



How to Assess and Manage School Refusal Behavior (SRB)



sage
THRIVE

Partners In School-Based Mental Wellness

About Sage Thrive

For those of us working in school settings, it's harder than ever to navigate the complex and growing need for readily available child and adolescent mental health treatment. We are seeing a continual rise in anxiety, depression, school refusal, suicide and other student mental health issues. Additionally, parents, teachers and community stakeholders increasingly expect school professionals to address these mental health issues in the school environment.

Sage Thrive partners with schools by providing counseling, intervention and staff support services to enhance the social, emotional and academic well-being of students and help them thrive in-district while significantly reducing costs.



Goals

To provide professionals with an overview of school refusal behavior, profiles and intervention strategies. This webinar will discuss the importance of:



Assessing the form (how) and the function (why) of SRB



Various family structures found in SRB students



Approaches to intervention



Case studies in which all of these components were utilized to effect change



Introduction

School Refusal is always a topic that draws a lot of interest since students exhibiting school refusal behaviors (SRB) are among the most challenging, complex and frustrating for school personnel.

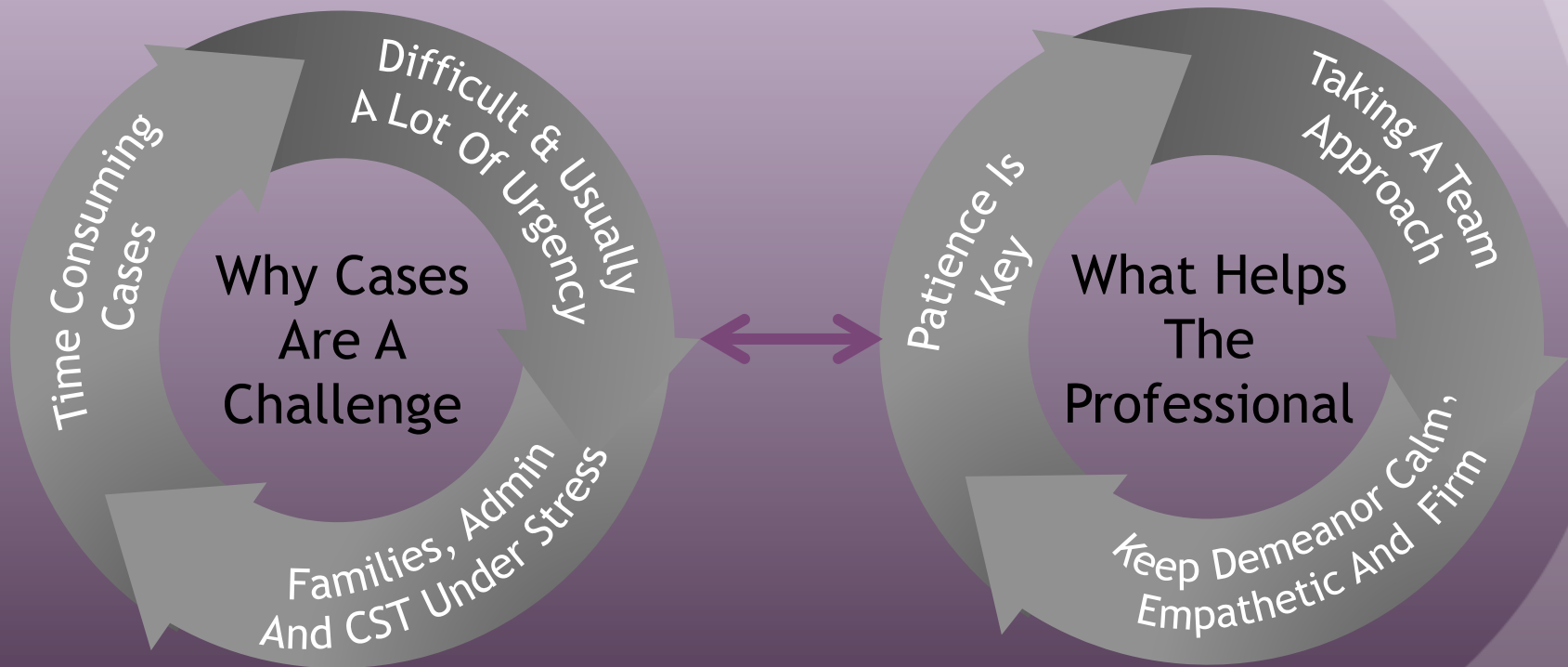


Mild = Clear cause and solution but severity can intensify without intervention.

Severe = Long in duration; entrenched, previous interventions have failed, family may have given up hope, or even become uncooperative; student has lost credit and is at risk of dropping out.



What Makes These Cases Challenging



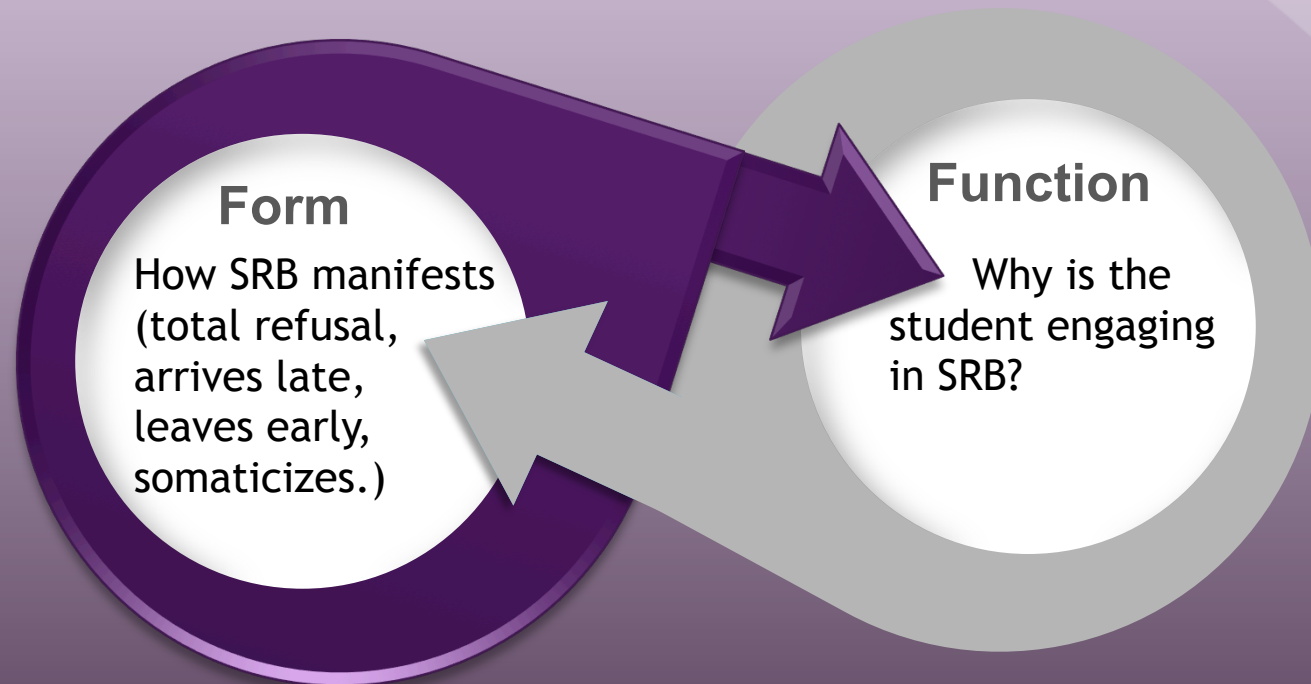
What Is School Refusal?

Contemporary Definition:

School refusal encompasses a continuum of school avoidant behaviors ranging from: chronic, complete refusal to go to school, to a pattern of difficulties attending classes or remaining in school for an entire day.



Assess & Understand Form and Function



- Negative reinforcements - Avoid something unpleasant
- Positive reinforcements - Tangible rewards, pleasurable behaviors



SRB Profiles

Negative Reinforcement Profile



- Student who avoids fear and anxiety producing situations at school.
- Student who avoids adverse social or testing situations.

The first two groups showed higher levels of fear and anxiety than did the other groups.

Positive Reinforcement Profile



- Student who stays home to pursue parental attention (separation-individuation.)
- Positive tangible reinforcement- computer, TV.

This group was more associated with conduct issues.



Primary Psychiatric Disorders Among Youth With SRB

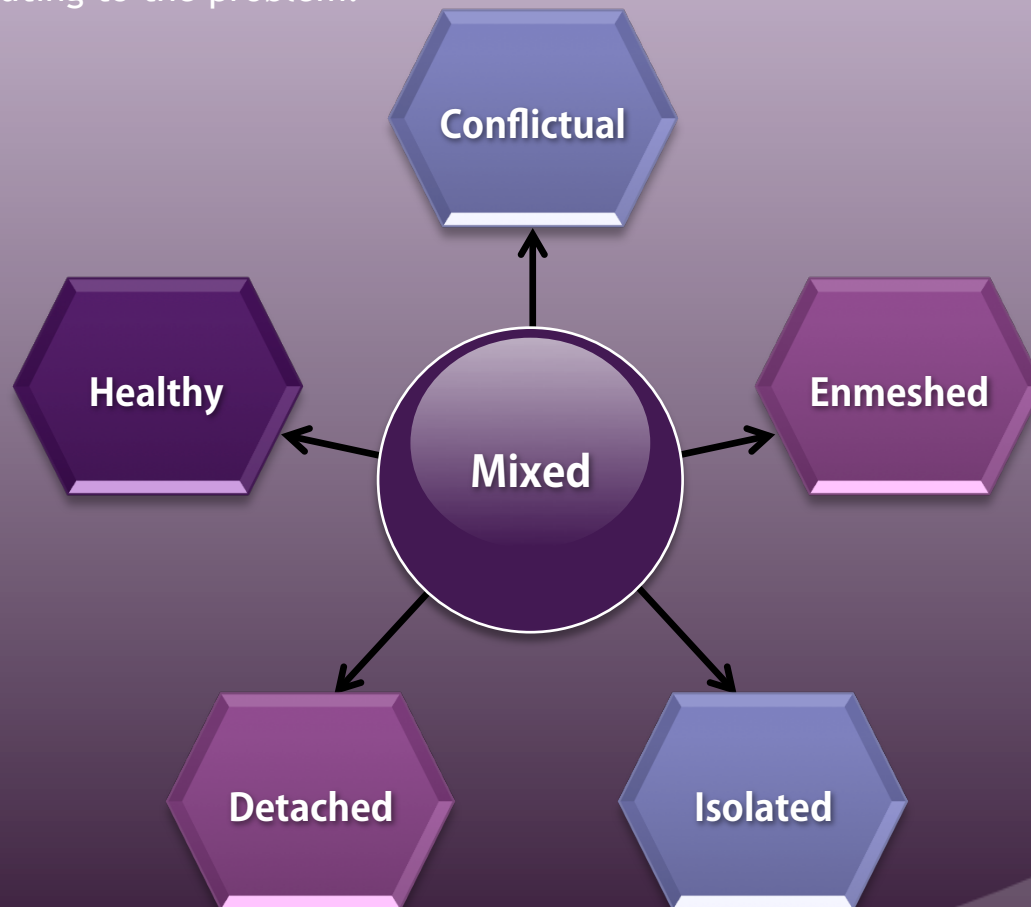
- Separation anxiety disorder 22.4%
- Generalized anxiety disorder 10.5%
- Oppositional defiant disorder 8.4 %
- Major depression 4.9%
- Specific phobia 4.2%
- Social anxiety disorder 3.5%
- Conduct disorder 2.8%
- Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder 1.4%
- Panic disorder 1.4%

It should be noted however, that 32.9% of subjects in this study had no identified psychiatric diagnosis.



Family Dynamics

In addition to form and function, knowing the family dynamics of the school refusing student is helpful in knowing where the strengths are and how family members can help or are contributing to the problem.



Intervention Components

“Conflictual” Family -

Initially make school the focus and focus on areas of agreement and what the rewards will be for attending school.

“Enmeshed” Family -

There has to be a focus on parents as primary.



Intervention Components

“Isolated” Family -

The child should be encouraged to branch out and help family to support that.
Realign family hierarchy.



Stay Positive By Remembering To:

EXPECT set backs and push back.

EDUCATE parents and colleagues so that they can expect and cope with set backs.

SUPPORT parents in their efforts. Push back will make parents doubt that they are doing the right thing.



Plan of Re-Entry

Therapeutic Intervention (always moving away from home toward school all while establishing a relationship.)

- Home visits.
- Sessions out of home; preferably at school or at an alternate site.
- For the more panic-oriented student, provide relaxation techniques and slow transitions.
- Therapist provides a holding, soothing function for the student during efforts to return to school.
- During transition period provide student with low stress activities (counseling, classes, clubs.)

