

SCHOOL AVERSION

What is it and how can you address it?

School Aversion Overview

School aversion (or school avoidance) is reluctance to go to school and participate in class or activities or an outright refusal to attend school. While school aversion is not a clinical diagnosis on its own, it is highly related to anxiety disorders and may be a sign of a mental health concern. School aversion often leads to absences, truancy, social development concerns, and academic concerns.

Prevalence

There is evidence that suggests that as many as 5% of children experience school aversion.

-healthychildren.org



Stressors and pressures related to school aversion may include social interactions, peer pressure, bullying, academic pressure, environmental overstimulation, sensory sensitivity, and more.



Typically, there will be signs of school anxiety before school aversion develops. School aversion can develop quickly, so addressing stressors and being aware of signs of school aversion are crucial in remaining proactive.

Signs of School Aversion

- Frequently tardy or absent
- Worsening academic performance
- Physical complaints like headaches & stomachaches
- Pushing off bedtime or waking up late, not getting ready on time
- Disruptive behaviors at school
- Anxiety or panic attacks
- Crying or tantrums about school
- Withdrawn behaviors, locking door, staying in room
- Mood swings
- Decline in or avoidance of social interactions

Addressing School Aversion

- Practice and maintain routines at night and in the morning.
- Give positive reinforcement for any small progress, like getting ready on time.
- Identify specific concerns with questions like “If you could change one thing about school, what would it be?” and then communicate with the school to address those concerns specifically.
- Involve the school in solutions so they can assist with transitions or address any concerns like bullying or conflicts with teachers.
- Coordinate dropping your child off with a school official at the curb to help at the separation point. If they are not ready for class, they can go to the office with the school official. If the person is unavailable, have a backup plan with the school.
- Break down the transition from home to the school campus into steps to ease anxiety. Make each step clear and actionable. Practice this process with your child and make relevant staff at the school aware of what the process is so they can assist as needed.
- Involve your child in the solution, so they can feel invested in their progress.
- If your child refuses to go to school, make home “boring” during the day (no TV, video games, computer, phone, etc.) so as not to reinforce the behavior.
- Ask the school for the work your child is missing and have your child work on it at home to avoid falling behind if possible.
- Speak in terms of “when” they are at school, not “if” they make it to school.
- Use clear, direct statements, such as “it’s time to get out of bed”, instead of a question that they can say “no” to.
- Model, teach, and initiate calming techniques for your child.
- Get support for yourself as needed.
- Seek professional help to address your child’s mental health needs.



Mental Health Services

If you observe signs of a mental health concern in your child, seeking mental health treatment can help with learning to cope in healthy ways, identify and regulate emotions, and/or process the root of the concern. If you feel that your child would benefit from such services, find out more about Touchstone’s programs and services today. Information about our program can be found at touchstonehs.org.

Share these resources with your child so they can talk with someone if they are struggling:

988 for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
602.248.8336 (TEEN) for Teen Lifeline

Sources:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK534195/>
<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/School-Avoidance.aspx>
<https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/school-learning/school-refusal/school-refusal>