

Attendance Matters...

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is attendance so important? Does it really matter if my child misses a few days of school?

Yes, attendance does matter, even if it is only a few days. Research has shown that students who attend less than 90% of the time (this is the equivalent to ½ day per week; students who miss several consecutive days are even more at risk) have greater academic struggles, disengage from school, and are at risk for not graduating. It also removes them from their social circles and can make it challenging for them to reintegrate back with friends, particularly if they have missed important social bonding situations.

Absenteeism is the “most common indicator of overall student engagement, and a significant predictor of dropping out. For almost all young people, discontinuing school is not a sudden act, but a gradual process of disengagement; attendance patterns are a clear early sign” (Silent Epidemic, 2006)

2. What if my child is sick?

Illness is an inevitable consequence of being in close contact with other children on a daily basis. If your child is ill, by all means keep them at home. However, you should have a plan to help them catch up on the work they have missed. Check the teacher’s website for information on due dates and homework and establish a class “buddy” who will collect homework and handouts for your child. Encourage your child to see the teacher directly for support on concepts they are unclear on and may have missed due to illness.

However, if your child is chronically ill and missing many days, this is the time to seek medical support. Your child may have an undiagnosed condition or may be struggling with anxiety or depression. Any medical or mental health issue can make it difficult for a child to feel well enough to attend school. Worse, if they miss several consecutive days, particularly at the high school level, it becomes even more challenging to make up the missed work. As soon as you see a pattern of non-attendance with your child, particularly if they don't “seem sick” please follow up immediately with the school counsellor and a health care professional.

3. My child is a good student. Is it okay to take them out of school for an extended period of time for a family vacation?

This is a question that is often asked of Principals. If you refer to the answer in question 1, then removing your child from school for a family vacation is not in the best interests of their academic or social needs, even if they are successful learners. Students very quickly get behind, fall out of the pattern of attending and can feel stressed and anxious about getting caught up again. If you must remove your child

from school for extended lengths of time, please contact the administration and your child's teacher(s), to see if there are projects and assignments that can be worked on while you are away. Have your child book an appointment to meet with their teacher(s) their first day back to see what work they have missed and determine a plan to catch up. Please note, that teachers will not be able to provide one on one lessons for students who have missed classes.

4. My child is in elementary school and sometimes on days with inclement weather, I prefer to keep them at home. Is this okay?

Each day you keep your child at home breaks their pattern of attendance and it may make it more challenging to get them to attend the next day. Provide your child with the appropriate clothing for all types of weather and expect them to attend.

5. My student loves school and has always attended well. Suddenly he/she does not want to go. What do I do?

A sudden change in behaviour like this indicates that something else may be going on for your child. They may have had a conflict with a teacher or a peer and they do not know how to handle it. They may not understand an important concept and are afraid to ask for help. Talk to your child to try to determine what is causing this change. Contact their teacher(s)/school counsellor and/or principal immediately to determine what has happened and what solutions and strategies can be put in place to re-engage them in school.

6. What may poor attendance indicate about a child?

Poor attendance indicates a lack of engagement with both the academic and social aspects of school. It may be a symptom of a more complicated issue or problem:

- Relational/attachment issues
- Undiagnosed learning disability
- Undiagnosed mental health condition (anxiety, depression, ADHD)
- Behaviour issues
- Addiction issues: drugs or alcohol, gaming, internet or social media
- Bullying
- Low self-esteem
- Sleep issues

7. What can I do as a parent to ensure good attendance for my child?

- First and foremost, make sure that your student clearly understands the importance of attending school regularly
- Set the expectation that in your family, children attend school: it is their job!
- Monitor their medical and mental well-being: put supports in place to keep them healthy and attending
- Make sure they are eating a healthy diet and have a sleep routine

- If you think they are struggling academically, contact the school immediately
- Try to book family vacations during regularly scheduled school breaks
- Be proactive. You know your child best. If you detect any unusual behavior or changes in their behaviour pattern, contact the school immediately

8. What can I expect from the school if my child's attendance drops below 90%?

- A letter or email indicating an attendance concern
- A request for a meeting with you and your child to determine any underlying issues
- Regular attendance monitoring and the creation of an “attendance support plan”

The attendance support plan may include:

- Regular attendance meetings with a school staff member
- School based counselling support
- An adjusted student timetable to facilitate consistent attendance
- The development of an IEP (Individual Education Plan) if attendance issues require academic and behavioural supports
- Referral to the Choices program at the secondary level
- Referral to a Youth Outreach Worker or other community supports as necessary

9. What other supports can parents access to help with the underlying issues that may be making attendance problematic for their child?

There are many community agencies on the North Shore that can support youth and their families with mental health issues, relational issues and addiction issues. Here is a sampling of some of these service providers. Your school counsellor can also recommend additional supports.

Family Services of the North Shore: <http://www.familyservices.bc.ca>

Capilano Community Services: <http://capservices.ca/youth-services/>

Parkgate Community Services: <http://www.myparkgate.com/youth/overview/>

Hollyburn Family Services: http://hollyburn.ca/?page_id=43

North Shore Neighbourhood House: <http://www.nsnh.bc.ca/youth.php>

Vancouver Coastal Health:

https://www.vch.ca/your_health/school_health/north-shore---school-health-manual/

Ministry of Child and Family Development:

<http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/sda/contacts.htm#cns>