



Promoting school attendance

There are a lot of reasons why a student might refuse school. However, schools that actively encourage mental health and wellbeing for children and young people can help to reduce school refusal.

What can schools do?

It's not unusual for students to sometimes be nervous or worried about going to school.

But for some students, this worry can be excessive and can lead to [school refusal](#). The following approaches can help learning communities foster positive mental health and wellbeing among children and young people, which can, in turn, alleviate their nerves and worry around school attendance.

Building a mentally healthy community

A positive school culture makes children and young people feel safe and secure. It promotes a sense of belonging and helps positive relationships thrive. Students are more likely to attend school regularly when they feel supported and valued as an important part of the learning community.

Creating family partnerships

Partnerships between school staff and families will mean that attendance problems are detected early and a consistent approach is used to support the child or young person. Regular communication between schools and families during periods of non-attendance helps everyone work together to support the child or young person to return to school.

Developing resilience

Embedding teaching of [social and emotional learning](#) skills into the curriculum, with opportunities to practise these skills across a range of contexts, gives children and young people tools for managing uncomfortable emotions. Having these real-life skills makes school refusal less likely.

Providing early support

Recognising the signs that a child or young person might be experiencing social or emotional difficulties helps educators take appropriate action. School refusal can be a flag for anxiety or other mental health issues. Recognising and responding to school refusal means that educators might pick up on issues that would otherwise be missed. The child or young person and their family can also be referred to other services or professionals who can support them.

Be You Professional Learning

Learn more about providing support for children, young people and their families, by helping them access information and internal and external supports, in the [Provide](#) module.

Strategies for educators

Early recognition of attendance and school refusal issues is essential.

Strategies can be put in place to support the student before the behaviour becomes entrenched.

At the whole-school level

- Create a positive school climate where everyone feels supported by their peers and educators, and has a sense of connectedness to the learning community.
- Establish peer support or mentoring programs to increase a sense of belonging among students.
- Closely monitor student attendance to enable early detection of attendance problems and make efforts to follow up with the student and their family.
- Communicate the importance of consistent attendance to the school community.
- Develop a school policy specifically on school refusal with defined processes for when and how to respond.
- Ensure students know where they can go and who they can talk to if they're feeling worried or overwhelmed.
- Develop effective programs to support students and their families during the transition to school and between schools.
- Ensure all school staff are aware of the factors that contribute to school refusal and receive support when working with students displaying persistent school refusal.

At the individual level

- Work closely with the family to understand the underlying reasons behind the school refusal and problem-solve together.
- Work with the school's wellbeing team, learning support team or pastoral care (depending on resources available at your school) and get advice on supports the student might need.
- Seek information about professionals within the broader community who may be able provide support.

- Maintain close contact with the family, even during extended periods of non-attendance.
- Acknowledge the challenges faced by families of children and young people who refuse school.
- Develop a return-to-school plan in collaboration with the family and student. Depending on individual needs, this might include gradual re-entry, a flexible learning program or timetable, or special arrangements for recess. The aim of the plan should include the expectation of gradual full attendance.
- Support families to implement a morning routine that sets the expectation of school attendance.
- Consider the support the child or young person might need upon arrival at school. This might include meeting with a friend at a specific place and time, using a quiet space to settle before school starts, engaging in an activity or responsibility, or meeting with a key staff member.
- Provide recognition and positive feedback for any efforts towards school attendance.
- Respond to any school-based needs, such as academic support, dealing with bullying or support with social relationships.
- Link families with appropriate support services for assistance with family-based issues which might be impacting on the child or young person's attendance.

Be You Professional Learning

Learn more about observing children and young people's behavioural and mood changes in the [Notice](#) module.

References

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