

# Cassadaga Valley Central School District

## SCHOOL REFUSAL AND AVOIDANCE

“If we have the attitude that it’s going to be a great day it usually is.”  
—Catherine Pulsifier

School Refusal can be a result of multiple different things. It could be avoidance, anxiety, a youth being tired, due to bullying, a test, and many other reasons. School refusal is a regular refusal to attend school or routine problems staying at school. School refusal is considered a symptom, is not a mental health diagnosis, but could be a part of another anxiety disorder, PTSD, or an adjustment disorder.

### BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

School refusal can come across the ages. There is no particular age where a child might not fight about going to school anymore. Fear of going to school started as a “school phobia” in 1941 and only about 2-5% of all school aged youth experience this. It is most common in ages 5-6 and also 10-11.



Symptoms of school refusal might include:

- **Autonomic:** dizziness, abdominal pain, back pain, joint pain, headache, shakiness, palpitations and chest pains
- **Gastrointestinal:** nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- **Stress**
- **Fears**

### HOW ELSE COULD THIS MANIFEST?

- Skipping school or refusing to go to school
- Frequent visits to the school nurse complaining and asking to go home
- Makes contact with home during the day and may be asked to be picked up
- Go to school only after crying, tantrums, defiance, or other problem behaviors

### HOW TO HELP

There are multiple people that can assist a child who might be anxious or refusing to come to school. Outside of school, a child’s primary care physician might be able to assist. They may recommend understanding the environment and triggers that may be assisting in refusal. They might recommend counseling with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Exposure Therapy, or Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT). If anxiety is severe, a primary care physician or counselor may recommend medication. This can include SSRI (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors).

Inside school, having a support team in place is key. Oftentimes this will assist the child in managing anxiety before it gets out of hand. Members of this team include the school social worker, school counselors, school nurse, teachers, principal or Dean of Students. Check in systems can be put in place to remind the child they are safe and supported first thing in

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the morning and throughout the day. Having a safe plan in school too for when the child gets overwhelmed or having a safe place to go is also crucial to success.

## ATTENDANCE IS CRUCIAL.

It is important to remember that every day a child misses school is a day that may potentially go against them. Missing school causes a change in routine, falling behind in work, and can cause an increase in anxiety and frustration. Once a child is in High School, attendance can also go against them in seat time when it comes to taking Regents and final exams. Educational neglect can also be charged should a child regularly miss school without a true reason. Fear or school refusal are not reasons to miss.



## WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

[School Avoidance Alliance](#)

[Tips for Concerned Parents](#)

[Stanford Children: School Refusal](#)

[Child Mind Institute: School Refusal](#)

[American Academy of Family Physicians](#)

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If you would like any more information on social media, social work or our services, feel free to reach out to us at [rsmith@cvcougars.org](mailto:rsmith@cvcougars.org) or [epleszewski@cvcougars.org](mailto:epleszewski@cvcougars.org)

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