



ATTENDANCE SCIENCE

INSTRUMENT REFERENCE GUIDE

Measuring What Drives Absence

SNACK • SRAS-R • ISAP and ISAP-P • SCREEN • PSSB© • Family Stability Index™

A standing reference for school teams, clinicians, and community partners

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Attendance USA, Inc. • School Avoidance and Refusal Certificate Course

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How to Use This Guide

An attendance record tells a team that a student is absent. It does not tell them what kind of absence this is, what is driving it, or who else sees the problem the same way. Those are three separate questions, and the field has produced separate instruments to answer each one.

This guide profiles six instruments a Tier 2 and Tier 3 team should be able to name, distinguish, and select between. Four are published, peer-reviewed measures developed by the international school attendance research community. Two are Attendance USA instruments used across our own work. For each one, this guide states what it measures, how it is built, what the psychometric evidence supports, when to reach for it, and where its limits sit.

SCOPE AND STANDING

This guide is a reference for selecting and interpreting instruments in school-based and community practice. It is not a substitute for the published manual of any instrument, and it does not confer permission to use one. Several of the measures profiled here carry licensing or authorship permissions that must be secured from the developer before use. Where an instrument is designed for clinical administration, it should be administered and interpreted by a professional qualified to do so.

The Three Questions

Every assessment decision in this course reduces to which of three questions the team is trying to answer right now.

Question	What It Establishes	Instruments That Answer It
What type of attendance problem is this?	Whether the absence is school refusal, truancy, school withdrawal, or school exclusion. This decides who owns the first response	SNACK
What is maintaining it?	Which of four reinforcement functions keeps the behavior going. This selects the intervention	SRAS-R
What sits behind it, and how strongly?	The symptom and context profile driving the student's experience of school	ISAP, ISAP-P, SCREEN

Type, function, and profile are not interchangeable, and no single instrument answers all three.

Two further questions belong to Attendance Science™ practice and are answered by our own instruments: how strong is this student's bond to school, answered by the PSSB®, and how stable is the household around this student, answered by the Family Stability Index™. A complete Tier 3 assessment picture draws on all five.

I. The SNACK

School Non-Attendance Checklist

The SNACK is the instrument that answers the first question: what type of attendance problem is in front of us. It comes from the paper that establishes the four-type framework this course is built on, co-authored by the founder of Attendance USA.

Field	Detail
Developers	David Heyne, Malin Gren-Landell, Glenn Melvin, and Carolyn Gentle-Genitty
Source	Differentiation Between School Attendance Problems: Why and How? Cognitive and Behavioral Practice, 2019, 26(1), 8-34
What it measures	Type of school attendance problem: school refusal, truancy, school withdrawal, or school exclusion
Format	Brief screening measure designed to permit differentiation by type at the point of first review
Primary use	The opening screen on any case of concerning absence, before function or symptom assessment begins
Why it matters	Type decides ownership. A withdrawal case is a family-engagement and resource case; an exclusion case is a school-practice case; a refusal case is a coordinated clinical and school case. Naming the type wrong sends the case to the wrong owner

The source paper sets out the reasoning as well as the tool. It reviews the history of how attendance problems have been conceptualized, lays the four-type approach alongside Kearney's functional approach, evaluates the strengths and limitations of each, and then offers the SNACK as a practical way to differentiate by type. Practitioners intending to use the SNACK should work from that paper, which carries the item set and scoring guidance.

Classify before you Consequence. (Attendance Science™)

The Four Types, as the Field Defines Them

Type	Who Initiates the Absence	Defining Signature
School refusal	The student	Reluctance or refusal driven by emotional distress. The student typically stays home, and the parents know
Truancy	The student	Absence concealed from parents, not authorized by the school, commonly without emotional distress at its center
School withdrawal	The parent or caregiver	The student is kept home, or minimal effort is made to secure attendance, often for caregiving, economic, or belief-based reasons
School exclusion	The school	Disciplinary exclusion, or an institutional failure to accommodate a student's needs, that results in absence

The four-type framework underlying the SNACK and the Attendance Science™ classification.

Attendance Science® teaches Truancy, Withdrawal, Avoidance, and Refusal, mapping avoidance to the environmental and systemic drivers the international literature treats under school exclusion and emotionally based school avoidance. The four-type logic is the same; the vocabulary is adapted to what a United States school team already uses.

II. The SRAS-R

School Refusal Assessment Scale, Revised

The SRAS-R is the most widely used functional measure in the field and the instrument behind the four-function model taught in Unit 2 of this course. It answers the second question: not what type this is, but what keeps it going.

Field	Detail
Developers	Christopher Kearney and Wendy Silverman. Original scale 1993; revised version published 2002
Source	Identifying the Function of School Refusal Behavior: A Revision of the School Refusal Assessment Scale. Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment
What it measures	The reinforcement function maintaining school refusal behavior, across four conditions
Structure	24 items, six per function. Child self-report form and parent form
Response format	0 to 6 scale, from never to always
Administration	Approximately 10 minutes. Designed for use with children aged 5 and older
Scoring	Sum each function's six items and divide by six. Average the child and parent means. The function with the highest mean is treated as the primary driver
Psychometrics	Multiple independent studies support its reliability and validity, including confirmation in samples with co-occurring attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder

The Four Functions

Function	What the Student Gains	Reinforcement Type
1. Avoidance of stimuli provoking negative affectivity	Relief from generalized distress associated with the school setting itself	Negative
2. Escape from aversive social or evaluative situations	Relief from a specific social or performance demand: a test, a presentation, a peer group	Negative
3. Pursuit of attention from significant others	Proximity to, and attention from, a caregiver	Positive
4. Pursuit of tangible reinforcement outside school	Access to something more rewarding than school: screens, work, friends, freedom	Positive

Kearney's four functions. Functions 1 and 2 are maintained by relief; functions 3 and 4 by reward.

The practice value of the function is that it selects the intervention. Function 1 calls for anxiety management and graded exposure. Function 2 calls for resolving the specific stressor and a graded return to that setting. Function 3 calls for caregiver contingency management and predictable scheduled attention. Function 4 calls for contingency management that reduces the reward value of staying home. Applying the function 1 response to a function 4 case is one of the most common and most costly errors in Tier 3 work.

READ THIS LIMIT CAREFULLY

The logic of function-matched treatment is well reasoned and widely taught, and it has not yet been demonstrated in a controlled trial that matching the intervention to the measured function outperforms a well-delivered unmatched intervention. Teach it as the field's best working model, not as a settled finding.

III. The ISAP and ISAP-P

Inventory of School Attendance Problems

The ISAP comes from Volker Reissner's group at Essen and takes the broadest view of any instrument in this guide. Rather than sorting a student into a type or a function, it asks how strongly a wide range of symptoms occur before or during school, and then how far each one is connected to the student's actual absence. That second step is what separates it from a general mental-health screener.

Field	Detail
Developers	Martin Knollmann, Volker Reissner, and Johannes Hebebrand
Source	Towards a comprehensive assessment of school absenteeism: development and initial validation of the inventory of school attendance problems. <i>European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry</i> , 2019, 28, 399-414
What it measures	Symptom intensity and functional relevance across 13 domains connected to school attendance problems
Structure	48 items across 13 scales, reduced from an initial pool of 124 items
Development sample	245 students with school attendance problems in a clinical setting, mean age 14.4, 53.5% male
Psychometrics	Good internal consistency across all 13 scales. Convergent and discriminant validity established against the Youth Self Report and a German version of the SRAS. Most scales associated with absence severity
Primary use	Comprehensive assessment where a case is complex, where the presentation does not fit a clean category, or where a treatment plan needs a symptom profile rather than a single label

The 13 Scales

Domain	Scales
Internalizing symptoms	Depression · Social Anxiety · Performance Anxiety · Separation Anxiety · Agoraphobia and Panic · Somatic Complaints
Externalizing symptoms	Aggression · School Aversion and Attractive Alternatives
Contextual problems	Problems with Teachers · Dislike of the Specific School · Problems with Peers · Problems Within the Family · Problems with Parents

The ISAP covers the student and the environment in one instrument.

The Parent Version: ISAP-P

Knollmann and Reissner published a validated parent version in 2025, in *Frontiers in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. It retains 49 items on the same 13 factors, drawn from 296 parents of young people aged 8 to 18 with attendance problems. Model fit was acceptable, with a comparative fit index of .93 and a root mean square error of approximation of .05, and every scale reached a Cronbach's alpha at or above .75.

Two findings from that study should change how a team runs an intake.

- **Parents rate symptoms higher than their children do, on every scale.** The difference was statistically significant across all 13 scales in a matched subsample of 145 pairs. That gap is not measurement error to be averaged away. It is information about where the family and the student understand the problem differently, and a plan that only one of them recognizes is a plan only one of them will carry.
- **Parent ratings did not track the extent of absence.** The authors attribute this to the limits of what parents can know about a school day. It is a direct argument for triangulating the register, the student, and the family rather than trusting any one of them alone.

Cross-Cultural Validation

Strömbeck, Heyne, Ferrer-Wreder and Alanko validated a Swedish version in 2025, in *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, with 399 community adolescents aged 12 to 16, of whom 28 percent reported special education needs. Confirmatory factor analysis supported the predicted 13-factor structure, with a comparative fit index of .983 and a Tucker-Lewis index of .981. Internal consistency ranged from .65 to .90 across symptom scales and .70 to .91 across function scales.

The finding with the most direct practice value is which scales tracked absence most strongly in a general school population: somatic complaints, depression, social anxiety, and school aversion. Those four are precisely the presentations a school nurse and an attendance officer encounter first, which means the front door of the school is already collecting the most predictive signal in the building.

SETTING MATTERS

The ISAP was developed in a clinical sample and validated in Swedish community schools. The authors of the Swedish study note that further work is needed on its applicability in clinical samples in that context. A school team using the ISAP should treat it as a structured way to understand a student, and should not read a scale elevation as a diagnosis.

IV. The SCREEN

School Refusal Evaluation Scale

The SCREEN is the most recent of the published instruments profiled here and the one built specifically to measure the emotional experience of school refusal in an adolescent's own words. It was developed in France from interview data rather than from an existing theoretical model.

Field	Detail
Developers	Marie Gallé-Tessonneau and Kamel Gana
Source	Development and Validation of the School Refusal Evaluation Scale for Adolescents. <i>Journal of Pediatric Psychology</i> , 2019, 44(2), 153-163
What it measures	The strength of an adolescent's negative emotional response to attending school
Development method	Content analysis of 42 semi-directed interviews with adolescents, expert review, then psychometric testing
Structure	An 18-item, four-factor model in the original validation. Later adaptations use a 12-item form carrying three items per factor
Response format	5-point scale, from not at all like me to much like me
Validation sample	649 French community adolescents aged 10 to 16, plus a clinical sample of 31
Psychometrics	Good reliability and validity. Receiver operating characteristic analysis reported sensitivity of .94 and specificity of .88

The Four Factors

Factor	What It Captures
Anxious Anticipation	Distress that builds before the school day rather than during it
Difficult Transition	The struggle at the point of leaving home and entering the school setting
Interpersonal Discomfort	Distress located in relationships with peers and adults at school
School Avoidance	The behavioral expression: the acts of staying away

SCREEN factor structure, as confirmed in the Spanish validation of the 12-item form.

A Spanish study of 681 students aged 13 to 16 found configural, metric, and scalar invariance across gender and age, meaning the instrument measures the same construct in the same way for boys and girls and across that age band. Only Interpersonal Discomfort differed by gender, with higher scores among girls. An Arabic adaptation in Algeria, across community samples of 658 and 485 middle-school students, recovered three factors rather than four, a reminder that instruments do not always transfer intact across languages and school systems.

The SCREEN earns its place in a Tier 2 and Tier 3 toolkit because of its screening performance. A sensitivity of .94 means it rarely misses a case that warrants a closer look, which is the property a screening instrument most needs.

V. The Attendance USA Instruments

Two further instruments are used across Attendance Science™ practice. They answer questions the published instruments above were not built to answer: how strongly is this student bonded to school, and how stable is the household around them.

The PSSB©: Perception of School Social Bonding

Field	Detail
Developer	Dr. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty
Theoretical base	Hirschi's social bond theory, operationalized for school settings
What it measures	The strength of a student's bond to school across four constructs: Attachment, Involvement, Belief, and Commitment
Validation	Gentle-Genitty, Keppens, and Kearney (2025), Contemporary School Psychology, validation sample of 3,507
Primary use	Screening at Tier 2 entry, and re-screening at 6 to 9 weeks to detect whether a Tier 3 plan is rebuilding the bond or only the attendance figure
Why it matters	Attendance can be coerced. Bond cannot. A student whose attendance improves while their bond scores stay flat has complied, not recovered, and is at high risk of relapse

Measure the Bond, Not just the seat. (Attendance Science™)

The Family Stability Index™

Field	Detail
Developer	Attendance USA, Inc.
What it measures	Household conditions surrounding the student across five domains: Safe, Housed, Nourished, Connected, and Supported
Primary use	Screening before a refusal classification is applied, and as the basis for a community-resource response in withdrawal cases
Why it matters	It separates a student who will not attend from a student who cannot. Applying a psychological classification to a logistics problem is the most damaging misclassification in the four-category system

Published evidence supports the underlying claim. Risk factors for school refusal cluster at the individual, family, and environmental levels, and those levels map onto the five domains. Attendance USA's own work with the Fight For Life Foundation found that consistent, stable caregiving households showed a marked reduction, in some cases a near-disappearance, of attendance issues.

VI. Choosing an Instrument Set

No team uses all six instruments on every case, and no team should. The right set depends on the question in front of you, the tier, and what your role permits you to administer.

By Tier

Tier	Question	Recommended Set
Tier 1, universal	Is the bond holding across the building?	PSSB© at cohort level
Tier 2, early pattern	What type is this, and is the household stable?	SNACK + Family Stability Index™ + PSSB©
Tier 2 to 3, escalating	What is keeping this going?	Add the SRAS-R. Consider the SCREEN where emotional distress is the presenting feature
Tier 3, intensive	What is the full picture, and who sees it differently?	Add the ISAP, with the ISAP-P from a caregiver. Coordinate with a licensed provider

Instrument selection by tier. Each tier adds to the set below it rather than replacing it.

By Role

Who You Are	What You Can Lead	Where to Hand Off
Attendance team, school counselor	SNACK, Family Stability Index™, PSSB©, attendance-pattern analysis	Hand off when the presentation includes panic, hopelessness, self-harm risk, or a case that has not moved in 6 to 9 weeks
Clinician or licensed provider	SRAS-R, ISAP and ISAP-P, SCREEN, diagnostic assessment and treatment	Hand back the school-facing plan: what the graded exposure schedule requires the building to do
Community or family-serving partner	Family Stability Index™ domains, resource navigation, family engagement	Hand off classification and function assessment to the school team and the clinician

Instrument selection by role. Coordination is the point: each party owns a piece and none owns all of it.

The Multi-Informant Rule

The strongest single methodological lesson across the instruments in this guide is that one informant is never enough. The ISAP-P study states the principle directly: multi-informant assessment is the standard in child psychology, and the value of the parent report lies precisely in where it disagrees with the child's.

The same lesson holds for administrative data. Keppens and colleagues found only a weak correlation between self-reported and officially registered unauthorized absence among 4,344 Belgian students, with the largest underreporting among boys, students in technical and vocational tracks, students from lower-income households, and students from homes where another language is spoken. A Danish clinical study found that 27 percent of young people whose parents reported significant absence showed no absence in the school record.

WHAT THIS MEANS AT INTAKE

Collect from three sources before you classify: the register, the student, and the caregiver. Where they disagree, the disagreement is the finding. Record it rather than resolving it silently in favor of the source that is easiest to reach.

VII. The Instrument Crosswalk

This table maps the Attendance Science™ four-category classification and ASC-AR codes onto the published instruments, so a team using both vocabularies can move between them without losing meaning.

ASC-AR Code	SNACK Type	SRAS-R Function	Expected ISAP Elevation	SCREEN Signal
AS-T Truancy	Truancy	Commonly function 4	School Aversion and Attractive Alternatives	Typically low
AS-W Withdrawal	School withdrawal	Not applicable: the absence is caregiver-initiated	Problems Within the Family, Problems with Parents	Typically low
AS-A Avoidance	School exclusion, or environmental avoidance	Function 2 where a specific setting is aversive	Problems with Teachers, Problems with Peers, Dislike of the Specific School	Interpersonal Discomfort
AS-R1 Refusal, negative affectivity	School refusal	Function 1	Somatic Complaints, Depression, Agoraphobia and Panic	Anxious Anticipation, Difficult Transition
AS-R2 Refusal, social or evaluative escape	School refusal	Function 2	Social Anxiety, Performance Anxiety	Interpersonal Discomfort, Anxious Anticipation
AS-R3 Refusal, attention	School refusal	Function 3	Separation Anxiety	Difficult Transition
AS-R4 Refusal, tangible reinforcement	School refusal or truancy, depending on concealment	Function 4	School Aversion and Attractive Alternatives	School Avoidance

Figure 1. The instrument crosswalk. Expected elevations are typical patterns, not decision rules.

HOW TO READ THIS TABLE

The ISAP and SCREEN columns describe patterns a team should expect to see, not thresholds that confirm a code. An elevation that contradicts the expected pattern is a reason to re-examine the classification, and never a reason to override the instrument in favor of the label the team has already chosen.

VIII. Permissions, Ethics, and Limits

Before You Administer Anything

- ☐ Confirm permission. Several instruments in this guide require authorization from the developer or publisher. Locate and follow the licensing terms for each one before it is used with a student
- ☐ Confirm qualification. Ask whether the person administering and interpreting the instrument is qualified to do so in your jurisdiction and under your district's policy
- ☐ Confirm purpose. State, before administration, what decision the result will inform. An instrument gathered with no decision attached to it is data collection on a child for its own sake
- ☐ Confirm consent and explanation. The student and caregiver should know what is being asked, why, who will see it, and what happens next
- ☐ Confirm the record. Decide where the result lives, who can access it, and how long it is retained, before the first item is answered

Four Limits to Hold On To

- **A score is not a diagnosis.** None of these instruments diagnose. They describe, screen, and structure a conversation. Diagnosis belongs to a licensed professional working from a full clinical picture.
- **An instrument validated in one setting may not transfer to another.** The SCREEN recovered four factors in France and Spain and three in Algeria. Treat cross-cultural use as a question to be checked, not assumed.
- **Profile does not predict response.** Knowing which scales are elevated tells a team what this student is experiencing. Whether that profile predicts which intervention will work is not yet established.
- **An instrument can make a system feel rigorous while changing nothing.** If the result does not change who does what by when, the assessment was a delay dressed as diligence.

| Systems reveal what they value by how they are designed. (Attendance Science™)

Source List

Instrument	Primary Citation
SNACK	Heyne, D., Gren-Landell, M., Melvin, G., & Gentle-Genitty, C. (2019). Differentiation between school attendance problems: Why and how? Cognitive and Behavioral Practice, 26(1), 8-34
SRAS-R	Kearney, C. A. (2002). Identifying the function of school refusal behavior: A revision of the School Refusal Assessment Scale. Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment
ISAP	Knollmann, M., Reissner, V., & Hebebrand, J. (2019). Towards a comprehensive assessment of school absenteeism. European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 28, 399-414
ISAP-P	Knollmann, M., & Reissner, V. (2025). Validation of the parent version of the inventory of school attendance problems. Frontiers in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 4, 1543527
ISAP, Swedish version	Strömbeck, J., Heyne, D., Ferrer-Wreder, L., & Alanko, K. (2025). Reliability and validity of the Swedish version of the ISAP. European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 34(7), 2069-2082

Instrument	Primary Citation
SCREEN	Gallé-Tessonneau, M., & Gana, K. (2019). Development and validation of the School Refusal Evaluation Scale for adolescents. <i>Journal of Pediatric Psychology</i> , 44(2), 153-163
PSSB©	Gentle-Genitty, C., Keppens, G., & Kearney, C. A. (2025). <i>Contemporary School Psychology</i>
Context and field overview	Gren Landell, M. (Ed.) (2021). <i>School Attendance Problems: A Research Update and Where to Go</i> . The Jerring Foundation and the International Network for School Attendance

 *A rising tide raises all boats.* (Attendance Science™)