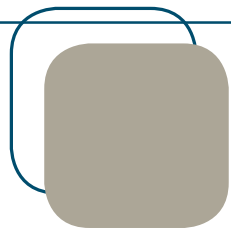
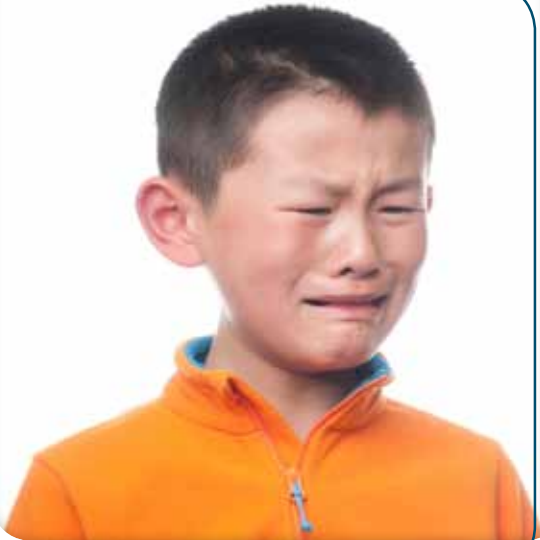


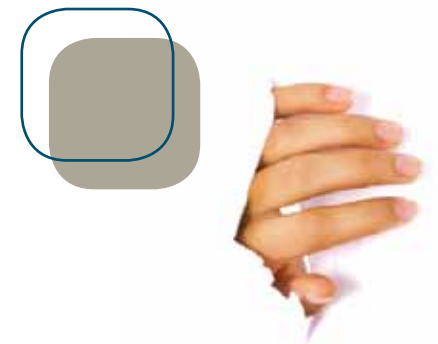
## Where To Get Help

If your child has not yet seen a doctor and you suspect that he is showing signs of school refusal, you may raise your concerns with your child's school counsellors. School counsellors are connected to our community mental health service, **REACH** (Response, Early intervention, Assessment in Community mental Health), which can provide further advice and assistance.

If your child is seeking help at our clinic, please raise your concerns with your child's doctor, nurse, or allied health professional.



# SCHOOL REFUSAL



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# WHAT IS SCHOOL REFUSAL?

*School refusal describes a child's or an adolescent's frequent refusal to attend school for a significant period and for various reasons. School refusal differs from truancy, in which the child or adolescent deliberately skips school, usually without parental knowledge and to engage in delinquent activities. School refusal is often a concern because it affects the child or adolescent's school performance and relationships with peers and family.*



Apart from refusing to attend school, common symptoms that might surface or worsen before it is time to leave for school include:

- physical complaints such as headaches, stomachaches, nausea, vomiting or fainting
- feelings of worry, nervousness, fear, irritability or anger
- behaviours such as crying, screaming, temper tantrums, refusing to get out of bed, clinging to caregivers, avoiding school-related topics or activities or threatening self-harm

After a prolonged period of school refusal, some children or adolescents may start worrying about their ability to catch up on schoolwork, as well as awkward questions that teachers or classmates may ask, and struggle to return to a routine of regular school attendance.

## What Causes School Refusal?

School refusal may have many causes. In some cases, the underlying reason could be a mental health disorder, such as anxiety, depression or addiction. In other cases, the underlying reason(s) may be related to one or more of the following:

- avoidance of specific fears, e.g. germs, school bell
- avoidance of school performance situations, e.g. tests, examinations, presentations, sports events
- avoidance of teacher or peer interactions, e.g. bullying, group work
- anxiety over separation from caregivers
- desire to spend more time with caregivers
- inconsistent parenting styles
- changes or stress in the family environment
- desire for rewards outside school, e.g. access to television, video or Internet games, more rest time at home



# MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOL REFUSAL

The management plan for supporting a child or adolescent with school refusal depends on the underlying reason for the condition. Where a mental health disorder is present, the recommended treatment may include medication, psychological therapy or both, in addition to a back-to-school plan. In most instances, the primary goal is for the child or adolescent to return to school. This is best achieved with close collaboration among the child, his or her parents, the school and other relevant agencies.

## TYPICAL BACK-TO-SCHOOL PLAN

- bring your child to a General Practitioner (GP) to rule out any medical problems
  - approach the school to develop a back-to-school plan together with any other external agencies that are involved
- This plan consists of the roles and responsibilities of the child, parents, school and external agencies. Be specific about the terms and conditions of the plan.
- carry out the back-to-school plan and reviewing it at regular intervals
  - keep calm and being prepared for your child's challenging behaviours to worsen during the early stages of the plan
- Keep your child safe, but at the same time be firm and see the plan through.

## GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

- structure your child's daily routine and spelling out the preparation required before bedtime (e.g. "Pack your schoolbag") and the morning routine (e.g. "Wake up at 6:30 am")
  - state instructions for expected behaviours
- Instructions should be short, clear, specific and without options. Communicate to your child clearly and calmly the details of the plan and what is expected of him or her.
- remain assertive as the parent
- Your child may try to negotiate the terms of the back-to-school plan. Although some leeway may be helpful (e.g. allowing your child to choose a reward at the end of the week), remain assertive as the parent.
- ensure consistency when using rewards or consequences
- A system of rewards or consequences can be helpful, but ensure that this is implemented consistently and that the rewards or consequences are specific, time-bound and given only after the child shows the targeted behaviour.
- garner support from the school management and ensuring that the back-to-school plan is approved by the school