



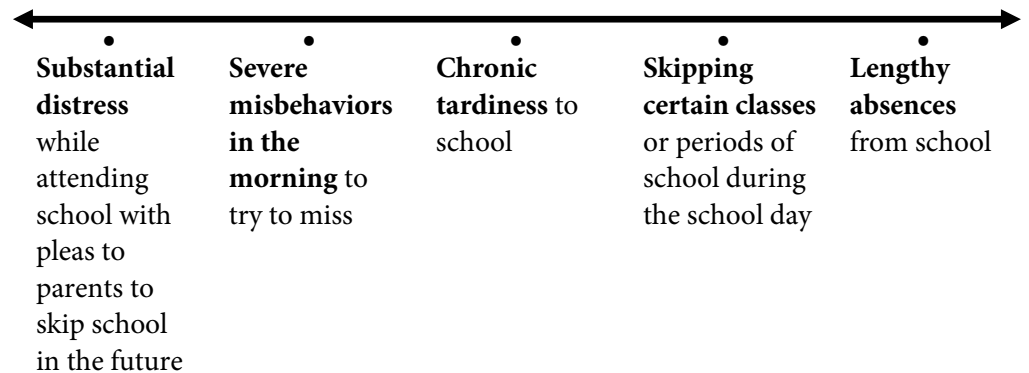
School Avoidance

Help! I can't get my child to go to school!

There is a wide range of school avoidance behaviors. It is best to address these behaviors early on. This flyer describes strategies for treating school avoidance behaviors.

What are school avoidance behaviors?

Below is a scale showing school avoidance behaviors:



Behavior that falls at the far right end of the scale is severe enough for healthcare providers to call it “school avoidance.” It is best to address school avoidance behaviors before they reach the far end of the scale.

Are school avoidance behaviors common?

This is not an unusual problem. About 1 out of every 20 students avoids school or avoids staying in class an entire day. Studies show that some form of ongoing absence from school affects many children each year.

What are the symptoms of school avoidance behavior?

Symptoms of school avoidance behavior include:

- Anxiety
- Depression and withdrawal
- Fatigue
- Crying and/or tantrums
- Arguing
- Aggression
- Physical complaints such as stomachaches and headaches
- Dawdling
- Refusing to obey and/or to move
- Running away from school or home

What can happen if school avoidance is not treated?

There are a number of problems caused by school avoidance if it is not treated, including:

- Academic problems and school dropout
- Loss of social interaction
- Family conflict and stress

- Breaking the law
- Problems with jobs and relationships in adulthood

Why does school avoidance happen?

Your child may avoid school for one or more of these reasons:

- To **avoid** school-related situations, such as bullying or a stressful situation, that cause them to be very upset.
- To **escape** painful social or school-related situations such as performances, social situations, or difficult academic work due to an undiagnosed learning disorder.
- To gain **attention** from parents and others.
- To get **tangible rewards** outside of school such as getting to sleep late, watching TV or playing video games.

What should I do if my child has symptoms?

The first step is to take your child to their doctor. If your child is showing significant symptoms of school avoidance, the next step is to connect with a mental health provider (e.g., psychologist, psychiatrist, counselor, etc) to develop a treatment plan. It is also recommended that you connect with your child's school team to develop a plan to reintegrate or stay in school.

There is a group at Seattle Children's for parents and caregivers to learn behavioral strategies to increase their child's attendance. Read more in our handout "School Avoidance Group for Parents and Caregivers" www.seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE2763.pdf.

What can be done to treat school avoidance behaviors?

A plan can be created that includes all or some of the strategies below:

- Develop a plan with your child, their mental health provider and their school to reintegrate them into school, increase time at school, or keep them in school throughout the day.
- Use a system of consequences to positively reinforce your child's efforts to meet school attendance goals (e.g., access to phone, preferred activities after school, and reduce any incentives around staying home (e.g., remove access to phone, TV, videogames).
- Set a regular morning and evening routine.
- Set firm rules about when it is OK to miss school such as for vomiting or fever.
- Take your child to school.

School Avoidance: Help! I can't get my child to go to school!

To Learn More

- Adolescent Medicine
206-987-2028
- Psychiatry and
Behavioral Medicine
School Avoidance
Group 206-987-2164
- Ask your child's
healthcare provider
- www.seattlechildrens.org

Your child's plan may also include:

- A therapy called cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT teaches your child how to identify and change problematic behaviors (avoidance) and thoughts in order to work toward changing how they feel.
- Medicines to help them manage psychological distress (per consultation with a healthcare provider who can prescribe medicine).
- A social worker to work with you and the school

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

Reference: Kearney, C.A. (2006). Dealing with School Refusal Behavior: A primer for family physicians. *The Journal of Family Practice*, 55 (8), 685-692.

Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

© 2018 Seattle Children's, Seattle, Washington. All rights reserved.
