



Fair Lawn Nurses

## Nurse's Newsletter

### School Refusal Behavior

School refusal is a serious condition that occurs when a student starts to refuse to go to school. This is a condition that **occurs in approximately 2-5% of school aged children. It equally affects both boys and girls.** School refusal behavior can occur at any age; however it tends to be seen more frequently during periods of major change. It may occur with a student starting kindergarten, middle school or high school. It also increases following vacations or weekends. Stressful situations also affect school refusal behavior. These may include death of a loved one, parental divorce, moving from one town to another, or the onset of school academic difficulties.

School refusal behavior is defined as when a student, 5-17 years of age

- is entirely absent from school for days or weeks
- attends school initially but leaves during the course of the school day
- goes to school following crying, tantrums, or other intense behavior problems
- Exhibits unusual distress during school days that leads to pleas for future absenteeism.

The causes of school refusal vary based on the individual student. However different issues have been frequently seen in school avoidant individuals. These include

- Separation anxiety - The fear of leaving a loved one as seen in younger children. The desire to attain excessive attention and closeness with a significant other, as well as a fear in some children that something bad will happen to a loved one if they are not present.
- Performance anxiety - Anxiety about taking tests, giving speeches or athletic competition in physical education classes. The fear of being embarrassed or humiliated in front of their peers.

- Social anxiety - Fear over interacting with their peers, or teacher. Some students feel uncomfortable in social situations.
- Generalized anxiety - The perceived notion that the world is a threatening place and something bad will happen.
- Depression
- Bullying- The student is facing bullying issues at school.
- A specific fear of something at school such as riding the bus or using the bathroom.
- Positive reinforcement - **A student is receiving rewards at home for not going to school. This may include parental attention or being able to spend time doing something they enjoy such as watching TV or playing games.**

Treatment of school refusal behavior

School personnel are frequently the first professionals to identify the existence of a problem that requires attention and intervention. Parents first need to be alerted to the fact that there is an existing problem. The School Psychologist and child study team should be called upon to help with assessment and intervention for the student. Finally, the student may need to be referred to a mental health specialist.

Through the mental health professional the student would be assessed for the causes of the school refusal behavior. The mental health professional, family, and the school would work together to create a plan that works towards the cessation of school refusal. The Student would be assisted in learning skills for managing anxiety and would be encouraged to return to school as soon as possible. The earlier intervention is given, the better the student's chances are for a successful outcome of their problem.