

School Avoidance

Definition

- Healthy children who miss lots of school
- They stay home because of vague physical symptoms
- Also called school phobia

Health Information

Symptoms

- Stomachaches and headaches are the most common symptoms.
- Symptoms mainly occur in the morning. They worsen when it's time to leave for school.
- The child seems healthy at other times.
- She checks out normal with her doctor.

Cause

- The child finds it hard to be away from the parents. This is called separation anxiety. It's like homesickness.
- A school-phobic child usually is very close to her parents.
- One of the parents also may be a little overprotective.

Care Advice

1. **Insist Your Child Goes to School on a Regular Basis:**
 - The best treatment for school phobia is to be in school every day. Fears are overcome by facing them as soon as possible.
 - Be positive with your child. Assure her that she will feel better after she gets to school.
2. **Be Extra Firm on School Mornings:**
 - At the start, mornings may be a hard time (especially Mondays).
 - Never ask your child how she feels because she will want to complain.
 - If well enough to be up moving around, she can go to school.
 - If your child complains of the usual symptoms, send her to school. She should be sent to school without much discussion. Going to school must be a strict rule.
3. **See the Doctor When Staying Home:**
 - If your child has a new symptom or seems quite sick, keep her home.
 - Call your doctor's office as soon as it opens. Try to have her seen that morning.
 - If the symptom is caused by a disease, correct treatment can be started.
 - If the symptom is from school phobia, she can go along to school. Ideally, this is the same day and before noon.
4. **Ask the School For Help:**
 - Schools are usually very understanding about school phobia because it is a common problem.
 - If your child has special fears, the teacher will usually make special allowances. An example of this fear is talking in front of the class.
 - If the symptoms act up, ask the school to allow your child to lie down. Laying down for 10 minutes will help her regroup. This can be an option rather than sending her home.

5. **Talk With Your Child About School Fears:**

- At a time other than school mornings, talk with your child about her problems.
- Help her to tell you exactly what upsets her.
- If there's a situation you can change, tell her you will work on it. While you address the problem, she must still go to school.

6. **What to Expect:**

- If daily school attendance is enforced, symptoms in most children will go away. They will be much improved in 1 or 2 weeks.
- Symptoms may recur after summer or other vacations. This requires the parents to put the tough love treatment plan back in effect.

Call Your Doctor If

- Your child's symptoms do not go away
- School attendance does not become normal
- You think your child needs to be seen

Pediatric Care Advice

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