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The School Refusal Assessment Scale

The School Refusal Assessment Scale was developed to ascertain the primary reasons for a pupil's school refusal and to inform interventions.

It can be used with pupils from Reception up until Year 11, although very young children or pupils with some special needs may not be able to complete the pupil questionnaire.

It is based on some extensive literature and devised by Kearney (2002).

It comprises a series of questions, which are answered on a numbered scale.

The scale must be filled in by pupils, parents and a member of staff well known to the pupil to get the most accurate result. However, it can be used with the pupil alone if needed.

The scale highlights the main motivating factors behind a pupil's school refusal from 4 categories:

- Avoidance of negative objects or stimuli related to a school setting (e.g., tests, a school bus, a teacher, fire alarm).
- Escape from aversive social or evaluative situations (e.g., those leading to unsatisfying peer relationships or severe social anxiety).
- Attention seeking behaviour (e.g., tantruming to stay home).
- Positive tangible reinforcement (e.g., pursuit of more rewarding experiences outside of school, such as television, play or visiting friends).

Scoring the Scale

To find the main reason for a pupil's school refusal from one respondent:

- Sort the questions into their categories as shown overleaf.
- Add up the responses from the numbered scale.
- Divide the answer by 6 (the number of questions in each category) to get the average response for that category.
- The category with the highest average response is likely to be the main motivating factor behind a pupil's school refusal.

To combine the responses from all respondents:

- Repeat this for the pupil, parent and school versions.
- For each of the categories, add together the average scores from each respondent.
- Divide the total by the number of respondents to get the combined average response for that category.
- As before, rank the categories in order to find the primary motivating factor behind a pupil's school refusal.

As there may be more than one reason for a pupil's school refusal, the categories can be put in order based on their average responses.

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The questions are categorized as follows:

- 1) Avoidance of negative objects or situations related to school:
Questions 1, 6, 9, 13, 17, 21
- 2) Escape from aversive or social or evaluative situations:
Questions 2, 5, 10, 14, 18, 22.
- 3) Attention seeking behaviour:
Questions 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, 23.
- 4) Pursuit of tangible reinforcement outside of school:
Questions 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24.

What Next?

The results from the School Refusal Assessment Scale can inform interventions in two ways:

First, the people who know the child can consult between themselves or with external agencies (e.g, EWO, Educational Psychologist) to consider the best ways to support the child, specifically targeting their motivation for refusing school.

Second, this could be done whilst considering psychological research which outlines the particular interventions that are considered to be more effective for each particular category of school refusal:

- Avoidance Category - may be best targeted by a child based approach; exposure to school through systematic desensitisation or relaxation techniques to alleviate feelings of anxiety when presented with an anxiety 'trigger'.
- Escape Category - may be best targeted by exposure to school as well as cognitive restructuring or social skills training to support the child in situations which produce anxiety.
- Attention-Seeking Category - may be best targeted by focusing on implementing routine and providing training in parenting skills, to equip parents with the skills to deal with attention-seeking behaviour.
- Tangible Reinforcement Category - may be best targeted by family based therapies or contingency contracts to provide positive reinforcement for desired behaviours. Forced school attendance may also be effective here.