

# Top Tips for School Refusal

## Put the School Refusal in Context

If your child doesn't want to talk about why they don't want to go to school, think about what was happening in their life when the school refusal started. Speak to your child's teachers; they may be able to give you more insight into factors contributing to your child's school refusal. Common causes include: peer problems, social anxiety, depression, stress, academic difficulties.

## Address Academic Problems

If your child's school refusal is caused by academic difficulties, speak with your child's school about what support they can offer and what advice they have for how you can support your child at home.

## Help Your Child Solve Social Problems

Encourage your child to speak about their problems. Give your undivided attention and listen carefully. Remember, while your child's problems might seem trivial to you, they're distressing enough to keep them from school. Once your child has opened up, ask them if they'd like help coming up with solutions. If your child says no, see if there's anyone else they'd rather talk to. If your child feels uncomfortable returning to school after time away from friends, offer to help organise time with friends on a weekend.

## Help Your Child Face their Anxiety

Set school goals that will gradually increase your child's attendance at school. If your child is an adolescent offer a choice, for example the time of day they will start, the classes they would like to attend in their first week. Choices will help your adolescent to cope with the fact that school attendance is non-negotiable.

Facing anxiety can be challenging and rewards can help to increase motivation. If your child's school refusal is longstanding you may also need to introduce consequences. Remember that to be effective rewards and consequences have to be meaningful.

## Manage Behaviour

If your child's school refusal is related to oppositional behaviour set clear, *realistic* expectations regarding school attendance. For example, if your child hasn't been at school for months a realistic first goal would be for them to attend 2 half days of school. If goals are unrealistic your child won't experience success.

Establish *meaningful* rewards and consequences. To help with this involve your child and ask them to identify possible rewards and consequences for school attendance goals.

# think TOP TIPS

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## SCHOOL REFUSAL

**School refusal is a term used to describe a child or teens lack of desire or actual refusal to go to school.**

**Kids and teens might refuse school for a number of reasons, but most commonly do so because of:**

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Feeling stressed and overwhelmed by school demands
- Peer problems
- Academic difficulties
- Oppositional Behaviour

**School refusal can start suddenly but generally develops over time. Early reluctance might be expressed:**

- Verbally
- Physically – headaches or stomachaches
- Behaviourally – staying in bed

**This tips sheet covers basic strategies for coping with school refusal.**

**If your child's school refusal continues, speak to your GP about a referral to a child and adolescent clinical psychologist.**

**A clinical psychologist can provide you with practical strategies for managing school refusal and help to address any underlying causes.**