



School refusal

Understanding 'school can't'

'School can't' is a term coined to understand the challenges children face when they find it difficult or not possible to attend school. This difficulty is often rooted in complex emotional and sensory experiences rather than a simple refusal to attend.

Our purpose
a different brilliant[®]

Understanding, engaging
and celebrating the strengths,
interests and aspirations of people
on the autism spectrum.

Prevalence among Autistic children

Autistic children are three to four times more likely to experience 'school can't' than their neurotypical peers. It is estimated that between 43% to 57% of absences among Autistic students can be attributed to 'school can't' and that it may impact Autistic students at an earlier age compared to neurotypical students.

How to spot 'school can't'

- Your child often misses school but isn't just skipping on purpose.
- They seem scared or really worried about going to school.
- Getting ready for school is super hard, and they might have meltdowns.
- They say they feel sick a lot, but there's no sickness you can see.
- They want to stay home where they feel safe and you understand they're having a hard time.

Why 'school can't' might happen

- School makes them feel really anxious, whether it's about the work, making friends, or fitting in.
- They've had bad times at school, like being bullied or feeling alone.
- They struggle if school schedules change or things don't go as planned.
- School is just too much for their senses — too loud, too bright, or too busy.
- They just feel safer and more comfortable at home.



Things that might increase 'school can't'

- Older kids might have it tougher because school gets more complicated as they grow up.
- If your child already deals with a lot of anxiety or feels down a lot, it might be harder for them.
- When the family is going through tough times, such as when parents are highly stressed, it can affect your child.
- If your child doesn't feel good about their relationship with their teacher, it can make school harder for them.

The impact of 'school can't'

- **Physical symptoms:** Your child might feel sick or in pain, which can be hard to figure out.
- **Feeling left out:** They may start to feel lonely and like they don't fit in at school.
- **Mood changes:** Your child might have big shifts in how they feel, which can make them less confident.
- **Struggling in school:** They may have a hard time keeping up with schoolwork.
- **Stress at home:** It can cause worry for the whole family and make everyday life more challenging.

Supportive actions for parents

- **Talk it out:** Have calm and open chats with your child about school and really listen to how they feel.
- **Routine helps:** Create a calm morning routine to make the start of the day less stressful.
- **Work together:** Team up with the school to make changes that can help your child.
- **Join forces:** Partner with teachers and therapists to help with your child's learning.
- **Find the right help:** Look for therapists who understand and support different kinds of minds.
- **Take care of you:** If you're feeling stressed, getting help for yourself can show your child how to deal with tough times.
- **Flexible schooling:** Consider different school schedules, like part-time, to help your child ease into attending more.

Remember, 'school can't' is not a dead end. It's a complex issue that can be addressed with a supportive, collaborative approach involving parents, educators, and healthcare providers. Together, you can create a path that acknowledges and respects your child's unique neurology while promoting educational engagement.

Useful resources

Some resources and research refer to 'school refusal' or 'school distress'.

Web

Parents Victoria: parentsvictoria.asn.au/issues/school-refusal

The Conversation: theconversation.com/you-cant-fix-school-refusal-with-tough-love-but-these-steps-might-help-199095

Raising Children: raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/school-learning/school-refusal/school-refusal

ReachOut Parents: parents.au.reachout.com/common-concerns/everyday-issues/school-refusal-and-teenagers

Aspect offers a comprehensive approach, based on the idea of a **different brilliant®**, that:

- Respects difference and diversity
- Builds a person's skills based on their strengths, interests, aspirations and support needs
- Develops autism-friendly environments
- Supports others to understand and embrace autism and to develop respectful supportive interactions.