



Attendance
Policy and
Procedure

Version 3 January 2019: This document will be reviewed annually

Saint Ignatius College Geelong
A Jesuit Partner School



Saint Ignatius College Geelong

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Student Attendance Policy

In accordance with the Education Training and Reform Act 2006 (Vic.) and the Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic.), school attendance is compulsory for children and young people aged from 6 to 17 years unless an exemption from attendance has been granted.

Whilst ensuring student attendance at school is a legal obligation of parents/guardians, supporting students to attend school each day is the shared responsibility of all parents, students, the school and wider community.

Students need to attend school regularly in order to gain maximum benefit from schooling so as to enable them to reach their full potential.

Purpose

To ensure active support for full student attendance and retention until the completion of Year 12 or its equivalent and respond to individual student circumstances when regular attendance is not consistent.

Saint Ignatius College maintain attendance records, identify and follow up unexplained absences and develop procedures to support and maintain student attendance.

Acknowledgements

Saint Ignatius College acknowledges the following:

- Education is a sequential process so absences often mean students miss important stages in the development of learning.
- Absenteeism can contribute significantly to student failure at school.
- There are many factors that can affect attendance including school, family and personal factors.
- Some students and families may need support to assist attendance to school.

Responsibilities

Parent/Guardian

Parents/Guardians must enrol a child of compulsory school age at a registered school and ensure the child attends at all times when the school is open for instruction, unless exemption from attendance has been granted.

It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to provide either a written note (email), medical certificate or a phone call to the College, explaining the reason for the absence.

Parents/Guardians must inform the College if they intend to take their children out of school for an extended leave and the reasons for this.

Students

Students are expected to attend the school in which they are enrolled during normal school hours every day of term, unless there is an approved exemption from school attendance for the student, or the student is registered for home schooling and has partial enrolment.

The College

The College must ensure:

- Daily attendance of each student enrolled at the school is recorded at least twice a day in homeroom and for every scheduled class.
- Any absences of a student from school, including classes, are identified.
- Reasons for each student's absence are provided and recorded.



Student Attendance Policy (cont.)

Responsibilities (cont.)

The College (cont.)

- Explanations for absences that are provided, are a reasonable excuse for the purposes of their responsibilities under the Act.
- Follow up any unexplained absences of a student by contacting the parent/guardian of the student as soon as practicable on the same day.
- Parents/guardians are notified promptly regarding a student's unsatisfactory school or class attendance. If, upon being notified of their child's absence or contacted to seek an explanation, a parent reports that the child was not living with them on that day, the school should ensure they notify another parent who was responsible for ensuring the child attended school on the relevant day(s).
- If contact cannot be made with the parent, contact should be made with the emergency contact/s nominated on the student's file held by the school.
- Information regarding a student's unsatisfactory attendance at school or classes is recorded on their student file.
- Parents/guardians are informed of their responsibilities around attendance and initiatives aimed at promoting parental awareness of the importance of children attending school every day are implemented.
- Attendance improvement strategies, interventions and levels of adjustment are implemented where the absence is having a significant impact on a student's educational achievement and development, including an Attendance Student Support Group, Personalised Learning Plan, Student Absence Learning Plan and Return to School Plan.
- Strategies for supporting attendance of students in out of home care, experiencing homelessness, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) families, overseas students, students with disabilities, students with cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and newly arrived families are implemented.
- Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) is advised where a referral to a School Attendance Officer is required because the student has been absent from school on at least five full days in the previous 12 months without reasonable excuse for absences.
- Referral processes are implemented to Child FIRST or Child Protection, CEM and the School Attendance Officer where required.

Expected Outcomes

- Schools within CEM actively support student attendance and retention.
- Schools within CEM maintain attendance records, identify and follow up unexplained absences, and develop procedures to support and maintain attendance.

1. Related Documents

- 1.1. VCE Attendance Policy
- 1.2. Student Support Group Guidelines
- 1.3. Attendance Monitoring Procedure
- 1.4. Student Wellbeing Policy

Position Responsible:	Deputy Principal (Students)
Approval Authority:	Saint Ignatius College Geelong Board
Review Date:	August 2021 (3 years from date of approval/amendment)
Revision History:	Amended 13.09.2018



Attendance Procedure

Purpose

The Student Attendance Procedures advises parents/guardians of the steps that are necessary to comply with the ***Student Attendance Policy*** and ensure that a student's learning is not adversely affected by absences. Furthermore, the procedure includes specific documentation in regards to ***School Refusal***.

1.0 *Responsibilities of Students*

1.1 *Attendance*

The Student Attendance Policy states that students are expected to:

- attend school on all designated school days
- attend and be punctual for all classes, activities and programs.

This includes school excursions, retreats, Masses, assemblies, sport, organized speakers, and any activity deemed by the school to be part of the curriculum.

Students must, where possible, give their homeroom/subject teacher advance notice of ensuing absence due to a College activity and they are responsible for catching up on missed work.

1.2 *Absence*

If students are absent their parents/guardians are required to phone/email the College on the morning of the absence. Parents are not required to send a follow up note if they have already contacted the College.

If the parents/guardians do not contact the College the student will be marked as ***unexplained absence*** and on immediate return to school the student must provide their Homeroom Teacher with a ***signed explanatory note*** from a parent/guardian explaining the absence.

If they do not do this within three days of the absence they could be issued with an After School Detention. For Unit 3-4 students a medical certificate is required if students miss a SAC while absent.

Absence from class due to a College activity is an excused absence and so no note is required.

1.3 *Late to school*

● ***Prior to 9.00am***

If a student arrives ***late*** to school, but prior to the conclusion of morning homeroom, the student will be admitted directly to homeroom and marked as late. A Level One Infringement notice will be issued if a note is not provided explaining the student's lateness.

● ***After 9.00am***

If a student arrives ***after the conclusion of morning homeroom*** the student must report to the office and sign in. For students to be permitted to attend class a parent/guardian must have explained the lateness in writing, in person or by phone on, or prior to, the late arrival.

The student will have a late pass stamped in their planner. This must be shown, to the teacher, on arrival at class.



1.3 Late to school (cont.)

- **Arriving late and no contact from home**

If a student *arrives after 9.00am with no contact from the parents/guardians* the office will contact the parents/guardians to check the lateness and remind the parents/guardians of the procedure.

If the parents cannot be contacted by the school a message will be left for the parents to call back. The student is then permitted to go to class.

An explanatory note must still be provided to the Homeroom teacher the following day.

1.4 Leaving school early

Students are to remain in the school grounds unless written approval is provided by a parent/guardian to *leave early*. The homeroom teacher countersigns the note and students must then present this note at the front office when they sign out.

Consequences

The consequence for the student of not complying with these Procedures (1.1 to 1.4) is an after school detention.

1.5 Satisfactory Completion of Courses

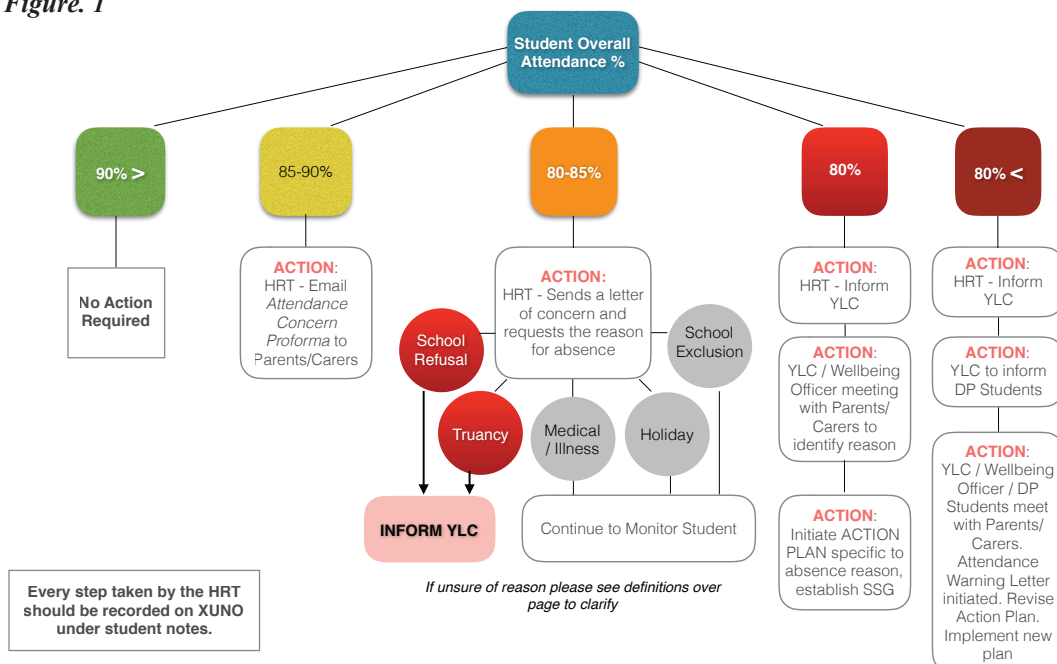
Students must attend a minimum amount of all scheduled course hours to satisfy the attendance requirements and therefore satisfactorily complete their studies. At Year 11 and Year 12 a minimum attendance of 80% is required for satisfactory completion of the VCE. This is a benchmark for other year levels.

To satisfy the College's legal responsibilities regarding student attendance staff will monitor student attendance in every class, as well as morning and afternoon Homeroom.

If a student's absence is a matter of concern the following steps will occur:

Attendance Monitoring Procedure

Figure. 1





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Appendix. Student Attendance Monitoring Procedure (Figure 1) related assets

- Appendix 1: Reasons for Absence Definitions
- Appendix 2: Parental Email Proforma
- Appendix 3: Parent Letter of Concern
- Appendix 4: Meeting with Parents when School Refusal Identified template

For VCE subjects the **VCE Concern Letter** is sent home by the subject teacher.

2. (b) If absence continues to be a concern the Homeroom Teacher and the appropriate Year Level Coordinator will meet with parents/guardians.
3. (c) If absence continues to be a concern the Year Level Coordinator will recommend to the Deputy Principal that the student not advance to the next year level.

2.0 Responsibilities of Parents/Guardians

2.1 Responsibilities

In order to support their daughter/son to maximize their education at Saint Ignatius College and to also support the school we ask parents/guardians to ensure their daughter/son:

- attends school on all designated school days
- arrives on time
- attends and is punctual for all classes, activities and programs.

This includes major school events (Swimming, Athletics, Feast Day, Cross Country), school excursions, retreats, Masses, assemblies, sport, organized speakers, and any activity deemed by the school to be part of the curriculum. It is a condition of a students enrolment that they attend such events.

2.2 Absent

When your daughter/son is absent, or expected to be absent Parents/Guardians are required:

Phone the front office prior to 10.00am (**5251 1136**) and the student will be marked as **Parent Notified Absence** and the Homeroom teacher will be notified.

or

Send Trish Langmaid (langmaidt@ignatius.vic.edu.au) an email via the XUNO Parent Portal or your personal email address prior to 10.00am and she will mark the student as **Parent Notified Absence** and inform the Homeroom teacher.

If the parent/guardian contacts the College on the day the student is absent they are **not** required to send a follow up note in the student planner.

If the Parent/Guardian does not contact the College the student will be marked as **Unexplained Absence** and the Parent/Guardian will receive an automated text outlining their son or daughters absence for the day. If a parent/guardian does not contact the College on the day their child is absent the parent will need to provide a note in the student planner within three days of the absence. If contact cannot be made with the Parent/Guardian via text or telephone, the College will attempt to make contact with any emergency contact nominated on the student's file held by the College.

If the student does not present a note to the Homeroom Teacher within three days of the absence, it could result in an After School Detention.

For Unit 3-4 students a medical certificate is required if students miss a SAC while absent.



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2.3 Late

If your daughter/son arrives after the conclusion of morning homeroom in order to be permitted to attend class you must have explained the lateness in writing, in person or by phone on, or prior to, arrival.

An explanatory note must still be provided to the Homeroom teacher the following day.

2.4 Other Absences

As per the Student Attendance Policy, student absence from school includes:

- **Excused absences**

Unable to attend due to unavoidable circumstances such as involvement in a school approved activity, specialist medical appointment, illness, injury or family bereavement.

- **Unexcused absences**

truancy, school refusal or other absences such as a family holiday, personal appointments, shopping, attending a concert.

Parents/Guardians are required to follow the absent procedure above for any unexcused absences.

Parents/Guardians wishing to take their son/daughter on an extended family holiday during the school term, please refer to 2.5 Extended leave during the school term.

Teachers are not expected to provide work for students during an unexcused absence.

2.5 Extended leave during the school term

- **Family holiday**

Saint Ignatius College discourages parents/guardians from organising family holidays during the school term. Contact with your son/daughters Year Level Coordinator should be made if parent/guardians are arranging holidays during the school term. Teachers are under no obligation to provide or correct work for students on family holidays during the normal school term.

- **Extended Medical / Illness**

Parents/Guardians are required to make contact with their son/daughters homeroom teacher if they are going to be away for more than three days due to medical or illness.

Teachers will provide work for a student who is absent for an extended time due to medical/illness, if parents/guardians believe this is appropriate.



3.0 Responsibilities of the College

3.1 Principal

The Principal, as the head of the College, has legal responsibilities in regard to monitoring student attendance as well as ensuring student safety, and monitoring satisfactory attendance and satisfactory completion.

Circumstances may require that the Principal, in consultation with the Deputy Principal (Students) and the appropriate Year Level Coordinator, consider the student's ongoing enrolment at Saint Ignatius College Geelong.

The Principal is responsible for the implementation of these procedures and to ensure that staff, students and parents are aware of its application and that staff implement its requirements.

3.2 Staff

To satisfy the College's legal responsibilities regarding student attendance staff are required to monitor student attendance in every class.

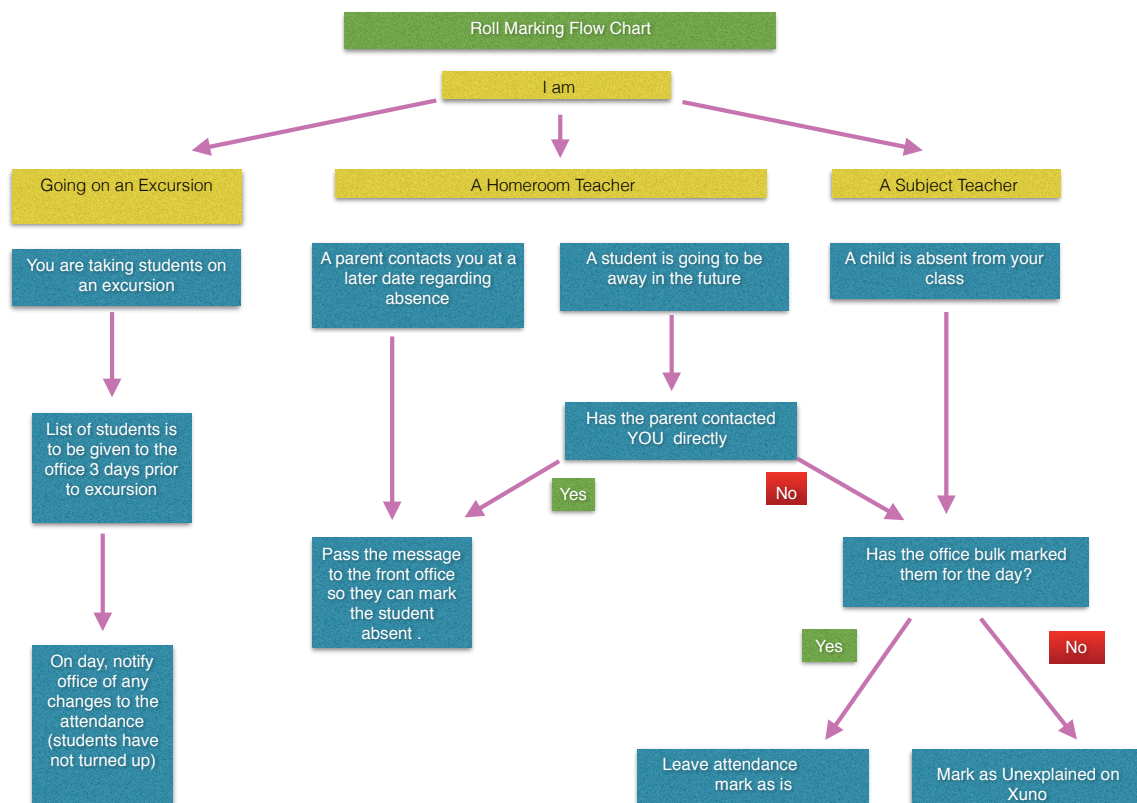
Teachers are to note late arrivals and early departures and check this against the daily student absence record.

Teachers are not expected to provide work for students during an unexcused absence.

Teachers will provide work for a student who is absent for an extended time due to medical/illness, if parents/guardians believe this is appropriate.

The following procedure should be followed by ALL staff to ensure student rolls are marked correctly.

Figure. 2: Roll Marking Procedure





3.3 Homeroom Teacher and Year Level Coordinator

To satisfy the College's legal responsibilities regarding student attendance Homeroom teachers are required to mark the electronic roll DURING morning and afternoon Homeroom. The number of days absent from school and attendance at, or absence from, major school events will be indicated on the front of the Semester Reports.

Parents/Guardians are required to contact the homeroom teacher if their son/daughter is going to absent for more than three days due to medical/illness. If a student is absent for three consecutive days and is medical/illness or unexplained absence the Homeroom teacher is to contact the parents ON THAT DAY.

Notes provided by parents/guardians for unexplained absences are to be collected by the Homeroom teacher and when this has happened the record on the ***electronic roll marking system must be updated***, from Unexplained Absence to Explained Absence. If a student does not provide a note within three days of the unexplained absence, the homeroom teacher will inform the YLC who will issue an After School Detention.

The Homeroom Teacher and Year Level Coordinator monitor student attendance and where it is a matter of concern regarding satisfactory attendance and satisfactory completion of a student's studies, the Year Level Coordinator and Homeroom Teacher will convene a meeting with the parents/guardians and the student to discuss the matter. (Refer to Figure 1: Attendance Procedure)

Where students are not attending school due to school refusal or truancy the Year Level Coordinator / Deputy Principal (Students), and other appropriate staff as support, will work with parents/guardians to assist in developing strategies to encourage the students to attend school. This may involve the offer of a referral to an outside agency. (Refer to Figure 1: Attendance Procedure)

Relevant SICG documents:

1. Student Attendance Policy (Board approved, February 2012)
2. Providing Work for Students Absent from School (College Procedures)
3. "VCAL/VCE Attendance Requirements" in the Senior Pathways booklet.



4.0 Appendix

Appendix 1

Reasons for attendance issues (definitions):

1. *Medical Illness*
2. *Truancy*
3. *School withdrawal*
4. *School exclusion*
5. *School Refusal*

Definitions:

1. *Medical Illness* Condition restricting attendance such as:

Respiratory issues (asthma)
Medical condition (diabetes, Chronic fatigue fibromyalgia),
Poor nutrition
Suicide Attempt
Risk taking behavior (binge drinking, sexual behavior, illicit drug use).

2. *Truancy - those students that are absent from school:*

On official schooling days without written or verbal consent from parents/guardian.
Willingly removing themselves from the school
The action of staying away from school; absenteeism

3. *School withdrawal*

Whereby parents are aware of school non-attendance and condone this through removal of students i.e. holidays, allowing non-attendance of events such as camps etc.

4. *School Exclusion - student unable to attend due to:*

Expulsion
Lack of resources to manage the student in school setting due to lack of aide support, other structures in the school (i.e. disabled access).

5. *School refusal - student experiencing severe difficulty attending due to:*

Severe emotional upset and in the absence of antisocial behaviours
At home with the parent's knowledge
Reasonable efforts by parents to enforce attendance

Spectrum of Refusal Diagram



Camps - Late Monday - Missing Am classes - Sporadic attendance - No attendance

Appendix 2

Email Template to be sent when HRT identifies student of concern

Appendix 3

Attendance Notification Letter

Appendix 4

Meeting with Parents when School Refusal Identified template



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Appendix 2

Email Template to be sent when HRT identifies student of concern

Dear *(insert parent name here)*,

It has come to my attention that *(insert student's name here)* has been missing from class increasingly and I wanted to check in to ensure they were managing ok. Their current attendance rate is *(insert attendance rate here)* and we have a policy to make contact with parents when a student falls below *(insert %)* of attendance to enquire if there are any areas of concern that the College could help support.

Please let me know if there is anything I, or the school, can do to support *(insert student's name)* in increasing their attendance.

You can contact me on *(insert contact email/phone number)*,

Kind Regards,

(insert HRT name here).



Attendance Notification

Date:

Dear *(insert parent's name here)*,

We are aware that there may be a variety of reasons for your child *(insert name of student here)*'s absences it is still an expectation of Saint Ignatius College for student's to have an attendance rate of above 80%.

Saint Ignatius College recognises that regular attendance and arriving to school on time are vital to a student's success in school. In order to take full advantage of the educational programming offered by the teachers and staff at Saint Ignatius College, it is essential that children arrive on time on a daily basis.

With this in mind we have a record that you child's attendance has fallen below 90% and currently sits at *(insert % here)*. Since daily attendance is important in a child's education and because a good education can help your child reach their full potential, this is a problem that requires immediate attention.

In addition, the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 requires parents / Guardians of children between the ages of six and seventeen to have their child enrolled in and regular attendance in a public or private school during the regular school day. It is an Offence for a parent to fail to comply with the duty set out in the Act.

Due to the importance of this we felt it relevant to send this letter home to indicate the expectations of the College.

If you could please discuss this with your child and return this signed form with the possible explanation or reason for your child's absence to the Homeroom teacher.

Parents/Guardians Signature: Date:

Reason for absence:



Appendix 4

Meeting with Parents when School Refusal Identified template

Date:

Student of concern: *(insert student's name here)*

Present:

YLC

Wellbeing worker

Parents

Student

1. Identification of problem *(insert 1 of 5 options as outlined above)*.

- a. Complete parent questionnaire if required (attachment 1).
- b. Request letter from professionals involved for information to support student (attachment 2).

2. Create plan around attendance

- a. Plan for home – (provide parent-based strategies as outlined in Attachment 3)
- b. Discuss ‘menu’ with student and schedule time with wellbeing staff to create this (Attachment 4).
- c. Schedule follow up appointment with wellbeing staff member for ongoing support.

3. Schedule follow up plan

- a. Set date for next meeting with all involved for review of plan *(insert date here)*.
- b. YLC to email all teachers involved of plan of support for student.
- c. Wellbeing worker to email ‘menu’ to all teachers involved to encourage reinforcement of coping strategies.



5.0 Attachments

Attachment 1: Parents Questionnaire

Attachment 2: Letter to Professional(s) Involved

Attachment 3: Parent Based Strategies

Attachment 4: Wellbeing Staff Resources



Parents Questionnaire

- 1. What do you see as the problem for your child?*
- 2. Why do you think your child is not attending school?*
- 3. How important is it for you to be involved in dealing with your child's attendance problems?*
- 4. What things do you feel you as a parent can do to help your child with a school attendance plan?*
- 5. Who ought to be most responsible for your child's attendance at school?*



Letter to Professional(s) Involved

Date:

Dear Mrs, Ms, Mr, Dr (*insert professional's name here*),

Saint Ignatius College has a duty of care to all students whilst they are on school grounds.

In every instance the school strives to offer the best possible tailored care, regardless of the student's condition (e.g. epilepsy, asthmas, anxiety, eating disorder).

Saint Ignatius College does not discriminate in any way but we require specific medical and psychological information in order to care for each and every student.

In keeping with this, all students with medical and psychological needs require information to be provided. We require all the following information to manage (*insert student's name here*) whilst they are in our care.

This return to school plan is strictly confidential.

We are seeking from you:

- Diagnosis for (*insert student's name here*)
- Formulation
- Medications
- A copy of the safety plan if required
- The preferred method of contacting you if (*insert name of student here*) is very unwell
- Preference for case conference - in person, telephone, Skype. (please circle one)

This return to school plan is only to be discussed with the following people at school:
(*list names of YLF, DP, WB, HRT*)

Please return this document to (*insert wellbeing / YLC contact name*) at your earliest convenience.

Signed,

Michael Timms
Deputy Principal
Saint Ignatius College



Parent Based Strategies

* A two parent approach is crucial for the wellbeing and success of the student's return to school plan.

1. Establishing and monitoring evening rituals
2. Modifying parent commands for brevity (short message), consistency (same message that is not changing), solidarity (2 parents working together).
3. Consequences for non-attendance (loss of screen time, earlier to bed, etc.)
4. Reduce child reassurance seeking behavior.
5. Change the person who takes the student to school.
6. Red apple – Green apple (illusion of choice)
7. Parents to talk away from student, agree on an approach, and then together meet with the child.
8. Parent needs to be more calm than the child (reduce parent anxiety).
9. Consequences (agreed to beforehand) vs punishment.
10. Pick your battles
11. Tag team parenting.
12. Behaviour contracts
13. Screen time - no screens after 10:00pm.



Wellbeing Staff Resources

The most successful techniques in working with school refusal have been found to be exposure therapy, CBT, DBT and Motivational Interviewing, breathing techniques and relaxation techniques.

Plans must aim to provide structure to student's return to school

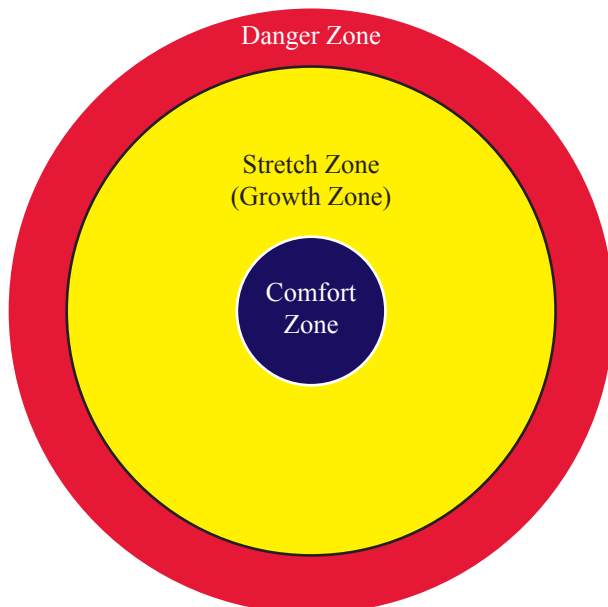
- Written down, detailed arrival time, who, where, what to expect
- Child chooses starting point, but need to move forward
- Use of back-up plans, reset 'goalposts'
- Distribute to all involved with the student
- Often graded for a staged return to school

Stretch Zone Diagram

Viewpoint is that exposure increases the **Stretch Zone** which will enable students to feel less anxious and therefore increase their **Comfort Zone** to include school.

It's important to emphasize that school is not in the **Danger Zone** (because it is a safe place to be), but the student may perceive it to be in this zone.

It's important to create a new narrative around this for the student.





Wellbeing Staff Resources

Menu

Create a list of options (like a menu) the student can choose from as a way of manage distress while at school.

Example below:

When I'm feeling anxious I can:

- Practice my breathing techniques
- Ask to get a drink of water
- Get some fresh air
- Focus on muscle relation techniques
- Do some mindful drawing
- Use my fiddle toy/grounding rock
- Ask for a hug
- Have something to eat
- Ask a friend to distract me
- Write in my worry journal
- Go to the sensory room
- Ask to see a wellbeing worker

School Attendance Plan

Create a plan of attendance with clear goals as well as a **minimum** expectation so the student has the opportunity to build on their **Stretch Zone** while also knowing they are safe.

Example below:

	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>
Goal	<i>Arrive on time. Stay in library until 11.00am. Do worksheets.</i>	<i>Arrive on time, 15 mins in class, and until 11:00am in library, doing worksheets.</i>	<i>Arrive on time, 30 mins in class. In library until 11:00am doing worksheets.</i>	<i>Arrive on time, 40 mins in class. Stay until after recess.</i>	<i>Arrive on time, 60 mins in class and stay for recess.</i>
Minimum	<i>Stay in library until 11.00am.</i>	<i>Stay in library until 11:00am.</i>	<i>10 mins in class, in library until 11:00am.</i>	<i>20 mins in class, stay for recess.</i>	<i>30 mins in class and stay for recess.</i>



Wellbeing Staff Resources

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Worksheet

Use worksheet to highlight how students can take their thoughts and change them into a more helpful thought.

Example below

<i>Old Thought</i>	<i>Coping Statement</i>
<i>I can't do it</i>	<i>I have been to school over 1000 times before, I CAN do it.</i>
<i>Everyone will ask me where I've been.</i>	<i>A few people might ask me questions - I know what I'll say.</i>
<i>I feel sick when I think about going to school.</i>	<i>That's anxiety - it will get better once I start going to school.</i>

Understanding illness behavior

It's important to be able to differentiate between the following:

- Normal illness behavior – responding to pain, illness, anxiety as expected i.e. crying, freezing, withdrawing.
- Illness denial – not acknowledging there is a problem i.e. denying there is a weight problem, minimising anxiety symptoms to 'normal'.
- Illness endorsing behavior (hypochondriac) – over-reacting to / over identifying with issues i.e. stomach ache = cancer.
- Conversion problems (symptoms) – somatic issue i.e. headaches and stomach ache when feeling anxious.
- Malingering (falsifying problems / Munchausen's by proxy) - creating issues that are not present i.e. stating there is a headache when there isn't, parent's encouraging student stays home but stating it's anxiety related.



Additional Resources

- 1: *Victorian Attendance Legislation*
- 2: *Same-day Notification of Unexplained Student Absences Fact Sheet*
- 3: *Recognising School Refusal*
- 4: *School Refusal Tips for Teachers*
- 6: *School Refusal Tips for Parents*
- 7: *'Every Day Counts' - Getting my child to school*



Victorian Attendance Legislation

From: Department of Education Victoria, Website

In Victoria, it is compulsory for children and young people aged 6–17 years to attend school.

Parents are legally required to ensure their child attends school every day and to provide an explanation for their child's absence from school unless an exemption from attendance has been granted or an exception to their attendance applies.

Evidence shows that daily school attendance is important for young people to succeed in education and to ensure they don't fall behind both socially and developmentally. Young people who regularly attend school and complete Year 12 or an equivalent qualification have better health and employment outcomes and enjoy higher incomes.

The law provides a framework for school's attendance, exemptions and exceptions from attendance and parents' obligations relating to ensuring attendance. The rules are not in place to punish students' time away from school, which can be unavoidable. Instead, the laws are an effort to promote and improve student attendance across Victorian schools.

The compulsory school age

All children aged 6–17 years are required to either be enrolled at a registered school, or registered for home schooling. In some circumstances a parent can apply to the Regional Director to exempt a child from enrolment at school. For more information see: Exemptions

Responsibility for ensuring that a child attends school

School attendance is mandated under the Education Training and Reform Act 2006. It is the responsibility of parents, guardians or anyone who has parental responsibility for a child to ensure the child attends school on a regular basis.

How attendance is recorded by schools

Schools must record student attendance twice per day in primary schools and every period in secondary schools.

Requirements that apply to children attending non-government schools

The rules apply to parents of compulsory school-aged children attending any Victorian Government, Independent and Catholic Schools.

Processes for following up attendance

'Poor attendance' for the purpose of the legislation

What is considered as "poor attendance" is determined on a case by case basis. However, under the legislation, if a student of compulsory school age is absent from school for five days within a school year and without a reasonable excuse, then further action can be taken, at the discretion of the principal.

Unexplained or unapproved absences

A principal can approve or not approve any absence, based on the requirements of the Education and Training Reform Act 2006, an individual school policy or on a case-by-case basis.

The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 provides some examples of what a reasonable excuse is for the purposes of explaining a school absence and includes, amongst other considerations:

- Illnesses and accidents;
- Unforeseen and unexplained circumstances;



Victorian Attendance Legislation (cont.)

- If the absence was a result of complying with another law;
- The child is receiving distance education through a registered school;
- The child is undertaking approved education, training and/or employment;
- The child has been suspended or expelled; and
- The child is attending or observing a religious event or obligation.

Unexplained Absence:

A principal will record an absence as ‘unexplained’ if no explanation about the absence is given to the school by the parent or carer of the student.

If you do not contact the school to provide an explanation on the day of the student absence, the school must attempt to contact the parent or legal guardian either by phone or in writing and seek an clarification within three days of the recorded absence.

If no contact can be made with the parent or other carers of the child within 10 days, the absence will be recorded as an unexplained absence and a noted will be made in the child’s file. A parent or legal guardian can contact the principal at any time after the recorded absence to provide an explanation.

Unapproved Absence:

In general, a principal may record an absence as ‘unapproved’ when no reasonable explanation has been given for the student’s absence. If a reason is given for a student absence is not approved by the principal than the school will notify the parent or legal guardian in writing.

Action that will be taken if your child reaches five days of unapproved or unexplained absence

If a child reaches five days of unapproved or unexplained absence in the preceding 12 months then the school and principal will work with the parent or legal guardian to implement the appropriate support or intervention to assist the child and ensure they attend school every day and remain at school during school hours. If the support and intervention do not improve your child’s attendance, the principal may decide to make a referral to the School Attendance Officer. This person is the Regional Director of the Department’s Regional Office where you are located.

When a referral is made to the school attendance officer

The School Attendance Officer will investigate the student absence records and may take one or all of the following steps depending on the circumstances.

- Issue a School Attendance Notice
- Issue an Official Warning
- Issue an Infringement Notice

For more information on the School Attendance Officer, see: *School Attendance Officers*.

What you can do if you have been issued a school attendance notice

The School Attendance Notice is not a fine but rather an opportunity for the child’s family to explain the absences and work with the child’s school to improve attendance in the future. The School Attendance Officer will assess the family’s response to a School Attendance Notice.

For more information, including how a School Attendance Officer assesses your family’s response, see: *School Attendance Notices*.



Victorian Attendance Legislation (cont.)

What you can do if you have received a school attendance notice but your child was not with you on the date listed

The School Attendance Notice gives parents and legal guardians the opportunity to state why their child was absent on the dates listed in the notice. The notice should be completed and returned to the School Attendance Officer by the due date.

What you can do if you have been issued with an official warning

A School Attendance Officer may decide to issue an Official Warning prior to, or instead of, issuing an Infringement Notice.

For more information see: *When to Issue an Official Warning*.

Circumstances under which you can be issued with an infringement notice

After other strategies to improve attendance have been implemented and failed under the new legislation, the school have the right to issue an Infringement Notice, which used as a last resort.

For more information see: *Infringement Notices*.

Appealing an infringement notice if you think it has been issued unfairly

If there is reason to believe that the Infringement Notice was unfairly issued, then a parent or legal guardian can apply for an internal review with the Department of Education and Training or elect to have the matter heard in the court.

For more information on the grounds for review and the process for lodging a review request, visit: *Infringement Notices ('Appeals')*.

How much is the fine

The infringement notice is currently \$78. The amount changes each financial year.

Types of absence

Circumstances when you may receive a fine if your child has missed lots of school due to illness

A genuine illness is a reasonable excuse. The cause of each absence will be considered on a case by case basis. While a child is absent, a parent or legal guardian should continue to update the school on the situation and work with the school to develop a Student Absence Learning Plan to ensure that the student's educational needs are supported and they do not fall behind in their school work.

If a child is absent for a long period of time due to illness then the parent or legal guardian may wish to discuss flexible options for accessing school. The principal will be able to advise if arrangements such as Distance Education are appropriate.

Circumstances when you may receive a fine if your child attends remedial tutoring or classes outside school that are scheduled during school hours

A school principal has the discretion to decide whether an absence caused by attending remedial class or tutoring will be approved or unapproved. The parent should discuss this before the child starts undertaking the classes. In general, it is expected that the family and the school work together to identify the child's educational needs and address them within the school setting and school hours.

Taking your child for an extended holiday during school term, and what you can do to ensure that their learning needs are supported

Generally, schools advise against planning a family holiday in term time.



Victorian Attendance Legislation (cont.)

If you are planning an extended holiday discuss this with your school principal well in advance of finalising any plans. The principal has the discretion to decide whether or not to approve the absence taking into account the student's educational interests. If the principal approves the absence, work with your child's school so you support your child's education during their holiday.

See: *Student Absence Learning Plan*

If the principal decides not to approve the absence, the parent or legal guardian should work with the school to decide on a reasonable length of absence or a more appropriate time for the child to go on holiday. If the parent or legal guardian decides to go on a holiday during the school term despite it being an 'unapproved' absence and the duration of the absence is over five days, the principal may choose to refer the case to the School Attendance Officer for further action and this may result in an Infringement Notice.

When it's appropriate for your child to attend school part-time due to a disability

Full-time attendance is compulsory for all students aged 6-17 unless an exception from school applies, an exemption has been granted or there is a reasonable excuse provided for non-attendance. For either an exception or an exemption, a student and/or parent needs to submit an application to the relevant principal who will then make a recommendation to the Regional Director who, in turn, makes a determination based on Department policy. For more information see: *Admission*

In some circumstances, it may be appropriate for students with a disability to attend school for a reduced number of hours. This arrangement should only be entered into on a short-term basis and only if it is agreed by all parties, including school, family, practitioners and Department regional offices, that the reduced amount of school hours is in the best interests of the child. Each arrangement will be assessed on a case by case basis.

If the child is attending school for a reduced amount of hours as part of a plan that both outlines the return to full-time schooling and has been developed in consultation with the child's school then this will be considered as an approved absence and will not be referred to a School Attendance Officer.

For more information contact the Disability Coordinator at your closest departmental Regional Office for further advice. See: *Regions*.

What happens if your child skips school without your knowledge

The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 recognises absences that are due to the child's disobedience and are not any fault of the parent. It is therefore deemed a reasonable excuse and will not count towards the total of unapproved or unexplained absences.

If these absences are a continuing issue for your child, you should work with the school to develop plans or strategies to support their continuing engagement in school and to prevent further truancy.

For more information on strategies and supports available see: *Attendance*

What happens if your child refuses to go to school, and how you can support them to return

School refusing children experience significant emotional distress not only when going to school but also at the thought of going to school; they may be absent from school for weeks or even months at a time. School refusal differs from truancy as children generally stay home with the knowledge of the parents and despite the parents' best efforts to encourage their child to go to school.

School refusal may be considered a reasonable excuse for absence and if supports and interventions are being sought, should not count towards unexplained or unapproved absence.



Victorian Attendance Legislation (cont.)

It is important in these circumstances that you clearly communicate your situation and concerns with your child's school. You should work with your child's school to find the best way to support them in this situation. Schools have the flexibility to modify the school experience for students so that it better caters to their needs, goals and strengths.

For more information on the supports and interventions to support your child see: *Attendance*

What happens if your child is employed in the entertainment industry and misses school regularly

Any child employed in the entertainment industry during school hours must have been granted a school exemption. When considering an application, a principal will consider, amongst other factors, how the employment might adversely affect the child's educational needs and wellbeing. The process for applying for these exemptions is outlined in the Department's School Policy and Advisory Guide. Non-government schools are also advised to follow these procedures.

For more information, see: *Attendance - Exemption Application Process*.

Being issued a school enrolment notice

All children of compulsory school age (6–17 years) must be enrolled in school or registered for home schooling. If you have been issued with a School Enrolment Notice this means that the School Attendance Officer has become aware that there is no record that your child or children are enrolled in school or registered for home schooling. The School Enrolment Notice is not a fine instead, it is an opportunity for your family to work with the School Attendance Officer to ensure your child is enrolled at school or properly registered for home schooling.

For more information see: *Enrolling Your Child in School or Registering for Home Schooling*.



Same-day Notification of Unexplained Student Absences

Fact Sheet for Parents / Carers

If your child is sick or absent, you are required to notify their school as soon as possible on the day of absence using one of the following methods:

1. **Online:** log the absence directly using your school's IT platform.
2. **Telephone:** the school office and let the staff know your child's name, class, date of absences and reason.
3. **Email:** the school and provide the staff with your child's name, class, date of absences and reason.

Notifying the school of your child's absence either prior to, or on the day that they will be away, helps ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and will fulfil your legal responsibility.

Why do I need to notify the school if my child is absent?

Schools need to know when and why a child is absent and you need to know if your child isn't at school.

From the end of Term 2 2018, all Victorian government schools are required to contact parents/carers as soon as practicable on the same day of an unexplained student absence. If your child is absent on a particular day and you have not contacted the school to explain why, the absence will be marked as unexplained.

This system also promotes daily school attendance. Going to school every day is the single most important part of your child's education, they learn new things every day – missing school puts them behind.

What is your responsibility?

You are legally required to ensure your child attends school every day or you must provide an explanation for their absence. You should let the school know in advance of any upcoming absences or let them know in the morning if your child won't be at school. In order for schools to implement the same day notification requirement, it's essential that you provide the school with your most up-to-date contact details.

Generally one notification will be sent per family. Should there be circumstances that require both parents and carers to be notified, please contact the school to make the necessary arrangements.

What is the school's responsibility?

The school must notify you of an unexplained absence in relation to your child as soon as practicable on the same day.

Schools will let you know either by your school's online communications app, SMS, phone call or email. If you can't be reached because the school does not have your correct contact details (i.e. changed phone number, SMS/email failure notification received etc.), the school will attempt to make contact with any emergency contact/s nominated on your child's file held by the school. Where possible, this contact will be made on the same day of the unexplained absence.

Where can I learn more about the process for managing student absences?

Ask your school for a copy of the Attendance Policy which outlines the school's processes and procedures for monitoring, recording and following-up of student absences.



Recognising School Refusal

Signs may include:

- Frequent school absences
- Frequently feeling sick eg sore tummy
- Frequently attending sick bay
- High reluctance to present in front of the class
- Absenteeism on certain days eg school sports days
- Difficulty getting to school on a Monday and/or after holidays
- Not wanting to go on school camps
- Excessively worried, excessive need for reassurance
- Check history: difficulty starting kindergarten and/or prep. Difficulties in transitioning through each grade.
- Absences on days of tests, exams, Naplan, etc
- Psychosocial stressors, family turmoil
- Student is a loner, even when they appear to be part of a group of friends
- Social withdrawal
- A student who is anxious can sometimes display aggressive language and behaviour. Defiance can sometimes be anxiety driven



School Refusal: Tips for Teachers

(Subject teachers, emergency teachers, teacher aides)

- Smile, welcoming and NO reference to absences.
- Remember that school refusal is an anxiety based issue and anxiety is fear based. The student is afraid – they do not want attention drawn to them.
Do not draw attention to the student.
- Do not single the student out in class eg do not ask the student a question.
- Ensure the young person has someone to sit and work with.
- Provide structure and certainty in the classroom.
- Reduce chance of “bad things” happening
- Opportunities to experience success.
- Praise but keep it quiet and understated.
- Recognise the small steps - keep it understated.
- Do not ask the student.
- How things are going at home.
- How s/he went in getting to school that morning.
- How are you feeling being at school etc.
- Do provide assistance with tasks if asked.
- Do check (not publicly) that the student understands any task that s/he is engaged in.
- Don't be concerned with homework unless it is part of the formal management plan.
- Avoid tasks such as oral presentations wherever possible. When do are required, this needs to be included in the management plan. An alternative for the student might be appropriate.
- Be aware of what is required of you in the formal management plan eg what needs to happen if the child requests to leave the classroom.
- Remember that initially, the most important thing is the student returning to school, this supersedes issues such as school work, homework or assignments.



School Refusal: Tips for Parents

The 12 Golden Rules for Parenting

1. Red apple - green apple.
2. Parents have to talk away from the child, agree on an approach, and then together meet with the child. Don't show your working out.
3. Parents need to be more calm than the child. The first pulse you take is your own.
4. Consequences vs punishment. Find the balance between love and discipline.
5. Parenting needs to be a guilt free zone.
6. Rights and responsibilities. The child has rights and responsibilities in equal measure.
7. Parents need to follow through with what consequences they have both agreed and told the young person.
8. Pick your battles.
9. Tag team parenting.
10. Be present for your child.
11. Imagine the situation from your child's perspective.
12. No screens after 10 pm.

Other tips for parents

1. Two parents/carers need to be working together and supporting each other - irrespective of where everyone lives.
2. Remember that school refusal is an anxiety based issue and anxiety is fear based. Your child is afraid. In your actions and body language demonstrate confidence - that there is nothing to be afraid of.
3. Reduce child reassurance seeking behaviour.
4. Create small opportunities for your child to practice independence eg asking the shop keeper for something.
5. Encourage your child to play/spend time with friends.
6. Discourage spending long periods of time in isolation eg watching TV in the bedroom.
7. Anxiety can be infectious. Manage your own anxiety and try not to let your child see that you are anxious.
8. Manage the use of your child's screentime during the day.
9. Establish morning and evening rituals. Every morning, everyone in the house should get up as usual, including your child.
10. Your child should go through the usual routine of getting ready for school.
11. Change the person who takes the child to school.
12. If your child cannot get to school then the day needs to be organized according to the management plan that has been developed. Your child should not be allowed to sleep in, watch TV or use screens all day.
13. Modify your language and messages; keep them short and consistent. Both parents/carers need to be saying and doing the same things.
14. Staying at home should not be an enjoyable alternative. Consequences for non-attendance (eg loss of screen time, earlier to bed). Keep the consequences manageable.
15. Set up a behaviour contract.



'Every Day Counts' - Getting my child to school

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/parents/behaviour/Pages/attendance.aspx>

No matter how hard parents try, some students may be reluctant to go to school. These are some ideas which may assist parents to deal with children who are reluctant to go to school and with school refusal.

Addressing attendance issues promptly and setting up good attendance patterns can lead to future success and can help students feel more engaged and connected at school.

Did you know?

- Patterns of late arrival at school or missing classes are early warning signs of disengagement from school
- Missing one day of school each week adds up to 2 months missed over a year
- Each day absent in high school has an impact on skill development and social connections
- Poor attendance may be associated with future unemployment, criminal activity, substance abuse, and poorer health and life expectancy

Some causes of school problems

Some of the more common causes of school problems are underlying learning difficulties or learning disabilities or behavioural or emotional issues. But there are many other reasons why a young person might not be engaging fully in their education.

School factors might include:

- bullying or cyberbullying
- feeling isolated at school
- disliking, or not feeling connected to, the school culture or environment
- falling behind on school work or feeling overwhelmed about keeping up
- disliking school subjects, not liking the choice of subjects, or not feeling challenged by the work
- poor school or academic support, especially in relation to heavy workloads
- not getting along with teachers or other students at school
- competing demands on time, such as extracurricular activities

Personal factors might include:

- chronic illness
- intellectual or cognitive disability
- behavioural or developmental difficulties or disorders
- mental health issues such as depression or anxiety (For more information see: *My child has anxiety fact sheet*)
- history of abuse and neglect
- poor self-concept or self-esteem
- poor communication skills
- poor social skills
- poor sleep habits
- difficulty with listening, concentrating or sitting still.



'Every Day Counts' - Getting my child to school (cont.)

Family factors might include:

- parents who aren't involved in their child's education
- a home environment that doesn't or can't adequately support a young person's learning
- family problems such as relationship breakdowns
- competing family or social responsibilities, such as caring for family members, or working outside school hours

What you can do

- Act early
- Talk about the importance of showing up to school every day, make that the expectation. Regular attendance at school sets up good behaviours for regular attendance at work
- Help your child maintain daily routines such as finishing homework and getting a good night's sleep. On average, teenagers need 8-9 hours sleep to be healthy and alert. You may also need to monitor their use of the Internet, mobile phone and TV at night to ensure they are not staying up too late or being disturbed while sleeping
- Consider how your child is sleeping – is their room cool and dark and have all devices, including TVs and mobile phones, been removed?
- Try not to schedule hair, dental or medical appointments during school hours. Arrange family holidays during scheduled school holidays so that they don't miss out on classes and feel left behind. If it is necessary to be absent from school for an extended period, arrange with your school for a Student Absence Learning Plan
- Don't let your child stay home unless genuinely sick. Complaints of headaches or stomach aches may be signs of anxiety
- Reward appropriate behaviour and don't unintentionally reward unwanted behaviour by letting children who stay home have access to their devices and the internet
- If your child wants to stay home to finish an assignment, rather than letting them stay home, expect them to go to school – make attendance the number one priority. Later, you can discuss with them how they can improve their study habits or adjust their schedule
- If your school has an assessment calendar on its website, use this to help your child plan their study so that they avoid working late the night before an assignment is due
- Be sure to set a good example – how you meet your commitments impacts on how they will meet theirs
- Talk to your child. What are their feelings about school? What interests them at school? Are there any difficult situations? It helps if you open these discussions in a relaxed way so that your teenager knows you are demonstrating concern, not authority
- Try to be aware of your teenager's social contacts. Peer influence can lead to skipping school, while students without many friends can feel isolated
- Encourage meaningful extracurricular activities that your child enjoys, such as sports and clubs, to develop positive relationships and experience success outside of a classroom setting. These activities can help your child feel part of the group, important to the school, and more motivated
- Set clear parameters around part-time work. Make sure that the hours your teenager is working do not impact on their ability to go to school the next day, or interfere with school assessment expectations or exam preparation. Most schools recommend no more than 10 hours per week
- Familiarise yourself with the school's attendance policy. This can help when trying to reason with teenagers
- Monitor your child's attendance and school performance. Periodically check with their teachers to find out how things are going. If you find it difficult to contact several different teachers by phone, try email. Alternatively, the year level coordinator may be a helpful point of contact in relation to specific issues.
- Ask your teenager's school about what types of flexible or blended learning options they offer



'Every Day Counts' - Getting my child to school (cont.)

Remember

You can talk with school staff (such as a teacher, year level coordinator, wellbeing staff, careers staff, assistant principal or principal) to find out what support they can provide to keep your teenager attending and engaged.

Further assistance

Sometimes you may need assistance from professionals who can help anxious children. Discuss your concerns with relevant teachers or wellbeing staff at your child's school. They can help address any school-based issues, refer your child to school counselling services and make recommendations about professional support.

Alternatively, you could seek support from your GP who can assist with a referral to mental health professional such as a psychologist, psychiatrist or therapist. They can help your child overcome their anxiety using mindfulness, improving self-confidence and self-esteem and helping children change the way they think about difficult situations.

Useful websites/contacts

<i>Kids Matter</i>	www.kidsmatter.edu.au
<i>Youth Beyond Blue</i>	www.youthbeyondblue.com.au
<i>Headspace</i>	www.headspace.org.au
<i>Reach Out</i>	www.au.reachout.com
<i>Raising Children Network</i>	www.raisingchildren.net.au
<i>Kids helpline</i>	1800 55 1800 24 hours a day, 7 days a week or web counselling
<i>Parent line</i>	1300 30 1300 (8am to 10pm seven days a week) & web counselling Tuesdays and Thursdays between 11am and 2pm