

School Avoidance Program

Intervening early to help treat the root causes of school avoidance and reduce chronic absenteeism.



Evidence-Based Approach

Cartwheel's program combines weekly individual therapy, parent guidance, school collaboration, and coordinated care to address the underlying causes of school avoidance to get students back on track.



Clinical Assessment

Students complete the School Refusal Assessment Scale (SRAS) to identify the specific reasons behind their avoidance which allows us to create a targeted treatment plan tailored to their needs.



Intensive Support Model

- Build coping skills through **weekly teletherapy with a licensed clinician** trained in school avoidance interventions
- **Engage parents and caregivers with 1-1 and group sessions** – parental involvement is critical for school avoidance
- Treat anxiety, depression, and other mental health needs with **psychiatric evals and medication management**
- Ensure consistent strategies across settings with **enhanced school and family collaboration**
- Reach students where they are – **available from home**, including weekend hours

School avoidance may look like:

- **Anxiety** about attending school or specific classes
- **Frequent tardiness** due to difficulty getting ready in the morning
- **Needing help or refusing to get out of the car** at school drop-off
- **Skipping certain classes** or leaving campus during the day
- **Frequently ending up in the nurse's office** with unexplained physical complaints
- **Stomachaches, headaches, or other physical symptoms** that appear only on school days
- **Emotional distress, tears, or panic** when discussing school

Four in ten districts identified reducing chronic absenteeism in their schools among their top three most pressing challenges for their schools during the 2024–2025 school year.

[Findings from the American School District Panel and the American Youth Panel](#)

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Key Program Benefits

- ✓ **Addresses Root Causes:** Goes beyond attendance tracking to tackle the anxiety and emotional barriers preventing school engagement.
- ✓ **Family-Centered Care:** Involves parents and caregivers as active participants through dedicated guidance sessions and coordinated support.
- ✓ **Measurable Outcomes:** Tracks progress through standardized assessments (PHQ-9/GAD-7).

A student may benefit from this program if they:

- **Experience frequent school avoidance** or difficulty getting to school (e.g., physical complaints, emotional meltdowns, refusing to leave home)
- **Have mental health conditions** like anxiety or depression that contribute to chronic absences
- **Have parents or caregivers who recognize attendance is an ongoing concern** and are seeking support
- **Have families committed to participating in weekly therapy sessions** alongside their child

*We conducted an outcomes evaluation and found that students receiving Cartwheel services were more likely to maintain or improve their **GPA** and **attendance** compared to other K-12 students.*

Dr. Ryan Sherman, Medway Public Schools