



# PARENTS' Guide to Truancy





Missing school weakens your child's confidence in his or her ability to do schoolwork. It also reduces the chances that he or she will reach his or her goals, will successfully move to the next grade, or graduate. But, schoolwork is not the only thing that is affected by missing school.

Children who frequently miss school are more likely to use drugs and to be involved in unlawful activity. Research shows that children who miss school are often involved in daytime crimes such as auto theft, burglary, vandalism, shoplifting, graffiti, and serious assault. They also become victims of crimes, themselves.

1

But, parents and guardians can play an important role in keeping kids in the classroom. Read on to see what you can do to help.

This pocket guide is designed to reduce incidences of truancy by providing parents and guardians with prevention and intervention strategies.



## What is Truancy ?

When a child misses school or class without an excuse from his or her parent/guardian, leaves school without the permission of the teacher or principal, or is consistently late for school, he or she is considered **truant**.



Some of the most common reasons for skipping school are oversleeping, wanting to hang out with friends, and just plain rebellion. A child's refusal to attend school may also be the result of health problems, school environment, living situations, academic failure, or alcohol/drug use.

## Health Problems

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It is natural for your child to be sick and unable to attend school. However, illnesses such as stomach aches, nausea, fatigue, and shaking could be signs of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, or even a fear of school.

## School Environment

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Children who feel that the school does not meet their needs, are bored with classes, or are not engaged in caring relationships

with teachers and peers tend to skip school. Other children become discouraged by poor bathroom and lunchroom conditions, inadequate security measures, environments that allow bullying by peers and teachers, and the school's inability to engage various cultural and learning styles.

## **Living Situations**

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High levels of family conflict can be a key reason that a child misses school. Allowing large amounts of unsupervised time or requiring the child to assist with family errands can contribute to truancy. Transportation problems and work-related tasks also increase the chances that a child will miss school. Some children even miss school as a way of getting attention from parents.



## **Academic Failure**

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Skipping school can also be directly linked to poor grades or frustrations in learning. Students who miss school or classes fall behind their peers in the classroom. This leads to low self-esteem, low perceptions of the likelihood of graduating, and push outs by teachers and peers who question the reason for continuing.

7

## **Alcohol & Drug Use**

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Alcohol and drug use can affect your child's judgment or ability to make choices. It can also reduce his or her ability to remember what he or she reads or is taught in class. As a result, he or she will experience frustration with learning and will be more likely to skip school.

PARENT  
TEACHER  
CONFERENCE

Many schools are enforcing truancy policies by holding parents responsible for their children's failure to go to school. In many states, if parents fail to make sure that their child attends school regularly, parents could lose options for public assistance. They could also get in trouble with the law and face a fine, a jail sentence or community service.

Many parents understand that children can't learn if they are not in school. Getting up to speed on the truancy laws and school guidelines as well as monitoring things at home can provide key opportunities to impact attendance. Making sure that children are in school or class can ensure that they receive the education that is so critical to life success.



There are specific things you can do to keep your child in the classroom.

- **Set Boundaries:** Talk to your children about the role education plays in future/life success. Let them know that you do not approve of them missing school. Refuse to write an excuse for unacceptable reasons. Review acceptable and unacceptable behavior with your child.
- **Ask Questions:** Take an active interest in your children's schoolwork. Ask them to demonstrate what they learned in school. Know the children your child associates with.
- **Stay Informed:** Know the school's attendance policy, the time school starts, the difference between an excused and unexcused absence, and share the information with your child.



- ***Be Prepared:*** Prepare your child for school with required supplies and clothes. If you need assistance, contact your local social services agency.
- ***Schedule Time:*** Set a time for your child to go to bed, wake up, have a healthy breakfast, arrive at school, and complete his/her homework. Monitor things in your home such as family routines that may prevent you or your child from keeping to the schedule.
- ***Plan Appointments:*** Plan visits to the doctor or dentist after the school day ends. If you must take an appointment during the school day, allow the child to miss only time needed for that appointment.
- ***Plan Vacations:*** Always talk with the school before you plan your holiday or vacation.





If you know your child is late to school, missing school, skipping class or not interested in attending school, you can help them.

- **Be Alert:** Look for early signs of a child's decision that school is not worthwhile. Monitor changes in friendships, teachers, or classrooms or even the loss of a pet or family member. All of these things contribute to reasons why children dread going to school.
- **Look for Alternatives:** If your child tells you he or she is bored at school, pursue support outside the school such as music lessons, sports clubs, neighborhood or church-related youth groups, or mentors. Seek out and enroll your child in a tutoring program, if necessary.
- **Be Pro-Active:** Regularly contact the school office to make sure your child is



attending school. Check in with his or her teachers on a regular basis. Make random visits to your child's classroom to observe.

- ***Maintain Your Routine:*** Stick to a regular schedule for homework, bedtime, and waking up.
- ***Provide Incentives:*** Reward good attendance. However, keeping your child out of school for his or her birthday is not acceptable.
- ***Talk about Consequences:*** Be sure that your child knows if he or she skips school, there will be consequences to pay such as losing television or video game time, limiting time with friends, or the lost of other privileges.
- ***Seek Advice:*** Speak to other parents and guardians who have experienced the same issues and problems. This can be a great way to get valuable advice and information.



- **Monitor Behavior:** Look for negative behavior changes such as alcohol use or staying out late. Seek a counselor if your child's behavior becomes, distant, withdrawn, anxious, depressed, delinquent or aggressive.
- **Talk about Expectations:** Talk with your child about acceptable and unacceptable behavior and grades. Discuss homework rules and school attendance.
- **Have Consistent Expectations:** Relaxing the rules for even one assignment or day can give a mixed message. Make sure that all your children live up to the same standards.
- **Communicate with Your Child:** Ask your child how you can help. Think about what situations he or she might face and talk



about ways to handle these situations before they occur.

- ***Be Supportive:*** Encourage your child to take an active role in the school by joining clubs or participating in sports. Teach them when and how to ask for help.
- ***Educate Yourself:*** Understand what your child is expected to learn at each grade level. Contact your state department of education, school district, or school for a copy of the standards and school attendance policies. Find out what goals your child's teacher has for the year and how your child will be graded.





The school can provide support to help you prevent your child from skipping school or missing classes. Remember the school needs your help also.

- *Be Available:* Make sure the school has your correct contact information. Provide work, home, cell and, if necessary, caretaker phone numbers.
- *Be Honest:* Talk with the principal and school social worker regarding changes that may affect the child's behavior such as divorce, death or sickness in the family, a missing pet, or a possible move. If your child has special needs, inform the teacher at the start of the school year.
- *Help the Teacher Connect with Your Child:* Tell the teacher about your child's hobbies and interests.
- *Get Advice:* Ask the teacher for suggestions

on how to make the homework time go more smoothly.

- ***Get Involved:*** Assist your child's teacher in classroom-related projects such as reading or one hour mentoring programs. Volunteer to assist with activities outside of the school such as class trips or school sponsored neighborhood events. Participate in parent, teacher, student associations organized by the school. Attend meetings scheduled by the school such as teacher conferences or family workshops such as planning for college.
- ***Be Open-Minded:*** Inform school officials of your interest in receiving feedback on your child's progress, attendance, and behavior.
- ***Speak Up:*** Question policies that counter the goal of keeping children in the classroom. Encourage your school to create alternatives to out-of-school suspension and expulsion. Seek changes in school grading policies

related to attendance.

- *Collaborate:* Be familiar with school disciplinary policies to ensure that actions at home support or reinforce the actions of the school.
- *Follow up:* When your child must miss school because of illness, contact the school immediately and arrange to pick up assignments, if necessary.



Involve people, churches, businesses, and community resources in the education of your child.

- **Participate:** Sign up and attend parenting education programs. This is a great place to learn new techniques and to share what you have learned.
- **Set up a Parent Network:** Talk to neighbors about your child's behaviors and activities. Set up a neighborhood watch or patrol to ensure that all children go to school every day. Exchange numbers in case you need to reach a parent quickly.
- **Create a Homework or Study Group:** Seek other parents or older children who are willing to help you and your child with homework. Make your home the homework center or develop a telephone tree to



make help available to all neighborhood children and their parents.

- ***Seek Consistency:*** Insist that all community agencies—social workers, school counselors, or juvenile officers—work together to develop a coordinated plan of support for your child.
- ***Be a Mentor:*** Volunteer to be a mentor and help children address needs not currently supported in school such as music, athletics, the arts, or even poetry.
- ***Make School Relevant:*** Push for activities where students can take part in their own learning by developing projects to address community needs.
- ***Vote:*** Vote in local school board elections and voice your opinion about what is working or not working in schools.

# Who can I contact for help?

You are not alone, there is help available.

## LOCAL:

1. Contact your local state education agency or your local school district.
2. Call or work with your local parent/teachers association.
3. Visit your local social service or mental health agency, if necessary.

## NATIONAL:

Call the following organizations, or go to their website, to find additional help, tips, or locate support groups in your area.

National Education Association

202-833-4000

<http://www.nea.org/parents>



National PTA  
(202) 289-6790  
<http://www.pta.org>

U.S. Department of Education  
1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327)  
<http://www.ed.gov/parents>

National Foster Parent Association  
(800) 557-5238  
<http://www.nfpainc.org>

Parents. The Anti-Drug  
1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)  
<http://www.theantidrug.com>

College Parents of America  
(888) 761-6702  
<http://www.collegeparents.org>

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