

Mental Fitness News and Tips

School Avoidance

Most students experience some days when they just do not want to go to school. Usually parents manage these episodes and the student goes to school. However, for some students the problem is more challenging and worsens into a complex pattern called School Avoidance.

School Avoidance refers to a pattern in which difficulty attending school is associated with emotional and physical distress. Children with school avoidance often have unexpressed anxiety about leaving their parents, worry about peer relationships, and are anxious about their performance at school. These unexpressed and unaddressed feelings become the driving force behind School Avoidance.



If the student is allowed to stay home, they may report feeling



better during the school day, but these feelings are temporary and only provide relief in the moment. The longer the child stays out of school, the more difficult it becomes for them to return to school. Their emotional distress and number of absences rapidly increase. Parents often worry that pushing their child to go to school when distressed will only make the situation worse. But, students need to be in school every day.

If left untreated, School Avoidance patterns worsen and result in many missed school days that negatively affects learning as well as friendships at school. For School Avoidance to be treated, it takes a joint effort from parents and school staff. In significant cases, medical and/or mental health providers can be asked to join the student's support team.



Written by: Renee Ladwig RN, CNS, LMFT - Jane B. Pettit Pain and Headache Center - Children's Hospital of Wisconsin

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Signs of a possible School Avoidance patterns include:

- Increasing tardiness and absences
- Monday and post-holiday absences
- Vague physical complaints or inability to get out of bed in the morning
- Crying and tantrums when encouraged to attend school in the morning
- Promising to go to school tomorrow if they can only stay home today

The Ways Parents Can Help

- ◊ Set the firm expectation that your child will attend school on time each day.
- ◊ If your child is complaining of physical symptoms that repeatedly makes the child miss school, your child should be evaluated by a medical provider.
- ◊ Recognize when a School Avoidance pattern may be developing.
- ◊ Notify your school. School staff are familiar with School Avoidance patterns and can help.

This newsletter is provided by the School Community Partnership for Mental Health, of which MPS is an integral part.