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“School Phobia”

The term “school phobia” is actually a misnomer because it suggests that the child is afraid of school. This is not necessarily the case. The term *school refusal* is a more accurate term because reluctance to attend school may be driven by a dozen different reasons, not all of them anxiety-based. School refusal describes the behaviors of children who refuse to attend school, those who remain in school with great difficulty or those who visit the nurse’s office frequently with complaints about pains or discomfort, crying, and temper tantrums. School refusal occurs in about 2% of children, most often between the ages of 5-11. It is equally common among boys and girls.

Possible Reasons for School Refusal

<i>Problem</i>	<i>Related Thought</i>
Separation anxiety	<i>Something bad will happen to my mother while I’m at school.</i>
Generalized anxiety	<i>I’m going to get a B on the spelling test.</i>
Obsessions and compulsions	<i>I’ll get AIDS and die if the kids touch my things.</i>
Social anxiety	<i>No one will talk to me in recess today.</i>
Panic	<i>I won’t be able to breathe and I’ll die.</i>
Performance anxiety	<i>I’ll get too nervous and forget everything.</i>
Learning difficulties	<i>Math is too hard. I’m dumb anyway.</i>
Medical illness and absences	<i>I’ll never catch up with the other kids. I’ll have an asthma attack in class.</i>
Fear of bullying/aggression	<i>They’ll laugh at me on the bus.</i>
Discipline in the classroom	<i>The teacher picks on me. She makes me feel stupid.</i>
Sleep deprivation and fatigue	<i>I can’t get up. I’m too tired to go to school.</i>
Adjustment to transitions	<i>High school is way too stressful.</i>
Oppositional behavior	<i>I’m angry that I couldn’t play Nintendo.</i>
Truancy	<i>School sucks. I’d rather hang out at the mall.</i>

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