

# Moyle Park College



## School Refusal Resource Pack

# Information for Parents & Schools

Adopted from the Roscommon School Refusal Resource Pack: A collaboration between CAMHS, PCCC Psychology, EWO, NEPS and Tusla Family Support Services

This Resource Pack is based on current knowledge in this area. It is intended as a guide only. Not all the suggestions here will apply to any one student or situation.

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## **1. What is school refusal?**

School refusal behaviour refers to a student's refusal to attend school or difficulty remaining in classes for an entire day. The problem is pervasive and exacts a heavy toll on students, families and schools if left unaddressed.

Refusal to go to school may happen at any age. Generally, the young person refuses to attend school and experiences significant distress about the idea of attending school. Young persons who refuse school do not typically engage in antisocial behaviour that is associated with truancy, such as lying, stealing or destruction of property. It differs from truancy in that the young person is staying at home with the knowledge of the family and despite their efforts to enforce attendance.

There are many reasons why a student may refuse to attend school or remain in school. These include;

- Social and peer related difficulties
- Learning and curriculum difficulties
- Difficulties with the physical environment

Starting school, moving, and other stressful life events may trigger the onset of school refusal. Other reasons include the young person's fear that something will happen to a parent while he/she is in school, fear that she won't do well in school, or fear of another student. The young person possibly wants to do something more enjoyable outside of school, like practice hobbies, play computer games, watch movies, meet with friends etc. School refusal is a significant difficulty affecting many students, families and schools.

### **2.1 What causes school refusal?**

There are lots of reasons why a young person might refuse school, and pinpointing the cause can be difficult. Often there are a number of factors that contribute to a young person's non-attendance. It is important to understand and address underlying issues when supporting young persons to return to school or attend consistently.

Predisposing Factors include;

- Student's temperament
- Environmental factors
- Family context including parental mental and/or physical health and coping skills
- Inconsistent parent discipline style
- Marital disharmony

The following factors can also be involved in school refusal;

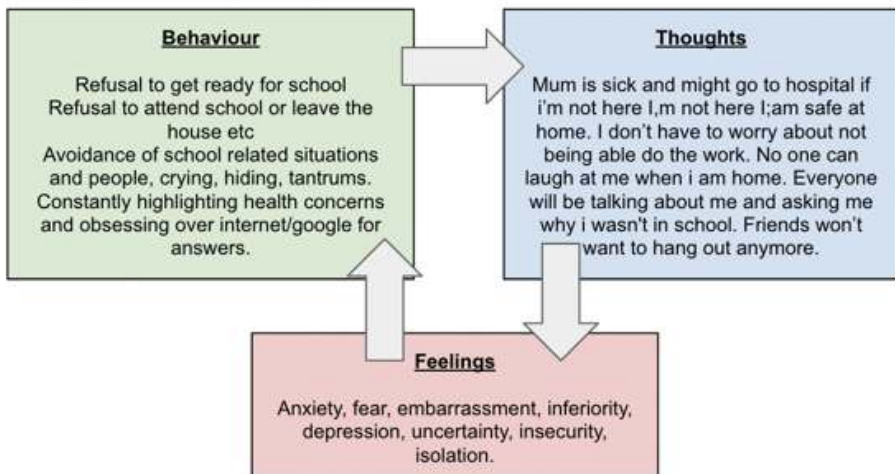
- A parent(s) being ill, separating, having marital problems, or having frequent arguments.
- Traumatic events, such as family illness, grief or domestic abuse.
- A death in the family or a death of a friend of the young person.
- Jealousy of a new infant sibling.
- Excessive parental worrying about the young person in some way (for example, poor health). Difficulties with transition, such as moving to a new school, returning to school after a long absence due to illness or entering/exiting primary school
- School factors such as workload and academic pressures, fear or dislike of subjects, finding subjects difficult.
- Peer problems, such as social isolation, bullying or conflict between/with friends
- Anxiety about social situations or activities that involve a performance or evaluation, such as sports days, speaking in front of the class or tests
- Anxiety around being separated from parents or carers
- Rewards inherent in staying at home, such as spending time with a parent, watching TV or playing video games.
- Bullying: unwanted aggressive behavior among school-aged children involving a real or perceived power imbalance that is repeated or has the potential to be repeated over time.

## 2.2 Factors that reduce the risk of school refusal

- Secure relationship between young person and parents (whether united or separated). Co-Parenting - sharing tasks, being consistent, clear and firm
- Understanding of anxiety and factors that maintain it
- High levels of support and low levels of stress
- Student's easy temperament, good coping skills and an ability to make friends
- School having the resources and knowledge necessary to provide a supportive environment for the student
- Cooperation between those involved in supporting the student
- The student's sense of belonging in school.

## 2.3 How does school refusal come about?

The following diagram illustrates the cycles of thoughts and feelings that can lead to a student's initial refusal to attend school.



### **3. Information for Parents/Guardians on Possible Precursors to School Refusal**

Be on the lookout for:

- Frequent Tearfulness/ distress/ pains in tummy or headaches on Sunday nights or Monday mornings
- Bedwetting or signs of distress/upset on Sunday nights at the thoughts of going back to school on Monday morning.
- Young person showing distress or saying they feel sick when faced with returning to school after a break ( e.g. long weekend or school holidays)
- A pattern of the young person frequently asking the teacher to ring his/her parent from school / wanting to go home/ saying that they are feeling sick
- Prolonged difficulties (anxieties) for a young person when mixing with other persons ( e.g. going outside to play with other children in the neighbourhood; going to after school activities, parties etc.)
- Preoccupation with being organised for school – overly perfectionistic
- A family stressor (e.g. parental separation or bereavement) can trigger some anxious behaviours / feelings about leaving home, or leaving a parent in order to attend school. This is normal. Providing the young person with a calm listening ear, and letting them know that you understand, but that they still need to attend school, can help them to get through a difficult period.

**Adolescents may also show the following behaviour;**

- Worry or fear related to school
- Sleeping difficulties and fatigue
- Change of mood, negativity towards school, subjects or teachers
- Increased self-consciousness
- Lack of engagement with school activities, outings, trips
- Poor sense of school belonging

#### 4. What can you as a parent/guardian do to help?

- Keep in regular contact with the school by using the school journal, calling and/or arranging a meeting.
- Keep the school up to date with any issues or changes of circumstance that they need to be aware of so that they can help.
- Speak calmly.
- Let them know that you understand.
- Encourage them to talk to you about how they feel.
- Be reassuring.
- Once you have reassured them and helped them to take some slow deep breaths, be persistent and bring your young person to school. This is the right thing to do.
- Give your child some positive self-statements such as : “ I can do this”, “I went to school yesterday and it was fine”.
- Praise them for making the effort to go to school.
- Model positive coping and positive thinking- use examples from your own life.
- Be consistent and present a united front.
- Listen but do not reinforce their fear/anxiety. Make statements such as “I know that you feel ....., we will work on it together, I will help you”.
- Don't ask leading questions, for example ask, “How are you feeling?” rather than “are you worried?”



## 4.1 Information and Tips

Resolution can take time and patience for all involved. Here are a few suggestions for how to deal with your child if they remains at home:

- If your son is at home during school time make home life less appealing to him; no TV, internet access of tablets and laptops.
- It's recommended that you son get up at the same time every day and put their uniform up.
- They must complete some school work and keep to a routine. Emailing teachers or using Google Classroom is promoted
- Don't interact too much with your child as this attention can be sometimes rewarding.

## Appendix 1: USEFUL CONTACTS

**N.B: Full list of local directories available on the school website under "PARENTAL SUPPORT"**

USEFUL CONTACTS NAME	ADDRESS	PHONE NUMBER
<u>Education Welfare Officers</u> (EWOs) are employed throughout the country to offer advice, support and guidance to parents who need support in ensuring that their young person attends schools regularly	Head Office: Tusla – Child and Family Agency, Floors 2-5, Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, Dublin 8.	01-7718500
<u>National Educational Psychology Service</u> (NEPS) NEPS psychologists work with both primary and post-primary schools and are concerned with learning, behaviour, social and emotional development.	NEPS Head Office Dublin Region Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1	Tel: (01) 889 2700 Email: <a href="mailto:neps@neps.gov.ie">neps@neps.gov.ie</a> Website: <a href="http://www.education.ie">www.education.ie</a>
<u>JIGSAW Clondalkin</u> Jigsaw Clondalkin is a free, non-judgmental and confidential	Moorfield Ave, Raheen, Dublin 22, D22 K778	(01) 538 0087 Email: <a href="mailto:clondalkin@jigsaw.ie">clondalkin@jigsaw.ie</a>



<p>support service for young people (15- 25). They provide guidance and support for young people who are going through a difficult or distressing time. They also provide advice and guidance for anyone who is concerned about a young person in their life or work.</p>		<p>Website:  <a href="http://www.jigsaw.ie/clondalkin">www.jigsaw.ie/clondalkin</a></p>
<p><u>Child &amp; Adolescent Mental Health Service</u> (CAMHS) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)</p>	<p>This is a free specialist service for assessment and treatment of children and adolescents with moderate to serious mental health difficulties</p>	<p>Referral through your GP</p>
<p><b>Pieta House:</b> provide free counselling to those with suicidal ideation, those engaging in self-harm, and those bereaved by suicide.</p> <p>Staff are fully qualified and provide a professional one-to-one therapeutic service.</p>	<p><b>Pieta Lucan:</b>  Lucan Road, Lucan  Dublin</p> <p><b>Pieta Ballyfermot:</b>  Canon Troy House,  Chapelizod Hill  Road, Ballyfermot</p> <p><b>Pieta Dublin South:</b> First Floor,  Greenhills Retail  Park Greenhills  Road, Tallaght  Dublin 24]</p>	<p>01 6010000</p> <p>01 6235606</p> <p>01 4624792</p>

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## **Contact Details**

Moyle Park College  
Convent Rd, Clondalkin,  
Dublin 22

Phone: (01) 457 48 37

Email: [info@moyleparkcollege.com](mailto:info@moyleparkcollege.com)