

Working with
children

who school refuse (revised)



Supporting teachers, leadership teams and professionals in primary and junior secondary schools

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Children who school refuse

It is not unusual for children to be reluctant to go to school from time to time. However, the effects of poor school attendance are cumulative and can impact engagement and lead to a decline in achievement. More serious than separation anxiety or being late to school on occasion, school refusal is often associated with a range of complex personal, family and school factors. It is accompanied by emotional distress such as anxiety and/or depression, physical symptoms and social isolation with the child usually remaining at home. School refusal generally requires support and intervention by a psychologist and others. Without appropriate support some chronic school refusers believe they just cannot go to school. This can be distressing for the child and family.¹

Characteristics of school refusal

As many as 5 per cent of school-age children experience school refusal² with higher levels evident in anxious and depressed students. It tends to peak in the first year of school, at the end of primary school and again in junior secondary school—that is, around transition times. Significant or adverse events, or special occasions can also contribute to school refusal. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has interrupted school attendance in some Australian states and territories and created transition difficulties for some children as they switch between school and remote learning. Extended periods of learning from home decreased social connection to friends and teachers, and extra curricula activities such as dance, swimming lessons and organised sport. This has contributed to increased feelings of uncertainty, stress and anxiety in children. One Melbourne-based school refusal clinic director has predicted a rise of up to 15 per cent of children not attending once school returns.³

Typically, the school refuser is more likely to be a younger member of the family⁴ although there may be siblings who have also experienced school refusal. It is equally common among males and females, and it affects children from all socioeconomic groups. School refusers are typically of average academic ability or higher, although the longer they miss school, the greater the chance that gaps in learning will develop. When at school, these children are generally compliant in the classroom and well behaved.

Why do children refuse to go to school?

The reasons children refuse to attend school are often complex and usually due to a combination

¹ School Phobia/School Refusal Australia. When it's not OK not to be OK; Victoria's invisible mental health and education crisis. http://rcvmhs.archive.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/School_Refusal_Australia.pdf

² The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation, Re-engaging School Refusers. <https://www.rchfoundation.org.au/2018/02/reengaging-school-refusers/>

³ Chellew, J., quoted in the article, Alarm raised on children's mental health, The Age, September 15, 2021, page 9

⁴ Ian McCormack, Getting the buggers to turn up, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005



of factors, rather than one single issue. These factors may include:

- Academic and personal problems
- Relationship issues with teacher/s, peers and friends
- Issues at home including family illness, separation, grief, dysfunction
- Difficulty coping with diagnosed or undiagnosed conditions
- Major transitions such as moving school, returning to school during or after a serious illness of self or a family member, or a life-threatening event such as pandemic, fire or flood
- Starting primary school or early or middle secondary school, changing teachers or year levels.

While school refusal is not usually related to bullying, it is evident in a small number of school refusal cases, so it is important to ensure this is not a contributing factor.

School refusal is typically linked to anxiety in the child and is often associated with early separation anxiety, social anxiety and/or generalised anxiety disorder (persistent worrying across a range of issues). School refusal can become an entrenched issue. It can become more difficult to address in the later years of schooling because the anxiety may be based on a distant anxious memory and staying at home may have become a comfortable habit, or the child may develop psycho-social and/or wellbeing issues that become barriers to returning to school.

Managing school refusal will be complicated by the student experiencing gaps in learning, parents having mental health problems and/or not communicating regularly with the school and the incidence of family dysfunction.

Other types of poor school attendance

School refusal is different from a range of other attendance problems. For example,

Truancy

Parents of the school refuser generally know their child is not at school, while those of a child who truants may not. The child who truants avoids school because they want to engage in activities, often antisocial in nature, that are typically outside both school and home. The school refuser often wants to be at school but cannot summon the courage to go, often due to feelings of dread.

School withdrawal

School refusal is also different from school withdrawal, where a parent or parents either condone or collude with the child to stay home. For example, to keep a parent company, for extended family holidays, for caregiving duties, interpreting, or visiting friends and relatives. Parents who either allow or encourage their child or children to be at home may be experiencing loneliness, parenting difficulties, mental health conditions and/or poor attitudes to education.

School non-attendance

School non-attendance is when a student simply stays at home instead of going to school. This may be because parents don't reinforce the need to be at school or the student finds home more comfortable than school because they are involved in recreational activities such as watching television, playing videogames, riding bikes, or playing. Non-attendance may occur with or without



parent knowledge and it tends to be irregular or spasmodic.

Students who are disconnected and not enrolled

This group of children are detached from schooling and unaccounted for within education enrolment systems. They are not considered to be school refusers. Estimates indicate that conservatively 50,000 school-aged Australian children are not just absent from school but are educationally disconnected and not enrolled in a school.⁵ A range of personal circumstances and school factors can contribute to this disengagement, such as homelessness, poor mental health, family dysfunction, bullying, disability and discrimination, or school exclusion due to misbehaviour or poor academic achievement.⁶

School exclusion

Anecdotal evidence suggests exclusionary practices are used in some schools to deal with problem behaviour. At present, little is known about such practices at a national level. An audit of policies and practices of suspensions and expulsions across Australian schools in 2019 found a disproportionate number of vulnerable children; indigenous, male and students with disabilities were excluded.⁷ School exclusion is currently being further investigated by the University of South Australia to help schools better understand and manage challenging behaviours.⁸

Often attendance related issues overlap, so it is important to identify school refusal as early as possible.

Typical school refusal behaviours

Children who school refuse may exhibit the following signs:

- 50 per cent or less school attendance during the past month, despite follow up from school
- Crying, being withdrawn or distressed at drop-off
- Increase in stomach-aches, dizziness, headaches, and/or other physical complaints
- Lack of friends, social isolation or withdrawal from peer activities
- Decreased participation in class activities
- Nervousness
- Difficulty concentrating or remaining on task.

Early warning signs

Warning signs of school refusal may appear very gradually. At home, the symptoms can escalate at night but diminish once the child is sure they don't have to go to school the next day. These

⁵ Watterston, J., and O'Connell, M (2019) Those who disappear: The Australian education problem nobody wants to talk about' https://education.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/3234214/15493-UoM-MGSE-Deans-Paper_Web_FA-FINAL.pdf Melbourne Graduate School of Education. The University of Melbourne.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ University of South Australia. (2020) Schools unfairly targeting vulnerable children with exclusion policies. <https://www.unisa.edu.au/Media-Centre/Releases/2020/schools-unfairly-targeting-vulnerable-children--with-exclusion-policies2/>

⁸ University of South Australia. (2019) School Exclusions Study: Exclusionary policies and practices in Australian schools and the impact they have on vulnerable children. A research project of the University of South Australia. <https://www.schoolexclusionsstudy.com.au/>



signs include:

- Regularly late to school
- Pattern of absences on significant days
- Tiredness
- Complaints about students and teachers
- Being disinterested in school life in general
- Loneliness and/or reporting teasing at school
- Having difficulty with schoolwork, giving up, appearing not to care
- Failure to meet school-based deadlines
- Mood swings, anxiety, tearfulness, irritability, loss of energy, becoming withdrawn
- Excessive worry about a parent while at school
- Exhibits strong emotions if forced to go to school
- Over-reacts when asked to explain situations
- Threats of self-harm.

Signs of school refusal at home

If a child refuses to go to school, parents might feel that school nights and mornings are a 'battle of wills.' The child may:

- Have difficulty getting out of bed
- Complain of aches, pains or illness the night before or on a school morning, but recover after a short time, if allowed to stay at home
- Cry, throw tantrums, yell or scream
- Beg or plead not to go to school, refuse to leave the house for school, refuse to leave the car on school arrival
- Hide or lock themselves in their bedroom or another room
- Refuse to leave their bedroom and want to eat all meals in their bedroom
- Stop showering, cleaning teeth and attending to personal hygiene
- Show high levels of anxiety and distress
- Have trouble sleeping
- Threaten to hurt themselves.

Caution

School refusal is most successfully treated if identified and addressed early. The longer the child remains away from school, the greater their anxiety can become and the more difficult it will be for them to return to school. Involvement with one or both parents, a psychologist and often a social



worker, and other school personnel is essential for successful re-engagement.

School refusal can occur in the context of child safety and child protection concerns. If after a carefully planned intervention, a regular attendance pattern has not been achieved after several weeks, and the child's safety or wellbeing is a concern, or is unknown despite attempts to check on the child's wellbeing via parents/carers, then an immediate notification to the government department overseeing child protection should be made. All parties should be consulted, the attendance plan modified or reviewed, and additional external support sought from appropriate agencies and mental health service providers.⁹

The chronic school refuser and many secondary school refusers will have a long history of staying at home and referral to a multidisciplinary mental health program or team may be required. It should be noted that some mental health agencies don't offer an outreach service which can place further strains on engaging and assessing the needs of the school refuser. In a small number of cases extensive one-to-one mental health support may be required.

Without treatment and support, there is increased risk of escalating mental health issues and significant problems with social skills, and the skills required for independence in daily living and occupational difficulties in later adolescence and adulthood.

⁹ NSW Ministry of Health, School Refusal - Every school day counts.

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/kidsfamilies/youth/Documents/forum-speaker-presentations/2017/webster-greenberg-sr-booklet.pdf>



Strategies to support the child who resists school or school refuses

Teachers need to identify warning signs and intervene early to avoid an escalation from attendance issues to school refusal. This may include teachers making simple academic, social and emotional adjustments for the child. On many occasions, school leadership staff, classroom teachers and wellbeing teams can work with the child and family to successfully engage school refusers.

Psycho-social, personal, and family issues can escalate quickly and become serious if the school refuser is not supported. By staying at home, the school refuser can become 'invisible' to and less understood by school staff. Clear processes for monitoring the child must be in place to avoid this situation developing. Parents/carers need to be encouraged to be responsive and to work with the school. Most parents/carers of school refusers want their child to attend but lack the support or knowledge about how to help their child, and how to work effectively with the school. Many parents/carers may also not understand the critical need for early intervention.

Know how to help the child and parents

- **Establish wellbeing teams and pastoral care processes** that enable the constructive support of students who resist school or have poor or no attendance. Families may also need support. Ensure regular contact with the parents/carers. This is often the role of an Assistant or Deputy Principal, Parent Liaison Officer, or a Wellbeing Coordinator who can set up informal morning teas, home visits, outreach programs, specific support groups, social groups, or just initiate friendly chats with parents/carers.
- **Where possible, involve a parent/carer of a school resisting or non-attending student in regular school activities**, for example, listening to children read, canteen duty, library support, special lunch days, year level family events or after-school sports training.
- **Involve parents in school activities.** Most schools use a centralised communication system such as [Compass Education](#). Some teachers also use an app such as [Class Dojo](#) to communicate with parents/carers. This free app allows teachers to message parents/carers via their phone, either as a group or individually.¹⁰ It can be used for class reminders, sharing photos and work, and to generally share what goes on in the classroom.¹¹ It can help to provide a quick and easy link between school and home.
- **A child with a history of extended time away from school who shows signs of distress**, should be referred promptly, with parental consent, to a GP, pediatrician, psychiatrist, or psychologist. Implement recommendations made by these practitioners.
- **For parents/carers who may be struggling emotionally** provide the Psych4Schools ebooket [For parents: Reduce your stress and worry](#) for practical tips and advice.
- **Provide information and handouts to assist parents.** For example, see Appendix 1 'Early intervention strategies for parents/carers of school refusers.'
- **For parents who wish to help their child to deal with stress**, provide the Psych4Schools ebooklet [For parents: Assist your child with stress and worry](#).

¹⁰ Carly, M. A., Investigating Teachers' Insights: The Influences of Perceived Barriers of Parental Involvement on Parent-Teacher Relationships. Minot State University. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2019. 10830689.

¹¹ Op.cit. page 42, 43



Assist in the implementation of an individually tailored program

- **Every school refuser needs an individually tailored program** that involves parents/carers, teachers, and as soon as practical other professional services. The child should not be forced back to school. A gradual reintroduction usually works best. It exposes and supports the child step-by-step to facing up to and coping with anxiety-promoting situations in small doses. The child will also benefit from reassurance and practical support to ensure they feel safe and welcome at school.
- **Provide direct support at points of need.** For example, can the parents/carers or pet dog get the child out of bed and out of the house? Is the child showering daily and clean and tidy enough to present themselves at school? Is the child worried about having fallen behind academically or that their friends will misunderstand their lack of attendance? While parents/carers are legally responsible for their child's school attendance, the school shares responsibility in helping to avoid school refusing becoming entrenched. Success relies on appreciating and understanding the child's situation and any personal barriers to re-entry. Direct discussions with the child and/or the parents/carers will assist.
- **Use a sensitive problem-solving approach to motivate the chronic school refuser** to return to school. Appendix 2 lists 'Teacher strategies to help chronic school refusers cope with common barriers to returning to school', and suggests goals and pathways to work towards, to help the child manage a successful return to a supportive school environment.

If the child is at school

Classroom teachers may need support from senior school staff to implement the following recommendations to support the child at risk of becoming a school refuser.

- **Carefully monitor attendance data**, conduct regular wellbeing checks with the child, and where possible, maintain regular communication with parents/carers.
- **Help the child to feel they belong** by establishing computer clubs, library or games groups, and mentoring roles with peers. Chat with the child regularly to understand their interests, strengths and passions.
- **Help the child to find a sense of hope** that they can achieve successful change in their thinking about school. The language you use is critical. It should always suggest the child is able to learn new skills. Give feedback such as, 'it takes time and practice', 'slip ups happen', 'we'll try again tomorrow'. It should give the child a strong message that you think they can change their negative thoughts and feelings, find solutions to day-to-day problems and that it's a team effort.
- **To assist with anxiety**, the Psych4Schools ebooklet [Working with children who are anxious \(new edition, book 2\)](#) pages 11- 17 highlights seven key strategies to assist. You might choose one or two key areas to focus on, in addition to your existing program.
- **To assist with depression**, the Psych4Schools ebooklet [Working with children who are depressed \(and helping prevent depression\)](#) highlights strategies to help prevent depression and to support the child who is depressed. For example, be sure to include regular physical activity and fun in your class program.



If the child is not at school

- **Follow up all absences.**
- **Respond to successive or prolonged absences immediately.** You or another designated person such as the deputy or assistant principal need to contact the parents/carers to enquire why the child is absent. Research in NSW ¹² suggests that school refusal may be developing if the child has unexplained or questionable patterns of absenteeism indicated by:
 - Absences of two days or more over a 2-week period
 - Partial absences and/or lateness to class which may relate to anxiety-based issues
 - Absent on Mondays, after holidays, after school camps or after sports days.
- **See ‘Script suggestions for speaking with the parents of a child who is school refusing’, Appendix 3.**
- **Continue attempts to have the child return and stay at school.** Engaging some parents by phone or in person can be difficult. Focus on one key strategy with parents. For example:
 - Call the parent and have them ask the child to rate out of 10 how they feel about school. Then ask the child, via the parents, what would it take to feel one point better at school? Listen to their thoughts and brainstorm together to accommodate one realistic change that will help to re-engage the child with school.
 - Suggest parents help to arrange for the child to go to a friend’s house or park for a catch-up or play date. Having the child leave the house to make a social connection is an important confidence-building strategy supporting a return to school.
 - Reinforce the idea that attending school can create greater short-term happiness than they currently enjoy at home. For example, there is a planned incursion that will interest the child, a therapy dog is visiting the classroom, a passion project is about to begin or a buddy is available to assist at school.
- **Meet with parents and/or the child at school.** Consult senior school staff and with parent consent request the expertise of the school counsellor/psychologist and deputy or assistant principal at the meeting. It may be useful to talk to the child without their parents/carers present for part of the meeting to assist the child to open-up and talk more freely.
- **Use the meeting to discuss possible causes of the child’s anxiety.** If the child cannot or does not want to tell you about the reasons for their school refusal, gently list reasons they might not want to come to school and carefully observe their body language. You can ask the child directly about their concerns and worries. Issues can start to be addressed if they are known. Sometimes it can help to use a conversational tone to ask direct questions such as:

¹² NSW Ministry of Health, School refusal, every school day counts.

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/kidsfamilies/youth/Documents/forum-speaker-presentations/2017/webster-greenberg-sr-booklet.pdf>



- I noticed you weren't at school last week. What happened?
- Did something happen to upset you?
- Are you being bullied?
- Do you sometimes feel left out?
- Are you struggling with schoolwork?
- Are you having a problem with a teacher?
- Are you worried about someone close to you?
- Is something else bothering you?

Look for head nodding or active avoidance of your gaze after each suggestion as an indicator of a possible cause. If a reason can be identified, ask the child to suggest a solution to the problem, and ask others at the meeting to help brainstorm solutions. Select one or two practical solutions to action immediately.

- **If the child is unwilling to attend, meet with the parent/carers.** Once concerns are known, identify strategies that are likely to achieve success, which the school and the parents have the capacity to implement. These strategies can form part of an attendance or return-to-school plan.

Help formulate an attendance or return to school plan

Meet with the family to develop and agree upon an Attendance or Return-to-School Plan. Most school systems will have a proforma for a Return-to-School Plan. Headspace has developed a useful template [Return to School Student Support Plan](#).

The most important thing a school can do to help re-engage a school refuser is to implement a thorough, but flexible Return-to-School Plan developed with the family and reviewed regularly. It is the gold standard for building trust with the teacher, the child and family. It also provides an anchor point for communication between home and school.

Plans for the child returning to school after attendance difficulties should:

- **Ensure the school, family and child (if appropriate) have a copy** of the agreed plan.
- **Obtain a commitment by all involved** to follow through with the plan to help the child to attend school regularly.
- **Identify and agree how to best meet the communication needs** of the parents and the school.
- **Establish a pattern of regular communication.** Ensure phone numbers and email addresses of parents/carers are correct and their electronic devices work.
- **Plan for gradual re-entry and re-integration** while the child manages or overcomes their anxiety. Take a step-by-step approach. For example, reduce the school day for a specified time, start the day with their favourite subject or teacher, work on a passion project, have opportunities to investigate a topic of interest.
- **For a designated period, begin school after lunch.** This gives the child the opportunity to manage their morning anxiety, to experience end-of-day routines with their peers, and to hear what is on the school program for the next day.
- **Prepare the class** for the child's return.



- **Identify additional requirements to support the child's return.**
- **Make reasonable adjustments** to the curriculum or teaching style to meet the learning needs of the child, including accommodation for missed work.
- **Use motivations, rewards and privileges for attendance**, for example, after a half day, a full day, several days, and a full week of attending school provide age-appropriate reinforcements. This can include reward charts, badges, stickers or stars that can be exchanged for desired activities such as, free time, computer time, an hour of game play or quiet reading.

In addition, once the child is attending school, consider strategies listed later, under the heading 'When the child comes to school', in conjunction with the attendance plan.

If the child continues to school refuse

- **With parental approval, arrange for a teacher and principal to meet the child and parents at home, via videoconference or phone.** Meeting at the school is preferable but a home visit may make a difference if the child is unable or unwilling to come to school. Ensure at least two staff members are present during a home visit. If home visits are deemed unsuitable or not allowed a video or phone call on speaker might be used. Again, two staff members need to be involved. All agreed actions should be followed up with a confirmation email or letter.
- **With parent/carer permission, arrange for the child to see a psychologist to assess their wellbeing.** The psychologist may use a range of assessment tools to measure anxiety, depression and psychological distress. The psychologist can also consider whether a safety plan is needed. For a suggested agenda for psychologist/parent meetings see Appendix 4 'Chronic school refusal – an intervention plan for psychologists'.
- **Revisit and/or revise the return-to-school plan regularly, as needed.**
 - **Continue to educate parents/carers about the complexity of school refusal and their role** in supporting the child's successful return to school. Work towards the parents understanding and committing to the plan.
 - **Emphasise to the child that school is the best place** to work things out, that the class needs them back. Reassure them that there is no embarrassment about returning to school.
 - **Ask the child for a commitment to return, either today or tomorrow** and give an illusion of choice as to starting time, such as 20 minutes before or after the main bell or at lunchtime. The sooner the child makes progress in returning to school the better, but never force a child to return.
 - **Ask parents/carers to ensure the child returns to school as they have committed.** Explain to the parents that it is critical that the child returns to school either today or tomorrow, to help ensure the problem does not escalate.
 - **Advise the parent/carer that it is important to remain calm and firm** and to tell the child they need to go to school; it is not possible to stay home, and they know the child can do it.
 - **Teach parents/carers the language to use.** For example, not '*If* you go back to school ...' but '*When* you go back to school...'



- **Advise the parents/carers that while it is their job to understand that their child's distress is real, the child needs to go to school.** Reassure them that any distress is likely to subside over time with the planned support.
- **Support the parents/carers.** They may need a lot of reassurance. It may be helpful to tell them that the school:
 - **has previously supported anxious children** in this situation, and these children settled well after a short period of adjustment
 - **will follow through on agreed processes** in the return-to-school plan
 - **is willing to be flexible** to assist a return to school
 - **has clear structures for empowering school refusing students** with options such as a staged return to the classroom, negotiating with the child on appropriate tasks such as reading or working in the school office area, or just outside the classroom, library administration, or down time before returning fulltime to the classroom
 - **experience shows that the child will usually find it progressively easier to come to school** each day, and their anxiety is likely to gradually decrease
 - **is comfortable and able to deal with the child's distressed behaviours** such as psychosomatic symptoms, tantrums, and crying.
 - **with parental consent will assist by thoughtful implementation of professional recommendations** made by referring doctors, psychologists or other accredited mental health specialists.
- **If family life appears to be unstructured or involving conflict,** suggest the establishment of rules, consequences and routines, the implementation of firm and calm parenting and the need to address any parent conflict. If appropriate, a local agency may be suggested that assists parents with relationship issues or parenting difficulties. There are a number of websites parents/carers might access for additional information on [parenting children who school refuse](#).

Continue to build home school connections and support

- **Post a note, postcards or letters to the child's home** with current school or class information and ensure the child knows the class is missing them.
- **Seek parental consent to ensure regular, frequent connection with the school.** Set up a learning management system or use the school-approved videoconference platform to enable homework and conversations via teachers and the wellbeing team to occur. To motivate the child to return to school, post or email news items to the child and/or the family, set up email between the class and the child, arrange for visits by the classroom teacher and the deputy or assistant principal on a weekly or fortnightly basis. These visits can take place at a local community centre with the child and parent present. At this type of meeting place the parent remains responsible for the child, school concerns associated with home visits can be avoided and the child is practicing leaving home as one step towards returning to school. If the child arrives by themselves, the two staff members can walk and talk with the child as they return the child home, aiming for the child to come back to school later that day or the following day. If the parents are not home and the child is at an age or maturity level that requires parental supervision, and the parents cannot be contacted, call the child's designated school emergency contacts.



- **Understand that the family may be exhausted** from trying to get the child to return to school. The family may wish to enlist support from a trusted extended family member, an outside agency such as those provided by some regional and state-based offices or multidisciplinary school refusal programs such as the [Reengaging School Refusers](#) program at Royal Children's Hospital Foundation in Victoria, or in Queensland, a [Regional Youth Engagement Hub](#).
- **Establish whether the child is suffering from poor sleep.** Often school refusers develop poor sleeping habits from accessing screens late into the night, having disrupted sleep for a range of social/emotional reasons, and sleeping or napping during the day because of tiredness and fatigue. Re-establish a set bedtime routine, no napping during the day and waking at the same time each morning as key goals. Many parents will require support to set appropriate boundaries to assist the child to re-establish restful sleep.
- **Provide information to parents to assist their child to develop healthy sleep patterns**¹³
 - Have the class or year level record their sleep hours. This may encourage the child to appreciate sleep norms for their age cohort.
 - Suggest parents trial various [sleep apps](#) to improve total sleep time and sleep habits.
 - Discuss research studies on sleep with the child. Stress that neither four hours nor 15 hours of sleep are helpful for anyone. It is generally recommended children aged 5–11 years should sleep 9–11 hours per night and older children aged 12 plus years should sleep 8–10 hours per night.
- **Help parents and the child to establish a weekly timetable** detailing physical activity, time in the fresh air, set times for healthy meals and snacks, and limited screen time (particularly recreational screen time). While most of these activities will not be negotiable, compromises might need to be made on occasion to enlist commitment from the child. Parents may need to discuss with the child that access to the internet and digital devices are a privilege.
- **Recommend to parents that the child is not positively reinforced for being at home.** Suggest parents limit home comforts and access to recreational internet use, refrigerator, videogames, TV and other pleasurable activities during school hours. Access to these comforts should be kept to outside school hours.
- **Suggest the child and family stick to routines** in the period before the planned return to school that reflects the school day routine. This includes wake-up times, lunch and snack times and bedtime. This will help prepare the child and make going to school as easy as possible.
- **Some chronic school refusers may become aggressive or violent towards parents/carers** who try to set boundaries. Negotiate a timetable with the child permitting some access to recreational screen time after school hours, with a break of 30 minutes or more before bedtime. Try agreeing that no-one in the home uses the internet after 9 pm or 10pm. Parents may require professional support to safely set boundaries.
- **Parents should encourage the child to complete schoolwork at home.** While the child remains at home, insist that schoolwork is done, that there is no sleeping during the day.

¹³ Teesson, M, (26 August 2021) The Health4life Initiative: An innovative digital approach to health and well-being for secondary school students. Keynote and Q&A. Leading the way to mentally healthier schools: The next frontier. Live stream presentation by the Black Dog Institute in partnership with the Australian Psychological Society.



- **Encourage the child and a parent/carer to go outdoors**, to move about, exercise and spend time engaging with the natural environment. For example, observe numbers and types of birds at intervals throughout a day or week, photograph changing cloud formations, sketch plants, flowers, and trees. Encourage physical activities such as completing star jumps, improve bouncing, dribbling or goal throwing skills with basketballs, keep a balloon or ball in the air.
- **Encourage the child to participate in one or more community sport programs** or the parent and child (or older child with parent and school permission) could visit the school playground after school or on weekends taking a basketball or soccer ball and invite others to join informal play.
- **Role-play going to school.** If school refusal continues, suggest the parents role-play returning to school. Have the child follow the school routine as closely as possible. It might be helpful to provide the parents with a timetable and work related to each subject for the child to complete at home that mirrors class activities. The child should be encouraged to wear the uniform and adhere to the school timetable—first bell, lunch time and so on—as closely as possible.

Revisit the Return to School Plan, as needed

- **Teachers will need the support of senior school staff** to review the attendance plan regularly and to consider the following strategies.
 - Has there been a pre-return meeting to talk through the plan with the child and parents?
 - What were the outcomes or requests from consultations and discussions with the family, and other professionals?
 - Have there been any changes since the last meeting?
 - What additional requirements are needed to support the child's return?

When the child comes to school

- **Encourage the parent to leave the child at the school gate or a designated quiet area near the office.** A nominated key teacher should meet the child and accompany them to the classroom after a short welcome. They can chat about the expectations of just attending to begin with, working towards completing some work tasks.
- **Assign a peer buddy** who can assist the socially anxious child feel more comfortable at recess and lunch. Some schools issue personal invitations to events and activities to help students feel welcome.
- **Smile, and welcome the child into your classroom.** Do not comment on the absence, or highlight the child's presence, rather tell the child you are glad to see them. Help the child settle into the agreed or normal schedule with as little fuss as possible.
- **Schedule one or two short activities the child finds pleasurable** to begin the day.
- **Anticipate and respond appropriately to any distressed behaviours.** Plan how you will respond if confronted with avoidance behaviours such as stomach-ache, tantrums or crying. A quiet area with a beanbag and calm music using headphones might provide sanctuary within the classroom.



- **Show sensitivity to the child with performance anxiety.** Reduce the need for the child to read aloud, answer questions, give presentations or participate in public speaking. Avoid tests and exams until the child is comfortable and attending regularly. Later, provide an alternate test-taking environment for the anxious child.
- **Provide a safe and quiet retreat space for the student if they feel stressed or overwhelmed.** This should be done in consultation with parents, and the counsellor, nurse or school psychologist.
- **Allow down time at school** to help reduce anxiety for the child.
- **If the child is anxious** and does not want to talk privately, suggest they might like to use a visualising technique where a worrying thought, such as missing a parent, can be bundled up and left on the 'worry tree' outside the room. Explain that the bundle of worries can be left there until the end of the day or for another time.
- **Tell the child there is nothing so bad that it can't be talked about** and reassure them that you are available to talk when they are ready.
- **Help build the child's feelings of connectedness to the school** using one or more of the following:
 - **Assign a responsible role** such as class monitor, pet feeder or gardening assistant. Ensure the student finds the role enjoyable and that it involves daily responsibilities.
 - **Assist the child to develop friendships and work routines with classmates.** Consider pairing the child with another friendly, supportive peer to complete work, engage the child in a group project with like-minded supportive peers, and encourage other children to invite the child to play or socialise at lunch time.
 - **Encourage the child to join school groups or teams** such as the choir or a sport team. For example, support parent-led sport teams training and playing out of school hours. See as an example [Playball Basketball](#) where in Melbourne from Year 1- 6, up to ten children can play other local teams.
 - **Provide the child with a trusted contact person at the school** who can check in with them several times each day until they begin to feel comfortable at school. This person could be a previous teacher, a teacher aide, deputy or assistant principal, special needs coordinator, school counsellor or older buddy.
- **Review class work and homework.** The child may have missed key parts of the curriculum. Assist the child to understand current concepts being taught. Modify work if necessary.
- **Use genuine praise and encouragement** for all efforts to engage in schoolwork.
- **End the child's day on a positive note**, and where possible, plan a pleasant activity with the child that they can engage in the following day at school.
- **Once the child is attending regularly** you may need to help them create a plan to catch up academically to alleviate any concerns, they have about being behind. Provide tutoring and other learning interventions and supports, by agreement with the child and parents.
- **Continue to use rewards and privileges** for successful attendance.



- **Encourage your school to establish transition programs across all year levels**, particularly for children beginning school, new arrivals into other classes, those leaving primary school and various transitions at secondary level. Anxiety can be greatly reduced if children are familiar with a new environment and know what to expect. For beginners or new arrivals, meeting the teacher and other school staff before commencing can greatly assist in reducing anxiety. Similarly for senior primary students, visiting their prospective secondary school, teaming up with other children who will be attending the school and having appropriate classroom discussions and graduation ceremonies to mark transition into secondary school can help to build confidence and alleviate anxiety.
- **Implement vertical transition programs.** Provide opportunities for all children at the school to take part in mixed-year-level activities such as electives, buddy and leadership programs, student representative council meetings and other activities on a regular basis. Such activities can build trust and connectedness with other children and teachers throughout the school.

In summary

School refusal is a serious condition often associated with a range of factors, and accompanied by emotional distress, physical symptoms and social isolation. The school refusing child generally requires support and intervention by a psychologist and others. Without appropriate support some chronic school refusers believe they just cannot go to school. This can be distressing for the child and family.¹⁴ Hence, the critical need for teachers to identify warning signs and to intervene early to avoid the pattern of school absences becoming entrenched.

Early intervention may include teachers making simple academic, social, and emotional adjustments or accommodations for the child. On many occasions, school staff and wellbeing teams can work with the child and family to successfully re-engage them. A gradual reintroduction to school usually works best. It exposes and supports the child step-by-step to facing up to and coping with anxiety-promoting situations in small doses.

However, the child's anxiety can escalate quickly and become serious if the school refuser is not identified and supported. By staying at home, the school refuser can become 'invisible' to and less understood by school staff. Clear processes for monitoring the child must be in place to avoid this situation developing. Parents/carers need to be encouraged to be responsive and to work with the school. Most parents/carers of school refusers want their child to attend but lack the support and/or knowledge about how to help their child and work effectively with the school.

Appropriate support seeks to optimise school attendance. These strategies help reduce the incidence of school refusal, reduce emotional distress, build strong relationships and positive attitudes to academic success, and reduce the likelihood of the child developing mental health disorders that can continue into later adolescence and adulthood.

¹⁴ School Phobia/School Refusal Australia. When it's not OK not to be OK; Victoria's invisible mental health and education crisis. http://rcvmhs.archive.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/School_Refusal_Australia.pdf



Appendix 1

Early intervention strategies for parents/carers of school refusers

Regular school attendance is important not only for academic success but also long-term wellbeing. The most powerful strategy to manage school attendance issues is for parents/carers and schools to work together. The goals are to help the child overcome their anxiety and to develop positive attitudes to school and learning.

Build healthy attitudes to school attendance

- **Help your child to begin the school day** in an organised, positive way with a routine for getting up, getting dressed, eating breakfast, brushing teeth and packing their bag. Where possible, one parent/carer should try to get up at least 30 minutes earlier than the child to help make a well-organised start to the day.
- **Assist your child to develop the habits of attending school every day and arriving at least 10 minutes before the morning bell.** Arriving early allows time to catch-up with friends and prepare for the day. Following the morning bell teachers usually provide an overview of the day's program, and often provide intervention programs such as those for numeracy or literacy.
- **Speak positively about school and teachers** because children mirror parents/cares' attitudes.
- **Show interest in your child's schoolwork and homework.**
- **Show interest in your child's school friends and/or potential friends.**



- **Be involved in school activities by keeping informed at a class level.** While most schools use a centralised communication system such as [Compass Education](#) some teachers also use an app to communicate with parents/carers. [Class Dojo](#) is a free app that allows teachers to message parents/carers via their phone to several platforms, either as a group or individually.¹⁵ It can be used for reminders, sharing photos and work examples, and to generally share what goes on in the classroom.¹⁶ It is useful in providing a quick, easy link between school and home.

- **Read the school newsletter** to stay informed about school policies, events and activities.
- **Be involved in regular school activities**, for example, canteen duty, library support, special lunch days, year-level events, after-school sports training or listening to children read.

When your child does not want to go to school

Try 'wondering' with your child to find out if there is any aspect of the school day or home life that is worrying them.

¹⁵ Carly, M. A., Investigating Teachers' Insights: The Influences of Perceived Barriers of Parental Involvement on Parent-Teacher Relationships. Minot State University. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2019. 10830689.

¹⁶ Op.cit. 42, 43



- **Show (not just tell) your child how you cope with problems** by letting them see you working out a solution to a problem or calming down and relaxing before 'having-a-go'. When appropriate, talk your child through what it is like for you, and how you cope using strategies such as setting a goal, using a 'can do' attitude and relaxing using deep breathing. For examples of ways adults can assist children with stress and worry, see the Psych4Schools ebooklet [For parents: Assist your child with stress and worry](#).
- **Foster 'hope' in your child.** See [3 ways to promote hope in children](#) by Dr Justin Coulson to assist your child to find a happy and successful pathway to the future.
- **If the issue is beyond your capability or competence, seek support.** Consider family or helpful friends, a teacher or senior staff member of the school, your GP or other professional. Show your child that you are committed to their school attendance.
- **Help your child prepare for school the night before** with bag packed, uniform ready, and perhaps a keepsake to take to school.
- **Help ensure your child is well rested, healthy and feels safe.** Children (and adults) are better able to cope if they are well rested, hydrated, eat healthy food and feel safe.
- **Implement predictable home routines** to increase feelings of safety and help reduce anxiety for you and your child.
 - **Set household rules with logical, fair, consistent and predictable consequences** if they are broken. Keep consequences short with opportunities for your child to take responsibility by showing understanding of how their behavior has affected others, suggesting a consequence, offering an apology, or demonstrating improved behaviour.
 - **Set a 'no yelling' rule.** Hold conversations in the same room, rather than calling out from another room.
 - **Set chores and routines** for morning, after school and bedtime.
 - **Inform and involve your child in changes to daily or weekly plans.** If possible, let them know ahead of time. For example, some children may be unable to concentrate at school because they don't know who will pick them up, or whether Mum will be working late and not home before bedtime to say goodnight.
 - **Ensure the child is aware of the time they need to wake up and get ready for school and that they have set an alarm correctly.**
- **If your child is upset about returning to school remain calm,** firm and focused on returning the child to school. Avoid being overly sympathetic and consoling as this may send a message that school is a place to be concerned about or feared. Seek support early from the classroom teacher and/or a senior staff member.
- **Don't engage with complaints about having to attend school.** Your child might complain about being unwell or missing you while at school. Ignore minor complaints, reassure the child, and remain firm and consistent about attending school.
- **Do not give in to tantrums.**

Children need:

- 8-12 hours of sleep each night.
- A healthy balanced diet.
- 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise each day.



- **Avoid making home a holiday.** Your child must be supported to stay connected to school, teachers and friends. Ensure that what is happening at home, apart from schoolwork, quickly becomes boring. It is a legal requirement to attend school (or training) regularly up to about age 17 years in most Australian jurisdictions.
- **If your child claims to be ill, home should be as uninteresting as possible,** so time off school isn't attractive. This means going to bed in pyjamas to rest, with no television, computers or tablets. Snacks and lunch should occur at the same time as school. Tell your child that you will review how they are feeling with the view of going to school at recess or lunchtime as an option. The message is that they only stay home if they are sick.
- **Don't allow your child to do as they please** or have free time if they stay at home.
- **Have them remain at the house even after school time.** If they are too sick for school, then they are too sick for social activities. Sitting and perhaps reading outside for 15 to 20 minutes to get some fresh air and sunlight is encouraged.
- **If you can accompany your child to school** this sends a message to the child that you are supportive and willing to engage with the school.
- **If need be, sit with your child in sick bay,** but having got to school, do not take them home.
- **Make firm plans with your child to collect or meet them at the end of the day.**
- **Recognise and praise every small step on the path to school re-engagement.** This can involve simple rewards and displaying school photographs and schoolwork at home.
- **If possible, look for opportunities to become involved in the life of the school.** Children can feel more attached to school when their parents/carers are involved in school activities.

Do you have concerns for your own wellbeing?

Around two-thirds of Australian parents report feeling stressed often or all the time.¹⁷ Raising children and adolescents is hard work. It follows that even the most resilient parent will sometimes feel overwhelmed and react to situations in ways they are not proud of.

If you are regularly stressed and react by crying, yelling, demanding attention or giving up, your children are likely to do the same. They watch and mirror how you cope with things, from small everyday problems to major stressful events.

While it is difficult to stay in control all the time, the better you are at actively using strategies that help you to manage your emotions and stay calm, the more likely your children will be able to regulate their responses to worries or stressful situations. Regulating your emotions can also help prevent daily stressors from becoming overwhelming.

For strategies to assist yourself see the Psych4Schools ebooket [For parents: Reduce your stress and worry](#).

For immediate help or information: Call [Lifeline](#) 131 114, or visit [beyondblue.org.au](#)

¹⁷ Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2008) Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children Annual Report 2006-2007. Retrieved from <http://www.growingupinaustralia.gov.au/pubs/ar/ar200607/index.html>



Appendix 2

Teacher strategies to help chronic school refusers cope with common barriers to returning to school

The following are common concerns of chronic school refusers. Suggestions for teachers to assist in framing their responses to the child are offered. Taking a problem-solving approach and reassuring the child that strategies are in place at school will assist them to manage and cope to promote a return to school.

1. School facilities and the curriculum

- **Embarrassed to use school toilets** – The school will make special arrangements for you, as it does for several students. For example, the sickbay area has toilets, toilet passes are readily available.
- **Worry about underachieving and falling behind academically** – Teacher support is in place and a buddy system can be arranged. You can catch up on work progressively as the you become more comfortable and relaxed at school.
- **Concern about disciplinary action for arriving late or having the wrong subject books** – Late arrival will be overlooked for up to a month, if needed. We can work together to colour code timetables and required books.
- **Feels overwhelmed or panic at the lockers and other congested areas** – We have an end locker to help you avoid feeling surrounded by others. We can work on solutions for other areas at school that concern you.

2. Social and friendship issues

- **Worry about what peers might say or think or that teachers might make adverse comments** – There are other students who have missed school like you in the past, so it is not likely to be an issue. We will speak with teachers to help with a smooth return to classes.
- **My best friend has left the school** – If you have the friend's contact details, we will assist you and your parents to maintain contact with them and assist you to find a new friend. It would be good to have friends if possible.
- **Fear of social anxiety with friends being either too close or difficulty making friends** - There are arrangements for several peer 'buddies' and two friends who will be supportive. You can meet them when you return. We also have a Psych4Schools [Making friends questionnaire](#) that you can do with a teacher of your choice. Together, you list two or three skills to learn or practice and after a week or two we will review it with you to see how we might further assist.

3. Self-care and personal presentation

- **Daily showering and unkept hair are issues** – If your parents agree we can take you for a haircut and you can shower and condition your hair at school. You can also wear a hat if you like.
- **My school uniform does not fit** - The school will help with a uniform or other needed items.



- **There are other personal matters** - A teacher can help you if you have questions about personal issues such as changing clothes or other things like getting to the toilet in time. Which teacher would you like to help you?

4. Tiredness and napping

- **My sleep wake cycle is out of sync** – After several days at school, the daily timetable and routines will help you to get your sleeping at night back on track.
- **I need to sleep or nap during the day** - The school will work with you and your parents/carers to help ensure no sleeping or napping at school during the day. This may be difficult for about a week. After that things should improve. To make it easier for yourself, you might set a personal challenge to be regularly sleeping at night by 10 pm or even by 9 pm and getting up by 7am or 7.30am.
- **My parents think I have a videogame addiction that disrupts my sleep, but I love playing each night with my online friends** - The school will work with you and your parents to set time limits. We are sure you'll be able to keep in contact with most friends, but there needs to be an agreed nightly sign-off if the next day is a school day. We can help you find ways to relax before going to sleep and feel sure there are other activities you can enjoy in addition to videogames.

5. Aches and emotional pain

- **I get butterflies in my stomach and often need visits to sick bay. Sometimes I feel my concerns have been ignored or overlooked** – Wellbeing checks have been introduced at school. Daily and later if all is going well, weekly wellbeing checks with you will help to ensure any concern is followed up by the school nurse or talked through with the wellbeing teacher or school counsellor (with parent permission). One suggestion is to make an outline of your body on A3 or A4 paper and rate out of ten any complaints or feelings to better understand how your body is feeling at school over time. This chart can be discussed with the school counsellor. Together we can also make a visual chart of your attendance to help show your progress in attending school.
- **There are one or two thoughts that get 'stuck in my head' which makes it hard for me to think about school** – This is not unusual for some students who find school attendance challenging. The school counsellor or the psychologist (with parent permission) can help. You can have an appointment as soon as you are back at school. There may be a short wait, so you may decide to start by talking to the wellbeing teacher Ms. Pye.
- **Can teachers help me with anxiety and depression?** Yes, your teachers have arrangements in place to assist students who experience these emotional issues. You can meet with your class or homeroom teacher who will explain and work with you as soon as you return to school.

6. Worry about one or both parents

As teachers and other school professionals know, there are many issues around family relationships and communication that can be legitimately concerning for children. Often, they find themselves trying to deal with issues they are not prepared for developmentally. Some children may disclose concerning and confronting information to a teacher, such as:

- My mum often uses me as a sounding board, and I get worried about her situation.
- My blended family life makes me feel uncomfortable. I need to stay home until at least the end of next month to help mum with the baby who is very unsettled.



- My mum has been viewing an online dating service behind my dad's back. I'm worried my dad will leave. I've also seen messages on my mum's mobile phone which worry me, and I saw dad going through mum's text messages.
- My dad has schizophrenia and I need to stay home with him.

It is generally advised that teachers do not involve themselves in complex family issues. A teacher could be courting disaster weighing into a conversation with a child that would be better handled by trained mental health practitioners and /or a trained wellbeing staff member, or with parental permission a psychologist/school counsellor.

In situations where disclosures such as those above are made, teachers should advise the child that this is something we could talk with the deputy or assistant principal about, and that with parental permission a psychologist or school counsellor or wellbeing teacher is the best person to help them with the issue. However, if the child makes disclosures that lead you to form a belief there are protective concerns, then a mandatory notification regarding child maltreatment and abuse should be made without delay to the government department overseeing child protection.



Appendix 3

Script suggestions for speaking with parents of a child who is school refusing

1. Good morning. Thanks for agreeing to talk with me. (Start with a positive comment about the child – something that you like about them or why you enjoy having them in your class.) Follow up with, I'm worried about (child's name) absences from school and I'm sure you're worried too.
2. As you know regular school attendance is linked to better social, emotional and learning outcomes for children.
3. It's important to develop good routines for attending school from the beginning, and to try to sort out any attendance problems early.
4. If (child's name) is reluctant to come to school it could be a sign that they're trying to avoid something, perhaps tests or problems with friends.
5. We'd like to share our thoughts and observations with you and see if you can help us find a way to support (child's name) returning to school.
6. We're interested to know what you think about (child's name) reluctance to come to school, and what might help the situation.
7. We'd like to reassure you that the school has previously supported children in this situation, and they've generally settled well after a short period of adjustment.
8. The school can be flexible to help (child's name) return to school.
9. We will develop a Return-to-School Plan to help (child's name) return to school. We'd like you to help us with this plan.
10. We want you to know that the school will follow through on processes that we agree to in the Return-to-School Plan.
11. We've got clear structures for helping students who are having attendance problems. We can give them options such as a staged return to the classroom, negotiate with (child's name) on tasks such as reading in a quiet area, working just outside the classroom door or



- near the school office area with one or two peers or a small group.
12. We can adjust school start times or make adjustments to the curriculum until (child's name) is more settled and less anxious about coming to school.
 13. If we're all calm and consistent with our support, (child's name) will find it progressively easier to come to school each day and their anxiety should gradually decrease.
 14. The school is comfortable dealing with (child's name) behaviour if distressed. We can be calm and fair dealing with any symptoms related to feeling unwell, outbursts, tantrums, crying, or withdrawal.
 15. Is there anything you think is important for the school to know about (child's name)? Is there anything about home life or family, or specific interests that would be helpful for us to know about?
 16. Do you have any questions you would like to ask us?
 17. We'd like to keep in daily/weekly contact with you while we support (child's name) to return to school. What are the best way/s to do this?
 18. We also have a help sheet for parents. We can provide you with a copy (Appendix 1 Early intervention strategies for parents of school refusers).
 19. Finish with an encouraging comment, or another positive comment about the child.

Thank you



Appendix 4

Chronic school refusal – an intervention plan for psychologists

For effective intervention it will be helpful for a psychologist to identify key barriers preventing a return to school.

It is not uncommon for early warning signs to have been overlooked or ignored at school and home. There may be layers of stress, anxiety, sadness or depression and distress that need to be talked through, including possible unresolved trauma issues.

Identifying the issues and understanding the complex dynamics that may underpin the school refusal is critical in formulating a treatment plan to support a return to school. A return to school plan is likely to require support from others such as a family support worker, youth or social worker and/or mental health professionals such as psychiatrists working with the family to put in place supports for parents/carers, the child and other family members. Ensure parental permission is given to share and request information with the school and relevant practitioners and agencies.

Suggested agenda for a psychologist/parent meeting

The initial meeting could take one or two hours and hence may need to be broken into two by having a short coffee and snack break. Where possible, complete this type of meeting as a single session to help ensure information is not missed, particularly as a planned second session may be avoided, cancelled, or postponed. The agenda could include items such as:

- 1. What are the child's and the parents/carers' immediate needs?** For example, does the child live in their room 24/7? Will the child shower? Do the parents and child eat meals together? Does the child have contact with other children and adults outside the family? Do the parents/carers require additional support?
- 2. How is each parent/carer managing?** Are they coping with specific issues, financial, family or relationship stressors? What are their key personal and parenting challenges? What are their strengths that may be drawn on to assist the child's return to school?
- 3. What are the parents' concerns for the child?** Is there a [child safety plan](#) in place or does one need to be drafted now?
- 4. Are there supporting professionals** and others involved with the family? What are their contact details? Seek permission to request or share relevant information with them, if appropriate.
- 5. Has the child been seen or assessed by a GP, paediatrician, psychiatrist, or psychologist recently?** Is the child anxious and/or depressed and/or psychologically distressed? Examples of scales to use are [The Spence Children's Anxiety Scale](#), the Value Options [Depression Screening scale](#), or the [Kessler Psychological Distress Scale \(K10\)](#).



6. What play and other recreational interests does the child have during the day and night?

What is the child's usual sleep pattern?

7. Have there been any changes in the child's behaviour or emotional state that parents/carers or others have observed. Is the child overwhelmed by anxiety each morning or before sleeping?

8. Are there recent or past events such as accidents, bullying, trauma, changes in the family or out-of-home care that might be affecting the child's ability to cope with school?

9. What has been done to encourage the child's return to school? What have been the successes and challenges? How long has the child been out of school? Will the child visit a friend (with support if needed)?

10. How is the child presenting overall? Are there additional psycho-social or other factors impacting on the child that can be modified or adjusted?

11. If school holidays are pending, what arrangements are in place for the child? Can a Parent Support Worker, Social Worker or Youth Worker assist in registering and supporting part- or full-time attendance at a holiday program if appropriate, or other service?

12. Review the return-to-school plan. What other services could help? List recommended actions for each of the various participants. Parent/carer and child actions listed in the return-to-school plan, could be photographed using the parent's/carer's mobile phone or emailed to them. Ensure parental permission is given to share and request information with the school and relevant practitioners and agencies.



References and resources

Psych4Schools ebooklets

Excerpts of all ebooklets are available at: <http://www.psych4schools.com.au/free-resources/www>

These include:

- Working with children
 - who worry excessively
 - who have difficulty making friends
 - to help prevent and reduce anxiety (new edition, book 1)
 - who are anxious (new edition, book 2)
 - who are depressed (and helping prevent depression)
 - with learning disabilities
 - who are experiencing bereavement
 - who are gifted and talented

Resources for Psych4Schools members are available at:
<http://www.psych4schools.com.au/members/moresources.html>

These include full copies of the above ebooklets, and

- Making friends questionnaire (Year 3 to Year 8)
- Relaxation – Deep abdominal breathing
- Social skills dice
- Social skills for children with additional needs
- What parents can do to help their child with friendships

Website blogs

- Gamin, Z and Evely, M., (2011, October 11). 'Encourage a child who refuses to come back to school' Psych4Schools Blog. <https://www.psych4schools.com.au/?s=school+refusal>

Books for young children

The wellbeing co-ordinator or school librarian should be able to provide a list of picture story books and other resources related to school refusal and worries.

- Virginia Ironside (2004). *The huge bag of worries*. Hodder Children's Books, England.



- Nicky Johnston (2008). *Go away Mr Worrythoughts*. Nicky's Art, Langwarrin, Australia.
- Nicky Johnston (2009). *Happy thoughts are everywhere*. Nicky's Art, Langwarrin, Australia.
- Kevin Henkes, (2010). *Wimberley Worried*, Harper Collins Publishers Inc. United States.
- Isabelle Duff and Susannah Crispe, (2021) *Cookie*, EK Books, Australia.

Books for middle primary children and junior secondary

- Dawn Huebner (2005). *What to do when you worry too much: A kid's guide to overcoming anxiety*. Magination Press. American Psychological Association, Washington, USA.
- James Crist (2004). *What to do when you're scared and worried*. Free Spirit Publishing. Minneapolis, USA.

Books for teachers and other school professionals

- Kearney, C.A. (2018). *Helping school refusing children and their parents: A guide for school-based professionals (2nd ed.)* New York: Oxford University Press.
<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/helping-school-refusing-children-and-their-parents-9780190662059?cc=us&lang=en&>
- Grafli, J. (2018) *Overcoming School Refusal: A practical guide for teachers, counsellors, caseworkers and parents*. Australian Academic Press, Australia.
<https://www.amazon.com/Overcoming-School-Refusal-counsellors-caseworkers/dp/1925644049>

Websites

- Raisingchildren.net.au The Australian Parenting website. School refusal: children and teenagers. <https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/school-learning/school-refusal/school-refusal>
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