## Social Anxiety: What's at its Core? (continued)
By Mindi Werblowsky, LCSW, Clinical Director

I meet with parents on a continuous basis who are seeking advice on how to approach their children who refuse to go to school. In some cases, the child presents in an oppositional manner and refuses to get out of bed. In other cases, the child is consistently "not feeling well" and complains of being sick. Although on the surface one might assume this behavior is the result of a defiant child, often there is something deeper going on.

One often-overlooked underlying cause of this behavior is social anxiety, a condition that can profoundly affect adolescents' ability to attend and participate in school. Social anxiety is characterized by the APA. as an intense fear of embarrassment or judgment in social or performance situations. It affects roughly one in ten adolescents and adults in the United States and typically begins around age 13 (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

For students with social anxiety, everyday school situations can feel overwhelming. Common triggers include speaking in front of others, navigating conflict within a social group, completing group projects, or managing academic pressures. Left unrecognized, social anxiety can affect a student's academic performance, self-confidence, and social development.

For many years, if a child missed a certain number of school days, the school was required to report the child as truant. This mandate has recently been revised to recognize the potential reasons for truancy. Presently, if a school reports a student as truant, it must provide evidence of attempts to reach out to the student, identify the reasons the student is not attending, and describe what the school has offered to make school a safe place. This legal shift reflects the understanding that truancy is often not due to a child being oppositional but rather may be influenced by emotional or social factors.

Parents, educators, and school mental health staff play a critical role in noticing early signs of social anxiety and helping students feel supported. Mental health professionals, in particular, are trained to recognize not only anxiety but also signs of potential abuse and neglect, helping ensure that

underlying issues are addressed accurately and safely. Simple actions, like listening without judgment, validating a student's feelings, and encouraging small, manageable steps toward participation, can make a meaningful difference. Creating safe spaces at school—such as quiet areas, small group settings, or check-ins with a counselor—can help students feel more comfortable and confident. Connecting families to appropriate resources, including school-based support programs, community groups, or professional therapists, can significantly improve a student's confidence and school engagement.

There are a variety of effective treatments for social anxiety, including cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), other targeted therapies, supportive peer groups, and, in some cases, medication. Treatment plans are most successful when individualized to the student's specific needs and combined with support from family and school. As with all mental health concerns, early detection and intervention are key—addressing social anxiety sooner rather than later can improve academic performance, strengthen social skills, and boost overall self-confidence.

If your child is refusing to attend school or presenting with another potential symptom of social anxiety, Madraigos can help. You can call or email us to schedule a free, thorough intake. Madraigos can then provide you with the appropriate tools and resources to help your child. The clinical staff at Madraigos is available to meet with parents, children/ students, and educators about any concerns they may have. mwerblowsky@madraigos.org or 516-371-3250 x 116