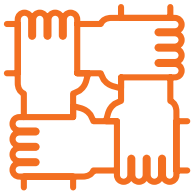


THE ABC SCIENCE COLLABORATIVE AND NC-PAL STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH MINISERIES:

Anxiety and School Avoidance



The ABC Science Collaborative works with school leadership and community partners to identify needs and solutions within North Carolina schools. One need that schools have identified in recent years is mental health support for students. To answer questions, provide information, and share strategies for navigating mental health in schools, The ABC Science Collaborative partnered with the [North Carolina Psychiatry Access Line \(NC-PAL\)](#) on a Student Mental Health Miniseries, made up of three meetings hosted by Dr. Andrea Diaz Stransky. As an NC-PAL clinician, Dr. Diaz Stransky provides psychiatric consultation and helps develop educational materials for pediatric providers across the state. She leads the NC-PAL School Consultation team that has provided group case-consultation to more than 100 school teams. In this resource, you can read a summary of key takeaways and resources from the first meeting in this series: Anxiety and School Avoidance.



There are strategies and treatments available to help students with anxiety and school avoidance. A care team can collaborate to create an action plan.

Key takeaways for supporting students with anxiety and school avoidance

- There are strategies and treatments available to help students who experience anxiety and school avoidance.
- Common symptoms of anxiety in children include irritability, forgetfulness, stomachaches, headaches, dizziness, and other physical complaints.
- Gradual exposure to school and school-related stressors is a core principle of addressing anxiety and school avoidance.
- Communicate openly and collaboratively with students' caregivers as well as their therapists or clinical teams.
- Celebrate incremental wins and progress.
- Get to know the student. Identify their stressors, as well as what helps them feel better.
- Use a systematic approach for students experiencing anxiety and school avoidance, while also recognizing that one size does not fit all.
- Treatment with medication does not lead to dependency and can help children overcome anxiety and school avoidance.

Useful tools and tips

CREATING AN ACTION PLAN:

An anxiety action plan is a tool to collaborate and communicate with students and caregivers, identify actionable steps, and set expectations. Keep the following in mind when creating an action plan and use the action plan template and tip sheets linked below to get started.

- Ask the student to identify what their stressors are, and how they make them feel. Ask what makes them feel better.
- Incorporate an element of choice for the student, with input from caregivers, teacher, counselor, etc.
- Plan for potential roadblocks ahead of time and create work-arounds.
- Establish a sustainable and personalized line of communication with caregivers.
- Gradually increase the student's exposure to school and stressors.
- Fine-tune the plan while in school. Encourage the student to navigate unexpected events by using their coping strategies.

BEST PRACTICES:

- Create a strategy that does not add excessive paperwork for the teacher.
- The strategy should not put a disproportionate burden on the teacher, school, or counselor. Create strategies that are implemented at home as well.
- Focus on 2 or 3 interventions at a time.
- Plan for removing these interventions as the student makes progress toward going to school normally.
- Tailor the action plan for an individual student at a school meeting in collaboration with caregivers.

COMMON PITFALLS:

- Don't rush to action. Listen to what the student is telling you and consider the contributing factors at school and at home.
- Don't make assumptions about what is or is not going on at home. Ask parents directly if there have been changes.
- Don't create action plans that are too rigid or too flexible. Set specific, agreed-upon expectations and follow them consistently.

Resources

- [Anxiety Action Plan](#)
Helps identify the student's stressors, what calms them down, and what to do during an anxiety episode. Invite members of the student's care team to collaborate to create an action plan.
- [School Avoidance Tip Sheet for Teachers](#)
- [School Avoidance Tip Sheet for Parents](#)
- [School Avoidance Tip Sheet for Pediatricians](#)
The NC-PAL phone line should be used only by clinicians in the state of North Carolina.

