

School Anxiety

What is it and how can I help my child?

School Anxiety is marked by anxiety specific to being at school, and is often related to social or separation anxiety, and even academic stress.

School anxiety often presents as headaches or stomachaches, either real or faked as an excuse to stay home from or leave school. This could also mean frequent stops to the restroom or nurse's office during the school day.



Some youth will refuse to go to school (school aversion) or won't participate due to school anxiety.

If not addressed, school anxiety can lead to absences, behavior concerns, and lower grades.

What can help?

Create a Plan

Especially with changes in teachers and starting a new school year, create a plan to address symptoms of school anxiety. Here are a few things to consider:

- Try to meet with your child's teacher before the school year.
- Make a routine and practice it.
 - Bus stop or walking to school routine.
 - Where to go each morning once at school.
- Work with school staff to help with transitions into the classroom as needed.
- Create a plan with teacher(s) for what to do when your child is having a hard time.
 - Does your child need a comfort object or family picture with them?
 - What is the best way your child can take a break when needed?
 - What is the best way you and your child's teacher(s) can communicate?





Positive Reinforcement

Be sure to give specific praise for the behaviors you want to see. For example: "Great job getting on the bus today!"

Even small positive behaviors should be praised and reinforced.

Don't "Give In"

If your child is complaining or whining, don't give in to them just because it's easy. For example, if you let them stay home from school because they whine, it shows them that they can avoid school and the anxiety that comes with it by complaining more. Instead, state that you understand they are anxious or scared but that it is important to go to school and work through it. You can still be affirming while consistently encouraging attendance.



Small Steps

Regardless of age, anxiety takes time to work through. Focus on small steps in the right direction. When you notice progress, look to make it consistent through positive reinforcement and setting goals. This could include goals like:

- being ready for school on time.
- identifying a positive from the school day
- participating/raising their hand in class one time

What if my child is struggling?

If your child is experiencing anxiety or other signs of a mental health concern, it may be time to consider mental health services.

Touchstone's School Based Services offers services for a variety of mental health concerns. Find out more here: <https://www.touchstonehs.org/school-based-services/>