



# Counselors Corner

A place to educate, inspire, and nurture our growth as parents and educators.

Many of our students faced significant struggles with attendance and engagement in their previous school settings. Sometimes referred to as “school refusal,” it is not a diagnosis but a symptom of a larger issue. Some examples of reasons students may want to avoid school; he or she is being bullied, he/she is having panic attacks in class, anxiety around peer interactions, not having assignments done on the due date. Sometimes, the fear that they will not make straight A’s and their rigid, perfectionistic thinking is gets in the way. Unfortunately, in most cases, missing school reinforces anxiety rather than alleviating it.

In order to avoid the development of serious educational or social problems if students are kept away from school or friends for any length of time, I suggest the following;

**1. Do not give your teen access to too many enjoyable activities when they stay home.** Today, the average teen resides in a home with cable TV, computers, iPads, smartphones and gaming systems. Why wouldn’t they rather stay home and use these technological wonders rather than engaging in the challenging curriculum and uncharted social interactions of an average high school day? If a student cannot make it to school, they need to be practicing a behavior that closely resembles the behaviors one would engage in at school. Their school day doesn’t involve social media, gaming, texting, or watching TV, neither should a day at home because a student is exhibiting “school refusal.”

**2. Know the dangerous territory your child is entering when they engage in school refusal behaviors.** When your teen was younger and screaming about not wanting to go to the dentist, what do you do? Do you wait until their mouth is full of cavities? Going to school is as vital to survival and maturation as obtaining appropriate medical care. Treat school refusal as a symptom of a larger problem that you and your teen need to address. High school age students not showing up for school is comparable to adults not showing up for work. In order to prepare our students for life after high school, we need to teach them the life skills of resiliency and problem solving.

**3. Conduct a functional analysis on why your student is refusing to go to school.** It is critical to determine why a student is having a difficult time going to school in order to develop an effectual treatment plan, or to assist your child in reintegrating back into school. Here at Edison, we will provide encouragement and assistance in creating an appropriate plan to get your teen back to school. In the past, counselors have walked into school with students to minimize overwhelming stimulus, notified teachers that a student could take a break if they start to feel symptoms of anxiety, allow students to do school work in a quiet place such as a counselor or administrators office. Edison staff are well versed on strategies to aid a student in managing distress, regulating their emotions and improving interpersonal relationships. During their high school career, students must acquire and practice the tools and skills crucial to handle life's challenging moments. We cannot teach our students that quitting, avoiding, or running away from problems is a solution.

**4. Help your student establish a support system.** Other students, family members, teachers, school administrators or an Edison counselor can be valuable supports.

**5. Depending on the severity of the school refusal, don't hesitate to get a mental health evaluation or request services from a qualified mental health professional.**

As always, I welcome your feedback and questions.