

Is your child missing school due to anxiety?



Definition of anxiety: Feeling of fear and uneasiness about everyday situations.

If your child is suffering from anxiety, you are not alone. The good news is that in most situations, anxiety is normal and temporary. Anxiety becomes a concern if it persists - it can impact relationships with family, peers and teachers, contribute to academic challenges, and lead to school avoidance/refusal. Addressing anxiety is important for a child's overall well-being, not just attendance.

In addition, if your child starts to complain of symptoms like a headache or stomach ache, it is important to **quickly determine** if this is related to anxiety or a physical illness which might require missing school. If the challenge is anxiety, then staying home may worsen the situation.



What are the symptoms of anxiety?

Persistent anxiety can present in many ways, making it difficult to recognize.

Symptoms may vary depending on the age of the child, and some children may keep worries to themselves or have difficulty explaining their feelings making it hard to identify symptoms. Anxiety symptoms can include, but aren't limited to, the following:

- Feeling tired, irritable or easily tearful
- Having trouble separating from parents
- Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares
- Trouble getting out of bed or dressed for school
- Lack of appetite
- Trouble concentrating which may lead to difficulty starting tasks, problems with homework and falling behind in school
- Physical symptoms, including stomachaches and headaches
- Avoiding activities they previously enjoyed
- Negative or continuous thoughts that something bad is going to happen

What Can Families Do?

Here are some tips that you can use to help your child get through these challenges, by intervening as quickly as possible, and return to school:

- Do not punish your child for refusing to go to school as this can worsen things.
- If possible, avoid letting your child stay home. Though staying home from school may provide short-term relief for your child, continued absence from school will lead to the feeling of being disconnected from classmates and teachers, cause your child to fall behind academically, and will only make it harder to return.
- Speak with your child and try to understand what's bothering them and why they are avoiding school. If you are feeling a similar anxiety, it may help to share this with your child and to explain what you are doing to get through it.
- Make it clear that you are there to help your child and that you believe they can face their fears and get through this problem.



Take Advantage of School Resources

Working through your child's anxiety issues can be difficult and scary and you shouldn't have to do it alone. Take advantage of the resources at your child's school:

- Talk with the school nurse, counselor, social worker and/or psychologist to discuss the student's challenges, identify what can help your child, and develop a return to school plan.
- For some students, this may need to happen gradually (one or two classes initially and eventually a full day).
- In certain situations, a 504 plan or Individualized Education Program (IEP) may be needed to ensure your child receives appropriate support and resources.

If symptoms persist or are very severe, your child's anxiety may be due to an underlying behavioral health disorder (i.e., anxiety disorder, panic disorder, etc.), an undiagnosed learning disability, or the result of a physical or chronic health condition and should be evaluated by your child's medical provider.

Finally, remember to take care of your own physical and emotional well-being!

Resources where you can find additional information anxiety and school avoidance

[Separation Anxiety in Babies, Toddlers, and School-Aged Children: Causes, Signs, and What to Do](#)
[Anxiety and Depression CDC](#)
[Understanding Anxiety in Children](#)

[School Avoidance Alliance: School Avoidance 101](#)
[School Refusal: When a Child Won't Go to School](#)
[Parent Anxiety Handout - EPIC](#)
[The Ultimate Guide to Working with Your School](#)