What Is School Refusal?

School refusal describes significant difficulty attending or remaining at school because of emotional distress. It can include frequent absences, late arrivals, leaving early, or intense distress before school.

School refusal is not a diagnosis by itself. Anxiety, bullying, academic struggles, learning needs, social difficulties, family stress, or other concerns may contribute.

A helpful reminder

Repeated school avoidance should be taken seriously. Responding early can help prevent missed instruction, increased anxiety, and a more difficult return to regular attendance.

Connect With Enspire

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Clinical Inquiries

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Website

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School Refusal

When a Child Struggles to Attend School



Repeated difficulty going to school can be a sign that a child is overwhelmed, anxious, struggling academically, or facing another unmet need.

Learn what school refusal can look like, possible contributing factors, and how families and schools can respond supportively.

EDUCATION • EVALUATION • SUPPORT

What Might It Look Like?

Families may notice patterns such as:

- **Morning distress**
- **Physical complaints**
- **Frequent absences**
- **Late arrivals**
- **Requests to go home**
- **Avoidance on school nights**

Important

Physical symptoms such as headaches or stomachaches can feel very real even when anxiety or stress is contributing. Medical concerns should also be appropriately evaluated.



Possible Contributing Factors

- Anxiety or fear related to school
- Bullying or peer difficulties
- Academic or learning struggles
- Attention or executive-function difficulties
- Changes at home or school
- Difficulty separating from caregivers
- Sensory or social demands
- Depression or other emotional concerns

The most effective plan addresses why the child is struggling—not only the absence itself.

When Should I Seek Support?

Seek support when attendance difficulties are recurring, worsening, causing significant distress, or interfering with the child's education and daily functioning.

An evaluation may include:

- Attendance patterns
- Child & parent concerns
- School observations
- Academic, behavioral & emotional needs

What Can Parents Do?

- Track when attendance difficulties occur.
- Ask the child what feels hardest about school.
- Communicate early with the school team.
- Keep routines calm and predictable.
- Seek professional help when the pattern continues.

How Enspire Can Help

Enspire can help families and schools better understand emotional, behavioral, attention, and learning factors that may be contributing to school attendance difficulties.

Questions? Call (215) 948-3171