

School Attendance Questions Asked by Parents

What am I supposed to do when my child is too sick to go to school, but I cannot get a doctor's appointment?

Five (5) parent notes can be used during the year to have an absence excused. One note is good for one day of absence. The note needs to state the child's name, the valid reason for absence, the date of absence and be signed by the parent or guardian. The note must be turned in to the school within three (3) days for the absence to be excused. Notes turned in after three (3) days will not be accepted, and the absence will be unexcused.

My child seems to catch every bug that goes around. We spend a lot of time in the doctor's office. Are all these absences excused?

Yes. If your child visits the doctor, get a doctor's note. Turn the note in to the school within three (3) days. If the child has the note and forgets to turn it in, the parent is responsible. Most doctors now fax notes directly to the school. Appointments for non-emergency situations should be scheduled after school or during school vacations if possible.

When my child wakes up complaining of feeling ill but gets to feeling better, should I keep the child at home or take him on to school?

Take the child to school. Alert the school nurse or teacher that the child was feeling ill earlier in the day. One rule of thumb says if the child does not have a fever, rash, diarrhea, or vomiting, take the child to school. Of course the parent knows the child best.

My child does not want to go to school. I am tired of fighting with him every day about going to school. What can I do?

Don't fight. Be firm. Let your child know that absenteeism is not an option. Talk to your child. Try to find out why he doesn't want to go to school. Talk to the school. Work together to find a solution. Let the child be involved in the process. Take action. Your child may need more supervision, after-school tutoring, counseling, an evaluation to determine if he or she has a learning disability, or help with an alcohol or other drug problem. Your child may be experiencing a problem with bullying or harassment at school. The school counselor may be of great assistance. The child may have a medical problem. However, the problem may be as simple as the child not getting enough sleep at night. Perhaps the child is being influenced by his peers. Know your child's friends. Don't give up, and don't give in!

If my child is suspended from the bus, I have no way of getting him to school. Is this an excused absence?

No. Bus transportation is a privilege. Students must be taught to behave on the bus and follow bus rules. The parent is responsible for getting the child to school.

I am a single parent. My child is larger than I. When he refuses to go to school, I cannot drag him. What can I do?

No matter how large the child, the parent is the one who is responsible for making sure the child is in school. The parent is the boss. If a child is unruly and the parent has tried all available options, the juvenile court can intervene. A parent can file an unruly petition with the court, and the child will be required to appear before the juvenile judge. Also, the parent may request crisis intervention services from the Department of Children's Services. Counseling services are available locally to assist families. Parent Project and other parenting classes are available to help parents develop strategies to deal with children.

My child may have surgery and be required to miss several weeks of school. What should I do?

If you can schedule your child's surgery during summer vacation or a school break, do so. If not, discuss the situation with the school principal and the child's teacher. Contact the school system's office of special services to request a homebound teacher. When your child returns to school, have letters from the doctor to share with school personnel if the student is to have any modifications to a regular schedule. Also, alert the school nurse to the student's condition.

What are valid reasons for being absent from school?

Valid reasons for being absent from school include student illness, death in the family, religious holidays, court appearance, and appointments with counselor, dentist, or doctor.

What happens if a child is referred to Juvenile Court for truancy?

Parents and the school need to work together so that court involvement is the last resort. In the past we have seen a variety of consequences for truancy including the assignment of up to six hours of public service work for each day missed, fines up to \$50 for each day of unexcused absence, the assignment of a DCS counselor, and payment of court costs. Parents have been required to take parenting classes, obtain counseling, and in rare cases, parents have been sent to jail. For older students, poor attendance can also result in the revocation of a student's driver's license. In addition, high school students with excessive absences must make up time or risk losing credit for classes.

If the school nurse calls and asks that I pick up my child because he is sick, does this count as unexcused?

No. This will be an excused sign out.

We have difficulty paying for the things my child needs. Sometimes she doesn't want to go to school because of this. What can I do?

Make sure you talk to the cafeteria manager and fill out a form to receive free or reduced meals at school. This information is confidential.

The school counselor will provide school supplies for the student. In addition, the school social worker can put families in touch with resources to help during difficult times.

School nurses may be able to help provide medical information and resources.

My child does not feel safe at school. I can't get her to tell me the problem.

Sometimes it is difficult for children to share their feelings. Sometimes they are fearful and can't explain or pinpoint the cause of their anxiety. Many times these feelings disappear or the child learns how to cope with fears. However, the counselor should be contacted. The counselor is trained to handle these situations and will be observant and try to get to the bottom of these feelings.

My child has been sent home from school because of nits. It is expensive to keep treating the child. We try hard but don't seem to be able to get rid of the nits.

What can we do?

We understand. Getting rid of nits can be expensive and time consuming. The school nurse is an expert. She can provide you with resources and information to help you.

My child doesn't make good grades. He doesn't want to go to school because he is embarrassed. What can I do?

It is important to keep encouraging the student. Bad attendance makes it more difficult to do well in school. Contact the teacher. Ask for specific things you and your child can do to improve his grades. Talk with the school counselor. Schools have programs to help students become more successful. Some schools have tutoring programs before and/or after school, computer-assisted programs, and student tutors or mentors. Some teachers will tutor students. The high school has credit recovery. Some summer programs may be available. Since each school is different, your counselor will be able to direct you.

If my child goes on a field trip, is she excused?

Yes. The trip will be school related. In effect, the child is counted present for school.

What general advice can you give me to help me with my child?

- Keep in touch with your child's school.
- Set high expectations for your child.
- Make education a top priority.
- Be supportive. Offer encouragement and praise.
- Teach your child to accept responsibility and realize that actions have consequences. (Don't make excuses or allow your child to make excuses.)
- Don't let there be any confusion over who is in charge. The child is not the boss. Teach your child to respect authority.
- Relax, be patient, love the child, and enjoy this time in your life.