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## School Refusal

School refusal describes the disorder of a child who refuses to go to school on a regular basis or has problems staying in school.

### Symptoms

Children with school refusal may complain of physical symptoms shortly before it is time to leave for school or repeatedly ask to visit the school nurse. If the child is allowed to stay home, the symptoms quickly disappear, only to reappear the next morning. In some cases a child may refuse to leave the house.

Common physical symptoms include headaches, stomachaches, nausea, or diarrhea. But tantrums, inflexibility, separation anxiety, avoidance, and defiance may show up, too.

### Reasons

Starting school, moving, and other stressful life events may trigger the onset of school refusal. Other reasons include the child's fear that something will happen to a parent after he is in school, fear that she won't do well in school, or fear of another student.

Often a symptom of a deeper problem, anxiety-based school refusal affects 2 to 5 percent of school-age children. It commonly takes place between the ages of five and six and between ten and eleven, and at times of transition, such as entering middle and high school.

Children who suffer from school refusal tend to have average or above-average intelligence. But they may develop serious educational or social problems if their fears and anxiety keep them away from school and friends for any length of time.

- [Related: When Kids Refuse to Go to School \(http://www.huffingtonpost.com/debra-kissen/when-kids-refuse-to-go-to-school\\_b\\_4483268.html\)](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/debra-kissen/when-kids-refuse-to-go-to-school_b_4483268.html)

### What Parents Can Do





# SCHOOL REFUSAL



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*"The most important thing a parent can do is obtain a comprehensive evaluation from a mental health professional."\**

This evaluation will reveal the reasons behind the school refusal and can help determine what kind of treatment will be best. Your child's pediatrician should be able to recommend a mental health professional in your area who works with children.

## WHAT PARENTS CAN DO:

Expose children to school in small degrees, increasing exposure slowly over time. Eventually this will help them realize there is nothing to fear and that nothing bad will happen.



Talk with your child about feelings and fears, which helps reduce them.



Arrange an informal meeting with your child's teacher away from the classroom.



Emphasize the positive aspects of going to school: being with friends, learning a favorite subject, and playing at recess.



Try self-help methods with your child. In addition to a therapist's recommendations, a good self-help book will provide relaxation techniques. Be open to new ideas so that your child is, too.



Meet with the school counselor for extra support and direction.



Encourage hobbies and interests. Fun is relaxation, and hobbies are good distractions that help build self-confidence.



Help your child establish a support system. A variety of people should be in your child's life—other children as well as family members or teachers who are willing to talk with your child should the occasion arise.



\*former ADAA board member, Daniel Pine, MD. - National Institute of Mental Health

- [Find out more about children's anxiety disorders. \(http://www.adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/children/childhood-anxiety-disorders\)](http://www.adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/children/childhood-anxiety-disorders)

## ADAA Overview

About ADAA (<https://www.adaa.org/about-adaa>)

Mission & History (</about-adaa/mission-history>)

ADAA Board & Committees (<https://www.adaa.org/about-adaa/people>)

ADAA Staff (<https://www.adaa.org/about-adaa/people/staff>)

ADAA in the News (<https://www.adaa.org/adaa-in-the-news>)

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## Press Room

ADAA In The News (<https://www.adaa.org/node/2628>)

News & Updates (</about-adaa/press-room/news-updates>)

Position Papers (<https://www.adaa.org/about-adaa/position-papers>)

Fact & Statistics (</about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics>)

Press Releases (</about-adaa/press-room/press-releases>)

Multimedia (</about-adaa/press-room/multimedia>)

Media Inquiries (<https://www.adaa.org/node/2611>)

## FAQ

Do I have an anxiety disorder? (</living-with-anxiety/ask-and-learn/faqs#n16>)

What causes anxiety disorders? (</living-with-anxiety/ask-and-learn/faqs#n17>)

How do I find the right health professional? (</living-with-anxiety/ask-and-learn/faqs#n20>)

More FAQs (</living-with-anxiety/ask-and-learn/faqs>)

## Contact ADAA

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Please note: ADAA is not a direct service organization.

Contact Information (<https://www.adaa.org/contact-adaa>)

Media Inquiries (<mailto:lbram@adaa.org>)

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