
SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PROBLEMS

— How to Seek and Obtain Help for —
Your Child

Not Legal Advice

— The information provided in this powerpoint does not constitute legal advice and should not be used as a substitution for legal advice. —

Does your child have a problem with school attendance that requires help?

School attendance problems can present in many different ways, including:

- A child who is often or regularly absent from school
- A child who leaves school early or arrives late
- A child who attends school, but only with extreme distress or only after significant resistance
- A child who goes to school, but often cuts classes

If you have concerns about your child's ability to attend school, act quickly to address your concerns.

- Resist the temptation to rationalize that your child is just going through a stage and will grow out of this behavior. The longer school refusal persists, the more difficult it is to address.
- Moreover, the consequences can be significant in the long term, including a greater likelihood of dropping out of high school and experiencing negative adult outcomes, such as poverty, poor physical and mental health, substance abuse and criminal justice involvement.

First, seek help to determine why your child is experiencing school attendance problems.

Consult with:

- Medical doctors to rule out a physical condition
- Mental health professionals to diagnose and prescribe a plan of treatment
- Your child's teachers
- Other school personnel, such as social workers, school psychologists and administrators

There could be many possible reasons for your child's problem.

For example:

- Anxiety based disorders
- Bullying
- Unaddressed educational needs
- Extensive peer pressure encouraging truancy, substance abuse and/or gang involvement
- Negative school environment
- Highly punitive disciplinary practices
- Parental or societal challenges

Your child may qualify for special education and/or accommodations to address school attendance issues.

- You have the right to request evaluations and a CSE meeting to determine eligibility or the need for special education services to facilitate your child's access to education.
- You have the right to share your private evaluations with the school for their consideration.
- If your child qualifies for special education services, the CSE must provide an appropriate educational placement for your child.

If bullying is an issue, your child has the right to be safe at school and free of harassment.

- Among other possible legal remedies, you can make a complaint under the Dignity for All Students Act (DASA), and/or also seek help from the CSE or 504 Committee.
- p12.nysed.gov/dignityact/

Even if your child is not eligible for special education services, you should act quickly to address attendance problems and you have the right to seek help from the school.

Focus on ways to improve the school climate and alleviate the pressures on your child that are interfering with attendance.

- Mentorship
- Anti-bullying and harassment programs
- Extracurricular programs
- Counseling
- Gang intervention programs
- Substance abuse programs
- Positive reinforcement plans
- Restorative practices rather than out of school suspensions
- Improving school curricula
- Career and technical education