

Time for School!

A function-based approach to
improving school attendance

**Southern Maine
Autism Conference
March 7, 2020**

Disclaimer

- ▶ **Neither the BACB or Woodfords Family Services is responsible for or endorses the content of this presentation. This training will not result in any state or national certification relevant to the conduct of assessment or intervention or constitute training sufficient to implement these procedures without professional guidance.**

Common Attributes of Non-Attending Students

...None, some, or all may apply

Sleep Problems

Overuse or reliance on specific activities and routines

Chaotic or Shifting Home Environment

Poor General Health

Learning Challenges

Mental Health Issues

Precipitating Event

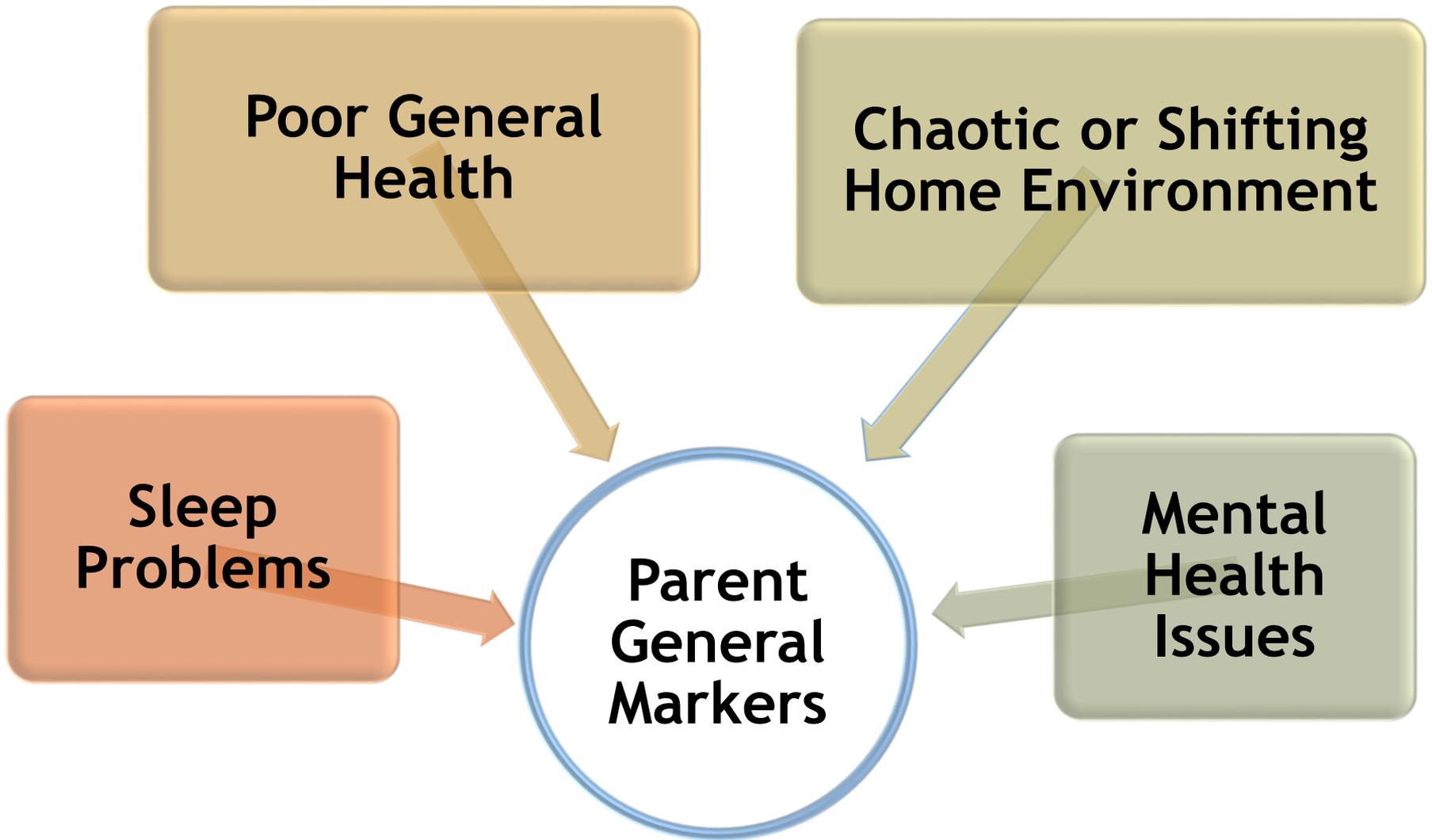
Student General Markers

Refusal Intensity Factors

- **Grade level**
- **Number of years out of school**
- **Repeated re-entry failures**
- **Multiple failed placements**

Child Refusal Intensity Factors

- **Chronic sleep problems**
- **Self-directed schedule**
- **Use of nonfunctional coping strategies (screens, substances)**
- **Not engaged with therapeutic services**



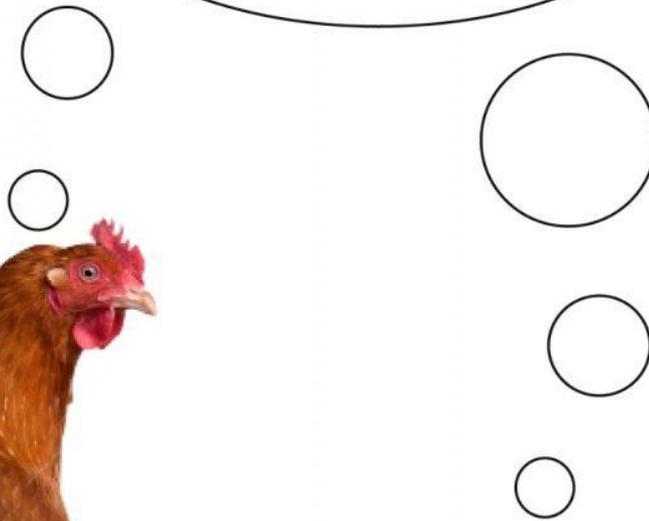
Parent Refusal Intensity Factors

- Multiple parent-terminated placements
- Preference for alternate placement
- Not engaged with therapeutic services
- Parent school history
- Consequences of insisting child attend
- Capacity to tolerate child discomfort
- Level of parent-school hostility

High Risk School Features

- **Chaotic, overwhelming environment**
- **Disorganized instruction**
- **Inconsistent discipline**
- **Traditional discipline code**
- **Multiple placements within school**
- **Poor relationship with parents**
- **School viewed by parents as deceptive, ineffective, non-communicative**
- **Featured on parent Facebook page...**

...it was me, right?



Ways to Think about Non-Attendance

Topography-Based

Diagnostic-Based

Function-Based

Topography-Based Approach

- Reliance on behavioral topography - what behaviors “look like” - may lead to inappropriate placement
- Because student with ID engages in aggression, they should go to the high rolling *Bellagio Program*
- But...Not everyone belongs in Vegas

Diagnosis-Based Approach

- Reliance on diagnosis may lead to a cookbook intervention ... tasty recipe that won't digest well
- Try 'X' for students with
 - Anxiety (generalized, social)
 - Trauma (PTSD)
 - Depression
- Helpful for putting behavior in context

Function-Based Approach

- Addresses the reinforcer for refusal as well as...
 - Setting events
 - Antecedents
 - Competing Responses

These components will be your focus when planning re-entry

Function-Based Approach

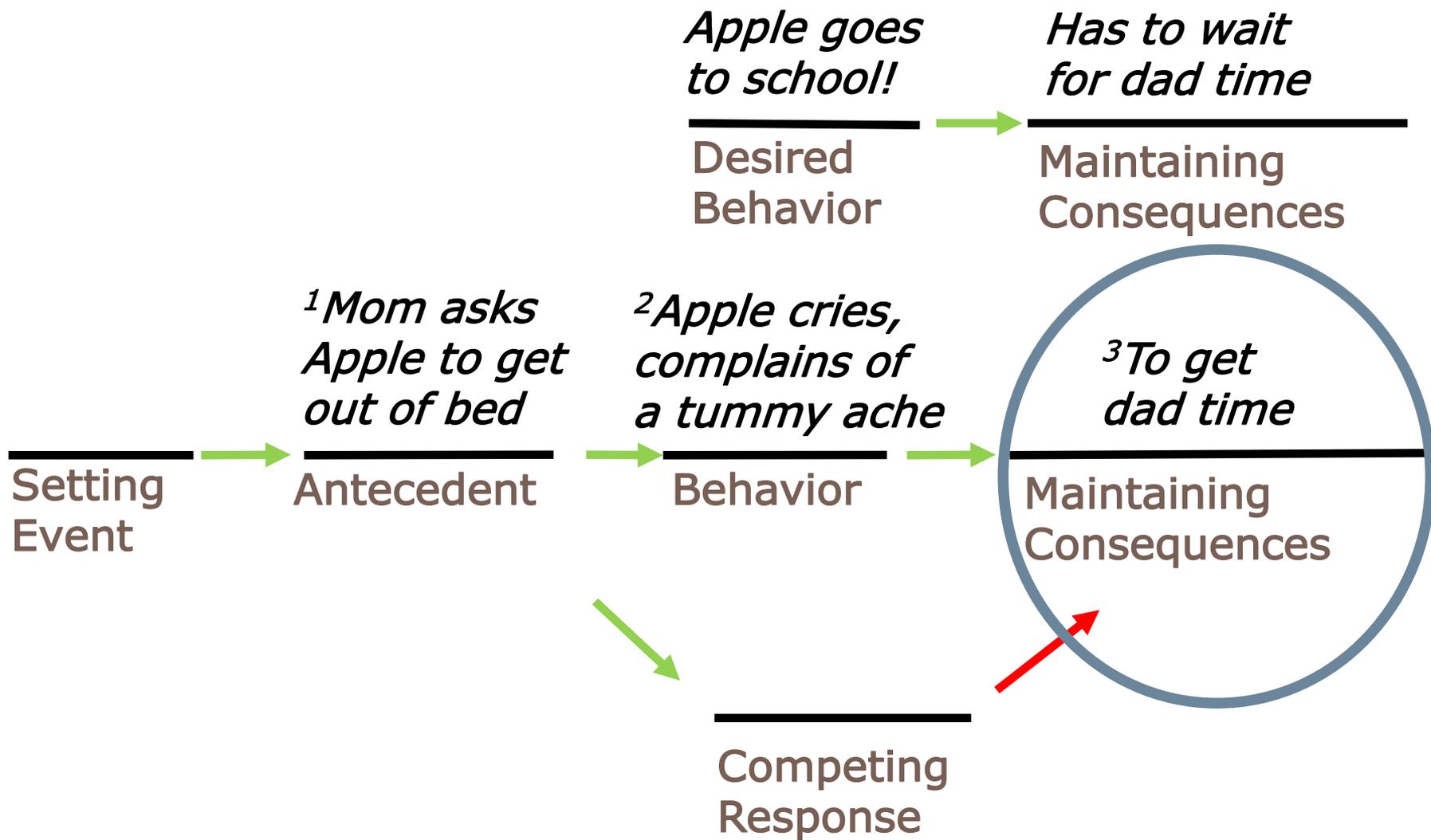
**...with a pinch
of diagnostic
presentation...**

Function-Based Example

- ▶ *When* mom asks Apple to get ready for school¹, she starts to cry and complain of a tummy ache² *in order to* stay home and be with dad, who just got home from a 3-day business trip³.



Competing Response Path



Gathering Information

Interviews and Observation

Structured Interviews

- **Functional Behavioral Assessment Interview (Parent and Student; full)**
- *School Refusal Assessment Scale –R*
Parent and Student complete
SEPARATELY (free and easy)
- *Functional Behavior(al) Assessment of Absenteeism and Truancy*
(excellent guided FBA process)

Direct Observation

- **What does it look like when parent asks their child to...**
 - Get ready for school?
 - Get on the bus?
 - Get out of the vehicle?
 - Go into the school building?
- **What does it look like when student**
 - Arrives to school?
 - Is asked to do work, be social, follow rules?

School Refusal Survey and Intervention Planning Worksheet - SMAC 3/7/20

Identify the Problem (circle or X)

| | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| I am working on this school refusal problem | Home | Sleep/Wake Time | Morning Routine | Leaving the House | Getting on Transport (at home) | Getting off transport (at school) | Other (tell me more)... |
| | School | Entering Building | Attending Class | Engaging with Class | Staying at School | Stress at School | Other (tell me more)... |

What does school refusal “look like” at home?
 (e.g., remains in bed, ignores your request to get ready while still gaming, yells at you to go away, somatic complaints, etc.)

What does school refusal “look like” at home?
 (e.g., ignores task requests, head down, demands you leave them alone, somatic complaints, etc.)

My goal for school attendance is:
 (e.g., attends a full school day, switches to a different smaller school, graduates, earns diploma, etc.)

What have you tried already to meet this goal?
 (e.g., consultation/treatment with physician and other medical professionals, therapists, BCBA, medication, homeopathy, other interventions)

The School Refusal Assessment Scale - Revised

Let's take a look!

Common Refusal Functions: SRAS-R

Positive Reinforcement

Social attention, items/activities

Negative Reinforcement

Evaluation, internal stimulation

Refusal Functions

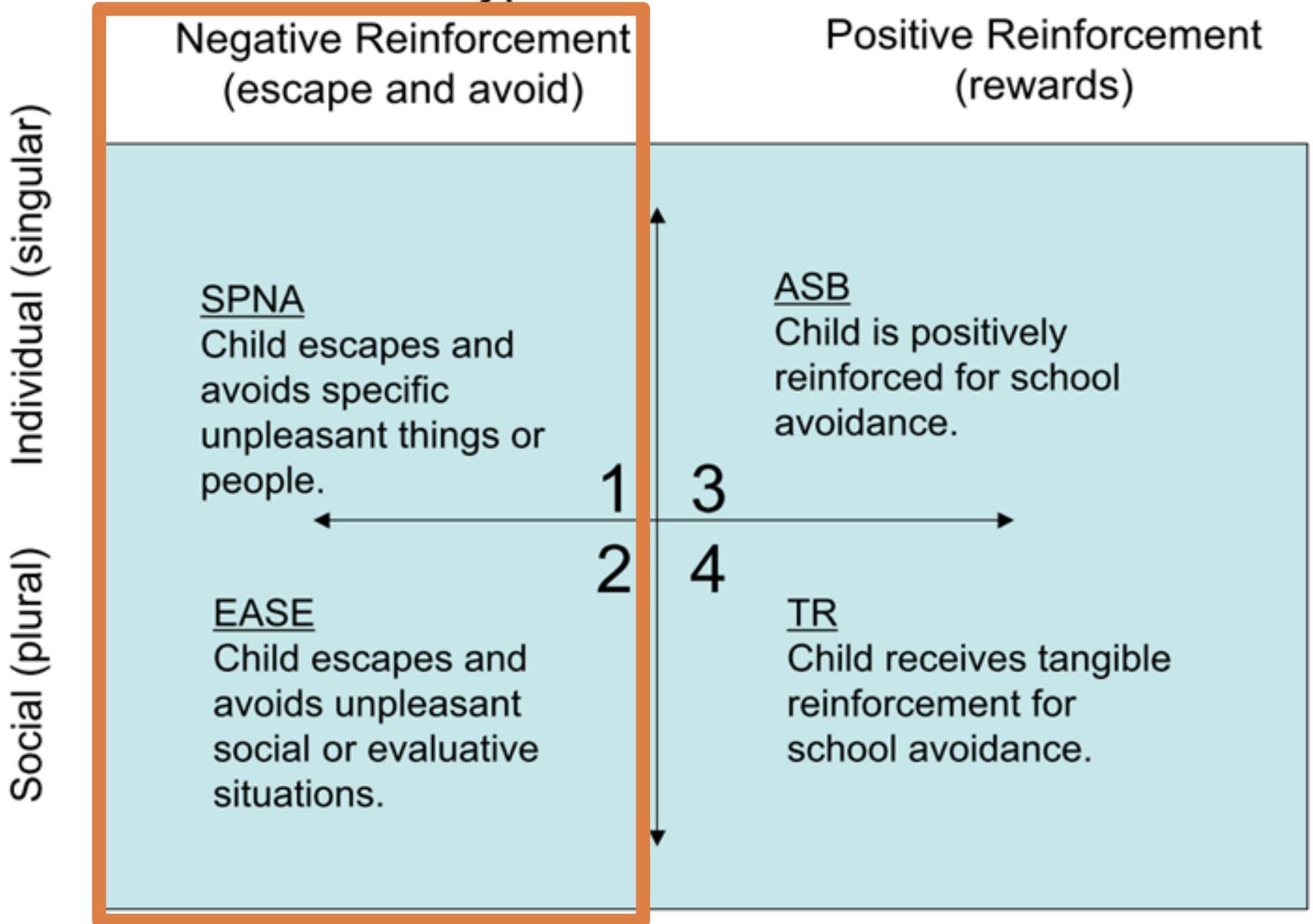
Positive Reinforcement

- ▶ Parents care for me
- ▶ My foods, my gear, my screens are here
- ▶ Parents get me... you?...not so much
- ▶ *Parent-splaining*

Negative Reinforcement

- ▶ Specific Negative (event/person/location)
- ▶ Evaluation (social/academic)

4 Types of School Refusal



Individual (singular)
Social (plural)

R- avoidance
Interior Stimuli

R+ reward
Exterior Stimuli

SPNA

Stimuli Provoking a Negative Affect
(bus, lunch, fire alarm, restrooms, teacher)
Symptoms: generalized anxiety, depression, phobias, sep anxiety.

Strategies

- Desensitization
- No "forced" attendance
- Gradual re-exposure
- Self-reinforcement
- Positive self-talk

EASE

Escape from Aversive Social/Evaluative Situations. (public speaking, halls, called on in class, tests)
Symptoms: generalized anxiety, social phobia, depression, avoidance.

Strategies

- Skill building
- Cognitive restructuring
- Role play
- Coping strategies
- Gradual re-exposure to social situations

ASB

Attention Seeking Behavior
(tantrums, somatic complaints, non-compliance)
Symptoms: separation anxiety, generalized anxiety, oppositional defiant.

Strategies

- Offer few choices
- Clear messages
- "Forced" attendance
- Parent training
- Routines and consequences

TR

Tangible Reinforcers outside of school
(sleeping, TV, video games, friends, mall)
Symptoms: generalized anxiety, ODD, conduct disorder, depression.

Strategies:

- Contracts
- Curtail other activities
- Increase rewards for attending
- Decrease rewards for missing
- Family communication skills
- Alternative problem solving strategies

4 Types of School Refusal

Negative Reinforcement
(escape and avoid)

Positive Reinforcement
(rewards)

Individual (singular)

SPNA

Child escapes and avoids specific unpleasant things or people.

1

3

ASB

Child is positively reinforced for school avoidance.

Social (plural)

EASE

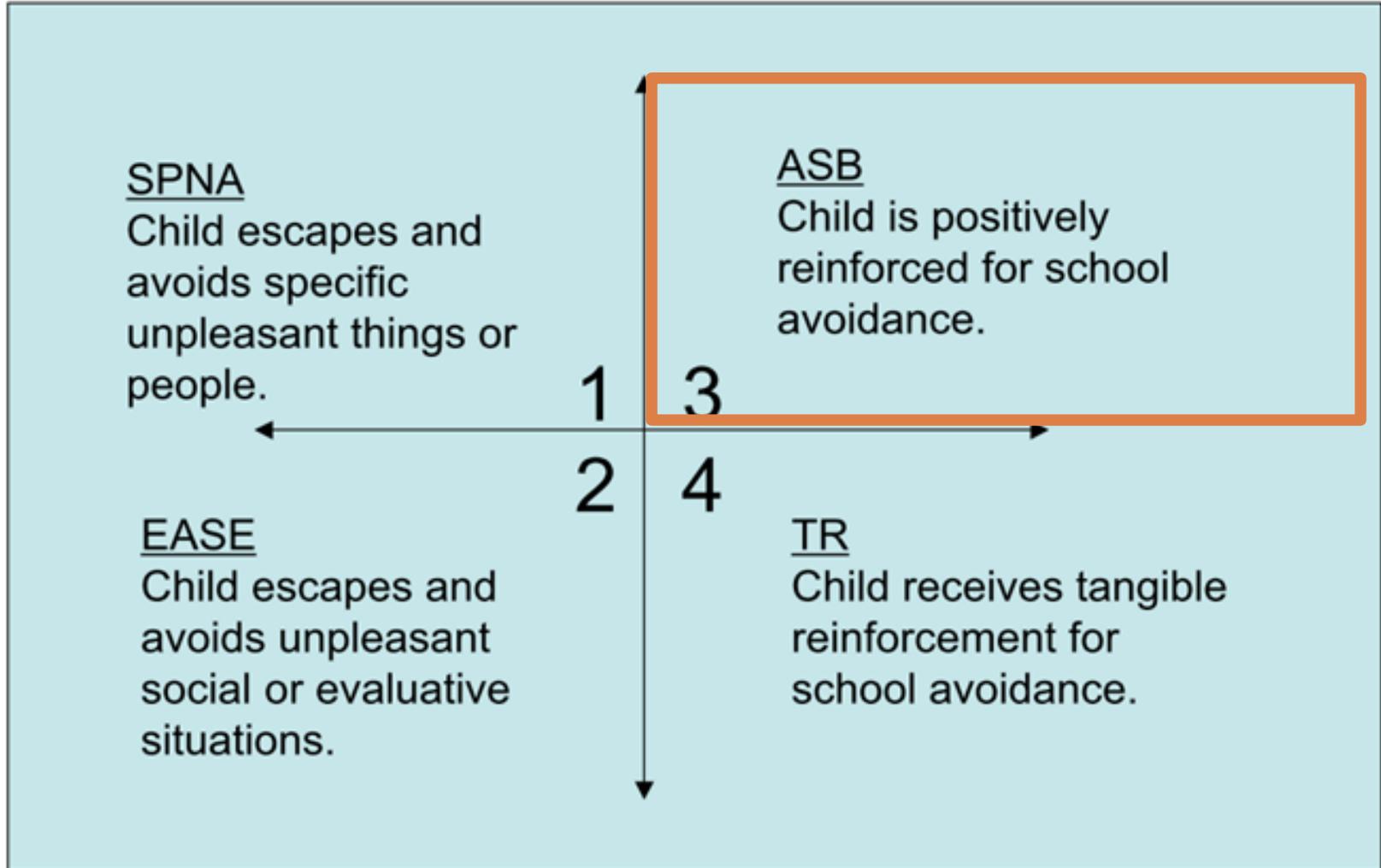
Child escapes and avoids unpleasant social or evaluative situations.

2

4

TR

Child receives tangible reinforcement for school avoidance.



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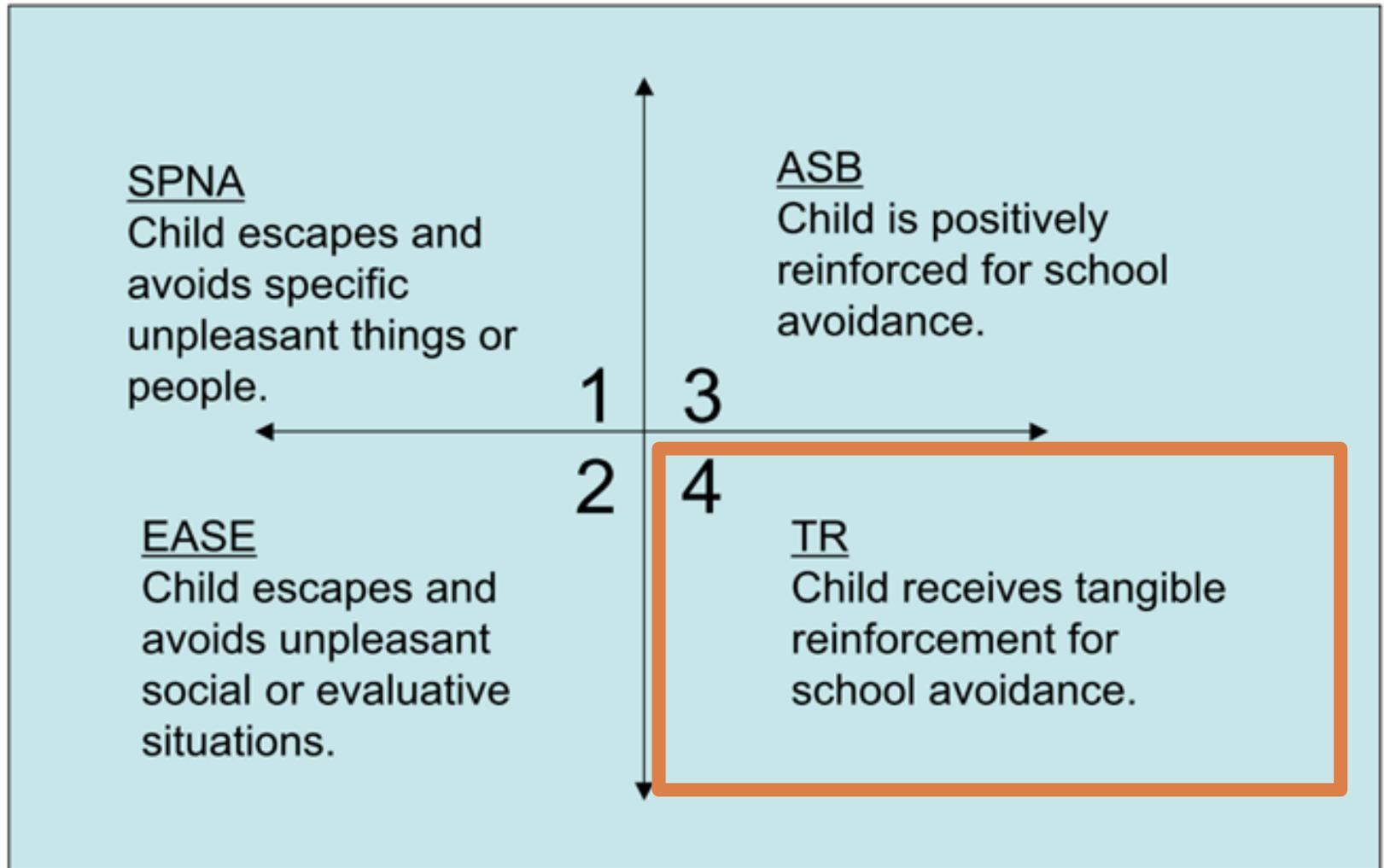
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Home Strategies across Refusal Functions

- **Setting Event Strategies**
 - Manage medical and mental health concerns
 - Behavioral sleep intervention (Hanley)
 - Establish and follow a schedule
 - Leave the house regularly
 - Family meeting

Home Strategies across Refusal Functions

- **Consequence Events**
 - Limit highly preferred activities until after school hours
 - Reinforcement system for attendance
 - No free for nonattendance

School Refusal Survey and Intervention Planning Worksheet - SMAC 3/7/20

Intervention Process and Selection (circle or X)

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|-----------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| What is your starting point? | Manage medical and mental health concerns | Improve sleep quality | Establish structure & routine | Get all family members on the same page |
| | Identify school person you can communicate with | Other... | Other... | Other... |

| | | | |
|---|----------------------|---|--|
| Based on the School Refusal Assessment Scale, what is the most likely reason or function for refusal at this time? | <i>Avoid</i> | General bad feelings associated with school | Avoiding social, academic evaluation or a specific person/thing/activity at school |
| | <i>Access</i> | Home, creature comforts, family members (including pets). Also includes keeping tabs on those people/things they worry about. | Fun things and people during the day that they can't access at school |

| | | | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|---|--|---|------------------------------|
| What is your intervention starting point? | <i>Avoidance Strategies</i> | Reinforce therapy attendance and medical compliance | Establish relaxation and coping routine, reinforce use | Set reasonable attendance goal | Set reasonable "escape plan" |
| | <i>Access Strategies</i> | Parent-child separation | Clearly communicate expectation for attendance | Reinforce attendance, not refusal by turning off the fun stuff during school hours and limiting fun events if refusal | Other... |

Ideal Re-Entry Team

- **School**

- Carefully selected Ed Tech
- Flexible touchstone school staff
- LCSW and BCBA working in concert
- Administrator

- **Community**

- Parent
- Family Therapist
- Flexible BHP
- Prescriber
- Case Manager

Re-Entry Plan Rules

- Write one (see handout)
- Establish the plan well in advance of implementation to give everyone time to ask questions, get organized, and change their mind
- Ensure full understanding of the plan by all parties. Use video, visual supports, etc. as needed
- Involve parents on site at school **ONLY** if necessary and concurrently develop a plan for fading them out

School Re-Entry Plan

Student: _____

Date: _____

Primary Contact: _____

I. Purpose of Plan/Goals

II. Statement of School Refusal Function

SRAS-R Results

| Respondent | Avoid Negative Affect (SPNA) | Avoid Aversive Social/Evaluative Situations (EASE) | Attention Seeking (ASB) | Tangible Reinforcers Outside School (TR) |
|----------------|------------------------------|--|-------------------------|--|
| <i>Parent</i> | | | | |
| <i>Student</i> | | | | |

III. Personnel and Roles.

IV. Schedule.

V. Special Accommodations.

- I. Entry Routine.

- II. Academic Work/Instructional Strategies.

- III. Alternate Classroom Strategies.

- IV. Sick Policy (what is too sick to come to or stay at school?).

- V. School-Based Contingencies (reinforcers for attendance).

- VI. Home-Based Contingencies (reinforcers for attendance, any restrictions for nonattendance).

- VII. Increasing Time/Production (goal and objectives, data driven).

- VIII. Decreasing Time/Production (data-driven).

- IX. Data Collection and Review (what data will be used to increase/decrease time, how often reviewed and by whom).

- X. Attached Protocols/Plans (behavior plan, relaxation plan, try to stay plan, etc.)

Re-Entry Plan Rules

- **When student has had multiple placement failures, do not include a step back in the plan.**
 - Instead, ensure that the expectation for attendance is sufficiently low that it can be easily attained.
- **Don't allow student to exceed the expectation for attendance (hours per day, number of days) and don't request that they stay – no matter how well the day is going.**
 - Instead, let the student know that you will let the team know of their interest and they will develop a new plan.

Please Don't

- Rush the process
- Let the lawyers override clinicians who do this for a living
 - The objective is progress, not meeting arbitrary deadlines
- Draw lines in the sand

Please Do

- Intervene early
- Recognize when you are not an effective team player and take a time out of the process
- Recognize that some time in school is better than no time in school.
- Find evaluators who will provide differential diagnoses and declare a *definitive* DSM-V diagnosis in the report.

THANK YOU!

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Nationally Certified School Psychologist
Board Certified Behavior Analyst - Doctoral