

Mommy I Hate School – Do I hafta go?

What is a Parent To Do?

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Like spinach or broccoli that are simply supposed to be good for you, kids are supposed to stomach a dozen or more years of schooling in the United States. Maybe you can force a kid to stomach, spinach, broccoli, or even castor oil, but *learning* is different. This is why the phrase, "I hate school," is so often evidenced—either by words or actions. But, consider this.

Almost every parent goes through it.

Your child comes home from school one day and says, "I hate school. I don't want to go back."

Convincing your child that school is a good place again is a fine balance between figuring out the problem and not overreacting. In the higher grades, hating school can lead to skipping class or even dropping out.

Some ways to deal with the problem:

First, make sure the complaint is persistent.

If your child complains only once, it could be the result of having a bad day or an unpleasant interaction with the teacher.

It's normal to say it occasionally. If the child is refusing to attend school, however, then you have a problem.

Next, ask questions.

"What do you hate about school?" or "What happened?" are good questions to get your child to open up.

Talk to the child's teacher if it involves a classroom issue.

Ask the teacher's opinion and whether the teacher has suggestions.

Sometimes the problem can be as simple as the child feeling left out.

Take an active interest in what's going on in your child's class.

It's important for parents to show an interest in what their children are doing in school. If parents act uninterested, it can send a message to the child that school is a low priority.

You may be surprised at the real reasons behind your kid's whines of "I don't want to go to school." Children can be miserable in school because of social, learning, or anxiety issues — and these don't just go away. Once you understand what's really going on, you can help him overcome these obstacles to education

Lots of children don't want to get up and go to school, especially after having a weekend of fun. Hanging around the house and playing with friends sure beats having to pay attention in the classroom — so it's not unusual for children to check to see if you'll cave in and let them play hooky. It's normal if your child tries this out occasionally, as long as he makes it to school without too much fuss. However, it's a whole different ball game if the kid habitually balks at going to school or seems genuinely fearful or anxious about it. Kids, especially in the grade-school years, display school refusal behaviors for three main reasons.

- They feel at risk socially — rejected, ostracized, or ignored by peers. The school environment may be perceived as lonely, uncomfortable, or threatening. It's tough when you're 7 years old and you feel unaccepted and different from the other kids.
- Those who perceive themselves as academically inferior often feel picked on or teased by other children when they make errors in class, and many consider themselves to be dumb or stupid because of the teasing. (It's humiliating to answer incorrectly in class with 20 kids watching your unsatisfactory performance.)
- Children who are very active, perhaps even hyperactive, can become extremely uncomfortable when expected to sit for several hours in the classroom, even with breaks for recess, lunch, and PE. These kids seem to be constantly chastised by their teachers to stay in their seats, to focus on their work, or to keep their hands to themselves.

Understand the Reason

First, listen to your child and take her seriously. If there's a pattern of complaints about others not liking her, check it out further. Also, ask the teacher about children your child seems to get along with. Does she have a special friend to sit with at lunch or is she alone? Does she hang around kids at recess? If not, your daughter is legitimately feeling

lonely and sad. What can you do? In the grade-school years, it's still possible to help create and cement social relationships for your children. Encourage the teacher to pair her with another child whom your kid would like to get to know better. You can also jumpstart friendships by inviting classmates home to play after school or on weekends. Get to know the other moms and dads — some are probably in the same boat, looking to help their kids establish relationships with their classmates. Also, check out organizations such as Cub Scouts and Brownies, sports teams, or chorus and band — kids with similar interests tend to get along well, and their mutual experience helps conversations flow easier.

If your child fits into the second category leading to school refusal — that of being weak in an academic area or two — assessment and remediation should do the trick. Consult with your child's teacher or guidance counselor to get information on achievement testing. After you understand the nature and causes of the weak areas, check into tutorial situations, both at school as well as privately. If your child's testing meets certain criteria, he should be eligible for special programs providing individualized instruction to bring his knowledge, grades, and skills up to par. The process may be lengthy, so try to get started as soon as you notice a deficit area developing.

Once your child feels more comfortable with the work, he'll feel smarter and more confident. The "I-hate-school" problem will tone down as he begins to look forward to answering questions in class and is no longer nervous about participating in front of his peers.

What to Expect as Your Child Moves to Middle and High School

School refusal generally decreases dramatically as children grow older. Although social rejection still can play a major role in adolescence, the sheer size of most middle and high schools lends itself to kids finding a buddy or two. Also, many academic problems have been worked out by then — either through direct remediation, compensation, or inclusion in a special program at school. In addition, the fidgety second grader usually becomes calmer by middle school and no longer is constantly chided by teachers to sit still. He may still be displaying inattention, but generally this does not lead to behavior-based referrals or classroom embarrassment.

There is a light at the end of the tunnel — the Monday morning chorus of, "I hate school, do I hafta go?" decreases as your child gets older. The trick is to decipher what's motivating the school refusal behavior and to take the appropriate steps toward remediation.

Have a heart-to-heart chat with your kid. Is he refusing to go to school because he feels socially outcast or academically inferior, or could it be that he's uncomfortable because he just can't sit still? Often your child will know and can talk about what is really going on at school.

If your child is clueless, check with the teacher. Often a savvy teacher has a hunch about what's really cooking with your kid. But, if she's unsure as to the basis of the problems, it may be wise to seek professional help for specific recommendations.

Contact your school counselor to set up a complete psychoeducational evaluation. This will help to determine your child's strengths and weaknesses in order to begin a program of remediation. It may be beneficial to set him up in a special class or program to meet his unique needs, or after-school tutoring or remediation just may do the trick.

Set up a study skills program. If you see that your child is disorganized in school or during homework time and the psychoeducational evaluation shows no deficits, then it's a matter of teaching him good study skills. Use a daily assignment sheet that the child fills in and each teacher signs to validate that the homework and test dates are accurate. The child uses this guide to determine what books and folders need to be taken home each day.

Next, make sure that homework is completed in a timely fashion. Quiz the kid to make sure that he's comprehending what he's reading, and review what he doesn't seem to know. Teach him to pack his organizer and book bag at night, so that in the morning he's ready to go.

If your child is socially anxious, let him know that he's not alone. Many children go through a period of feeling alone, invisible, or "out-of-it." Help to begin or cement new friendships by contacting some classmates' parents to set up playdates. All your child may need is one good friend to sit with at lunch or to play with at recess to feel on top of the world. She'll gain confidence and social skills as her relationships progress. It's not only OK but at times necessary for parents to jumpstart friendships and to promote pro-social behavior in their children.