Læringsmiljøsenteret
Nasjonalt senter for læringsmiljø
og atferdsforskning

Universitetet i Stavanger

Trude Havik, associate professor

International perspective on school non-attendance

Specialpedagogikens dag 2020
Tema: Problematisk skolfrånvaro

Stockholms universitet
Specialpedagogiska institutionen

11.03.2020

International Network for School Attendance
https://www.insa.network/

- For years school non-attendance has been a problem. Lots of research and work – in isolation and lack of consensus

- INSA was formed March 16th, 2018, after 21 members from different professional fields, participated in a one week workshop. Title: School Absenteeism - Universal Problems Seeks Gold Standard Solutions

- INSA's mission: promote school attendance and reduce school attendance problems, by compiling, generating, evaluating and disseminating information, assessment and intervention strategies

- INSA will help to broaden and hasten the dissemination of information relevant to science and practice

- Membership is open to everyone committed to improving school attendance - not necessary to have an academic background

- Currently receiving contributions from 15 countries, included from Sweden https://www.insa.network/Sweden. Host: Malin Gren-Landell: Malin@grenlandelliskolan.se

INSA-conferences

- October 2019 in Oslo: Theme: School absenteeism: A universal problem in need of local, national and international solutions

- More than 50 contributions from 12 countries included the voices of youth and parent representatives

- Next conference: Melbourne, Australia, 7.-9. October 2020. Theme: Collaboration: Working together towards improved attendance

Research moves forward, slowly....

- A literature review in *school refusal* (Elliot & Place, 2019) indicates that there has been little substantial advance in knowledge that can guide practitioners (from Elliot, 1999)

  - Heterogeneous nature of the problem (not a psychiatric disorder)

  - Broad conceptualizations (school refusal behavior) or to maintain a clear distinction between school refusal and truancy

  - Therapy of choice: cognitive behavior therapy (moving from standardized to individualized approaches, with incorporation of exposure techniques), supplemented by working closely with family and school

  - Areas for future research: need more randomized controlled studies to ascertain what treatments work, how they work and to identify important mediating and moderating factors

- However, prevention, early identification and interventions for emerging school refusal are needed (e.g. Ingul, Havik & Heyne, 2019) -Response to Intervention model

What is school attendance problems?

- Different terms, definitions and reasons – complexity

- Different cutt-off – when is school absenteeism a problem?

- How much absence is «too much» absence in Sweden - in your municipality - at your school?

10 Barriers To Education Children Living In Poverty

1. A lack of funding for education
2. Having no teacher, or having an untrained teacher
3. No classroom
4. A lack of learning materials
5. The exclusion of children with disabilities
6. Being the "wrong" gender
7. Living in a country in conflict or at risk of conflict
8. Distance from home to school
9. Hunger and poor nutrition
10. The expense of education

https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/10-barriers-to-education-around-the-world-2/

School attendance problems – many terms...

- Authorized/excused absence
- Unauthorized/unexcused absence
- School withdrawal/parentally condoned absence
- School exclusion
- School refusal behavior
- School refusal
- Truancy – whole days or lessons
- Specific lesson absence
- Post-registration absence
- School push-out (something in school pushing students out)

- School phobia (an outdated term used to refer to intense anxiety about being at school)
- School avoidance
- Separation anxiety disorder (about 3/4 of children who present with separation anxiety disorder have at least one episode of school refusal; Hella & Bernstein, 2012)
- School anxiety
- Hjemmesittare
- «Streifere» (they are at school, but not in class)
- School reluctant («de motvillige»)
- Drop-out - thoughts about quitting school
- Chronic non-attendance
- Psychological absence - students just sitting in class
- Etc.

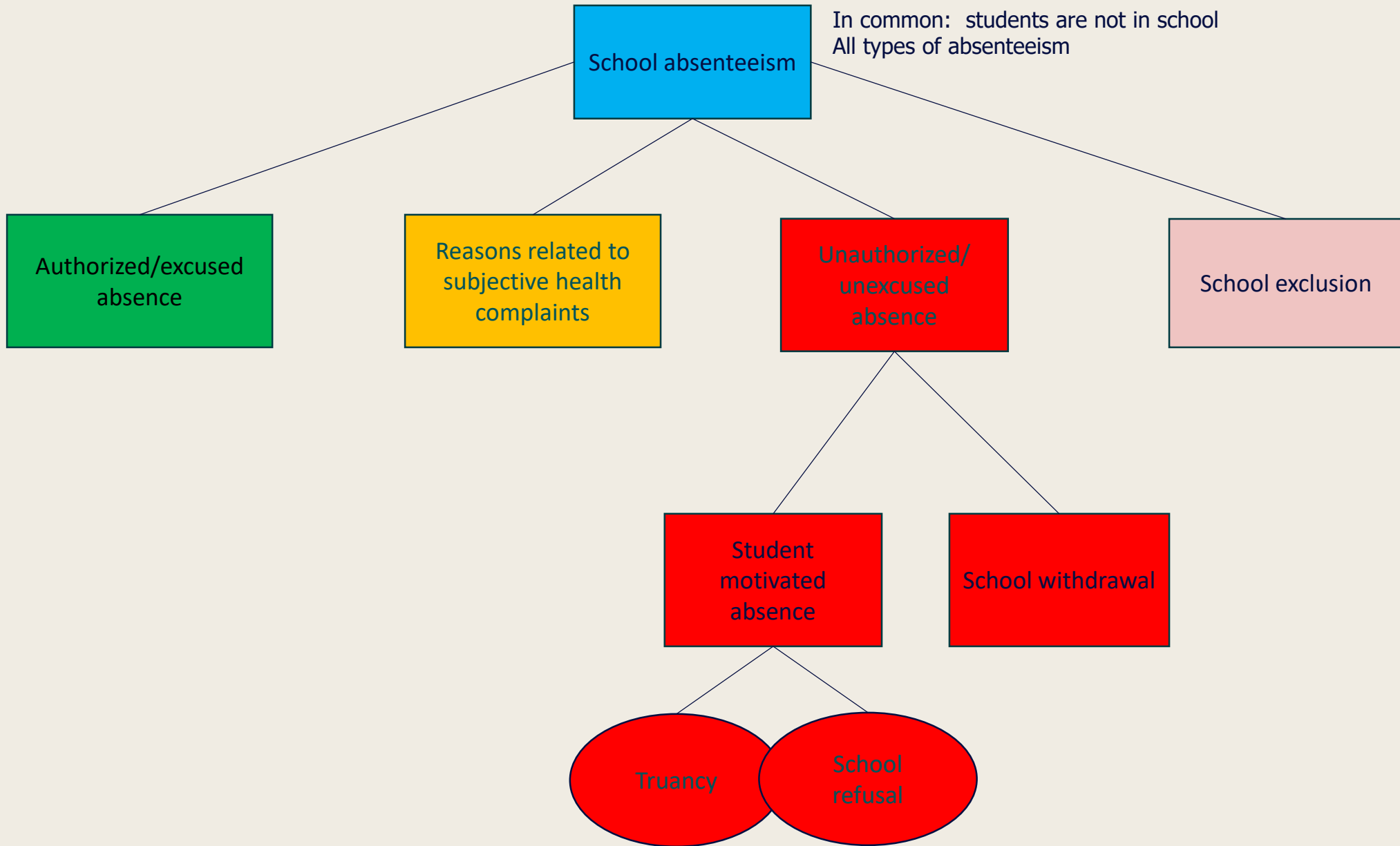**WHICH DO YOU USE? WHY? WHICH DEFINITION?**

Shared understanding

- A shared understanding is needed (Pellegrini, 2007), because inconsistencies and ambiguity are obstacles to the advancement of assessment, intervention and scientific knowledge surrounding school attendance problems (Kearney, 2003)
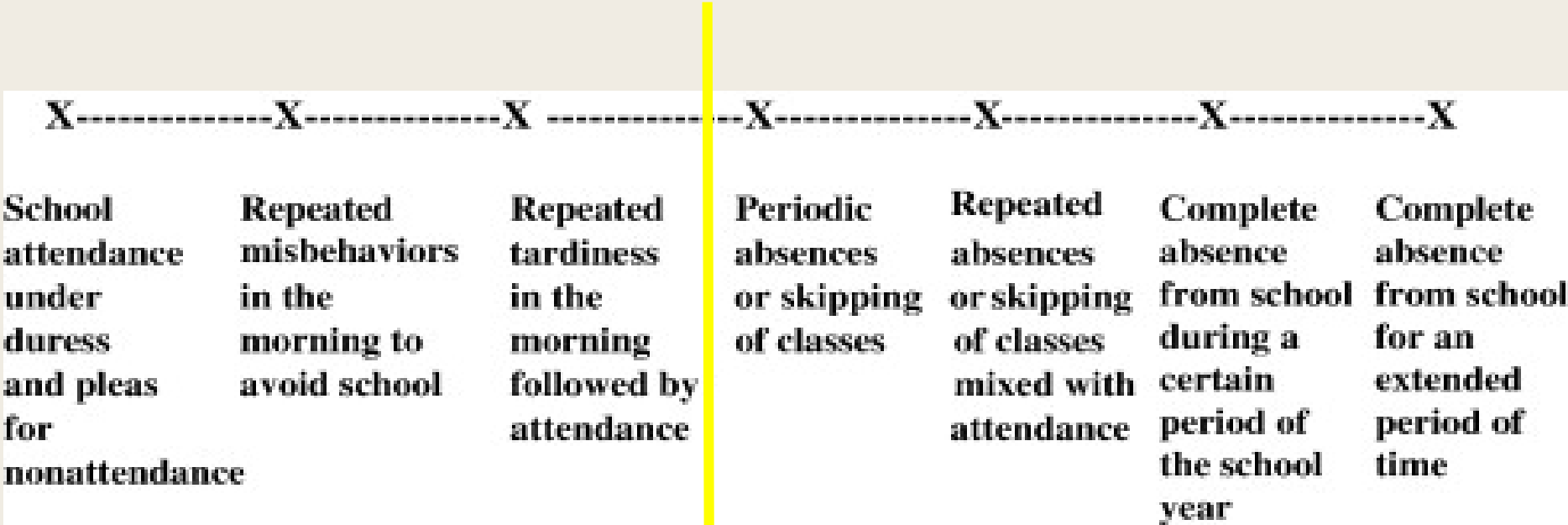
  from Heyne et al., 2019

- Do you share undertanding in Sweden, in your municipality, at your school, in the support system, among parents and students?

Differentiation Between School Attendance Problems: Why and How?

- Heyne, Gren-Landell, Melvin & Gentle-Genitty, 2019

- Outlining the evolution in the conceptualization of school attendance problems

- The first approach draws on the differentiation between types (school refusal, truancy, school withdrawal and school exclusion)

- The other approach focus on the functions of absenteeism, measured via the School Refusal Assessment Scale (SRAS-R)

- The paper offers suggestions for how to differentiate between types and introduces SNACK (a brief screening measure that permits differentiation types)

School absenteeism

In common: students are not in school
All types of absenteeism

Authorized/excused absence

Reasons related to subjective health complaints

Unauthorized/ unexcused absence

School exclusion

Student motivated absence

School withdrawal

Truancy

School refusal

Spectrum of school refusal behaviors

X-------------X-------------X -------------X-------------X-------------X-------------X

| School attendance under duress and pleas for nonattendance | Repeated misbehaviors in the morning to avoid school | Repeated tardiness in the morning followed by attendance | Periodic absences or skipping of classes | Repeated absences or skipping of classes mixed with attendance | Complete absence from school during a certain period of the school year | Complete absence from school for an extended period of time |

Kearney, 2008

School attendance problems and behavior, pschological sympoms and mental disorders

School refusal
…with the parents' knowledge

Internalizing behavior

Anxiety, stomachache, headache, dizziness, sadness, nausea, sickness, social withdrawal, anhedonia, etc.

E.g. Social phobia, Agoraphobia, Panic disorder, Separation anxiety disorder; Mild/Moderate/Severe depressive episode … (ICD 10)

Truancy
…without the parents' knowledge

Externalizing behavior

Hyperactivity, drug consumption, dissocial behaviors, oppositional, breaking rules

E.g. Hyperkinetic conduct disorder, conduct disorder, Mental and behavioural disorders due to use of cannabinoids … (ICD 10)

Egger et al., 2003, Knollmann et al., 2010; Heyne et al., 2019

Læringsmiljøsenteret
Universitetet i Stavanger

Prevalence of school absenteeism

	3-month-prevalence	% with mental disorder	Associated symptoms/mental disorders
School refusal	1.5%	25%	Depression. Separation anxiety disorder. Etc. (e.g. approximately one-half of referred SR meet full diagnostic criteria for one or more of the anxiety disorders, e.g. McShane et al., 2001)
Truancy	5.8%	25%	Conduct disorder. Oppositional-defiant disorder. Etc.
Mixed group	0.5%	88%	Separation anxiety disorder and conduct disorder. Etc.

Egger et al., 2003

School withdrawal

- **An alternative subtyping based on observations of parents:**

  - (1) parents who are antieducated

  - (2) laissez-faire parents who support any actions taken by their child

  - (3) frustrated parents who have failed in their efforts to get their child to school (might be school refusal)

  - (4) desperate parents who need their children at home to look after them

  - (5) vulnerable parents who are young, single or come from ethnic minority backgrounds

Reid, 2002

School exclusion

- **Stems from school-based decision-making:**

  - The use of disciplinary measures

  - The allocation of resources for students in need (inability or unwillingness)

  - The need to satisfy school-based performance requirements

Heyne et al., 2019

School refusal and
school avoidance

Loss of friends
and increased
isolation

Falling behind
in schoolwork

Increased anxiety
and depression

Increased anxiety when
requirement to attend
school increases

Pleasurable activities
at home

Increased school avoidance

Thambirajah et al., 2008
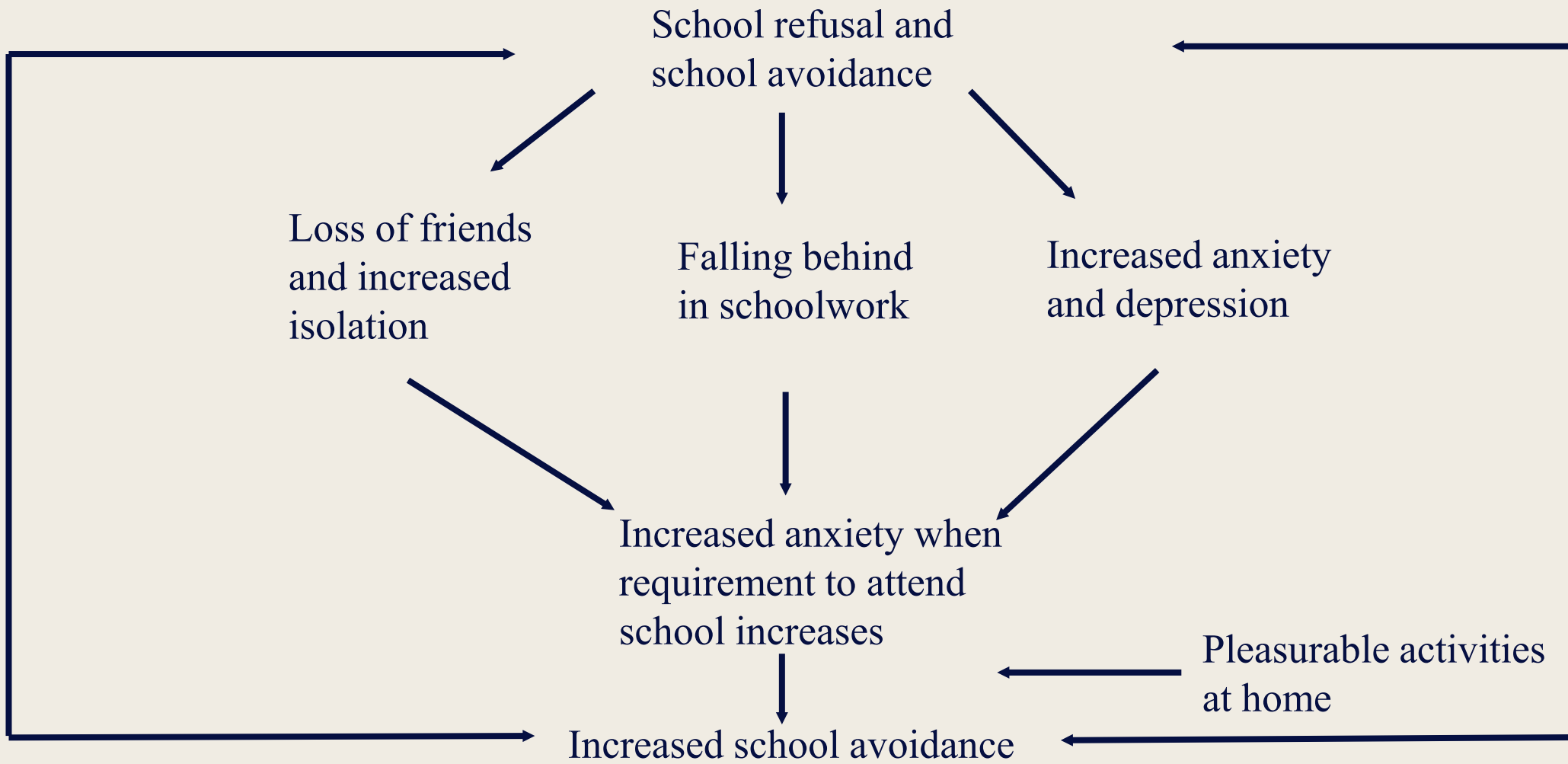
'Response-to-Intervention' (RtI)
– a framework to address students need at 3 tiers

Increasing severity of absenteeism and increasing intensity of intervention

Tier 3
Intensive interventions for serve/ chronic/complex problems

Tier 2
Targeted Intervention: early intervention for emerging school attendance problems

Tier 1
Universal Intervention: preventions of school attendance problems

Kearney & Graczyk, 2014

Prevention: general interventions

- Safe learning environment, relations teachers-student and student-student
  - E.g. bullying, loneliness, classroom interactions
- Student engagement, interest and enthusiasm in school
  - At all grade levels
- Stress in school (performance or mastery orientation)
- Welcome students every day
  - Why should students attend school?
- Initiatives to involve and engage all parents
  - School-home cooperation
- Prepare transitions (increased expectations)
- Predictability (reduces stress and anxiety)
- Mental health initiatives and social-emotional learning programs

Illustration: Hilde Thomsen

School – an important social arena

Social relations - promotes safety and learning - and reduces the experience of stress and anxiety. Not only for the youngest students!

What do most students look forward to after a long vacation?

Læringsmiljøsenteret
Universitetet i Stavanger

Prevention: specific interventions

- Interventions directed towards school attendance:
  - Registration of absence – and analyzing of these data
  - Guidelines and school policy
  - Parent information and involvement
  - Teacher and staff information and education

Attend Today, Achieve Tomorrow

#schooleveryday

Registration and analysing attendance

- «A sucessfull and effective assessment strategy for absenteeism starts with an accurate and daily record keeping of actual absences» (Kearney, 2016, p.39)

- What should be recorded? Absence every day or lesson? Late arrivals? Excused/unexcused? Reasons? Distress on arrival? Parent report of distress before school?
  - Whose responsibility is it to provide these data, how often, how to register?

- Analyses: can be further devided into: grade level, subgroups; special education, chronic vs. non-chronic, high risk group (e.g. having emotional problems, oppositional-defiant disorder or other early warning signs), days of week and time of year

Examples of handout to parents

ATTENDANCE
in the early grades

Many of our youngest students miss 10 percent of the school year—about 18 days a year or just two days every month. Chronic absenteeism in kindergarten, and even preK, can predict lower test scores, poor attendance and retention in later grades, especially if the problem persists for more than a year. Do you know how many young children are chronically absent in your school or community?

Attendance Works
Advancing Student Success By Reducing Chronic Absence

www.attendanceworks.org

Who Is Affected

Kindergarten and 1st grade classes often have absenteeism rates as high as those in high school. Many of these absences are excused, but they still add up to lost time in the classroom.

1 in 10 kids

in kindergarten and 1st grade are chronically absent. In some schools, it's as high as 1 in 4.[1]

2 in 10
low-income kids

miss too much school. They're also more likely to suffer academically.[1]

2.5 in 10
homeless kids

are chronically absent.[2]

4 in 10
transient kids
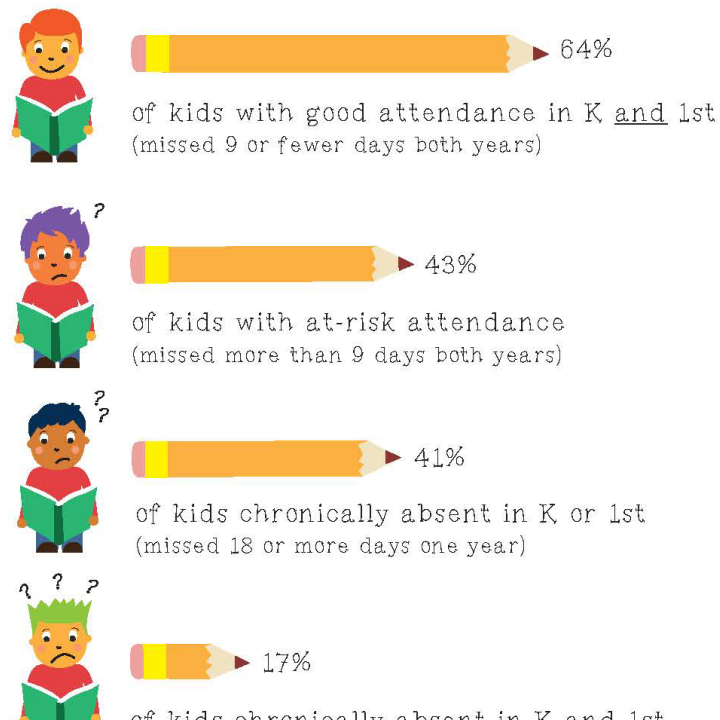
miss too much school when families move.[2]

Why It Matters

If children don't show up for school regularly, they miss out on fundamental reading and math skills and the chance to build a habit of good attendance that will carry them into college and careers.

Preliminary data from a California study found that children who were chronically absent in kindergarten and 1st grade were far less likely to read proficiently at the end of 3rd grade.

Who Can Read on Grade Level After 3rd Grade?[3]

64%
of kids with good attendance in K <u>and</u> 1st
(missed 9 or fewer days both years)

43%
of kids with at-risk attendance
(missed more than 9 days both years)

41%
of kids chronically absent in K or 1st
(missed 18 or more days one year)

17%
of kids chronically absent in K and 1st

What We Can Do

Engage Families

Many parents and students don't realize how quickly early absences can add up to academic trouble. Community members and teachers can educate families and build a culture of attendance through early outreach, incentives and attention to data.

Fix Transportation

The lack of a reliable car, or simply missing the school bus, can mean some students don't make it to class. Schools, transit agencies and community partners can organize car pools, supply bus passes or find other ways to get kids to school.
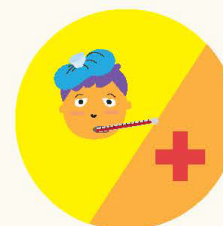
Address Health Needs

Health concerns, particularly asthma and dental problems, are among the leading reasons students miss school in the early grades. Schools and medical professionals can work together to give children and families health care and advice.

Track the Right Data

Schools too often overlook chronic absence because they track average attendance or unexcused absences, not how many kids miss too many days for any reason. Attendance Works has free

Policy and guidlines

- Proritize
- Handbook for school absenteeism
- Include definitions
- The law
- School/municipalities procedures
- Provide interventions at different tiers
- Examples and templates for assessment and intervention

Make Every Day Count

Reducing **Chronic Absence** in Arkansas Schools

October 2016

ARKANSAS ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

ARKANSAS CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE–LEVEL READING

The importance of assessment

- Investigate broadly because of the complexity in most cases:
  - Risk factors: individual-, family-, school-, friends- and community factors
  - Maintaining factors
  - Protective/resilience factors

- How to assess these factors? Which assessment do we use before interventions/ treatment – and how to investigate if they work or not?

- Collaboration - share concepts/definitions and understanding (school, parents, students, educational psychological services (PPT), youth psychiatric services – others?)

- Goals – what are the goal for **this** student (long and short term goals)

- Intervention and treatment plan – who do what, when and why?

Functional model - SRAS-R

- Kearney and colleagues developed a functional model of absenteeism suited to emerging school attendance problems

- Students are considered to refuse school for one or more of the following reasons (functional conditions):

  - Maintaining negative reinforcement

    (1) To avoid school-based stimuli that provoke a general sense of negative affectivity (distress, anxiety, depression)

    (2) To escape aversive school-based social and/or evaluative situations (e.g. tests, speak or read in class, peer interactions)

  - Maintaining positive reinforcement:

    (3) To pursue attention from significant others (e.g. parents)

    (4) To pursue tangible reinforces outside of school (e.g. sleep long, be with friends)

Kearney & Silverman, 1996

Læringsmiljøsenteret
Universitetet i Stavanger

Assessment of types - SNACK

- Heyne and colleagues 2019 recently provided a summary of century-long developments in the conceptualization of school attendance problems

- Four types labelled: school refusal, truancy, school withdrawal and school exclusion

- Developing an instrument to screen for types (SNACK: School Non-Attendance ChecKlist)

Over the PAST 4 WEEKS your child missed X whole days and X half days of school. Students miss school for all sorts of reasons. We would like to understand the reason(s) your son/daughter missed school. His/her absences are highlighted in the table shown here [hyperlink to table, or printed table, showing the last 4 weeks]. There is a list of reasons below the table. For each whole day or half day absent, choose the reason that best explains the absence. For example, if your child was absent on November 7 due to extreme weather conditions you would put a "14" as the reason for absence that day. If the reason your child missed school is not in the list, put "15" at the relevant place in the table and tell us the reason using the space provided. Your calendar or diary/planner may help you remember (e.g., trip to the doctor, religious holiday).

| Reason	Examples
My child:	
1. had an appointment	• a doctor's appointment • an appointment with a specialist
2. was sick	• had a cold or flu; had asthma • was in hospital
3. was reluctant or refused	• he/she said it was hard to go to school or to stay there the whole day • he/she seemed upset/anxious/scared about school
4. skipped/wagged/truanted	• he/she headed to school but did not arrive there • he/she left school without permission
I or my partner:	
5. gave my child a day off	• to give him/her a rest
6. kept my child home for other reasons	• so he/she could help out at home • because school is not helping him/her
7. arranged extra holidays	• to take a family holiday during school-time
Our family:	
8. had an urgent situation	• a funeral • someone in the family was taken to hospital
9. had other difficulties	• the car broke down • someone in the family had a medical appointment
10. had a religious holiday or cultural observance	• Chinese New Year • Jewish holidays
The school:	
11. was closed	• public holiday / term holidays • curriculum day / teacher training day
12. sent my child home due to his/her behavior	• he/she was suspended or expelled from school • he/she was asked to leave school for the remainder of the day
13. asked that my child stay away from school	• because the school could not take care of my child's needs • because the school could not keep my child safe at school
Other:	
14. weather conditions	• snow, floods • fire
15. something else (please describe in the space provided)	

Inventory of School Attendance Problems (ISAP)

- Form and function of various school attendance problems (not school withdrawal)

- Age 8-19: rate intensity and impact on attendance

- 48 items, 13 subscales. Assess internalizing and externalizing symptoms (depression, social anxiety, performance anxiety, agoraphobia/panic, separation anxiety, somatic complaints, aggression, school aversion/attractive alternatives) as well as emotional distress due to problems in the school or family context (problems with teachers, dislike of the specific school, problems with peers, problems within the family, problems with parents)

- New assessment-tool with breadth - useful for a comprehensive assessment of school attendance problems in clinical settings

Knollmann et al., 2019

Other assessments

YOU MISSED SCHOOL TODAY, DIDN'T YOU?

NOT AT ALL!

Listen to the student!

- Assessments of:
  - The learning environment and school/classroom climate
  - Bullying and friendships
  - Relation teacher- students
  - Mental health problems
  - Student engagement
  - Parent involvement
  - Etc.

- Observations, surveys, different scales (mental health problems, somatic complaints, self-efficacy, emotion regulation, negative thinking, problem solving, school climate, bullying, teacher support, school safety, etc.), social network analyses, achievement tests, communication with parents, students and school staff, assess information from prior school, etc.

e.g. Ingul et al., 2019

Læringsmiljøsenteret
Universitetet i Stavanger
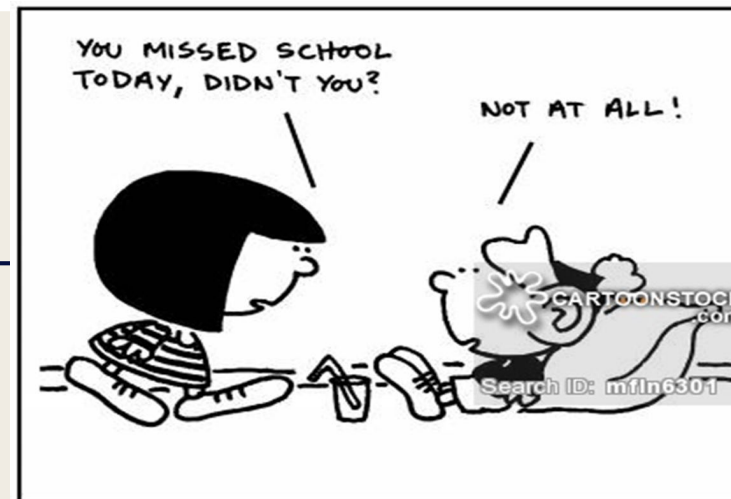
Emerging school refusal - early signs and risk factors

- Ingul, Havik, & Heyne (2019). Emerging school refusal: a school-based framework for identifying early signs and risk factors. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*

Outlines the need for identification of emerging school refusal

Proposes signs and risk factors for emerging school refusal

Presents a school-based framework to support identification of early signs and risk factors

Considers the challenges associated with implementing a school-based framework

On the
frontline

Photo: Adobe Stock

Tier 3
Intensive Intervention

Tier 2
Targeted Intervention

Tier 1
Universal Intervention
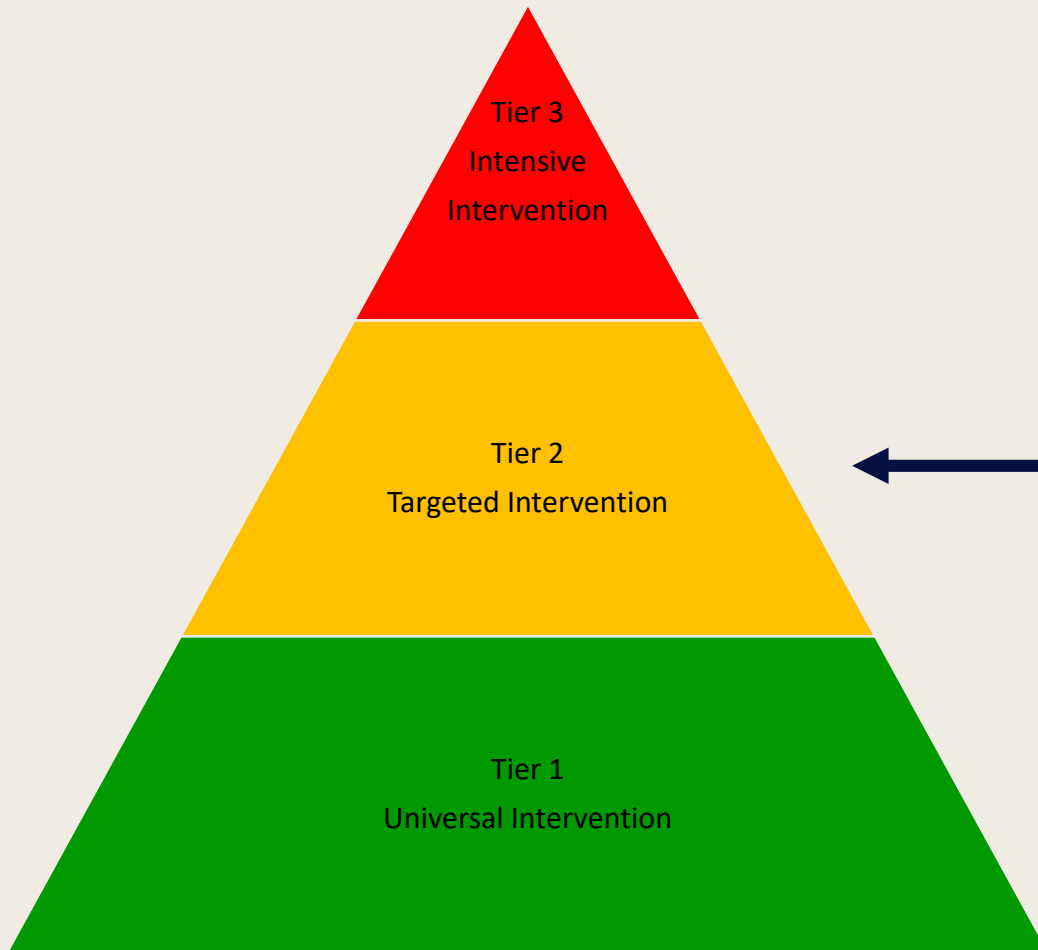
Tier 2:
Responding to emerging/mild absenteeism, for example:

- Regular contact with parents
- Support parents in their role (supervise attendance more closely, refrain from keeping a child home from school, maintain a regular morning routine for school preparation behaviors and implement consequences for attendance and non-attendance as appropriate)
- Boost student engagement
- Peers and mentoring
- Build/prompt students coping skills (relaxation and non-negative thinking)
- Possible referral for family support (pediatrician, family therapist, clinical child psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker, tutor or specialists for developmental or learning disorders)

Emerging school attendance problems

- Need for targeted, early intervention approaches at Tier 2 is based on the efficient identification of emerging school attendance problems at Tier 1: students at risk

- Signs and risk factors for emerging school attendance problems (school, family, individual, friends and communtiy factors)

- Primary goals at Tier 2: e.g. stabilizing school attendance, developing a clear and gradual strategy for orienting the student to school, reduce emerging distress and obstacles to attendance and rule out competing explanations for absenteeism such as school-based threats (e.g. bullying) (Kearney & Grazcyk, 2014)

Initial generic strategies
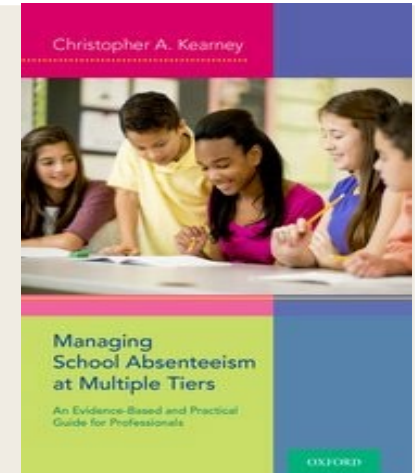
1. Give parents psychoeductional materials (e.g., about absenteeism, anxiety)
2. Rule out competing explanations for absenteeism (e.g., actual school-based threats)
3. Ask parents to pursue appointments as needed (e.g., child therapist, doctor)
4. Ask parents to mobilize support network if help is needed to get the child to school
5. Ask parents to have regular contact with school about attendance, work, legality
6. Ask student what they are willing to attend; begin graded return; have clear strategy
7. Ask parents to record attendance, distress, behavior, on daily basis
8. Ask parents to establish a regular morning routine, even if child doesn't attend
9. At school, closely monitor attendance once the student is back
10. Implement consequences for attendance and non-attendance

Kearney, 2016

Interventions based on functions 1 and 2
-maintained by negative reinforcement

1. Avoid stimuli that provoke negative affectivity : *"How often do you have bad feelings about going to school because you are afraid of something related to school (e.g. tests, school bus, teacher, fire alarm)?"*

- focused on the student
- psychoeducation (about anxiety)
- anxiety/avoidance hierarchy development
- somatic control strategies (e.g. relaxation training, rebreathing)
- gradual re-exposure to the school settting

2. Escape from aversive social/evaluative situations: *"How often do you stay away from school because it is hard to speak with the other kids at school?"*

- focused on the student
- psychoeducation
- anxiety/avoidance hierarchy development
- social skills training
- restructuring of social cognitions
- modeling and role-play
- gradual re-exposure to the school setting

Interventions based on functions 3 and 4
-maintained by positive reinforcement

3. Attention-seeking/separation anxiety
"How often do you feel you would rather be with your parents than go to school?"

- focused on the parents

- giving clear messages

- contingency management and modification of parent commants (in some cases forced school attendance)

- consequences for non-attendance

- planned ignoring of inappropriate behavior
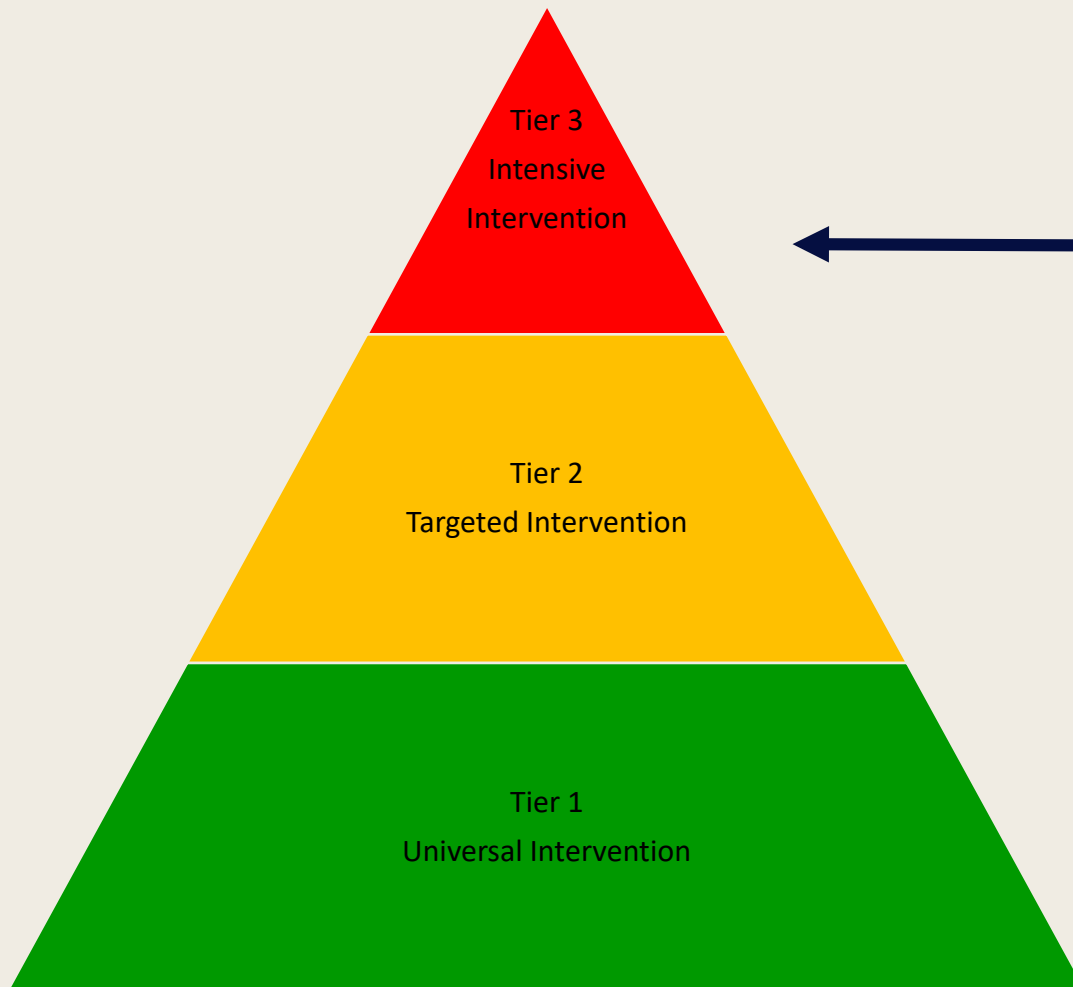
- establisment of routines (e.g. morning and evening)

4. Positive tangible reinforcement outside school: *"When you are not in school during the week, how often do you leave the house and do something fun?"*

- focused on the parents and student
- communication skills training
- problem-solving
- contingency contracting
- in some cases: escort to school
- academic assistance
- monitoring non-attendance

- school bonding (Keppens & Spruyt, 2020)

Kearney & Albano, 2000

Tier 3
Intensive Intervention

Tier 2
Targeted Intervention

Tier 1
Universal Intervention

Tier 3:
Intensive interventions for severe/chronic absenteeism or complex problems

- Expanded Tier 2 work
- Alternative Educational Programs
- Legal strategies
- Coordinating services
- Multisystemic therapy
- Cognitive behavioral therapy
- Parent/family involvement strategies
- E.g. Back2School (Denmark)

- "Tier 3 interventions must include innovative, creative and intense procedures to propel academic achievement, enhance parental involvement and address comorbid problems" (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014)

- What do schools and family do while being in therapy? Cooperation and guidance to to reinforce the interventions

When to intervene?

- Some researchers suggest that there is no safe level of absence

- Others suggest that initial intervention can occur at a threshold of 1, 3, or 5% absence - or 10%, while acknowledging the lack of empirical support for this criterion (Tier 2)

- In addition, there is disparity around when to employ intensive intervention, such as at 10%, 15% or 20% absence (Tier 3)

- Consensus on the time frames for measuring absenteeism is also lacking (e.g., past week, 2 weeks, month or school term), although frequent monitoring of absenteeism is recommended (once a week/twice a month)

- Decisions should be based on resources available to a school and their priorities

Avoid a "wait to fail" approach (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014)

- Schools and parents should not wait until a young person shows excessive absenteeism or comorbid problems before intervening

- Every day counts: academic achievement and increasing emotional, behavioral and social problems

- Early response (parent – school)
  - How?

- To prevent drop-out starts in elementary school – or in kindergarten

  (N° EAC/17/2012. Study on the effective use of early childhood education and care in preventing early school leaving)

  "He dropped out of high school in kindergarten"

The role of school and teachers

- Previous research on school refusal is manly from clinical and individual perspectives, however last years more focus on the complexity, including factors in school and family

- Results of my doctoral thesis demonstrated the importance of school factors for school refusal. Demanding factors in school beyond the students' capacity to cope with them, might give stressors leading to absenteeism. Ability to consider and moderate demands and stressors?

  Havik, 2015

- YOUR work are important every day. Why do your student attend school, except for learning (and that they have to attend)?
  - to meet their friends (if they have friends....)
  - and to meet YOU - because you are an important person in their life – and for some students YOU are the most important one ☺ How to be «the ONE» for all your students?

- Parents: do not blame the parents – how to help them, involve them and cooperate with them?

Læringsmiljøsenteret
Nasjonalt senter for læringsmiljø
og atferdsforskning

Universitetet i Stavanger

Thank you for your attention ☺

trude.havik@uis.no