

Children and Adolescents with School Anxiety and Avoidance Behavior

Strategies for Parents

Possible Symptoms of School Anxiety/Avoidance Behaviors

- Upset about school more often than other children their age
- Child's feelings/attitudes towards school have negatively changed
- Child avoids certain aspects of school, (i.e. gym class, certain teachers)
- Certain behavior patterns only occur on school days
- Child exhibits stomach aches, headaches, throwing up, etc. especially on school days
- Child struggles with social skills and peer relations
- Child struggles completing academic tasks and becomes easily overwhelmed with home and school assignments

Strategies and Interventions

1. Make school attendance mandatory unless your child has a fever or contagious illness. Avoid calling your child out of school unless absolutely necessary. Children cannot deal with their school issues unless they are present at school. A child's anxiety will increase the more school is avoided.
2. If child refuses to attend school, contact school personnel and report child's refusal to attend school, even if it results in an unexcused absence. Allow the child to have consequence from school for unexpected absence.
3. Establish and maintain open communication with school personnel regarding your child's feelings about school, difficulties with school, etc.
4. Create an environment at home that fosters structure and consistency. Expectations should include rules, chores, privileges and limits. This will allow children to learn to structure themselves, as well as understand rewards and consequences. Likewise, expectations should be clear regarding school attendance and homework, as well as privileges and consequences given for not meeting expectations. Based on research, structure, routine and consistency work to alleviate anxiety in children.
5. Routine is essential for children with school anxiety/avoidance issues. A daily schedule that is followed consistently through the eyes both when the child is in school, as well as, out of school is beneficial.
6. Encourage children to enroll in school extracurricular activities to feel more connected to school. Have child choose at least one activity per school term.
7. Provide positive feedback for successes made at school.

8. Seek support from school and/or external resources when your child first starts displaying symptoms of school anxiety /avoidance.
9. If patterns of academic failure are present, psychological and/or neuro-cognitive assessment and/or intervention may be needed due to possible learning disabilities or neuro-cognitive deficit issues that may be present.
10. Negative peer relations may result in school avoidance/anxiety issues. Contact the school social worker if your child is struggling with peer relations, i.e. bullying, difficulty getting along with peers, etc. Therapeutic intervention on the school level may be needed.

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References

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- **Parenting with Positive Behavior Support: A Practical Guide to Resolving Your Child's Difficult Behavior.** (2006). Author: Meme Hieneman, Karen Childs, and Jane Sergay. Publisher: Brookes Publishing Co. Baltimore, MD
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- **When Children Refuse School, A Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy Approach.** Authors: Christopher A. Kearny and Anne Marie Albano. Publisher: Oxford University Press. New York, NY
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Illinois School Code – Compulsory Attendance (105 ILCS 5/2601)

Sec. 26-1. Compulsory school age-exemptions. Whoever has custody or control of any child between the ages of 7 and 16 years shall cause such child to attend some public school in the district wherein the child resides the entire time it is in session during regular school term.