

WHAT'S HAPPENING:

Often rooted in anxiety, sensory overwhelm, or a specific fear (social, academic, separation). This is involuntary distress, not defiance.

STEP-BY-STEP STRATEGIES:

- Meet the student where they are: validate the fear before problem-solving
- Loop in the school counselor within 48 hours
- Build a gradual re-entry plan (partial days, safe-person check-ins, quiet arrival)
- Identify the specific trigger: academic demand? peer conflict? transitions? sensory load?
- Avoid power struggles or punitive consequences; they increase avoidance
- Consider referral for anxiety, OCD, or trauma screening

TALKING WITH FAMILIES:

Frame the conversation around partnership: *"We want to understand what's hard about mornings and work on it together."*

CONNECT TO PSSB™:

Low PSSB Attachment and Belonging scores often co-occur with school refusal. Pair this plan with a PSSB Bonding Card check-in.

WHAT'S HAPPENING:

Disengagement without visible distress. The student (or family) may not see attendance as valuable or connected to a future goal.

STEP-BY-STEP STRATEGIES:

- Build the relationship first: find one authentic point of connection
- Connect coursework or school activities to the student's actual interests
- Set small, visible goals with immediate positive feedback
- Educate family on the compounding impact of missed instructional days
- Pair with a mentor or attendance buddy for accountability
- Screen for underlying depression or learned helplessness

TALKING WITH FAMILIES:

Reframe school as opportunity rather than obligation; share concrete examples of what's being missed.

CONNECT TO PSSB™:

Withdrawal often reflects low PSSB Commitment and Involvement. Use the PSSB Bonding Card to surface the weakest construct.

WHAT'S HAPPENING:

A documented, ongoing health condition is generating legitimate but accumulating absences that still carry academic risk.

STEP-BY-STEP STRATEGIES:

- Request a 504 or IEP meeting if one is not already in place
- Set up homebound services or virtual access for extended absences
- Coordinate scheduling with medical providers where possible
- Send materials/assignments in advance of planned absences
- Use nurse check-ins to support smooth return-to-school transitions
- Track separately from unexcused absence in your data; excused absences still carry academic impact

TALKING WITH FAMILIES:

Ask what the school can adjust (deadlines, workload pacing) to reduce the academic cost of medical absence.

CONNECT TO PSSB™:

Maintaining PSSB Attachment (a consistent adult contact) during long absences preserves belonging even when physical presence is limited.

WHAT'S HAPPENING:

Structural barriers (transportation, housing instability, caregiving duties, lack of basic supplies) are preventing attendance regardless of student motivation.

STEP-BY-STEP STRATEGIES:

- Screen for housing instability and connect to your McKinney-Vento liaison
- Arrange transportation support (bus route change, gas cards, rideshare partnership)
- Connect family to community resources: food bank, clothing closet, utility assistance
- Offer flexible scheduling if the student is working or caregiving
- Provide school supplies, hygiene kits, or laundry access on-site
- Assign case management: this is a systems-level barrier rather than a motivation problem

TALKING WITH FAMILIES:

Lead with resources, not requirements: "We want to help remove what's in the way."

CONNECT TO PSSB™:

Economic barriers can suppress PSSB Involvement (extracurriculars, peer time) even when Belonging is intact. Track both.

WHAT'S HAPPENING:

The student is avoiding a specific person, place, or time due to a real or perceived safety threat.

STEP-BY-STEP STRATEGIES:

- Interview the student privately: take their account seriously and never minimize it
- Report and investigate promptly per your district's anti-bullying policy
- Adjust schedule, supervision, or transitions to restore a sense of safety
- Use restorative practices only when safe and voluntary; avoid peer mediation for bullying
- Provide counseling support for the student
- Follow up weekly; bullying-related avoidance rarely resolves after one conversation

TALKING WITH FAMILIES:

Keep the family informed of concrete safety steps taken, not just that "it's being handled."

CONNECT TO PSSB™:

Bullying can damage PSSB Belonging and Attachment. Rebuilding both is central to a successful return to school.

WHAT'S HAPPENING:

Chaotic or unsafe home circumstances (substance use, domestic conflict, incarceration, frequent moves, foster placement) can leave no consistent adult ensuring the student gets to school.

STEP-BY-STEP STRATEGIES:

- Report suspected abuse or neglect as required by law; coordinate with CPS, foster liaison, or family services
- Assign one consistent adult advocate at school (counselor, mentor, favorite teacher)
- Use brief morning check-in calls or texts as a stabilizing routine
- Lead with a trauma-informed approach: safety and predictability before academics
- Connect family to wraparound services: housing, food security, counseling
- Treat this as a team effort: no single teacher can resolve it alone

TALKING WITH FAMILIES:

Approach without judgment; ask what one thing would make mornings easier this week.

CONNECT TO PSSB™:

Family instability can erode every PSSB construct at once. Prioritize rebuilding one adult Attachment relationship first.