforce the value of parent participation

- Help parents to understand how highly their role is valued
- Talk about a structure for reaching agreement if parents are not happy with services
- Honor the knowledge of families – and use it whenever possible




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## Strategies to Support School Success



## Plan to meet...

- Prepare in advance and know the important points to discuss and questions to ask
- Gather relevant records to share at the meeting and share them in advance with all attendees, if possible
- Clearly define the concerns/issues in your mind before you meet
- Come with ideas for solutions and be willing to listen to the ideas of others



## ...and meet to plan

- Communicate in an honest and direct manner
- Ask questions of parents and other professionals
- When action is required, always clarify who is responsible for seeing that it is done
- Clearly state what parents and their child/youth can expect next before ending the meeting




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Developing an educational plan for child/youth with school avoidance –

### Define the interventions to accomplish the goals

- The interventions and supports should positively support the student and be consistent
- What accommodations will help the child successfully return to school or the classroom?
- Who will meet with the child on a regular basis and/or when they need support?
- What changes will be made to the IEP/504 plan?
- How will this plan be communicated to staff who work with the child?

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Developing an educational plan for child/youth with school avoidance –

### Meet again and revise the plan if necessary

- What interventions are working well?
- Which interventions are not working? Why aren't they working?
- Is it appropriate to increase expectations of the amount of time the child/youth is at school or in the classroom? How much time?
- What educational progress has the child/youth made since the last meeting?




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### PACER Center – how we help

- Individual assistance for parents/guardians
- Information for professionals
- Multicultural services
- PACER projects




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