



PSYCHOLOGISTS & COUNSELLORS

IS YOUR CHILD OR ADOLESCENT REFUSING TO GO TO SCHOOL?

Definition of school refusal/phobia – not to be confused with school truancy which is failure to attend school. - Children and adolescents refusing to attend school usually exhibit symptoms of anxiety about attendance and may develop abdominal pain, nausea or other physical complaints before the time to go to school. Adolescents may exhibit defiant type behaviours including truancy a refusing to follow parent rules

It is likely that some traumatic incident or threatening and stressful demands for academic or social performance induce the fear. When school becomes threatening or aversive, the child may seek refuge and protection at home.

Prevalence

School refusal is quite common. There are times in every child's life when they may refuse to go to school. Its only when the time lapse becomes frequent that parents need to seek professional advice as there may be an underlying reason for their refusal to attend school

Research has found that there are a number of reasons for children and adolescents refusing to attend school. These reasons can include anxiety, bullying, learning difficulties, not fitting in at school or problems at home (such as sickness or loss of a family member, recent divorce/separation etc)

Many parents frequently ask what can be done when their child or teenager refuses to attend school. First of all don't panic. If the problem is ongoing it may be wise to seek out professionals such as a psychologist who is specialised in these issues. The psychologist would assess the child's/teenager's motives through counseling and collaboration with the school. Psychologists would then develop an intervention plan depending on the needs of the child which can be implemented in the home as well as in the school. Generally a cognitive-behavioural program is implemented or other programs that may be applicable to the needs of the child

Parents have an obligation to make sure their child attend school. If a child is under the age of 14 years 9 months parents are obliged to make sure their children are enrolled and attend school. If children do not attend school it is the responsibility of the parents. Hefty fines into the thousands of dollars can be imposed to parents of children who refuse to attend school

There is Support for Parents

These include special teachers who come to homes and pick children. Most schools refer children with frequent absences from school to these teachers. This is only a short term solution as these children may require more specific help

Tips on how to get students to go to school

Look at your own skills in setting limits- are they consistent? Are they age appropriate?
Discuss these with other parents or with a professional. It may be worthwhile to consider the following suggestions:

Removal of reinforcers for staying home – watching TV, play a favorite game, staying close to mother or engaging in other pleasurable activities,
Desensitization of fear through role playing etc,
Matter-of-fact parental statements that the child will go back to school and avoiding lengthy or emotional discussions,
Reinforcements for attending school for a certain length of time to begin with..

RED LIGHT- WARNING

Remember when there is a sudden change in behaviour in children or adolescents it may be time to seek help. You need to seek professional assistance. Failure to do so may lead to more severe problems with time if not resolved.

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