

# GUIDANCE ON THE TOPIC OF SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM

## Dear Parents and Guardians,

we would like to draw your attention to a topic that is important to all of us: the regular school attendance of your children. Sometimes there are phases in which children and adolescents are reluctant to go to school or are absent more frequently – whether for health, personal, or other reasons. We understand that this can be a stressful situation and would like to provide you with some information and suggestions on how we can deal with it appropriately together.

Important: This guide does not replace a personal (counseling) conversation and is intended solely to raise awareness of the topic!

## WHAT IS SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM?

School absenteeism refers to unexpected or repeated absences from school. When the rate of absences reaches 20%, experts such as Rotthaus (2016) consider it a potential problem (this equals either one absence per week or one full week in every five).

It does not matter whether absences are excused or accompanied by medical certificates. 80% attendance, conversely, means absences of: 1 day per week or 2 months per school year.

School absenteeism includes not only full days of absence, but also the repeated skipping of individual lessons (e.g., certain subjects), as well as frequent or consistent tardiness.

## WHY DO CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS MISS SCHOOL?

The reasons for frequent absence are varied and individual. There can be many valid reasons for being reluctant to attend school:

However, there are two common basic patterns:

- **Lack of motivation:** Some children simply find little joy in school, due to feeling overwhelmed, bored, or lacking motivation.
  - School is annoying
  - It's pointless anyway
  - School isn't that important
  - Can't be bothered

**Main goal:** A prompt reintegration into the regular school routine. Since lack of motivation is often less obvious and may occur without the parents' knowledge, it is important to understand the causes. School and family should work together to find ways to rekindle interest in attending school.
- **School anxiety or school phobia:** Other children are burdened by fears, such as fear of exams, social interactions, or performance pressure. It is important to take a closer look together and help the children cope with these fears.

- I can't handle this
- I can't bear it
- I feel helpless

**Main goal:** The goal is not to eliminate fear, but to go to school despite the fear and experience that the fear subsides if it is endured long enough. This way, children can learn that these fears lessen over time and that they can actively influence them. (This applies to school phobia and school anxiety if real external causes have been ruled out!) Close communication with the school is often helpful here.

## OVERVIEW

Type	Characteristics
Truancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of motivation</li> <li>• Lack of discipline</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence without parental knowledge</li> <li>• No underlying fear</li> <li>• Preference for more pleasant activities</li> </ul>
Separation anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear something will happen to a caregiver</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear something will happen to themselves</li> </ul>
School anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School-related fears</li> <li>• Fear of academic failure</li> <li>• Fear of teachers</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear of peers</li> <li>• Fear of social situations / withdrawal</li> <li>• Test anxiety</li> </ul>
Being kept at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By parents</li> <li>• Absence due to family reasons</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disability and illness</li> <li>• Religious/cultural differences</li> <li>• Critical/indifferent attitude towards school</li> <li>• Neglect/abuse</li> </ul>

**Important:** Real causes of fear (violence, bullying, etc.) must be resolved before reintegration can begin! The background of the fears can only be identified through cooperation between students, parents, and teachers/school social workers. → Your knowledge of your child is valuable, and we want to find solutions together with you. If it becomes clear that school-related factors are causing the absenteeism, targeted measures must be taken.

It is crucial to recognize school avoidance early and take appropriate steps to restore regular school attendance. Many children suffer in these situations and should have their fears and concerns taken seriously.

If there are physical complaints, a thorough medical examination is important. However,

repeated sick notes without a verifiable physical cause are not advisable. Mild discomfort should not be a reason to miss school.

## WHAT ROLE DO MEDICAL CERTIFICATES AND EXCUSES PLAY?

Of course, there are good reasons to keep children at home when they are ill. At the same time, repeated medical certificates not based on an acute illness can have unintended effects. Being away from school is often experienced as a relief, which can intensify the problem in the long run. Every missed school day makes it more difficult to return to a regular school routine.

- The “valid reason” is reinforced/upheld by a medical certificate
- Certification of a “disorder” relieves the individual from taking responsibility for their own actions
- Every missed school day intensifies the issue

**Main goal:** Quick resumption of school attendance.

Our shared goal should be for your child to return to regular school attendance as soon as possible. Every school day helps maintain academic progress, sustain social connections, and overcome fears. We are here to support you in finding solutions together and assisting your child during this phase.

## WHAT CAN HELP

- **Presence and consistency** in parenting are important to effectively counter school absenteeism while maintaining a supportive but firm attitude. Parental presence means being reliable, attentive, and determined, setting clear boundaries, and supporting the child with consistent, calm action – without getting drawn into power struggles.
- **Show appreciation** – even small steps or efforts should be recognized to encourage the child.
- **Take fears seriously and understand the background** – work together with the child, the school, and possibly other professionals to uncover the reasons behind the absenteeism.
- **Find individual solutions**, as there is no one-size-fits-all intervention – each case requires an approach tailored to the child.
- **Gradual exposure to fears** – work in small, supported steps to reintroduce the child to school.
- **Be patient** – setbacks are normal and do not mean progress is lost. Support should be planned for the long term.
- **Empathetic communication** – approach the child openly, understandingly, and without blame.
- **Engage in regular conversations** – maintain open communication with the child to identify worries and fears early.
- **Promote positive associations with school** – talk about enjoyable aspects of school life, connect to the child’s interests, and set motivating goals.

- **Create reliable routines** – clear daily structures help the child feel secure and make school attendance a normal part of life.
- **View school as a key social environment** – foster social and emotional development through contact with peers and other trusted individuals.
- **Strengthen collaboration with the school** – seek contact with teachers to develop joint strategies.
- **Consider professional support if the issue persists** – school social work, counseling centers, or therapeutic help can be valuable resources.
- **Celebrate successes** – consciously acknowledge small and large progress to reinforce the child's motivation.

## WHAT DOESN'T HELP

- **Do not take it personally** if the child cannot follow through with agreed steps – perhaps the goal was too ambitious. Stay flexible and develop new, realistic steps together.
- **Do not break agreements** – commitments should be followed consistently. Sudden changes like “Don't you want to take the test after all?” or “Don't you want to stay longer?” can cause uncertainty and additional pressure.
- **Do not lose sight of the context** – if causes and background factors remain unclarified, the risk of relapse remains high. Regular reflection with the child and school is important.
- **Do not assume the problem is solved** just because things go well for a short time – sustainable change requires time and stability.
- **Do not leave the decision entirely up to the child** as to whether they go to school – parents must show a clear, supportive stance and work on solutions together with the child.
- **Do not view sick notes due to psychosomatic complaints as a long-term solution** – instead, seek ways to support the child despite their fears.

## CONCLUSION

When children have problems at school, it always affects both school and home. That's why it is important that we, as parents and school staff, work together in trust. Only together can we provide your child with the stability, guidance, and support it needs during this time.

## SUPPORT

Please first contact the class teacher, grade coordinator, school social worker, or other trusted professionals.

**School Social Work – Ulrike Gülden, Achim Breuer**

Email: [schulsozialarbeit@gymnasium-wuerselen.de](mailto:schulsozialarbeit@gymnasium-wuerselen.de)

**External support for school absenteeism can be consulted if needed:**

*School Psychological Counseling Center*

Steinstraße 87

52249 Eschweiler

Tel: 0241 5198-5144

Email: [schulpsychologische-beratungsstelle@staedteregion-aachen.de](mailto:schulpsychologische-beratungsstelle@staedteregion-aachen.de)

*Parenting Counseling at Lindenplatz Counseling Office*

Youth Office of the City of Würselen

Lindenplatz 24

52146 Würselen

Tel: 02405-675164

*Family Counseling*

Counseling Center for Parents, Children, and Adolescents of the Städteregion Aachen

Kaiserstraße 100

52134 Herzogenrath

Tel: 02407-5591800

If your child exhibits serious psychological symptoms, a child psychiatry practice or psychotherapy may be necessary. Due to long waiting times, parents should contact multiple practices early or arrange an appointment via the appointment service center (Tel. 116 117). Contact details for professionals can be found via the search tool of the „Kassenärztliche Vereinigung Nordrhein“.