

Techniques to Modify a Behavior

Predetermined Consequences

Effective for children who try to gain parents' attention:

- Loss of time or attention from the parent
- Time out
- Going to bed early

Not effective:

- Yelling
- Arguing
- Physical punishment

Think Realistically

Distress comes from worrying unrealistically about situations. The child needs to change "worst-case scenario" thoughts into thoughts of what is actually happening and what is likely to happen. The acronym S.T.O.P. provides guidelines to help refocus thoughts.

S: Am I **Scared** or nervous?

T: What **Thoughts** am I having in this situation?

O: What **Other**, more realistic thoughts can I have?

P: **Praise** myself for thinking more realistically

(Cited by Kearney, 2007; adapted from Silverman & Kurtines, 1996).

Tangible (Non-food) Incentives

Offer rewards to a child who wants to skip school to gain attention:

- Give the child an opportunity to make money
- Reward with a small gift, such as a DVD or music

Breathing Exercises

- Find a comfortable seat
- With the mouth closed, breathe long, deep breaths in through the nose
- Slowly release the air from the mouth

Ignore Inappropriate Behaviors

Children who miss school because they want attention will often act out.

Ignore:

- Temper tantrums
- Deliberate slow downs (dawdling)

Techniques to Modify a Behavior

Morning Routine

A morning routine should be organized, unhurried, and composed.

- Engage every adult in the household who deals with the morning routine in the planning
- Add extra time to the routine in order to deal with unexpected situations
- Put the plan in writing with specific and clear expectations for the child
- Replace arguing and yelling with predetermined rewards and consequences
- Reward the child when he or she sticks to the routine without complaining
- Deal predetermined consequences to the youth who does not complete a task as specified

Muscle Relaxation

For those students who miss school due to distress or in order to avoid a performance situation try muscle relaxation techniques. The steps are:

- Flex the muscles where you feel the most stress
- Contract those muscles even harder
- Hold that contraction for 10 seconds
- Quickly release
- Repeat

Additional Resources

- Improving academic achievement of students with problematic attendance – eric # ED512064 by Kay, James Edward
- Getting your child to say "yes" to school by Kearney, Christopher

Is Your Child Missing School?



Straight Answers: How to get your child to attend school

How to Motivate Your Child to Attend School

If your child is refusing to attend school, there are things you can do at home to help.

The reason your child is missing school is most likely one of the following:

1. Feeling general distress
2. Avoiding social or performance situations
3. Gaining attention (even negative)
4. Having fun instead of going to school

First, answer the following questions:

- From the list above, which is the most common reason your child misses school?
- Why do you believe your child doesn't want to go to school?

Each reason for missing school can be overcome. The behavior can be modified. The table to the right provides strategies to help your child make better decisions. Different strategies work for different causes.



Choose the reason you believe your child is missing school. Follow that column to find some proven strategies for overcoming each type of school refusal. More details about each strategy can be found later in this pamphlet.

| Have Fun | Gain Attention | Avoid Social/ Performance | General Distress | |
|----------|----------------|------------------------------|------------------|---|
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Use a written contract |
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Do not fight or argue |
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Gradually increase the amount of time they are attending school |
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Return the student to school |
| | | ✓ | ✓ | Breathing techniques |
| | | ✓ | ✓ | Muscle relaxation techniques |
| ✓ | | | | Monitor the child's whereabouts |
| | ✓ | | | Use small (non food) rewards |
| | ✓ | | | Ignore inappropriate behaviors |
| | | ✓ | | Set a morning routine |
| | | ✓ | | Think realistically about a situation |

Specific Answers for Each Type of School Refusal

General Distress

Don't say:

- "Don't worry."
- "Stop it!"
- "You shouldn't be scared."
- "You're faking it."

Do Say:

- "Relax. Breathe in through your nose, out through your mouth."
- "Loosen up. Try to tense your muscles then relax them."

Avoid Social or Performance Situations

Do Say:

- "You need to see the situation as it really is. Embarrassment is temporary."
- "Go to school now and we'll talk about this tonight."

Gain Attention (Even if It Is Negative)

- Don't answer the child's request to miss school more than once.
- Tell them *no* one time.

Having Fun Instead of Going to School

Monitor your child's whereabouts:

- Cell phones can track a person's movements.
- Know the phone numbers and addresses of your child's friends.
- Know the phone numbers of their friends' parent(s).
- Search your child's room.
- Search inside electrical equipment.
- View cell phone text messages and photos.