

Tips for Promoting School Attendance

Dealing with school refusal behaviours at home can be hard. If it was easy, you would already be doing it. We have provided some key tips and strategies to help you reflect on what is working well and implement new strategies to set up a typical day to promote school attendance.

Tips	Example
Maintain clear expectations about school attendance and why it is important	• Display the school timetable to make it visible • Have school equipment and books ready • Talk about roles and responsibilities that everyone has in the household • Build a strong supportive relationship with your young person's school support team. • Be ready to try again the next day
Practice clear and assertive communication when talking about school attendance	• "You will be required to go to school no matter how much you delay" • "I've asked you already. It's time to get up for school. Its 7.30, we will be leaving in 45 minutes for school. You have 5 minutes to get dressed for school". • "I/We will do whatever we have to do in order to get you to school" • "We cannot allow you to remain at home" • "I know this is hard but it has to happen. You have to go to school." • "After school today you can _____ for attending school" • "I know it was tough today but we expect you to go tomorrow". Avoid vague messages e.g. "Are you going to school today?"
Acknowledge and validate anxious feelings about attending school	• Notice the emotion e.g. look for facial expressions and body language • Label the emotions e.g. "you look worried" or "You're pacing around the room, I can you are anxious" • Acknowledge, empathise and validate the emotion e.g. "I know this is really hard"; "I know this is tiring for you having to constantly struggle"
Externalise the problem when talking about school refusal or anxiety. The person is not the problem, the problem is the problem.	• Your anxiety is visiting you with force this morning huh? • What is the anxiety saying to you? • What could you say back to your anxiety to get it to go away this morning? • I have seen you fight back against your anxiety, what did you say to it last time? Avoid negative messages e.g. "You should...", "You never...", threats, criticism or put downs.

Remain firm and calm when talking about school attendance	• Reflect on your own personal distress around the situation and how you manage it; • your internal dialogue around the young person's challenges in going to school; and • Your experiences and attitudes towards school.
Set boundaries and limits to provide clear expectations around behaviour and school attendance	• Plan Ahead! Don't make up rules and consequences in the heat of the moment. Discuss rules and consequences when everyone is calm. • Consequences should be immediate and short term to allow adolescents the opportunity to practice doing the right thing. • Make staying at home boring. This means no TV or computer games. Confiscate device or WIFI access during school hours. • Only allow your young person to stay home from school for medical reasons (not including minor ailments or tiredness). Obtain medical certificate and provide it to the school. • Aim for rules and consequences to be clear and consistent. Avoid threatening things you won't follow through on. • When implementing consequences try to do it in private and stay calm
Reinforce school attendance with positive rewards and incentives	• Help your young person face their fears and provide lots of praise and rewards when they do. • Avoid punishment as it only makes it worse and it can feel discouraging.