



## EVERY DAY COUNTS

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### HOW CAN I GET MY CHILD/TEEN TO SCHOOL

No matter how hard parents try, some students may be reluctant to go to school.

Here are some ideas which may assist you to support a child or teen who is reluctant to go to school and may even be school refusing.

Addressing attendance issues promptly and setting up good attendance patterns can lead to future success and can help students feel more engaged and connected at school.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Patterns of late arrival at school or missing classes are early warning signs of disengagement from school
- Missing one day of school each week adds up to 2 months missed over a year
- Each day of absence has an impact on skill development and social connections
- Poor attendance may be associated with future unemployment, criminal activity, substance abuse, and poorer health and life expectancy.

### SOME CAUSES OF SCHOOL PROBLEMS

Some of the more common causes of school problems are underlying learning difficulties or learning disabilities or behavioural or emotional issues.

But there are many other reasons why a child or teen might not be engaging fully in their education.

#### School factors might include:

- bullying or cyberbullying
- feeling isolated at school
- disliking, or not feeling connected to, the school culture or environment
- falling behind on school work or feeling overwhelmed about keeping up
- disliking school subjects, not liking the choice of subjects, or not feeling challenged by the work
- poor school or academic support, especially in relation to heavy workloads
- not getting along with teachers or other students at school
- competing demands on time, such as extracurricular activities
- not feeling understood and fully accepted by peers or teachers
- cultural acknowledgement and understanding

#### Personal factors might include:

- chronic illness
- intellectual or cognitive disability
- behavioural or developmental difficulties or disorders
- mental health issues such as depression or anxiety
- history of abuse and neglect



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- poor self-concept or self-esteem
- poor communication skills
- poor social skills
- poor sleep habits
- difficulty with listening, concentrating or sitting still
- generational trauma

### **Family factors might include:**

- parents who aren't involved in their child's education
- a home environment that doesn't or can't adequately support a young person's learning
- family problems such as relationship breakdowns
- competing family or social responsibilities, such as caring for family members, or working outside school hours
- cultural differences with the school culture and environment

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

### **Generally:**

- Act early if you are concerned
- Talk about the importance of showing up to school every day, make that the expectation.
- Regular attendance at school sets up good behaviours for regular attendance at future workplaces and other life commitments
- Don't let your child stay home unless genuinely sick. Complaints of headaches or stomach aches may be signs of anxiety
- Reward appropriate behaviour and don't unintentionally reward unwanted behaviour by letting children who stay home have access to their devices and the internet
- Be sure to set a good example – how you meet your commitments impacts on how they will meet theirs

### **Daily Routines & sleep**

- Help your child maintain daily routines such as finishing homework and getting a good night's sleep.
- Primary school aged children need about 10 to 11 hours sleep. Teenagers need an average of 8-9 hours of sleep to be healthy and alert.
- You may also need to monitor your child's use of the Internet, mobile phone and TV at night to ensure they are not staying up too late or being disturbed while sleeping
- Consider how your child is sleeping – is their room cool and dark and have all devices, including TVs and mobile phones, been removed?

### **Talk about school**

- Talk to your child. What are their feelings about school? What interests them at school? Are there any difficult situations?
- For teens, it helps if you open these discussions in a relaxed way so that your teenager knows you are demonstrating concern, not authority. It's often a good idea to have these



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conversations while doing something else together such as driving, preparing dinner or going for a walk. If your teen doesn't want to talk right then, let them know you're ready to listen whenever they're ready to talk

- For younger children, talking about the school day shows your interest. Ask simple, positive and specific questions about parts of the day e.g. *What was fun? Who did you play with today? Did you help anyone today?*

### **Extracurricular activities, social connections & part-time work**

- Encourage meaningful extracurricular activities that your child enjoys, such as sports and clubs, to develop positive relationships and experience success outside of a classroom setting. These activities can help your child feel part of the group, important to the school, and more motivated
- For teens, try to be aware of your child's social contacts. Peer influence can lead to skipping school, while students without many friends can feel isolated
- Set clear parameters around part-time work. Make sure that the hours your teenager is working do not impact on their ability to go to school the next day, or interfere with school assessment expectations or exam preparation. Most schools recommend no more than 10 hours per week.

### **Family holidays & appointments**

- Try not to schedule hair, dental or medical appointments during school hours. Arrange family holidays during scheduled school holidays so that students don't miss out on classes and feel left behind.
- If it is necessary to be absent from school for an extended period, arrange with your school for a Student Absence Learning Plan.

### **School policies & monitoring attendance**

- Familiarise yourself with the school's attendance policy. This can help when trying to reason with a child or teenager who is resisting going to school
- Monitor your child's attendance and school performance. Periodically check with their teachers to find out how things are going. If you find it difficult to contact several different teachers by phone, try email. Alternatively, the year level coordinator may be a helpful point of contact in relation to specific issues.

### **Homework & assignments**

- If your child wants to stay home to finish an assignment, rather than letting them stay home, expect them to go to school – make attendance the number one priority. Later, you can discuss with them how they can improve their study habits or adjust their schedule
- If your school has an assessment calendar on its website, use this to help your child plan their study so that they avoid working late the night before an assignment is due



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### SCHOOL REFUSAL

School refusing children experience significant emotional distress not only when going to school but also at the thought of going to school; they may be absent from school for weeks or even months at a time. School refusal differs from truancy as children generally stay home with the knowledge of the parents and despite their best efforts to encourage their child to go to school.

School refusal can be very distressing for parents who can find it very difficult to manage and address; it can cause conflict in the home and disrupt routines.

Identifying the cause of school refusal can be difficult; there may be a number of complex causes. Early intervention is essential as prolonged absences from school can greatly affect a child's social and emotional development, academic achievement and vocational opportunities.

### FURTHER ASSISTANCE

Sometimes you may need assistance from professionals who can help anxious children. Discuss your concerns with relevant teachers or wellbeing staff at your child's school. They can help address any school-based issues, refer your child to school counselling services and make recommendations about professional support.

Alternatively, you could seek support from your GP who can assist with a referral to mental health professional such as a psychologist, psychiatrist or therapist. They can help your child overcome their anxiety using mindfulness, improving self-confidence and self-esteem and helping children change the way they think about difficult situations.

### REMEMBER

You can talk with school staff (such as a teacher, year level coordinator, wellbeing staff, careers staff, assistant principal or principal) to find out what support they can provide to keep your child/teen attending and engaged.

### TOP ATTENDANCE TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Schools want to work in partnership with parents – act early if you have any concerns by contacting your child's school and asking for advice and support
- Remember that every day counts
- There is no safe number of days for missing school – each day a student misses puts them behind, and can affect their educational outcomes and their social connectedness
- Talk positively about school and the importance of attending every day
- Open and prompt communication with your child's school about all absences is a good idea
- Avoid making routine medical and dental appointments during the school day or planning family holidays during the term
- Seek help from your school if you are concerned about your child's attendance and wellbeing. Schools want to work in partnership with parents to support student attendance and wellbeing



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### USEFUL WEBSITES/CONTACTS

**Department of Education and Training -**

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/studentmanagement/attendance/Pages/default.aspx>

**Kids Matter -** [www.kidsmatter.edu.au](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au)

**Youth Beyond Blue -** [www.youthbeyondblue.com.au](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com.au)

**Headspace -** [www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)

**Reach Out –** [www.reachout.com](http://www.reachout.com)

**Raising Children Network -** [www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

**Kids helpline -** 1800 55 1800 24 hours a day, 7 days a week or [web counselling](#)

**Parentline –** 1300 30 1300 (8am to 10pm seven days a week) & [web counselling](#) Tuesdays and Thursdays between 11am and 2pm