

When Kids Refuse to Go to School

By

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1. Children and adolescents have access to too many enjoyable activities when they stay home.

When I was a child, if I were to stay home from school, I would be bored out of my mind. Unless I could have quickly caught up with the story line of "General Hospital," there would be nothing to distract me from the long, drawn-out day, where I was lacking in social interactions. Today, the average home has TVs hooked up to cable, computers, iPads and smartphones galore and gaming systems, etc. Who would not want to stay home and "play" with their gadgets, in contrast to engaging in the challenging curriculum and unchartered social relations of an average day at school?

I am always shocked when I hear how the children and adolescents who are too "emotionally ill" to go to school are allowed to be home, having access to technology. IF you are too sick to go to school, then you need to be engaging in a behavior that as closely as possible approximates the behaviors one would engage in at school. As long as your kid does not go to a school for programmers and gamers, chances are their school day does not entail being locked into technology. So they should not be allowed to do that if they are engaging in school refusal behaviors.

2. Parents fail to see the dangerous waters their child is entering when they engage in school refusal behaviors.

When your child is little and screaming about not wanting to go to the doctor, what do you do? Do you negotiate? Do you wait until they are ready to obtain their annual checkup? Going to school is as mission-critical to survival as obtaining appropriate medical care. I always tell parents who meet with me that we need to treat school refusal as a psychiatric emergency. Children not showing up for school is equivalent to adults not showing up for work and not caring for their families' needs.

3. It is unclear why the child is refusing to attend school.

In treating school refusal, it is critical to first conduct a functional analysis to determine why a child is refusing to go to school. School refusal is not a diagnosis; it is a symptom of a disorder. Is a child refusing to go to school because he is being bullied? Is she refusing to go to school because she is having panic attacks in the cafeteria? Is he refusing to go to school because he fears he will not make straight A's and his rigid, perfectionistic thinking is getting in his way? It is critical to figure out why a child is having a difficult time going to school in order to develop an effective treatment plan, to assist your child in reintegrating back into school.

It is also critical to have the support and the assistance of your child's school. It can assist you in creating an appropriate action plan to get your child back to school. That plan may entail a school staff member temporarily coming over to escort your child to school in the mornings (nothing quite as effective at getting a kid up and out as a school security guard entering the home). The plan may also entail accommodations such as your child being able to take a break from class if he or she feels a panic attack coming on. There are many creative strategies to assist a child in more effectively managing distress and obtaining the tools and skills necessary to handle life's challenging moments.

What is most important is for children to learn that quitting, avoiding, or running away from problems is not a viable long-term solution. As we adults have all learned the hard way, it just leads to digging ourselves deeper into the pain and suffering.

Source: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/when-kids-refuse-to-go-to-school_b_4483268



SCHOOL REFUSAL



School refusal describes the disorder of a child who refuses to go to school on a regular basis or has problems staying in school.

*"The most important thing a parent can do is obtain a comprehensive evaluation from a mental health professional." **

This evaluation will reveal the reasons behind the school refusal and can help determine what kind of treatment will be best. Your child's pediatrician should be able to recommend a mental health professional in your area who works with children.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO:

Expose children to school in small degrees, increasing exposure slowly over time. Eventually this will help them realize there is nothing to fear and that nothing bad will happen.



Try self-help methods with your child. In addition to a therapist's recommendations, a good self-help book will provide relaxation techniques. Be open to new ideas so that your child is, too.



Talk with your child about feelings and fears, which helps reduce them.

Meet with the school counselor for extra support and direction.



Arrange an informal meeting with your child's teacher away from the classroom.

Encourage hobbies and interests. Fun is relaxation, and hobbies are good distractions that help build self-confidence.



Emphasize the positive aspects of going to school: being with friends, learning a favorite subject, and playing at recess.

Help your child establish a support system. A variety of people should be in your child's life—other children as well as family members or teachers who are willing to talk with your child should the occasion arise.



ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

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