

School Refusal

Tips for Parents

What is school refusal?

Sometimes called school avoidance or school phobia, school refusal refers to a child's repeated refusal to go to school. This refusal is often accompanied by claims of illness, such as stomachaches or headaches, tantrums, or separation anxiety.

School refusal can happen at any time, but it occurs most frequently at the beginning of a school year, after moving, or following a stressful life event.

Reasons for school refusal

School refusal happens for a variety of reasons. Here are just a few.

Anxiety



Anxiety about a new school year or new routine can make students apprehensive about leaving the security of home. Children may also suffer from anxiety if they don't feel completely safe at school.

Academic issues



Trouble with grades, falling behind, or not understanding what they're learning is often the underlying cause students refuse to go to school.

Social issues



Bullying, conflicts with friends, or exclusion by other students can make students not want to go to school.

Determine the reasons

It's important to identify the underlying issue(s) behind school refusal. Once you've identified why your child is refusing to go to school, you can better develop a plan to fix the issue. *Don't hesitate to enlist the help of your child's teacher(s) and school counselor.*

What You Can Do

School refusal can be frustrating for parents and students, and it can take a big toll on a student's academic performance. Here are some tips for dealing with school refusal.

Rule out physical causes

If your child is frequently complaining of illness, your pediatrician may provide insight as to whether or not your child is suffering from a physical illness or anxiety-induced symptoms.

Be reassuring

Don't fight with or be at odds with your child. Remind your child that you are on their side, and that you can and will help with any fear or problem.

Treat underlying issue(s)

Have a frank discussion about why your child is refusing to go to school. Emphasize that your child is not in trouble, and that while not going to school is not an option, you will make sure that whatever is making your child not want to go to school will be dealt with.

Work with your school

Discuss your child's school refusal issues with teachers, counselors, and administrators. Work together to support your child.

Attendance matters

Attendance is the number one school success factor. Therefore, it's very important not to give in to school refusal, even when it's difficult. Reassure your child that school is a safe place for them to be, and that whatever is happening to make them feel unsafe, unhappy, or anxious will be taken care of.



VIDEO

To review, watch this quick video!