



Top 5 Reasons Teens Are Skipping School, and What Parents Can Do



As a parent, it's concerning to find out your teen is repeatedly skipping school. Truancy, defined as any unexcused absence from school without a parent's permission, has sharply risen among teenagers in recent years. But why are so many teens missing class? And what can parents do to get their child back on track?

Here are the top five reasons teens are skipping school today, along with tips for parents on addressing each issue:

Bullying

For some teens, skipping school is an attempt to avoid being bullied or tormented by their peers. Persistent bullying, whether physical, verbal, social, or online, can make the school environment feel threatening and unsafe. This leads many bullied students to start chronically missing class as a coping mechanism.

What you can do:

- Work very closely with teachers, counselors, principals, and other school staff to get an accurate picture of any bullying issues your teen may be facing.
- Report all bullying incidents. Advocate for your child's safety and well-being.
- Help build their self-esteem and sense of belonging outside of school. Consider counseling to cope with the impacts of bullying.
- Explore options for changing classes, friendship circles, or even schools if bullying persists.

The full process from concern to IEP can take 2–6 months depending on the school. Eligibility criteria are set by the State Board of Education. Most students must perform well below average for their age to qualify.

Mental Health Struggles

One of the biggest drivers of truant behavior is mental health problems like anxiety, depression, trauma, and other concerning issues. A staggering 87% of Gen Z youth report experiencing these challenges. For some teens, the prospect of facing anxiety triggers at school leads to avoiding it altogether through unexcused absences. This only reinforces the problem, as avoidance breeds more anxiety in the long run.

What you can do:

- Pay close attention to any warning signs of mental health struggles, such as persistent low mood, worry, irritability, changes in eating/sleeping habits, or social withdrawal.
- Seek help from a counselor, therapist, or your child's doctor.
- Avoid punishing truant behavior, as this often worsens the underlying issues. Instead, work on getting to the root of the problem with professional support.

Pandemic Disruptions and Virtual Learning

The COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on school attendance. As education shifted to virtual formats and many teens enjoyed more flexible schedules at home, habits around consistent attendance eroded. Now that in-person school has resumed, millions of students have

struggled to return to the routine. The longer schools were closed in a given area, the higher the truancy rates. Nearly half of students in some states, like Alaska and Washington, D.C., are now chronically absent.

What you can do:

- Reestablish structures and routines that were disrupted during the pandemic. This may involve earlier bedtimes, consistent morning alarms, and clearing away distractions that developed during virtual schooling.
- Emphasize the importance of classroom learning.
- Rebuild connections to school by attending events and getting to know teachers/staff.

Academic Disengagement and Boredom

When teens feel disengaged from their coursework, unmotivated by a lack of exciting material, or unchallenged by schoolwork that doesn't match their abilities, it can lead to boredom and chronic absenteeism. Falling behind academically, perhaps due to an unidentified learning disability, can compound these issues. Poor performance and feeling "dumb" erodes self-esteem, making teens less inclined to keep showing up.

What you can do:

- Keep tabs on whether your child seems bored, under-challenged, or frustrated with academics.
- Meet with counselors and teachers to explore modifications to your teen's course load.
- Get them evaluated for potential learning disabilities.
- Tap into your child's interests and passions to help reignite academic engagement and self-confidence.

Risky Behaviors and Outside Pressures

Substance abuse, sexuality, peer influence, and a desire for independence can also motivate truant behavior in teens. Some may skip class to experiment with drugs/alcohol, to spend time with a romantic partner, or due to prodding from friends. Working jobs outside of school can add complications as well.

What you can do:

- Keep an open dialogue with your teen about pressures they may face from peers or elsewhere.
- Set clear expectations around school attendance.
- Know your child's friend circle and discourage relationships that enable truancy.
- Emphasize school as the priority over jobs.
- If substance abuse, unsafe sexual activity, or other concerning behaviors emerge, seek professional help.

The Consequences of Truancy

The impacts of truancy on a teen's life can be severe. Poor school performance, loneliness, decreased self-worth, increased mental health problems, substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, conflict with parents, academic penalties like being held back, and even potential fines or criminal charges for both student and parents in some cases. Tackling truancy head-on is crucial.

For any parent whose teen is frequently skipping school, getting to the root of the problem is vital. Approach the situation with empathy rather than punishment. Work closely with teachers, counselors, therapists, doctors, and your child to understand motivations and find solutions. Rebuild school connections and prioritize addressing any underlying mental, emotional, or circumstantial issues that may be driving truant behavior.

Consistent communication, professional support, and a problem-solving mindset that re-engages your teen with academics is critical. When parents and schools address truancy collaboratively and proactively, they can help get a young person's education back on track.