



Together We Are Safe, Together We Are Respectful, Together We Achieve

Wellbeing Wednesday #5

Each Wednesday we will be posting some exciting Wellbeing content for our community. This may include information about how you can support your children's and families' wellbeing, a snapshot on mental health issues currently prevalent in the community, or information about a local service in the area that might benefit you or your child.

This week's topic is School Refusal

What is school refusal?

School refusal can occur when a young person finds it difficult to attend school because they experience emotional distress, such as anxiety, in doing so. This can present as feeling ill or unhappy in the morning before school with a desire to stay at home. The good news is that with some strategies and the right support, things can get better for your young person.

Effects of school refusal

Some young people may feel worried and not want to attend school occasionally, but for some, the difficulties around attending school can persevere and result in them repeatedly refusing to attend school. Repeated school refusal can negatively impact young persons' learning, development and friendships.

Signs to look out for

School refusal can manifest in many ways. Things to look out for might be:

- distress and anxiety about going to school
- tearfulness before school, sometimes resulting in conflict with family members
- frequent complaints of physical illness before or during school including headaches, tiredness, stomach upsets or diarrhoea
- poor teacher/student relationships
- refusal to get out of bed, leave the house or get out of the car to go to school
- difficulty attending school after disruptions to usual school routines such as holidays, school sporting events or school camps
- frequent absences from class including being late or periods spent in the sick bay.

What contributes to school refusal?

School refusal is complex and differs for each young person. There might be a few contributing reasons that lead to school refusal. Some common factors include:

- Anxiety related to being separated from family
- Worry related to social interactions
- Changes to school environment such as transitioning from primary to high school or to a new school
- Learning difficulties or conflict with teachers
- Anxiety about exams or public speaking
- Being affected by bullying or friendship difficulties
- An unsettled family life – separation or divorce or illness.

How to support your young person return to school?

If you're caring for a young person who is refusing school, early action can help prevent behaviours from becoming longer-term habits. Modelling effective communication and problem solving at home can encourage your young person to do the same.

You can support your young person by:

- Finding a time when you both seem calm, then ask your young person about their concerns and worries about school. These issues can start to be addressed if they are known. Sometimes it can help to ask direct questions about school. If a child is unable to express their feelings about school, use the emoji board on your phone and ask the child to pick the face that best represents how they feel about coming to school.
- Exploring different ways your young person can try to manage their worries. Focus on their strengths and ways to positively engage in day-to-day activities
- Learning relaxation techniques together, such as breathing exercises, to help reduce feelings of stress and anxiety
- Creating a plan together that explores ways to manage the beginning of the school day, school term, school year, social situations or school work, depending on what is troubling your young person
- Making the time at home seem less appealing by reducing screen time and focussing on homework, discouraging them from refusing school.
- Speaking to the school and developing a collaborative plan. A clear and well understood plan between a young person, parents and the school can be a useful tool in addressing school refusal
- Considering if your young person may benefit from professional support to assist them with strategies and to better understand the underlying reasons for their school refusal
- Get someone else to drop your child at school, if you can. Children often cope better with separation at home rather than at the school gate.
- Praise and reward your child for going to school. For example, if your child goes regularly, they could earn bonus technology time, a special outing with a parent to their favourite park, or their favourite meal for dinner.

Don't forget to:

- Stay calm and look after your own wellbeing also
- Visit a Paediatrician to get a referral or a mental health plan: Families can get professional help to learn about managing school refusal and to sort out the problems behind it.
- Get support from Woodville teachers, leadership or wellbeing staff.

For more information, search Beyond Blue, Kids Helpline, Raising Children's Network, or contact Griffin Errey through the Woodville PS email or phone line.

Have a great week!

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