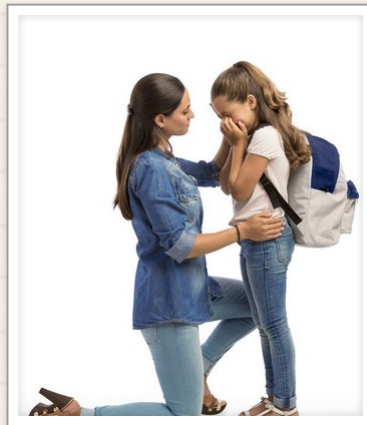


# MENTAL HEALTH MINUTE

ASSOCIATED CLINIC OF PSYCHOLOGY

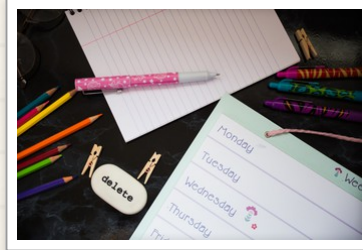


## SCHOOL REFUSAL AND AVOIDANCE

### What To Do When They Don't Want To Do School

It's no secret that this year has had its challenges! On top of navigating increased mental health needs, you might also be noticing an increase in school refusal and school avoidance. In the age of COVID, many students are experiencing environmental stress (wearing masks, social distancing), new pressures (inconsistent schedules, family stress), and academic expectations (online learning, navigating digital platforms) - *they are anxious and stressed out!* Other contributing factors may include a combination of school, family, and child dynamics. All of these big feelings may present themselves as emotional distress (crying, begging, worrying), somatic complaints (sleep issues, headaches, stomach pain, etc) or as behaviors (clinginess, tardiness, classroom disruptions, skipping school, etc). The good news is there are ways to identify and work through the anxiety that presents itself in school refusal and avoidance!

Do I know for sure that _____ will happen?
What else could happen?
What evidence do I have for and against my fear?
What's the worst case/best case/most likely outcome?
What would I tell a friend?



## TALK IT THROUGH!

- **Externalize the anxiety** - *How does the ..... get in the way of you attending school? When is ..... in charge and when are you in charge?*
- **Can't verbalize it?** -- Ask them to draw their thoughts and feelings about school or how their body feels when they are worried.
- Have them **create or act out the "story"** of how they are thinking and feeling about school and what they would want in the future.

## HOME HELP

- **Establish routines** (bedtime, wake time, mealtime, homework time, etc.)! It is helpful for weekday routines to mimic routine at school. If it is a home-learning day (or if child has refused to attend school), routine should still be followed.
- **Set clear expectations.** Student must go to school or be doing your home learning during school times unless physical symptoms are severe enough to warrant a doctor visit.
- **Avoid reinforcing negative behaviors.** If they have refused school or work, avoid rewards (television, gaming, lunch dates, etc.) until work is done or school is attended. Every 45 minutes ask your child if they are ready to go back to school or continue their work. Ignore unwanted behavior, such as whining, complaining, and attention-seeking.
- **When they go to school or do their work, reinforce that behavior.** Reassure and encourage ("I know you are nervous and I know you can do it") and keep goodbyes short.

## SCHOOL STRATEGIES

- **Make it a team approach.** Who are the people who should be involved and working together for this student? Differing perspectives are important in considering the root causes!
- **Conceptualize possible accommodations** (i.e., modified assignments, tutoring, breaks with "safe adult," reducing public speaking, different testing area, etc.).
- **Develop a plan!** Have a meeting, assign roles, be specific, decide what accommodations will be made and for how long, address any safety concerns, and ensure full understanding of all team members on the plan and roles.



### Kid Refuses to Go to School | Sc...

childmind.org

Recognize school refusal or a struggling student in your child. Child Mind Institute offers tips for parents on how to get kids back in class.



## HELP IS AVAILABLE

It typically takes a few weeks of adjustment before kids are used to their new routines and schedules. If you notice significant changes in your child's behavior, such as sleep problems, major appetite changes, behavior or mood changes, or anxiety that makes it difficult for them to function, seek out support and consultation.

Associated Clinic of Psychology is here to provide mental health services to students and their families. Consult with your child's school counselor or contact us directly with questions. [www.acp-mn.com](http://www.acp-mn.com) or 612-455-8643

*\* this newsletter was created by Sarah Najafalipour, LPCC, School Lead*



### School Attendance | Dakota Cou...

[www.co.dakota.mn.us](http://www.co.dakota.mn.us)