



Coming to School

What to say (or not to say)

- Be kind but firm
 - Consistent limits and routine are important for establishing a habit of coming to school. The child may be avoiding for various reasons (anxiety, bullying, friendship problems, academics, etc.), so it is also important to be empathetic and kind
- Talk about the reasons the child does not want to go to school
 - You may make more progress in the conversation if you ask open-ended questions (ones that do not have yes/no answers) – "What things are making you not want to go to school?" NOT "are you being bullied?"
 - Do not be afraid to collaborate with the school about any concerns your child raises
- In the mornings, do not ask the child about how they feel about going to school - this can remind them of the hesitance even if they were feeling ok.
- Give clear messages to the child, acknowledging concerns but remaining firm - "I know you don't want to go, but we cannot allow you to stay home"

Routines

- Have consistent routines every day (same bedtime, same wake-up time, etc.)
- While getting ready in the morning, focus on one step at a time - "Let's focus on eating breakfast first" "Let's get your things ready" "It's time to get dressed"
- Give instructions as sentences, not questions – "It is time to go to school." not "do you want to go to school today?"

Limited Choices strategy

- Limited Choices strategy: Rephrase what you would like the child to do with a choice where you are content with either option
 - For example, "When we get in the car, would you like to sit in the middle or near the window?" "Would you like me to walk you up to the bus or watch you here from the bus stop?" The child gets to make a choice, but either way the end result will be getting in the car or getting on the bus
 - Another example: Bedtime is in 5 minutes. You tell the child "We can go to bed in 3 minutes or 5 minutes, it's up to you" There is no choice over going to bed, but they can have a sense of control around what time this happens.



"ELC" Method:

- Empathy ("you're feeling nervous after being away for a little while")
- Limit ("and it's time to go to school")
- Choice Question ("would you like to hop to the bus like a frog or walk like a dinosaur?")

Logical consequences

- Provide logical consequences - if the issue is getting out of bed in the morning because they are tired, the logical consequence is that they need to go to bed earlier the next evening. Similarly, another logical consequence in this case can be limiting screen time in the evening.

For days when they must stay home

- Continue similar routines on days they stay home (wake up at the same time, no TV or internet during school hours, work on school work during school hours, etc.)
- If the child stays home, make sure they are safe and comfortable but do not give them special treatment. No special trips, treats, visitors, etc. as this reinforces that staying home is a fun option.
- Make the time at home as boring as possible - they cannot watch TV or play video games but can read. This will make staying home a less pleasant option for them - going to school with their friends will start to look better in comparison.

On days they attend school

- Give specific praise - "I really liked how you packed your backpack without me asking you to,"
- Celebrate with the child, especially for early successes - "I'm very proud of you for going to school today. You should be proud of yourself too"
- Ask them how they were able to do it. This will help them reflect on which strategies work for them
- Ask how the day went and their favorite things about the day. This will help them remember the positive things associated with going to school



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Strengthening social connectedness

- Encourage friendships with other students within the school/the child's class as this can be an additional motivation for attending
- Encourage your child's independence by encouraging activities with other children.

Coping Skills

- Practice coping skills consistently and regularly - even when the child is doing well. This makes it easier for them to access these skills when they feel overwhelmed
- [An Organized Way to Explore a Child's Coping Skills](#)
 - [Coping Skills for Kids: Free Coping Skills Checklist](#)
 - [Visual Coping Skills Checklist.pdf](#)

Articles

- [School Avoidance: Tips for Concerned Parents - HealthyChildren.org](#)
- [So your child refuses to go to school? Here's how to respond](#)
- [Back to school during COVID-19: Helping with children's anxiety](#)
- [How to Set Limits with Your Child \(That Stick!\) in 3 Easy Steps](#)
- [Limited Choices | Positive Discipline](#)
- [How To Cope With The Sunday Scaries | Newport Institute](#)

People who can help

- Pediatrician
- Teacher
- The child's therapist, psychologist, coach, etc.
- School counselor
- School nurse
- School staff