

Parent Newsletter

NEW CANEY ISD COUNSELING

September 2025



Understanding and Addressing School Refusal and Chronic Absenteeism

Helping Your Child Build Confidence, Connection, and a Positive Routine

What is School Refusal and Chronic Absenteeism?

School refusal is when a child or adolescent experiences emotional discomfort about attending school, leading to frequent late arrivals, partial days, or full-day absences. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of school days—whether excused or unexcused. While occasional absences due to illness or family emergencies are normal, frequent absences can lead to serious academic, emotional, and social challenges. Early intervention is key to helping your child feel safe, supported, and successful at school.

Common Causes of School Refusal or Avoidance

Challenges can create a cycle where staying home feels like the only relief—making the return to school even harder. Children may avoid school for a variety of reasons, such as:

- *Anxiety or depression:* Worry about academic performance, separation from parents, or social interactions.
- *Peer conflict or social stress:* Feeling excluded, misunderstood, or having difficulty forming or maintaining friendships.

- *Learning challenges:* Feeling overwhelmed by schoolwork, struggling to keep up with class expectations, or lacking confidence in certain subjects.
- *Family transitions:* Divorce, loss, moving, or new family members can cause emotional upheaval.
- *Physical symptoms tied to stress:* Headaches or stomach aches with no clear medical cause.



Signs Your Child May Be Struggling With Attendance

Look for these emotional, behavioral, or physical signs:

- Frequent complaints of feeling ill (especially on school mornings)
- Refusal to get dressed or leave for school
- Tantrums, crying, or clinginess at drop-off
- Avoidance of school-related tasks (homework, talking about school)
- Sudden drop in grades or interest in learning
- Sleep disturbances or changes in appetite

In this newsletter you can expect:

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Common Causes of School Refusal or Avoidance

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How Parents Can Help: Setting Routines, Building Motivation, and Offering Support

1. Establish Consistent Routines

Children feel safer with structure. Routines help children know what to expect, which reduces anxiety and builds confidence.

- Create clear morning and bedtime routines.
- Prepare school items the night before to reduce stress.
- Keep wake-up and sleep times consistent—even on weekends.

2. Set Clear Expectations About School Attendance

- Communicate that attending school is a family expectation and part of their responsibility.
- Avoid reinforcing avoidance behavior by letting your child stay home without a clear reason.
- Stay calm and supportive, but be firm about the importance of going to school.

3. Reconnect Your Child to the Joy of Learning

- Celebrate small successes: getting ready on time, attending part of the day, completing an assignment.
- Get them excited about school again by asking what they *do* like—friends, art, recess, science?
- Talk positively about your own learning experiences.

4. Address the Root Cause—Not Just the Symptoms

- Ask open-ended questions: “What feels hard about school right now?” or “What would help you feel better about going?”
- Validate their feelings without judgment: “It sounds like you’re feeling really overwhelmed.”
- Connect with teachers, school counselors, or mental health professionals to understand the bigger picture.

5. Limit Overscheduling and Screen Time

- Overscheduling and excessive screen time can increase stress and reduce motivation.
- Build in time for calm, creative, or physical activities outside of school hours.
- Encourage movement, nature, and face-to-face connections.

6. Additional tips for Communication

- Acknowledge their feelings: *“I know you’re worried about school. It’s hard, but it’s important—and your teachers and I will help.”*
- Use clear, confident language: Say *“when you’re at school”* instead of *“if you go to school”* to set a clear expectation.
- Encourage with belief: Reinforce confidence by saying things like, *“You’re brave for going to school.”*
- Give direct choices: Use firm, simple options like, *“It’s time to get up,”* or *“Do you want breakfast or a shower first?”*

Resources for Parents

Books:

Ruby Finds a Worry by Tom Percival

Support Hotlines:

National Parent Helpline: 1-855-4A
PARENT (1-855-427-2736)

Mental Health Support: Tri-County
Behavioral Healthcare 936-521-6100



When to Seek Additional Help

If your child's school refusal or absenteeism is ongoing, consider reaching out for professional support. You may need help if your child:

- Cries or panics daily at the thought of school
 - Is missing multiple days per month
 - Shows signs of depression or anxiety
 - Refuses to leave the house or engage socially
 - Is falling behind academically due to absences
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