



School Avoidance-

How to understand
and act to help kids
get back to school

Wharaurau lunchtime
webinar

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Today's talk will

- Provide some information about school avoidance and what some causes might be
- Explore strategies that can help you support a child/young person get back to school

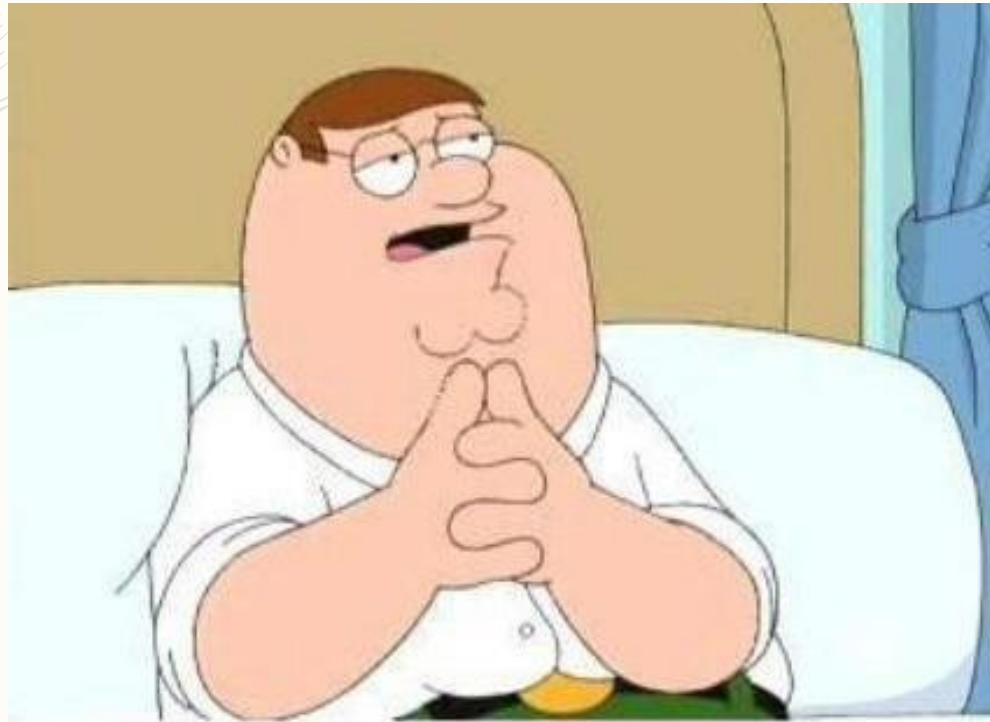




- This is a huge topic and today's slice of it is just a beginning
- Acknowledging the wisdom that already in the 'room'
- We are all just doing our best...and that includes our kids
- The influence of judgements/assumptions....



And so we begin....



Go on...



Why is getting kids to school important?

- **Learning**

To be specific:

More frequent attendance predicts higher achievement,

(the number of half-days attended during a single term (Term 2) was consistently one of the strongest predictors of the number of credits a student would attain by the end of the year)

- **Socialisation**

- **Experience of other expectations, rules and people in charge**

- **Exposure to other activities/sports/experiences**

Why do we normally do stuff?



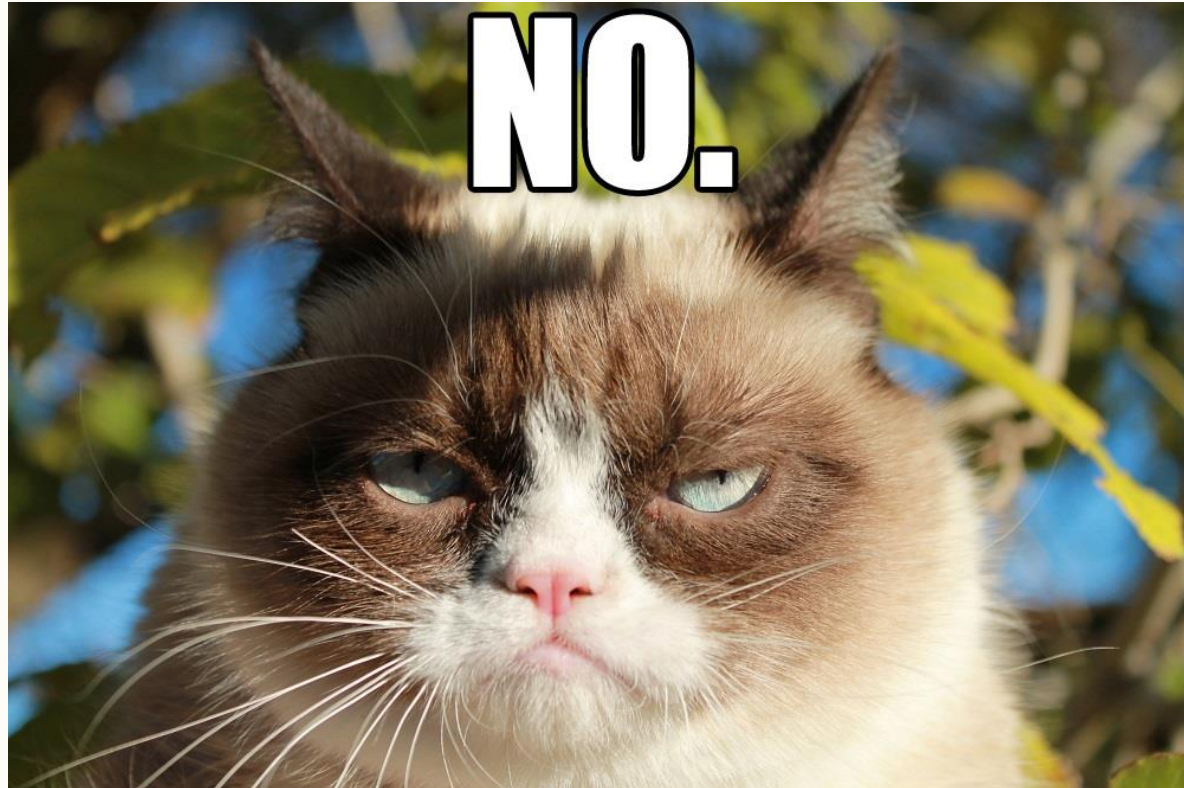



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- Enjoy it
 - Feel guilty not to do it
 - Its the law/rules
 - Someone I admire does it
 - We want to impress
 - It's easy for me
 - I'm feeling generally pretty good
 - Its a stepping stone to other things
 - I didn't know there was a choice not to

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- For some school will tick positive boxes, for others they attend because they have to...For most it's some where in between



What makes us say no...and
stick to our guns?



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- Anxious
 - Don't know what expected of me
 - Don't want to
 - Have something better to do
 - Mixed messages about education
 - We say no to lots of things and it works
 - Have no motivation or energy
 - Low mood
 - Feel sick
 - I've had an experience of not doing something and it suited me
 - Avoiding was made possible/easy



HOW TO AVOID STRESS AT WORK:

1. DON'T GO TO WORK.



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- As you can see the behaviour might look the same but underlying reasons can be different
 - Different emphasis in push /pull between home and school





To put that more formally

3 main groups of school avoiders...


- 1) phobic...to avoid school related objects and situations
- 2) Separation anxiety
- 3) Anxious depressed

King et al 2005

I'd add another

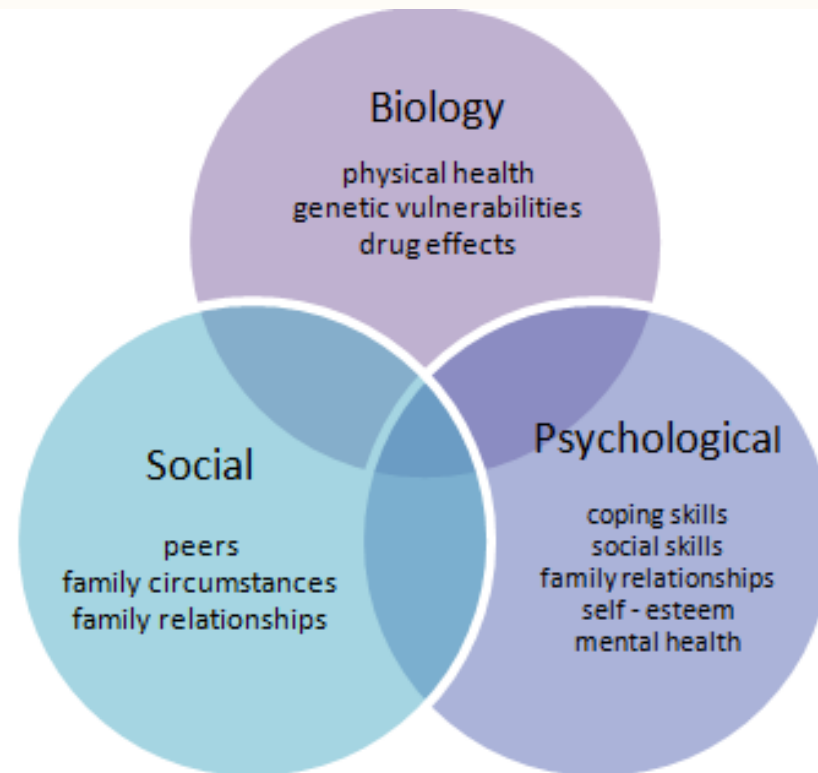
- Attending school has become optional...

A screenshot of a form field with a dark red background. On the left is a white smartphone icon. The text 'Enter Phone Number (optional)' is in white. On the right, there is a black user icon with a checkmark and a red exclamation mark. Below the field, a red error message reads 'This field is required.'



There is a road map to help guide understanding of the child you are supporting

Bio Psycho Social Model



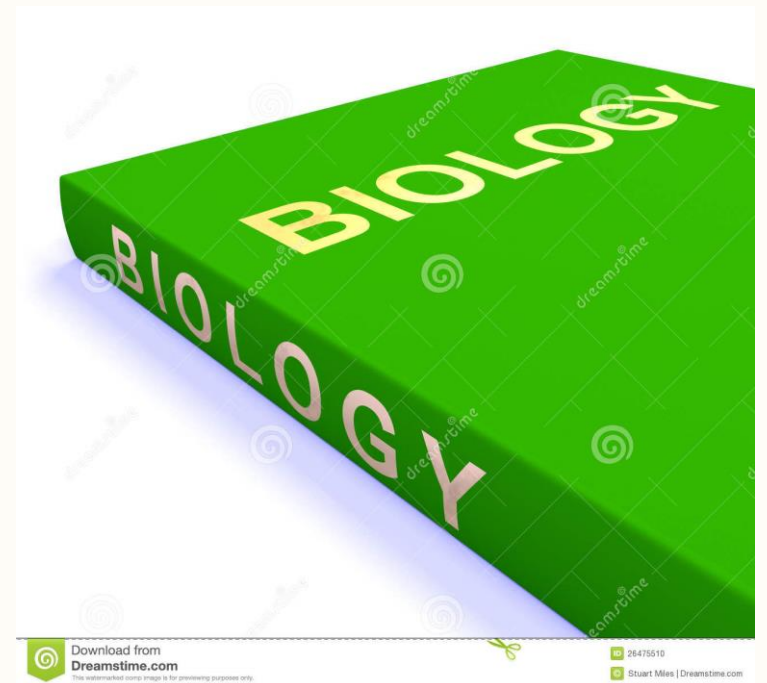
‘BIO’



- A child’s biology and/or genetic make-up play an important role.
- Things that happen to them and their body



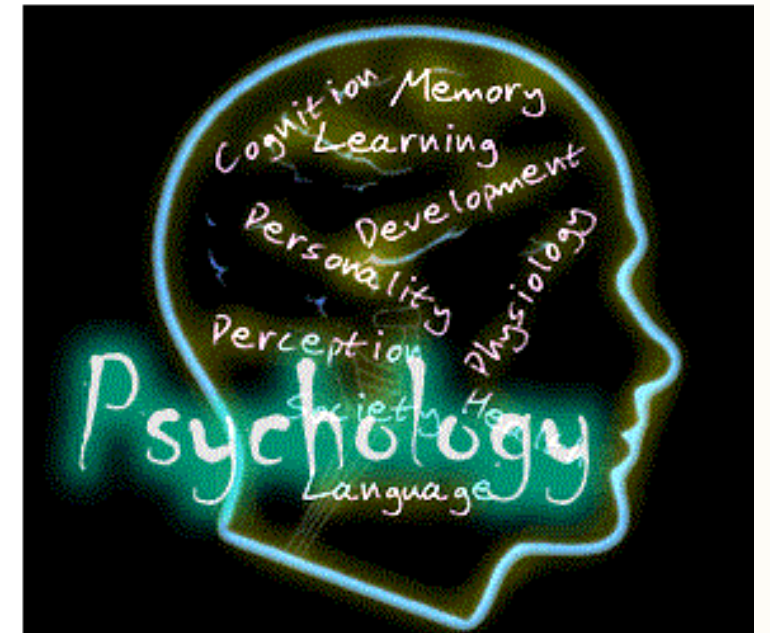
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- Neuro developmental issues
 - Illness...sick tummy v worry tummy!!
 - IQ or LD
 - Injury
 - Sensory sensitivities

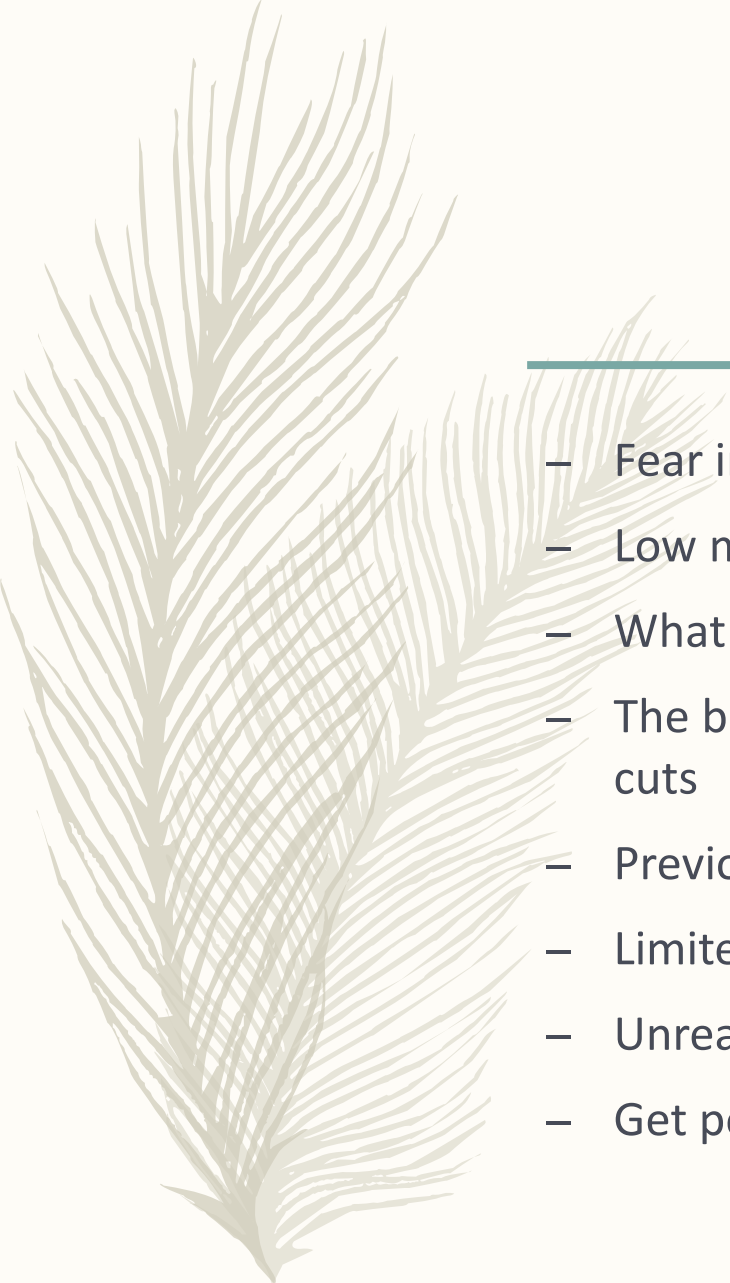


PSYCHO

– The psychology of the person.

In other words....how the child makes sense of and responds to their biology and social world.




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- Fear in the absence of actual threat (aka anxiety)
 - Low motivation, mood and energy
 - What we pay attention to
 - The brains ability to automate what we do and think (NATs) and come up with short cuts
 - Previous experience...especially the scary stuff
 - Limited skills
 - Unrealistic expectations
 - Get positives for staying at home

SOCIAL

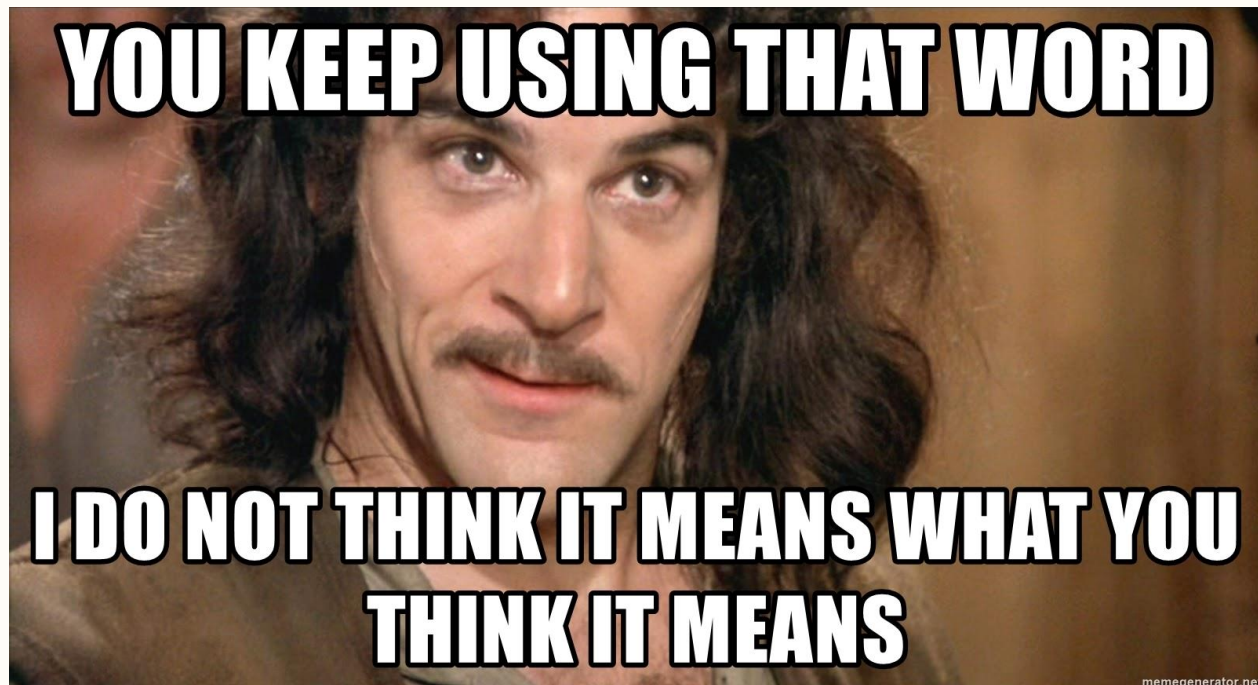
- The social, emotional, and physical world the child is born into and lives within.



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- Issues with friends
 - Issues at home that create anxiety
 - Avoidance made possible...often not through lack of effort!
 - Avoidance modelled both through peers and from home
 - Inconsistent responses
 - Pandemics and lock down
 - World affairs
 - At home learning made easy

What we can do?

- Biggest thing is to be curious about the child you are working with (or parenting)...not make assumptions for as you can see SCHOOL AVOIDANCE can mean different things for different children and this meaning can keep changing...



The other biggest thing to do...

There are some things that help in every situation

**DON'T
PANIC**



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- Get in quick...this stuff gets established quick.
 - Hold the knowledge that you can't get over school avoidance at home
 - Don't look to child for permission to act
 - Need a team as puzzle can be complicated
 - 'Solution' might not be/sound hard...but enacting it consistently can be
 - Plan for regression
 - Breathe and be patient...this is tough and can take time
 - Remember that school is NOT optional

Let's break it down...





Bio...

- Medical check to make sure health is ok...just do it once
- Plan for specific challenges. Crossing fingers doesn't tend to work (e.g. sick bay plan)
- De-pathologise issue if there is no REAL danger. Pain is uncomfortable and NOT dangerous. Be realistic...if pain/issue is chronic, they might have to get good at managing and sitting alongside pain, not waiting for it to stop
- Might need medication if mood and or anxiety is a big player
- 'Turn down' the stress response by increasing a sense of safety and regulating the NS. Stress is really handy when the threat is real, but can become unhelpful and harmful when it is triggered in a chronic way

(this is true for both children and their significant adults!)

Social...out of order I know

- Young person NEEDS environment/ expectations/ consequences to change before they do. Won't use strategies unless they have to
- Plan involving home and school.
- Plan needs to be realistic ...aimed at the people/situation That actually exists and not what you are hoping for (aka...no place for SHOULD!)





Plan might involve

- Make home less comfortable
- Exposure to school in bite sized chunks
- Bring in supports that maximize chances of getting to school
- Provide other options for time out that don't include home
- Manage contact with 'home' during school time (e.g. parent might need to limit responses to texts)
- Reduce attention to unhelpful behavior
- Provide rewards...in other words access to things that motivate (Work with what they are motivated by...not big picture stuff. Kids pragmatic!)

Address problems...if there are some

- More support with learning
- Manage bullying
- Parents needing support
- Gaming issue
- Sleep/wake cycle issue
- Support with anxiety



What ever the 'driver' you NEED to address the avoidance

In the midst of behavior that is unhelpful we need to :

- Detach
- Trust our 'ground work'
- Stay calm...ish
- Validate the child's feelings
- ACT

In other words.....

Be the WARM ROCK





Correspondence Vs Homeschooling

Is it avoidance driven or preference/belief?

If it's the latter...make sure the child has social engagement, exposure to other experiences and people...especially ones that are safe but take them out of their comfort zone

If it's the former...

- Have a think about what the child is being taught about the world and themselves...
This fear is true...they cannot cope...the world is dangerous...
- If needed, use short term and never without plan to get back to school (like tube feeding).

In summary...Good idea or not...your call, but have a think about lesson the child is learning

Psycho

- Behavioural activation
- Catch negative thoughts and respond differently
- Learn strategies for distress tolerance
- Realistic expectations for young person and adults
- Look at overall wellness...

school avoidance can be like a barometer



Regulation is the key...for all parties

- A child cannot take in 'our wisdom' or access their own wisdom if they are dysregulated!
- **We cannot access or share much wisdom if we are not regulated....so BREATHE!**



What makes for a regulating experience....





Other regulating influences

- Routines
- Calmish voice and includes variability and prosodyand not just pretending 😊
- Reminders of structure and expectations
- Opportunities to show competence
- Physically down regulating the stress response....i.e. take a deep breath, timely physical exercise breaks, mindfulness activities
- Physical touch... if welcome
- Have a plan ...the brain loves a plan
- Adults feeling supported and regulated which helps them remain safe 'ports' in what can be a very emotional storm for children

A last reminder for AIROR





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- Take care of self!
 - Recognise that this can be hard work
 - We are all imperfect
 - Rupture and repair
 - You get ‘do overs!!’
 - You actually have control over the most important player in this...you!
 - Manage own anxiety
 - Be a squeaky wheel and get support for yourself and the child
 - BREATHE

