

Family and Parent Supports

- > **Parent Coaches** work with parents to learn different problem-solving skills, conflict resolution, and to speak openly with youth, to achieve the family's goals
- > **Family Therapists** explore the whole family's interactions. They work to achieve long-term well-being for all family members

Tips from Clinical Mental Health Workers

We asked mental health workers who work with youth who are refusing school and their families for their tips on how to help. Here are some of their suggestions:

- > **Encourage good behaviour at home:**

Support the youth's emotions and feelings.

Create a routine in the morning and evenings.

Promote healthy sleep patterns and nutrition.

Listen to your youth and talk with him/her.

Help your youth get involved in hobbies that they enjoy.

Limit caffeine, nicotine, and Internet use.

Talk about drug use and alcohol use with your child, without "judging" them.

- > **Do not focus on the "timeline".**

If you try to get your youth back into school too quickly without tools for success this may not help. Take time to find the root of your youth's issues and work together to make sure he/she is set to succeed in school. High school is usually done in four years, but summer courses, a fifth year, and alternative schools are also options.

- > **Remember that there is more than just one option.**

Treatment for school refusal and absenteeism behavior can be treated or managed with many programs. There is no one best way.

- > **Change the habit, while healing the reason.**

School refusal can become a habit that is hard to break. It is important to change this behaviour quickly, and find out how you can help with the root cause. Healing the reason behind the behaviour can be a long process and may mean you need professional help.

In need of more information?

Please visit the link below for more resources and for The Family Navigation Project Information Package on School Refusal in High-School Aged Youth:

sunnybrook.ca/familynavigation

The **Family Navigation Project** at Sunnybrook is a non-profit program. We provide expert navigation of the mental health and addictions service system for youth aged 13-26 with serious mental health and/or addictions problems.

Email us at familynavigation@sunnybrook.ca or call us toll-free at 1-800-380-9FNP.

School Refusal & Absenteeism Behaviour in High School-Aged Youth



Family Navigation Project
at Sunnybrook



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What is school refusal and absenteeism behaviour?

Youth in high school sometimes will not go to school or are absent from too many classes. If you are a parent (**i.e. parent, parental figure, caregiver, guardian, etc...**) of a youth who refuses school, you are probably quite frustrated and concerned. The main reasons youth do not go to school include:

- > Not being able to cope with the stress of school.
- > Not feeling motivated or interested in school.
- > Dealing with a mental health or unhealthy substance use issue.

This pamphlet will give you information about what you can do to help and where you can get support.

What are the signs of school refusal & absenteeism behaviour?

Many parents first find out that their child is not going to classes through a phone call from the school. Sometimes parents notice that the youth is skipping class, not going to school, not talking about school, or not doing homework.

Substance use (i.e. alcohol and or drug use), mental health issues (i.e., Anxiety, Depression, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity



Disorder), or other concerns (i.e. Learning Disabilities) can be related to youth missing school. If you know the signs of these issues it may help you understand why the youth refuses school.

Some signs are:

- > Changes in sleep patterns (e.g. going to bed later, sleeping in longer than usual).
- > More defiant, stubborn, or angry.
- > Times of sadness or feeling down.
- > Worrying a lot, even over small things for no reason.
- > Withdrawal from family, or being secretive or suspicious.
- > Changes in friends and/or interest in activities.

Please visit [sunnybrook.ca/familynavigation](https://www.sunnybrook.ca/familynavigation) for more about these signs and conditions.

Where can families find help?

It is important that you take time to find support for yourself as well as your youth. Different professionals can help your family work through a difficult time and can help the youth get back on track.

Youth Supports:

- > **Psychiatric Assessment and Treatment** by a specialist (i.e. family doctor, pediatrician, psychiatrist) to evaluate and treat youth who struggle with mental health issues.
- > **Psycho-Educational Assessments** look at the youth's school performance, how the youth learns, and the youth's social or emotional skills.
- > **Individual Education Plans (IEP)** look at the student's learning needs and outline how the school will help by providing the right supports.
- > **School Guidance Counsellors** work with students and parents. They help guide the youth's academic, behavioural, and social growth.
- > **School Social Workers** consult on a student's social and/or emotional issues. They can refer to outside agencies. They can also provide family counselling, individual counselling, and classroom support.
- > **Alternative Schools** let students to learn in non-traditional classrooms. Students can be supported through out-of-class learning experiences, smaller class sizes, and credit recovery options.
- > **Section 23 Programs** are classrooms for students whose needs would be better met in treatment settings outside the regular school setting. Students work to develop life skills, work towards high school credits, and receive therapy or psychiatric treatment.

Speak to your family doctor or a teacher or administrator at your youth's school about how to access any of the above resources.