

# School Avoidance



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**Advocates for Children of New York**  
Protecting every child's right to learn



# Today's Training



Introduction

What is School Avoidance?

Rights of Students with School Avoidance

Tips & Strategies



# What is Advocates for Children (AFC)?



AFC is an independent agency that protects the education rights of **all** NYC students

## Our Services:

- Helpline: **1-866-427-6033** (Mon-Thurs, 10am – 4pm)
- Guides and resources: [www.advocatesforchildren.org](http://www.advocatesforchildren.org)
- Workshops and trainings
- Free legal services to low-income families



# What is School Avoidance?

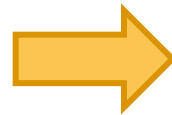


- Spectrum of Behaviors
- Often linked to mental health challenges:
  - Anxiety
  - Depression
  - Social phobia
  - Shame/low self-esteem due to academic challenges

Here are some resources for [understanding](#) and [recognizing](#) school avoidance.



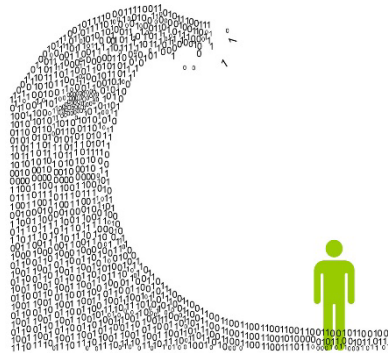
# Impact on Learning



Competition  
for energy and  
attention.



Less available to learn  
and potentially more  
behavior challenges.





# Why is this important?

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## Signs of School Avoidance



Fear of teachers  
being upset or  
unkind

Fear of  
challenges with  
peers (bullying,  
etc.)

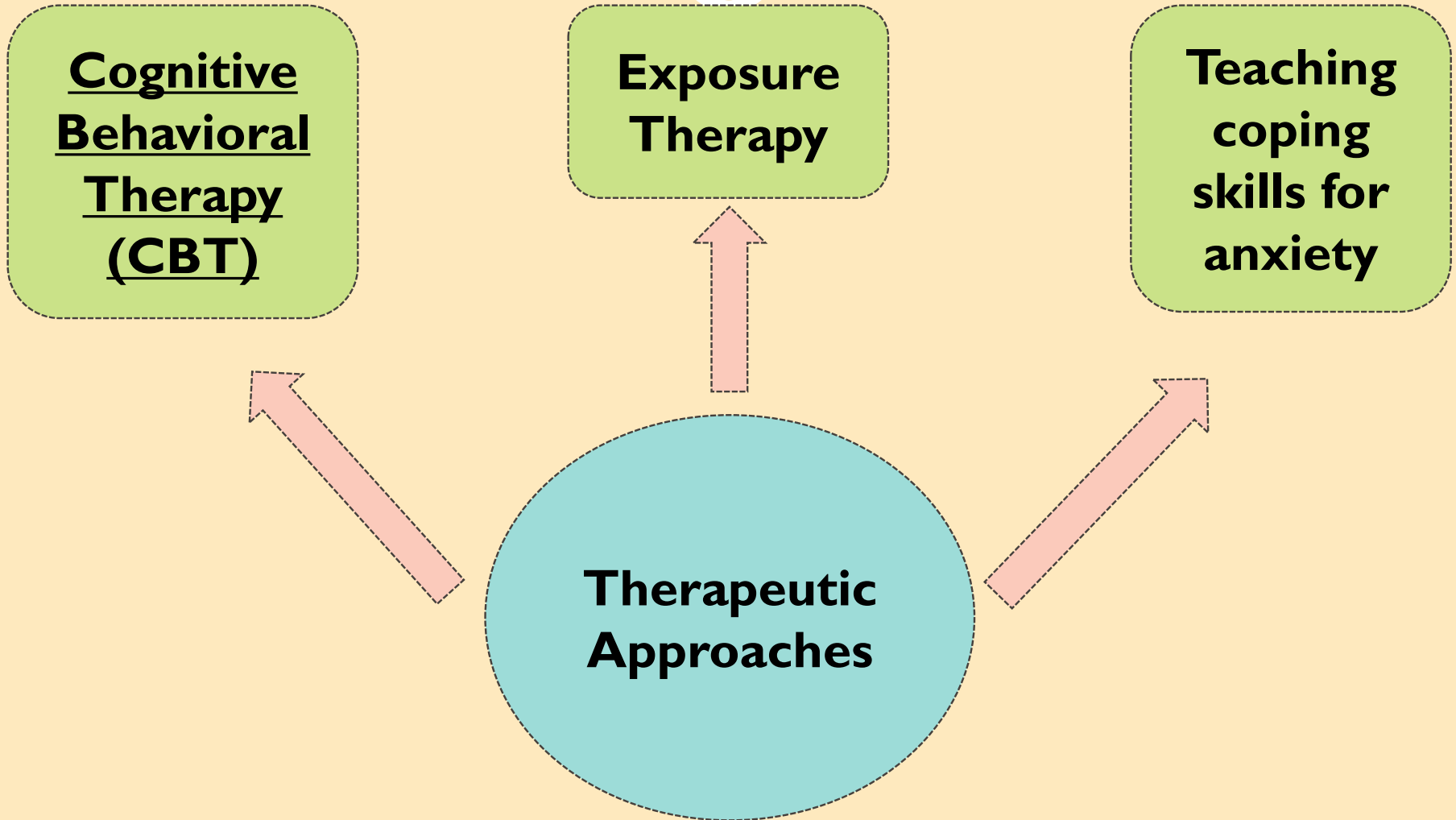
Perfectionism  
about academic  
performance

Emotional or  
behavioral issues  
at time of school

Physical  
symptoms



# Therapeutic Approaches





# Private Providers



Examples of private providers with school avoidance practices or clinicians who work in related areas:

- [NYU Anita Saltz Institute for Anxiety & Mood Disorders](#)
- [Promise Project](#)
- [Child Mind Institute](#)
- [Manhattan Psychology Group](#)



# Today's Training



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 Rights of Students with School Avoidance

Tips & Strategies



# Parents' and Students' Rights



- Schools must support students with school avoidant behavior by providing appropriate supports/services to address the behavior
- If a student is facing mental health challenges and school avoidance, they may be entitled to certain rights under federal and state law. These rights include:
  - The right to an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** or
  - The right a **504 Plan** to address the school-avoidant behavior
    - See [AFC's Guide to Section 504](#)



# Individuals with Disabilities Education Act



**IDEA:** All children (through age 22) with a disability...

Have the right to a

Free

Appropriate

Public

Education

**FAPE**

In the

Least

Restrictive

Environment

**LRE**

For more information see [AFC's Guide to Special Education](#)



# Individualized Education Program (IEP)



Legal document (like a contract)

Individualized – describes the student and the special education services that the student requires

Must be based on the student's needs and not on availability of services/programming

All the services and programs on the IEP must be given to the student

Must be reviewed every year and must be revised if expected progress is not achieved



# Classifications

Autism

Deafness

Deaf-Blindness

Emotional Disability

Hearing Impairment

Learning Disability

Intellectual Disability

Multiple Disabilities

Orthopedic Impairment

Other Health Impairment

Speech or Language Imp.

Traumatic Brain Injury

Visual Impairment



# Parents' and Students' Rights



- The bottom line is that students with school avoidance have a right to services to help them return to school:

These services can be included in an IEP if the student is found eligible for special education.

These services can be included in a 504 plan if the student is not found eligible for special education.



# School Avoidance and Push-Out



**Gradual, increasing drops in attendance**



**School fails to take measures in response**



**Student becomes more and more removed from school**





# Right to Be in School

Students must  
stay in school

- Until the end of the school year in which they turn

**17**

Students may  
stay in school

- Until the end of the school year in which they turn

**21**

or until they get a diploma



# Legal Consequences of Missing School



- If a student (who is 17 and under) is absent for 10+ consecutive days, their school can act as a mandated reporter and file for educational neglect with the Administration for Children Services (ACS).
- This should NOT deter you from asking the school for help with your child's school avoidance!
- [NYCPS guidance](#) from March 2025 recognizes school avoidance; states that calling ACS for educational neglect should be "an option of last resort"
- **Communication with the school is key.**



# Common Misconceptions



**School  
Avoidance**



**Truancy**

Advocates: Support the family in distinguishing school avoidance from “truancy”



# Questions?

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# General Strategies for School Avoidance



- Plan for gradual re-engagement
- Incorporating motivating factors into school day
- Ask your school to identify one or two "point people" for your student
- Designate a safe space in the building
- Develop a behavior contract or behavior management plan



# General Strategies for School Avoidance



- Look for alternative school programs depending on cause of school avoidance
  - Transfer schools
  - Work-based learning programs
- Weigh the benefits and drawbacks of temporary Home Instruction



# Weigh the benefits and drawbacks of temporary Home Instruction



## Home Instruction

Interim instruction provided to students who require long-term absence due to orthopedic, non-orthopedic/medical, or psychiatric reasons

Requires an MD to complete forms to justify instruction

Only for 6 months; can be renewed with MD approval

Does not revise/change IEP

For more information and how to apply, see <https://www.homeinstructionschools.com/>





# General Strategies School-Avoidant Students



- Outside of school:
  - Try to connect student with mental health provider
    - [NYC 988 website](#): can look for mental health providers and chat electronically with counselor 24/7, 365 days per year
  - Look for mentorship or other programs based on what motivates the student



# Strategies for Students with IEPs



I. Identify the source of school avoidance



Ask your school for an **Independent Assessment Authorization (IAA)** for a **neuropsychological evaluation or other independent evaluations.**



# Requesting an IAA for an Independent Evaluation



[Date]

Re: Request for IAA

I am requesting an Independent Assessment Authorization (IAA) for my child, [child's full name], as I am concerned that my child's school avoidance is interfering with their education. [Add more details or examples].

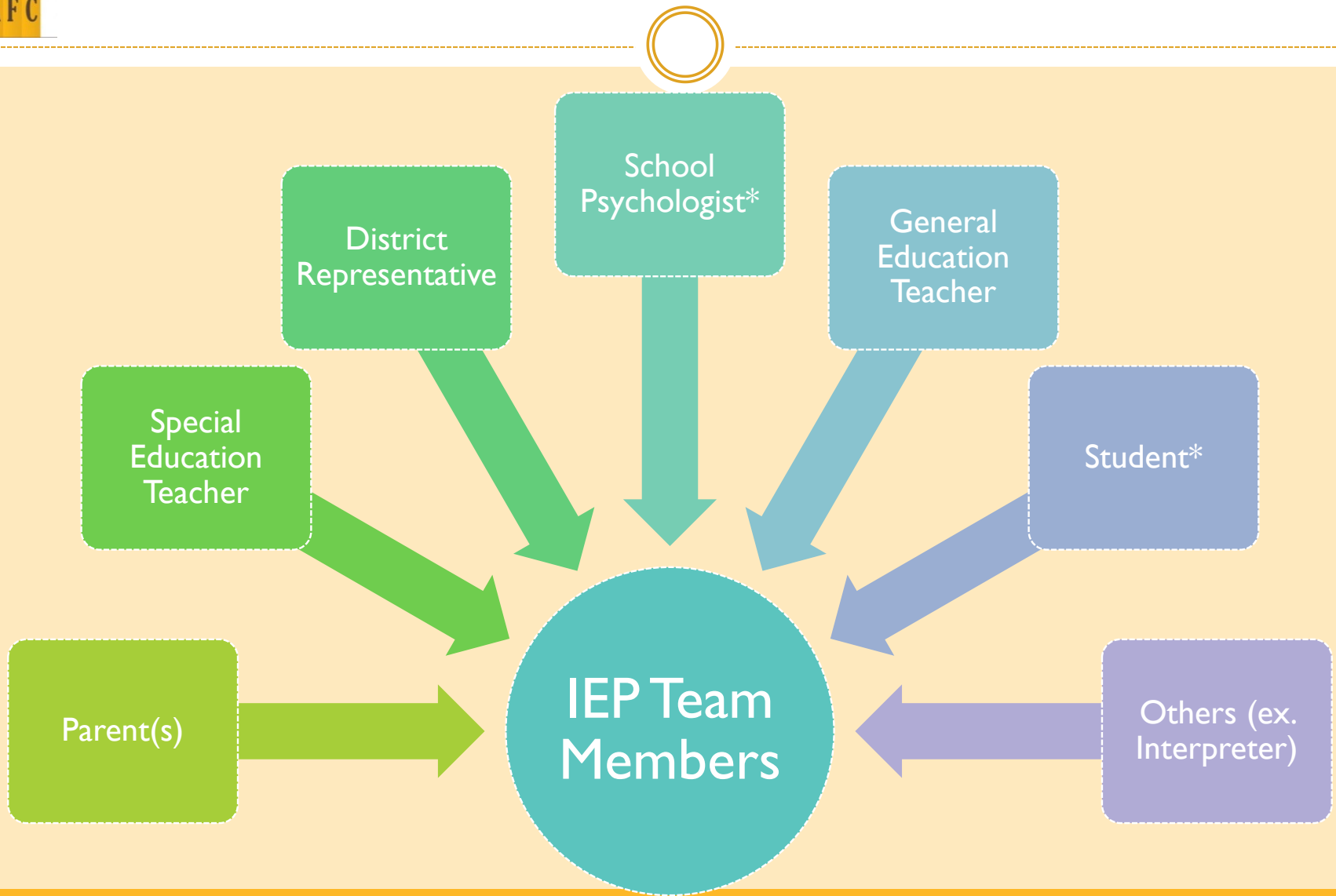
I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

[Your name]



## 2. Ask for an IEP Meeting



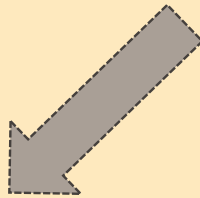
See [AFC's Worksheet: Preparing for an IEP Meeting](#)



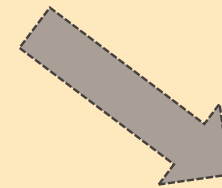
# Advocating for School-Avoidant Students



## 3. Advocate for supports at the IEP meeting:



Describe your child's mental health challenges.



Ask the school to conduct a **Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)** and develop a **Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)**.



# What goes in a BIP?

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## Data from FBA

Classroom observations

Reports

Interviews



## BIP

Prevent behavior from occurring

Manage the behavior

Measure progress



### 3. Advocate for Supports at the IEP Meeting



Include strategies for school avoidance in the Management Needs section of the IEP

- Adjustments to school schedule
- Access to quiet spaces/breaks

Include training for school staff on therapeutic approaches

- This would go in the section for “supports for school personnel on behalf of the student”



# When to Call AFC



Call  
AFC's  
Helpline:

- School will not grant an IAA
- School says it cannot help your child if they aren't in the school building
- School-based solutions are not working
- Schools takes disciplinary action against your child





# Questions?

33





## Wrapping up: Reminders!



- Fill out our survey!
- If you need help, ask! We are open!
- Call Our Helpline: 866-427-6033
  - Toll free
  - Monday-Thursday
  - 10am-4pm
- Email Us: [Info@advocatesforchildren.org](mailto:Info@advocatesforchildren.org)

