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National Alliance on Mental Illness

Mercer

Serving the New Jersey Capital Area

SCHOOL ANXIETY

**A GUIDE FOR
PARENTS**

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INTRODUCTION

This toolkit is a brief guide to aid parents with children coping with school anxiety. Understanding your child is key to helping them conquer their fears.

Included in this toolkit:

- Information about school anxiety
- ADHD signs, symptoms, and support
- Support systems and measures for children



While this toolkit is directed towards parents who already have kids that struggle with school anxiety, this toolkit will also be helpful for future parents of school-aged children.



WHAT IS SCHOOL ANXIETY

THE FEAR OF SCHOOL

Children of all ages may experience fear going to school and related activities

Common activities children may fear include socializing, speaking to teachers, and taking exams.

LEARNING SPECIFIC ANXIETIES

Because each child is different, he/she may have anxiety about school for different reasons. It is crucial to understand WHY a child may not want to go to school.

Examples include:

Separation anxiety: Child may have anxiety about leaving a specific person (typically a parent).

Social anxiety: Child may have anxiety interacting with others at school.

Agoraphobia: Fear of crowded places, leaving home, or being in places difficult to escape.

SIGNS OF SCHOOL ANXIETY

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Signs	Description	Reasons
Restlessness/ Inattention	Tapping on desks, clicking of pens, inability to sit still	May indicate a child wants to leave the situation
Disruptions	Can include verbal disruptions or nonverbal including passing notes or using electronics	May be trying to avoid something they'd rather not do
Frequent Trips to the Nurse	A child constantly visits the nurse for a variety of reasons or what seems like no good reason at all	May be an excuse to get out of a situation, typically class. Anxiety may also cause a child to feel ill
Failure to Turn in Homework	A child may consistently fail to complete homework or lose their work	May lack confidence in their ability to do the work well or they need help
Avoiding Social Situations	Child may try to think of excuses to avoid interacting with people or being in crowds	Fear of judgement or feeling embarrassed

What may cause a child to be chronically absent?

Individual Factors:

- Bullying
- Safety concerns
- Chronic illness
- Disabilities/ special education
- Sleep deficiency
- Low academic abilities

Family Factors:

- Food insecurity
- Home responsibilities
- Lack of supervision
- Family health problems
- Exposure to harmful substances (tobacco smoke...)

School Factors

- Cultural/ language barrier
- Member of a vulnerable group (LGBTQ)
- Unreliable transportation
- Safety
- Economic disadvantage

SCHOOL ABSENCE

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General school absence information

Chronic absenteeism is considered to be when a child misses 10% of the school year (around 18 days)

While school absenteeism is mostly seen in high school students, school avoidance often begins in elementary school.

At least 10% of kindergarten and first grade students miss a month or more of school in any given year

During high school, chronic absenteeism becomes a larger issue with around 19% of students being chronically absent

Tips for parents

Tackle the problem ASAP: Once missing work snowballs it will become more difficult to manage over time

Be open with asking straightforward questions to your child (ex. "what is making school feel hard?")

Take vacations or long trips over breaks and not during school time

Keep track of your child's attendance

Prepare for school the night before to make the mornings less stressful



STATISTICS

In high school, about 1 in 5 students are chronically absent.

Native English speakers are less likely to be chronically absent at every grade level except for high school.

Approximately 8 million students, grades K-12, are chronically absent each year.

Overall, **13.7%** of English speaking students are chronically absent compared to the **16.2%** of non-English speakers.

All statistics are provided by the U.S Department of Education

ADHD

ATTENTION-DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

WHAT IS ADHD?

ADHD is a neurological disorder which makes focusing on tasks including schoolwork, chores, sitting still, and paying attention difficult.

ADHD may contribute towards school anxiety as many of the symptoms of ADHD are similar to the signs of school anxiety.



UNDERSTANDING ADHD

There are two types of ADHD behaviors including inattentive and impulsive behaviors. Some children may have one or the other, but many have both.

Symptoms must be present for at least 6 months and negatively affect one socially and academically.

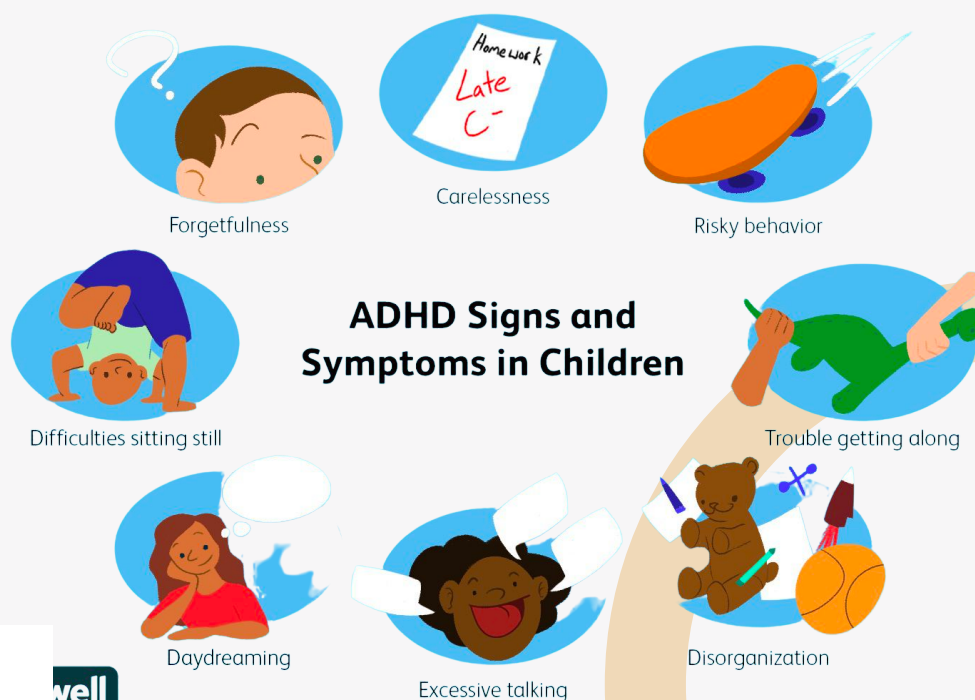
Children with ADHD may have higher levels of social anxiety, separation anxiety, depression, agoraphobia, and aggression.

The conglomerate of symptoms may lead to children with ADHD to stray away from school both mentally and physically.

SIGNS OF ADHD

- Avoidance of school-related activities
- Inability to focus on a specific task or goal
- Hyperactivity
- Poor organizational skills
- Not listening or interrupting others

To be diagnosed with ADHD, the symptoms must be present in at least two environments, for example, at school and at home.



SCHOOL ABSENTEE SUPPORT



Absentee support at home

- Request/provide Individualized Education Program (IEP)
- Be a model for how to handle emotions (be calm with kids, even if they are having a meltdown)
- Create a routine for children:
 - Put things away in the same spot each day
 - Designate a homework location
 - Use checklists
 - Have a consistent bedtime
 - Provide downtime
 - Designate chores
- Help children be kinder to themselves/ boost self esteem. Swat down thoughts of being a “failure,” “stupid,” or “annoying”
- Explain to your kids why they may feel different from other kids
- Make time for healthy hobbies, clubs, and sports that your child loves
- Confidence is key for kids with ADHD!
- Remind your child that the past is the past, have them breathe and start a new slate so they can acquire a newfound confidence

SCHOOL ABSENTEE SUPPORT



Absentee support at school

- Talk to the teacher beforehand about your child's ADHD so the teacher may also support the child.
- Have your child sit at the front of the classroom; this will promote accountability.
- If your child takes medication for their ADHD have them start taking it a couple weeks before summer break ends.
- Read over the syllabus with your child and break everything down into understandable segments.
- Many kids with ADHD tend to ignore issues rather than face them. Talk to your child about the harmful repercussions of ignoring issues and aid them in accomplishing tasks, but don't complete the tasks for them.
- Stress the fact: "Turning in something late or unfinished is better than turning in nothing at all."



NEXT STEPS

Creating an Action Plan



An action plan is a planned set of steps or information for specific scenarios

What to include:

- Individual Emergency protocol
- Medication list
- Monitoring instructions
- Triggers (environmental, social, ect.)
- Emergency contact information

Creating an action plan for your child and giving it to trusted individuals (teachers, relatives, other guardians) will give you peace of mind knowing others are able to help your child with anxiety about school.

Templates for action plans can be found online

REMEMBER: you never have to be alone helping your child

RESOURCES

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry



Child Mind Institute



Anxiety Canada



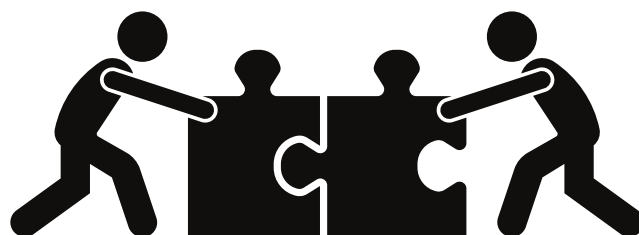
RESOURCES NJ

NAMI Mercer

Help Line: 609.799.8994 x17

Perform Care (NJ)
609-586-1200

Mercer County FSO



You got this!

School anxiety, although it may be confusing, can be worked on. Children need guidance from their parents, guardians, and teachers to be the best student they possibly can be. Help will always be available whether it be from NAMI, a trusted physician, or loved ones.

"Believe you can, and you're half way there"

- Theodore Roosevelt

