

MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT (BETTER INFORMED TOGETHER)

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD WILL NOT GO TO SCHOOL

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP
OCTOBER 2022 MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT

Having a child who does not want to go to school is an issue that can impact the entire family and can cause a great deal of stress for parents. With the school year now underway, you may notice your child is avoiding school. School avoidance can lead to truancy concerns. While you may feel alone, many parents are going through similar situations and challenges. In this edition of MH TidBIT, we discuss some steps you can take if your child does not want to go to school.

Prioritize their mental health-If your child does not want to go to school, it is likely there could be another issue going on. Start by opening the discussion with your child and letting them know you are there to talk about what may be bothering them. It may sound simple but asking them why they do not want to go to school and listen carefully to their answers. There are many signs that your child can exhibit when they are experiencing a mental health issue, some common ones to watch for would be changes in sleep, appetite, hygiene, fear of leaving the parent, and school performance. They may have increased physical health complaints with no known medical cause. Additionally, you may find your child isolating and withdrawing from friends or social activities. If your child is communicating, they are dealing with these symptoms, you should reach out to your child's primary care physician or contact the behavioral health company of your health insurance for a list of mental health outpatient providers. You can find the contact for the behavioral health company by looking on the back of your child's health insurance card and locating the phone number for behavioral health/mental health.

Model good behavior and ask for help if needed-You want to show your child that asking for help is an act of courage and the sooner you address the issue, the better off your child will be in the long run. Reach out to your child's school guidance office to discuss your concerns. Parents may also contact their school's Student Assistance Program (SAP). Parents can refer their children to this program. SAP is a team of trained professionals who can assist with linking students with needed in-school and community supports. Reach out to your school guidance office to start this process.

Know your child's rights-While no parent wants to deal with truancy, it is very important you know your child's rights. You can be the best advocate child when you know what is supposed to happen. For instance, a school needs to have scheduled a Student Attendance Improvement Conference (SAIC) with you before filing with a magistrate for truancy issues. Additionally, students with disabilities that impact attendance can have these outlined in their IEP or 504 plans and an Alternate Attendance Plan can be created. For more information on your child's rights, please reference

https://www.paparentandfamilyalliance.org/_files/ugd/dcd421_2b71b5d3f3a54e3a9f7f7d915c2cda11.pdf which is a resource that was put together by the Parent Education & Advocacy Leadership Center.