

Understanding School Attendance Difficulties

An Early Intervention Guide for Parents

School refusal — also called emotionally-based school avoidance (EBSA) or 'school can't' — is when a child experiences overwhelming distress about attending school. It's not laziness or defiance — instead, it is usually linked to significant social, emotional, or learning challenges. Triggers can include anxiety, bullying, sensory overload, depression, sleep problems, or screen overuse.

Signs to Look Out For

- Stomachaches, headaches, or feeling sick on school mornings
- Panic attacks or meltdowns before school
- Difficulty sleeping or worrying the night before
- Withdrawal from friends, sports, or hobbies
- Persistent refusal or lateness to school

What Parents Can Do Right Away

1. Stay calm yourself – Your child will sense your stress.
2. Validate their feelings – Acknowledge worries rather than dismiss them.
3. Create routines – Regular sleep, meals, and limited screen use build stability.
4. Plan ahead – Practice coping strategies for stressful moments.
5. Celebrate effort – Praise even small steps toward school attendance.
6. Teach calming tools – Breathing, movement, and breaks can reduce anxiety.

What Not To Do

-  Don't ignore early warning signs
-  Don't drag or physically force attendance
-  Don't rely solely on rewards or punishments
-  Don't dismiss your child's feelings or say "just toughen up"
-  Don't delay raising concerns with school leaders

Working with the School

- Speak early with teachers, principals, or school wellbeing staff
- Request supports such as flexible timetables, safe spaces, or gradual returns
- Ask for regular updates and collaborative planning
- Ensure bullying or social issues are investigated and addressed
- Explore alternative options like tutoring, apprenticeships, or support classes if needed

When to Seek More Help

Seek professional support if your child:

- Has ongoing panic attacks, meltdowns, or distress around school
- Refuses school for more than two weeks
- Shows persistent physical symptoms without medical cause
- Withdraws from friends and family

Support options include your GP, pediatrician, psychologists, social workers, or specialist services like the School Refusal Clinic.

Services We Provide at the School Refusal Clinic

-  Individual child sessions – outdoor walk-and-talk and play-based therapy
-  Parent and family support
-  School collaboration and return-to-school planning
-  Specialised tutoring (with a dedicated tutor)
-  NDIS-accredited support worker available
-  Group programs – fitness, social, and peer support (e.g., Fit for School, Pizza in the Park)
-  Therapy dog sessions with Max
-  Telehealth services

Costing & Rebates

- Therapy sessions: \$250 per hour (first two sessions 90 minutes)
- Tutoring: \$180 per hour
- Medicare rebates available with a Mental Health Care Plan from your GP
- Free 15-minute consultation
- NDIS-funded clients are welcome

Contact Us

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 Free 15-minute consultation or referral online

 Contact Us: <https://www.schoolrefusal.com.au/contact-3>

 Watch our video: [School Refusal Clinic on YouTube](#)