



# Attendance Matters



## What can I do as a parent to promote regular attendance?

- First and foremost, make sure that your child 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 health: put supports in place to keep them healthy
- Make sure they are eating a healthy diet and have a sleep routine with a regular wake up time
- 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

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

- Involvement of the school counsellor
- A letter or email indicating an attendance concern
- A request for a meeting with you and your child to determine any underlying issues
- A referral to the School Based Resource Team
- 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 specific support personnel and/or programs at the school
- Referral to a Behaviour Support Worker, Youth Outreach Worker or other community supports as necessary

## What may poor attendance indicate?

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, such as:

- 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

## What other supports can parents access to help with the underlying issues that may be making school attendance problematic?

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/>

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/](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>



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Absenteeism is the most significant predictor of academic underachievement, disengagement from school and failure to graduate. Studies have linked absenteeism with mental health issues, maladjustment, substance abuse, delinquency and future unemployment. School attendance is improved when there are:

- supportive school environments
- positive student-teacher relationships
- appropriate community supports
- supports for complex family circumstances

Dropping out of school is typically a gradual process of disengagement. Students surveyed indicate that their schools could have done more to help. "I missed too many days and could not catch up." They also indicated that poor relationships with their teachers contributed to their absenteeism. Schools that implement supportive strategies as follows, can successfully improve student engagement:

- positive and supportive relationships with staff
- sanctions for absenteeism with incentives for regular attendance
- individual academic enrichment/support programs
- computerized attendance monitoring with prompt responses to absences - daily texts or calls
- multiagency collaborative interventions

### School Based Resource Team (SBRT)

Each school SBRT can assist with supporting and monitoring student attendance. The following strategies are in common use:

- Assignment of case manager (counsellor, YEW, Teacher, EA, etc)
- Timetable adjustments
- Connection to a Youth Outreach Worker, outside counselling supports (if necessary)
- Supported Distributed Learning for classes with problematic attendance
- Provision of transit tickets/passes where transportation is primary issue
- Learning Services/Choices support if attendance is problematic and causing gaps in learning
- Creation of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) with specific attendance goals

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 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.

### 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, there should be a plan to help them catch up. Check the teacher's website for information on due dates and homework and establish a class "buddy" who will collect homework and handouts. Encourage your child to see the teacher directly for support on concepts they are unclear on and may have missed due to illness.

Seek medical support for any prolonged illness. There may be an undiagnosed condition such as anxiety or depression. Any medical or mental health issue can make school attendance difficult. Missing several consecutive days, particularly at the high school level, makes it even more challenging to make up the missed work.

### When the weather is bad I prefer to keep my child 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.

### Is it okay to take students out of school for a family vacation?

Removing your child from school for a family vacation is typically 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, 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.

### My child loves school and has always attended well, but now does not want to go. What do I do?

A sudden change in behaviour like this indicates that something else may be going on. There may be a conflict with a teacher or a peer. There may be a misunderstanding about the work. 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.

