

WHEN YOUR CHILD DOESN'T WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP
JANUARY 2020 RESOURCE SHARING

There are lots of reasons children ask to stay home from school, including just needing a day off to recharge. Sometimes a break, such as the recent one for the holidays, can make returning to the school routine difficult.

The chart below can give you a different perspective on why your child may be avoiding school. It also provides some responses that can help open up a conversation with your child.

Your child says...	You may think...	What might be going on	What you can say
"I don't feel like going."	Your child doesn't take school seriously.	Children don't usually act out for no reason. It's possible your child is having a hard time at school. It could be something very recent or something that's been building for a long time.	"I wonder if you want to stay home because things aren't going well at school. When you get home, let's talk about what's most difficult and figure out what we can do to make it better."
"I'm too tired to go."	Your child gets plenty of sleep, so that's just an excuse.	School can be exhausting. That's especially true if children are struggling in some way. It takes a lot of energy to try to keep up or hide difficulties.	"It surprises me you're tired. I thought you were sleeping well. Is there something you've been working extra hard at or that's using up a lot of your energy? Sometimes, just worrying can be tiring."
"I hate school."	Your child's being over-dramatic.	Sometimes a specific bad experience or trouble with one aspect of school translates to general feelings of negativity.	"I know there's a lot that you like at school. Is there something in particular that's making you so unhappy that you want to stay home?"
"The kids are mean."	Your child has a few friends, so this must be an overreaction.	It can be tough for some children to size up social situations and fit in. They may even be the targets of bullying.	"I'm sorry kids are being mean. What are they doing? Can you tell me who they are or what grade they're in? Would you like me to talk to your teacher and come up with a plan?"

Your child says...	You may think...	What might be going on	What you can say
"School's too hard."	Your child does OK in school, so this is about not wanting to work hard.	School isn't always easy, even when children seem to be doing OK. Sometimes children can't meet all the expectations. And when that happens, they can feel like failures.	"It sounds like things aren't going as well as you'd like at school. What's the most challenging thing about school right now?"
"I forgot to do my homework again."	Your child's irresponsible.	For some children, keeping track of assignments and managing time is really tough, no matter how hard they try. And if it happens a lot, they might feel embarrassed about it.	"You seem to be having trouble staying on top of your work. Do you feel like that's a challenge for you? We can try different ways to help you stay organized."

What if you've tried having the above conversations with your child, and they still don't want to go to school? Normal avoidance can turn into school refusal, which is an extreme pattern of school avoidance that can include frequent tardiness, leaving school early, spending a lot of time visiting the nurse or texting you throughout the day. So what can you do?

1. If your child says they have physical symptoms, get them checked out by their doctor to ensure there isn't a medical problem.
2. If the refusal is linked to something like returning to school after an extended illness or vacation, the key is to get your child back into school as soon as possible. Do not prolong it.
3. If school refusal goes on for a longer period of time, reach out for help. Talk to their doctor to determine if something like separation anxiety or social anxiety could be behind the refusal. Their doctor can help you determine next steps and connect you with a therapist if appropriate.
4. Unfortunately the longer a child misses school, the harder it is to get back in the routine. It's important for parents to know that the sooner their child gets back to school the better, and reaching out for help is an important first step.

Excerpted from: <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/understanding-childrens-challenges/talking-with-your-child/what-to-say-when-kids-with-learning-and-thinking-differences-dont-want-to-go-to-school>

https://childmind.org/article/when-kids-refuse-to-go-to-school/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=READ%20MORE&utm_campaign=Weekly-01-07-20