

Parent Talk

AUGUST 2026

Learning About School Refusal

As summer quickly ends and back-to-school season begins, caregivers may feel fear and anxiety creeping in. Many parents may have struggled with getting their kids into the mindset of returning to school in the past and can be unsure how to handle it. Some kids may outright refuse to go to school altogether. While this may seem typical, it can be an indicator of a larger mental health challenge.

How To Tell When It's Serious

Many kids may refuse to go to school early in the year, and that's not necessarily cause for concern. What should raise red flags is if your child repeatedly displays severe anxiety and fear over going to school that lasts beyond just the first few weeks. This can take the form of kids asking to leave school early, spending time in the nurse's office, or experiencing physical symptoms like stomachaches. Serious school refusal typically is not caused by a general disinterest in school, but by real fear and anxiety. Try asking your child exactly why they don't want to go to school, and you'll likely get a specific answer about what's causing them anxiety.

What Causes School Refusal?

School refusal is usually deeply rooted in anxiety. The cause of this anxiety can be many different things, but it's typically triggered by situations that arise in a school environment. This can be something like feeling the weight to perform well in classes, social anxiety with classmates, bullying, and more. It's important to address the source of the anxiety early on to prevent your child from falling behind in class or missing out on social development time with their peers.

Tips For Overcoming School Refusal

School refusal can be treated using many of the same standard treatments for tackling anxiety in kids. Exposure therapy under the guidance of a professional can be a great way to target the source of your child's school refusal and slowly work on changing their reaction to the things that cause them anxiety. Exposure therapy involves identifying the specific causes of anxiety and then slowly and intentionally exposing someone to those causes until they're able to control their reaction to them and not feel as much anxiety. A successful treatment plan may also involve support from teachers and other school personnel.

How You Can Help

In addition to pursuing treatment, caregivers can help their children with school refusal by trying hard to not always accommodate their desire to stay home from school. It can be incredibly difficult to do that, but the more often kids are allowed to stay home, the more comfortable they will be there. If you do let your child stay home, try not to make the experience a fun one. Don't allow access to screens and try to simulate a real school day. The next day, frame going to school as a positive thing and try to highlight aspects of school they may like such as a favorite teacher, friend, or class.

Need more help?

Resources at The Baker Center are just a click away

Therapy & Treatment Services

CENTER FOR EFFECTIVE THERAPY →

Special Education

MANVILLE SCHOOL →

Therapeutic Summer Camp

CAMP BAKER →

College Preparation

NEXT STEP →

Featured Resources

Back to School Challenges: Learning About School Refusal

In this seminar, we explore how we can support children as they transition back to school and provide information on how to detect school refusal, how to address it, and what treatments have been proven to work in managing this tricky problem area.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Treating School Refusal

Addressing school refusal as early as possible is important for providing your child with the greatest opportunity for success in school. Here are some steps you can take at home, and with professionals, to provide your child with support.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Understanding School Refusal

The transition back to school after a long summer can be challenging, both for kids and for caregivers. Sometimes, kids and teens can experience so much emotional distress when returning to school, that they can repeatedly attempt to avoid going to or staying in school.

[LEARN MORE](#)

School Refusal: Reasons & Red Flags Every Parent Should Know

As a parent or caregiver, you have likely heard of a child who comes down with the "24-hour bug" the day of a big test. You may have experienced it for yourself, as statistics indicate that as many as 25% of school-aged children will engage in some degree of refusing to go to school before they reach 18.

[LEARN MORE](#)