

School Refusal

When a child refuses to attend school there is significant stress for the child, family and school community involved. Chronic school refusal can have significant impacts, both short and long term, on a child's social, emotional and academic development. There are many complex factors which may impact a child's willingness to attend school and successfully addressing school refusal requires a collaborative problem solving approach between the family and school community.

If you are having problems with your child or adolescent's school attendance it may be helpful to:

- Be mindful of the fact that school refusal is usually a sign that a child is experiencing some kind of difficulty or stress, either at school or at home. It is likely that the child currently does not have the skills or courage to be regularly attending school. As such, school refusal needs to be approached with empathy and understanding in addition to firmness and discipline.
- Talk with your child about any worries they may have regarding home life. Allow your child time to talk and take suitable action to address their concerns.
- Talk with your child about how they are feeling about school. Try to get a sense of any difficulties they may be facing in social or academic areas. You might ask them about their friendships, whether there is any bullying behaviour occurring or whether they are experiencing any difficulties with learning. If you are able to get a sense of your child's worries take them seriously and make a plan to address these worries with the teacher, school counsellor or principal.
- Talk with your child's school regarding the staff's observations of your child at school. If they have noticed any difficulties ensure that these are addressed in a way which is reassuring to your child.
- If your child is complaining about feeling sick, check this out with your family doctor. If your child does have an underlying health problem this can result in difficulty attending school. Children may also experience stress as feeling sick in the stomach or having a tight chest. If there is no apparent medical explanation for symptoms consider the physical symptoms as a possible sign of serious stress.

- Ensure that your child feels that their worries regarding school have been adequately addressed and that your child knows who they can talk to if they have any further worries or problems.
- Make a plan for increasing school attendance. While it is your aim to have your child at school full time you may need to start with some achievable goals. As long as attendance is increasing you are on the right track. Set clear expectations for school attendance and provide rewards for that attendance.
- Develop a plan with the school to enable your child to catch up on missed school work. Ensure that this plan is manageable and does not overwhelm your child. You may decide to give your child time to increase attendance before you address the issue of missed school work.
- Ensure that the option of staying at home is an undesirable option for your child. This may involve banning television, computer games, internet and outings during school time. If you are not able to get your child to school in the morning attempt to get the child to school later in the day.

Please feel free to contact Life Supports on 1300 735 030 if you would like to discuss your situation with a professional counsellor. You can find more information about Life Supports services by visiting www.lifesupports.com.au.