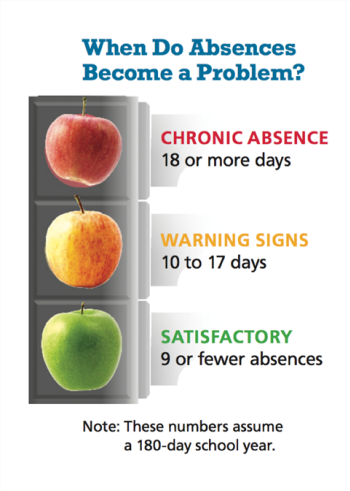
Community Corner

"I don't want to go to school today!"



--School Refusal: Information for Parents

Each year, approximately 2–5% of children refuse to come to school due to anxiety or depression. Previously referred to as school phobia, school refusal includes kindergarten students with relatively mild separation anxiety and more severe cases where a student misses weeks or months of school because of debilitating anxiety or depression. Because of the serious long-term social and educational consequences associated with missing school, the problem needs to be addressed promptly and aggressively with a team approach that includes both parents AND school staff.

<u>What are signs of school refusal?</u> If your child has missed 2-3 days over a 2-week period, especially if they display any of the behaviors below, you child may be developing a patter of school refusal:

- Tearfulness before school or repeated pleas to stay at home resulting in frequent lateness or absences.
- Tantrums, clinginess, dawdling or running away before school or during drop-off.
- Frequent complaints of illness before or during school such as stomach aches, headaches, dizziness or fatigue.
- Difficulty attending school after weekends, holidays, school camps, or sports days.
- Long periods or frequent visits to health room or principal's office.

<u>What are the consequences of school refusal?</u> Students who school refuse can quickly create a habit of refusing to attend school which may have long-term impacts for their future. Missing one day of school each week adds up to 2 months of learning over a school year. That's also a lot of missed recess which might jeopardize children's social relationships. School refusal can also impact household income as caretakers have to forgo work to stay home with the child. Some research has shown that school refusal also has been associated with having problems later in life with mental health and the ability to get employment (Queensland Department of Education, 2013).

<u>How can you help at home?</u>

- Decrease the reward for staying home (i.e. no video games, television, toys, extra snacking, or parental attention).
- Listen to your child's concerns about going to school and maintain open communication regarding attendance issues with classroom teacher, school counselor, etc.
- Seek professional help for your child as you see fit.

If you want more information and practical tools and tips for parenting your child, feel free to contact me. You can reach me by phone at (402) 715-8774 or e-mail me anytime at rlmcintosh@mpsomaha.org.

Respectfully,

Rye McIntosh LCSW, LMHP
School Social Worker