When School Feels Impossible

Understanding and Responding to School Avoidance

A live webinar broadcast with Dr Caroline Buzanko

This workshop integrates contemporary research on school attendance difficulties, developmental neuroscience, anxiety, neurodivergence, behavioural learning, and ecological systems to provide a practical, formulation-driven approach to prevention and intervention.

Key topics will include:

- Understanding What's Really Driving School Avoidance
  - Differentiating anxiety-driven avoidance, emotional dysregulation, neurodevelopmental needs, skill deficits, and environmental barriers.
  - Recognizing early warning signs before attendance difficulties become entrenched.
  - Understanding the roles of school climate, relationships, bullying, sensory demands, and academic challenges.
- Functional Assessment: Understanding the Why Behind the Behaviour
  - Kearney and Silverman's functional assessment framework and the four maintaining functions of school avoidance.
  - Identifying avoidance-reinforcement cycles and other maintaining mechanisms.
  - Matching individualized interventions to the underlying causes of attendance difficulties.
- The Neuroscience of Avoidance and Building Capacity for Regulation
  - Understanding threat responses, anticipatory anxiety, somatic symptoms, and emotional overload.
  - Differentiating regulation difficulties, limited coping skills, and learned avoidance.
  - Building distress tolerance, psychological flexibility, and self-efficacy.
- Evidence-Informed Interventions That Build Lasting Capacity
  - Approach behaviours and inhibitory learning principles.
  - Acceptance, psychological flexibility and values-based action.
  - Reducing anxiety-maintaining accommodation.
  - Distinguishing necessary accommodations from supports that inadvertently maintain avoidance.
- Practical Strategies for Families and Schools
  - Responding to morning distress, school-entry difficulties, separation anxiety, and physical complaints.
  - Communicating with empathy, confidence, and clear expectations.
  - Developing school transition routines, caregiver scripts, and collaborative response plans.
- Creating Sustainable Return-to-School Plans
  - Designing individualized, stepwise school re-engagement plans.
  - Using MTSS and ecological frameworks to coordinate school, family, and clinical supports.
  - Addressing academic catch-up, partial attendance, school transitions, and prolonged absences.
  - Monitoring progress, preventing relapse, and knowing when more intensive intervention is needed.

Through clinical case examples, participants will learn to identify maintaining mechanisms, distinguish helpful accommodations from avoidance-maintaining patterns, develop graduated re-engagement plans, and apply practical caregiver and educator communication strategies. The overarching goal is to move beyond simply increasing attendance toward building the regulation, confidence, skills, and environmental supports students need for sustainable school engagement.



Dr. Caroline Buzanko is a psychologist. Mother. International Speaker. Professor. Yoda of Anxiety. ADHD Superhero. And Changer of Lives. For nearly thirty years, she has dedicated herself to building client resilience. Honoured as the Psychologist of the Year for Alberta in 2024, Dr. Caroline is a renowned expert in emotion regulation, anxiety, resilience, and neurodivergence. Dr. Buzanko brings energy, clarity, and practical expertise to every session and her engaging style ensures participants leave feeling confident and inspired to create real change.

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Details:

- Wednesday 17 March 2027 9:00am - 2:30pm
- Delivered via Live Webinar (The webinar link will be emailed to you prior to the day)
- $280 (incl. GST). Includes downloadable presentation notes
- Contact the Compass Seminars team on 06 759 1647 or office@compass.ac.nz

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