

Spotting School Problems Early: What to Watch, Ask, and Record

A school concern is easier to understand when families notice it early and gather clear information. One hard day does not always mean there is a larger problem. Look for a change that repeats, grows, or begins to affect the child at home or at school.

Watch several areas instead of focusing on one sign. Notice changes in mood, sleep, attendance, grades, homework, behavior, friendships, and physical complaints such as repeated headaches or stomachaches. Write down what you directly observe, including when it happens and how long it lasts.

Talk with your child calmly. Use short questions such as, “What part of the day feels hardest?” or, “What happened before you felt upset?” Listen without interrupting or turning the conversation into an interview. Record the child's exact words when they may help explain the concern.

Keep facts and reports separate. “My child cried before school three mornings this week” is a direct observation. “My child said another student pushed them” is reported information that still needs follow-up. Avoid guessing about causes or labeling the child, another student, or a staff member.

Contact the person closest to the concern and ask for specific school observations. Ask what happened, how often it has happened, when it occurs, and whether it appears to be one event or a pattern. Compare home and school information before deciding what the problem may be.

Record how the concern affects learning, attendance, safety, behavior, health, or well-being. Agree on one reasonable next step and a follow-up date. Contact the teacher, counselor, school nurse, pediatrician, or another appropriate professional when the pattern continues, becomes more serious, or involves safety.

Did You Know?

- ✓ The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends asking for specific examples, including how often a school problem happens and whether it is an isolated event or a repeated pattern.¹
- ✓ The American Academy of Pediatrics explains that an occasional school struggle can be normal, but a continuing pattern may involve academic, behavioral, health, emotional, or social factors that deserve closer attention.²
- ✓ The CDC says regular conversations and active listening can help children share their thoughts and feelings without interruption.³

Research Sources

1. American Academy of Pediatrics. ["Dealing with Problems at School: How to Talk With Your Child's Teacher."](#)
2. American Academy of Pediatrics. ["What to Do If Your Child Is Falling Behind in School."](#)
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. ["Conversation Tips for Connecting Conversations."](#) November 29, 2024.

Early School Concern Observation Log

Use this log to separate direct observations from reported information, identify a possible pattern, and prepare one clear next step with the school or another appropriate professional.

Parent/caregiver: _____	Date started: _____
Child: _____	School/grade: _____

1. Record the Event or Change

Date/time: _____ School day or situation: _____

Direct parent observation: _____

Child's exact words: _____

Information reported by teacher, staff, or another person: _____

2. Areas to Watch

☐ Mood ☐ Sleep ☐ Attendance ☐ Grades/learning ☐ Homework

☐ Behavior ☐ Friendships ☐ Physical complaint ☐ Safety concern

Specific change or concern: _____

3. Isolated Event or Pattern?

How often has this happened? _____ First noticed: _____

☐ One event ☐ Repeated pattern ☐ Increasing ☐ Improving ☐ Unsure

When or where does it usually happen? _____

4. Effect on the Child

Effect on learning or grades: _____

Effect on attendance, behavior, health, safety, friendships, or well-being: _____

5. Contact, Action, and Follow-Up

Person contacted and date: _____

School or professional response: _____

Agreed action and person responsible: _____

Follow-up date: _____ Result: _____