

# School truancy

School truancy can have an impact on your child's attitude towards school and their ability to learn. It can also affect you as a parent as it is very stressful dealing with this situation.

## Key Points:

- If your child is caught truanting, try not to get angry, but instead try to talk to them about how they are feeling, and why they have been avoiding school
- Take any contact from the school seriously and make sure that your son or daughter understands the importance of the situation
- If your child continues to truant, the school may impose other sanctions such as exclusion or a Parenting Contract. The Local Authority may get involved at this point

## What to do when you discover your child is truanting

If your child is caught truanting, you may receive a call or a message from the school. While this can be upsetting and surprising, it's important not to get angry or punish your child, but instead try to talk to them about how they are feeling, and why they have been avoiding school. Your child may be having problems which they need help with, so try to offer a trusting environment in which they can talk honestly with you.

It is also important to respond to any messages or calls that you or your child may have received from the school as the situation may get worse if you do not take action. You can ask for an interpreter to be provided if you need one.

## Is truancy such a big deal?

It may not always seem like a big deal if your child has skipped a few lessons - you may even have done it yourself when you were at school - however, it's important to deal with the issue. Aside from the potential dangers of your child being unsupervised you, as a parent, are legally responsible for keeping your child in school, and could face fines if the truancy persists.

Take any contact from the school seriously and make sure that your son or daughter understands the importance of the situation. Your child missing school could be a sign that she or he is having serious problems. They may be being bullied, or having trouble with school work, or struggling to deal with situations at home. All of these situations can impact on a child's behaviour.

## Coping with a truanting child

You may already feel overwhelmed with different problems. Life as a parent can be difficult and can sometimes seem like one crisis after another. Try to deal with problems as they arise, one stage at a time. Accept any offers of help that seem appropriate and, if you need any further support, there are many services available. Find out what's available in your local area, preferably before things reach crisis point. You may be able to get practical support, such as:

- a home help if you are suffering from ill health
- a nursery place for younger children
- an after-school club for older children
- someone who can help you with interpretation and translation

Your local social services, library or family doctor may be able to help you find these services. Let the school know about anything else that is going on, and ensure your child knows that you are on their side.

## Talking about truancy

As a parent, it's important to find a way to set limits and boundaries on your child's behaviour. The best way to do this is to help your child set their own limits through talking and negotiating. Even though children may object at the time, they need to know that someone is monitoring where they are and what they are doing. This lets them know that someone cares, and helps them feel more secure. However upset or angry you may feel, try to avoid seeing your child as the problem and focus instead on finding ways to change their behaviour..

Try to avoid emotional responses like name-calling, or blaming. Instead, talk to your child about how the situation makes you feel. Be clear that your child understands the seriousness of the situation, and that you want to help. If things go become heated, come back to the subject another time. The important thing is to keep on trying to talk.

Listen to what your child has to say. Discuss any problems they might be having at school or at home and talk about what they might have already done to try to resolve the situation. Be flexible and open to some negotiation - you might need to compromise a little before you can agree of a solution that works for everybody. You can also involve the school, to see if there is any way they can help.

If your teenager's behaviour seems extreme, it could be a sign that she or he is feeling upset or disturbed about something. Give your child opportunities to talk through what's happening. For example, the trauma of bereavement or divorce or separation can have a significant effect on a young person's outlook or behaviour. If the problem seems too big to deal with on your own, you can call our free support line any time on 0808 800 2222 or contact us via email or online chat for support.

## Problems at school

If your child has had problems at school, this could be an opportunity for you, your child and the school to tackle them together. Talk things through with your child and ask what help they think they might need. Other possible difficulties include the following:

**Stress** - many young people feel under a lot of pressure with school work, [exams](#) and all the pressures of growing up, which includes physical change, mood swings and concerns about body image, relationships and identity.

[Bullying](#) - bullying includes physical or verbal attacks or threats, either directly or online, social exclusion, sexist and racist abuse. If your child is being bullied, they will need your help to get it stopped.

**Health** - if you have any concerns about your child's health, go with them to the doctor for a medical check-up, or the optician's for an eye-test. Your child may be experiencing [depression](#) or other mental health problems so your doctor should be able to arrange medical and counselling help.

**Educational needs** - it may be that your child is bored or disillusioned with school because his or her [educational needs](#) are not met adequately. Sometimes this can cause a child to act up and be disruptive.

## Talking to the school when your child is truanting

If you have already been contacted by the school about your child's truancy, the school will expect to hear from you and you have a responsibility to reply. Try to talk to them as soon as possible. Talking

to the school can feel daunting. However, even if you've not been contacted, one of the best ways to find a solution is for pupils, parents and teachers to work together. Either way, always discuss the matter with your son or daughter before approaching the school.

If you are worried about talking to the school, or if English is not your first language, ask at your library if there are local community organisations that can help you. Telephone or write to the school to arrange a meeting with the teacher, Head of Year or Deputy Head. Ask if you can take a friend or relative along with you. Make a note of any points you want to make or questions you want to ask.

## **Meeting the school**

Try to stay calm when talking to the teacher. It's ok to say so if you feel angry or upset, but try to avoid being aggressive. Listen to what the teacher has to say before you respond, even if you disagree. If your child has been having problems at school, or even difficulties at home, let the school know what they are and ask what can be done to help.

School jargon can be confusing, and it is important to understand what is being said about your child. Always ask for clarification if the teacher isn't explaining things in a way that you understand. Make a note of all the main points made at the meeting for future reference. Sometimes a teacher may be unaware of any underlying problems. The school has a duty of care towards its pupils so if your child is being bullied, for example, you can ask to see a copy of the school's anti-bullying policy.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the meeting, make an appointment to see the Head Teacher or a parent governor. If the school is threatening exclusion get some information together so you know what to expect next. You can request an information pack through the Exclusion Line at the Advisory Centre for Education on 020 7704 9822.

## **Support at home**

You can also play a vital role in your child's education by giving support and encouragement at home. Often, the more supported a child feels at home, the more effectively she or he will learn at school. Try to spend more time with your child even if you are not doing something together.

If you are a non-resident parent, you may still want to be involved with the school. So long as there is no court order to limit this, both parents are entitled to meet or speak to teachers, attend school functions and ask for a school report to be sent home. The involvement of non-resident parents, organised sensitively, can be extremely valuable to your child. Maintain regular contact and take an interest in what your child is learning.

## **If your child continues to truant**

If your child continues to truant and/or behave disruptively, the school may ask you to sign up to a Parenting Contract. This is a voluntary agreement between you and the local education authority or the school's governing body. The contract will mean that you are given practical help and support to make sure your child attends school or improves their behaviour. In the case of regular truanting or exclusion you may be served with a Parenting Order. This is a court order which will insist you attend a parenting programme and comply with orders about your child's attendance or behaviour.

This support is designed to help you tackle your child's behaviour and to gain the skills and confidence to make a real difference. The courts may also impose an Education Supervision Order which means the LEA can tell you what to do to make sure your child is properly educated.

If any of these measures are carried out, it is really important that you do everything you can to comply with the regulations and work to get your child back into school. Ignoring an escalating problem can lead to fines and, in some extreme cases, jail sentences. Make sure you understand your rights around these measures before anything gets out of hand.

## **Further resources**

It may help to chat to other parents on our [forums](#) to find out how they are dealing with this issue within their family life. You can also talk to us online via our [live chat service](#), email us at [askus@familylives.org.uk](mailto:askus@familylives.org.uk) or call us on our helpline on 0808 800 2222 to speak to trained family support worker. To find out more about Parenting Contracts, Parenting Orders, possible fines and other penalties, see [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk). You may find it helpful to visit [Child Law Advice](#) for information too.

# Other organisations that can help

[Not Fine in School](#) is a parent/carer-led organisation set up in response to the growing number of children and young people who struggle with school attendance.

To find out more about Parenting Contracts, Parenting Orders, possible fines and other penalties, see [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

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