

- ✓ What the law says
- ✓ When can children take time off school?
- ✓ What to do if your child is missing school



Am I responsible for my child's **school attendance?**

AT A GLANCE



Your child and school attendance

- Children who attend school regularly benefit in the short and long term. They stay on top of their education and learn how to get on with people better.
- As a parent, you have a legal responsibility to make sure your child gets a full-time education between the ages of five and 16. For most people, this means registering a child with a school and making sure they attend regularly.
- You can be fined up to £2,500 or imprisoned if your child has a poor attendance record.
- If your child is behaving badly at school, unless formally excluded they must still attend. It is against the law to keep your child away; even if the teachers suggest it.
- If you have problems, your child's school and your local authority can help you get your child back into school.
- There will be times when your child cannot go to school: for example, if they are ill. But taking time off for holidays and birthdays is not acceptable.
- Taking an active interest in your child's education and letting them know that you are not happy if they do not go to school will make them less likely to bunk off occasionally or play truant for longer periods.
- If your child won't go to school and you are struggling to deal with it, help is available from their school or your local authority.

Did you know?

Every day 50,000 children of all ages miss school without permission. Don't let your child waste their potential too.

Is your child missing out?

We've all been there: woken up one morning not wanting to face the day. Kids feel the same, especially if they're teenagers and at the mercy of their hormones. Going to school may be the last thing they feel like doing.

The fact is, if your child doesn't attend school regularly, they are less likely to do as well as other children. And that means fewer chances and fewer choices when they are looking for work and developing social relationships later in life.

Every parent knows how tough it can be to get their children to school each day. But by making sure they turn up, you're helping create a much better start for them. You're also fulfilling a legal requirement as a parent. If you know your child is not turning up for school sometimes and are not sure what to do about it, or you are not sure what your legal responsibility is, this booklet is for you. It will tell you:

- why your child needs to attend school regularly**
- what the law says about your responsibilities as a parent**
- what happens if your child doesn't attend school regularly**
- what are acceptable and unacceptable reasons for staying away from school**
- how to deal with and stop your child skipping school.**

Going to school – why it's so important

Lots of people think that missing the odd day at school here and there can't do much harm. But even taking a short amount of time out can be a problem. Your child might fall behind in their work and not be able to catch up. If there are gaps in their knowledge, they will suffer when exams and school assessments come around.

There could be other problems too. Children who miss school are missing out on the social side of things, which affects their ability to make and keep friends. And if your child is bunking off, can you be sure you know what they're doing during the day? If they're not in school, where are they? Young people can easily get involved in anti-social behaviour and crime.

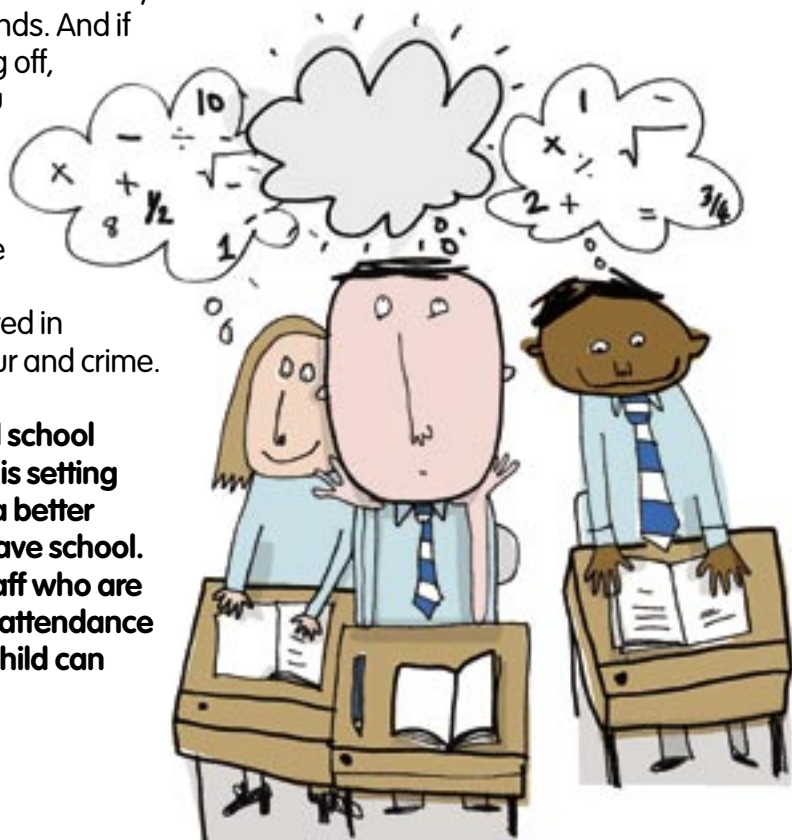
A child with a good school attendance record is setting themselves up for a better future once they leave school. Employers want staff who are reliable, and good attendance is a sign that your child can be trusted.

What the law says

School attendance is also important because the law requires it. As a parent, you are legally responsible for making sure your child gets a full-time education. For most people, this means registering a child at school and making sure they attend.

Did you know?

Missing five days of every term every year is the same as missing one whole school year.



If your child doesn't go to school

It's in your interest to make sure your child has a good attendance record. If they miss school regularly – even if you don't know about it – your local authority can take legal action against you.

If your child is missing school regularly, your local authority or the school will contact you to see what can be done.

- An Education Welfare Officer may visit or write to you to discuss the problem.
- You might be offered a parenting contract. This is a voluntary and formal agreement between you and your child's school or the local authority. It sets out things that you and the school (or local authority) will do to help improve your child's attendance.

- In some areas, schools have other workers – such as Connexions Personal Advisers – who might work with your child to improve their attendance and help with problems they might have.

Remember...

... if you're having difficulties getting your child to attend school, you don't have to struggle alone. See our tips on page 7 of this booklet and work with teachers and Education Welfare Officers to encourage your child back into school.

Legal consequences – what could happen if your child truants from school

- You may be prosecuted and, if convicted, will have a criminal record.
- For more serious offences, you can be fined up to £2,500 and/or sent to prison for up to three months.
- You could also be given a Parenting Order, which means you have to attend a parenting class.
- You may be issued with a penalty notice of £50 (rising to £100 if unpaid after 28 days). If you don't pay, you will be prosecuted.

What's acceptable, what's not

Of course, there will be times when your child has to miss school for a good reason. If your child needs time off, you must ask the school's permission as far in advance as possible.

When is it OK for your child to stay away from school?

- **Illness** – follow the school's illness procedures and let them know as soon as possible on the first day that your child is ill.
- **Medical appointments** – try to arrange them during school holidays, at weekends or after school hours. Naturally, there will be times when this isn't possible, but try to give the school as much advance warning as possible.
- **Bereavements** – let your school know as soon as possible if someone in your family dies – the school will want to make sure that staff and pupils act sensitively with your child on their return.
- **Exclusion** – if your child has seriously misbehaved and the headteacher issues a letter saying they must stay away either permanently or for a set number of days (up to 45). If the exclusion is permanent, your child will be offered alternative education.

- **Religious festivals** – ask your school well in advance for time off for religious reasons.

When is it not OK for your child to stay away from school?

- **Holidays** – don't expect your child's school to automatically agree to give time off for holidays in term time. Holidays with an educational aspect, such as foreign exchange trips, are more likely to be approved.
- **Birthdays** – your child should attend school, even if it's their birthday. Depriving your child of the chance to celebrate their birthday with their classmates is not a 'treat'!
- **Shopping** – or any other activity for which there is no serious reason for your child to be away from school.
- **Truancy** – skipping school is not acceptable and may well have serious consequences for both you and your child. Remember, parents can still be fined or prosecuted even if they did not know that their child was bunking off.
- **Informal exclusion** – your child must go to school unless the headteacher takes formal action to exclude, telling you in writing the length of the exclusion and what your rights are.

Making sure your child doesn't miss out

Tips for preventing truancy

- Let your child know that attendance is important and that it's not right for them to miss school.
- Is your child unhappy at school? Are they bored or bullied, for example? Contact your child's teacher as soon as possible if you think there are problems.
- If your child makes excuses to try to get out of going to school, take time to listen to them. There might be an underlying problem.
- Take an interest in your child's education, ask them about their day and praise them when they do well at school.

- Try to make sure they get to school on time. Arriving late can be disruptive and unsettling for your child. It also sets a bad example.

Parentline Plus tips for dealing with truancy

- Tell your child how worried you are. Let them know that you are concerned about their future.
- Ask for help as soon as you know there's a problem. Speak to your child's school, an Education Welfare Officer or the local authority, and work with them to help get your child back into school.
- Talk openly with your child about any problems they have. They are more likely to open up if you understand rather than punish or blame them.



Want to find out more?

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) Independent, practical and legal advice on schooling issues.

 **Helpline 0808 8005793 (2pm–5pm, weekdays)**
www.ace-ed.org.uk

Childline

Free confidential helpline for children:

 **Helpline 0800 1111**

Parentline Plus

Free, 24-hour confidential helpline for parents:

 **Helpline 0808 800 2222**

 **Textphone 0800 783 6783**

www.parentlineplus.org.uk

www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolattendance

Information on all aspects of school attendance, including links to relevant legislation.

www.direct.gov.uk/schoolattendance

Information on all aspects of school attendance, including links to relevant legislation.

www.parentscentre.gov.uk

Information and support for parents. Contains useful pages on truancy.

Can't get onto the internet at home?

Visit your local library which will have computers and internet access.

Copies of this publication can be obtained from: DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.
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