

*Questions Parents Ask About ...*

# Attendance



# Attendance Matters!

“It’s only one day!” Why is attendance all that important?

Studies show that school attendance is linked to school achievement. Learning builds day by day. And if children are not in class, they can’t do well in school. It’s that simple.

Absences mean students are missing out on learning—and teachers are missing out on teaching those students. When they return, students have to work harder to catch up—and teachers may have to disrupt current lessons to help them. Some students get overwhelmed and give up.

Following school attendance policies in elementary school is critical for preventing problems later on. One research study found that sixth graders who miss just one day of school a week have a 75 percent chance of never graduating!

Make every effort to get your child to school *on time every day*. Inside this booklet, you’ll find guidance and answers to questions many families ask about attendance.





*I wasn't very strict about attendance when my child was in preschool. Now my child is in kindergarten and sometimes asks to stay home and play. How can I reinforce the importance of attendance?*

In kindergarten, there is a much stricter attitude about attendance than there may have been in preschool. Elementary schools expect students to attend school every day unless they are sick or have a family emergency. Student absences will be tracked, and will likely require a written excuse. Unexcused absences may result in a follow-up call from the school.

Letting your child skip preschool sent confusing messages about attendance. To make sure your child understands that it is a priority in your family:

- » **Explain that your child will go to school every day.**  
Absences are only allowed if your child is sick or there is a family emergency.
- » **Show excitement** about what your child is learning.
- » **Avoid interrupting the school day.** Try to schedule doctor's appointments and vacations during non-school times.
- » **Help your child get enough rest** to be fresh for school the next day.

Positive habits begin early. And the most important school habit is regular attendance.



***My child always has a reason for wanting to stay home—a headache, a stomachache, a complaint that school is boring, etc. How can I make it clear that students can't skip school whenever they feel like it?***

It's normal for students to want to stay home—sometimes (especially if the bus stop is cold and the blankets are toasty). But don't let your child fall into the habit of thinking it's no big deal to miss school. It *is* a big deal! Students can't do their best in class if they're not actually *in* class.

To help your child develop positive attendance habits:

- » **Talk to your child.** Make sure there's no particular reason for wanting to stay home. Is your child afraid of being bullied? Struggling with a tough subject? If there is a reason, help tackle the problem. Start by making an appointment with teachers to discuss what to do.
- » **Question vague "symptoms."** Ask your child for specifics. If your child might really be ill, follow school protocols for handling illnesses.
- » **Set an example.** Do you ever call in sick to work when you're feeling fine? Your child takes cues about responsibility from you, so make sure you're sending the right message.
- » **Get organized.** Your child shouldn't be scrambling to find a toothbrush, schoolbag or cereal bowl every morning. Make it easy to get out the door by having your child organize everything the night before.
- » **Enforce a bedtime.** Overtired children are especially tough to rouse in the morning. So be sure your child gets to bed at an hour that allows for sufficient sleep.





*My child has been working really hard all weekend on a school project that's due tomorrow and is asking for an extra day to complete it. Should I allow my child to stay home—"just this once"—to get the best grade possible on the project?*

It is commendable that your child is striving for the best grade possible. But letting a student stay home “just this once,” can start a habit that will be hard to break.

Today’s busy students never seem to have enough time. Yet they each start the week with the same number of hours. No one can change that. An important way you *can* help is to teach your child to organize and use time wisely.

Start by having your child keep a log of daily activities—including time spent online, playing digital games, watching shows, etc. At the end of a week, check the log together. Is there room for change? Then help your child:

- » **Use a calendar.** Write down what’s due and when. For big projects, work backwards: Estimate how long each step of the project will take, then set deadlines for each step. Post the calendar in a prominent place. Check it every day.
- » **Use a planner.** Avoid surprises. At the start of every week, transfer items from the calendar to a weekly planner.
- » **Make a daily to-do list.** Check the planner every day and prioritize assignments. Don’t forget to schedule short breaks!

Don’t allow your child to miss school. Let your child turn the project in on the due date—and learn from getting a less than perfect grade that starting earlier next time is a smart idea.



***My child has watery eyes and a runny nose. Should I send my student to school?***

**Y**our child may be suffering from one of a number of contagious illnesses. Touching, sneezing or coughing on items, and even breathing—can spread the illness to others.

Although students have a responsibility to attend school every day, you also have a responsibility to make sure your child doesn't make other students sick. The school is concerned with the well-being of the entire community. To determine if you should send your child to school:

- » **Check the school's policy and guidelines.** When is a child considered too sick to go to school? Who needs to be notified? What testing is required? Will your child need clearance from a doctor to return to school?
- » **Check with your pediatrician** for specific medical advice.

Talk about ways to prevent spreading illnesses. Teach your child to:

- » **Wash hands frequently.** Use hand sanitizer when handwashing is not an option.
- » **Cover nose and mouth** when coughing.
- » **Follow recommendations** for interacting with others safely.
- » **Avoid sharing items.**



Attendance is very important, but you know your child best. If you think your child is feeling sick, it is important to follow school guidelines to care for your child and protect others.



*So far, this has not been a good year. My child is struggling in school, seems to have lost all motivation and is even asking to skip school on test days. I keep hearing, "I'm going to fail anyway." What can I do?*

**A**lthough it's not unusual for a student's schoolwork to suffer from time to time, it sounds like your child has started to give up. The first step toward a solution is to identify the problem. Here's how:

- » **Talk with your child** to find out what's really going on. Pick a quiet moment (bedtime is often a reflective time) and ask what your child thinks is causing struggles at school.
- » **Schedule a conference** with teachers. What has the teacher observed? Is your child struggling in a particular subject? Ask about your child's test grades. Is your child turning in all work? Identify specific areas of weakness. Ask how to reinforce at home what's being taught in school.

Next:

- » **Help your child set some achievable goals.** Remember to celebrate progress and success along the way.
- » **Monitor schoolwork.** Build structure into your child's study routine—same time, same place every day!
- » **Focus on the positive.** Don't say things like, "I guess math just isn't your subject. It wasn't mine, either." Instead, praise effort. "Your hard work is paying off!"

Students who attend class every day are more likely to do well on tests. Insist on daily attendance in all classes. Hard work and perseverance will lead to an improvement in your child's attitude and grades!



***I suspect my middle schooler is being teased at school. My child has always liked school, but now doesn't want to go. How can I find out what's really going on—and stop the bullying?***

**Y**ou are right to call the teasing what it is—bullying. While bullying can be physical—one or more students hurting another—it is more often verbal and includes persistent teasing, ridicule, gossiping, isolation and even threats. It can happen in person or online.

Parents are often the last to know that their child is being bullied. Most children just don't talk about it. Students who bully tend to make targeted kids feel unpopular and isolated. If your child is reluctant to talk about what is happening, ask some indirect and general questions, such as:

- » **“How do you spend your lunch period?”**
- » **“What's it like riding the bus home from school?”**
- » **“Are there kids at school who are mean?”**
- » **“Are there any kids who get picked on?”**

Once your child begins talking about the subject in general terms, it may be easier to talk about the situation at hand. If you learn that your child *is* being teased, be thoughtful in your reaction. Express how sorry you are.

Make it clear that bullying *is not your child's fault!* No one deserves to be bullied. Some children bully others as a way of showing off or making themselves look tough. Sometimes, they've been bullied themselves and they think intimidation is an effective way to handle problems.



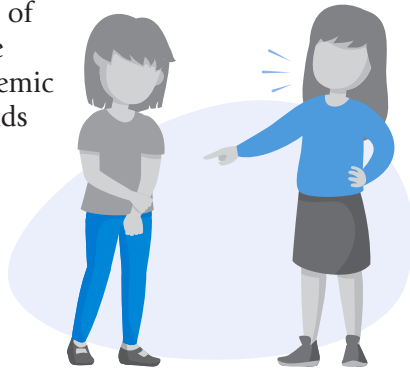
## Suggest ways to cope with bullying

Encourage your child to:

- » **Tell an adult.** Assure your child that it's not tattling to tell a teacher, the school counselor or the principal.
- » **Tell a friend.** It's tougher to pick on a person who has someone there for support.
- » **Say *no* and walk away.** It's harder to bully someone who won't stand still to listen.
- » **Stay calm.** Students who bully may be egged on when children react to their taunts. It's no fun to bully someone who doesn't seem to care.
- » **Keep a record.** Help your child keep track of what happens—dates, times, places. Write down exactly what the children who bully say and do.

If the bullying doesn't stop, arrange a meeting with the school. Students have a right to feel safe at school. Often a child bullies more than one person, so reporting the incident can help to prevent the child from bullying others.

Avoiding school because of bullying can have a negative impact on your child's academic success. Poor attendance leads to lower achievement, so it's important for you to take action.





*My child has a hard time getting up and out the door on school days—and often misses the bus. By the time we drive to school, the bell has already rung. My child is just not a morning person. Can you help?*

**Y**ou are right to be concerned. Tardies, like absences, are serious. It is your child's responsibility to arrive at school prepared and on time every day. And missing the bus is no excuse. Arriving late affects not only your child but also disrupts classmates' learning time.

To take control of morning chaos, establish routines—and stick to them! Here's how:

## Start the night before

The annoying thing about mornings is that they arrive so early. But look on the bright side: You and your child know they're coming, so you have plenty of time to prepare. Here are some things you can do:

- » **Make bedtime earlier** if your child has trouble getting up in the morning. Children ages 6-13 need 9-11 hours of sleep, and adolescents need 8-10. Decide when your child needs to go to bed to get that amount of sleep. Announce a time, then enforce it.
- » **Help your child lay out tomorrow's school clothes** before bedtime.
- » **Have your child help** pack a lunch at night and leave it in the fridge.
- » **Make sure your child** has packed a schoolbag with completed assignments, signed papers, library books—and everything else needed for school.

- » **Establish a “launch pad” by the door** for your child’s schoolbag, musical instrument, soccer cleats or anything else your child will need in the morning.
- » **Provide an alarm clock.** Give your child the responsibility of getting up in the morning in plenty of time to get dressed and ready for school.

## Make mornings successful

Create a morning routine. Follow a regular schedule for everything that your child needs to do—from getting up, eating and making the bed to walking out the door.

- » **Use a kitchen timer** to help with the countdown. Most children enjoy playing “beat the clock.” Your child can set the timer to ring when it’s time to be out of the bathroom, be dressed, sit down for breakfast, finish eating and get out the door.
- » **Allow time for a healthy breakfast—** unless your child eats one at school. There will, of course, be those occasional days when nothing seems to go right. Be prepared by keeping nutritious foods on hand that your child can eat in a hurry.
- » **Don’t simply say, “Hurry up!”** Instead, ask your child, “What do you need to do next?” Give physical cues, like handing your child a hairbrush.
- » **Don’t forget** to send your child off on a positive note. Say, “Have a great day. I love you!”





***What if a child simply refuses to go to school? Mine cries and clings to me when it's time to leave the house—and then again when we get to school. Every morning is a battle. What can I do?***

**S**chool avoidance can occur for a number of reasons, including anxiety about:

- » Riding the bus.
- » Using the school bathroom.
- » Reading aloud in class.
- » Being disciplined by the teacher.
- » Being separated from parents.
- » Something terrible happening at home.

Try to determine the specific reason for your child's anxiety. Your child may even feel a sense of relief just talking about worries.

Then talk to the teacher, school counselor or school psychologist about developing a plan to solve the problem. You might start by having another family member bring your child to school.

But be sure to keep your child in school. If you "rescue" your child by allowing absences, you will only reinforce the anxiety. (If you decide to keep your child home? No recreational screen time, fun snacks, etc. Staying home should not be more fun than going to school.)



*Our family recently moved and our child is attending a new school. Despite being a good student, our child now dislikes going to school and complains about not having any friends. Of course, we can't let our child stay home, but how can we help?*

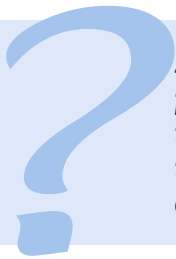
**M**oving from preschool to kindergarten, from elementary school to middle school, from middle school to high school, or to school in a new neighborhood—these transitions come with unique anxieties and challenges.

Let your child know you understand it can be lonely to be the new student. Say that even adults feel uncomfortable in new situations. Assure your child of your support, and try these ideas for helping your child connect with the new school:

- » **Encourage your child** to smile and be friendly. Offer this challenge: “How many people can you say ‘hi’ to each day?”
- » **Explain that everyone likes to be asked** about their interests. Help your child think of questions to ask: “Do you play any sports?” “What’s your favorite movie?”
- » **Encourage your child to join activities.** Does your child like to sing or play soccer? Kids can usually find friends in clubs or on the sports field. Be sure your child compliments teammates: “Nice shot!”
- » **Have your child invite a classmate** to play or study together.



Friendships are important to children. If making friends still seems very difficult for your child, talk with the teacher about ways you can work together to improve the situation.



*Spring break is approaching, and we've made plans for a much-needed family vacation. We will need to take our child out of school for a few extra days. The teacher has already sent a letter reminding everyone of the school attendance policy. What should we do?*

**T**here are legitimate reasons for families to take their children out of school, such as medical emergencies or a death in the family. Most school attendance policies expect families to schedule vacations and even medical appointments during non-school times.

Remember that many in-class opportunities can't be "made up" when your child returns to school. For example, a great class discussion or a science experiment can't be recreated. But if a trip is truly unavoidable:

- » **Talk to your child's teachers.** Find out exactly what is acceptable. What are consequences for turning work in late?
- » **Ask if your child can get classwork** from the teacher in advance. Keep in mind that teachers are busy and this may not be possible.
- » **Make sure you know exactly** what assignments your child has—and when they're due.
- » **See if your child can submit work online.**



*Remember: Learning builds day by day.  
A child who misses a day of school also  
misses a day of learning.*

*So make school a top priority. By building  
the habit of daily attendance, you'll help your  
child see that school is serious. And chances  
are you'll also see an improvement in grades.*

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