

When your anxious child refuses to attend school

Most likely the most troublesome aspect for parents whose children are suffering from anxiety is their refusal to go to school. Children will ask to stay home and ask, whine, or beg you to be able to stay home with you and not go to school. Your child will complain that the teacher is “mean” to them, the other kids “make fun of me”, or they will complain of a stomach ache or a headache. Psychosomatic complaints, are common in children and their anxiety is manifested through their physical complaints. Once your child learns that they can use begging, crying, or physical symptoms to get out of school, it becomes very hard to get them to return to school.

First and foremost, the main problem with your child not going to school is that they get behind in their school work very quickly. The homework piles up and they will find it very difficult to “catch up.” In addition, your child who already probably has a difficult time making or keeping friends, is missing out on developing relationships with their peers at school. The longer your child misses school, the harder it is to get back into “the swing of things” and they will be less confident on returning to school.

As a parent this is how you can help your anxious child who does not want to go back to school. There are several techniques that you can use to get them back in school and sometimes more than approach will need to be used in order to be successful. First, use your child’s friends or siblings that attend the same school to help you. You as a parent, may want to volunteer some time at your child’s school in order to encourage your child to stay in school for the entire day. School personnel can be of great assistance to talk to your child or a social worker, therapist, or the school psychologist can help allay some of your child’s fears. You may have to go to your child’s school at lunch or snack time to talk to them or you may have to give them a reward for staying at school for the entire day. Of course, rewards for younger and older children will be different and you as the parent have to reward them with whatever works. Within reason of course! Even children can spot a bribe!

Above all, use positive reinforcement with a child that has anxiety. Any time that you see your child making an effort to get up to go to school, completing their homework, staying at school for the entire day, make a big deal about this and praise them. Using positive reinforcement gives the child something to think about that is positive instead of hearing what they are doing wrong all the time. Parents that reinforce their children positively when they are doing something good, have more confident and assured children.

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