

Book Review: Helping School Refusing Children

Contributed by Patricia Naso

Review of Helping School Refusing Children {mosgoogle right}

Helping School Refusing Children and Their Parents. Written by Christopher A. Kearney. Published by Oxford University Press Inc., New York, 2008. 185 pages, \$24.95.

The purpose of this book is to assist professionals dealing with school refusing children, to increase school attendance. The author achieves this by first defining reasons for the school refusal. Specifically, he speaks about anxiety related absences, attention seeking behavior, and obtaining tangible rewards outside of school. He then offers suggestions on how mental health providers can collaboratively work with school administration, teachers, parents, and the students to obtain consistent attendance. He provides examples, such as increasing communication skills among all parties involved, attendance tracking, and slowly reintegrating the student back into the classroom. The author addresses obstacles that each of these groups face when overcoming absenteeism. Those obstacles include medical reasons, economic issues, lack of staff, and family dynamics. Resources such as worksheets are included in the book, and the author gives permission for them to be reproduced and altered, as appropriate.

This book is especially useful for social workers who work within the school system. The author presents the material in a realistic and comprehensive manner. He was able to capture the point of view of all parties who are involved in school refusal behavior. This includes school administrators, parents, and mental health professionals. The author notes the feelings of frustration on the part of everyone involved. He provides case examples of school refusal behavior. The scenarios are followed by the students' rationale for not attending school. By doing this, he provides useful insight into the thought process of students. The author ends the book with a nice touch by providing encouragement for all professionals working with school refusing children to continue doing so because their work is making a difference.

In addition, social workers outside of the school system can benefit from reading this book. Often, school refusing students will be referred to social workers outside of the school for individual therapy, social skills groups, and family therapy. With the knowledge obtained from this book, social workers can provide care coordination on behalf of students and parents with school personnel.

Social work educators can use this book as a resource for their social work students. The information provided in the book can orient social work students to the impact that family dynamics, environmental factors, and lack of resources in the educational system have on the academic success of students.

The author has indicated that this book is intended for professionals, not parents. I agree with him. The information is not presented in a therapeutically beneficial manner for parents. As a clinician, I would refer the parents to read the author's other book in this series, which is geared toward them.

In summary, I found the material to be informative and yet easy to read. I will use this as a personal resource. In addition, I would refer my colleagues to obtain a copy, as well.

Reviewed by Patricia Naso, MSW, LCSW, private practitioner.