

Card Sort Activity: Identifying the Function(s) of Emotionally Based School Avoidance

This card sort activity, based on a School Refusal Assessment Scale developed by Kearney (2002), has been devised by Sheffield EPS as a tool to support staff to develop a greater understanding of a young person's school avoidance. The 24 statements are colour-coded by the function of behaviour identified by Kearney and Silverman (1990). By asking a CYP to sort the statements or by talking about each one, mentors may find that using the cards can support an understanding of the function of the school avoidance behaviour.

Blue, Function 1 To avoid something or situations that elicits negative feelings or high levels of stress or anxiety (e.g. fear of the toilets; the noise in the playground; lots of people moving all together in the corridors between classes, tests/ exams)	Red, Function 2 To escape difficult social situations (e.g. feeling left out at playtime, reading out loud in class or other public speaking/group task, working as part of a group)
Green, Function 3 To get attention from or spend more time with significant others at home (e.g. change in family dynamic, concerned about the well-being of parent)	Yellow, Function 4 To spend more time out of school as it is more fun or stimulating (e.g. watch tv, go shopping, play computer games, hang out with friends).

How the statements could be used with a child or young person:

- Cut up the statements
- Ask the child or young person to sort the statements into three groups, shown on the white cards: A bit like me, most like me and least like me
- Using the key below, consider if any patterns are noticeable and whether some functions are more prevalent than others

Adapted from Sheffield EPS – the wording is identical to Sheffield except where I have changed CYP to 'child or young person'

- If the child or young person is comfortable, discuss the statements to help build a richer picture

Consider together how this information can help to plan the next steps

I have bad feelings about going to school because I'm afraid of something related to school (e.g. tests, school bus, teacher, fire alarm)	I stay away from school because it is hard to speak with the other kids at school
I would rather be with my parent(s) than go to school	When I am not in school during the week (Monday to Friday). I leave the house and do something fun
I stay away from school because I will feel sad or depressed if I go.	I stay away from school because I feel embarrassed in front of other people at school

**I think about my parent(s)
or family when in school**

**When I am not in school
during the week (Monday to
Friday). I talk to or see
other people (other than my
family)**

**I feel worse at school (e.g.
scared, nervous, sad)
compared to how I feel at
home with friends**

**I stay away from school
because I do not have many
friends there**

**I would rather be with my
parent(s) than go to school**

**When I am not in school
during the week (Monday to
Friday). I enjoy doing
different things (e.g. being
with friends, going places)**

**I have bad feelings about
school (e.g. scared,
nervous, sad) when I think
about school on Saturday
or Sunday**

**I stay away from places in
school (e.g. hallways,
places where certain
groups of people are)
where I would have to talk
to someone**

I would rather be taught by my parents at home than by my teacher at school

I stay away from school because I want to have fun outside of school

If I had less bad feelings (e.g. scared, nervous, sad) about school, it would be easier for me to go to school

If it were easier for me to make new friends, it would be easier for me to go to school

It would be easier for me to go to school if my parents went with me

It would be easier for me to go to school if I could do more things I like to do after school hours (e.g. being with friends)

I have bad feelings about school (e.g. scared, nervous, sad) compared to other kids of my age

I often stay away from people in school compared to other kids of my age

**I would like to be home with
my parents more than other
kids my age would**

**I would rather be doing fun
things outside of school
more than most kids of my
age**

Most Like Me

A Bit Like Me

Least Like Me