

What to Do When Your Child Says, “I Don’t Want to Go to School”

A child may say, “I don’t want to go to school,” after one hard day or because a problem keeps returning. Do not guess at the reason. Slow down, listen, and find out what your child means before deciding what to do next.

Ask short, specific questions. Try, “What part of school feels hardest?” “When did this start?” or “Does it happen in one class, at lunch, on the bus, or all day?” Listen for concerns about schoolwork, friends, adults, routines, bathrooms, bullying, or safety.

Notice the pattern. Write down the child’s exact words, physical complaints, the time they appear, and what happens on weekends or non-school days. Headaches and stomachaches deserve attention. A healthcare professional can help check for illness and discuss stress that may be affecting the body.

Validate the feeling without immediately removing the school expectation. You might say, “I believe that this feels hard. We will find out what is happening and make a plan.” Keep the morning calm and avoid a long argument while the child is highly upset.

Share repeated concerns with the school. The teacher, counselor, nurse, or another trusted adult may notice a learning problem, peer conflict, safety issue, or difficult part of the day. Ask what the school has observed and agree on one clear next step and a follow-up date.

Get added help when the pattern continues, the child misses school repeatedly, physical complaints keep returning, or there is a concern about bullying, harm, severe fear, or mental health. Contact the child’s healthcare professional and appropriate school staff. Urgent safety concerns require prompt action.

Did You Know?

- ✓ The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends talking with the child about the exact reason for avoiding school and working with the child’s doctor and school when the problem continues.¹
- ✓ The American Academy of Pediatrics notes that repeated absences can be connected to health, learning, emotional, bullying, or school-climate concerns that need closer attention.²
- ✓ The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry explains that persistent school refusal may involve physical complaints, separation fears, bullying, learning problems, or other concerns and often requires family, school, and professional teamwork.³

Research Sources

1. American Academy of Pediatrics. [“School Avoidance: Tips for Concerned Parents.”](#) HealthyChildren.org. Updated September 26, 2024.
2. American Academy of Pediatrics Council on School Health. [“School Attendance, Truancy & Chronic Absenteeism: What Parents Need to Know.”](#) HealthyChildren.org. Updated October 10, 2024.
3. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. [“School Refusal.”](#) Facts for Families No. 7. Updated June 2018.

School Reluctance Observation and Response Sheet

Use this sheet to record what your child says, look for patterns, and coordinate one clear next step. This form supports observation and communication; it does not diagnose the cause.

Child's name: _____	Date: _____
School/day situation: _____	Follow-up date: _____
1. Record the Child's Exact Words Child's exact words: _____ When/where: _____ _____	
2. Identify the Reported Feeling or Worry Feeling named by the child: _____ Specific worry or hardest part: _____ _____ Physical complaint, if any: _____ Time it appeared: _____ _____	
3. Check Possible Areas Without Assuming a Cause Academic: _____ Peer or bullying: _____ Adult: _____ Routine or transition: _____ Health or physical: _____ Transportation: _____ Bathroom or food: _____ Safety: _____ Other observation: _____ _____	
4. Look for a Pattern One difficult day / repeated pattern / unsure: _____ Similar concern before? _____ Attendance affected? _____	

Different on weekends or non-school days? _____ Parent response:

5. Coordinate and Follow Up

School contact and information received:

Next step: _____ Person: _____ Follow-up: _____

Seek prompt help for safety concerns. Contact appropriate school staff and the child's healthcare professional when concerns continue or symptoms interfere with daily life.